

# AWARDS



photo: Martin Roy

● *La Turlute des années dures* co-director Pascal Gélinas accepting the Louis-Ernest-Quimet-Molson prize from Molson communications director Marthe Bouchard-Hatch and Richard Gay, president of the Quebec Association of Cinema Critics

David Gelfand, who helped us reconstitute the great puzzle of the 1930s. *La Turlute* is the warm, precise and supple images of Robert van Herweghem, assisted by Claude Brasseur. It's Claude Beaugrand's excellent sound recording, despite having had to work in difficult locations. It's also Pierre Blain's sound work, recording songs in kitchens and living rooms. It's the patient, sensitive, and aereated editing of Francis Van Den Heuvel, assisted by Ginette Leduc. It's also the sound editing of Noël Almey, and the NFB's Hans Peter Ströbl, a veritable voyage through the sounds of the '30s. It's also the work and experience of all the technicians, witnesses, archivists, historians and friends who participated with enthusiasm in this undertaking. And managing this spectacle was producer Lucille Veilleux whose active and creative presence constituted from the very beginning a most precious resource.

We would like also to lay some "savage flowers" to the memory of Marguerite Duparc who believed in our risky project, who encouraged us to "*turluter*" (a wordless form of singing) despite the institutional obstacles, and who before she left us, passed on a part of her love of life and cinema.

I would also like to add that co-directing with Richard Boutet was from beginning to end, a completely warm and democratic experience. Even in cinema as in life, there are still a few successful marriages!

Another reason that leads us to accept this prize with a great deal of pride, is that we do so in the name of all the filmmakers and artisans of an independent cinema who labor for the most part in the shadows, always with passion and ingenuity, but rarely with adequate financing. They bring to our cinema the breath of warmth and life, a vital and essential contribution. We feel solidarity with these passionate image-makers who, without having received any real support from the institutions or the almighty industry, bear with their own arms the screen of their vision of the imaginary and the real.

We would like to thank the Canada Council whose support made the shooting of this film possible. We believe also that more than one film-funding organism could usefully gain inspiration from the flexibility and the open-mindedness that prevails in the Canada Council's granting process.

The NFB's English production also equally contribute d in a crucial manner to the technical making of the film through its assistance program to independent filmmaking, and we thank them while underlining the urgency of a similar program in French production.

We were also assisted by the Quebec government's now-defunct Ose Arts program, by the CFDC (now Telefilm Canada), and by Radio-Québec even though with the "other television" the discussions were long and laborious in order to keep the screening of the work to its original running time.

But it is difficult to thank the former Institut québécois du cinéma (now the Société générale du cinéma) which after having funded part of the script development, twice refused to invest in this production, despite two versions of the screenplay and Marguerite Duparc's collaboration. Not content with that, the Institut, in the name of a debatable principle, imposed upon us the repayment of its script development investment as of the first day's shooting,

## Quebec's "hobos of cinema": a manifesto

by Pascal Gélinas

It gives me great pleasure on behalf of Richard Boutet, co-director of the film *La Turlute des années dures* and Lucille Veilleux, producer, both of whom were detained outside Montreal, to accept the Louis-Ernest-Quimet-Molson prize awarded by the Association des critiques de cinéma. This is a prize which we view highly, a prize that belongs to us as Québécois and which is democratically awarded by people whose job it is to communicate their emotions and reflections to the public concerning cinema from here and elsewhere.

Their choice was surely a difficult one to make, and we are convinced that the

five finalist films would also have deserved this honor as each testifies in its own fashion to the astonishing vitality of our cinema, each bringing to our cinematography a unique and original contribution.

It is for us a very great honor to receive this prize, after three-and-a-half years of passionate, systematic and collective work.

But we believe that this prize is given equally to the entire collective genius of the Québécois people, to all those men and women of the common people who by their courage, their ingenuity and their culture, made our country come to

life and built it with the work of their hands.

We also believe that this prize is awarded to all the witnesses and musicians who with all their being, participated in the construction of this musical tragedy, and who are in reality its true screenwriters. This film is the result of a long love affair between us and them, a love affair that today celebrates its silver anniversary.

The worth of the film is due in large part to the crew and it is in their name that we accept this prize. *La Turlute* is the group of researchers, Marie-Dominique Cousineau, Martin Roy and



which we were obliged to refuse to do. We were as a result classified, to use their term, as "a delinquent dossier," and we're still living with the consequences. Which is how mandates to assist creativity can sometimes take the form of programs that encourage giving-up.

We have been awarded this prize at a time when, in Quebec as in Canada, the institutional structures are being transformed, when the NFB is put into question, when the federal government is readying new cinema legislation, and new budgetary envelopes for production are being decided upon federally as well as provincially. But through all this a dangerous tendency is being confirmed: that of subjugating cinema to a forced internationalization, of enfeebing it to the all-powerful producer, of forcing it into the industrial harness, of planing it down at all costs to the dimensions of the small screen, of monopolizing creation and production in the hands of a few.

We believe that in order to assure the development of a veritable national cinematography the State must give creators the means of translating in all its forms the revolts and the aspirations of their society, and make these works available to the public. But ever since our cinema came under the five-year plan, exactly the reverse has taken place: the condemnation of a so-called budgetary "sprinkling" which in the past allowed at low cost the development of a crowd of original works; the concentration of monies on a few prestige productions that will supposedly answer all our problems; the search for infallible recipes to add spice to a sauce that has neither taste nor aroma; the wiping out of small production houses; the neglect of the upcoming generation, and research; the cloistering of individuals and genres; in short, the frenetic imposition of a production model that doesn't resemble us and that stifles the dynamic of creativity.

Federally, one can ask oneself whether the new Telefilm Canada will remain the same secret society, reserved only to select initiates of Big Business and invisible international coproduction.

As for the distribution policies, they are still striking by their absence. Bill 109, despite positive aspects, enforces no quotas on the screens and changes nothing in the light of the absence of markets for Québécois films. Essential distribution structures for our filmmaking like Les Films du Crépuscule, Cinéma Libre, or the Cinéma Parallele, that do intervene effectively in a domain that the state has left uncultivated are now threatened in their very existence through the lack of funding that would respect the very nature of their activity.

This scenario is not very colorful. One could even speak of a return to black-and-white. It is the struggle between industry and creativity, between the collective imagination and big bucks, between art and bureaucracy. Which of the two camps will prevail? Will creators become the hobos of cinema, condemned to hop the freight-train of production to carry out their endeavors?

If there was real assistance to our filmmaking, how many *Turlutes*, how many *Wives' Tales*, how many *Hiver bleu*, how many *Grand Remue-ménage*, how many *Futur intérieur*, how many *Mémoire battante*, how many *Doux aveux* would be made on the screens of Quebec?

Richard Boutet  
& Pascal Gélinas'

## La Turlute des années dures

*It is difficult to be sure of one's attitudes in a decade like this. Can we heroize our men when we know them to be exploited? Can we romanticize our industrial scene when we know that our men work brutally and starve ignobly for it? Can we praise it – and in art there must be praise – when the most blatant fact of our time is the bankruptcy of our national management? Our confidence is sapped, our beliefs troubled, our eye for beauty is most plainly disturbed: and the more so in cinema than in any other art. For we have to build on the actual. Our capital comes from the actual. The medium itself insists on the actual. There we must build or be damned. – John Grierson (1935)*

Every year the Quebec Association of Film Critics awards the \$5000 Louis-Ernest Ouimet Molson prize to the best made-in-Quebec feature film released in the year preceeding. This year the five finalists boiled down to a toss-up between André Forcier's *Au clair de la lune* and Pascal Gélinas & Richard Boutet's documentary musical tragedy on the Great Depression then and now, *La Turlute des années dures*, with the prize going to the latter.

A curious choice indeed – and one that possibly says far more about the discontent in the critical milieu over the orientation taken by the officially funded

filmmaking organisms. A wonderful occasion, to be sure, for Pascal Gélinas to say in public and on prime-time francophone television some important things that need to be said. All in all, an opportunity for the revival of a long-standing political debate about film and filmmaking that has of late been sadly stifled beneath the cold, wet blanket of hard times.

If this rediscovery of a critical voice is all to the good, it leaves unaddressed one basic question – the *raison d'être* for the prize itself – namely, the honoring of the best Québécois film of the previous year. Was *La Turlute des années dures* really the best film of '83?

The short – and blunt – answer is no. *La Turlute* is a competent documentary, a work of passion, dedication, and love, that was made under impossible conditions without any official support (except for the NFB as always under-the-table, aided reluctantly by Radio-Québec). *La Turlute* is a filmic gesture of criticism, directed against the capitalist system as a whole, and more specifically against what one could call the capitalist method of filmmaking. And it is for this, one suspects, more than for any intrinsic filmic value that the film was awarded the Ouimet-Molson prize.

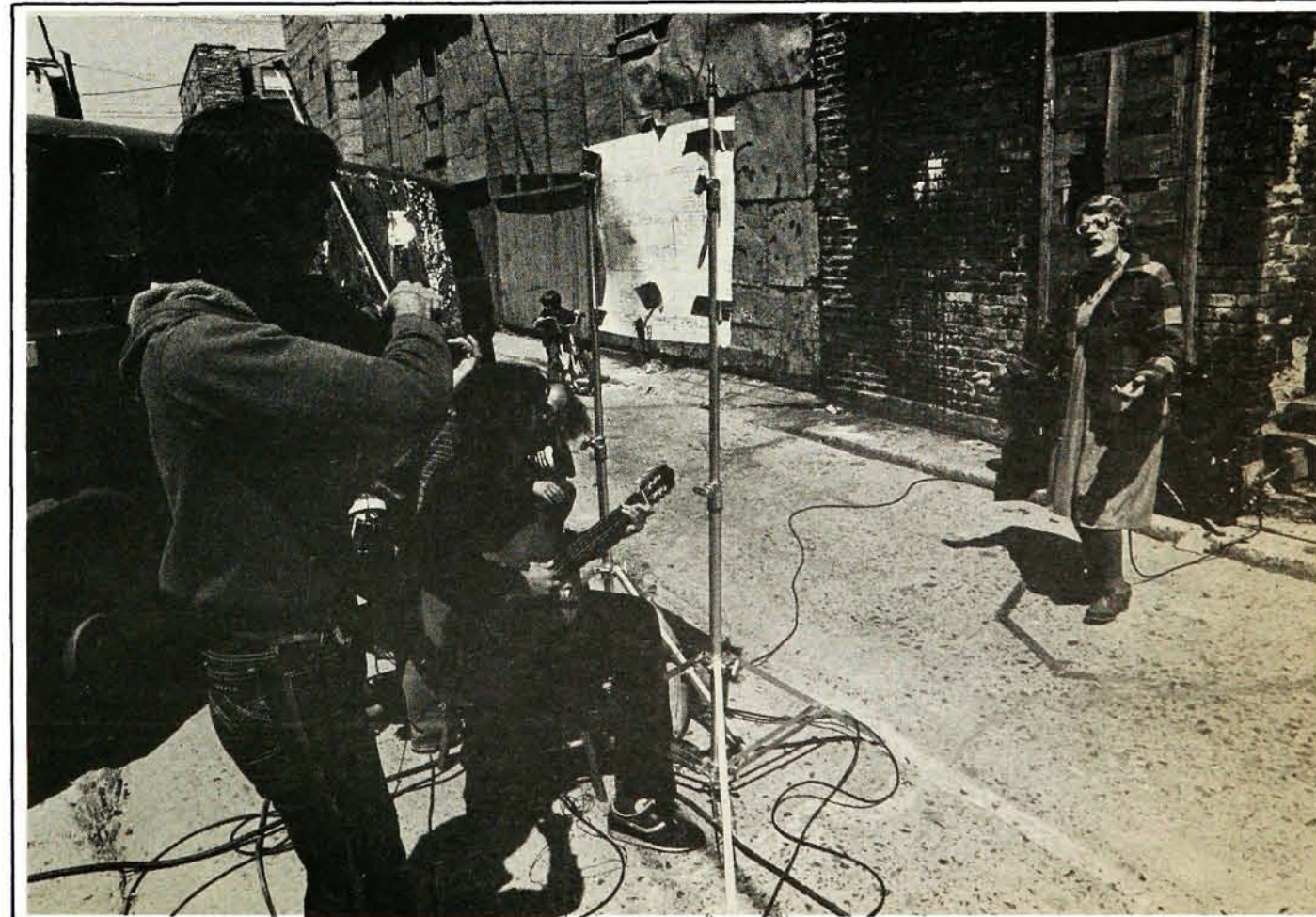
As a film, *La Turlute* accomplishes two important things: on the level of its archival footage, it rescues from oblivion, otherwise rarely seen Canadian images of the Depression. And this is a crucial act of memoration for we are all too familiar with, say, American or even German images of the dirty '30s. It is important to see what the 1929 Crash looked like in Canada: how the Montreal newspapers played the story, the consternation of Canadian stock traders, the closing of Canadian factories and so on. But once these images have been established, one can only conclude, with small comfort, that the Depression in Canada looked pretty much like it did

anywhere else in urban settings where workers have been reduced to idleness by capitalist over-production. Only in rural Quebec did the Depression look different; here, the Church-sponsored colonization of Abitibi or the lumber camps of the Quebec forests, reveal the face of an exploitation that was not only pre-capitalist, but was brutally intensified by the collapse of the outside capitalist economy pressing down upon the 'primary' natural-resource economy.

That these reminders of their double exploitation – as Québécois and as Canadians – would strike some powerful response in Québécois today is hardly surprising.

Secondly, on the level of sound, *La Turlute* accomplishes an equally important recuperation of the wordless type of folk music known as the "turlute", a kind of musical humming. The film's 25 songs are an archival feat of sound-recording, and a lively echo from an obliterated past. For these two reasons – image and sound – *La Turlute* can definitely lay claim to a fully deserved distinction as a film that has a necessity of its own. That necessity, however, does not necessarily make it the best.

For *La Turlute* makes the jump from the '30s to the present in a manner that is so blithely facile as to be questionable. Contemporary newspaper headlines and images of today's unemployed establish part of a simplistic parallel; the closing contemporary song with its message that "together we can change the world" updates the musical complaints of the '30s; and thirdly, the various witnesses in the film who lived through the '30s opine today that everything is much the same. Capitalism produces unemployment, mass unemployment produces work camps, work camps produce the recruitment material for armies; capitalism, therefore, produces war. Cut to Reagan, cut to missiles. Rousing song. End of film.



● An archival feat of sound recording, *La Turlute des années dures* captures echoes of a musical past



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● One of *La Turlute*'s unidentified witnesses reminisces about a life spent in the service of technology

Spirited, combative, lively – *La Turlute* is all that, and in the same basic griersonian style of the '30s that hasn't budged an inch since. Is it this – that is, basically a throwback – that is being fêted as the best film of 1983 (or better 1938)?

And yet if one reads Grierson's 1935 documentary credo that is the epigraph for this piece, it contains an utterly radical challenge to the documentarian that Grierson himself was unable to live up to. If only *La Turlute* had been an ice-cold look at the mechanisms of capitalist exploitation than as now, it might have been able to surpass Deny's Arcand's extraordinary *On est au coton* as a contribution to the truly militant documentary. Instead, despite its patina of well-meaning radicality, *La Turlute* not only heroizes and romanticizes; worst of all, it folksifies; for *La Turlute* is folk-cinema in the same relation to cinema as folk-music is to music.

Which means that it has its place, just as folk-music has its place. It does not mean that folk-music is the best music, nor that folk-cinema is the best of all possible cinema.

But in the light of the complex, devastating, and reductive process that Gélinas himself terms "the forced industrialization" of Quebec filmmaking, hoisting the tattered flag of folkish values seems a response that is as inadequate as it is retrograde.

For, if at the height of the black-and-white '30s, even Grierson could admit "it is difficult to be sure of one's attitudes in a decade like this," the Quebec critics' 1983 selection only shows how much harder that has become in the faded colors of the '80s.

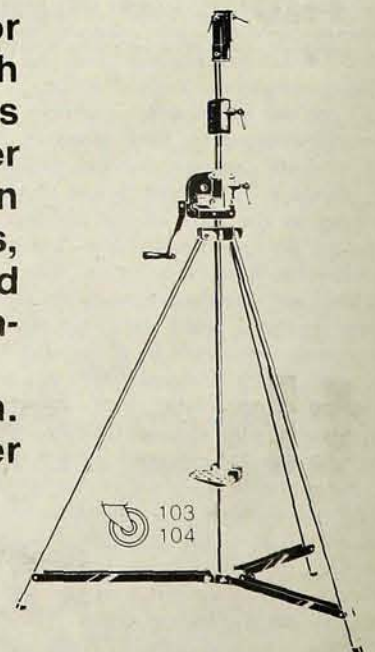
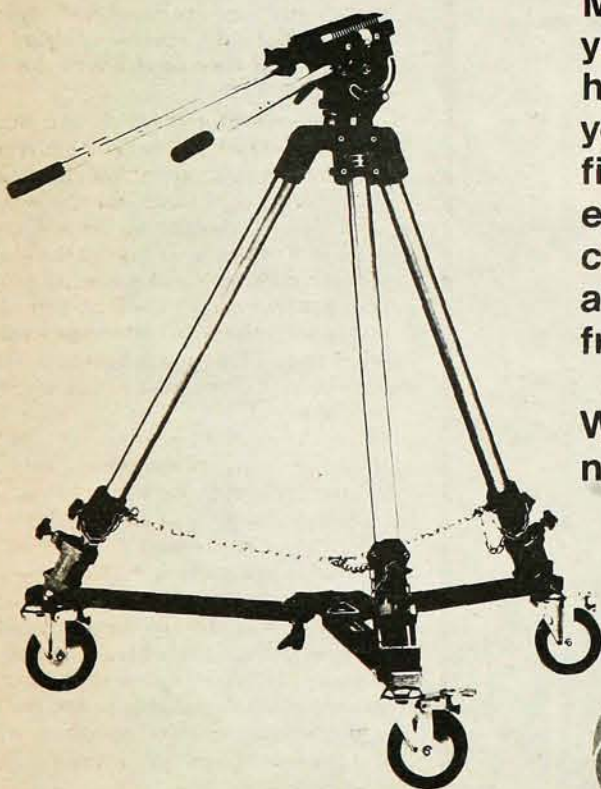
Michael Dorland ●

**La turlute des années dures** d. Richard Boutet, Pascal Gélinas p./p. man. Lucille Veilleux p. assoc. Marguerite Duparc cam. Robert Vanherweghem cam. asst. Claude Brasseur ed. Francis Van den Heuvel asst. ed. Ginette Leduc sd. Claude Beaugrand sd. ed. Noel Almey mus. res. Pascal Gélinas archival res. Richard Boutet, Pascal Gélinas res. assts. Marie-Dominique Cousineau, David Gelfand, Martin Roy instr. mus. comp. & interpreted by Gilles Garand, Pascal Gélinas mus. rec. Pierre Blain, Claude Beaugrand, Louis Hone mixer Hans Peter Strobl prod. synch. Michel Lamothe graphics Richard Boutet photo-mécanic Jean-Pierre Joly anim. cam. Jacques Avoine, Raymond Dumas, Gilles Tremblay titres Serge Bouthillier neg. cut. Estelle Potvin mus. accompagnement: Réal Veilleux, Claude Nicol, David Gelfand, Jean St-Onge, Pascal Gélinas, Paul Cholette, Noella Marquis, Clément Cyr, Christian Lafond et Michel Faubert songs: Irène Berthiaume ("La complainte des années dures"; "C'est aujourd'hui le 25 décembre"; "Ça va venir, découragez-vous pas"); Gaétane Breton ("Le chômage à la Baie des Chaleurs"); Paul Denis ("Valcartier"); Cyrine Dufour ("A Franklin, je vous conseille pas d'y aller"; "Quand on part pour un long voyage"); Pierrette Gingras ("Ma mère m'a raconté"); Christian Lafond ("Imitons nos peres, soyons des colons"); Paul-Emile Lavigne ("Ça ne vient pas vite"; "C'est le temps de la depression"; "Veux-tu travailler"); Lionel Parent ("Les mamans maudissent la guerre"); Jeanne Roberge ("Les chômeurs"; "Le temps de déménagement"; "Un voyageur se determine"); p.c. Les Productions Vent D'Est in assoc. with Cinak Ltée. A co-production with Radio-Quebec, with technical assistance by the National Film Board of Canada (English Production), and the financial participation of The Canada Council, and the Canadian Film Development Corp. colour 16mm running time: 90 min. dist.: Les Films du crépuscule (514) 849-2477. Witnesses: Cédulie Arsenault, Irène Berthiaume, Jeanne Laramée, Cecile Longpré, Fernande Parenteau, Léa Roback, Simone Salvail, Mathias Arsenault, Philippe Côté Roger Denizet, Roméo Ducas, Cyrice Dufour, Armand Guimond, Eloi Guimond, Georges-Aimé Normand, John Rose, Arthur Salvail, and members of the Union des pêcheurs des maritimes.

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