

BINGO

It's probably inevitable that in Québec, where filmmakers seem to be much more politically active regarding filmmaking itself than their English-Canadian counterparts, politics itself should serve as a subject for films. Just recently we've had Denys Arcand's *Réjeanne Padovani*, Michel Brault's *Les Ordres*, and, commercially the most successful of them all, *Bingo*, the second feature of Jean-Claude Lord. It's grossed \$1.3 million in Québec alone, far greater than the other films mentioned, indeed one of the all-time Québécois box office successes.

But, says director Lord, *Bingo* is not a political film, it's a film about politics. And even though the story, about a young man who becomes involved first in a strike and then in terrorism, leading to his death at the hands of oppressive authority, seems to have been inspired by the October 1970 Crisis, Lord actually wrote the film in 1968. "It was another script, it's true, but many of these scenes, like the bomb-throwing, were in it. I had different concepts of how to change things then, more faith in certain kinds of action. And the characters were different because some of the story was different.

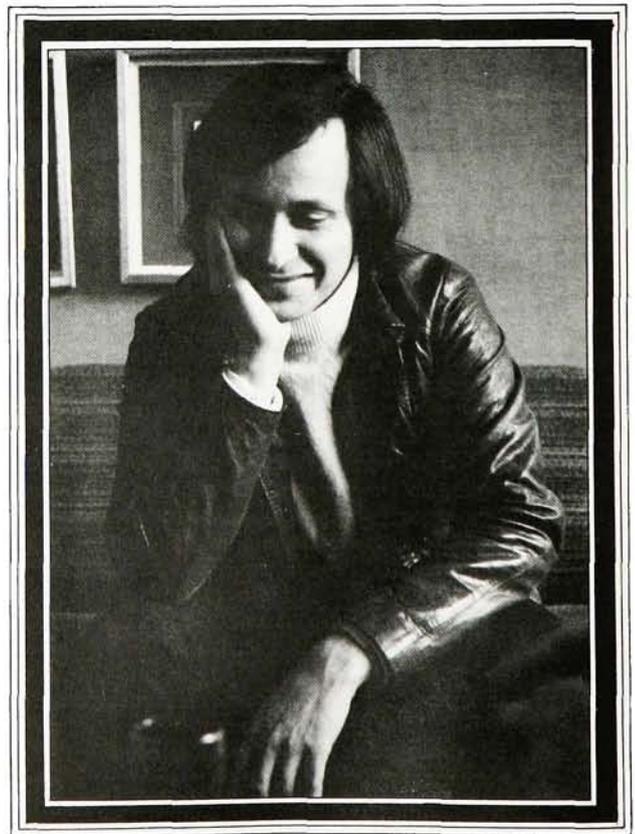
"I chose young people — it's sort of a Romeo and Juliet situation — because for me it was a continuation of my first feature, *Les Colombes*, where I spoke of children. Also I like to work with children. Most of the adults in the film fool the young. Not all — the grandmother, the union leader, the father are sympathetic even though we don't agree with what they say. But because of circumstances and the system, what happens to the boy and girl happens."

Unlike most other filmmakers who tackle political subjects, Lord emphasizes that his first concern was commercial acceptance. He succeeded, obviously: the film is a fast-moving, exciting series of events that affects an audience more like a thriller than a message vehicle. But Lord does have a message to get across. "My main concern was to tell people to be careful what you do so that your actions won't be used by other people for their own purposes. That's the only message. When I made the film I wanted to make it entertainment but also provoke reactions in people so that when they get home they don't just say 'I've seen a beautiful film' and go to sleep and that's all. I want them to reflect on the film in the following days and think about the situation that's described in the film, too.

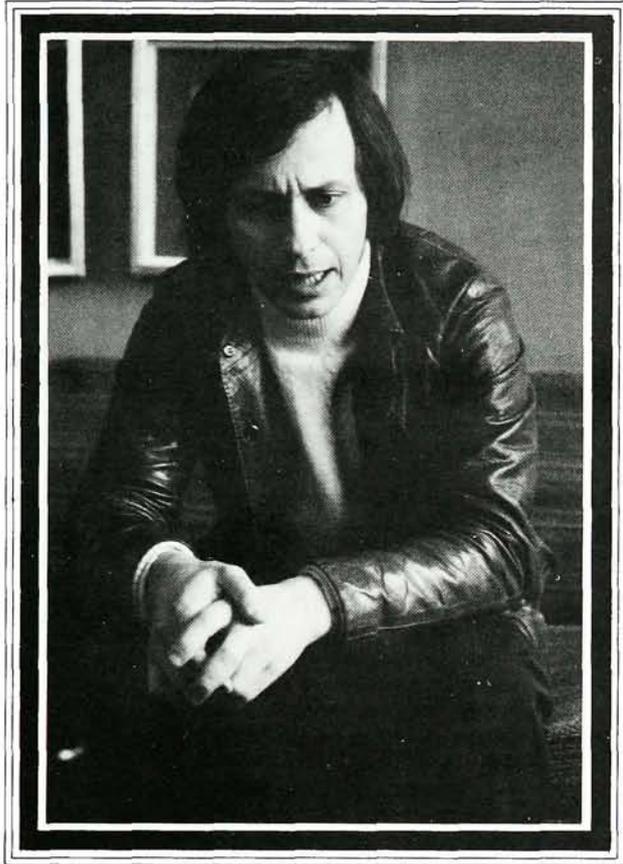
"I want it to be as highly commercial as possible so that it can be seen by as many people as possible. If you work for two years on something, you have to make it interesting, I liked *Réjeanne Padovani*, but it wasn't seen because the audience found it boring, too slow. What he had to say was said to those who already knew it. It's a choice you have to make at the start. When I am writing a script, on every page I ask myself if this is the best way to interest the public in what I have to show and say. It's always in my mind. I think I know the public well because I am myself middle class, and I was a film critic

on TV for four years — every time I went to the supermarket or gas station everybody talked to me about films and their reactions, so I had direct response. And when *Bingo* was launched I spent one-and-a-half months travelling around the province. So a communication exists."

Having been a critic himself, and with such great success for *Bingo*, Lord talks about responses to the film and his own feelings about other critics. "There has been a great response to the film, including some strange critical comments. Some say it's too reactionary, some too revolutionary, some in between. What I don't like about most critics is that if the ideology in the film doesn't correspond to their ideology, they don't like the film. But many in Québec have misinterpreted the film. They were too close to the October Crisis. Also it was the first film out that talked about events like the October Crisis, and everyone wanted to see his own film on the Crisis. As for the public, after the launch we tried an experiment and had special screenings for strikers at Westinghouse, Canadian Gypsum and others. There was a discussion following the screening, and it's very interesting that they reacted exactly as I wanted them to react, not discouraged, but taking it as an entertainment and as a warning. . . .



Stephen Chesley



"When I was a critic myself, what I tried to do was first, to see the films in the theatres with the audiences, not at private screenings. And second, I tried to talk about the kind of film it was, the quality of it, and what audiences would find interesting in it, because even if there is no quality, there can still be something to interest an audience. For example, sex films are all badly done, but if you like them, you should know which has the most beautiful girls or which the most sex scenes, so you can choose. When it was a Québécois film, I wanted as often as possible to have the director in front of me, so he could respond to the critic, because usually critics just write alone or speak and no response is possible.

"The show was popular and I got immediate feedback." Despite his TV experience, Lord refuses to make films for the medium. "The impact is less. You speak of a theatrical film for a long time because it's still playing so people are still going to see it and talking about it. On TV it plays once and two weeks later it's forgotten."

Interestingly enough, although he has made a film about politics, Lord himself maintains a real separation between the political world and his own life. "I have no faith in political parties, they're all the same, or in the way unions are structured or the leaders we have. People in Québec are turning away from politics because they think there is nothing they can accomplish with the present parties and the business that supports them. They feel small and powerless. The young have many

ideas but they don't fight for them. In *Bingo* the boy becomes involved only when he is emotionally pushed by his father's cowardice or his love of photography. But you also must remember that when events like this happen, everyone knows about them – it's a great show on TV." Which brings us back to the title of the film, and especially the Québécois obsession with such games.

"It's really a generation thing. The young aren't like that. During the October crisis my mother-in-law never watched TV or bought a newspaper because she didn't want to know, it would make her nervous. So she had her *Bingo* and her games. And she was not alone. Many of that generation could not face the reality. The grandmother in the film was not a caricature."

At thirty-two, Lord looks back on his career and sees many changes. He started in college, with 8mm, and when he graduated in 1963, he set out to make films. He tried to get *Bingo* off the ground for three years, set it aside and made *Les Colombes* in 1970, and after CFDC refusals (based on script quality) *Bingo* was made two years ago. He's just returned from opening the film in Paris and completing work on his next project, which he will also co-produce to retain as much control as possible over the final result. It's a \$1.1 million project and he and co-producer Pierre David have raised all but \$200,000. "I insist on having the proper budget for my script or I won't make the film. Probably we'll have to set up a French co-production, but that won't affect the script. *Bingo* couldn't have been made as a co-production, but this one can be. It's about international finance and the pursuit of money, money, money, without regard for people around them. We'll use French actors for one or two parts.

"I try to make only the films I want to make. Fortunately what I want to make reaches a great audience, and that's why I can continue to do what I want to. With inflation – *Bingo* would cost \$650,000 instead of \$450,000 if it were made today – and people becoming more selective about which movies they see, I'm very lucky."



LORD