Conspiracy just went on and on with overkill. For instance, the sequence of Leslie Nielsen trying to remember the names of all those other “talented Canadians” he went to school with up there in Canada (as the Americans call it).

Ideally this should have been nothing more than a typical 15-minute Canadian Reflections film, which is where CBC normally slots its summertime made-in-Canada summer fare, and watches, Dallas isn’t on anyway. Instead, the nation got an hour and a half’s worth of prime time leg-gawing, with such gags as the voice-overer’s “Canadians as a stop at nothing to capture every American box-office dollar.” Or, in the same vein, “Politicians will do anything to camouflage their direct responsibility for the Canadian conspiracy.”

In fact, Lorne Greene himself put it in The Conspiracy’s one second of truth: “There’s never been a Canadian conspiracy. There’s no such thing as a Canadian conspiracy.”

Maybe it’s time there was one. Unfortunately a Canadian-made send-up of an American-style spoof about a conspiracy that never was seems to be the best we can come up with.

Michael Dorland


To lose oneself in one’s own world, where the familiar becomes strange and time has no meaning, must be a journey into the vortex of a terrifying nightmarch, that is the essence of Alzheimer’s disease. The first indications of Sonia’s illness come on her birthday. First she forgets it is her birthday — in itself not so peculiar because an active and independent, fulfilled, apparently worry-free life — does her vitality, so does her home. Signs are put up indicating which doors lead where, furniture is overturned, toys and knick-knacks left in disarray. Sonia’s living space is a symbol of her mind — at first orderly, open, modern, then filled with corridors, rooms and doors that can no longer be travelled through with conscious knowledge and safety.

Several beautifully conceived and moving scenes indicate the talent at work on this film. One that I found most memorable and expressive occurs about a third of the way through, after Sonia begins to experience prolonged lapses of memory, and time and place become distorted. She packs a suitcase, convinced that she must go away. Not recognizing Rosanne she busily folds and packs while Rosanne empties the suitcase. The camera stays on their hands, frantically struggling, as Rosanne tries desperately to bring her mother’s mind back to the present. Their panic and anger is evident in their hands and voices — faces or eyes are unnecessary and, in fact, would probably have been too pathetic.

Another moment that I found one of the darkest of the film, is when Sonia seems to be moving further and further back into the past, sometimes a child and sometimes a young woman. Her hair on end and sloppily dressed, then wanders around her apartment, lost, apparently unable even to read the signs indicating the way outside. We have no idea where she wants to go, or does she. The intelligent, sophisticated Sonia has fallen lost inside this woman who visually has the same effect as bagging inside. We wonder what kind of a film it would be to include Roxanne’s own struggle to emerge from the shadow of such a mother. As actress, director and writer, Baillargeon has managed to imply all of the emotions and situations particular to the mother/daughter relationship; the recognition of one’s self in the other and the desperate need to break away and assert one’s individuality that coincides with an inexplicable love.

While Sonia and Rosanne there is a respect, tenderness and love, of the kind possible only in the absence of a father-figure. Yet there is the nance of an edge — that edge inevitably exists between mother and daughter. We watch Rosanne as she watches her beautiful, talented, vivacious mother, wondering perhaps, to “be” to include Roxanne’s own struggle to emerge from the shadow of such a mother.

Both actresses, Kim Yaroshevskaya as Sonia and Paule Baillargeon as Rosanne bring the relationship alive, and it is such to the credit of their talents that the film is what it is. It is not easy to play someone re-experiencing childhood and not look ridiculous. Yaroshevskaya faced a difficult role and plays it with grace and intelligence. Her anger, her gentle patience and her girlish silliness, all remain in character — Sonia as created by Yaroshevskaya.

If I have one problem with Sonia, it is with the idealized world it encapsulates. And that is a problem I’ve had with other recent Quebec productions. The world created within these films is so beautiful, everyone is so successful, I never forget I’m watching “movies.” There is an insistent degree of unreality in them, but understandably, the tragedy in this film would have been too intense if Sonia had lived in any less perfect a world. But I couldn’t help wondering what kind of a film it would have been if she had — or about those more average people who find themselves victims of Alzheimer’s disease.

At 58 minutes, Sonia has the look of a made-for-TV movie in its small spaces and tight framing. It is pleasing to see the NFB deploying its talent with a view toward the mass audience.

Jame Gaetz •

Paule Baillargeon's

Sonia

Quebec's Paule Baillargeon, best known and respected as an actress and filmmaker (La Cuisine rouge), should find glory added to her reputation with Sonia, which she co-directed, wrote as well as acted in. Sonia premiered in Montreal on June 15 as the major closing-night attraction of the Tournant, the second International Festival of Women's Films and Videos.

Sonia is about a woman who, literally at the prime of her artistic and professional life as an artist who teaches art history at a university and lives an independent, fulfilled and apparently finan-

ially worry-free life — discovers she has Alzheimer’s disease. Surrounded by loving and supporting people, including her daughter Roxanne, Sonia’s life could not be more near-perfect — until the advent of the disease.

Dressed in the film’s potential for more subtly choreographed and sentimental emotionality, Sonia caught me off-guard and captured me instead. Of succumbing to tragedy, Baillargeon creates two worlds, the world of warm and loving family centers, who change the whole focus and dynamic of the film. While it is still about a woman whose life slowly and visibly slips from her, Sonia is also about the further tests, begun by her daughter Roxanne, of that disease.

The first indications of Sonia’s illness come on her birthday. First she forgets it is her birthday — in itself not so peculiar because an active and independent, fulfilled, apparently worry-free life — does her vitality, so does her home.

Sonia takes a tender speech of gratitude to her daughter and friends, then several minutes later repeats it word for word, oblivious that she has just said the same thing. Everyone is taken aback but lets it pass. Other minor events occur, but it’s not until Sonia disappears for several days and cannot explain where she’s been that Roxanne realizes something is seriously wrong. Toward Sonia’s wishes, Roxanne takes her to a doctor who truly explains that it’s probably nothing — “the change of life, that’s all” — and prescribes something to help her sleep.

Sonia herself finally sees another doctor who recognizes the symptoms of the first world, which is, after all, Alzheimer’s disease. Through this first third, the film flows, creating a virtual world and atmosphere that contains balance, beauty and security.

Sonia’s home is an important visual focal point throughout the film. Filled with her paintings (in reality painted by Lise Abastado), it is a personality that in essence is Sonia herself — as Sonia loves her vitality, so does her home. Signs are put up indicating which doors lead where, furniture is overturned, toys and knick-knacks left in disarray. Sonia’s living space is a symbol of her mind — at first orderly, open, modern, then filled with corridors, rooms and doors that can no longer be travelled through with conscious knowledge and safety.

Several beautifully conceived and moving scenes indicate the talent at work on this film. One that I found most memorable and expressive occurs about a third of the way through, after Sonia begins to experience prolonged lapses of memory, and time and place become distorted. She packs a suitcase, convinced that she must go away. Not recognizing Rosanne she busily folds and packs while Rosanne empties the suitcase. The camera stays on their hands, frantically struggling, as Rosanne tries desperately to bring her mother’s mind back to the present. Their panic and anger is evident in their hands and voices — faces or eyes are unnecessary and, in fact, would probably have been too pathetic.

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