

# INTRODUCING...

## douglas leopold

photo: Lois Siegel

### born to it

Monday afternoon, 3 p.m.

The scene is a spacious loft in Old Montreal. Queen Street, no pun intended. Classical music, paintings individually lit, pottery, a hammock strung between beams, clothes in open cupboards. Two telephones side by side on a pillow. The telephones never stop ringing. The bathroom is wall to wall photos, some of famous people, almost all include the occupant: Douglas Leopold.

The scene continues...

Enter Roger Héroux of the City on Fire Héroux. Douglas introduces him as "the cutest of the Héroux brothers." Roger offers Douglas a handshake. Douglas complains, "Is that all I get?"

Later:

Douglas, "I just realized I have to be in Toronto, Montreal and Quebec City — all in three hours. I just keep saying Yes to everyone. I raised \$4000 myself this weekend by going on stage at Place Des Arts. Maybe I should raffle someone's jock strap from the Alouettes."

Douglas organizes publicity for feature films. In between he raises funds for Ballet Jazz. In between that he has about 200 other projects "happening."

"I'm a great cook," he explains as he offers a summer drink of Orzata (almond syrup), milk and soda water. He once worked in a "chic" French restaurant in order to earn money to travel.

"PR is a funny kind of career. You have to start very early. You're either born to it or forget it. I don't think it's the kind of thing that one can learn. You have to be very curious and get involved with any kind of project."

At McGill Douglas studied psychology, law and classical music.

"My first interest more than anything was culture. I felt that a law de-

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*Lois Siegel writes, photographs, teaches and makes experimental films in Montreal.*



Douglas on the phone

gree would be helpful and suffered through a few years of that. I went to a lot of cases in court and realized that there was no justice in this world after all, and psychology I realized was perfectly useless — so I went to Harvard for a year and discovered that the outside world way beyond Canada was really very exciting."

Douglas wanted to travel. Summers were spent in the N.Y. and Cape Cod area. He kept meeting people in theatre, film and the arts. Paris was his first stop abroad. He became a teacher of English Literature and Economic History at a lycée.

"That changed my philosophy in life. I became very European and very French. I think everybody should go and live in Europe for a year. It brings you out of your Canadian context. I think that's really important if you are in the film industry. It's wrong to

only see what we're doing here. It also gave me fluent French. I speak 6 languages.

"My first job back in Montreal was Assistant Manager of the Montreal Symphony. And I just did everything. I raised money, sold tickets, arranged press conferences. I like putting interesting things together, and I take no risks — I'm very careful. I'm truly Canadian that way.

"But I know what sells, and I know what's going to attract. I have a strong feeling for the street: I want to know what people are doing. I run to New York — anywhere where there's a "scene" going on. I think it's important to remain in contact with what people are doing who are half your age: I'm 34."

Where Douglas has done PR: National Arts Center, McGill Faculty of Music, Saidye Bronfman Center, Place Bonaventure, Bell Telephone.

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"The filming of Canada's Cup '78 has been an extremely exciting project to say the least. "Right from the start of this eighteen month production it was agreed that all filming would be carried out on the basis of a "one man band." In addition, not to effect the design, construction, or racing of the yachts, all filmmaking could only be done as the event occurred... NO SET UP SHOTS... NO RE-TAKES..."

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"I think what people really want to know is not what happened, but what's happening... and how they can change their lives. I've proved that because I teach a course to 165 students at Dawson College. It's called 'Culture Vulture,' and I take them to art auctions, exhibitions, museums, plays and rehearsals and to New York, Asia, England and France.

"There's a lot of divorced, separated, retired and young people who want a change in their life style and who want to meet other interesting people but don't know where to go - I tell them what to read - what magazines to subscribe to and where to travel.

"After doing all these things - it's funny - you become just a known quantity, and so you don't go looking for the next part of your career. I fell into film. I fell into Robert Lantos and did *In Praise of Older Women*. I also do financing, and casting, besides publicity.

"A good publicist needs contacts - it's very important to work everywhere - as you know the Margaret Trudeau film (*Kings and Desperate Men*) made 780 front pages across America.

"Canadian film should not only be known about in Canada. The biggest problem is that we just don't think our product is good enough. Also they save the pages of "Time Magazine" for a big \$10 million American film so even though you have Karen Black, it doesn't guarantee you much more than say "The Hollywood Reporter," "Variety" and a mention in "The New York Times. And often the big name stars do not want it known that they are doing a small Canadian film.

"They save the biggies for the biggies. You're just another small movie somewhere out there - if you had 10 big names at least a \$5 million budget and a fabulous film - you might have half a chance.

"But then you have the other side of the coin where you have Altman and Paul Newman. They don't even hire a publicity person. Everybody knows in the industry - and just waits for it. They don't need publicity - they just release a few photos and the photos go around the world and onto the wire - and that's the end of it.

"Or you get a Super Star like Margaret Trudeau and then you can just have 50 journalists drop everything, and you call a press conference in three hours, and they're all there - like we had 200 journalists at a press conference - outrageous - really outrageous."

Future:

"I don't want to be an actor, and I don't want to be a producer. I don't want to get up at 5 a.m. and stand out in the cold.

"I'm for having better culture. I want to be known for turning more Canadians on to culture because I think there is really nothing that is superb and international except for The Ontario Art Gallery, The Montreal Opéra du Québec when we had it, and The Chinese Collection of The Royal Ontario Museum. There's very little else except for a dozen plays a year spread out across the country. We don't have any orchestra that comes near The Chicago or The London Symphony. We don't have any opera that comes near Salzburg or Vienna or La Scalla or Paris. We don't have any ballet that comes near The New York City Ballet or The American Ballet Theatre. So let's not kid ourselves.

"The same in film - I think we've only had half a dozen great films out of this country. Duddy Kravitz was a great film. I really honestly can't remember too many other great films, but I should say half a dozen or otherwise I'll get axed."

About the "Stars"....

"Canadians are so themselves that they don't get overwhelmed by working with big people, and the wonderful thing is they're very friendly and very 1st name basis - so you get these big stars coming to Canada - they're in your hands because without you they don't know where to go or what to do - you've got to get them their fur coats wholesale - you've got to take them to restaurants - you've got to make sure they're happy -

"Marilyn Keach wanted to go for 2nd hand clothes - Marissa Pavan wanted a fur coat - Karen Black wanted 20 pillows for her baby. Jean-Pierre Aumont wanted interesting evenings."

About people:

"Patrick McGoohan: an impossible man - he's got private problems.

Karen Black: unpredictable, very direct, like sexy direct, very Hollywood.

Stephen Lack: one of the strangest characters in this country.

"There are Hollywood type conversations between directors and producers that I find are very strange and not very Canadian - they're constantly promoting themselves in their own minds. So they better get very good

PR people who can do the job properly. There are only two people in film in this country who are good at PR. Prudence Emery and myself."

About PR:

"One of the strangest things I've ever done was to put 5 drag queens from "French Dressing" with Terry Evanshen from the Alouettes in a calèche in the Gray Cup Parade for Hai-Karate Cologne.

"Every client has a different problem *Kings and Desperate Men* had a Super Star - all I did was answer the phone - 300 times a day. They came to you and pleaded.

"Whereas with *Two Solitudes* everybody was down on the film because the PR had started very slowly, and people didn't think that the number was going to get off the ground - there had been a lot of personality conflicts - so I had to change the whole image of the film.

"With *In Praise of Older Women* Karen Black didn't want to give any interviews until after the movie was over, and then she only chose "The Globe and Mail" and "The Star". That was it - only two interviews in Canada, and you had a very aggressive Hungarian team that wanted to be in the papers every day."

Friends:

"I fit my friends in with my work. My friends help me on films - they stuff envelopes and type press releases. I bring them along to the press conferences and openings and drag them to the theatre every night. It could be worse. I think it's important to be amused as well as amusing."

A Typical Day in the Life of Douglas Leopold:

8:30: Phone starts ringing.

8:45: Listen to Thomas Schumacher Program (my partner) then talk to him on the phone. Do telephone calls.

11-4: Appointments

4-5: Swimming

5-7: Press conferences, openings or clients.

8: Performances every night: parties, ballet, Centaur, Symphony, Chinese Opera or movies.

11: Receptions or friends

1 a.m.: Dancing for 1/2 hour

2-8:30 a.m.: Sleep

"On and on and on for 15 years. If it gets any wilder, I'm going to get very old."

Lois Siegel

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# vincent vaitiekunas

## putting his foot down

During the two years, 1973 and that Vincent Vaitiekunas taught filmmaking at Simon Fraser University near Vancouver, films made by his students won the McLaren Award for best film at the Canadian Student Film Festival in Montreal. Today, a high proportion of those students are full-fledged professional filmmakers in Vancouver, Edmonton, Toronto and elsewhere.

In 1974 Vaitiekunas moved back to Toronto and began teaching film at York University where he's now an associate professor in the film department. Again, several of his more recent students are starting to make their way into professional filmmaking.

Vaitiekunas is one of those rare characters who is both a recognized filmmaker, and a teacher with a real flair; and he draws from a varied background of experience.

He began his career by studying architecture and opera at the Baltic University in Hamburg, following an escape during the war from an SS forced labor camp in his native Lithuania, where he had been held as a member of an underground student resistance movement.

In the mid 1950's, after a move to England, Vaitiekunas became an actor and, under the stage name of Vincent Edward, appeared in several British feature films. He invariably played the role of a nasty villain. ('Or semi-nasty,' says Vaitiekunas.)

Not too many years later, and after another move, he attended the Ontario College of Art, which he left in his second year to join a design company for \$20. (twenty dollars) a week. At that time he also worked as a set and puppet designer with John Conway's *Uncle Chichimus*, a well-known name in early CBC television.

The next stop was two years at the Canadian Theatre School, where he met a number of fellow students including screenwriter and director Bill Fruet and novelist Donald Jack. While at the school he also met his wife, Mary. At that time an actress, Mary Vaitiekunas

has since made her mark as an artist/bannermaker. They have two children.

As a teacher, Vaitiekunas has a style that's decidedly unique. Even he can't figure it out. "Hell if I knew how it happened" was his reply when I asked him about it.

One feature of Vaitiekunas' teaching style is that he assumes without question that his students are fully capable of achieving the standards of energy, integrity and imaginativeness that distinguish a professional in any field.

photo: Nick Rotunda



Vaitiekunas on location

Another feature especially in evidence at the SFU Film Workshop, which at that time was an innovative non-credit program for students who weren't interested in grades or lectures, to his readiness, as he says, to "put my foot down," to ensure that students work at their films consistently, right

through post production, instead of procrastinating till the last minute.

Aikenhead, whose *Ivory Founts* won the McLaren Award for SFU in 1973, contributed to the sound recording.

In the same year Tim Sale, another of Vaitiekunas' students shared the honors for CFA's craft award for cinematography, for Phil Borsos' *Spartree*, which also won the CFA award for best theatrical short.

Among other notable Vaitiekunas students from SFU are Harlan Dorfman, a Vancouver TV newsfilm editor; Chris Windsor, whose *Trapper Dan* won the McLaren in 1974 and who later went to ACCESS TV in Edmonton; Danice MacLeod, who finished her epic film *Rawstock* after Vaitiekunas had gone to York; Rudy Wrench, directing for NFB in Toronto; and Mary Anne McEwen, a busy Vancouver filmmaker who remarks that 'everything I know I learned from Vincent.'

Vaitiekunas was delighted, but not surprised, when one of his former SFU students, Michael Chechik, won the 1977 Canadian Film Award for best documentary film under 60 minutes, for *Greenpeace: Voyages to Save the Whales*. *Greenpeace* was co-directed by Chechik and two other SFU alumni, Ron Precious and Fred Easton.

Some SFU Film Workshop students, such as Larry Keane, have gone on to further studies: in Keane's case to USC in California. James Orr, a graduate from York who studied production with Vaitiekunas in more recent times, has also gone on to further study at the American Film Institute in Beverly Hills.

All this points to Vaitiekunas' resourcefulness and innate versatility as both a film teacher who has inspired and guided many of his students on to their own successes and as an acclaimed filmmaker who has worked on over 100 theatrical, documentary and television films: as director, editor, writer, producer and actor.

Among his national and international film awards is the prize for best color cinematography at the 1970 Canadian Film Awards for *Multiplicity* (For Canadian Pacific, produced by Crawley Films Ltd.), a film which, be-

*Jaan Pill is a free-lance writer and artist who lives in Toronto.*

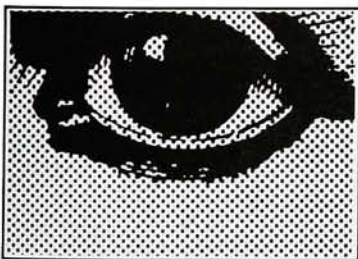
cause of its excellent color quality, was used for an entire year as a color standard by the BBC at the start of each day's television programming to enable viewers to adjust their sets. **Explore - Expo 67** (produced by Crawley for Alcan) won Vaitiekunas a diploma of merit at the Edinburgh Film Festival in 1968. **Motion**, another Expo Film (by Crawley for Canadian National) was released theatrically by Warner Brothers.

In 1969 his film **For Want of a Suitable Playhouse** (by Crawley for the Shaw Festival) won a silver medal award at the New York International Film and TV Festival. More recently, Vaitiekunas won a bronze at the same festival for **Fine Arts at York** which he directed, produced and edited for York University.

Earlier in his career he also directed two Film Board films, and his television experience includes several films for the CBC's **This Hour Has Seven Days**, including **Strike! Men Against Computers**, which he co-directed with Larry Zolf, winning the CBC's Special Wilderness Award for Screen Journalism in 1965. He had begun his production career as an assistant film editor at CBC.

During the coming year at York, Vaitiekunas will teach a course in directing and acting for film and television as well as 16mm production. He also has several film projects of his own in the works. When asked for details, he looked for a moment with that canny expression that his students well know, and said, "The film will speak for itself."

**Jaan Pill**



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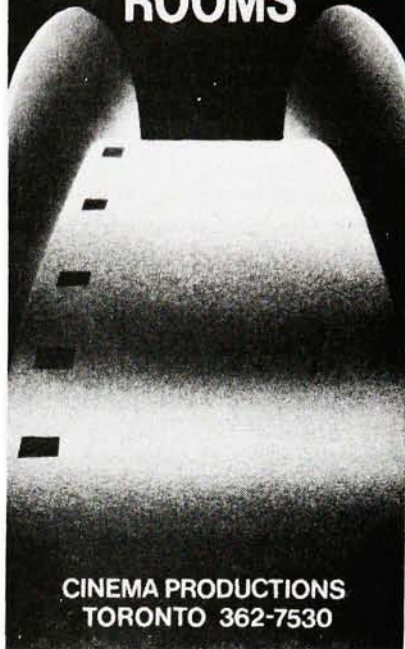


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