



photo: Bernard Fugère

• The crowning of Don Cordosco (Pierre Curzi) in *Caffè Italia*

emigration. The crowning as king by his grateful workers of Don Cordosco, a Montreal Godfather figure who contracted Italian labourers to the CPR, is not only masterfully acted by Pierre Curzi as 'the don' speaking in Italian in a loving, funny testimonial to his heritage, but is furthermore a simply precious reconstruction of the biases of culture. For what made it possible for the immigrants to cope with America was the very myth of the Old Country that would prevent them from assimilating fully into the new.

This worked in two contradictory ways: by the reconstruction in America of traditions that were no longer the case in Italy, or conversely by adopting modernist myths that were in advance of those of the new country they had come to. And this was particularly the case of the Italian Fascists in Montreal, for whom Fascism was a form of technological futurism well-ahead of Canada's own lumbering imperialism or Quebec's ultramontane rejection of modernization until the early '50s.

It's this dissynchronicity of cultural development that *Caffè Italia* handles subtly yet powerfully at the same time. Thrown into the midst of the Canadian 'two solitudes,' the Italians of Montreal, for the most part and not without bitterness, became another solitude in the Canadian 'mosaic' of cultural isolation. Like the good Candides they were, stuck in this Voltairian 'thirty arpents of snow,' they simply contented themselves with tilling their own gardens. For it would not be until the Québécois themselves had experimented with and experienced some of the misadventures of modernity, including intimations of that postmodern sense of also being 'strangers in a strange land,' that a basis for an authentic commonality could begin to develop.

Based on the research of historian Bruno Ramirez, who co-scripted the film along with director Tana, *Caffè Italia* has unearthed a minor gem of archival footage in General Italo Balbo's mid-'30s flying visit to Montreal to display the modern airborne face of Fascist Italy.

Curious, though, is the general paucity of specifically Canadian archival material, which only heightens the terrible cultural loss that immigration to Canada must have been. If Tana makes up for this lack particularly effectively in the Don Cordosco sequence, the other

docudrama insertions (with the exception of a lovely sepia-tinted train sequence) work less well: neo-Brechtian in intent, they come across as neo-Ronald McDonald in execution. Casting Curzi in multiple roles might have seemed like an excellent Lefebvrian idea at the time, but after you've seen him in a half-dozen persona, it's the film's budget itself that begins to look thin.

As a film by a critic - Tana teaches communications at UQAM and writes for *Format Cinéma* - *Caffè Italia* is disappointingly conservative in style. It does, however, make up for this with musical passages on the accordion so painfully haunting that the sounds of these alone speak volumes as to the cultural tragedy of immigration.

Above all, it's for its firm grip on the ambiguity of culture that *Caffè Italia* is a film well-worth seeing, and a real credit to all concerned with its making.

Michael Dorland •

**CAFFÈ ITALIA** d. Paul Tana sc. Bruno Ramirez. Tana res. Ramirez cam. Michel Caron sd. Serge Beauchemin ed. Louise Surprenant mus. Pierre Flynn. Andrea Piazza p. Marc Daigle p.c. ACPAV, with the financial participation of the Société générale du cinéma, Telefilm Canada, Bellevue Pathé and Société Radio-Canada dist. Cinéma Libre (514) 526-0473. col. 16mm running time: 80 mins. l.p. Pierre Curzi, Tony Nardi, and the participation of the Italians of Montreal

Brigitte Berman's  
**Artie Shaw:  
Time Is All  
You've Got**

The beguiling sinuous strains of "Begin The Beguine" float over the credits, and those of us who remember the '40s and '50s and the Big Bands recognize the clarinet of Artie Shaw and his definitive arrangement of this popular tune.

Brigitte Berman presented her second music documentary at the recent

Festival of Festivals in Toronto and, as it's more than probable that most filmgoers have never heard of her first, make a note of *Bix*: "Ain't none of them play like him yet." And then make another note to catch *Artie Shaw: Time is all you've got* when it gets to a screen. It really deserves to be shown at neighbourhood theatres because of it has wide-ranging age appeal and perfectly conjures up the nostalgia of this period - swing...big bands...jitterbug...

Artie Shaw is now 75, and has been classified as reclusive, arrogant and, heavens, intellectual. Twice he walked away from his successful career - "For fourteen years I was an instant celebrity." The first time was in 1939, after making \$60,000 a week in 1938, and being constantly mobbed by a demanding and adoring public. Shaw despised these fans, referring to them as "morons" who always wanted to hear the same tunes played the same way.

A voracious reader and seeker of knowledge, Shaw's desire to write and to pursue a personal life often led him to retreat from show biz - to Mexico, to a farm in Bucks County, Penn., to a dairy farm in New York state where he wrote his first book *The Trouble With Cinderella* and, finally, to Spain. In the '50s, Shaw was called to testify before the House Un-American Activities Committee and, after that experience, decided he didn't want to live in America any more. He gave up the music business, and departed with his eighth wife, actress Evelyn Keyes, to build a house in Bagur, Spain. Eventually, Shaw returned to live in his own country in 1973, and to teach extension courses at the University of California, Santa Barbara.

But the life of this talented musician has never before been chronicled, and the articulate and abrasive Artie Shaw resisted all offers to sensationalize his story. He agreed to do Berman's film because he liked her handling of *Bix*. And what a great interview he is! In his home, in front of the camera for four days, he doesn't exactly spill his guts, but he does roam through his memory, giving out details (and probably holding back too); putting on old recordings and listening to them intently with an added comment or two; sitting at the piano to demonstrate his theme music, *Nightmare*; and making wonderfully acerbic remarks about his forays into the movies.

Interpersed with these lengthy reminiscences is a vast collection of researched material. Photos of his youthful beginnings (when he taught himself to play the saxophone); fronting his own bands - both stills and from movies; some delightful 'home movie' footage of Shaw clowning in a New York park (taken by a band member); his Navy war service entertaining the troops - all jostling for attention as the Artie Shaw bands play and play and play on the track.

Little is said by Shaw of his unusual marital track-record and that's understandable in a film devoted to his artistic life and career. However, the passing reference to his marriage to Lana Turner is a sad comment on two 'famous' people who meet, marry, but don't really know anything about each other. His last wife, Evelyn Keyes, stayed married to him for 15 years, and she gives a warm, rueful and witty account of their life together, mainly in the house of Spain. With great charm, Keyes makes amusing comments on Shaw's fanatical neatness and tidiness - and admits that, to this day, she is still under his influence in this respect.

So, it's difficult to fault such an absorbing, truly interesting documentary, full of music, good talk and lively comment. At 114 minutes it ought to be shorter, but what to take out? What will Artie say next? is the thread that draws the audience on through the whole film.

After the Festival of Festivals screening, the mixed-age audience streamed into the lobby. A university professor and a newspaper book reviewer greeted each other and started to wander "down-memory-lane" together. They recalled all their Artie Shaw records, when they had seen him with his band, and the girls they had danced with to his music. A 12-year-old passed by, remarking to his Mum that Artie Shaw was a "neat" man...

Pat Thompson •

**ARTIE SHAW: TIME IS ALL YOU'VE GOT**

p./ed./sc./narr. Brigitte Berman, assoc.p. Don Haig, cam. Mark Irwin, Jim Aquila, sd.rec. Jon Brodin, Gerry Jest, anim.cam. John Derderian, Visual Arts, add.ed. Barry Backus, 16mm., col., running time: 114 mins. Availability: Bridge Film Productions, 44 Charles St.W., Ste. 2518, Toronto, M4Y 1R7

• Artie Shaw beginning the beguine in 1939

