

Claude Gagnon's  
**The Kid Brother**

Few recent films offer so slippery a sense of their own context as Claude Gagnon's **Kid Brother**. A modest film which provides little sense of the places from or to which it speaks, its unexpected success at Montreal's World Film Festival has resulted in awkward attempts to account for it in terms of an (as-yet elusive) authorial career or a resurgent local cinema. Newspaper reviewers, in opting to read the film against the backdrop of other treatments of comparable themes or subjects, have been led to what is perhaps the only useful matrix within which **Kid Brother** may be judged. One watches with vigilant attention as the film winds its way around the traps endemic to films about

the disabled or unusual, then congratulates it on its success.

Normally, a film like this might be expected to find a life within the interstices of the youth festival circuit and international television markets, arousing a broad if restrained consensus in its favour. A film whose principal appeal is not to cinephiles, it has nevertheless been forced to seek its momentum from festival and journalistic response, with variable success. This is unfortunate; **Kid Brother's** virtues are those of a film with a long shelf-life and specialized constituency, not those of a seasonal triumph.

The intricacies of **Kid Brother's** history (it was filmed in the U.S., with a cast of mid-range mainstream American performers, and financed in part — like Gagnon's earlier films — with Japanese money) are by now well-known, as is the director's acknowledged estrangement from the main currents of Quebec filmmaking over the last several years. Similar circumstances have, in the case of other filmmakers, resulted in everything from a thematization of this *déracinement* to a productive clash of cultural traditions. With **Kid Brother**, it is

rather as if a strong investment in the apparent universality of the film's subject matter (the portrait of a boy born with no legs) has converged with the naturalism of Gagnon's earlier films (in particular, **Visage pâle**) to produce a kind of humanist esperanto. **Kid Brother** seems committed to eliciting universalist adjectives like "funny, moving and heartwarming" (the press release) and the Bulgarian or Chinese distribution deals which almost inevitably follow.

**Kid Brother** is, to its credit, successful at avoiding the twin traps of inspirational condescension and the voyeuristic revelation of sexual or hygienic detail. It accomplishes this, in large part, by making these part of the film's thematic and narrative material. The inability of characters in the film to just let Kenny live his life is set up against the film's own resolute determination to do just that. The unfolding of Kenny's difficulties takes shape within the style and narrative patterns of television melodrama (like so many of these, the story involves the disruption and reconciliation of the nuclear family). The point — that the magnitude of problems as perceived outside the family has little to do with the banality and familiarity of their effects within it — is a useful if uncontroversial one. It is, however, established quite early, and many viewers pass the point at which that ordinariness still has the force of revelation.

In this respect, I am reminded of Leslie Halliwell's brusque dismissal of Ida Lupino's film **The Bigamist**: that, having summoned all its force to make the point that bigamy exists, it finds few viewers surprised or shocked and retreats, deflated. **Kid Brother**, in its insistence on the quotidian ordinariness of Kenny's life, risks a similar reaction. The film, for many initially skeptical viewers, elicits a simple sigh of relief for having fulfilled its promise to be unobjectionable. Those most affected by **Kid Brother** seem to be those, precisely, for whom Kenny's story is one of courage and inspiration, an unfortunate but widespread response to a film which genuinely works to resist it.

Will Straw •



• Kenny Easterday in slippery Kid

**THE KID BROTHER** A Kinema Amerika Motion Picture A Towa Production Co., Ltd. Bandai Co., Ltd. and Kinema Tokyo Co., Ltd. presentation exec. p. Matsuo Takahashi, Makoto Yamashina co-p. Hirohiko Suyoshi line p. Dennis Bishop d.o.p. Yudai Kato (J.S.C.) art d. Bill Bilowit lighting sup. Kenjiro Konaka casting by Judy Courtney, Donna Newton add. cast. by Sharon Ceccatti, Clayton Hill m. comp and conducted by François Dompiere song "Soaring Baby" m. by François Dompiere lyric Daniel Lavoie sung by Daniel Lavoie ed. André Corriveau p. Kiyoshi Fujimoto sc/ d. Claude Gagnon assist. p. Daisaku Yamada prod. sup. Mel Howard, Yuri Yoshimura-Gagnon prod. man. Kathleen Caton 1st a. d. Eduardo Rossof 2nd a. d. Annie Loeffler loc. man. Brett Botula sc. sup. Carmen Soriano, Paul Bowers cost. des. Maureen Hogan asst. art. d. David Hill prop master Ruth Lounsbury asst. prop. Martin Carrigan 1st. cam. op. Bert Guthrie 2nd. cam. op. John Rice cam assts Clive Sacke, Simon Manses, Tony Baggott, Tsotomu Takada cam. loader Evan Estern still photog. Alain Gagnon, Susan Golomb, Richard Golomb sd. mix Russell Fager boom op. Jim Bruwelheide sd. ed. Louis Dupire dialogue ed. Michel Bordeleau asst sd. ed. Louis Col-

lin m. ed. Noel Almey re-rec. mix Michel Descombes. André Gagnon Foley rec. Andy Malcolm color timing Pierre Campeau neg. cutter Negbec Film Inc. asst ed. Christine Denault apprentice editor Anne-Josée Boudreau head carp Gary Kosko scenic painters Carol Stavish, Leah Boogeman, Rick Sheridan carp. Bill Franko, Greg Deroy set dressers Frederika Gray, Alexis Samulski make-up Jeanne Josefczyk asst. make-up Karin Wagner ward sup. Mary Lee Anderson Forrester ward asst. Terry Eglar Bilsky lighting d. Bill Schwarz gaffer Barry Kessler best-boy elec. Hirokazu Murasawa elec. Robert Lubomski key grip Peter Bennett Beal dolly grips Nick Tallo, Richard Sieg craft services Craig Snidach, Susan Sayers catering service Metro Catering asst. to d. Luc Vandal int. Shisho Ito, Juncho Tsunashima tutors Diane Benec, Susan Handeshield stand in Mike Treylinek, Sal Palazzo dogs supplied by Captain Haggerty's School for Dogs handlers Susan Zaretsky, Mary Doran transportation co-ords Frank McGough, T. Michael Reid gripelec. driver Dennis Drogan honey wagon, driver Jackie L. Crane prod. co-ord Jessica Abrams prod. acc. Deann Balser prod. sec. Barbara Homziuk, Debby Carter, Holly Bruwelheide acc asst. Media Rago key prod. asst. Thom Dowling prod. asst. John Stefancic, Bill Alberter, Jeff Barker, Andy Taylor, Arthur Sherin, Maria Polanick, Randall Newsome, Tony Mastrelembro post-production staff Montreal (Canada) prod. man. Alain Gagnon prod. co-ord Joanne Duguay prod. acc. Marie-Josée Théoret et prod. asst. Denys Lortie Production Staff Tokyo co-ord Akihiko Shimada acc. Rikiji Mori pub. Tadahiko Nobe sec. Kyoko Suzuki, Taeko Saito prod. counsel Janet C. Jacobson, Thomas E. Rothman film by Fuji Film, Hoei Sangyo cam. lenses Panavision loc. equip. Filmtrucks, Performance lighting lab Bellevue-Pathé Québec Inc., Michel Déglise, Serge Nadeau sd. lab. Sonolab Inc. titles Les productions ciné-titres opticals Film Docteur du Québec Inc. Special Thanks to Takaka Shigemori, The Easterday Family, Pennsylvania Governor Dick Thornburgh, Film Commission of Pennsylvania, Joyce Tomana, The City of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh Mayor Richard Caliguri, People of West Aliquippa, Pennsylvania, Aliquippa Mayor Dan Britza, Greater Pittsburgh International Airport, Central Medical Pavilion of Pittsburgh, Union Electric Steel Corporation, Bob Mack, Ace Auto Glass (Harry), WPXI-TV (Pittsburgh), Ritz's, Jérôme Langlois. Song "Disposable Love", music Rudy Toussaint lyric Stéphane Fortier sung by B. B. Boom I. p. Kenny Easterday, Caitlin Clarke, Liane Curtis, Zach Grenier, Jesse Easterday, Jr., Tom Reddy, Alain St-Alix, Daniel Lambert, Lamy Derval, Eduardo Rossoff, John Carpenter, Gerry Klug, Bingo O'Mally, Bill Dalzell, Fretchen Greaser, Barbara Russell, Donale Stone, Karen Eisenhower, Laurence Woshner, Angelica Bellomo, Sharon Ceccatti, Frederika Gray, B. J. Rankin, Phyllis Stern, Sal Palazzo, Martin Carrigan, John King, Clayton D. Hill, Jim McCrum.

Robert Frank and  
Rudy Wurlitzer's

**Candy Mountain**

When Henry Fonda hit the road in **The Grapes of Wrath**, it was because the banks had turfed him off his land and the long road to California was the only option open to him. When son Peter, along with his buddy Dennis Hopper, trekked across the country some 25 years later in **Easy Rider**, the open road represented the means through which one could opt out of society. In Robert Frank and Rudy Wurlitzer's **Candy Mountain**, Julius (Kevin J. O'Connor) heads north to Nova Scotia in search of fame and fortune. **Candy Mountain** is in some ways just another road movie, but it is also a movie of our times; a movie of the '80s.

Given the histories of the two directors involved, one might have expected