

Hugues Mignault's

Le Choix d'un peuple

The documentary *Le choix d'un peuple* chronicles the campaigns and outcome of the May 20, 1980 Referendum. The film begins with the results – 60% no, 49% yes – and then jumps back to the "Oui" and "Non" campaigns, their progression and, once again, conclusion.

Voice-over narration accompanies the first few minutes of the film, providing a brief introduction. After that the compilation of campaign footage and informal interviews are left to speak for themselves, which they do, often humorously.

There is a "home-movie" quality to much of the footage. It captures those funny, human moments that occur when people don't realize they're being observed. Much of the camerawork appears to be hand-held, reinforcing the spontaneity of many of the images. So the camera takes us into Claude Ryan's living room where he, with family and friends, sits eating dinner and watching the results on television; a young man is captured in close-up as he takes a large bite of his dinner. Jean Chrétien teases Brian Mulroney about the tie he's wearing. As an interview with a farmer goes on and on, the film cuts to a close-up of a cow yawning. The camera focuses on two sets of feet at a big rally; it tilts up revealing one set as belonging to a sleepy Claude Ryan.

Another perspective the film provides is how the campaigns are filtered through the media. There are several shots of television coverage of the events. Again and again, the film returns (as though to two comedy show hosts or sports commentators) to Robert Bourassa and Pierre Bourgault as they wait in a TV studio watching live coverage on a large screen, and making revealing and amusing comments.

Director Hugues Mignault remarked, while introducing his film at its Montreal première, that this film offers a chance to look back, to laugh and to cry. The film's many funny moments serve as necessary comic relief from its sorrow and passion.

Le choix d'un peuple brings the political to the personal level. More than anything, it is composed of faces, of people – some who care deeply one way or the other, and others who are uninterested, because "no matter what the result of the Referendum is they'll still have to go to work the next day."

Mignault claims *Le choix d'un peuple* is not a political film – the "Oui" and "Non" campaigns are given approximately the same amount of screen-time. But somehow, in the footage selected, the "Non" supporters seem a little less impassioned (as though, perhaps, their cause is less worthy of passion). The sad Québécois ballads that accompany scenes of grieving "Oui" campaign supporters greatly intensify the feeling of sor-

row. There is no equivalent to portray the joy of the "Non" supporters.

English Quebecers are virtually unrepresented in the film. *Le choix d'un peuple* gives the impression that sovereignty was largely a French Québécois concern – the English Quebecer present only as the threatening, unseen Other. The English are mentioned, once, by a "Oui" activist – as the enemy. At one point someone wonders how many of the "Non" votes were English.

Of the few Anglos who do make it into the film, one is a patronizing man whose French everyone (a largely French audience) laughs at. Another Anglophone man is interviewed on the street (he is saying in troubled French that he thinks it's ridiculous to even have a referendum); he turns and walks off quickly, looking embarrassed, intimidated – the camera follows his retreat, as though pleased. A businessman, Michel Gaucher, while being interviewed, takes a call from an Anglo business-associate. There seems no reason to, but the camera rolls throughout the call, the Anglophone completely unaware of the interview in progress, while Gaucher plays with a toy dumptruck as he talks nonchalantly to the English voice.

Pierre Trudeau, appropriately enough, has the last word in the film. But the final sequence undercuts the decisiveness of Trudeau's speech. A slow montage of various moments from both campaigns is accompanied by a sad Québécois ballad – bringing the sorrow of the "Oui" loss to the forefront.

The night of the film's première, the director and producer Bernard Lalonde

gave a short introduction, noting that the ending of *Le choix d'un peuple* is still undecided. One of the film's final ambiguous images supports this: two people in a crowd, one with a Quebec flag, another with a Maple Leaf, wave them back and forth in such a way that they cross and part.

The connotation is that the issue of Quebec's independence is not merely one of the past. Mignault concluded his introduction with a reiteration of René Lévesque's consoling and hopeful words that evening in May 1980: "à la prochaine fois." Many supporters in the theatre audience cheered loudly.

Fay Plant ●

LE CHOIX D'UN PEUPLE d. Hugues Mignault sc. Mignault, Bernard Lalonde, Michel Pratt, Jean Saulnier p. Bernard Lalonde assoc.p. France Morin Lemoine ed. Jean Saulnier asst.ed. Guy "Borza" Boutet mus.comp. Pierre Langevin mus.d. Marc O'Farrell sd.ed. Eric de Baysier, Noel Almey mix. Henri Blondeau cam. Bruno Carrière, Marc Bergeron, Louis de Ernsted, Robert Vanherweghem, Daniel Jobin, Richard Lavoie, Carl Brubacher, François Gill, Michel Caron, André Gagnon, Maurice Roy, James Gray, Marc Tardif sd. Michel Charron, André Legault, Antoine L'Heureux, Dominique Chartrand, Robert Girard, Gilbert Lachapelle, Jean Payette, Marcel Fraser, Marcel Delambre, André Dussault, Alain Corneau, Jean-Guy Bergeron, Robert Morin asst.d. Pierre Lacombe, Louis Laverdière, Alain Corneau, Daniel Le Saunier, Margot Ricard, James Gray, Carl Maillot, Jacques Marcotte, Jean Saulnier, Michel Pratt, Dominique Bernier, Richard Lavoie asst.p. René Clermont, Yvon Arsenault, Yvon Favre, Michel St-Laurent cam.assts Michel La Veaux, Daniel Vincelette, Pierre Blackburn, Jean Caron, Paul Gravel, Daniel Fitzgérald, Marc Tardif, Pierre Duceppe, Sylvain Brault, Madeleine Ste-Marie, Simon Poulin stills Bertrand Carrière, Pierre Beaudin p.c. ACPAV. Produced with the financial participation of La Société générale du cinéma du Québec, Téléfilm Canada, Bellevue Pathé, Les techniciens du S.T.C.Q. dist. Cinéma Libre, 4872, rue Papineau, Montréal (Québec) H2H 1V6, (514) 526-0473, 16mm, col., running time: 99 mins.

Paul Tana's

Caffè Italia

The Québécois, reassured in their *Québécoisité* by the last 20 years of nationalist agitation, have mellowed quite extraordinarily these days. Externally there's an openness to foreign influences that's unprecedented in its relaxedness, while internally it is accompanied (at last) by a welcoming recognition of the equality of the other ethnies that make up contemporary Quebec society. And Paul Tana's charming documentary *Caffè Italia*, a collective biography of the Italians of Montreal, is a reflection of this fact.

Montreal's some quarter-million Italians were the first non-Francophones (after the Métis and the Irish, but not the Ashkenazim Jews) to actually achieve a degree of integration with the surrounding Québécois population, with whom they come to share an urban neighborhood (Rosemont) and a common religion. However, the process of integration was both uneasy and not without its ambiguities. If the Italians were not, unlike the later Greek immigration, historically unprejudiced to speaking French, the fact remained that they had come, not specifically to Quebec or even to Canada ("Canada?" says one of the film's interviewees, "nobody had even spoken about it"), but to America – and America was obviously English and dollar-speaking. Much of the charm of *Caffè Italia* lies in its documenting the Italians' own slow realization that the part of America they had ended up in was, indeed, somehow different. This realization, which the film nicely captures in its contradictoriness, in turn, reflects back on the audience as a shared recognition that, whether our ancestors were *habitants* or the uprooted peasants of Europe, it's a shock on both sides to find that we inhabit the common modernity of today's Quebec. But in that shock lies the basis of a community, and it's in contributing to that new-found sense of community that Tana's film becomes, more than just a film, but a genuine cultural moment.

For *Caffè Italia* is a case-study in culture shock, and the clash of contending modernities. Between 1902 and 1931, until it was halted by Mussolini, Italy exported 11 million emigrants, and generally the poorest of the *mezzogiorno* peasantry who could not be absorbed into the growing proletariat of the industrializing northern Italian cities. Spared from proletarianization in the Old World, the immigrants to the New World arrived just in time to join the ranks of the floating proletariat that industrialized America, including, in Canada, the building of what the Italians called "our CPR."

In a docudrama sequence so utterly mind-boggling that it has to be seen to be believed, Tana brilliantly captures some of the weirder cultural manifestations of the deculturation wrought by

● *Le Choix d'un peuple*: a chance to look back, to laugh, to cry



Photo: Bertrand Carrière



photo: Bernard Fugère

• The crowning of Don Cordosco (Pierre Curzi) in *Caffè Italia*

emigration. The crowning as king by his grateful workers of Don Cordosco, a Montreal Godfather figure who contracted Italian labourers to the CPR, is not only masterfully acted by Pierre Curzi as 'the don' speaking in Italian in a loving, funny testimonial to his heritage, but is furthermore a simply precious reconstruction of the biases of culture. For what made it possible for the immigrants to cope with America was the very myth of the Old Country that would prevent them from assimilating fully into the new.

This worked in two contradictory ways: by the reconstruction in America of traditions that were no longer the case in Italy, or conversely by adopting modernist myths that were in advance of those of the new country they had come to. And this was particularly the case of the Italian Fascists in Montreal, for whom Fascism was a form of technological futurism well-ahead of Canada's own lumbering imperialism or Quebec's ultramontane rejection of modernization until the early '50s.

It's this dissynchronicity of cultural development that *Caffè Italia* handles subtly yet powerfully at the same time. Thrown into the midst of the Canadian 'two solitudes,' the Italians of Montreal, for the most part and not without bitterness, became another solitude in the Canadian 'mosaic' of cultural isolation. Like the good Candides they were, stuck in this Voltairian 'thirty arpents of snow,' they simply contented themselves with tilling their own gardens. For it would not be until the Québécois themselves had experimented with and experienced some of the misadventures of modernity, including intimations of that postmodern sense of also being 'strangers in a strange land,' that a basis for an authentic commonality could begin to develop.

Based on the research of historian Bruno Ramirez, who co-scripted the film along with director Tana, *Caffè Italia* has unearthed a minor gem of archival footage in General Italo Balbo's mid-'30s flying visit to Montreal to display the modern airborne face of Fascist Italy.

Curious, though, is the general paucity of specifically Canadian archival material, which only heightens the terrible cultural loss that immigration to Canada must have been. If Tana makes up for this lack particularly effectively in the Don Cordosco sequence, the other

docudrama insertions (with the exception of a lovely sepia-tinted train sequence) work less well: neo-Brechtian in intent, they come across as neo-Ronald McDonald in execution. Casting Curzi in multiple roles might have seemed like an excellent Lefebvrian idea at the time, but after you've seen him in a half-dozen persona, it's the film's budget itself that begins to look thin.

As a film by a critic - Tana teaches communications at UQAM and writes for *Format Cinéma* - *Caffè Italia* is disappointingly conservative in style. It does, however, make up for this with musical passages on the accordion so painfully haunting that the sounds of these alone speak volumes as to the cultural tragedy of immigration.

Above all, it's for its firm grip on the ambiguity of culture that *Caffè Italia* is a film well-worth seeing, and a real credit to all concerned with its making.

Michael Dorland •

CAFFÈ ITALIA d. Paul Tana sc. Bruno Ramirez. Tana res. Ramirez cam. Michel Caron sd. Serge Beauchemin ed. Louise Surprenant mus. Pierre Flynn. Andrea Piazza p. Marc Daigle p.c. ACPAV, with the financial participation of the Société générale du cinéma, Telefilm Canada, Bellevue Pathé and Société Radio-Canada dist. Cinéma Libre (514) 526-0473. col. 16mm running time: 80 mins. l.p. Pierre Curzi, Tony Nardi, and the participation of the Italians of Montreal

Brigitte Berman's
**Artie Shaw:
Time Is All
You've Got**

The beguiling sinuous strains of "Begin The Beguine" float over the credits, and those of us who remember the '40s and '50s and the Big Bands recognize the clarinet of Artie Shaw and his definitive arrangement of this popular tune.

Brigitte Berman presented her second music documentary at the recent

Festival of Festivals in Toronto and, as it's more than probable that most filmgoers have never heard of her first, make a note of *Bix*: "Ain't none of them play like him yet." And then make another note to catch *Artie Shaw: Time is all you've got* when it gets to a screen. It really deserves to be shown at neighbourhood theatres because of it has wide-ranging age appeal and perfectly conjures up the nostalgia of this period - swing...big bands...jitterbug...

Artie Shaw is now 75, and has been classified as reclusive, arrogant and, heavens, intellectual. Twice he walked away from his successful career - "For fourteen years I was an instant celebrity." The first time was in 1939, after making \$60,000 a week in 1938, and being constantly mobbed by a demanding and adoring public. Shaw despised these fans, referring to them as "morons" who always wanted to hear the same tunes played the same way.

A voracious reader and seeker of knowledge, Shaw's desire to write and to pursue a personal life often led him to retreat from show biz - to Mexico, to a farm in Bucks County, Penn., to a dairy farm in New York state where he wrote his first book *The Trouble With Cinderella* and, finally, to Spain. In the '50s, Shaw was called to testify before the House Un-American Activities Committee and, after that experience, decided he didn't want to live in America any more. He gave up the music business, and departed with his eighth wife, actress Evelyn Keyes, to build a house in Bagur, Spain. Eventually, Shaw returned to live in his own country in 1973, and to teach extension courses at the University of California, Santa Barbara.

But the life of this talented musician has never before been chronicled, and the articulate and abrasive Artie Shaw resisted all offers to sensationalize his story. He agreed to do Berman's film because he liked her handling of *Bix*. And what a great interview he is! In his home, in front of the camera for four days, he doesn't exactly spill his guts, but he does roam through his memory, giving out details (and probably holding back too); putting on old recordings and listening to them intently with an added comment or two; sitting at the piano to demonstrate his theme music, *Nightmare*; and making wonderfully acerbic remarks about his forays into the movies.

Interpersed with these lengthy reminiscences is a vast collection of researched material. Photos of his youthful beginnings (when he taught himself to play the saxophone); fronting his own bands - both stills and from movies; some delightful 'home movie' footage of Shaw clowning in a New York park (taken by a band member); his Navy war service entertaining the troops - all jostling for attention as the Artie Shaw bands play and play and play on the track.

Little is said by Shaw of his unusual marital track-record and that's understandable in a film devoted to his artistic life and career. However, the passing reference to his marriage to Lana Turner is a sad comment on two 'famous' people who meet, marry, but don't really know anything about each other. His last wife, Evelyn Keyes, stayed married to him for 15 years, and she gives a warm, rueful and witty account of their life together, mainly in the house of Spain. With great charm, Keyes makes amusing comments on Shaw's fanatical neatness and tidiness - and admits that, to this day, she is still under his influence in this respect.

So, it's difficult to fault such an absorbing, truly interesting documentary, full of music, good talk and lively comment. At 114 minutes it ought to be shorter, but what to take out? What will Artie say next? is the thread that draws the audience on through the whole film.

After the Festival of Festivals screening, the mixed-age audience streamed into the lobby. A university professor and a newspaper book reviewer greeted each other and started to wander "down-memory-lane" together. They recalled all their Artie Shaw records, when they had seen him with his band, and the girls they had danced with to his music. A 12-year-old passed by, remarking to his Mum that Artie Shaw was a "neat" man...

Pat Thompson •

ARTIE SHAW: TIME IS ALL YOU'VE GOT

p./ed./sc./narr. Brigitte Berman, assoc.p. Don Haig, cam. Mark Irwin, Jim Aquila, sd.rec. Jon Brodin, Gerry Jest, anim.cam. John Derderian, Visual Arts, add.ed. Barry Backus, 16mm., col., running time: 114 mins. Availability: Bridge Film Productions, 44 Charles St.W., Ste. 2518, Toronto, M4Y 1R7

• Artie Shaw beginning the beguine in 1939

