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FILM REVIEWS

## Beirut: The Last Home Movie (U.S.-DOCU-COLOR-16m)

A Zohe Film production, N.Y., in association with Valley Filmworks, N.Y.; the Max M. and Majory Fisher Foundation; Public Broadcasting Stations, Corp. for Public Broadcasting; WGBH Boston. Produced and directed by Jennifer Fox. Written by John Mullen, Fox; camera (color), Alex Nepomniashchy; editor, Mullen; original music, Lanny Meyers; Lebanese music, Ziad Rahbani; sound, Jeff Brown. Reviewed at Intl. Documentary Film Festival, Nyon, Switzerland, Oct. 15, 1987. (Also in London Film Festival.) Running time: 120 MINS.

Nyon — A Soviet commentator once remarked, misunderstanding Chekhov's play, that his "Three Sisters" is about a privileged trio of spoiled bourgeois brats who somehow can't take the train to Moscow although they have the fare.

Perhaps Jennifer Fox' "Beirut" is like that. Its three idle aristocratic Lebanese sisters languorously talk a lot (too much) about themselves and social change, but they cannot get themselves organized to do anything.

Beirut is an international trouble spot but somehow these three attractive, cultured Bustros sisters manage to survive unscratched with their mother and servants in their magnificent 200-year-old palace, untouched and unmoved by the violence around them. We keep waiting for big, dramatic action but it never comes. That's the point and that's why the film works. It's fascinating (well, mostly) because of what should happen or could happen but doesn't.

The three sisters have a kid brother, something of a sissy, whom they idolize and pamper. By the end of two hours (three months of shooting), the brother weds in a fancy, old-fashioned ceremony, a scene that culminates the film and seems to say that old aristocratic Beirut is unchanged and unchangeable. The film ends, as does its audience, convinced that the privileged brats of this world are deservedly the last holdouts of style and good manners.

Old family movie footage and stills, plus news footage of Beirut at war, are intercut with the Bustros opulence. As their chandeliers vibrate, we feel the concussion of artillery, but it's in the distance. That's the problem with this film — the problems are in the distance.

More important than "Beirut" as a film and the Bustros family is the debut of Jennifer Fox as director/producer. A recent dropout from the NYU film school, she makes an auspicious start with this film. Editing in effect is writing, nicely controlled. Although this is a documentary, here is a fiction talent, and of considerable promise, with the right material. — *Hich.*