



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



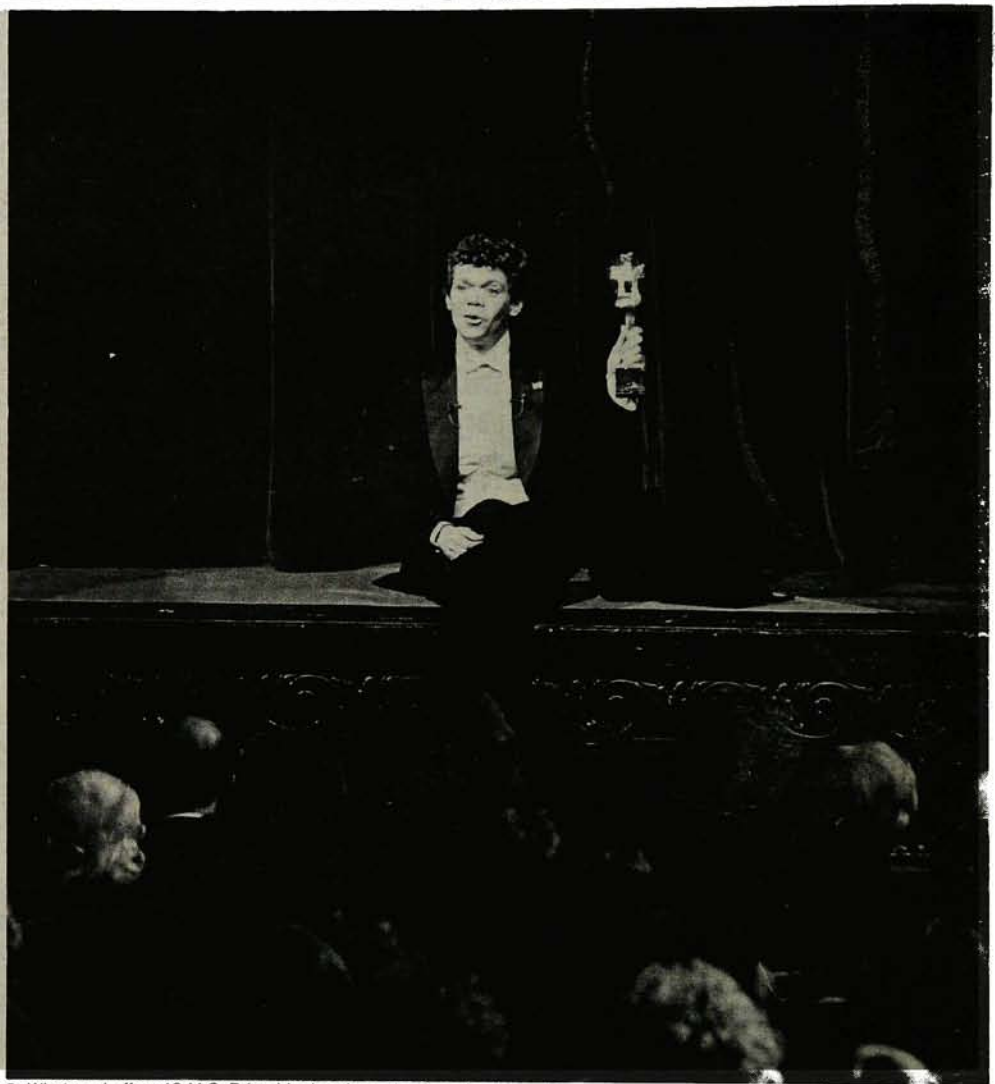
Sharing the spotlight, actress Kim Cattral and her most distinguished escort, P.E.T. himself



"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