

# Quebec production plays to mixed reviews at annual Rendez-vous

MONTREAL - The Rendez-vous du cinéma québécois, Quebec's annual retrospective of the previous year's cinematographic production, offered a view of a cinema struggling with great hesitation towards new forms of filmic expression.

If there was consensus on the basis of the 15 features screened during the Rendez-vous, Jan. 29-Feb. 3, that the feature remains the most dynamic level of Québécois cinema, there was as well a noticeable dynamism in the animated, experimental and dramatic short, categories. But the documentary, the single largest genre category, either short- or hour-long, either made-for TV or National Film Board produced, is undergoing a severe crisis of identity.

"It takes a lot of courage to show a year's production," Rendez-vous guest, French filmmaker and *Cahiers du cinéma* critic Alain Bergala told Cinema Canada. "If any national cinema anywhere else displayed everything it's done it wouldn't be much better. Just imagine if in France they screened all the documentaries made for the various ministries, it would be even worse. Here the Rendez-vous want to show everything; I think that's good."

Bergala's praise, however, would not be shared by Montreal film critic Richard Martineau. "We're a little country, a little people, with a little cinema that's made with little budgets," Martineau despaired after a grim day of viewing documentaries that seemed overwhelmingly either about fish or the ontological complexities of women. However, even Martineau would be roused to enthusiasm a couple of days later by Roger Cantin and Danyèle Patenaude's half-hour science-fiction short, *L'objet*.

Held for the first time in January, the Rendez-vous drew about the same number of spectators as the previous '83 autumn screening - 3200 tickets were sold for the Cinéma-thèque québécoise's near-300-seat theatre, including sell-out screenings for films like *La femme de l'hôtel*, Léa Pool's award-winning feature that, on the Rendez-vous' opening day, captured its third critics' prize. Hot on the heels of Montreal critics in August and Toronto critics in September, the Quebec Film Critics' Association awarded *La femme* the \$5000 L.E. Ouimet-Molson prize as the best 1984 Quebec feature for "the quality of its look, the modernism of its image composition and the universalism of its subject-matter."

"If we look at ourselves critically, which is what we're trying to do," says Rendez-vous director-general Louise Carré, who after two years of devoted

(and unpaid) labor is handing over the administrative baton of the \$55,000-budget retrospective, "we're not doing all that badly. In any case, this hasn't gone on for eight years for nothing, although always under difficult conditions.

"In terms of the state of Québécois cinema, there's been a real improvement at the feature-level. Things are starting to move, and you can feel the young filmmakers saying, 'Here we come.' And the women are bringing a new look that is going to force the men who began the history of cinema here also to take a hard look at themselves. We're really between two looks in our filmmaking and if we can continue producing more fiction, we shouldn't be in too bad shape. But it's up to the funding administrators who have the power to determine the kind of cinema we're developing.

"If the documentary today is experiencing real difficulty, and it is - there's no point pretending it's not - that is in part due to the fact that its place has been taken from it. If you were a filmmaker in a genre that's been condemned to death, your creativity wouldn't be at its best.

"What shocks me the most is that the people in power, at Radio-Canada, at Radio-Québec, at the Société générale du cinéma and at Telefilm Canada, are not present at the Rendez-vous. How is anything

ever going to change if these people can't make the effort to come and see what's being done, to take the pulse of the Rendez-vous, hear what people are saying, if only to make better informed judgements? There's no dialogue with the agencies, only our monologue to them or theirs to us. After all, these people put up the money; they should at least come hear what's being said."

But, for Carré, the survival of the Rendez-vous is no longer an issue. "There's a demand for our films, both outside the province and outside Montreal, that's simply not being met." The reason is a simple one: lack of means to distribute the films, to advertise, or even to have a paid staff. "I'm not saying the Rendez-vous should become a Festivals Bureau," says Carré, "but it should exist on another basis than permanent anxiety and self-sacrifice. There is a Québécois cinema and that's something worth knowing."

For instance, this means, to mention the more notable of the 87 films screened at the Rendez-vous, the work of NFB animator Pierre Hébert (*Chants et danses du monde inanimé - le Métro, Étienne et Sara*) whose oeuvre was deservedly awarded the Quebec Film Critics' Association \$2500 prize for the best short- and medium-short of the Rendez-vous. This also means the experimental work of young filmmakers like

Martial Éthier (*666*) or Michèle Mercure and Josette Trépanier (*Bouches*), the experimental documentary of Michel Lamothe (*Face à la caméra*), the imaginativeness of Marie Décary (*La chevauchée roze*), the direction and screenwriting of Marc-André Berthiaume's 36-minute drama *Prenons la mer*, the sheer slickness of Denise Labrie's 27-minute drama *Demi-jour*, or the brilliant improvisations of Jacques Méthé's hour-long drama *Aux pieds de la lettre*.

"There is no longer a standard, no central type of filmmaking," says Bergala, "there are only the individual references of each filmmaker. So Léa Pool's *La femme de l'hôtel* refers to European cinema. *Mario*, for instance, refers to an international, Esperanto cinema. Each film is seeking its own reference, and that creates a scattered impression. It's so much easier in France: the major reference-points have all been established long ago; you can refer to them or against them; the references are shared. Here there are no common references, there's greater dispersal. It's nobody's fault; it's structural. To the extent that Quebec filmmakers no longer want their old references, the new ones are still purely imaginary.

"But when you see this, it means that something important is taking place. People are searching. I'm left feeling quite

optimistic by what I've seen here. Even if many of the films are not very good, there's definitely something going on."

Bergala's point of view was shared in the main by Montreal film critic Michel Euvrard. "Judging by what I've seen," he told Cinema Canada, "you can no longer speak of Quebec cinema as one thing, there are now a plurality of Quebec cinemas. If films like *Les illusions tranquilles* (Gilles Blais, NFB) or *Le dernier glacier* (Jacques Leduc and Roger Frappier, also NFB) are still attempting to establish facts, other films reflect an emerging psychologism - the director's concern with self, family or with moral values, notably in the women's films. Sometimes this is done effectively, with a certain humor as in Diane Poitras' *Pense à ton désir* (28 min., video) or with a worrying immobilism as in *J'ai toujours rêvé d'aimer ma mère* (Francine Prévost, NFB, 56 mins.)

"It's as if the collapse of the social project had freed some filmmakers to undertake a renewed formalistic research that's potentially positive but for now is producing films that are all atypical. *La femme de l'hôtel* is an atypical film; *Jacques et Novembre* is too."

Finally, the attempt to translate Quebec cinema's shifting images into printed words was the subject of the Rendez-vous' own award for the best piece of

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Rendez-vous

criticism on a Quebecois film for 1983-1984. In three rounds of voting by the Rendez-vous's seven-person organizing committee, finalists were reduced to six: Robert Claude Bérubé in *Séquences* on *Sonatine*;

Michael Dorland in *Cinema Canada* on *Sonatine* and again on *Jacques et Novembre*; Patrick Straram le bison ravi in *Copie Zéro* on *Au clair de la lune*; Paul Warren in *Québec français* on "L'adoption de notre littérature par notre cinéma"; and Réal Larochelle in *Copie Zéro* on "Collager politi-

quement le culturel québécois."

The prize, a painting entitled *Maya* by artist Mickie Hamilton, was awarded to Réal Larochelle for his review of Gilles Groulx's *Au pays de Zoom*. The award was presented by the 1983 feature's lead, tenor Joseph Rouleau.

Public needed by CRTC

OTTAWA - In an attempt to streamline broadcasting license renewal procedures by reducing the numbers of public hearings, the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) is placing greater onus on public participation through the intervention process.

A public notice last September indicated that the Commission would begin implementing simplified procedures for the renewal of AM, FM TV and cable licenses "in certain circumstances." This would mean a reduction in renewal application information requirements when, according to the CRTC, "applications raised no concerns necessitating a detailed public analysis of the licensee's past performance or future plans and when the Commission was satisfied that a public hearing may not be required." It would be up to public, kept informed by publication of the applications in the *Canada Gazette* or general circulation newspapers in the areas served by the broadcaster, to intervene. In that event, says the Commission, "the licensee may be asked to reply to such interventions." Only then would a

determination be made as to whether or not to schedule a public hearing, according to current procedures.

Implementing the streamlined procedure, the CRTC, in a public notice Feb. 1, announced that it had received renewal applications from 12 Atlantic region licensees for renewal of licenses due to expire on Sept. 30, 1985. The Commission "in accordance with this new licensing procedure, now proposes to renew the licenses for a full license term" - that is, unless intervenors from the public decide otherwise. The CRTC gave Mar. 8 as the deadline for intervention.

Meanwhile, three dates and places have been announced at which times the CRTC will hold public hearings on proposals for an ethnic broadcasting policy for Canada. The first public hearing has been scheduled for Mar. 12 in Vancouver at the Sheraton Landmark, followed as of Mar. 19 by a second hearing in Hull at the Conference Center and as of Mar. 26 in Toronto at the Metro Convention Center. All hearings are scheduled to begin at 9:30 a.m., and the final date for submission of comments is Feb. 28.

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