



I Dream of Genies

by Daniel Hausmann

I don't know. I just sat through the Genie Award films; all 24 of them, and I am feeling slightly optimistic. It's a strange feeling.

One usually approaches these screenings with a mixture of curiosity and trepidation. What have people actually been doing? What are the movies really like? After a year's worth of major announcements, deals, starts, shoots, prizes, and general blowing of trumpets or, alternately, delays, cuts, changes, institutional obituaries and general moaning and groaning, one is curious to see what it's all about. To gauge the distance between the hoopla and the real thing.

Then there's the fear. Fear of last year's (and the previous year's) mind-numbing defeats. Fear of embarrassment. Of one's participation, however small, in the collective guilt. Of our perennial creative deficit.

Perhaps this is one of the reasons why attendance is so minimal, at least in Montreal. I counted only two other diehard viewers, oddly enough both actors. (Will they ever suffer enough?). To be fair, at least 15-20 people showed for the better-known pictures. And it is

true that most of the Quebec films had already had successful runs downtown. Besides, these are only screenings. The social gathering of the tribe takes place at the Genie Awards ceremony, where the assuaging of guilt and the concomitant ego buildup under the limelight allows one a fresh start on *next year's* round.

The fact is that if you judge by past nominations and awards, they consistently reflect a profound desire to acknowledge Canadian films and craft achievements. Notwithstanding the Academy's call to duty, insiders' accumulated knowledge, word-of-mouth and intuition, seem as good a system as any.

What you can get out of these screenings – aside from a free pass to the Triaminicol DM auditions – is a sense of the type and range of the films being made. (See lists.*) Also a good morning-after look at the year's production. The nitty gritty. As you will have already voted by the time this article appears, and as I *know* you haven't seen all 24 pictures, let me fill you in before you go, God forbid, not fully informed on to next year's production.

Coulibiatic anyone? Needless to say, *the* picture of the year. (*Le Déclin de l'empire américain*, for the uninitiated). Stylish, self-assured, biting and also gentle. It had something to say and did so in a clever and carefully structured *mise-en-scène*. Sly Denys Arcand has been around for some time and he has picked up a few things from his

more commercial work on *Ovide Plouffe* and *Empire* (without losing the sharp sense of social satire of his earlier work). Taking great pains to avoid parochialisms, and meticulously staging the talky dialogue, he now has the craft to meet the challenge of his writing. Confident, original filmmaking, the buoyant Handel opening has no equal in the other 22 films.

Which is not to say there weren't at least two other interesting and original works. *Bach et Bottine* and *Loyalties*. The remarkable thing about *Bach et Bottine* is the emotional punch it packs within its children's film label. (Reminiscent of *Les Bons débarras*, except of course without its echoes). It is told so simply it couldn't be plainer – okay, perhaps a little too plain – letting the two main characters build up tremendous believability. By far the most human and affecting of all films – including *Le Déclin*, okay which seems a bit dry, a shade schematic, in comparison. A classic Hollywood theme, yet handled in its very own, very simple, Quebec way. And a big hit, though I don't know if it is slick enough to do as well outside the province.

Loyalties is interesting for its *ease*, its sense of self, of space. This picture is, as they say, centered. It knows its theme, builds up to it, and is not afraid of humour. You can enjoy it. And the landscape means something, it's not just there as scenic backdrop. A little slow and a little coy as it pulls back at the last minute from a head-on confrontation with our heroine. Nevertheless, there's a confidence and an openness not often seen in Canadian films. (So often enclosed, no matter how big the space.)

Four other films managed to score in our consciousness (and the public's). *Les Fous de Bassan*, *Pouvoir intime*,

Anne Trister and *Dancing in the Dark*. All by young filmmakers.

No matter what else you want to say about Simoneau's work, he can sure string his shots together. You can watch his movies twice, they are so taut. On the other hand, there's a kind of image grid-lock that tends to imprison the characters rather than letting *them* generate the action. *Les Fous* is impressive, carefully set up and beautifully shot to recreate Anne Hébert's claustrophobic vision, but it stands in frozen poses, while the simpler, more commercial premise of *Pouvoir intime* brings out a warmth and humanity absent from the more 'artistic' work. Still, the achievement is considerable and there is some surprisingly fine acting.

Anne Trister is that rarity, the successful second feature. More ambitious and with a bigger budget this time, Léa Pool proves she can cut it. Beautifully shot, with a melancholy undertone and an almost European light, the film is a little thin (like *nouvelle cuisine*, it's good, but is it enough?). Still, our heroine *makes* it. That in itself is refreshing.

Finally, the quietly smashing *Dancing in the Dark*, where our protagonist breaks through, if not in the real world, at least into a clear-sighted one of her own. Small-screen in our context, it nevertheless sneaks up on you. What's interesting here is the cool direction by Leon Marr and Martha Henry's remarkably restrained and gutsy performance combining to deliver powerfully on Joan Barfoot's story. It's slow all right, but at least it doesn't pull its punches. This picture *earns* its screen space.

Well, there you have it. Whether they took the low road (*Dancing*), the high road (*Le Déclin*, *Loyalties*, *Anne Trister*, *Les Fous*), or the commercial road

Daniel Hausmann has been a casting director in Montreal and is presently working on a screenplay.

O V E R - V I E W

(*Pouvoir intime*, *Bach et Bottine*), these films make it on their own. They did it *their* way. And that's probably at the root of their success.

Two other films popped out. Although thoroughly commercial, à la branch plant Canadian, they nevertheless showed a certain mastery of the medium: *Bullies* and *Toby McTeague*. In *Bullies*, Paul Lynch really outdoes himself with three unshaven guys and a messy front yard. Great work out of

cinematographer René Verzier. It's so well done that one regrets Lynch has stayed so much within the genre. It lacks just a little of that *extra* reach, that something that can open up a picture, take it beyond the strictly B category. (Like Cronenberg, Lynch expands the genre).

Toby McTeague – a teen market picture – suffers from wooden dialogue and a zero love interest, but it's well made, the action scenes carry you

through. At least Jean-Claude Lord's work seems honest, not the token bow toward Mecca that you often see in these circumstances.

And now we move into that familiar territory – the good-but-no-cigar category. Pictures not without their promises and sometimes numerous qualities, but not quite cutting it either. On the one hand the long standing and truly Canadian tradition of the small, sincere, *honourable* Canadian film that does

not quite have the energy to live on its own – whether stifled by too much earnestness, or too much refusal to compromise with what it perceives as Hollywoodisms, or by its own inability to rise above its surrounding conditions (the movie itself being a failed attempt to break through). And on the other, another long-standing tradition – the Hollywood North picture, either naively or knowingly hooking onto the Hollywood gravy train without its craft,

English Canada				Quebec			
HONOURABLE-SMALL	COMMERCIAL	HIGH ROAD		HONOURABLE-SMALL	COMMERCIAL	HIGH ROAD	
Ⓢ = fringe	Worked	Didn't work		Ⓢ = fringe	Worked	Didn't work	
1986				1986			
Dancing in the Dark*	Bullies	The Blue Man	Loyalties*	Le Dernier Havre	Pouvoir intime*	The Morning Man	Anne Trister*
Sitting in Limbo*	Toby McTeague	Keeping Track		Équinoxe	Bach et Bottine*	La Guêpe	Les Fous de Bassan*
John and the Missus		Abducted		Exit			Le Déclin de l'empire américain*
The Adventure of Faustus Bidgood* Ⓢ		Lost!		Claire, cette nuit et demain			
1985				1985			
90 Days*	One Magic Christmas	Night Magic	The Boy in Blue	Jacques et Novembre*	Elvis Gratton		Le Matou*
My American Cousin*		Separate Vacations	Joshua Then and Now	Visage pâle	The Peanut Butter Solution		
Overnight							
Samuel Lount							
Storm Ⓢ							
Timing Ⓢ							
1984				1984			
My Kind of Town Ⓢ		Bedroom Eyes	The Bay Boy*	Les Années de rêve	La Guerre des tuques*		Le Crime d'Ovide Plouffe*
Next of Kin Ⓢ		Draw		La Femme de l'hôtel*			Mario*
That's My Baby		Heavenly Bodies		Le Jour S			
Unfinished Business		Hey Babe!		Sonatine*			
Walls		Isaac Littlefeather					
		Killer Instinct					
		Reno and the Doc					
		The Surrogate					
		Thrillkill					
1983				1983			
Deserters	A Christmas Story	Tell Me that You Love Me	The Terry Fox Story*	Au Clair de la lune			Bonheur d'occasion*
A 20th Century	Strange Brew	Ups and Downs	The Wars	Lucien Brouillard			Maria Chapdelaine
Chocolate Cake Ⓢ	Videodrome*	Dead Wrong		Rien qu'un jeu			
1982				1982			
Big Meat Eater Ⓢ	Hard Feelings	By Design	The Grey Fox*	Doux Aveux	Les Yeux rouges		
Latitude 55	Porky's*	Harry Tracy	Quest for Fire*	Les Fleurs sauvages			
		Hot Touch		Une Journée en taxi			
		If You Could See What I Hear		Larose, Pierrot et la Luce			
		Melanie		La Quarantaine			
		Sneakers					
		Threshold					
		Visiting Hours					
1981				1981			
Alligator Shoes*	Hank Williams: The Show He Never Gave	Bells	Amateur	Les Beaux Souvenirs*			Les Plouffe*
Surfacing	Happy Birthday to Me	Cries in the Night	Ticket to Heaven*				
	Heavy Metal	Finishing Touch					
	Scanners	Head On					
	Silence of the North*	Heartaches					
		Improper Channels					

**To give you an idea of the overall picture in the past few years, here's a quick-glance handy guide to the films. All categories are strictly subjective. To those who would take umbrage, my apologies in advance. 'Fringe' films are one-of-a-kind efforts, usually by young filmmakers and not in the race. 'Commercial' films are those in which I felt a proven formula or genre at work. A certain slickness of handling stock situations. 'Worked' or 'Didn't work' is merely my own perception of how well they did in their own terms – either craftsmanship or straight box-office. 'Honourable small' films are distinguished by the modesty of their ambitions, financial and creative. The high road are those pictures whose ambition to make a big impact on a wide audience are reflected in their budget and often, the scope of a film. * denotes films of special interest – either creative or productionwise.*

or more importantly, its convictions. (The cinematic language is the same, but it often has an all too evident 'accent' - like Quebec films in France - in terms of pacing, rhythm, motivation.)

In the first group, **John and the Missus**, **Sitting in Limbo**, **Le Dernier havre** and **Equinoxe**. **John and the Missus** should really have been among the successes and I certainly hope it will be. But as much as it is a real pleasure to watch Gordon Pinsent's fine dry-point work on screen, and the many other true-ringing characterizations (most notably Roland Hewgill's), somewhere along the line the plot gets finessed out. We lose the thread, and the final pointed understatement comes much too late. Where *does* he go with his horse at the end?

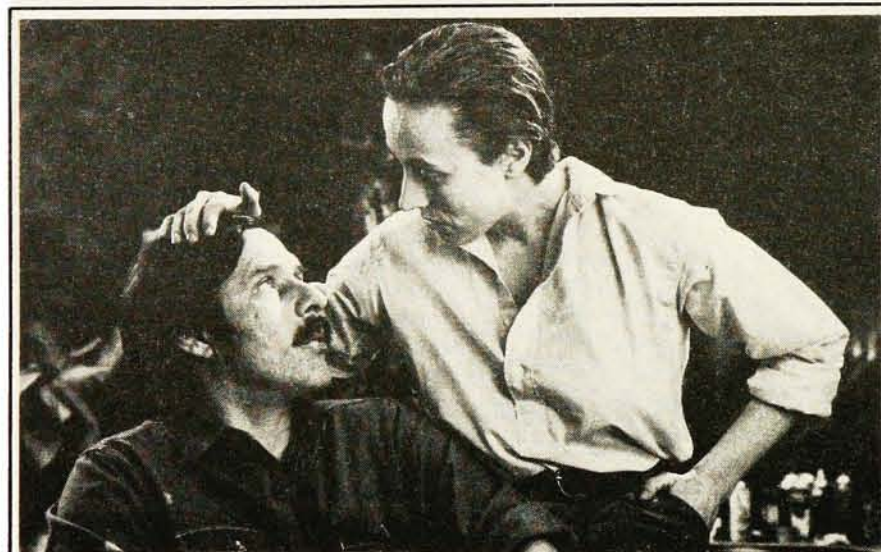
Sitting in Limbo is truthful, courageous, humorous, but *precisely* sitting in a limbo between docu and drama. It induces restlessness - you keep waiting for this picture to get up and go. John Smith has a fine touch with young actors, and the picture is well crafted. But we are still watching from the outside as in a docu, not identifying as in a drama. I am skeptical about 'alternative' drama - either it is or it isn't.

Le Dernier havre, like its hero, shuffles all too discreetly towards its own demise. Redolent of a certain Quebec nostalgia, its only possible audience did not flock to it. Otherwise a fine first effort and a very beautiful last image. **Equinoxe**, despite outstanding photography and Jacques Godin's presence, is dramatically disappointing. We are elaborately set up for a very small payoff.

In the second group - a dwindling species - and not without *their* qualities, **Keeping Track**, **Lost** and **Abducted**. **Keeping Track** (it's amazing



• The women of *The Decline of the American Empire*



• Pierre Curzi, Marie Tifo - *Intimate Power*

the number of films whose titles subconsciously describe their dilemmas) is, natch, more like *losing* track. A contemporary action-thriller, it is awkward and rushed. Robin Spry packs in so many unconvincingly set-up plot twists

that we soon run out of breath, and can only watch helplessly as the story careens off on its own. And the love interest that should have been like a lit flame throughout, turns out to be more of a pilot light - it that never develops

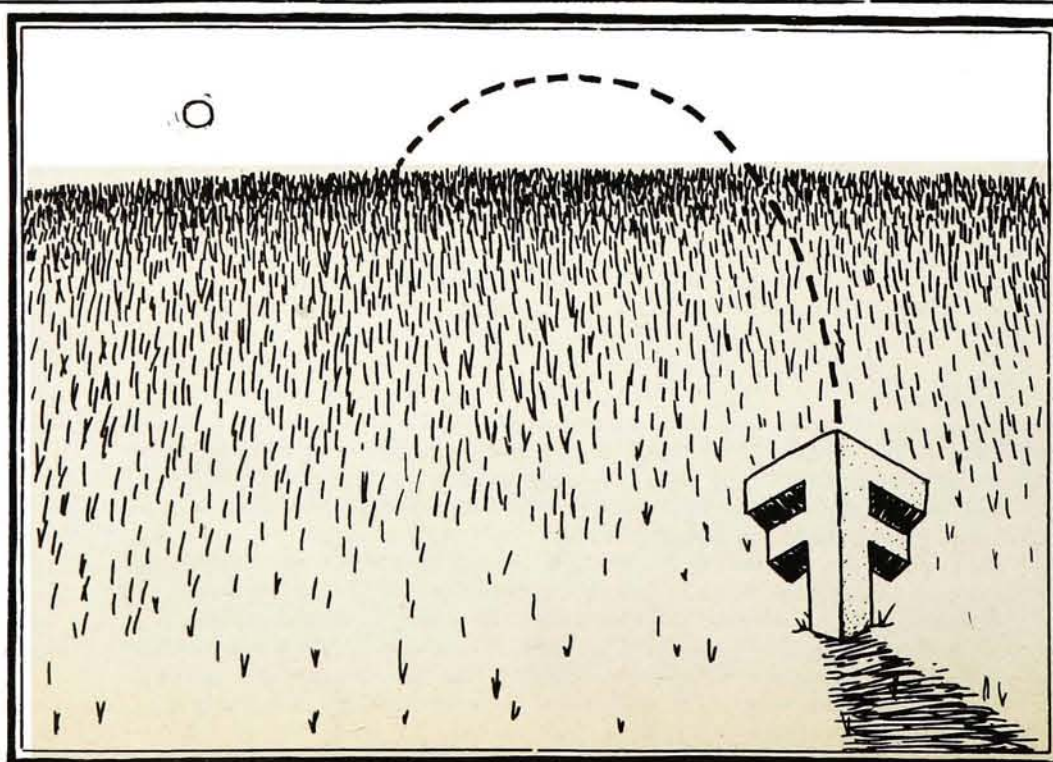
any real heat. An otherwise well-made truly major production, this film could have used a little yoga: you know, breathe in, out, center, character, *then* action.

The Blue Man is not quite up to par. A supernatural thriller, it has some very fine scary work. Unfortunately, the real killer here is the expository dialogue, aided and abetted by several key cardboard characterizations. **Lost** is... well, lost at sea. A heavy-going dramatization of a true-story - three people capsizing in a small boat and awaiting rescue - we *die* with our characters. **They** talk their theme out, and *we* shrivel in the heat. (I guess there is a certain type of Canadian that just won't make for a great conversationalist). **Abducted** is also lost... in the woods. Fine work for a young filmmaker, but you don't want to spend too much time with these guys either. A one-note picture, they don't talk and the pretty girl runs.

And one almost forgets, **Faustus Bidgood**. Impossible not to like this picture. A brilliant script - it's a kind of Newfoundland **Brazil**, but funnier. Unfortunately, it is an amateur production craft-wise, and out of its depth in this competition. One can only imagine the kind of inspired madness that Andy and Michael Jones could commit with a little budget and craft support behind them. They deserve it.

And here we come to yet a third and perhaps inevitable group - at least the numbers are bearable - the major loss category. Disastersville. The common denominator here is terminal script/director trouble. **Exit**, **The Morning Man**, **Claire cette nuit et demain**, **La Guêpe**, **Exit**, another story with the supernatural touch, is a ludicrous melodrama even Louise Marleau can't save. You want to stay away from your

Francont Film
has moved



to 48 Stewart Street
Toronto, Ont. M5V 1H6
(416) 360-6400

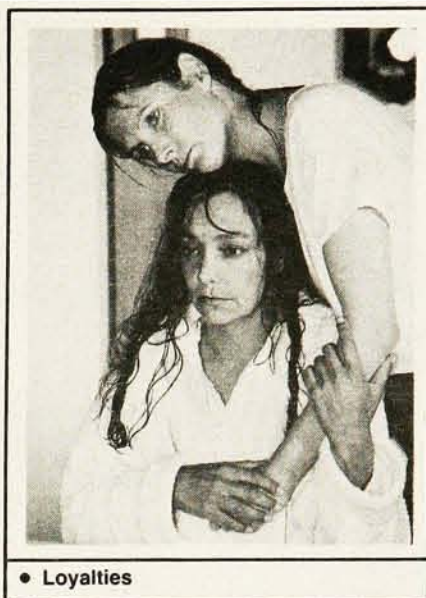
piano on this one. **The Morning Man**, a big disappointment, is so stogy I swear I could hear an echo all through the soundtrack. **Claire...** has an interesting premise – life as an instant's dream – unfortunately it's so irredeemably smug you can relive your own life many times before this picture is over. And **La Guêpe**. What can one say? Gilles Carle's fine sense of the perverse really comes through in this excruciatingly bad film. For sure there's a thesis in it for somebody.

Two other films entered in this year's competition – **Recruits** and **The Pink Chiquitas** – are really beneath comment. We are talking here about 5¢ admission and basement projection on old bedsheets. What these pictures are doing at any awards show is a total mystery. (Minor note to Academy programmers: it would be better to go back to putting the shorts in a separate screening of their own, otherwise some good efforts are likely to be sunk by the quality of the features they may have the misfortune to be coupled with – mainly, nobody's going to see them.)

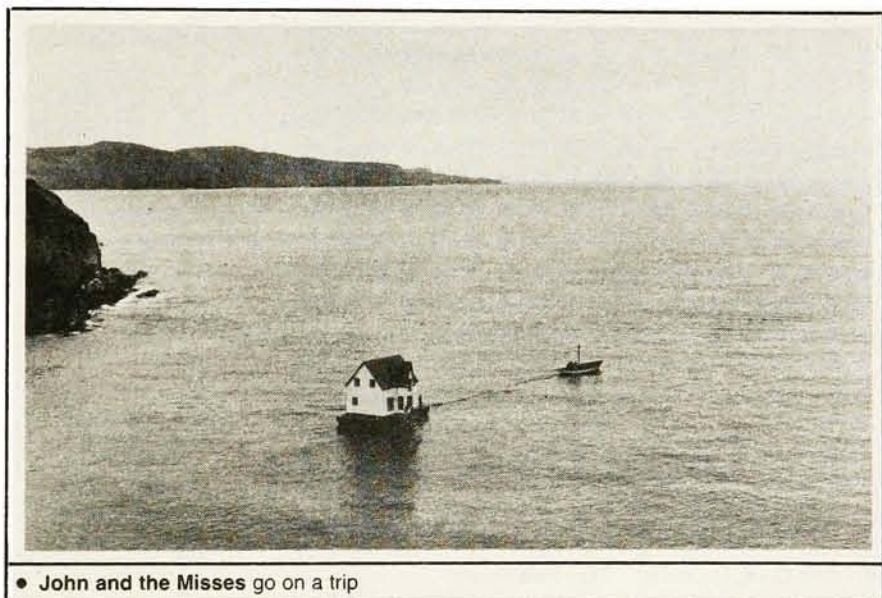
Well, there you have it. Now you know. I think the production angle seems under control Peter, now if we could only get the creative part right... Actually it's really not bad at all if you compare with previous years. No **Mon Oncle Antoine** or even **Goin' Down the Road**, but a very classy sex comedy and more than a handful (count'em) of successful films carving out their own territory. A growing sense of confidence and creative will ready to impose itself, backed by production. Most important, something to look *forward* to. There's a breath of fresh air in some of these films (and boy does it feel good!) as they begin to unravel in their own way the dilemma of the Canadian film. Most films retain a distinctly Canadian



• Dancing in the Dark



• Loyalties



• John and the Misses go on a trip

look – either through natural (rural or wilderness) settings (9 of 22 films) or through the intimate drama aspect (13 of 22). It's just that what we've come to expect of them, perhaps their biggest burden, may be changing.

Another thing this year is the sense of talent out there. Not just the directors, but performers and performances (always so dependent on the script/director factor). Not only those who can carry a picture – Martha Henry, Louise

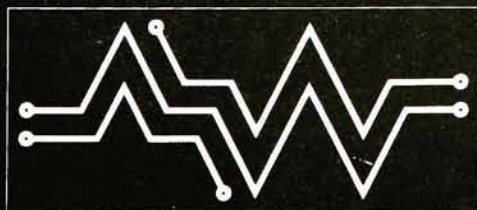
Marleau, Paul Hébert, Jacques Godin, Gordon Pinsent – but also very fine performances by Roland Hewgill and Randy Follett in **John and the Missus**, Lothaire Bluteau and Angèle Coutru in **Les Fous**, Marie Tifo the entire cast of **Le Déclin** and, in particular, Dorothee Berryman, Tantoo Cardinal in **Loyalties**, Allan Scarfe and Kenneth Welsh gleefully playing the JR parts, and at least two kids – Mahée Paiement in **Bach et Bottine** and Andrew Bednarsky in **Toby McTeague**.

Directors of photography: Pierre Mignot, Paul van der Linden, Vic Sarin, Guy Dufaux, Alain Dostie, Frank Tidy, René Verzier, to mention only those whose work is seen this year.

Music tracks are with notable exceptions still largely blah. Everywhere there are these endemic lush orchestral opening arrangements that unsupported by the visuals just spell s-t-a-l-e.

Without a doubt, the thrust of this year's films reflect (dare one say it?) a new-found maturity in Quebec. Not only from the point of view of the individual directors, but also and most important, in the collaboration of producer/distributors, private producers, the Société Générale, the ONF, Telefilm and Radio-Canada. While in English Canada one still senses the heavy hand of L.A. and the twisting in the wind of the independent Canadian producer. The tremendous success of TV production has so far failed to translate into the riskier film side. And of course, it is much tougher to develop that sense of audience, which regardless of its size, must *start* here. Nevertheless, there's hope, if only there was a truly *concerted* effort on the part of the powers that be. The talent seems to be there. Always has.

As I say, it's a strange feeling, this optimism. One can only begin to worry. ●



MOTION PICTURE VIDEO CORPORATION

- FILM TO TAPE • EDITORIAL SERVICES 1", 2", 3/4", BETACAM, MULTI-FORMAT
- DUPLICATION • TAPE TO FILM • STUDIO FACILITIES • 'ARTSTAR' •
- PLUS SATELLITE DISTRIBUTION ('DAILIES' OR COMPLETED PROGRAMS)

annualcan
adiansoci
etyofcine
matograp
hersfilm&
videoequi
pmentfair
(pewh!)

tripods-camera's-lights-magazines-projectors-generators
magazines-fluid heads-posters-soundgear-cases-monitor
video equipment-powerpack-filter-meters-phonographs
lenses-dittybag-amplifiers-vcrs-cb gear-microphones-arcs
mixer-wheels-boxes-clapperboards-gobo's-editors-dollies
tapes-filmstock--cranes-rewinds-sun guns-tape recorders
slide projector-still cameras-telephones-batteries-etcetera
what-more-do-yo-want-we-have-it-adaptors-bulbs-slates
video assists-gear heads-tracks-french flags-matte box-etc

Sunday April 5th 1987, 10am-4pm
Yorkdale Holiday Inn, Toronto
(Dufferin at 401)

information: (416) 636-6113 and 239-0904

Tickets: Adults \$ 4.-, Students, Senior Citizens \$ 3.50

Canadian Society of Cinematographers

head office: 230 Niagara st. Toronto, Ontario, M6J 2L4 (416) 361-3484

Join Us!...we're the professionals

The Annual CSC Awards/Dinner/Dance is held on Saturday, April 25th 1987
at the Ontario Science Center in Toronto. Cocktails at 7pm. Seating is limited.

Please call (416) 361-3484 for reservations