

N.Y. Film Festival

Little People (COLOR-DOCU-16m)

No distributor set. Produced and directed by Jan Krawitz and Thomas Ott. Camera (DuArt color). Ott; editor, Krawitz, Ott; sound, Krawitz; music, Randy Arneson. No other credits provided. Reviewed at Alice Tully Hall, New York Film Festival, Oct. 9, 1982. (No MPAA Rating). Running time: 88 MINS.

"Little People" is an informative and emotionally affecting documentary immersing the viewer in the lives of dwarfs, a category which includes well-proportioned midgets. While including some brief historical material for perspective, directors Jan Krawitz and Thomas Ott emphasize a personal approach which yields considerable empathy-potential from viewers of all sizes.

Interviewees present a good deal of self-analysis, giving the audience a chance to identify with their problems and methods of coping. Though the picture and speakers emphasize that little people are "normal" from *their* point-of-view (and have to conquer society's stigmatizing of them) the film also covers in clinical detail the physical disabilities afflicting many of them. This footage, such as doctor's exams of kids, is somewhat morbid and hard to watch, but balanced by upbeat, fun segments.

Speakers are not identified on-screen, but one consistently stimulating spokesman is an educator and natural comedian who looks like a miniature Tommy Smothers. He beautifully mocks society's attitudes and even puts forward another activist movement, "dwarf power," not facetiously modelled after the civil rights cause.

Ott uses his camera to thematically demonstrate the relativity of the little people's position: varying camera angle and framing takes the viewer in and out of traditional "shoulder level" shots. There are some grotesque scenes, such as the dwarfs at a convention dressed oddly and all playing kazoos, but picture is generally free of even inadvertent "exploitative" footage.

Very emotional sections of the docu deal with dwarf children and the adults' romances. The question of responsibility regarding dwarfs contemplating having children (which genetically can yield average-sized, dwarf or severe birth-defects offspring) is discussed by many interviewees using their own cases as examples but is not resolved.

Problem is getting this worthwhile picture seen by the general public and breaking down the resistance (outside of the exploitation film arena) of people to view something "unpleasant" or "strange." As in a segment when a young married dwarf recalls his feelings of being an outsider, left out of the school cliques, there is much material here with which everyone can identify, given the opportunity.

—Lor.