



Indian wrestling anyone? Caught in a three-way stretch **Suzanne's** Jennifer Dale, Gabriel Arcand (left) and Winston Rekert

film industry is anything but a class act.

An example, to clarify and exhibit the symptoms. I happened to see one of our better films, **Middle Age Crazy**, the same day I saw Robert Redford's **Ordinary People**. Now, neither movie is a master piece, to be sure; but there is a difference in quality. Quite simply, the first film is laden with Canadian Crude, whereas Redford's first directorial effort is not. At every level — dialogue, acting style, camera work, sound and editing, in almost every artistic choice made by its creators — the Canadian effort comes out as cruder and more blatant. It is as if its creators felt they must do things to the central theme or story, resorting to cheap effects to win the audience. Redford and Co., on the other hand, seem to trust their material, its essential humanity and appeal, and their audience.

RSL is one of our most dynamic production houses. But, like so many of our other production units, it repeatedly succumbs. Where oh where have sensitivity, nuance, wit, a true sense of quality and style, disappeared to? Where are those values that precisely inform the best American work? RSL's **In Praise of Older Women** had so many truly fine things in it: it could have been a brilliant, bitter/sweet essay in the tradition of any number of film creators in, say, France or Czechoslovakia. Instead, it thudded its way into crudeness. And the same can be said, *mutatis mutandis*, about **Suzanne**.

The more I think about it, the more severe I find myself becoming concerning Robin Spry's latest effort. The film community as a whole seems to share this attitude. However, it has to be admitted that a good section of that packaged Toronto gala audience felt much more positively about the movie. It is conceivable, I suppose, that **Suzanne** may find some market out there, that it may have enough going for it — its energy, skills, fine performances, youth identification, even its Canadian Crude quality — to appeal to a jaded, perpetual-adolescent market, or some other naive market. **Suzanne** may even manage to get most of its money back. But what about the general disappointment surrounding it? Is that all there is... Robin?

It would be all too easy, and destructive, to end this piece with a whimper, or worse still, to magnify one's lack of enchantment into an over-all condemnation of the present situation. Rather, let the film serve as one more *irresistible, unavoidable* call to the Canadian feature film establishment to do some serious, far-reaching re-thinking. RSL and the other Canadian producers had better study their own track records. Somehow, the idea has to get across that in the big leagues mass appeal need not be equated with playing down to the audience, and that real professional *quality* is a far more viable product than Canadian Crude. Producers certainly have a creative role to play, but they are not the be-all and end-all, the supreme

arbiters of artistic quality in a film, nor the sole judges of its mass appeal.

None of this contradicts the real contribution of RSL to the Canadian film scene. The energy and dedication of Roth/Lantos & Co. have helped to make things go. And it is RSL who plunged into an all-Canadian film adventure, a risky business indeed in the game as it is now played. Almost all of their undertakings, it must be admitted, have had a touch of adventurousness about them, at one level or another. And with experience and growing expertise, given the initial energy and dedication... tout est possible.

As for Robin Spry, among whose admirers the present writer must be numbered, he is now, for better or for worse, launched in the private sector. Despite its shortcomings, **Suzanne** has revealed some new and exciting aspects of Spry's talent. He is presently at work on a new feature. Besides, wasn't it Aristotle, or some other Greek who said that Canadian film directors cannot hope to be *real* feature filmmakers until after forty? Spry was born in 1939. So, in spite of his already distinguished record, one may venture to say that his best work is still ahead.

Marc Gervais'

Michael Grant's Head On

d./p. Michael Grant p. Alan Simmonds script James Sanderson, Paul Illidge d.o.p. Anthony Richmond, b.s.c. p. design. Antonin Dimitrov mus. Peter Mann ed. Gary Oppenheimer assoc. p. Isabel Beveridge casting Karen Hazzard (Can.), TNI Casting (U.S.) p. man. Sally Dundas p. sec. Oni Freeman p. account. Wayne Arron a.d. Mac Bradden (1st), John Board (1st), David Storey (2nd), Dan McIlravey (3rd) assist. to p. Daphne Grant assist. cam. Robin Miller (1st), Carl Harvey (2nd) loc. man. Randy Tambling cont. Gillian Richardson ward. design. Tam Southam, Paula Munck ward. mistress Gurteen Cohen Ms. Kellerman's dresser Suzanna Ploughright set dec. Enrico Campana, Elinor Galbraith, Sarah Gould (asst.) set dress. assist. Gareth Wilson art d. sec. Judith Keeler art d. driver Benjamin Hayden Winnebago driver Neil Huhta props Linda McClelland, Ed Hanna (asst.), Allyn Terry (driver) make-up Suzanne Benoit hair Bruce Appleby gaf. Jock Brandis best boy Douglas Allen 1st elec. Gary Phipps key grip Carlo Campana assist. grip Dennis Thompson (1st), Greg Pelchat (2nd) sd. rec. Ian Hendry boom Dave Joliat 2nd unit cam. Bob New Stedicam op. Robin Miller stunts Bobby Hanna, Ken Porter, Wayne Thurston sd. efx. Gary Oppenheimer dialog. ed. Catherine Lane efx. rec. Andy Malcolm assist. ed. Elaine Hurwitz, Michele Cook

rec., mix. Joe Grimaldi, Dave Appleby, Dino Pigat mus. arrange. /conduct. Bobby Edwards theme sung by Dawn Aitken "Barnacle Rag" comp. by Ben Mink perform. by Johnathan Goldsmith, Ben Mink (courtesy of Passport Records) unit pub. Molly Thom stills John Phillips tech. advisor Kay Aoyama (fencing), Gerald C. Cupchik (psych.) sculpture by Kosso Eloul title design Paula Munck l.p. Sally Kellerman, Stephen Lack, John Huston, Lawrence Dane, John Peter Linton, Patrick Crean, Marty Galin, Joann McIntyre, Sheila Currie, Sandra Scott, Harry Kumano, Kunio Suyama, Hadley Kay, Mina E. Mina, Al Bernardo, Jim Coates, Wendy Creed, Ardon Bess, Maxwell Moffett, Robert Silverman, Tony Moffat-Lynch, James Kidney, Catherine Vaneri, Nick Nichols, Rummy Bishop, Martin Donlevy, Dan Bradley, Anne de Villiers p.c. Michael Grant Productions Ltd. (1979) col. 35mm running time 98 min.

Head On is not a nice movie. But being nice has been precisely the problem with so many Canadian films. Conservative in style and content, they may be respectable, but rarely are they exciting. **Head On** careens and careers all over the place, often to little effect, but no one can accuse it of being uninteresting.

It tells the story of a professor of abnormal psychology, Peter Hill (Stephen Lack), and a child therapist, Michelle Keys (Sally Kellerman), who meet when their almost identical Mercedes sports cars collide head on. Their unusual introduction leads to an affair characterized by a series of violent and sardonic fantasy games.

Sex and romance are popular film themes, but only infrequently are they examined with any originality or subtlety. Many contemporary "adult" films are largely insult comedies, with lots of hilarious yelling and screaming, scenes of people caught outdoors in their underwear, but without a glimpse of real emotion, or an understanding of why people do and don't love one another. One thinks of the banal shtick of **Willie and Phil**, the boring pretensions of **Heartbeat**, the brainlessness of **Nothing Personal**. **Head On** treads dangerously in this direction, but is saved from dumb oblivion by its inventiveness and unpredictability.

Early in the film, Lack hears a radio report of the landing on earth of intelligent aliens. If one interprets this as a clue — it must have been included in the script for a reason — it suggests that the world this couple inhabits is unreal, one in which anything can happen. (**Head On's** advertising uses the phrase "expect the unexpected.") Seen in this light, their fantasy games can be understood as metaphors for the intangible games couples play daily.

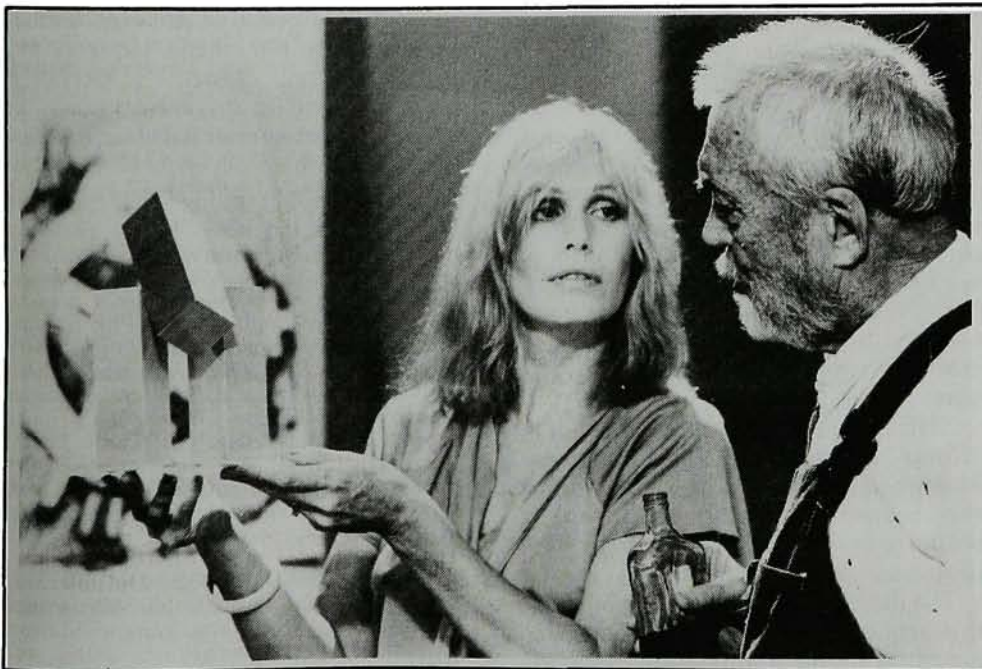
In one scene, for example, Kellerman arranges for Lack to be picked up by a chauffeur, driven to her husband's office after hours, and outfitted as her spouse. She then enters to "confess" her affair with Lack, an inspired way of simultaneously expressing both regret and joy at her infidelity.

Occasionally, however, the film lapses into sentimentality. By choosing a happy ending, the filmmakers missed the opportunity to maintain a consistent, if macabre, tone. In another scene, following their separation after a disastrously unsuccessful game, the protagonists meet again. As they stroll along the waterfront, Lack says, "We lost what we had light years ago." Although they both exchange sarcastic witticisms of the highest order, the scene doesn't quite ring true. In fact, their reunion seems to be less an outcome of the characters' desires than of the screenwriters' wish to continue the story.

The casting of the two principals is perfect. Kellerman, who is frequently restricted to roles in which she is required to only look sex-starved (her characters in **Foxes**, **Serial**, **Loving Couples** for example), brings the necessary warmth and intelligence to Michelle Keys. Stephen Lack lives up to his entertainingly eclectic performance in **The Rubber Gun**, and along with Donald Sutherland, may be the actor most capable of expressing a sophisticated and quick intelligence on screen. John Huston, as Lack's artist-father, is engaging, even if his character is irrelevant.

Head On was shot in and around Toronto, and is, surprisingly, actually set there. But the filmmakers have admirably avoided making this explicit. Instead, they have presented the city in glimpses, creating a "look" that is identifiably Toronto-esque, yet also quietly surreal in keeping with the script. In fact, **Head On's** greatest virtue is its insistence on the viewer's participation, its refusal to spell everything out. It may be thanks to Brian DePalma, and films like **Sleuth**, that **Head On** is not easily classifiable — which is good.

Gerry Flahive



In Sally Kellerman's eyes, **Head On's** John Huston is a first-rate sculptor.

CFMDC Short Film Selection

On Thursday, September 4 (opening night of the Festival of Festivals), the Canadian Filmmakers Distribution Centre presented an intriguing selection of short 16 mm films at the Science Centre's Ontario Film Theatre. Notable among them were Robert McLachlan's **An Egg Story**, Drew Morey's **This is the Title of My Film**, and three animated one-minute pieces, **Animals**, **Specimen**, and **Night Time**.