

FESTIVAL REVIEW

Little People

NEW YORK — "Little People" is the first feature-length (88 minutes) film by American documentarians Jan Krawitz and Thomas Ott, and it's a winner in every respect. Their subject is the annual convention of Little People of America, where more than 500 dwarfs and midgets gathered for a week of workshops and soul-baring. Funny and touching without being sullen or self-pitying, the film nevertheless faces an uphill distribution battle and may be destined for specialized houses or public TV.

Krawitz and Ott shot much of the picture on their knees since we often see the "stars" on an eye-to-eye level; the directors also wisely avoid narration, letting their subjects' anxious or ironic personalities come across unhindered by editorial comment. Some

of the more memorable among the many interviewed are Karla Eastburg, a teenager who recalls, somewhat ruefully, her struggle for acceptance among her peers; Len Sawisch, a quick-witted psychologist who turns out to be, of all things, a stand-up comic, and 11-year-old Mark Trombino, who lists among the advantages of being small a certain degree of success at playing hide-and-seek.

Actor Billy Barty, the founder of Little People of America, makes a brief appearance, as does Meinhardt Raabe, who portrayed Little Oscar in the Oscar Mayer TV commercials of the '50s. There's also a vintage clip from the midget western of the '30s, "The Terror of Tiny Town," which is indicative of the generally light-hearted nature of this endeavor. "Little People" was funded in part by grants from the University of Texas, the Southwest Alternate Media Project and the Sinking Creek Film Celebration.

— Gerry Putzer