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Sohio: For today and tomorrow - circa 1979

Cinécraft Productions, Cleveland's longest-standing production company, presents a Flashback Friday video from our archives.

Director's Notes:

This was my first REALLY big project at Cinécraft.

In the 1960's Sohio, an oil refiner and retailer, had a problem. They had no crude oil. Sohio sold majority ownership in itself to British Petroleum and acquired BP's North Slope oil rights. Sohio then took the lead on building the trans-Alaskan pipeline through a joint venture - Alyeska. At that time, the 800-mile pipeline was the largest private enterprise project ever built. It was an engineering and construction marvel. It took nearly a decade from start to finish, and cost 10 times more (\$850 million) than originally estimated . By 1977, Sohio had completed the Alaskan Pipeline and 2 million barrels of crude oil per day were flowing. The income allowed Sohio to transform the company into a diversified energy company, no longer just a regional oil refiner. So they had a BIG story to tell.

The project involved shooting at the full range of Sohio business units around the USA: underground and strip coal mines in Illinois, oil rigs in Wyoming, an oil tanker management office in San Francisco, and Alaska. In Alaska we shot work and life in Anchorage, oil rigs on the North Slope -in sub-zero temperatures. We followed the Alaskan Pipeline by helicopter through Atigun Pass in the Brooks Mountain range, where my crew and pilot were the only human beings within hundreds of miles. Atigun Pass is the highest point of the Alaskan Pipeline at 4,739 feet. We also filmed at the port of Valdez where the Alaskan Pipeline deep water terminal is located.



The film was intended to be a high-concept piece, with each and every shot containing motion - movement of the subject or movement of the camera. Today, audiences wouldn't think much of that approach. In 1979, it was pushing the envelope. The Director of Photography was Ed Perry and his Assistant Cameraman was Nick Boris, who had introduced me to Cinécraft just 3 years earlier.



An original music score was composed and conducted by the late Dick Wooley. Dick was a well-known trombone player and band leader in Cleveland as well as an accomplished commercial composer. For many years he created the music for the Shamu shows at SeaWorld in Aurora. For this film Dick had nearly half of The Cleveland Orchestra jammed into a recording studio for an intense (and expensive!) recording session. The 18-minute film had wall-to-wall original music. For me as a young filmmaker, that was quite a thrill.

The film was written by Larry Adams and the voice over was narrated by some 20 employees of Sohio, including CEO Alton Whitehouse who appropriately got the last words you hear at the end of the clip.

-Neil McCormick

Transcription

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