

Man Alive, Witness dare to express points of view

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IN spite of the recent public debate about the veracity of *The Valour and the Horror*, CBC Television continues to broadcast shows that use dramatizations and dare to express points of view that might be contrary to "official" history. Both *Man Alive* (tonight at 10) and *Witness* (tonight at 11) are vivid reminders of the filmmaking virtues for which the superb *Valour* has been so loudly (and shamefully) criticized by the corporation's ombudsman.

Perhaps this duality exists because there are at least two CBCs. There is the stuffy, bureaucratic CBC that lives mostly in Ottawa and seems preoccupied with covering its behind every time some lobby group or noisy minority whines to the government. And there is the other CBC, the essential one, which is busy trying to fill the airwaves with programs

that will draw viewers away from the competing 30 or more channels — the ones that exist not to provide a public service but to fill the pockets of their owners and sponsors.

To provide a genuinely alternative service and satisfy some notion of public responsibility, the makers of CBC television programs must take some risks and express ideas that are more complex and controversial than the "official" CBC is comfortable with.

The sort of safe and politically correct programming the bean-counting mandarins in Ottawa would love to impose on viewers would destroy the CBC because no one would watch it.

If the "official" CBC had its way there might well be no *Kids in the Hall*, no *Codco*, and no *Man Alive* or *Witness*, shows that regularly flout the spirit and letter of the network's guidelines regarding journalistic balance, guidelines that have re-

cently caused so much grief to the creators of *The Valour and the Horror*.

Held Hostage, tonight's episode of *Man Alive*, uses dramatic re-enactments frequently and vividly and makes no attempt to give both sides of the story. The result is a strong and affecting portrait of heroism that does not involve bombing civilians or bearing arms. Host Peter Downie interviews three Americans who survived extended periods of captivity and torture after being kidnapped by Muslim guerrillas in Beirut. All three men recount mind-bending tales of pain and deprivation but nowhere in the program are their captors interviewed or asked to explain their reasons for torturing the trio.

The dramatizations are shot in black and white and are used only briefly, but they are effective in underlining the calmly related tales of man's unspeakable inhumanity to

man. They are not strictly necessary because the victims' testimony is spare, lucid and moving. But *Man Alive* must compete and the snazzier, more dramatic look does not undermine the integrity of these stories. Held Hostage was produced by Halya Kuchmij.

Witness: Between the Solitudes is less interesting in content but worth mentioning because of its form. It is a personal essay by Montreal journalist Josh Freed which explores his feelings as a besieged anglophone in Quebec. Freed's roots in the province are deep and his feelings can be characterized as sad and bewildered rather than angry and frustrated.

He's no Mordecai Richler, there's no bite to anything he has to say and it's a shame really, because the television essay works best when the point of view is strong and colourful. Instead there's an affectionate portrait of a city that seems to be driving

away its most talented young anglophones and alienating anyone who is not white and certifiably Québécois. And if it makes Freed angry, it doesn't show, more's the pity.

Three years in the making, *The Truth Shall Make Us Free* is a documentary about the rise of neo-Nazism in Germany. It will be broadcast on the *Human Edge* series tomorrow night at 10 on TVOntario. Filmmaker Michael Schmidt infiltrated secret meetings of the neo-Nazis and won the confidence of their German leader, Michael Kuhn, who died of AIDS last year.

It is an ugly, frightening portrait of widespread unemployment and growing xenophobia in what was formerly East Germany. Worse, Schmidt's film also explores how far-reaching neo-Nazism has become, with thriving branches in North America, Britain and France.