



1981 GENIE AWARDS

Proof Positive

by Gary Lamphier

The results of the recent Genie Awards hint that the demise of Hollywood North may be at hand; for this year's best films come in small packages marked "Genuine Canadian Product."

It's a pity Neil Armstrong wasn't there. The guy who uttered the immortal banality: "That's one small step for man," etc., would surely have marked so momentous an occasion as the 1981 Genie Awards by proffering some bona fide heaviosity. I mean, planting your arch supports on the lunar sands is one thing. But actually witnessing an entire city's startled discovery of its own country?!? That, I respectfully submit, is far more fertile material for so punctilious a pundit as the former NASA astronaut.

The events at Toronto's Royal Alexandra Theatre on March 12 not only unconcealed *Les bons débarras* as the year's best picture, it also established Edmonton drama teacher, Thomas Peacocke, as Canadian filmdom's best actor of 1980. Justly honoured though they were, neither the film — which grabbed eight awards — nor the blustery star of *The Hounds of Notre Dame*, nor even the remaining group of Genie winners constituted the evening's key revelation. (For that matter, neither did such notable items as Alberta Watson's *Leavage*, the identity of Pierre Trudeau's speechwriter, or the whereabouts of most of the winners.) Instead, the key piece of news at the second annual awards ceremony was the historic discovery by the bastion of Canuckified glitz, Hollywood North, that yes, there is life beyond the Don Valley Parkway. And people even make films Out There. Sometimes, very good films. About Canada, of all places.

Well... before you could say the Academy of Canadian Cinema, Marie Tifo and Germain Houde had cornered the market on the best actress and best supporting actor awards. The director of *Les bons débarras*, Francis Mankiewicz, had pilfered one of Sorel Etrog's statuettes too. As did Michel Brault, for the film's cinematography; André Corveaux, for editing; Réjean Ducharme, for its original screenplay; and Henri Blondeau and Michel Descombes, for over-all sound. Only Peacocke's sterling portrayal of Pere Athol Murray, in *Hounds* (an Alberta production), and Kate Reid's best supporting actress award for *Atlantic City, USA*, prevented *Les bons débarras* from conducting a neat blitzkrieg on all the major awards. (And this despite a budget of \$600,000 — or roughly .003 percent of 1980's production total.)

In fact, the only other multiple winners were Louis Malle's *Atlantic City, USA* — a Franco-Canadian co-production — and *The Lucky Star*, a Montreal production directed by Max Fischer. The former won for best foreign actress (Susan Sarandon) and art direction (Anne Pritchard), along with best supporting actress (Ms. Reid). *The Lucky Star*, meanwhile, also won in three categories: for sound editing (Jean-Guy Montpetit), music score (Art Phillips), and adapted screenplay (Max Fischer, Jack Rosenthal). Ms. Pritchard, whose absence cost Ms. Sarandon the evening's most embarrassing moments, won a second Genie for her costume design

and *Murder By Decree* — two products of the Canadjun, huh? school of filmmaking — dominate the proceedings on that occasion (sharing 13 of a possible 17 awards between them), but French-language films and stars were all but ignored by the voters, with costume designer Louise Jobin (*Cordélia*) the sole exception.

A short 12 months later, with many of the bloated productions from that first 'boom' year played out or shuffled off to oblivion, Academy voters levelled most of their praise on 'little' pictures; those low-budget ones that tell a simple story, and tell it well.

Not all has changed, however. As was the case in 1980, few Canadians had actually seen the nominated films. Aside from *Tribute*, which enjoyed a high-powered Christmas break in hundreds of North American theatres, none of the best picture nominees have enjoyed nationwide exposure. Given the language barrier, it is unlikely that even *Les bons débarras*, despite its critical acclaim and the post-awards publicity, will ever venture beyond the largest cities and into the hinterlands. A ruffled Peacocke put it best, stating, as he accepted his award, "I had an opportunity to portray a great Canadian hero. But you know what's really sad about it? I'm playing a hero and no one's seen the movie. That says a great deal about our industry and our country." (A security man at the post-awards dinner unwittingly drove the point home when he failed to recognize the award-winner and refused him admission.) Nevertheless, Peacocke's film did have a commercial run out west, albeit a brief and inauspicious one; *Les bons débarras* (unlike *The Changeling*) was playing in theatres on Genie Awards night; and

all of the nominees, unlike a year ago, enjoyed at least a week-long flirtation with the public at some Canadian theatre. In short, distribution prospects for recognizably Canadian films, French and English, are improving — partly owing to the publicity generated by a nationally-televised annual awards show.

Interestingly enough, the most entertaining part of the awards show itself revolved not around elaborate choreography or Brian Linehan's clever wordplays, but around the film clips. And that's as it should be. The fact that Micheline Lanctôt's *L'homme à tout faire* didn't win any awards is perhaps the best evidence that there were no weak entries among the contenders; unlike last year, the industry had every reason to show off its best.

Though Trudeau (with actress Kim Cattrall in tow), and *Atlantic City* stars Burt Lancaster and Sarandon provided a taste of last year's bevy of superstars, the 1981 parade of certifiable celebs was noticeably shorter. There were no outpourings of gratitude to former Canadian ambassador Ken Taylor and his courageous countrymen from *The Six Million Dollar Man*, and no words of encouragement from *One Who Has Been There* (i.e. Jack Lemmon) — though Cattrall assured all that the *Tribute* star would have made a "wonderful" speech had he been there. (Lemmon was in California shooting a Billy Wilder film.) One inattentive reporter even found himself squeezing his way around the anatomy of Louise Fletcher in the theatre lobby — the actress soaking up the attention that bypassed her during the show itself.

Nope, the 1981 awards didn't need to import its stars. Like the industry, it had grown a little.

● Gordon Pinsent lends an ear as producers Marcia Couëlle and Claude Godbout accept their award for Best Picture



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1981

Genie photos by Ron Levine



A fitting finish: Brian Linehan, Larry Dane and Gale Garnett toasting the Genies



Toller Cranston - keeping his balance for a swooning admirer



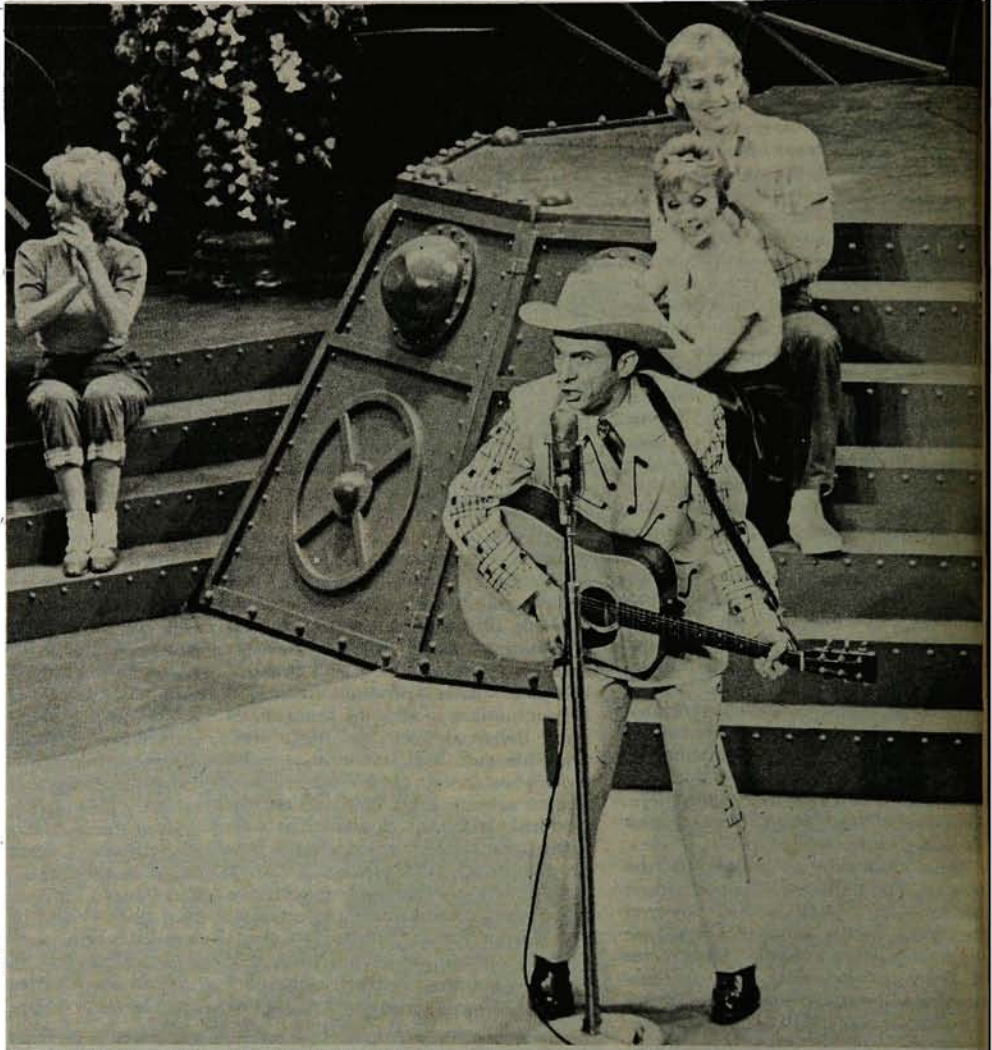
Winston Recket - the price he pays for stardom



Susan Sarandon stands back (after stockpiling Genies for Anne Pritchard) to give Claude Godbout a turn



Love me, love my coat! Yorkville hair stylist Murray Cooper



● Sneazy Waters socking it to them with "Jambulaya"



● Dressed to kill - the Beautiful People taking Hog Town by storm



Phoney Baloney

by Maurice Yacowar

Some say it was the best ever. Maurice Yacowar disagrees. For him, this year's Genie telecast was gravely off colour.

musical spectacular seemed to have wandered in from another channel. Throughout the program, the set shot off hokey flares that seemed uncertainly to evoke *Star Wars* and *Hockey Night in Canada*. In all this glitz the only touch of simple Canadian humanity was when a rumpled Mordecai Richler slouched onstage in his peccable gray suit, tie askew, to announce the winning screenplays. (Plus the sloppy bleeping that left in the swear-word in the clip from *Atlantic City, USA*).

Two scenes typify the show's essential folly. The first was Susan Sarandon's prolonged stint: she won the best foreign actress award, which she accepted with

gracious candor ("This is the first thing I ever won and I appreciate it"), followed by a well-intentioned portrayal of the arrogance and imperialism of Her People. The Canadian crew on *Atlantic City, USA* was "professional in every way," she allowed, as if this were a matter of surprise or note. Then the poor girl was stuck on camera to announce the two design winners. As both categories were won by the absent Anne Pritchard, Ms. Sarandon accepted the awards she presented. Then she made the best editing presentation. Her prolonged stand pointed to the paucity of stars on the Genie roster. Moreover, Ms. Sarandon showed all the poise and control of an epileptic ferret. At the opposite extreme, Burt Lancaster's patriarchal appearance had dignity and style, but his *Leopard* and *1900* associations made him embody the American industry's rigid paternalism.

The second telling example was Sneezey Waters's rendition of "Jambalaya." This might have been a tempting appetizer for the film of his show *Hank Williams: The Show He Never Gave*, but the warm and homey number was corned by a mess of dance, from jive through square, that blew the song's context of a suffering singer in a seedy bar. In this moment, as in the show as a hole [sic], the potential humanity and character were encrusted by the conventions of the Oscar show. The pos-

sibility of grit was killed in glitz.

As if the imitativeness was not depressing enough, the whole affair evoked a sense of waste, of lost opportunity. It is ironic that the theatre life of Canadian films is seemingly dependent upon the Awards' showcase, when, in fact, the Americanization of the celebration discourages confidence in that same product.

Will *The Handyman (L'homme à tout faire)* play across English Canada even though it didn't win any of the biggies? Will Tom Peacocke's best actor award resurrect *The Hounds of Notre Dame* (before its American title-change to 'Puppies of the Prairie Priest')? Does anyone out there care?

While the stars and asterisks gathered onstage for their (Oscar-style) champagne party, the Canadian film-fan had to feel a little flat. For like Canada itself, why should its film industry be sustained if it is only a pale copy of the American? What should have been a celebration that promoted the Canadian in film became a squeaky pretense at being American. As far as Canadian content was concerned, the only subject discussed with ardor was the background (and fore) of Trudeau's date (Kim Cattrall, the lusty lack-lustre vacuity from *Tribute*). Otherwise there was no challenge to the show's assumption that Canada's maturity and worth lie in how American it acts.

I dream of Genie with a guilty pate. I don't know why: something I ate?
(Traditional song)

The best one can say about this year's Genie Awards is that they could have been worse. Francis Mankiewicz's *Les bons débarras* would be a distinguished winner in any country in any year. So, for that matter, would be Micheline Lanctôt's *L'homme à tout faire*. We can be grateful that there was no unseemly rush to reward the lugubrious *Tribute*, or the muddle-headed *Lucky Star* (wherein it is implied that a Jew can achieve heroism by adopting the mythology of the American gunslinger, much as the supposedly "Canadian" film plunges into American genres, images, tones and values for self-fulfillment). Similarly, the indefensible *Terror Train* won nothing, though its four technical nominations left it with excessive shreds of respectability. Such justice is rare in any awards competition, so we can be grateful for small mercies.

But this relief should not divert us from the essential wrong-headedness of the whole Genie operation. Simply, it is silly to celebrate *Canadian* film in such a transparently *American* ritual. It recalls that *Fernwood Tonite* gag where Frank Sinatra Jr. establishes his own fame by singing "My Way" in exactly his father's tone and cadence.

This self-disrespectful imitation pervades the whole show. It is implicit in the organization's name, the *Academy of Canadian Cinema*. The prize itself is a gold statuette that looks like an eviscerated Oscar, standing cross-legged to avoid further violation. So, too, the ironic aptness of its name: the Genie recalls a foreign giant that springs out of a magic lantern to bolster some 97-pound weakling (Aladdin Canuck, boy cineaste!).

The build-up to this year's show reeked of this disrespect for Canadian film. The poster was a vulgar, sexist affront that pretended to be a Muybridge primer for artistic success through the casting couch. The ad run in the cinemas showed more Canadian than last year's but still relied on the lure of Jack Lemmon, Bruce Dern, Ann-Margret, as if they were Canadian stalwarts. Of course, none of the named showed. Hardest to swallow was the ad's closing salute to the audience for being such great supporters of Canadian film. It was enough to make you retch. Or at least, to kvetch.

The Genie show lived down to its promise. Brian Linehan was smooth and engaging enough, and he even braved the danger of wandering from his spot into comic and lyrical routines, but the show as a whole felt like the Oscar-nomination that it was. So we had the tiresome routine of envelopes and "And the winner is..." The opening

● Mordecai Richler — leaving the lustre to the stars



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1981



Veteran film-makers, Vi and Bob Crone, proud as punch



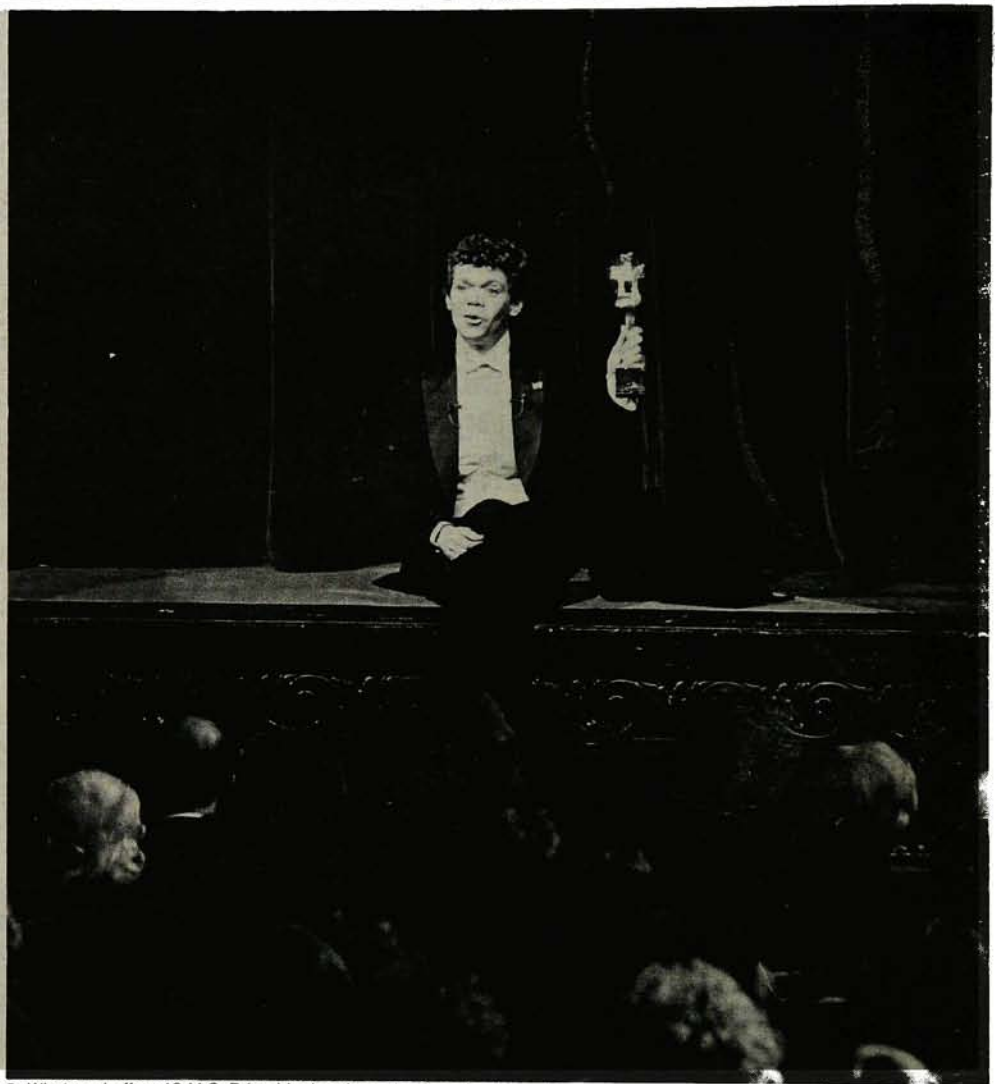
Sharing the spotlight, actress Kim Cattral and her most distinguished escort, P.E.T. himself



"How about the second kiss?" says Micheline Lanctôt to Academy President Ron Cohen



Comedian Howie Mandel wouldn't be caught dead without his handbag: here, he chats with Gino Empry



● What am I offered? M.C. Brian Linehan hamming it up for the audience



● The elegant Denise Filiatrault entering the Royal Alex with Gordon Pinsent

Shooting for the Best

by John Locke

Francis Mankiewicz's latest film proves that it's not the money but the thought that counts.

has now become a cliché — often used by Chabrol and DePalma, among others.

Still, the cinematography in tandem with the editing produces some very memorable sequences. There are startling but successful cuts from dark images to very bright ones. Manon is sleeping. Then instantly a cut replaces her repose with a howling red chainsaw. Or the night sequence, in which Manon is devastated upon hearing her mother confess that she is pregnant, followed by a straight cut to a window flooded with intense light, the camera movement revealing the mother routinely preparing breakfast. An important part of the editing style consists of these straight-cut transitions between sequences which might have been linked by fades or dissolves. The result is a clean, clear narrative rather than a

murky, lyrical one.

Les bons débarras is the story of a mother and daughter, and the mother's mentally slow brother. Mankiewicz avoids dwelling on the family's economic hardship, to concentrate on their personal relationships. Still, we vividly see a family at the lowest end of the great North American middle class. And it sinks in. In this, the film's social statement is powerful instead of preachy.

Charlotte Laurier's brilliant portrayal of Manon is reminiscent of Robert Bresson's "Mouchette." Both girls are the central figures in their narratives; both are hovering at the edge of poverty with only one parent in view; both are independent and aggressive. But Bresson's child/woman resolves her problems by committing suicide, beautifully, while Mankiewicz's child/woman shows herself to be in active control of her life by the end of the film. Perhaps this could be taken as a comment, contrasting young women of the '60s with those of the early '80s.

The performances are uniformly excellent. The one actor who destroys the flow of so many Canadian films with a poor performance in a small role cannot be found here. While Laurier's is the single most extraordinary performance, she is not alone. Marie Tifo as Manon's mother, Germain Houde as the brother, and Gilbert Sicotte as Gaétan (Manon's mechanic friend) are all remarkable. Marie Tifo has an intensity and presence perfect for her role. Thankfully she avoids projecting a star quality which would be out of place in this film. Although Germain Houde has a look that occasionally resembles Jack Nicholson in *The Shining*, he deftly walks a tightrope between appearing to be slightly insane, strangely introverted, or simply not all there. It is a difficult role, played well. The grown-up-kid-

garage-mechanic, Gaétan seems familiar with his small-town style of '60s wildness and long hair. Gilbert Sicotte does a good job in this secondary role.

Fortunately, all of the performers — except perhaps Laurier, who is too young to be judged in this respect — avoid the Hollywood-glamour and girl/boy-next-door stereotypes. They look a bit ordinary, but have an ability to 'hold the screen.' Just what is needed for this film and for future non-American Canadian films.

Although the narrative, the acting and the human significance of this film are all admirable, it is the little touches added to every scene (Michel Poulx's notable art direction and Diane Paquet's costumes) that make the film so special: the humorous portrayal of the village policeman shown under the credits; the decision to shoot at the height of the fall foliage in the Laurentians, and on and on.

Les bons débarras is a film that succeeds because both the major, and minor decisions were carefully, sensitively, and knowledgeably made. Congratulations Francis Mankiewicz. Congratulations Canada. Congratulations Quebec.

The hope is that Mankiewicz will be able to resist the offers he will have to direct trashy international films. If he has the courage to continue to make a series of low-budget, modest, regional films, his work could represent a new beginning for Canadian, and particularly Quebec cinema. It would be good to see him make a series of films using virtually the same cast, production team, and general location. Frequently, filmmakers are prematurely tempted to move on to the New (story, cast, production team, Money) before having explored one style fully. Courage Francis Mankiewicz! The Mercedes can wait; Canadian cinema is in a crisis.

● Best Film Director of 1980, Francis Mankiewicz (right) getting the goods from David Cronenberg (who's not doing too badly himself!)



All those interested in the future of the Canadian film industry should take a good look at *Les bons débarras*. It perhaps best represents the direction our national cinema should take if it is to establish itself internationally as a distinct cinema of quality. Francis Mankiewicz's film has it all: it is a superbly crafted, beautifully acted, sensually and intellectually satisfying film reflecting its regional origins. And it is low-budget.

Many films have good moments: one will have fine cinematography, another first rate performances; but too few films manage to achieve an overall, consistent, high level of excellence. Low-budget films made outside of the film capitals suffer most. With enough money a Hollywood/Paris/Rome director can easily hire a team whose expertise should assure at least technical competence. But all too often Canadian films with one really good performance, or interesting cinematography, ultimately fail because of weaknesses in other areas. It is terribly difficult to assemble a film team which can maintain quality from the origin of the story idea, through production to the release print. *Les bons débarras*, if not flawless, is still a very fine film for having achieved a consistent level of excellence — appropriately reflected by its dominance of the Genie Awards.

Michel Brault has created wonderful images in the film — as might be expected from a cinematographer of his stature. When a police car drives off down a highway, the camera is positioned so low that there is an unusually strong sense of the road and the receding car. This demonstrates an effort to develop the story through shots which go far beyond the ordinary, but stop short of being gratuitous. Such attention to images is seen throughout the film. Take, for example, the narratively effective and visually arresting shot of young Manon (the central character), as she decides not to go to school. The single shot over her body reclining in bed focuses on the school van pausing outside to wait for her, then continuing on its way without her. Another shot uses a rising camera to reveal Manon reading *Wuthering Heights* in the bath. The character's economic poverty is not allowed to dictate an oppressive poverty of images.

Despite the film's visual richness several quibbles can be made about the cinematography. The most serious one being that some of the sequences, particularly those around the home of the wealthy woman, make excessive use of the "diffuse images/burned-out windows," 1970's-style of cinematography. Though this technique makes narrative sense in the fantasy-like environment of the wealthy, the diffuse/burned-out look is beginning to resemble a relic of the past. Similarly, there is a sequence where the camera revolves around Manon, to represent someone circling her on a bicycle. A perfectly good idea, except that this type of shot