

Saluting the "Salute"

BY PETER WINTONICK



Site of the Salute: the NFB's Montreal HQ.

It all started rather fitfully, furtively, ominously. A press conference atop Montreal's Dinosauric Olympic Complex promised visions of grandeur for those still interested in that other pre-cambrian model of expression—the documentary. But, of course, the sound system at the press conference was so bad that we weren't able to hear how one of the most important cultural events of the decade was about to unravel in a collection of rented circus tents on the back lot of the National Film Board's industrial-pharmaceutical headquarters.

Over two years in the planning, *Le documentaire se fête/A Salute to the Documentary* brought an international cinema circus to Montreal to honour the 50-year-old NFB's mid-life crisis. For 10 dazed days the tent village, the NFB's enormous shooting stage and a half dozen cinemas throughout the city were filled beyond expectation by an unusually appreciative public and 1200 delegates from 46 countries, who were subjected to 300 non-fiction films and tapes and hours of meetings, symposia and parties.

Peter Wintonick is a filmmaker living in Montreal.

The Salute started off with a few minor miscues. The giant program book had to be withdrawn temporarily from distribution while trusty and overwrought workers glued in thousands of little stickers. The word "Brian" (as in Mulroney) was pasted over the offending "Bryan" at the bottom of his Right Honourable's opening letter of welcome and support. There was speculation that this "Celtic misspelling" was either the work of a disgruntled Tory backbencher or Flora's revenge. Another theory claimed it to be the work of a mole tunnelling into the lab to look for an excuse to privatize the illustrious Film Board at a time when trains, planes, health, water, and air are meeting their respective private industry makers-fakers-care-takers. And then there were the flags. Early one morning, a team of flag-raisers was seen outside the NFB raising and lowering flags, guidebooks in hand, trying to figure out if Quebec came before Burkina Faso in protocol, or if Cuba's flag could fly beside the Stars and Stripes. George Bush could have figured it out. Maybe.

RIDING THE REELS

Be that as it may, the film festival section of the Salute was most enlightening. The selection was

made democratically – by sampling the world's most influential filmmakers for their top 10 lists. In air-conditioned cinemas, one could snooze though some of the most important films in world history, as well as those newer productions heralding a bright cinematic future. Because in real life I am afraid of heights, I was grateful for the reel life of Rene Clair's 1928 impressionistic trip to the top of the Eiffel Tower, *La Tour*. I also gazed over some glazed-over recent revisionist Soviet history in the guise of *The Power Of Solovki* and *Risk 11*. I flew over Tahiti in Dennis O'Rourke's *Half Life*, and watched over a lovely, timely piece which taught Chilean children about cinema, *100 Children Waiting For A Train*. I relived Gordon Sheppard's seminal film about playboy Hugh Hefner, *The Most*. I also got to remember a time when Television was brave, impressed again by CBS's 1960 film *Harvest Of Shame*. I saw everything: from the Lumière's first film about a factory to Godard's first industrial; from Varda to Van der Keuken; from de Antonio to Wiseman; from Robert Kramer to Terri Nash. I was stirred awake by the power, honesty and humanity of the documentary tradition.

And of course I also had to see Nettie Wild's *A Rustling Of Leaves: Inside The Philippine Revolution*,

because I worked on it and because I am addicted to it. Nettie's film won the People's Choice Award at the Festival, echoing a similar award won earlier at this year's Berlin Festival. The National Bank gave Wild 5,000 Canuck bucks which promptly went to pay off lab bills. Why no Canadian broadcaster has picked up the film remained a mystery to Everyone from Everywhere. The situation also points with some irony to the central question which informed the hardcore of the Salute, a six-day symposium. This colloque was designed "to chart a course for international documentary producers who are anxiously facing dramatic challenges in the broadcast and film environments due to changes created by new technological and market forces." Not to mention the force of political upheaval, censorship, faltering economies, and all the other unrest. Plenary sessions and informal workshops grouped resource people around such topics as *The Audience; Documentary And*

Social Change; The Media and Documentary Film; Education; Women And Film; Journalism vs. Documentary; The Control Of Image In Developing Countries; The InterRelationship Of The Filmmaker And Subject and inevitably, *The Market*. A Final Plenary session included debate and discussion about the many issues raised by the Salute and surprisingly resulted in many practical guidelines and suggestions to help filmmakers find their way on the road ahead.

More than 50 position papers and essays were printed as reference materials. The newsprint itself weighed as much as a rainforest. We sifted through *A Charter of Delphes*, which was developed in Europe in 1988 to support independent expression. We de-constructed Pierre Perrault's poetry and Jean Rouche's Reality. We gained hope from a precedent-setting *Proposal for an Independent Program Service* that American independents have forced Congress and PBS to support to the tune of \$6 million. We shared coffee over pamphlets about

the Australian Film Finance corporation. And to enlighten our load, the proceedings themselves will be made available on videotape and in print. Just when you thought it was safe to come out of the cinema.

A STIRRING OF HOPE

But all this aside, The Salute to the Documentary was the single most important world event to happen around the idea of social action documentary since a similar event in 1974, which explains why nearly all the national media chose to stay away. *The Globe and Mail* et al. were joined in their absence by most Canadian broadcasters save for a breakaway CBC station in Barrie, Ontario and Radio-Québec. It's funny how Channel Four in Britain, PBS in the U.S. and European broadcasters all had representatives in Montreal while our own furtive, fictive, and fun-loving teevee types stayed away in droves. It's my guess that they consider the documentary an infectious cancer quietly eating

away at the soul and meat of objectivity.

So what did I learn? I must first cite environmental and climatic indicators: Recently the Bank of Nova Scotia and the Toronto-Dominion Bank each agreed to lend a billion (U.S.) dollars to Paramount Communications Inc. to finance its \$12.2 billion hostile takeover bid for Time Inc. of New York. (I wish they'd put a billion or so into financing my independent documentary satellite network.) Secondly: my five-year-old Canadian child watches 725 hours of American television programming a year. (I wish somebody would turn off the set.)

But the climate is changing for the better. Out of the ethos comes ethics. New ideas about saving our documented selves emerged at the Salute. I learned, for example, that an effective strategy to guarantee access to national airwaves was developed by Anand Patwardhan in India. Filmmakers applauded Patwardhan as he told a story about his captivating and internationally

Open letter to all interested organizations and individuals

Why do we want a global documentary organization? During the course of events in Montreal we identified common causes for concern and action. Documentary films and videos play a crucial role in the democratic process, since one of the central functions of documentary is to provide an open exchange of information and opinions. Documentaries catalyze debate, creating informed consent and dissent. They reflect the diverse variety and pluralism of the communities and audiences that they are meant to serve. Documentaries become even more important in those areas of the world where a large part of the population is functionally illiterate.

Independent, alternative and oppositional voices and visions are being increasingly excluded from the mainstream mass media. Information has become a commodity, often exchanged for truth in the guise of misinformation, dis-information, and the selective distortion of information. Worldwide public and private television have come more and more to reflect the private and limited truths of commercial and governing elites. As a result, info-tainment, pseudo-documentary and mega-fiction dominate public screens. Accordingly, independent expressions have been universally neglected and abandoned by funding sources. Orthodox establishment values and controlling interests keep the documentary from playing its important role.

What can we do? We have a plan of action. A strategy:

It is our hope and desire to join together in an international effort to expand the documentary form to higher and broader levels of understanding, to wider public acceptance, and to greater heights of aesthetic achievement. We commit ourselves to opening the restrictive doors of television networks and cinema theatres for the films and videos that the public has a right to see.

After our enriching experience in Montreal, we reaffirmed our belief that we are creating works of real quality and deep human concern in every part of the world.

THEREFORE IT IS PROPOSED THAT THE GOALS OF A GLOBAL DOCUMENTARY ORGANIZATION BE THE FOLLOWING:

- 1. To create a platform - a meeting place, a regular international symposium/colloque/biennale - where we can discuss and exchange all imaginable ideas concerning form, content and context and their relation to conditions of production and distribution.
- 2. To exchange factual and practical information concerning our work, materials, resources, financing, production, distribution and exhibition in all the countries of the world. Perhaps this could be done through a clearing house, electronic networking, a publication or other means.
- 3. To function as an international pressure group. A Global Documentary Organization would be a permanent body collectively representing an international coalition of documentary organizations and individuals. This Organization would also support individuals and groups

lobbying on local, regional and national levels who are fighting for the cause of documentaries.

We commit ourselves to engaging and involving the active participation of individuals and organizations representing communities and constituencies that truly reflect the diversity of our world, regardless of colour, status, sexual orientation, gender, language or belief.

FIRST MEETING: DECEMBER, 1989

Our first task is to ask you to join with us to inform documentary film and video makers about the imminent formation of this international organization. It is our intention to call together an international planning group in December 1989 to organize the founding meeting of this Global Documentary Organization. You are invited to join in the process.

In short, we believe that we can change the world. We believe that we can change little parts of the world. We believe that we can change ourselves and little parts of ourselves. We believe that the struggle to create nonfiction, informational, educational and artful forms of documentary film and video parallels the struggle for life that most of the peoples of the world encounter day by day. In many ways, our work is inspired and created by their struggle. We also believe that our personal and global survival depends on education and action. That the survival of relationships, neighborhoods, communities, indigenous cultures, and ecosystems depend on informed choices. On informed actions.

We believe that our children and our children's children should be able to walk in peace throughout the four corners of the planet to places where universal, original, and diverse new visions can be reborn. To meeting places. To thinking places. To electronic/cinematic democracies. To places where the public screen can reflect and mirror real life, creating debate, movement and freedom of expression. A place, ultimately beyond the screen.

So that we can best serve the peoples of the world with our work, let us join in a global organization that may respond to the needs that arise from the political, moral, and economic crises we are now passing through. We are relying on your contributions to this process. Inter-connect. If you want to keep united in this common effort, please write to us and say yes.

Temporary mailing address:

International Steering Committee for a Global Documentary Organization

c/o A Salute to the Documentary/Le documentaire se fête

D50 National Film Board of Canada/Office national du film du Canada Attention: Jean-Marc Garand/Andre Paquet

Post Box/C.P. 6100, Station/Succursale A

Montreal, Quebec, Canada H3C 3H5

Telephone: (514) 283-9000 Fax: c/o NFB/ONF (514) 283-5487

Telex-Montreal: c/o NFB/ONF DIALCOM 20; GOC 148

acclaimed film, *Bombay: Our City*. After the Indian Television Network, "Doordarshan," refused to air it, the director took them to court and the judge ruled in his favour, ordering a national screening and a settlement of 3,500 rupees. The network ignored the judgement. As a result, Patwardhan recently petitioned the court to bring the Controller of Programmes and the Directorate General of the Network to trial. This, perhaps, is an idea whose time should come to Canada.

What else did I learn? Hope. Documentary is alive and well and living at the annual Marseilles International Documentary market in June 1990; in National Documentary Conferences in Australia; with the Bande à Lumieres, a group of French documentarists; with RED, the European Network of Documentary Filmmakers; at Biennales in Europe; with the Canadian Independent Film Caucus, and its U.S. counterpart the Association of Independent Video and Filmmakers in New York; in European Manifestos in Favour of Documentary. (an aside: Should you call someone who makes non-fiction film a documentarist or a documenterrorist. Who knows?) So much hope.

Most of the Symposium's debate centered on what I call: "TeeVee or not TeeVee, what was the question?" An inordinate amount of time was spent preaching the virtue of television sales on the one hand, and damning them on the other. Feeding the hand that eats you. Beating the hands that bite you. You can't live with it or without it. Little time was left for a discussion of alternate ways of seeing and being - for documentary as film, pure and simple.

For me the most important sessions dealt with positive international role models that may

motivate some of our national broadcasters, ever reluctant to consider documentary as televisually viable, to get off their lazee-boy chairs. Channel Four's *True Stories* and *Eleventh Hour*, PBS's *P.O.V.* Summer Series, Canal+ in France, and various Scandinavian examples were all discussed in detail and in person.

Another important session dealt with the most important question of these changing times: Who controls the image in and of the "developing world"? The men and women of this important panel were all representatives of the inaccurately described "third world." (It was pointed out that "third and fourth worlds" co-exist within the borders of many so-called "first and second-world" countries.) With their eloquent, militant, and positive articulations, Haile Germina from Ethiopia, Anand Patwardhan and Manjira Datta from India, Eduardo Moldonado from Mexico, Gaston Kabore from Burkina Faso and Ousseynou Diop from Quebec empowered the rest of us to examine our own presumptions, motives and responsibilities - the concept of "other" for example. We were fueled into thinking about ways to "rehabilitate reality," as Kabore put it. "Even in Africa, African films are foreign films," he continued. "A disenfranchising of our own reality has occurred." Does this sound familiar?

GO FORTH AND MULTIPLY

The most important things to happen at this or any other conference are the personal contacts and new networks that develop. These enable us to continue making media knowing that support systems are all around us. For this alone, the Salute was important. But in more concrete ways, the final session of the

Symposium generated several ideas which, in the end, will go forth and multiply. The great strength of the Salute was its reliance on the democratic process. Out of this came a final statement, read on behalf of international filmmakers, voicing alarm that the NFB is threatened. The statement expressed concern that quality, point-of-view Canadian documentaries have no broadcast windows in Canada, despite their international acclaim and despite the fact that the public, in poll after poll, makes clear its desire for more non-fiction television programming. The filmmakers appealed to the minister of communications, Marcel Masse to ensure that the endangered documentary species be preserved and revitalized through support by all federal agencies for the NFB and for independent filmmaking. To ensure that the National Film Board and the Canadian documentary remain the international treasure and trust that they are. To ensure that, as the world is confronted by homogenizing forces, many more voices may be heard. The documentary process and the democratic process depend on it. Freedom of speech and thought depend on it.

And finally, rising out of the ashes of the Salute to the Documentary will be a new Global Documentary Association. An *ad hoc* steering committee will organize the information and groundwork necessary to form such an Organization, and a planning session will take place in December 1989. It is hoped that this organization will create a regular international symposium and act as an international clearinghouse for practical production information, as well as function as an international pressure and support group. You are invited to join in its creation. (See sidebar).

Capsule reviews of selected recent documentaries

SHOOT AND CRY

Helen Klodawsky took care to tell the audience at its premiere that *Shoot and Cry*, her documentary on Israel-Palestinian relations, was filmed before the Intifadah, the Palestinian uprising in the occupied territories.

Inasmuch as she means to educate an audience not familiar with the history of the Israel-Palestine conflict, Klodawsky misses her target. This is largely because the topic is a huge one and it would be impossible, in a one-hour documentary, to cover it properly. Even so, the decision to focus on two subjects distills the controversy into more of a character study than anything else.

Tal, a liberal Israeli teenager about to enter his mandatory military service, believes that there must be a political solution - that the Palestinians have the right to a homeland on the West Bank. Mohammed, or "Sammy," as he is known to his Israeli employers, is from a West Bank village and works, without legal papers, in Haifa. The problem is that Tal, bright, energetic, full of contradictions but also honest, is juxtaposed with Mohammed, inarticulate, depressed, passive, and angry.

If Klodawsky sought to underline the powerlessness of the Palestinian, she has succeeded. But in choosing a subject as inarticulate as Mohammed, by not allowing a strong Palestinian voice to be heard, she has also managed to further that victimization which she intends to expose.

- Naomi Guttman

exec. p. Barrie Howells p. Mark Zannis, Jean-Roch Marcotte d. Helene Klodawsky a.d. Miguel Merkin ed. Liette Aubin res. Tamar Weinstein cam. Pierre Letarte trans. Tamar Weinstein, Hiam Abbass, Jeremiah Blanc, Edmond Omran sd. rec. Richard Besse orig. mus. score Jean Derome, René Lussier sd. ed. Paul Demers, Jean-Pierre Viau re-rec. Hans Peter Strobl. col. 51 min. An NFB production.

NO ADDRESS

Written, directed, and narrated by native Canadian singer, song-writer, artist, and filmmaker Alanis Obomsawin, *No Address* is a trenchant examination of the lives of young natives who come to Montreal looking for a good life and end up living in the streets. The



problems of these people are dramatized through individual interviews as well as with some group scenes filmed at Montreal's Native Friendship Centre, a place to come for help on how to negotiate the Welfare bureaucracy and for some conversation.

While some of the subjects look fondly back at their lives on the reservation where life was clean and simple, others would not go back even if they could. It is clear that the cycle of illiteracy, unemployment, poverty and malnourishment is often exacerbated by alcohol and drug addiction and that there is no easy way to help people overcome these problems when so little is offered them in life – not even a place to call home.

There are some high points, however, as when the women of the Kahnawake radio station are raising funds for a Native Women's Shelter to be established in Montreal and collect \$2,000 worth of pledges in half an hour. Or when Thomas, a man who could not collect Welfare because he had no address, is employed as a janitor, even if it is for only 10 hours a week.

Obomsawin's final statement though, does put things in perspective. For so many young natives, it is not simply a question of a roof under which to camp. It's their effective disenfranchisement – in a country which was once their own – which is at the root of the problem.

– Naomi Guttman

exec. p. Colin Neale p. Marrin Canell, Alanis Obomsawin d./sc. Alanis Obomsawin ed. Marrin Canell cam. Roger Rochat loc. sd. Jacques Drouin, Yves Gendron orig. mus. Dominique Tremblay sd. ed. Wojtek Klis voice rec. Natalie Fleurant mus. rec. Studio Rue des Musiciens Inc. mus. rec. cons. Louis Hone mus. ed. Diane Le Floc'h re-rec. Hans Peter Strobl. An NFB production.

MILE ZERO: The SAGE Tour

Bonnie Sherr Klein's (*Not a Love Story*) latest film is a record of the remarkable initiative taken by four young Montrealers, who carried their message of nuclear disarmament to their peers across Canada in 1986. That one of the four, Seth Klein, is the filmmaker's son, could set up expectations of little more than a "My Son the Peace Activist" home movie.

Fortunately, such preconceptions are quickly dispelled by a well-constructed and provocative piece of filmmaking. We follow the four; Klein, Maxime Faille, Desirée McGraw, and Alison Carpenter, members (and in two cases founders) of the anti-nuke group SAGE (Students Against Global Extinction), from Newfoundland to Victoria, B. C. in a dilapidated station wagon. The tour – for which they took a year off school – was the result of wanting to spur other students to action. Articulate, poised, bilingual and attractive – and at the time of the tour ranging in age from 16 to 18 years of age – the four are impressive spokespersons for their cause.

What emerges, through scenes of their interaction with students at schools across the country, is a sense of how demoralized and impotent young people feel in the face of the impending apocalypse. The film presents a startling statistic: two out of three Canadian teenagers think a nuclear war will occur in their lifetime. But there's also a fair bit of lightheartedness; the ups and downs of life on the road; dealing with obnoxious teachers and talk-show hosts (the tour sparked intense media interest, including a report on CBC's *The Journal*). And Klein, the younger, gets off the film's best line (and, perhaps, hits the heart of teen apathy) when he remarks that, "If we took all the money spent on arms, we could probably find a cure for acne!"

But the survival of the planet is not only dependent on the elimination of nuclear weapons. Environmental degradation and the strife resulting from the increasing gap between rich and poor, are bombs with only slightly slower fuses. Happily, the film (and the SAGE members) seem to recognize this, and the important message that *Mile Zero* carries is the necessity for political action, education, and organization around whatever you feel strongly about.

– Frank Rackow

Irene Angelico co-p./d. Bonnie Sherr Klein ed. Sidonie Kerr cam. Zoe Dirse, Pierre Letarte loc. sd. Diane Carrière narr. written by Josh Freed film cons./sd. ed. Abbey Neidik p. mgr/stills photo Michèle Hozer orig. mus. Laurie Conger re-rec. Jean-Pierre Joutel. An NFB, DLI co-production. col. 16mm. 48 min.

HOLDING OUR GROUND

A recent documentary on the current situation in the Philippines, *Holding Our Ground* can be seen in some ways as a useful companion piece to Nettie Wild's *A Rustling of Leaves*. Anne Henderson's work lacks the dramatic intensity of Wild's film, which works both in *Holding Our Ground's* favour, and to its disadvantage.

On the plus side, the film does an excellent job of detailing a very specific, and touching, struggle – the efforts of a group of rural women to gain the land necessary to break their chains of deep poverty. Land reform, promised by Cory Aquino and her "Peoples Revolution," has not come, and the women are, technically, squatters on ground owned by an immensely wealthy woman, Mrs. Sosa. We follow their efforts, led by dynamic community organizer Tessie Fernandez (with whom director Henderson is obviously quite taken), to get land of their own via legal channels. Of course, they're stymied by an insensitive bureaucrat who passes the buck to another level of government.

When they approach the landowner, Mrs. Sosa, she asks 12 times the market price for the

land. In this sense, *Holding Our Ground* very eloquently portrays the social reality at the root of the armed conflict in the Philippines. Also, in showing the activities of popular groups like Pilipina (the Philippines women's organization which sponsors the squatters' efforts), *Holding Our Ground* balances the perception, created by *A Rustling of Leaves*, of a simple struggle between two armed camps.

But there are problems with the film's structure. The pace is, well, languid, and the related story – about the efforts of Fernandez and Sister Marcia Antigua to help street kids in the nearby city of Cebu – is not well integrated. A repackaging of the hour-long film into two half-hour segments – each concentrating on one aspect – would help both the focus and the pace.

– Frank Rackow

exec p. Barrie Howells assoc. p. Rose Hutchinson unit admin. Robert Spence p./d./ed. Anne Henderson a. d. H. Balisalisa-Villa cam. Kent Nason loc. sd. Diane Carrière adn. cam. Nastaran Dibai, Steve Griffiths sc. David Wilson, Anne Henderson cons. Robert Majzels asst. cam. Nastaran Dibai asst. ed. Vida Urvbonavicius res. cons. Tessie Fernandez, Sister Marcia Antigua trans. Nonita Yap boy's song Dindo Canales orig. mus. André Duchesne mus. rec. Louis Hone mus. ed. Julian Olson sd. ed. Jean-Pierre Viau, Bill Graziadei re-rec. Hans Peter Strobl. An NFB production.

TAXI SANS DETOUR

Taxi Sans Detour is a dramatized documentary, a rare and difficult form of filmmaking. Making use of true-life taxi drivers and other non-actors, it presents a plotted dramatization of real situations as experienced by black, Haitian taxi drivers in Montreal in the mid-1980s.

In a "cosmopolitan" city, these taxi drivers are forced to put up with blatant racial affronts in the daily course of their jobs. Making less money than their white counterparts because of prejudiced management and customers, they grow frustrated and angered by their lot.

One of several incidents experienced by the central driver, George-Yvon Antoine, sparks him and his fellow Haitian drivers to go to the police to lodge a complaint. They don't get very far within the judicial system, and decide to organize on their own to preserve their self-respect and their livelihood. They successfully start their own taxi company, Metro Montreal Taxi, embracing equality as their company policy.

Taxi Sans Detour offers a fascinating behind-the-scenes view of the Haitian taxi-driving community in Montreal, while clearly delineating racism in action. Technically, it is a competent work which tells a simply plotted story. Admirable in its content and intent, the film nevertheless does not find a strong enough dramatic line. Perhaps this is attributable to the fact that the film is structured around one central character, and one central incident – neither of which stand out as more interesting than other elements in the film. They simply meld into the even pace that characterizes *Taxi Sans Detour*.

Toby Zeldin

exec. p. Claude Forget del. p. Suzanne Corriveau p. Videographe Inc. co-p. Third Avenue Resource Centre d./sc./ed. Garry Beitel, Mireille Landry p. mgr/cast. Suzanne Corriveau d. o. p. Philip Herbison sd. rec. Lucien Rainone orig. mus. Richard Angers stills Frédéric Jean l. p. Georges-Yvon Antoine, Obertz Belfond, Pierre Dorsaint, Roosevelt Pierre, Willy Ciceron, Micheline Antoine.



Taxi Sans Detour

The Canadian Independent Film Caucus: Six years of success and still growing

BY WYNDHAM PAUL WISE

To be considered an independent documentary, the film, whether it is viewed as art, information, or commentary, should be the creative work of the individual filmmaker, where the maker has sole control over the production in every phase, including the expression of its content."

Letter from the original 10 signing members of the Canadian Independent Film Caucus to then Minister of Communications Francis Fox.

The Canadian Independent film Caucus (CIFC) was established in the fall of 1983 in direct reaction to the announced plans of the newly created Broadcast Fund at Telefilm which would have excluded documentary filmmakers from accessing the fund. At the urging of Rudy Buttignol, Toronto-based filmmakers Murray Battle, Paul deSilva and Jennifer Hodge, Niv Fichman, Barbara Sweete and Larry Weinstein, David Springbett and Heather McAndrew, Barry Greenwald, Robert Lang, Peter Raymont, Deepak Sahasrabudhe, and Laura Sky formed a loose association to lobby Telefilm to change the rules. The fledgling organization met with Telefilm's first boss Andre Lamy along with the more established film associations, the Canadian Film and Television Association (CFTA) and the Canadian Association of Motion Picture Producers (CAMPP), to argue the case that documentaries should be included in the fund. Despite the cool reception from Lamy, within three months Telefilm did change their policy and the CIFC scored its first and most dramatic success. Canadian independent filmmakers had finally found an effective voice.

CENTRAL CANADIAN CENTRISM

True, the voice emanated from Toronto and not the rest of Canada, but membership expanded quickly and within 18 months they were 25. John Walker, the first elected chair of the caucus (Buttignol was the first appointed chairman), says "Calling it Canadian was the typical central Canadian point of view. Really we were open to members from across the country and we soon found sympathy with other parts of the country." The membership six years later is 105 and, according to Buttignol, "from Yellowknife to Charlottetown."

The caucus has had a number of successes over those six years, if not as dramatic as the Telefilm reversal. They made submissions to the "Other Film Industry" committee in 1986 and continued to lobby the Department of Communications in support of the committee's recommendations. This eventually led the DOC

to announce in February, 1988, the creation of a Non-Theatrical Film Fund to be administered by the Department of Supply and Services and financed at \$2 million a year. The Caucus was very vocal against the Free Trade Agreement and lobbied in support of educational producers and distributors. They had meetings with Ontario's Ministry of Communications and Culture (MCC) to determine the structure of a non-theatrical fund financed by the province. Earlier this year, then MCC minister Lily Munro announced just such a fund (at \$750,000 a year for two years) to be administered by the Ministry. The CIFC has now struck a Broadcast Committee with the purpose of meeting broadcasters on an ongoing basis to discuss issues and problems facing the independent documentary filmmaker.

However, lobbying is not the only activity of the group. "The most important thing is the sharing of information," said Walker. "We are against the old boys network of silence and making deals only for ourselves and the competitiveness between producers. We have eliminated that to a large extent. We share information, that's our strength. It forces the system, the broadcaster, to deal equitably with us. It has been our most powerful lobbying tool."

A case in point has been TVOntario. Caucus member Paul Caulfield wrote in the 1988 Festival Of Festivals Issue of the CIFC newsletter, "TVO's rates are so bad, that I'm not sure they're worth approaching anymore." John Walker said that filmmakers were being offered a variety of fees ranging anywhere from \$6,000 to \$40,000 per hour. A year later Don Duprey, the new head of English-language programming at TVO has agreed to sit down with Caucus members on a regular basis to discuss problem areas. "At some point, they thought we were not leveling with them," said Duprey. "They felt that we were discriminating. We tried to be as clear as possible about setting levels of participation and help them to identify our priority areas."

A THORN IN THE CBC'S SIDE

Accessing CBC has been another headache for

Où sont les documentaires d'antan?

BY DONNA LYPCHUK

Last year Geoff Pevere wrote in the introduction to the Perspective Canada section of the Festival of Festivals catalogue, "This year documentary has moved front and centre as the dominant presence in the program." He pointed out that they were made in difficult circumstances of diminished avenues of funding and exhibition for this kind of filmmaking. He noted that "clearly, the abundance and quality of these films must therefore be interpreted as a kind of statement of resistance: these films were made because their makers couldn't not make them. A year later, documentaries seemed to have faded again from the scene. But what happened to those hits of yesteryear: *Comic Book Confidential* and *The World Is Watching*? *Growing Up in America* and *Witnesses*? Other acclaimed feature documentaries screened at last year's Festival of Festivals included *Calling The Shots*, *I Will Make No More Boring Art*, and *Strangers In A Strange Land*. Have they survived in festival afterlife? Donna Lypchuk undertook a brief survey to find out the fate of the films and the filmmakers. Some were reluctant to talk; others difficult to get hold of. But the stories that remain have a familiar ring and probably speak to the experience of the diverse group of filmmakers represented at last year's Festival.

Most filmmakers will tell you that making a documentary in Canada is by and large a thankless proposition financially, but a rewarding and addictive activity in other respects.

There are many reasons why it is difficult for documentary filmmakers to recoup their investment in a film. Documentaries are generally not feature-length, and therefore do not find the all-important theatrical slot which can generate publicity for healthy video and TV sales. In some cases the filmmaker is unable to obtain enough local or foreign pre-sales for the film because the television industry is not interested in "one-shot deals". Often the documentary filmmaker works on deferral hoping to recoup his salary on sales of the finished film. But perhaps most galling to the filmmaker is that Canadian films tend to be more accessible abroad than they are to Canadians.

Following the fate of four of the featured documentaries in last year's Festival of Festivals, it was not surprising to find that, in general, all four films are doing well abroad in terms of sales, audience attendance, awards and critical acceptance; all four filmmakers are optimistic about the future of documentary in Canada and busy working on their next films; and all four films have yet to recoup their money.

As Genie award-winner Ron Mann says, "You can never ever expect to recoup your money, even if you sell your documentary to every country in the world unless you are selling them a series or a package." But as Mann also points out - a view echoed by Peter Raymont, Morley Markson and David Ostriker - making money is important, but making the next film is even more important.

Premiered at last year's Festival, Morley

Markson's low-budget 90-minute documentary *Growing Up In America* has been aired on First Choice pay-TV, and has been released theatrically in New York and San Francisco to favourable reviews. Distributed by André Bennett of Cinéphile, *Growing Up In America* has been doing well on the art-house circuit in the United States. It's memory trip back to the sixties with some of the surviving leading American radicals of the period, including Abbie Hoffman before his untimely death, probably created a built-in audience of nostalgia-seekers. But Markson is optimistic that the film, which is on the verge of being sold to Germany, will do well internationally. He admits, however, that he is a long way from recouping his investment in the film.

THE WORLD (EXCEPT CANADA) IS WATCHING

Since its premiere at the Festival last year, Peter Raymont's *The World Is Watching*, represented internationally by Jane Balfour of London, by the NFB in Canada, and by First Run Icarus in the States, has been versioned in seven languages, sold to almost every country in Europe, as well as Japan and Australia and won seven international awards including a Genie and a Gold Hugo.

Despite the critical success, it's only now, a year after its premiere, that the film received its first recoupment payment: \$1,500 towards Raymont's salary, half of which was deferred; \$6,000 to Telefilm and \$3,000 for the OFDC. Raymont noted that "unless you do a series for television or have an extended theatrical release, you don't have much hope of recouping." He added that it is very important when you are making a film to chop salaries rather than ever chop the film.

Donna Lypchuk is a Toronto-based freelance writer.

Wyndham Paul Wise is Cinema Canada's Toronto News Editor.

♦ Caucus cont'd

the CIBC, and even though Trina McQueen, the new head of TV News and Current Affairs, has agreed to meet with them, under the current funding structure and the push to play the ratings game, the Corporation is unable to commit to documentaries as fully as the Caucus would like. Members would like to see a regular prime-time slot be put aside for point-of-view documentaries. McQueen agrees in principle that there should be more documentaries on the CBC. "There's no doubt about that," she says, but adds quickly, "it is not possible in the next few years." John Walker acknowledges that the main problem at the CBC is the lack of air time. "Their air time is filled with sports. There should be a CBC 2 like there is a BBC 2 for documentaries and more cultural programming." The Caucus has made the creation of a second CBC station a special concern of theirs (they have made representations to the CRTC in favour of TV Canada), but realistically they must deal with what they have. CBC doesn't pay badly when a program does get on air (certainly more than TVO and the other education networks) and McQueen sees the achievement of 95 per cent Canadianization of prime time CBC-TV as the answer to the lack of air time for Canadian documentaries. But, in the meantime, the CBC has said they will not issue any broadcast letters for documentaries to access Telefilm's Broadcast Fund.

Caucus members are ambivalent about CBC bashing. The history of CBC's rocky relationship with the NFB and its official journalistic policy on "objectivity" in all its current affairs programming makes getting any point-of-view documentary on the CBC problematic. Apart from the work of Donald Brittain and Harry Raskey, the CBC has failed to show some of the best Canadian documentaries made over the past few years. The NFB's *If You Love This planet* was only shown on *The Journal* after it won the Academy Award. However, compared to the private broadcasters, the CBC is the bread and butter for Canadian documentary filmmakers. "It is one of our failings," admits Walker, "to continually lobby the CBC and not go after the private broadcasters because they have a responsibility too. The private sector's record has been so dismal in point-of-view documentaries that we sort of see this as a lost cause, but I think we should make some effort in this area in the future."

AND THE FUTURE?

A nagging question that serious documentary filmmakers must ask themselves is about the future of the form. This, of course, leads to endless hours of discussion about the nature of the form and the meaning of objectivity. Caucus members are fond of this sort of discussion and certainly there are no easy answers. Some feel the documentary is dying of neglect. Peter Raymont, one of Canada's most successful

documentary filmmakers with over 30 films to his credit, is not hopeful. He calls it a lonely existence and finds that when he teaches at places like Ryerson the kids are hell-bent on making their first feature. "I think it is very sad when you can't find anyone in their early 20s who can see a future in making documentaries." Raymont, himself, spent the past year at the Canadian Centre for Advanced Film Studies to learn the skills of feature filmmaking. "I see the future for myself in dramas," he said.

Others point to the abundance of documentaries at last year's Festival of Festivals, Buttignol's *Space Pioneers*, Ron Mann's *Comic Book Confidential*, Holly Dale and Janis Cole's *Calling The Shots*, Morley Markson's *Growing Up in America* and Raymont's *The World is Watching*, as signs of a resurgence in independent Canadian documentaries. Despite the doom and gloom about the form, it seems it will be around for some time yet. "I don't think the fate of the documentary in Canada rests with the NFB," comments Buttignol, "but with the independents." Louise Clark, Production and Development Executive Coordinator at the OFDC, seems to agree with that assessment. "Right now some of our strongest proposals are for documentary films. It is an easy way to take a chance on a young filmmaker." Walker looks to the future with cautious optimism. "There is a future for those who are persistent, but currently the trend is to drama for a lot of younger filmmakers. Documentaries are going to be seen as more of an art form. They are going to become a rare commodity." This opinion seems all the more poignant with the recent death of Canada's greatest documentarian, Donald Brittain. Raymont calls it a "symbolic event", maybe the end of an era.

The Caucus has spread out from its original documentary base and now includes those independents making features and other dramas. It is on the verge of going truly national, and right now Buttignol is working on a draft constitution. Two years ago several independents in Montreal formed an informal caucus of their own under the heading of the Montreal Independent Filmmakers Association. After some meetings, they approached the CIBC with the idea of forming a Montreal chapter. This was done and now groups in Ottawa and Vancouver are holding informal meetings with CIBC members. The problem now is how to run a national grass roots organization on a volunteer basis. It is no longer a group of Toronto filmmakers seeking change to a specific government policy, but a national organization with a leading advocacy role to play. Some members would like to see a fulltime staff person hired to do the work while others would prefer the CIBC to remain a volunteer group. The question of funding and further lobbying efforts will increasingly occupy members time in the foreseeable future.

It would seem that the very success of the

♦ Docs cont'd

Raymont's greatest frustration with regard to *The World Is Watching* is that he cannot get the documentary aired on any of the major Canadian television networks (CTV, CBC or Global), even though the film was screened to standing-room-only houses at festivals around the world (Berlin, Havana, Toronto; in Australia more than 2,000 people lined up to see the film). *The World Is Watching* has been aired on Canadian television once, on TVOntario which invested \$60,000 in the film. But it has sold to networks abroad including Britain's Channel 4. Raymont has also screened the film in community halls, church basements, and rep theatres across the country in an attempt to reach a Canadian audience.

For Raymont there is a perverse Canadian Catch-22 in a situation which deems a documentary acceptable for broadcasting everywhere but on national Canadian television. The reason for this, according to Raymont, is the clash between his film's strong point-of-view and the CBC's view of documentaries solely as journalism with the concomitant requirement to live up to the CBC's Journalistic Standards of "balance, fairness and objectivity in reporting." The decision of the CBC to reject *The World Is Watching* is particularly ironic considering that it is a film about the "distortion of international news reporting."

Raymont is optimistic that with recent staff changes at CBC, this policy - which does not allow for the documentary to be anything but a sub-form of broadcast journalism - will be revised to accommodate films such as his.

David Ostriker, the producer of *Witnesses*, did not set out to make a documentary but rather five one-hour specials shot in Cuba, Angola, Ethiopia and Afghanistan. The two-and-a-half hours shot by the crew in Afghanistan turned out to be so exceptional that the filmmakers were encouraged by Festival organizer Helga Stephenson to transfer the videotape onto film. The film was screened to an SRO crowd at the Festival. Even before then, it was pre-sold to PBS and has since been sold to the CBC. *Witnesses* also enjoyed a limited theatrical release for 10 days at the Bloor Cinema in Toronto.

Caucus has caused them to reassess their current structure and reaffirm their position in the broader spectrum of the Canadian film industry. In the discussion with Ontario's MCC about the nature of the non-theatrical fund, the Caucus was offered the chance to administer the \$1.5 million fund. They turned it down. "We didn't want to say no to other filmmakers," explained Buttignol. But the fact that they would be

Cinéophile is distributing the film and is in process of selling foreign rights although the company would not release any details.

"COMIC...": WELL CIRCULATED

Ron Mann's documentary *Comic Book Confidential* has probably had the greatest exposure of all the documentaries featured at the Festival. It opened at the Berlin Festival and won awards at the Atlantic Film Festival and the Chicago Film Festival as well as winning a Genie. It's been reviewed in the main American film magazines, as well as including *The New Yorker* and *The Village Voice*. The film has been released theatrically in Canada by Cineplex Odeon and by CineCom in the States where it has played 25 major centres. But even with its wide release, the film has been struggling to make money, though Mann says he's not discouraged.

He has set about reinventing the documentary. He describes *Comic Book Confidential* as being part of a new era in documentaries which includes Errol Morris's *Thin Blue Line*. Mann describes these films as a new genre that has reinvented its audience - not necessarily its format. He refuses to call his next film, *The Twist*, currently in production, a documentary. He refers to it simply as a document, sometimes as a collage.

Mann describes documentary filmmakers as always being financially vulnerable. He says he owes any of the financial success of the film so far to Moses Znaimer and Jay Switzer of City TV, and to Jan Rofekamp of Films Transit who sold *Comic Book Confidential* all over the world including Japan, England, Australia, London, Germany and France. To protect himself, Mann has established a company, Sphinx Productions, along with Annie Mayall, Sue Lenquon and Robert Kennedy. He envisions the company as a kind of film factory, able to produce the works of a number of filmmakers. "As filmmakers," Mann says, "we are not in an indefensible position. The survival of our art is dependent on business, but at the same time it is important to make a great film for that audience out there, and there is an audience out there."

considered is testimony to their growing stature and thoroughly professional lobbying efforts. Angela Longo, who heads up the Cultural Industries Branch for the Ministry, feels that there is definitely a place and a purpose for the Caucus. "I encouraged them. They are the best people to represent their interests. They won't get other people to do it. They're the ones who will have to do it themselves." ●