

The 1983 Genies : Looking back upon tomorrow

by Connie Tadros

The 1983 Genie awards were the industry's swan song for the film boom that was. The five films in nomination for Best Picture had all been made in 1981, the last year for films pieced together with private investments. Several of them — *The Grey Fox*, *Quest for Fire* and *Une journée en taxi* — had production stories more dramatic than anything that got on the screen. These were the films that almost didn't get made, caught as they were in an industry fast coming apart as investors scrambled off the ship. But if these films mark the end of Canada's tax-shelter production boom, they also point to the future and the divergent paths Canadian production will take.

The critics were unanimous in stating that this year's nominees were the best ever presented by the Academy to its members. In fact, it's more like a draw. In 1982, the Genies offered us The Year of the Director in which Ralph Thomas, Don Shebib, Gilles Carle, Eric Till and Allan King were responsible for the films which were honored. It seemed that the boom was finally throwing up the directors everyone felt could give Canada a distinctive film vision. Certainly *Ticket to Heaven*, *Heartaches* and *Les Plouffe* still look very good.

This year, the best films were of two sorts. With *The Grey Fox* and *Une journée en taxi*, Phil Borsos and Robert Menard proved that young directors with first feature films could get support to make the best of films. With *Threshold*, *Quest for Fire* and *Harry Tracy*, the producers showed that proven international directors, surrounded by Canadian talent, can bring home respectable films tailored for the world market.

In both years, the films were fine indeed, though this year surely Jean-Pierre Lefebvre's delicate *Les fleurs sauvages* should have replaced the lightweight *Harry Tracy* in the Best Motion Picture category.

The awards

It was reassuring to see most of the awards go to the right people: there is always a latent fear that the Academy voting system, asking the industry to vote for its own, will turn up bizarre, inappropriate choices.¹

Most gratifying of all was to see Peter O'Brian and Phil Borsos honored for *The Grey Fox*. Borsos, in graciously thanking the Canada Council for its support through years of making shorts and documentaries, underlined once again the exceptional help the Council does give young filmmakers: help, incidental-

ly, that is virtually unparalleled in most other countries.

O'Brian reflected the satisfaction of seeing a creative producer steal the thunder from those tax-shelter producers who have regrouped in the ACMPC² and have made so much noise in recent years. O'Brian, and many of his CAMPP colleagues, have been around longer than the Drabinskys, Cooper-Cohens, and Slans of this world. And though the latter have made their own important contributions to Canadian film, their association has sufficiently bad-mouthed other producers until it seemed that the O'Brians might not make it in the current climate. For those who remember titles like *Me* and *Love at First Sight*, the satisfaction was palpable.

There does seem to be in the Academy, a certain perversity about rejecting the opinions of others concerning our films. Did *Quest for Fire*, which beat out every other French film this year to win the

César for Best Film in France really not measure up to *The Grey Fox*? And did *Les fleurs sauvages*, which won the FIPRESCI award at Cannes, not even deserve to get in the running? As in 1981, when *Les bons débarras* won over *Atlantic City* for best picture, is there a hidden agenda on which it is written that the indigenous under-dog gets the benefit of the doubt when the votes are cast?

There were a few anomalies. Both Jackie Burroughs and R.H. Thomson seemed uncomfortable with their awards for Best Supporting Actress and Actor, as well they should have been. She was in the wrong category, obviously having held the lead role next to Farnsworth in *Grey Fox*. As for Thomson, his was a career award, honoring his considerable work in interesting films like *Tyler*, *Surfacing* and *Ticket to Heaven*. Like Kate Lynch before him, who won for her role in *Meatballs*, he

must have felt pleased with the recognition but sorry that it had come for an unsubstantial film like *If You Could See What I Hear*. The Best Supporting awards would have been just as appropriate for Clare Coulter for her uncanny portrayal of a social worker in *By Design* and for Wayne Robson in *The Grey Fox*.

Of the Best Original Song, let it suffice to say that if votes had been cast the evening of the Genies, when everyone had had a chance to hear Raoul Duguay sing "Le quêteux d'amour" from *Les fleurs sauvages*, Burton Cummings would have gone home empty-handed.

The question of Quebec

Which does indirectly bring up the question of Quebec. And among the Québécois, there is real and reasonable doubt as to whether their films are seen and understood by the members of the Academy.

While the Academy boasts 600 paying



● A winning combination: David Brady, Richard Farnsworth, Jackie Burroughs, Peter O'Brian...



● ...and Philip Borsos, all of *The Grey Fox*

Photos: Brian Anderson

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members, with about 160 from Quebec, a head-count in that province shows francophones and anglophones about evenly split, and the two solitudes are every bit as estranged there as elsewhere. Gaffes over the years – like confusing Micheline Lanctôt and Julie Vincent in *Silent Scream* in 1981, and omitting *Les fleurs sauvages* this year – have led to paranoia. With seven nominations for *Une journée en taxi*, Robert Ménard is clearly heard as he wonders what happened on the way to the Genies.

To some extent, the Québécois are singularly off-handed in the way they approach these awards. Every year, they send French prints to Academy screenings without sub-titles; the National Film Board did so with *Mourir à tue-tête* (*Silent Scream*) and Ménard did it with *Taxi*. A film like *The Great Chess Movie*, which got rave reviews at the Toronto festival and might well have walked off with the prize this year in the documentary category, was entered by the NFB under its French title, *Jouer sa vie*. How many Academy members knew it was the same film?

The Academy has a board of directors of 21 people. Of that number, only one – Louise Carré – is a francophone, and she is an "honorary member." The rest seem absolutely insensitive to the need to respond to the French. Dave Thomas' joke about being unilingual – and the very fact that the host could not speak French – is one measure of the distance the Academy must still travel. Paul Hofert's effort to compensate, though brave, was so stressful for him that at the end of a long paragraph in French, he welcomed us all to the Junos instead of the Genies!

There was singular irony, lost on the Toronto crowd, in giving the only Quebec award to *Elvis Gratton*, a short about the bastardization of Quebec society. Although Julien Poulin's acceptance speech was funny for about three seconds and then swiftly deteriorated into an exercise in bad taste, a point was made. There is a political element to the goings-on at the Genies. The Academy can surely understand that the entire Genie exercise is not just a gathering of the clan to share in-jokes and old stories. It is the industry's once-a-year chance to do something about the consciousness of the people who watch the show at home, the people who are being offered a chance to see a Canadian film.

And how about the public?

To suggest that there was a real problem of "tone" this year would be to put things mildly, and the CBC must largely be held to account for this.

The evening before the ceremony, *The Journal* promoted a special in-depth look at the Genies. Earlier on *The National*, clips repeatedly urged us to stay-tuned-to-*The Journal*-and-see-why-winning-a-Genie-doesn't-amount-to-a-hill-of-beans. When *The Journal* report was aired, it was deplorable. The Genies were used to make a point about the distribution of features in Canada. It was one of the worst examples of manipulative journalism I've seen in a while, and industry people who participated felt sorely used. Marcia Couëlle, for instance, was interviewed on film for 45 minutes; she is an ardent supporter of the Genies ever since *Les bons débarras* won two years ago. The clip mentioned only that the film had not yet made its money back. Peter O'Brian and Jay Scott were also appalled by the editing done



● In the limelight: Charlaine Woodard (*Hard Feelings*) and Best Actress Rae Dawn Chong (*Quest for Fire*)



● The CFDC's André Lamy gets in the mood with Denise Mulvey –celebrating his new wealth?



● Elvis Gratton himself –Julien Poulin by day– with Cinema Canada's Del Mehes

1983 PRIX GENIE AWARDS

Congratulations — Félicitations!

The following is a complete list of the
1983 Genie Award winners in all categories:

Voici la liste des lauréats
dans chacune des catégories:

Best Motion Picture

Meilleur film

THE GREY FOX — Peter O'Brian

Best Performance by an Actor in a Leading Role

Meilleure interprétation masculine dans un rôle principal

Donald Sutherland — THRESHOLD

Best Performance by an Actress in a Leading Role

Meilleure interprétation féminine dans un rôle principal

Rae Dawn Chong — QUEST FOR FIRE

Best Performance by an Actor in a Supporting Role

Meilleure interprétation masculine dans un rôle secondaire

R.H. Thomson — IF YOU COULD SEE WHAT I HEAR

Best Performance by an Actress in a Supporting Role

Meilleure interprétation féminine dans un rôle secondaire

Jackie Burroughs — THE GREY FOX

Best Performance by a Foreign Actor

Meilleur acteur étranger

Richard Farnsworth — THE GREY FOX

Best Performance by a Foreign Actress

Meilleure actrice étrangère

Glynnis O'Connor — MELANIE

Best Achievement in Art Direction

Meilleur directeur artistique

THE GREY FOX — Bill Brodie

Best Achievement in Costume Design

Meilleurs costumes

QUEST FOR FIRE — John Hay

Best Achievement in Cinematography

Meilleur directeur de la photographie

THRESHOLD — Michel Brault

Best Achievement in Direction

Meilleur réalisateur

THE GREY FOX — Phillip Borsos

Best Achievement in Film Editing

Meilleur monteur

QUEST FOR FIRE — Yves Langlois

Best Achievement in Sound Editing

Meilleur monteur — son

QUEST FOR FIRE — Ken Heeley-Ray, Martin Ashbee,
David Evans, Kevin Ward

Best Music Score

Meilleure musique

THE GREY FOX — Michael Conway Baker

Best Original Song

Meilleure chanson originale

MELANIE "Save My Soul" — Burton Cummings

Best Original Screenplay

Meilleur scénario original

THE GREY FOX — John Hunter

Best Screenplay Adapted from Another Medium

Meilleur scénario — adaptation d'un autre médium

MELANIE — Richard Paluck

Best Achievement in Overall Sound

Meilleur son d'ensemble

QUEST FOR FIRE — Ken Heeley-Ray, Joe Grimaldi, Austin Grimaldi,
Claude Hazanavicius, Don White

Best Theatrical Short

Meilleur court métrage

ELVIS GRATTON — Pierre Falardeau, Julien Poulin

Best Theatrical Documentary

Meilleur documentaire

THE DEVIL AT YOUR HEELS — Bill Brind, Robert Fortier,
Adam Symansky

The Academy's special annual award, the **Air Canada Award**, was presented to Fin Quinn for outstanding contributions to the business of filmmaking in Canada by Michel Fournier, Vice President, Public Affairs, Air Canada.

L'Académie du cinéma Canadien a également remis le Prix de l'industrie cinématographique canadienne d'Air Canada à Fin Quinn en reconnaissance de sa longue carrière au service des aspects techniques du septième art au Canada; le Prix d'Air Canada a été présenté à Fin Quinn par M. Michel Fournier, vice-président aux affaires publiques d'Air Canada.



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to their comments. As for Academy head Andra Sheffer, she didn't even make it into the piece. Certainly, after listening to *The Journal* and hearing all the bad news about the Genies and the industry, the public would hardly feel tempted to stay tuned the following evening.³

As for the actual Genie show, produced by the CBC, its budget was showing. Suffering cut-backs, the presentation was drab in comparison to the previous year's stylish production, and technical problems involving the synchronization of the clips and the sound persisted.

Bruce Malloch called the evening a "recession Genie," and it was. The house was not sold out, and fewer people were dressed to the hilt. Thomas got laughs from the audience by underlining the industry's fragility and dependence on the Americans. "I haven't seen this many people from the industry together since the morning flight from Los Angeles." The put-down jokes got laughs from the audience, but I doubt whether the public tuning in had any idea why that was supposed to be funny. Thomas was a good, comic host except for the fact that the situation in the industry is not really very funny at all.

What he and his humor did serve to point up was that the entire affair is predicated on the American experience. His jokes - "Don't worry; this won't be seen in L.A. and no reputations will be ruined" - make no sense unless this assumption of a carbon-copy industry is accepted, and Canadians' set role as MacKenzie-type bumpkins corresponds to the industry's image of itself. No wonder there seems to be a problem in reaching the Canadian public.

Denis Héroux couldn't resist comparing his evening at the Genies to the reception he got at the Césars with *Quest for Fire*. "The English-Canadian public is simply disconnected to what is going on here," he commented, seeing no crowds of curious people standing by the doors of the theatre. Indeed.

The Genies are a once-a-year chance for the Canadian film community to touch the Canadian public. The staffers at the Academy are doing their best. The numbers of nominees they were able to drum out this year was impressive, and the organization can hardly be faulted. But it's up to the film community itself to shake its depression - and a very real ambivalence about its own work.

During the film boom, the only model was the American theatrical feature, and too many tried to make copies, only to find they didn't - and couldn't - best the original. The ambivalence felt by the filmmaker centered on whether this model was the right one or whether he should refuse the model and look inward for inspiration. This is the same dilemma which presents itself to the Genie ceremony. With the end of the tax shelter production comes, coincidentally, the end of the theatrical feature and the rise of the "program production industry" with its bewildering mix of series, mini-series, TV movies and theatrical spin-offs. Certainly the Academy will soon be confronted with the need to adapt its own structures to these changes and, with that chance, another one to carve out a more appropriate and meaningful ceremony. The context must cease to present Canadian filmmakers as the dim reflection of their American counterparts.

Donald Sutherland, for one, understood the implications of the current situation. In his acceptance speech, and in his gracious presence at the press



● Fin Quinn was awarded the Air Canada prize for his outstanding contribution to the industry

lunch, he knew that a point had to be made: that a Genie award was an occasion for gratitude, and that only when the players take the awards seriously will the public also come to do so. He did more in three minutes to communicate a sense of pride and excitement in the idea of winning a Canadian award than did Dave Thomas in an entire evening of hosting.

So the real question is how does one organize a Genie ceremony that reaches out to the public and creates excitement?

For those who thought the films were the best ever this year, just wait. English production next year should include *The Terry Fox Story*, *Videodrome* and *The Wars*, not to mention the lower-budgeted *The Deserters* and *That's My Baby*. From Quebec will come *Maria Chapdelaine*, *The Tin Flute* (inexcusably retitled *For the Rest of Our Lives*), *Au clair de la lune*, *Rien qu'un jeu* (which is on its way to the Directors Fortnight), *Sonatine* and *Lucien Brouillard*.

If the Academy and its members are truly ready to risk getting an appreciative public, then the show should be moved to Montreal next year. The crowds would be in the streets, and the local media coverage would be dazzling. Even the international press which the Academy might wish to fly in would be bowled-over by the enthusiasm of the province for its filmmakers and stars.

Such a decision, however, just might have to be made in spite of the Québécois... and that's the problem.

Going to Toronto and picking up an award is a bit like going to New York or Chicago. Having the party come home and being seen picking up a prize for the Best Canadian Motion Picture would

require a maturity which the Québécois film community may not yet have.

In 1973, the Canadian Film Awards were scheduled in Montreal. CBC/Radio-Canada were ready to do the first-ever bilingual show with Lise Payette (now a former minister from the Levesque government) as hostess. But Quebec filmmakers got cold feet and decided to boycott the affair, bringing the whole event down like a house of cards. Today, according to staffers at the Academy, the situation is similar. The Québécois want the event to stay in Toronto; they need the media exposure in English Canada, they say; it would be better for the Academy, and so on.

That's all very well, but the Academy needs Quebec more. It needs to catch that enthusiasm which only the Québécois public can generate, and it needs, for once, to put on a genuinely bilingual show, out of respect for and in fairness to francophone filmmakers. Moreover, it needs to articulate the kind of fundamental respect which the Québécois have for the making of films: the ingrained, culturally biased, gut reaction to film as a way of communicating to the public, and not - as Garth Drabinsky once said - to film "as an asset which generates receivables."

The 1983 Genies bid farewell to the tax shelter dealers. The coast is now clear for new and different efforts. If the Borsos and Menards are to continue, then the much-awaited federal film policy must make allowance for film directors, ready to try their hand at a first feature; for starting out is always tough. In that context, an evening at the Genies should go a long way to allow those filmmakers to enter the mainstream.

As for the others, the Héroux and Cohens, their equations now include the promise of television and the guarantees of pre-sales. In theory, this should give us more popular and substantial films than those of the past. Certainly, experience will play its part in creating quality. As for the Genies and the Academy, the task falls to it to help make that connection between the filmmakers and their public. It's a risky and difficult time, but in this often colorless country of compromise, the risk should be taken.

Notes:

(1) Voting for the Genies awarded to feature films is limited to the active members of the Academy of Canadian Cinema. Candidates for membership have to have a credit on a feature film to be eligible; this results in eliminating, for instance, all the documentary filmmakers, most of the young makers of short films, the past director of the Canadian Film Awards and all of Canada's film critics and commentators.

Although all active members can nominate in the Best Motion Picture category, only craft members can nominate in the various crafts: composers nominate best song, actors nominate actors, editors nominate editors, etc. In some crafts, like composers, the numbers of people are small, and the numbers who actually get to the screenings are even smaller. There is always the danger, therefore, that the final nomination or vote will go by default to a well-known name and may not necessarily reflect the quality of the particular work. For example, two years ago, when Julie Vincent went unmentioned for her lead role in *Mourir à tue-tête*, Micheline Lanctôt received a nomination for best leading actress in the same film, though her speaking role lasted less than five minutes.

(2) The idea of creating the Academy of Canadian Cinema originated among the producers of the Canadian Association of Motion Picture Producers (CAMPP) in 1979, when, spear-headed by Bill Marshall, producers threatened to boycott the Canadian Film Awards (CFA) unless they were given a bigger say in the proceedings. (The CFA had been run by a committee made up of representatives of all the various associations and guilds.) The new ACC, on a \$50,000 grant from the CFDC, replaced the CFA.

CAMPP itself was a splinter group of feature filmmakers which broke from the Canadian Film and Television Association. Several members of Quebec's Association des producteurs de films (APFQ) joined CAMPP though retaining membership in the APFQ as well. While the CFTA and the APFQ had proper organizations, with permanent staff, offices, well-defined membership criteria, and the like, CAMPP seemed more fluid, accepting producers, line-producers, production managers, etc. as full members, and running affairs out of the offices of the president. CAMPP membership swelled to over 50.

By 1981, the nine producers of feature films who had been most active during the boom period were being out-voted by the others in CAMPP, and decided to split once again, creating the Association of Canadian Movie Production Companies (ACMPC), and leaving the "line-producers" at CAMPP to fend for themselves. The former group was soon referred to as the "gang of nine"; its Quebec members also severed their relations with the APFQ.

In 1981-1982, the ACMPC and executive director Martin Bockner became one of the most effective lobbies in Ottawa, joining the CFTA and the APFQ in the Producers Council of Canada, a paper organization which has never had any actual, structural existence. The by-product of this lobbying activity was a conscious attempt to eliminate CAMPP as a viable voice in the political process. Today, CAMPP is seriously debilitated.

In 1983, the ranks of the ACMPC are reduced, the executive director and the office are gone. Several of the original members have not been active for several years, others are producing in the U.S., and still others have grown disinterested. Rumor has it that the remaining members are negotiating re-integration with the CFTA.

(3) Next year, the CBC could do another piece about the "insignificant" win of *The Grey Fox* and its subsequent distribution. In fact, United Artists Classics, an American company which has held distribution rights on the film for many months, and which had been forewarned that in all probability the film would win strongly, had only one print of the film in Canada in the week following the Genies. Despite efforts on the part of all the Canadians involved to make hay with the Genie publicity, and the willingness of the exhibitor to free up screens, it will take the New York-based distributor another two weeks before 19 prints - and appropriate publicity-support material - are made available across Canada. Compare this to Astral's approach to *Maria Chapdelaine* which will open in April with 30 prints in Quebec alone.