

Claude Gagnon's
The Kid Brother

Few recent films offer so slippery a sense of their own context as Claude Gagnon's **Kid Brother**. A modest film which provides little sense of the places from or to which it speaks, its unexpected success at Montreal's World Film Festival has resulted in awkward attempts to account for it in terms of an (as-yet elusive) authorial career or a resurgent local cinema. Newspaper reviewers, in opting to read the film against the backdrop of other treatments of comparable themes or subjects, have been led to what is perhaps the only useful matrix within which **Kid Brother** may be judged. One watches with vigilant attention as the film winds its way around the traps endemic to films about

the disabled or unusual, then congratulates it on its success.

Normally, a film like this might be expected to find a life within the interstices of the youth festival circuit and international television markets, arousing a broad if restrained consensus in its favour. A film whose principal appeal is not to cinephiles, it has nevertheless been forced to seek its momentum from festival and journalistic response, with variable success. This is unfortunate; **Kid Brother's** virtues are those of a film with a long shelf-life and specialized constituency, not those of a seasonal triumph.

The intricacies of **Kid Brother's** history (it was filmed in the U.S., with a cast of mid-range mainstream American performers, and financed in part — like Gagnon's earlier films — with Japanese money) are by now well-known, as is the director's acknowledged estrangement from the main currents of Quebec filmmaking over the last several years. Similar circumstances have, in the case of other filmmakers, resulted in everything from a thematization of this *déracinement* to a productive clash of cultural traditions. With **Kid Brother**, it is

rather as if a strong investment in the apparent universality of the film's subject matter (the portrait of a boy born with no legs) has converged with the naturalism of Gagnon's earlier films (in particular, **Visage pâle**) to produce a kind of humanist esperanto. **Kid Brother** seems committed to eliciting universalist adjectives like "funny, moving and heartwarming" (the press release) and the Bulgarian or Chinese distribution deals which almost inevitably follow.

Kid Brother is, to its credit, successful at avoiding the twin traps of inspirational condescension and the voyeuristic revelation of sexual or hygienic detail. It accomplishes this, in large part, by making these part of the film's thematic and narrative material. The inability of characters in the film to just let Kenny live his life is set up against the film's own resolute determination to do just that. The unfolding of Kenny's difficulties takes shape within the style and narrative patterns of television melodrama (like so many of these, the story involves the disruption and reconciliation of the nuclear family). The point — that the magnitude of problems as perceived outside the family has little to do with the banality and familiarity of their effects within it — is a useful if uncontroversial one. It is, however, established quite early, and many viewers pass the point at which that ordinariness still has the force of revelation.

In this respect, I am reminded of Leslie Halliwell's brusque dismissal of Ida Lupino's film **The Bigamist**: that, having summoned all its force to make the point that bigamy exists, it finds few viewers surprised or shocked and retreats, deflated. **Kid Brother**, in its insistence on the quotidian ordinariness of Kenny's life, risks a similar reaction. The film, for many initially skeptical viewers, elicits a simple sigh of relief for having fulfilled its promise to be unobjectionable. Those most affected by **Kid Brother** seem to be those, precisely, for whom Kenny's story is one of courage and inspiration, an unfortunate but widespread response to a film which genuinely works to resist it.

Will Straw •



• Kenny Easterday in slippery Kid

THE KID BROTHER A Kinema Amerika Motion Picture A Towa Production Co., Ltd. Bandai Co., Ltd. and Kinema Tokyo Co., Ltd. presentation exec. p. Matsuo Takahashi, Makoto Yamashina co-p. Hirohiko Suyoshi line p. Dennis Bishop d.o.p. Yudai Kato (J.S.C.) art d. Bill Bilowit lighting sup. Kenjiro Konaka casting by Judy Courtney, Donna Newton add. cast. by Sharon Ceccatti, Clayton Hill m. comp and conducted by François Dompierre song "Soaring Baby" m. by François Dompierre lyric Daniel Lavoie sung by Daniel Lavoie ed. André Corriveau p. Kiyoshi Fujimoto sc/ d. Claude Gagnon assist. p. Daisaku Yamada prod. sup. Mel Howard, Yuri Yoshimura-Gagnon prod. man. Kathleen Caton 1st a. d. Eduardo Rossof 2nd a. d. Annie Loeffler loc. man. Brett Botula sc. sup. Carmen Soriano, Paul Bowers cost. des. Maureen Hogan asst. art. d. David Hill prop master Ruth Lounsbury asst. prop. Martin Carrigan 1st. cam. op. Bert Guthrie 2nd. cam. op. John Rice cam assts Clive Sacke, Simon Manses, Tony Baggott, Tsotomu Takada cam. loader Evan Estern still photog. Alain Gagnon, Susan Golomb, Richard Golomb sd. mix Russell Fager boom op. Jim Bruwelheide sd. ed. Louis Dupire dialogue ed. Michel Bordeleau asst sd. ed. Louis Col-

lin m. ed. Noel Almey re-rec. mix Michel Descombes. André Gagnon Foley rec. Andy Malcolm color timing Pierre Campeau neg. cutter Negbec Film Inc. asst ed. Christine Denault apprentice editor Anne-Josée Boudreau head carp Gary Kosko scenic painters Carol Stavish, Leah Boogeman, Rick Sheridan carp. Bill Franko, Greg Deroy set dressers Frederika Gray, Alexis Samulski make-up Jeanne Josefczyk asst. make-up Karin Wagner ward sup. Mary Lee Anderson Forrester ward asst. Terry Eglar Bilsky lighting d. Bill Schwarz gaffer Barry Kessler best-boy elec. Hirokazu Murasawa elec. Robert Lubomski key grip Peter Bennett Beal dolly grips Nick Tallo, Richard Sieg craft services Craig Snidach, Susan Sayers catering service Metro Catering asst. to d. Luc Vandal int. Shisho Ito, Juncho Tsunashima tutors Diane Benec, Susan Handeshield stand in Mike Treylinek, Sal Palazzo dogs supplied by Captain Haggerty's School for Dogs handlers Susan Zaretsky, Mary Doran transportation co-ords Frank McGough, T. Michael Reid gripelec. driver Dennis Drogan honey wagon, driver Jackie L. Crane prod. co-ord Jessica Abrams prod. acc. Deann Balse prod. sec. Barbara Homziuk, Debby Carter, Holly Bruwelheide acc asst. Media Rago key prod. asst. Thom Dowling prod. asst. John Stefancic, Bill Alberter, Jeff Barker, Andy Taylor, Arthur Sherin, Maria Polanick, Randall Newsome, Tony Mastrelembro post-production staff Montreal (Canada) prod. man. Alain Gagnon prod. co-ord Joanne Duguay prod. acc. Marie-Josée Théoret et prod. asst. Denys Lortie Production Staff Tokyo co-ord Akihiko Shimada acc. Rikiji Mori pub. Tadahiko Nobe sec. Kyoko Suzuki, Taeko Saito prod. counsel Janet C. Jacobson, Thomas E. Rothman film by Fuji Film, Hoei Sangyo cam. lenses Panavision loc. equip. Filmtrucks, Performance lighting lab Bellevue-Pathé Québec Inc., Michel Déglise, Serge Nadeau sd. lab. Sonolab Inc. titles Les productions ciné-titres opticals Film Docteur du Québec Inc. Special Thanks to Takaka Shigemori, The Easterday Family, Pennsylvania Governor Dick Thornburgh, Film Commission of Pennsylvania, Joyce Tomana, The City of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh Mayor Richard Caliguri, People of West Aliquippa, Pennsylvania, Aliquippa Mayor Dan Britza, Greater Pittsburgh International Airport, Central Medical Pavilion of Pittsburgh, Union Electric Steel Corporation, Bob Mack, Ace Auto Glass (Harry), WPXI-TV (Pittsburgh), Ritzy's, Jérôme Langlois. Song "Disposable Love", music Rudy Toussaint lyric Stéphane Fortier sung by B. B. Boom I. p. Kenny Easterday, Caitlin Clarke, Liane Curtis, Zach Grenier, Jesse Easterday, Jr., Tom Reddy, Alain St-Alix, Daniel Lambert, Lamy Derval, Eduardo Rossoff, John Carpenter, Gerry Klug, Bingo O'Mally, Bill Dalzell, Fretchen Greaser, Barbara Russell, Donale Stone, Karen Eisenhower, Laurence Woshner, Angelica Bellomo, Sharon Ceccatti, Frederika Gray, B. J. Rankin, Phyllis Stern, Sal Palazzo, Martin Carrigan, John King, Clayton D. Hill, Jim McCrum.

Robert Frank and
Rudy Wurlitzer's

Candy Mountain

When Henry Fonda hit the road in **The Grapes of Wrath**, it was because the banks had turfed him off his land and the long road to California was the only option open to him. When son Peter, along with his buddy Dennis Hopper, trekked across the country some 25 years later in **Easy Rider**, the open road represented the means through which one could opt out of society. In Robert Frank and Rudy Wurlitzer's **Candy Mountain**, Julius (Kevin J. O'Connor) heads north to Nova Scotia in search of fame and fortune. **Candy Mountain** is in some ways just another road movie, but it is also a movie of our times; a movie of the '80s.

Given the histories of the two directors involved, one might have expected



• Kevin J. O'Connor watches dream candy get scorched

an updated version of a '60s road picture. Yet although many elements of the Beat vision of '50s and '60s America are firmly in place, there is a real attempt to reconcile the idealism of the past with the realities of the present.

Candy Mountain begins in New York City as Julius overhears a conversation about the 'legendary' Elmore Silk, one of the greatest acoustic guitar makers in the country who hasn't been seen or heard from in more than a decade. If Silk can be found, think the city schemers, his new guitars could be leaked onto the market and profits in the thousands could be made. For \$2,000 and a cut of profits, Julius volunteers to track down the longlost Elmore Silk.

And so the adventure begins. Changing cars in virtually every scene, Julius works his way up through New York State and across the border into Nova Scotia. Along the way, he comes face-to-face with the threads that make up the past of the elusive Elmore Silk. Silk's brother, played with tacky flair by Tom Waits, tells our young hero: "You're young, you should be playing lots of golf." Dr. John appears as Silk's less-than-fraternal, wheelchair-bound brother-in-law; Leon Redbone pops up in the most unlikely role of a Nova Scotian justice of the peace; and Tantoo Cardinal puts a great deal of spunk into her role as a local native who breaks into the cottages of summering Americans to keep warm while stalking deer.

This is a film that depends almost entirely on the strength of its cameo appearances. It is, after all, a road movie; a road movie with a beginning, an end, and a string of cameos in between. The cameo turns are often a bit too quirky to be entirely successful, but none of them are way off the mark. In the true spirit of the road movie, every performance

keeps things moving, and the forward momentum is never lost.

All of this, however, would have been for naught if the film's ending didn't deliver the goods. The true spirit of the film (and of the road as well) materializes at the end when Julius finally catches up with Elmore Silk, played with restraint, ease and humour by Harris Yulin. Silk is no Kurtz, but his presence envelops **Candy Mountain** in much the same way that the most vivid of Conrad characters hangs over the jungle in **Heart of Darkness**. If Julius' ambition in trekking to Nova Scotia is seeking fame and fortune, Silk's only ambition is to keep moving. Silk has no interest in Julius' schemes and is preparing to leave once again. As Elmore tells Julius, "I'll go somewhere I haven't been before. Maybe out West."

Candy Mountain is by no means a perfect film. It runs a bit too long at times, the segments which make up the film are not joined together as fluidly as they might have been, and there's not nearly enough local flavour in the Nova Scotian portion of the film — a rather serious criticism when one considers the insight and detail that Robert Frank was able to capture in his photographs of the American South and West.

It's been 30 years since Kerouac wrote *On the Road*, but that road has as much of an engrossing mystique as it did in 1955. And though it may be at odds with the 'make it' ethic of the '80s, there's something still strangely appealing about a voyage of discovery through the unknown roadways of North America. As Kerouac himself wrote: "What is that feeling when you're driving away from people and they recede on the plain till you see their specks dispersing? — it's the too-huge world vaulting us, and it's good-by. But we lean for-

ward to the next crazy venture beneath the skies." With **Candy Mountain**, Kerouac himself couldn't have asked for a better tribute, and the familiar material of the road movie couldn't have been better served.

Greg Clarke •

CANDY MOUNTAIN. A Xanadu Film, Rudy Waldburger presentation in association with Les Films Plain-Chant (Philippe Diaz) and Les Films Vision 4 Inc (Claude Bonin, Suzanne Hénauld). sc. Rudy Wurlitzer, d. Robert Frank, Rudy Wurlitzer d.o.p. Pio Corradi sd. David Joliat art d. (N.Y.) Brad Ricker art d. Canada Keith Currie ward/ styling Carol Wood casting USA Risa Braemon/ Billy Hopkins, Heidi Lewitt casting Canada Gail Carr asst. d. Richard Garber, Alain Klarer, Lydie Mahias sc. sup. Brigitte Germain asst. cam. Patrick Lindernmaier gaffer Andre Pinkus grip/ elec. Richard Ludwig key grip. N.Y. Chris Ingvordsen key grip Canada Michael Periard spfx Jacques Godbout prod. man. N.Y. Philippe D'Arbanville prod. man. Canada Marcelle Gibson loc. unit man. K.C. Schulberg asst. to the d. Jerry Poynton ed. Jennifer Auge asst. ed. Camille Côté sd. ed. François Gedigier asst. sd. ed. Karen Logan mix. Dominique Dalmasso m. sup. Hal Wilner p. Ruth Waldburger, Philippe Diaz, Claude Bonin, Suzanne Hénauld exec. p. Gerald Dearing assoc. p. Tom Rothman. A co-production of Canada, Switzerland, France, Canada, Xanadu Film, Films Plain Chant, Films Vision 4 Inc. Produced with the participation of Department of the Interior, Bern; Ministry of Culture (CNC), Paris; Telefilm Canada, First Choice (Canada) in co-production with George Reinhart, Zurich; T.S. Production, Milena Poylo, Paris, Television Suisse (SSR) and Films A2 Ip. Kevin J. O'Connor, Harris Yulin, Tom Waits, Bulle Ogier, Roberts Blossom, Leon Redbone, Dr. John, Rita MacNeil, Joe Strummer, Laurie Metcalf, Jayne Eastwood, Kazuko Oshima, Eric Mitchell, Mary Joy, Bob Joy, Arto Lindsay, Mary Margaret O'Hara, David Johansen, David Margulies, Tony "Machine" Krasinski, Susan H. Kirschner, Dee de Antonio, Jose Soto, Bob Maroff, Rockets Redglare, Nancy Fish, Liz Porrizzo, Harry Fox, Roy Maceachern, Wayne Robson, Eric House, Rosalee Larade, John Simon Beaton, Norman Rankin, Stanley MacNeil, Tantoo Cardinal, Jo-Ann Rolls, Ralph Dillon musicians Dr. John, David Johansen, Leon Redbone, Rita MacNeil, Tom Waits, Joey Barron, Mark Bingham, Michael Blair, Ralph Carney, Crispin Cioe, Greg Cohen, Joe de Lia, Ralph Dillon, Bob Funk, Tony Garnier, Arno Hecht, Brian Koonan, Arto Lindsay, Paul Litteral, Tony Machine, Magic Dick, Steve Morrell, Parc Ribot, Fernando Saunders, John Saunders, John Scofield, Chris Spedding, Peter Stammel, Kevin Tooley. colour 35 mm Running time 91 min.

Jean-Yves Laforce's **Le Coeur découvert**

Playwright and novelist Michel Tremblay, Quebec's literary superstar, is no stranger to the Quebec cinema. During the '70s he scripted **Il Était une fois dans l'est** and **Le Soleil se lève en retard** for director André Brassard, his longstanding collaborator, as well as **Parlez-nous d'amour** for Jean-Claude Lord. All three films are among the underrated treasures of that decade. But the neglect of the brilliant, ferocious **Il Était une fois**, which assembled Tremblay's menagerie from the momentous **Les Belles-soeurs** play cycle plus a breathtaking ensemble of the leading acting talent of the day, is especially unfair (today it is recycled only in gay film festivals around the world). More recently, the movies have profited less from Tremblay's gifts, perhaps because his plays are so self-consciously theatrical with their direct-address monologues, and perhaps because the novels would be very expensive to adapt with their period urban sets.

All the same, I don't understand why Tremblay got the cold shoulder everywhere when he approached producers with a script called **Le Coeur découvert**. It was a low-budget, present-day project with clear commercial potential, a kind of gay comic instalment in the series of family melodramas that have done rather well commercially over the last decade in Quebec, from **Les Bons débarras** to **Mario** to **Bach et bottine**, with the focus shifted somewhat towards the grownups. Not one to be easily discouraged, Tremblay brought out a novel version of the property last year and at the same time succeeded in hooking Radio-Canada into a commitment for a TV-movie version.

Hearing this background made everything come into place since my first impression had been that the film adaptation was a refreshing improvement on the novel. In fact **Le Coeur**, which premiered at the Montreal World Film Festival (where some of it was actually photographed as well, since one of the principals belongs to that particular Montreal breed, the festival glutton), is a delightful *tour de force*. Directed by Jean-Yves Laforce and masterfully shot in 16mm by none other than Jean Pierre Lefebvre, the film will hopefully make the shortsighted private producers a little bit more openminded in the future.

Since Tremblay moved to Outremont at the peak of his success, some of his work, I think, had lacked the punch of the earlier plays situated in the Plateau Mont-Royal, the *quartier populaire* of