

wounded, just trying to stay alive, but barely retaining his sanity by clinging to his one remaining pillar — the love of his life. (But when even she appears to have conspired against him, he is destroyed); and 4) a side-line love-interest is thrown in, but in a departure from the norm the character, Janvier (Jacques Lussier), is a gay young man. However, the central relationship between the leading female role, Roxanne, and conspirator Gaétan, is never properly defined and seems confined to looking at each other with misty-eyes.

As for the father-son relationship of Théo and Robin, mighty efforts are required from both actors to keep from falling into a stereotype — and they just barely achieve it. Jacques Godin shines, as always, as a strong and loving father, while 16-year-old actor Eric Brisebois gives a good performance as a young man caught in the maelstrom of enveloping violence.

Another veteran actor, Jean-Louis Millette, fits his role well as a shady low-life who actually raises a flag to decency before he too is crushed by events beyond his control.

Robert Gravel, playing the security guard, renders a truly stunning performance as a man caught in a deadly situation, and gradually being destroyed by slow, painful inches. Some of his scenes are among the most memorable of the film.

Director of photography Guy Dufaux brings a look of strong linear beauty to Simoneau's direction (which must have been difficult to shoot at times), while artistic director Michel Proulx works wonders creating a realistically gritty yet beautiful world for the actors to fit in. Despite its \$1.7 million budget, this film *looks* like it cost five times that.

A good deal of the film's effectiveness in creating a suitably tense atmosphere, its deliciously acrid tang, is achieved in the marriage between Simoneau's direction and the music track created by Richard Grégoire.

Simoneau develops the story with a detailed awareness of pacing and creating atmosphere. He adds broadstrokes of tension like an artist applying paint — layer by poignant layer, playing on every fear and phobia common to man, weighing each stroke for its effect as much as its reasoning. As a result, tension builds to a seemingly inevitable crescendo. Therefore more is the pity when the true ending dissipates this pent-up energy with one senseless, nihilistic and anti-climactic orgy of self-destruction of the main players, the very characters the audience have

come to *care* about, and just when the script had pointed brilliantly to a moment of confrontation that should have been the high-point of the story. Instead, when the heavy arrives, two of the four thieves are already dead (one by their own hand).

Despite the unsatisfying ending to a memorable tale, **Pouvoir intime** is an important work of cinema, that could win wider markets than its present local release (though, it's been doing well in its first week). A European release is entirely conceivable, as the French are great fans of American-style thrillers.

Someone is bound to wonder what Simoneau could possibly do as an encore, given a heftier budget and an outstanding script. Judging by the brilliance of **Pouvoir intime**, it would be well worth finding out.

André Guy Arseneault •

Ron Mann's

## Listen To The City

Ron Mann's **Listen to the City**, the first (and to date, only) dramatic feature by the celebrated Toronto documentarist (**Imagine the Sound, Poetry in Motion, Marcia Resnick's Bad Boys**), was completed in 1984 but, by 1986, still hadn't more than a scant handful of public screenings in Canada.

Following a carnivorous nasty reception at its premiere at the '84 Festival of Festivals in Toronto, the film was re-edited by Mann but its distributor, Spectrafilm, remains reluctant to push for screenings. Whether that's because the film still bears the taint of high-profile humiliation (and no beast is tougher than Torontosaurus), or because its formal and political eccentricities make it a hard sell for a commercial distributor seeking first-run engagements in commercial theatres, (its best context would be a classroom or a political meeting) the virtual non-release of **Listen to the City** is unfortunate. For it is one of the more original features produced in English Canada in this decade. (Only in Canada. Pity.)

A self-described "political fable" that combines elements of Godard, Marvel comics, Orwell, rock video and King Vidor's **Our Daily Bread**, **Listen to the City** takes the form (but thankfully not the tone) of an academic argument: it addresses a particular problem and posits a possible strategy for solution.

The problem is unemployment. As introductory titles inform us, Canada's ever-escalating unemployment rate is encompassing increasing numbers of Canadian youth — a situation that cannot bode well for the fostering of a healthy sense of optimism and commitment concerning the nation's future. **Listen to the City's** quasi-utopian, urban romantic solution, which it will allegorically illustrate, is job rotation, the concept of rotating work periods so great numbers of workers can share the same jobs. To create, as the titles boldly prophecy, a "new social solidarity in which ever scarcer jobs are shared by more and more people."

But what follows is not the didactically strained *agitprop* these titles ominously foretell. Quite the contrary. In fact, for all its initial political threats, **Listen to the City** has actually far less political savvy than it has aesthetic gumption. Its cultural concerns are firmly of the pop variety, and its somewhat scattered social improvement strategies are finally less convincing or captivating than the sheer formal exuberance of the film. This affinity to art before politics is in fact immediately established in **Listen to the City's** first sequence, which shows an apparently bedevilled hospital inmate (played by poet-songwriter-reformed junkie Jim Carroll) taking to the street armed with sunglasses, an intravenous stand and a steady stream of prophetic poetic platitudes ("Power is not wealth and power does not serve wealth...", "Our work is our passion and our passion is our task..."). The poet-songwriter figure, a romantic symbol of the exaltation-through-suffering of art and artists, who will re-appear throughout the film like some Christly panhandler, has a signifying resonance far more profound and immediate than most of the more elaborate and developed scenarios he's constantly barging in on. He stands for art and pain and vision and such, and his romantic function in the movie can actually stand for the whole movie, which

is really more a plea for art than a call to arms.

**Listen to the City** tells the story of an eponymous metropolis (undisguisedly Toronto, though not named as such) on the verge of economic collapse as its principal industrial mainstay, Lambda Corporation, is threatening to withdraw because of what slick company spokespersons claim is an irrecoverable decline in profits. We don't trust these silver-haired smoothies a whit and, as it turns out, well that we shouldn't. It seems that Lambda's icily cool and cynical wunderkind president, Shadow (Sky Gilbert), is orchestrating the whole scam from an immaculately sparse office somewhere high in the sky above Bay Street. Shadow's plan is to offer to sell to Lambda workers the seemingly-crippled company at a bargain basement price. Not only will such a scheme bestow upon Shadow a politically progressive nice-guy veneer, it will facilitate his bailing out just in time to avoid (nyah-hah-hah!) the stock market collapse he knows is imminent. It is the agitation of the workers by Shadow's Devo-esque thugs, and the attempts of a reporter (P.J. Soles), a union officer, and a liberal city council member (Barry Callaghan) to put a stop to Lambda's mustache-twiddling subterfuge, that makes up most of **Listen to the City's** dramatic intrigue.

But it is actually the fracturing and disassembly of the parallel scenarios (which collide at the climax) that distinguishes the film, and not their integrated linear momentum. Structured something like a video monitor set on rapid remote control channel-changing, the film conveys more in terms of jarring juxtaposition than it does dramatic development. And while the puzzling parallel intrigues do not fuse in an entirely neat and satisfactory manner in the end, their simultaneity is neither random nor meaningless. In attempting to establish in cinematic terms the same sense of socialist cooperation and mechanical interdependency allegorically alluded to by the voiceover that calls the city a "symphony of voices", Mann's fractured fable acts as an apt working example of politics as process, involving constant changes of perspective and simultaneous individual endeavour. Like the city, political action is not independent entity; it consists of many disparate activities, voices and

• In **Listen To The City**, Sandy Home of The Spoons uses her music to build harmony out of divergent aural and stylistic elements



photo: Joanne Hovey

**POUVOIR INTIME** d. Yves Simoneau p. Claude Bonin, Roger Frappier; sc. Yves Simoneau, Pierre Curzi 1st a.d. Alain "Lino" Chartrand cont. Johanne Prgent d.o.p. Guy Dufaux stills Warren Lipton art d. Michel Proulx set des. Normand Sarrazin props Pierre Fournier p.acct. Daniel Demers asst. Louise Dupré p.sec. Nicole Bernier p.asst. Christine Jasmin mus. Richard Grégoire ed. André Corriveau sup.sd.ed. Paul Dion asst. Marie-Claude Gagné make-up Micheline Trépanier cost. Louise Jobin dresser Luc Le Flaguais gaffer Yves Charbonneau elect. Denis Ménard, Eloi Deraspé, Brian Baker key grip Emmanuel Lépine, grips Pierre Charpentier, Richard Bonin; post-p.d. Jacques Bonin, Suzanne Dusault; unit pub. Danielle Papineau-Couture. Col. 35mm, running time: 87 mins. p.c. Les Films Vision 4 Inc., L'Office National du Film du Canada. With the financial participation of: Téléfilm Canada, La Société générale du cinéma du Québec, and the collaboration of La Société Radio-Canada. Can.dist. Vivafilm (514) 931-2500. Foreign sales Films Transit (514) 527-9781 l.p. Marie Tifo, Pierre Curzi, Jacques Godin, Robert Gravel, Jean-Louis Millette, Yvan Ponton, Eric Brisebois, Jacques Lussier.



elements, which work to create an appearance of integrity and seamless purpose. Thus, political change and social progress are also like (and this is the crux of the allegory) art itself, and particularly music, which also builds harmony out of disparity.

Thus musical production plays a prominent role as both a complement and catalyst to the action, particularly in the form of a young woman (Sandy Horne of *The Spoons*) who writes and performs compositions for guitar and synthesizer. Her attempts to build harmony out of divergent aural elements and styles are interwoven with the various social factions' attempts to confront the impending economic apocalypse (in what is an ultimately unnecessary diegetic explanation for her presence, she is introduced as the union activist's daughter). It is, I think, telling in terms of the film's romantic but engaging political concerns that the actual climax and resolution of the narrative consists of an artistic rather than political reconciliation. The wandering poet-musician, who has been nurtured back to creative activity (he learns synthesizer) by the young woman, is seen in the final moments of the film — which follows the public exposure of Shadow's scheme — performing with her at the same tavern the workers frequent. The song is recognizable to us as the final mix of many congruent themes and melodies we've seen and heard being composed throughout *Listen to the City*. In itself a marvelously economic and effective crystallization of the film's harmony-through-disparity ideology, Mann pushes this perfect moment of narrative closure right through the other side back into the open: as the song is performed, the camera tracks back to reveal, well, **everything** — the director, the crew, sound equipment, camera and dolly — essentially all the disparate mechanical and human bric-a-brac that comprises the apparent formal "harmony" of film.

At once, it is both an evocative and profoundly modest moment: not only does it remind us that every finished work requires the efforts of many to get finished, it emphasizes the tentative and relative nature of political prescription itself. When that camera moves back to reveal its own means of illusion, its organs, so to speak, the film also admitting the subjective nature of its own politics, the specificity of its point of view. It's saying, with a frankness and humility uncommon in the realm of political proselytism, "Well, that's the way I see it, anyway."

Here's hoping more people see it any way. Period.

**Geoff Pevere** •

Charles Jarrott's  
**The Boy In Blue**

**A**t the time of his death in 1983, director John Trent had spent some time working on an idea for a feature film about Ned Hanlan (1855-1908), the greatest sculler of his day. Before the rise of team sports in the late nineteenth century, competitive rowing was the great event in most waterfront communities in Canada, America, Britain and Australia. Hanlan was a legend in his time, praised to the skies by the press for his prowess on the water. Whatever Trent may have planned to celebrate Hanlan, it can't have been *The Boy in Blue*, the John Kemeny production whose opening in Toronto in January had film reviewers Scott, Harkness, Kirkland and Base rushing to outdo each other in creating new synonyms for crap.

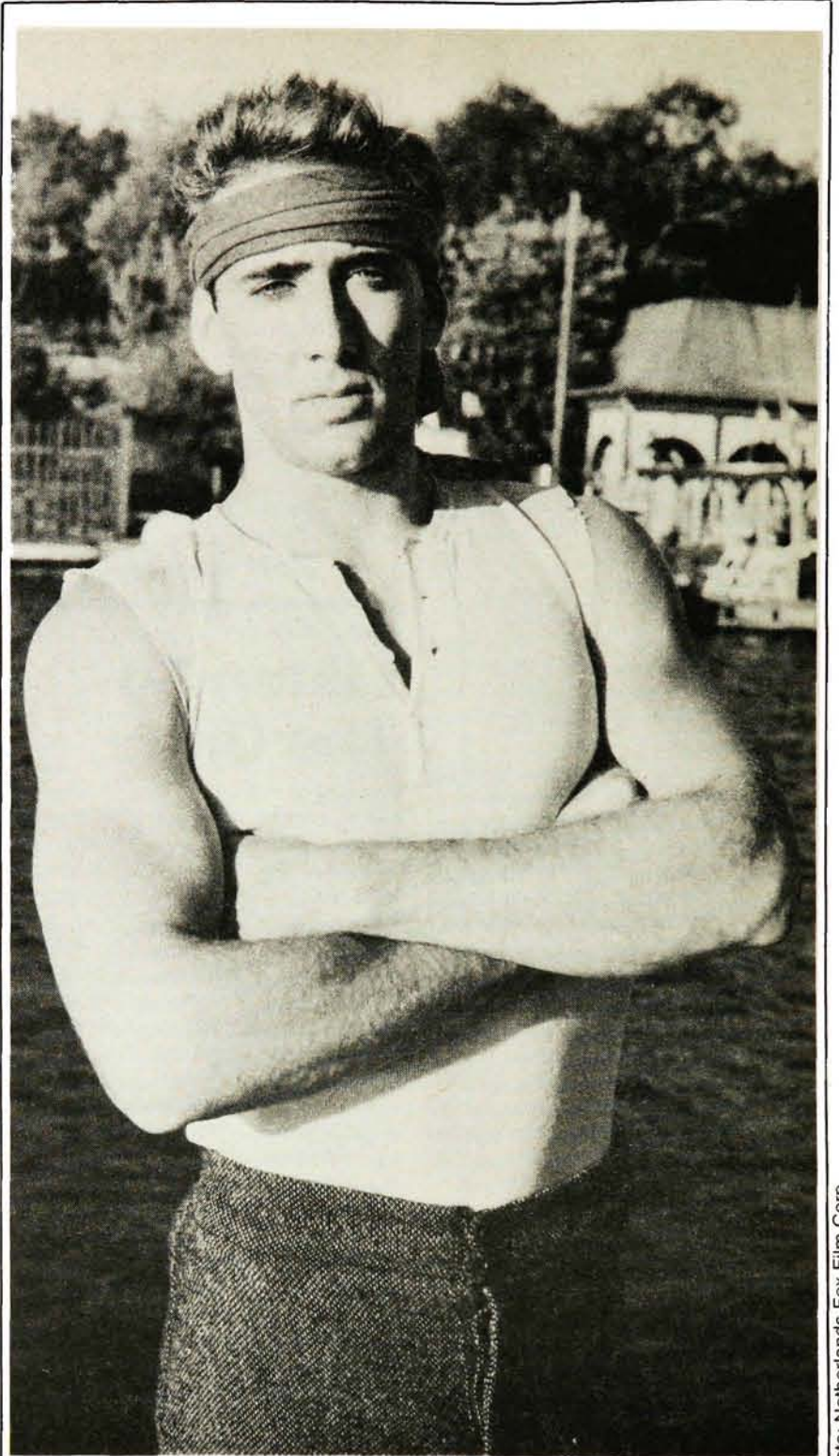
Ned Hanlan (Nicholas Cage) is first seen in 1876, living on the west end of Toronto Island (which was later named for him). After winning a race in the harbour against Bill McCoy (David Naughton), he sets off to deliver some of his moonshine, only to be surprised by the police. Anxious to get out of town quickly, he accepts Bill's offer to go to Philadelphia and compete in the Centennial Regatta. Hanlan defeats the American champion Fred Plaisted, and returns to Toronto a hero.

Seeing the potential and possibility of profit in the young oarsman, Colonel Alexander Knox (Christopher Plummer), a wealthy sportsman and gambler, offers to manage Ned's career. Ned is reluctant to dump Bill, but is smitten by Margaret Sutherland (Cynthia Dale), the colonel's niece. After many trials and tribulations, in which Knox and Hanlan fall out, and Margaret is forced to choose between Ned and the rich Harvard man her uncle prefers, Ned triumphs, marries Margaret, and defeats the Australian Edward Trickett to become world champion.

Strange to say, there are some elements of truth in the shopworn and gooey plot which Douglas Bowie (*Empire Inc.*) has constructed. Hanlan did indeed do some bootlegging, but it was to help his father's hotel, as the civic authorities would not extend his liquor permit. He did win his first international match in 1876 against Plaisted and the world championship against Trickett in 1880. And Hanlan's wife was named Margaret Sutherland.

That, however, is about it. In a central point in the plot of the film, Hanlan rams his opponent in Boston in 1878. This did happen, though against Plaisted instead of Trickett, but Hanlan was not barred from competition. (A race he had a year later in Washington saw more sculduggery than anything concocted for the film). Nor did Hanlan's financial backers desert him. In fact, they had backed him even before he first went to Philadelphia. The characters of Knox and McCoy are fictional.

Perhaps some originality of direction could have negated the melodramatic



• Typical American biopic hunk: Nicolas Cage as *The Boy In Blue's* Ned Hanlan

blarney of Bowie's script. But it would be too much to expect such from Charles Jarrott. Nothing in his previous work of stodgy history (*Anne of the Thousand Days*), blowsy trash (*The Other Side of Midnight*), failed musical (the 1973 version of *Lost Horizon*), overblown thriller (*The Amateur*) or limp spoof (*Condorman*), would suggest it.

Thus, we get the predictable borrowings. From the *Rocky* films comes the underdog getting his shot, the sweaty training, and the triumphant music. From *Chariots of Fire* comes the notion of the outsider who challenges the effete establishment. The nostalgic glow recalls the Australian film *Phar Lap*, and, as an added bonus, the Ned-Bill relationship has distinct echoes of *The Sting*.

There is not much to cheer about regarding the performances either. Although he is physically able to handle the part of Hanlan, Nicolas Cage remains too much the contemporary

American hunk to convincingly portray the nineteenth-century Irish-Canadian. For some reason, he never wears Hanlan's characteristic moustache. Christopher Plummer's Knox is in the same mode of the villains he played in *Some-where in Time* and *Highpoint*, cardboard stereotypes of the rich. David Naughton's Bill is forgettable. Only Sean Sullivan, in what was his last role, makes any real impression. He plays Walter Brown, whose invention of the sliding sculling seat contributed much to Hanlan's victories, with characteristic dignity.

Of the two female leads, Cynthia Dale deserves more respect than she has received. She attempts to give some depth and comic flair to Margaret, though she is thoroughly hampered by the anachronistic behaviour which Bowie gives to her and to Cage. Melody Anderson, who plays Ned's early girlfriend Dulcie, is not so lucky. The comic sex scene between Dulcie and Ned is the most jarring anachronism of all. It belongs in

**LISTEN TO THE CITY** d./p. Ron Mann sc. Ron Mann and Bill Schroeder orig. story Bill Schroeder ed. Elaine Foreman d.o.p. René Ohashi art d. Barbara Dunphy sd. David Joliat mus. Gordon Deppe perf. by Sandy Horne assoc. p./p.man. Colin Brunton a.d./p.coord. Peter Wintonick cast. Elliott Lefko lighting Jock Brandis asst to p./unit pub. Elliott Lefko stock footage National Film Board of Canada comp. grafix Alan Winters All Music Copyright Spoons Music Inc. 1984. Sphinx Productions gratefully acknowledge the importance of the ideas of Frithjof Bergmann to the production of this film. For further reading, see *On Being Free* (Notre-Dame University Press, 1977) and *The Future of Work*, Praxis Intern (1983). p.c. Sphinx Productions. Col. 90 minutes dist. International Spectrafilm Dist., Inc. l.p. P.J. Soles, Michael Glassbourg, Sandy Horne, Jim Carroll, Barry Callaghan, Sky Gilbert, Mary Hawkins, Real Andrews, Gary Augustynck, Peter Wintonick, Bill Lord, Gigi Guthrie, Peter Griffen, Geets Romo.

photo: Netherlands Fox Film Corp.