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Les Annees 80
(Golden 80s)
(BELGIAN-COLOR)

Montreal, Aug. 28.

A Paradise films production. Produced by Marilyn Watelet. Directed by Chantal Akerman. Features entire cast. Screenplay, Akerman, Jean Gruault; camera (Fuji color), Michael Houssaiu; editors, Nadine Keseman, Francine Sandberg; art direction, Viviane Druez; music, Marc Herouet, lyrics, Akerman. Reviewed at the World Film Festival (Competition), Montreal, Aug. 28, 1983. Running Time: 82 MINS.

With: Aischa Bentebouche, Francesca Best, Warre Borgmans, Amid Chakir, Aurore Clement, Harry Cleven, Patricia Frans, Herman Gillis, Martine Kivits, Marie-Line Lefevre, Xavier Lukornsky, Estelle Marion, Magali Noel, Yvette Poirier, Pascale Salkin, Nora Rilly, Nicole Valberg, Florence Vercheval, Michel Weinstadt, Bernard Yerles, Simon Zaleski.

Flemish filmmaker Chantal Akerman is best noted for offbeat productions catering to specialty audiences. While "Les Annees 80" is indeed out of the norm, it has an infectious charm which should win wider audiences for the female director.

In the simplest sense, Akerman divides her film into two parts. The first consists of a series of auditions on videotape for a proposed musical followed by filmed portions of the actual production. Although basically a sketch piece, the film is wholly satisfying in and of itself.

One of the film's great strengths is Akerman's insistence of ridiculing the process rather than the individuals involved. The opening section progresses from script readings to reaction shots, movement tests and scenes where she tests her participants with one another and as dancers and singers. Apparently, she culled from some 40 hours of tapes for her lively, versatile 50 minutes of film.

Akerman also steps in front of the camera to record a song. It's a wonderful sequence and one wonders whether the filmmaker is commenting on her own prowess or asking the audience to serve as casting agent.

The actual filmed musical sequences remind one of Demy's "Umbrellas of Cherbourg" or Renoir's musical section of the multi-part "Le Petit Theatre de Jean Renoir." In any event, the sections combine the energy of vintage musicals with modern surroundings such as a clothing store and a studio street.

Although just a taste of a possible feature, the vignettes register effectively and one craves to see Akerman given the go ahead for a full production. As with Orson Welles' "F for Fake," "Les Annees 80" is a kind of found film which owes no apologies, thanks to invention and style.

The film has an art house appeal and one might only wish Akerman had the budget to shoot more production and rely less heavily on the auditions. Her voice-over closing comment is "next year in Jerusalem," suggesting the hope for the budget and backing on a full fledged musical extravaganza. It's to be hoped her desire comes through based on her initial promising tests. Already "Les Annees 80" has received a warm reception in a non-competition category at Cannes, competition in Montreal and will be at the forthcoming New York film festival, where it gets a special midnight showing. —Klad.