

## No free lunch?

Recently I had the opportunity, no, the privilege of working as a production assistant on a film being shot at the Canadian Centre for Advanced Film Studies. I drove a cube van on the production for a few days and I was promoted to transportation captain. Not for minimum wage mind you, not for union scale? (unthinkable) but for a free lunch (Swiss Chalet to be specific). Who says there's no such thing as a free lunch? Something for nothing. You bet!

After a few days of largesse I moved on to bigger and better things: I began work as the volunteer co-ordinator from the guest office of the thirteenth annual Festival of Festivals. Again remuneration took the form of perquisites; a salary consisting of croissants and orange juice from the hospitality suite of the Park Plaza. If a few words of wisdom from Roger Ebert, a smile from Rae Dawn Chong or shaking hands with Bonnie Bedelia (excuse me Miss Bedelia) is enough to sustain life then this is the job for you! If I had it to do all over again I'd jump at the chance!

While all this fun and games was going on my I.A.T.S.E. and D.G.C. cards were lapsing into suspension because my dues payments were in arrears. So the next time Bruce McDonald writes to Norman Jewison about the vicissitudes of survival in the Canadian film industry I have

some advice for him: learn to live on hope, inspiration and Kraft Dinner or hopes of putting together an inspired meal of Kraft Dinner...

From the land of the idle poor,

Steven B. Freeman  
Toronto

## A glaring omission

Canada has at least three world-class festivals, not two, as Greg Klymkiw seems to believe (*Immovable fests* - CC#157). I turned to his article to see how the various festivals emerged from his scrutiny, and was astonished to find the Vancouver International Film Festival not included, or even mentioned. Why the glaring omission? The VIFF meets all the (serious) criteria admirably and has done so for several years. I applaud Klymkiw's main point - rivalry between the festivals is pointless and unproductive. So is promoting the idea that Canada ends at the Quebec and Ontario borders.

Theresa Best  
Vancouver

## Philip Stuart McPhedran

(April 10, 1949 - December 4, 1988)

BY GEORGE CSABA KOLLER

Seventeen years ago, Phil McPhedran and I were writing scripts and creating filmstrips for an educational film company in Toronto. Even though we made money for the outfit by converting their 16mm motion picture library to the faster-selling format, they expressed their thanks by firing both of us, just a week before Christmas.

Needless to say, our holidays weren't the most cheerful. But things aren't always what they seem, and the cold heartedness of that film company proved to be a blessing. Knowing that we were out of a job, Ed de Fay of the Canadian Society of Cinematographers approached Phil and I to resurrect their defunct publication. Thus was born this second edition of *Cinema Canada*, the very magazine you are reading.

The first issue was put together on Phil's kitchen table, and looked it. But it struck a chord and filled a need within Canada's film community. A community that was beginning to exhibit signs of vitality with such films as *Mon Oncle Antoine* and *Going Down the Road*. After our third issue, Phil and I went separate ways, with me continuing to edit and publish the magazine, while he started a very successful career, first as an Assistant Director, and later as a Production Manager on major features.

Those who worked with Philip on the numerous films that carry his credit, will always remember his vitality, his ability to make lightning-quick decisions, his passion for games ranging from bridge to tennis to billiards to golf, and most of all his slightly-off-the-wall sense of humour, which was balanced by his sense of fair play and his own brand of integrity.

Some of the productions that benefitted from his seemingly unlimited energies were *The Hard Part Begins*, *Love at First Sight*, *Monkeys in the Attic*, the CBC shows *The Newcomers*, *The Collaborators*, *Anthology*, and the multi-million dollar features *Bells, Tulips, and Spacehunters*. He even directed a documentary for the CBC, called *Karen Kain: Ballerina* in the '70s. More recently, he has been analyzing budgets for Telefilm.



According to his wife Lynne Mackay, who is a costume designer on features and TV movies, Phil's passing (due to cancer) was "perfect," with "cats and sunshine, plants and people" in the living room of their house in Toronto. He was at peace with the idea of leaving this reality. As Lynne's 80-year-old Aunt Grace put it: "Phil had too much energy to let it disappear. He had another job to do."

On December 9th a memorial service was held at the Toronto Necropolis. The old cemetery was a favourite haunt of Philip's since he was a young man. It was where he went to work out his confusions. The place was packed with people who loved him and those that had been touched by him. His mother, Honor McPherson, spoke, along with his family and friends. A ceremonial talking stick carved by Michele Moses was passed around to each speaker, and it seemed very appropriate to the occasion.

Phil's ashes will be scattered from the Maritimes to British Columbia, with a special handful used to fertilize his favourite Wisteria plant in their back garden. "They'll never bloom in this climate," Lynne told him when he planted the flowers. We're confident that the Wisteria will be blooming purple blossoms come next season.

### FILM POSITION

The Centre for the Arts at Simon Fraser University expects to make a tenure track appointment in film production at the rank commensurate with qualifications. The appointment will be made for **September 1989**.

The successful candidate will have substantial professional experience in documentary, dramatic, or experimental film; a demonstrated ability to teach film production at all levels; and familiarity with contemporary film theory and criticism.

The position involves teaching filmmaking at the intermediate and advanced levels; conducting seminars in film criticism; and supervising student films. In addition candidates should be prepared to accept responsibilities within an interdisciplinary fine and performing arts department. Preference will be given to candidates eligible for employment in Canada at the time of application.

Deadline for applications is **February 3, 1989**.

Letters of application, a complete curriculum vitae, and the names of three referees should be sent to:

Professor Grant State  
Director  
Centre for the Arts  
Simon Fraser University  
Burnaby, B.C. Canada  
V5A 1S6

Next  
Issue

- René Malo, Claude Fournier and Marie-José Raymond : *Les Tisserands* power trio
- On location with Bill McGillivray
- Time, trust and money . Inside stories about the making of Nettie Wild's *A Rustling of Leaves*

## Pourquoi? – round two

**A**n assistant to one of your writers phoned up to ask why I make films, explaining that you were quoting a number of filmmakers on the theme. I replied, "to make a living – it's my profession." True but a limited answer, as I explained in response to a similar question from Louis Skorecki of *Liberation* for the 40th anniversary of the Cannes Festival.

It occurred to me that the extended answer I gave to him might interest your readers and therefore I've enclosed it here.

Why do I make films? Money? To make a living is an answer but it calls to mind the last Hangman of Britain. In an interview I asked him why he got into that line of work. "Well", he said "In the Depression it was awfully hard to get a regular job." The answer doesn't quite answer. So to push into the matter further, for me it's a way to make a living doing something which we all have to do whether we like it or not: make some meaning out of life. It's a compulsion for me because, as a child, life was bloody confusing.

When I began my career the choice was between filmmaking or philosophy, which I'd read in university in the naive hope of getting answers. But philosophy is about questions and perspectives, a kindly professor explained, like looking at the world through different colored glasses. "You can read and see the world through Plato's eyes, or Aristotle's or Kant's, for example, and these are interesting views." Indeed, but I wanted answers and I hadn't paid much attention to Hume.

So I turned to filmmaking in the equally naive belief that if we could just capture life on film exactly as it happened perhaps we could see through the misunderstandings which cause such misery and this precious insight would set us free. Being men and women of goodwill, we could then live happily ever after.

And since alcohol was said to be the cause of events hurtful to me as a child, my first film was *Skidrow*. (John Grierson liked it a lot.) What the film expressed, however, was more about the cost of deprivation than the evils of addiction or the virtues of prohibition and, while I hadn't found answers, I thought perhaps I was on the right track so I determined to pick up the path in Calcutta with *Rickshaw*, a film which was meant to explore the experience of living at the rock bottom of economic existence. But what emerged said more about man's almost infinite capacity to endure with dignity. The fact that we have choices – that in the face of adversity we can laugh or cry, rage or sigh, embrace a living death



Allan King

or curl up and die – this central fact hadn't been much evident to me as a child. Perhaps choice is the reward for growing up and one possesses choice to the degree one grows up – if, indeed, one ever does.

However that may be, I wasn't ready to look clearly at the implications of choice. My rooted notion of childhood was that I was a victim. I thought of myself as Little Orphan Allan, though I wasn't – only in my most precious fantasy, as I discovered working with Sheldon Heath, but that was years later. So I became obsessed with exploring childhood.

*Warrendale*, much to my surprise, turned out to be a film about rage, more particularly, about the outrageousness of life and death as experienced by a group of so-called "disturbed" children – because life treated them with especial indifference. They had lost parents, never had parents or, one way or another, had been deprived of adequate parenting. The rage this produced was handled in many ways: denial, indifference, self-destruction, depression and, for some, deeply experienced feeling and insight. The film ends with a romp and a song.

*A Married Couple*, an examination of a marriage in conflict, followed *Warrendale* directly and naturally from my central obsession. If problems of childhood come from problems in parenting, these in turn often come from conflict in marriage, from broken marriages. (Yes, yes, I

know it's more complex than that, but we're talking one film at a time here!) The surprise was that not only did the film turn out to be a comedy, dire – yes, black even, but it revealed as much about the audience at large – "us" – as it did about "them" – the couple. We project onto others so much of our unconscious hopes, fears, hungers and anxieties that it is utterly amazing that we see each other as we actually are at all. Our need to maintain grievance as a defence against intimacy is desperately strong and the need to scapegoat as a defence against difference is the other side of the coin. For *A Married Couple* the audience split into four equal parts: loved him, hated her; hated him, loved her; hated them both, loved them both. Same couple. The *Warrendale* audience offered another clue – that part of it which hated the staff who worked with the children for not being perfect parents.

But to give up the notion of perfect parents may mean giving up the roles of victim and dependent. They are sturdy defences against freedom, which is perhaps our greatest fear of all. We need victims just as we need scapegoats.

*Who's In Charge?* explores the experience of being unemployed: painful feelings of helplessness, panic, rage and depression. What we discovered was that when we allow ourselves to "experience the experience" (to use the words of Austin Lee) we are able to mobilize our strength, anger and even humour; we become articulate, full of fight and begin to take charge of our own lives again.

What was startling was the need for some of the audience to see the unemployed as helpless victims, inarticulate and pathetic, confirming Gordon Lawrence's notion that society needs victims: for example, the unemployed, to carry our shitty feelings of helplessness and deprivation "because we don't want to carry them ourselves, thank you very much!" The notion also explains in part (obviously there is much more) the perseverance of unemployment in the richest, most skillful society mankind has ever known.

*Who's In Charge?* also exemplified Wilfrid Bion's description of the way large groups (club, tribe, society, the state, take your pick) unconsciously avoid the pursuit of their avowed task: in the search for an omnipotent leader who will do our work for us; the discovery of a magic text which will save us the trouble of thinking for ourselves; the flight into irrelevant activity; the search for a scapegoat; and finally, identification with the group as a mystical entity which will save us from all harm (Pierre Turquet's notion).

Anything to save us from the hard work of grappling with reality to make sense of it. How often in the middle of the struggle have I thought, "Oh God, if I could just pay back the money and get out of making this film!"

*Who's In Charge?* also offered interesting evidence of our compulsive need to tell stories: as solace, illustration, metaphor, avoidance, many reasons. Sometimes we tell stories to help us express experience, sometimes to deflect it because it is unpleasant or disturbing. This notion also accounts for the difficulty new work has in gaining acceptance. We agree on stories about reality in order to encompass it but new stories require us to reexamine and perhaps restructure our sense of reality. Since structure is well known as a defence against feeling, no wonder the genuinely new is often seen as a threat. (It may also be specious.)

*Why Do I Make Films?* From the compulsive need to tell stories: sometimes to express experience, sometimes to avoid it.

My most humbling discovery as a director was that my best scenes (my?) occurred when I was out of the room (off the set) and for the three best works I was rarely on set at all. So perhaps my work is something about providing the conditions in which others can work at making meaning for themselves within the conceptual or task definition which I as a filmmaker must of necessity provide. Certainly one's work is much more a gift, one is much more merely a vehicle than the ego might like. But that, as the man said, is the reality of the matter so far as I know it. So be it.

Authorship is perhaps the hardest work we know, often painful, sometimes rewarding. It offers and demands from us freedom; it certainly delivers us naked. Thus when an interviewer asked me years ago "If you were given a million dollars free, what film would you make?" the instant reply was, "I'd put the money in the bank, live off the interest and never make another film again!" And for years I believed this was true but now, a little wiser for wear, I realize the compulsion to make meaning is innate and irresistible. The old farmer was right. "What would you do if you were given a million dollars?" "Och," he said, "I guess I'd go on farming till the money ran out." When something grows, when a little insight emerges after all the digging, it's a reward almost equal to love. A little light. And as the man said, "Let there be light!"

Allan King •  
Toronto