

has created. For better or worse. Dreamers all, they're just slightly out of step, uncompromising individuals and good-natured misfits. And for that reason, they frighten Canadians with their dreams: King's for the Big Time, Cole's for the Good Times and Dillon's for some other Time, ten years ago or fifty. In a country where "why rock the boat?" seems to perfectly express the National Philosophy of Life, it's easy to laugh at these "town fools" with the people of Smalltown, Ontario, Newfoundland or Saskatchewan. And it's reassuring to dismiss them as losers.

But listen to Jim King philosophically writing off an eventful week in West Eden as just a test of his staying power. He has learned something of himself and is prepared to live with, or perhaps in spite of the truth as he now knows it. And watch Will Cole, after all that he has been through, wandering down the road in search of the ol' times and kicking up his heels in anticipation. A loser? Convince *him* of that. Or Rick Dillon, shot down on Mainstreet, Delisle, Saskatchewan, living and dying a crazy dream. If they should suddenly give up on their dreams, if Jim King were to return to West Eden's tire factory, if the Rowdyman were to shake more than just flour out of his hair, if Rick Dillon were to die as any other than the Last of the Big Guns, would that change anything? *Then* they might indeed be losers, true to no one, least of all themselves.

Johnny Canuck as dreamer. It's something to think about. Duddy Kravitz to the contrary, it's really not how you win or lose, it's whether you play the game. Win or lose, Johnny Canuck continues to play the game. Just look at Sir John, our National Dreamer.

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Leo Bachle might once have had a dream. But he's a little older though not necessarily any wiser in his own way than Jim King. He too is an entertainer, a stand-up comic. And very likely he has seen a dream of the Big Time fade as the years pass and the bar circuit that he has so long and often travelled bringing "joy into the hearts of the inebriated" becomes ever more familiar. Now, he has few delusions. He's a different breed of Johnny Canuck, a Canadian Everyman. He's just doing his job, taking the bookings as they come from his Toronto agency. This week it's St. Thomas. The Grand Central Hotel. One hundred and twenty-five rooms of comfort.

Like *The Hard Part Begins*, 125 Rooms of Comfort follows a tradition of sorts. It's the well worn Hail! Hail! The Gang's All Here approach, drawing an assortment of characters together by chance within the confines of the Grand Central. They're not together long, just a day or so, but it's long enough to change the pattern of at least one life. (And yes, it may sound familiar. *Hotel*, however, was never like this!) Leo Bachle is but one of those characters, and like the others plays a specific role in the proceedings. There's something about the man that makes him seem respectable. In any other Canadian film, a night-club comedian would probably be immediately suspect of something. But it may well be that the other characters, a strange and desperate lot, show him in a particularly reputable light. (Of course, anyone who has played the *Juliette Show* can't be all bad.) He is, in a sense, the first to arrive and the last to leave and acts only as a witness to the other's actions, never to become personally involved. Is this the Johnny Canuck we all know and love?

He watches without really understanding. How would he know that the Grand Central Hotel is supposed to be bought by American business interests? That the callous but smooth talking American, Oscar Kidd is here to close the deal. That the Hotel's manager is helping things along. Why would he care that the hotel's present owner, Billie Joyce, is a retired Rock singer. That he's a transvestite and he's cracking up. That he has decided not to sell the grand Central and the old tradition, his father's tradition and, yes, the Canadian tradition that it represents. How would Leo Bachle perceive such a fascinating world when he remains a soul apart, not even obliging a rather condescending offer to get involved from Kidd's more than willing wife. To her, he's just little Johnny Canuck. He's probably the only Canadian she has ever met.

Politics are seldom very far from the surface of 125 Rooms of Comfort. (In fact, change a few names and details, dub in a certain other language and voilà! A Québec film. Well, almost. . . .) But would Leo Bachle realize the significance of all these things around him? How is he to understand the scene which greets him outside the Grand Central? Billie Joyce in drag, beaten by St. Thomas thugs, lies in an alley. Oscar Kidd and his Canadian friend, the hotel manager, stand over him. Waiting for him to die. Waiting for a man, metaphorically the cultural split-personality of

this country, to die. (Director Patrick Loubert readily admits that the metaphor is forced.) And Johnny Canuck looks on. The American pays him off. Of course, it's just the balance of his fee for a night's entertainment, but there's no denying the meaning of the exchange. Johnny Canuck hesitates a little longer and then walks away. Does he understand the truth of what he has seen? Will he be able to live with it? Will we?

—Mark Miller

Les Dernières Fiançailles

Perhaps the first love story of an *old* couple in film history, *Les dernières fiançailles* is devoid of story line. But what it lacks in subject matter, it gains in depth and intensity. The film does not stress the whims and turmoil of a young, or even mature modern couple struggling to stay together, as in Maurice Pialat's *Nous ne vieillirons pas ensemble* or Mike Nichols' version of Edward Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, but rather the degree of harmony Rose (Marthe Nadeau) and Armand (J.-Léo Gagnon) have reached after 55 years of marriage. Their lives, from early sunrise to sunset, are a series of simple activities rather than events, each one accomplished as a ritual, with a gravity reminiscent of monastic life. Their modest living quarters, a cottage rather than a house, are located in the unperturbed countryside. The rusticity of the interior may offend the taste of city-dwellers and suburbanites spoiled by an excess of comfort and luxury. But material concern is not of prime importance here. And what a refreshing approach to life since the cheap ill-matched tableware pieces are transformed and enhanced by Rose's noble gestures as she sets the breakfast table. A privilege granted only to those living an undisturbed life close to nature, which is omnipresent in this film. Weather, for instance, is an important factor in the life of the couple, on account of the crops. Never hermetic, indoor scenes always encompass a glimpse of the outdoors, through the many large windows of the dwelling. And many scenes take place in the open air, such as the couple taking a slow walk in their apple orchard, chatting and teasing each other, while attentive to nature's beauty, or the rainy day that Rose plants seeds in the earth, which she caresses with the palm of her hand. Surprisingly touching moments, because we are reminded of a fact that is too often

forgotten: that simplicity is the apogee of grandeur.

The tragedy of old age is at the heart of this film. Its inevitable attributes are precisely those which tend to deepen at that late stage of life. One is the problem of solitude. Apart from being cut off from society, Rose and Armand have no posterity, having already lost their only child, whom we are reminded of in a particularly moving scene at lunchtime. Another is an emotional problem. Not that love has disappeared with time; on the contrary, it has become immutable. But love may not be as explicit with lost ardour, an afflicting situation summarized by Armand in these terms: "Pity we are too old to even exchange words of love." And death, the infallible outcome, is not the least of embarrassments to the couple. At one point, Armand has a heart seizure as he is working in the fields. Lying in bed, he will try in vain to recuperate. One morning, he gets up and walks to the veranda. Rose wakes up instinctively and follows him outside, sitting next to him. The time has come. They die as they have lived, together and in harmony.

A sad film? Not really. Rather a deeply moving film. In spite of its tragic implications, old age is not presented here tragically, but rather as a normal consequence of a fulfilled life — after all, they have loved each other for more than 50 years. In fact, the film looks so natural that the most alert *cinéphile* will believe it was achieved through the *cinéma-vérité* technique. But all is illusion here: *Les dernières fiançailles* is pure fiction, not a documentary (viz., Pierre Perrault's trilogy based on another old couple, the Tremblays.) Two main factors account for this effect: the impeccable acting, since everything said and done is *felt*; and the slow-paced rhythm of the film, well-attuned to the movements of the two main characters, by making constant use of static shots.

Les dernières fiançailles has the rigour, restraint and clarity of the French literary classics. Yet, it is emotionally dense. In that respect, director Jean-Pierre Lefebvre's touch is a beautiful blending of Jan Troëll and Robert Bresson. The film also evokes the purity of Bach. Its silences are priceless, only intermittently interrupted by the sound of a clock, a reminder of the erosion of time. Lefebvre's twelfth feature film is his most accomplished, and a normally refractory topic to a 33-year-old filmmaker is maturely rendered here. Shot in ten days with a budget of \$35,000,

Les dernières fiançailles proves that ideas, imagination and talent are still more important in films than money: the presumably essential criteria and guarantee of creation and quality. Lefebvre is profound, and a master of nuance and tenderness. This is a truly fine film and a memorable one.

René Rozon

Bingo

Bingo a film by Jean-Claude Lord, opened a year ago in Quebec and promptly became a big hit, drawing raves from the French and English press. It's easy to see why. *Bingo* has captured the elements of the October 1970 crisis and put them into a fast-paced, well-structured story. The story is not of the events of the period when the War Measures Act was in effect, but of the fabric and feelings of those events.

It's not necessary that Quebec produce the definitive, or any version of the October Crisis now; that's a tall order, and maybe not possible after only a few years. But dealing with the origins, effects, resonances of such a crisis is important, and it's entirely valid to invent a story as a means of presenting those ideas.

The father of a photography student, (Réjean Guénette) loses his job and the boy joins the strikers at the factory. The union leader persuades him to help the workers by taking pictures to publicize the cause. Before long he finds himself implicated in kidnapping, bombing, and other terrorist acts. Within this story framework we see his working class parents, the relationship with his girlfriend, his idealism and growing dismay at the extremism he is caught up in. What some may object to in Lord's script is its frequently obvious form. It's all there, laid out for us to see, almost academic in plot development, juxtaposition of scenes and climaxes. And there is a line or two that indicates all too clearly that it is more the director-author speaking than the character. It's a very "commercial" movie. Still, commercial values never harmed a good picture and this attention to craft and narrative is what we have come to miss in recent movies. There is a certain delight in seeing the form realized so well, like watching a good actor and being aware of his performance.

Making us believe in a variety of characters is pretty hard to do in any movie, and especially difficult where different political sympathies are

present. The characterization is excellent here. None of the people are simply drawn; their motives are mixed. We begin to understand why they behave the way they do, idealistic, frightened, bitter, or confused. At the end it really is an outrage to see the lovers killed, even though it's been made to seem inevitable. The movie has taught us to care about them.

Bingo is a melodrama, but it's a superior one. In a picture dealing with gunplay, idealism, and young love, there are surprisingly few clichés. Instead, there are little touches that make it a personal and moving experience: Denys Pelletier in a cameo role, playing the distraught wife of a kidnapped businessman, making an emotional plea on television for her husband's safety; the jobless father (Jean Duceppe) raging drunkenly in his disappointment; a bingo party coinciding with the climax of terrorist acts. *Bingo* has been called "the best Canadian film of international caliber". In as much as the film deals with Quebec experience and makes it accessible to a large audience in that province and the rest of Canada, that judgement may well be accurate.

David Roche

Janis

Remember the days when you used to get so high, man, that you couldn't help but boogie along with whatever psychedelia was blared at you on underground FM? If not, chances are you don't fully remember Janis Joplin, either, the first lady of San Francisco rock (sorry Grace, but premature death *does* add a certain kind of mystique), who used to blow her own and our collective minds with Southern Comfort fumed gut music, delivered straight from her non-Presleyan pelvis. Of her black forebears, Aretha, Billie and Bessie, only Franklyn is around, the other two immortals are with Janis in that Big Blue Soul in the sky, their ball and chains dropped forever.

Janis' throaty sounds and soul linger on, most recently in the Canadian produced feature documentary, *Janis*. Budge Crawley deserves credit (see elsewhere in this issue for more details) for spending close to a quarter of a million over a four year period securing rights to the choicest available footage of her performances. The best concert scenes in the film are those captured by Clarke Mackey and other local cameramen along the 1970 Festi-