

Entertainment Outlook

Armchair critics of Canadian television

Armchair critics of Canadian television have been known to complain that the trouble with Canadian television is that it merely copies American television.

I don't suggest there is absolutely no basis for such complaint, but it will be difficult to level that charge against a CBC hour-long program called *The Real Stuff*, which is set to air on Sunday evening, March 29, on the publicly-owned TV network.

The title is a parody of Tom Wolfe's book, *The Right Stuff*, which was turned into a moderately interesting (but financially unsuccessful) movie a few years back. It dealt, rather fancifully, with the lives of the American astronauts.

The Real Stuff, produced and directed by John Zaritsky, is an absorbing look at the Snowbirds, Canada's world famous jet aerobatic team. Zaritsky got some invaluable help from a fine team of cinematographers, editors, co-producers and second unit directors, all of whom receive well-earned credit at the end of the program.

But Zaritsky's most visible help came from pop composer David Foster (best known, perhaps, for his work, also with Zaritsky, on *Tears Are Not Enough*). Foster provided the music for *The Real Stuff* and also served as on-camera host for the program.

What I like most about *The Real*

Stuff is not the stunningly beautiful aerial photography (although that's certainly laudable), but the fact that the show's high quality was achieved without the kind of razzle-dazzle special effects that have become so commonplace in present-day TV and films.

Zaritsky and Foster set out to give us a close-up look at the nine Canadians who make up the Snowbirds, and they had enough confidence in their subject to avoid the sort of gimmicky program into yet another dreary example of the triumph of style over content.

It's gratifying, also, to see that Zaritsky found time to include some foot-

age of the Snowbirds' wives, along with some of their comment on the work their husbands do. And it's also pleasing to see that the usually ignored ground crew are given some measure of credit.

Apart from the dazzling footage of the planes during their breath-taking aerial manoeuvres, what stands out in the memory after you see *The Real Stuff* are some of the telling comments made by the Snowbirds themselves. Here are some I recall:

"I'm scared of heights. I can't look over a balcony, I get dizzy."

"It doesn't hurt to get scared — it helps keep you honest."

"I always have butterflies in my stomach, walking out to the plane."

"I know right now, it's the best job I'll ever have. So, for two years, you're here."

"Next to sex, it's the best thing."

Classifying *The Real Stuff* as a documentary is probably accurate enough, but I urge you not to be put off by that misleadingly dry categorization. It's a most entertaining program, one that all those who were involved in should be proud of.

You may remember a story here some months ago about Bob Bossin, the Vancouver-based minstrel, and his show, *Bob's Home Remedy For Nuclear War*. It's a witty and sang look, in musical form, at the horrors of the nuclear age.

Bossin's taken to the road again after a winter layover, and he's in the midst of a string of dates across Canada. This month, he already has put on his show in a few places in Ontario and Alberta, but there are still quite a number of scheduled performances to come.

On March 19, Bossin is in Edmonton. The next day the locale is Lethbridge. Calgary can see Bob Bossin on March 21, then Medicine Hat (22) and Unity, Saskatchewan (23) and Regina (24).

From March 26 to April 1, Bossin's *Home Remedy For Nuclear War* can be seen at the Prairie Theatre Exchange in Winnipeg. Between April 12 and 18, he will do his show at the Great Canadian Theatre Company, in Ottawa.

Then come some scattered dates: April 29 in Windsor; May 2 at Nanaimo, B.C., and May 3 in Vancouver. From May 20 to 30, he'll be at the Canadian Popular Theatre Alliance Con-

ference in Sydney, N. S.

Names, Names, Names: Andre Gagnon will compose music for the Stratford Festival's production of *The School For Scandal*. And veteran Lucio Agostini will perform the same function for the same festival's production of *Otello*.

All you Ed Asner fans can catch him as a school principal on his new series, *The Bronx Zoo*, which debuts this week on Global TV. . . . Al Waxman is the host (Sunday, March 29) of a CTV special called *The Ticker Test*. It deals with the latest statistics and developments about heart disease.

A *Nest Of Six* Birds is the title of a TV movie currently shooting in Saskatoon. It's based on the Susan Charlotte Haley novel and is being directed by Eric Till from a script by Joe Wiesenfeld. Sheila McCarthy and Barry MacGregor star. . . . And writer-director Donald Brittain (who did Canada's *Sweetheart*) is preparing a three-part film biography of William Lyon Mackenzie King.

Singer Louisa Florio's career got an early boost last year when she was introduced to audiences across Canada on Roger Whittaker's tour of this country. The young Toronto singer is getting another boost, this time on the record charts, with her single, *Today I Met The Boy I'm Going To Marry*.

Morley Callaghan, sometimes referred to as the father of Canadian literature, is the subject of a one-hour television profile due on March 25 on CBC. Callaghan, now in his 80s, is the author of some dozen novels and about 100 short stories, and he's still a feisty and fascinating man.

On the TV program, Callaghan looks back at his life and career, including his time in Paris with the likes of Ernest Hemingway, Scott Fitzgerald and James Joyce. Also appearing in the affectionate tribute are Timothy Findley, Marie-Claire Blais and Callaghan's sons, Barry and Michael.

Inside Howie Mandel: "My friends make fun of me, but I need noise. I sleep with the television on. When I was a baby, I couldn't sleep when it was quiet. My mother used to turn the vacuum cleaner on and let it stand by my bed."

(No offense, Howie, but I sometimes sleep with the television on, too.)

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