



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 light 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 word-plays, 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



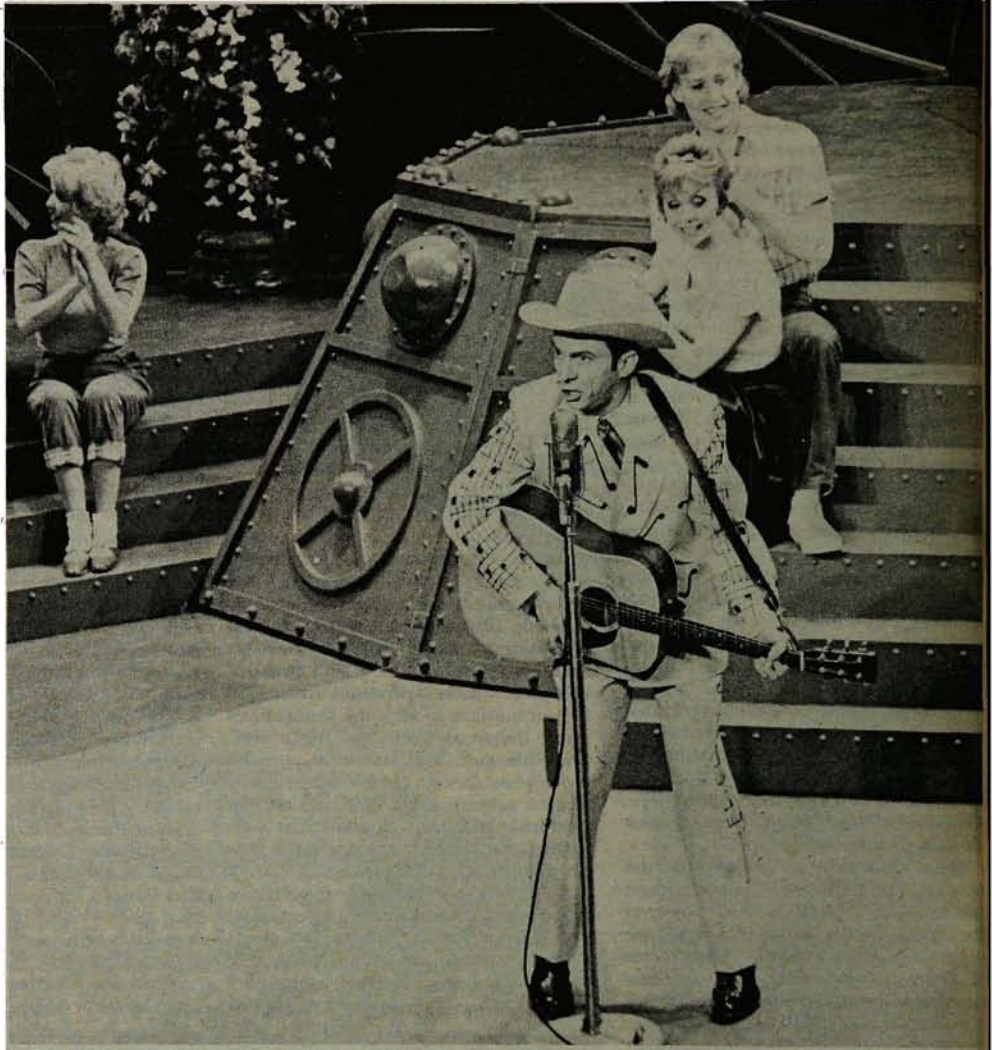
Winston Recket - the price he pays for stardom



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