

Robyn Spry's

Keeping Track

The '60s were the youth of Canadian cinema, and youth was its best subject. Dewy-eyed Michael Sarrazin played a sensitive juvenile delinquent in George Kaczender's *You're No Good* and dewy-eyed Margot Kidder played a restless daughter of the Ottawa Valley outback in Peter Pearson's *The Best Damn Fiddler from Calabogie to Kaladar*. Meanwhile, Robin Spry, the National Film Board's resident expert in Flower Power, celebrated rebellious young adulthood as the special condition of Canadian-ness, joining a whole generation of young filmmakers with the same vision: Owen, Shebib, King, Spring, Jutra, Groulx, Lefebvre, and Poirier, as well as Kaczender and Pearson. One of the finest films of the decade, Spry's *Prologue* set a couple of teenage innocents from Montreal against the backdrop of the international youth upheaval of 1968.

The rest is not quite history, with Kidder and Sarrazin going on to become second-stringers in Hollywood and occasional expatriate stars in Hollywood North, and with Spry going on to become the never-fully-appreciated Great Anglo Hope of Quebec cinema.

Now 20 years later, Sarrazin, Kidder, and Spry are *together for the first time!!* The film is *Keeping Track*, a tired but respectable middle-aged thriller that sums up many of the hopes and disappointments of a national cinema that never grew up.

Keeping Track is based on a serviceable intrigue involving the CIA, the KGB, and the Mounties chasing each other about Montreal in hot pursuit of the 'doomsday chip', an organic microchip that is going to Destabilize the Balance of Power and Change the Face of Western Civilization. Tangled in the web are a weary loser of a television news announcer (Sarrazin) who thinks he's Jane Fonda in *The China Syndrome*, a ditsy financier/computer-expert (Kidder) who thinks she's Lois Lane in *The China Syndrome*, and a slimy international banker (Alan Scarfe) who thinks he's the sneeringest high-camp heavy of Canadian cinema (he's right).

I found myself enjoying Jamie Brown's stylishly paranoid and funny script. But it's undeniably Spry's picture, a decent but *lite* remake of his fervent *One Man* (ten years old already), complete, once more, with crusading journalist standing in for the director (although haggard Sarrazin has credibility problems as a crusading anything). Kidder for her part seems to be a remake of the heroine of Spry's *Suzanne*, complete with working-class bi-cultural roots. She plays the part with brio, I suppose, but it occurred to me as I watched her frantically hobbling along in her too-tight high-heels with the



• Margot Kidder, Michael Sarrazin, - *Keeping Track*

KGB on her tail, or gamely trying to create Doris-Day-style sparks with Sarrazin, that Spry often had problems creating adult women.

The real star of the picture in any case is another old Spry stand-by: the most cinematic urban backdrop in the country, Montreal. The chase careens vividly from the Renaissance Palace headquarters of the Bank of Montreal, alongside the cranes of the Vieux Port to the green-spined rooftops and clotheslines of St-Henri. The location work is the kind of witty, tongue-in-cheek tourism Hitchcock indulged in everywhere from San Francisco to East Berlin - the *calèches* are everywhere, both literally and figuratively. But there's also a defiant depth of sentiment and belonging that Spry has acquired after years of fiction and documentary in this town that others have stripmined and recast as generic Americanopolis.

Spry's Canadian fingernails are thus as sharp as ever. I'm not referring only to the location work, nor to his habitual sensitive evocation of the French cultural backdrop (complete with blaspheming Montreal cops). If anything, the Canadian-ness of *Keeping Track* is as lovingly overstated as the civic boos-

terism. The biggest laugh at the screening I attended came when the KGB bad guy is revealed to be a Ukrainian RCMP counteragent from Moose Jaw. But on a more profound level the film plays resonantly with the heaviness of border crossings and exchange rates and making-it-in-New-York - and of course trains - in our collective imagination. A constant mock-reverential refrain is *American* money and Kidder symbolically incinerates a whole suitcase-full of the stuff at the climax. Take that you Free Traders!

Spry's moralism is also still visible, if somewhat diluted in tune with '80s yuppie fatigue. Though *Keeping Track's* villains include our local arms manufacturers, one hardly expects to hear Spry's voice under the end credits intoning a list of the guilty corporations as in *One Man*. There's a slackness in conviction, as if the Telefilm Canada cynicism had permeated Spry's vision as well as his casting. All the same, any script full of broadsides at complicit media, corrupt Ottawa cabinet ministers and Mounties toadying up to the CIA means there's still life in the corpse of Spry's '60s idealism.

Keeping Track is conspicuously ab-

sent from the Genie nominations, despite Spry's graceful *mise-en-scène*, Diann Ilnicki's snappy editing (though she should have persuaded the boss to trim another 15 minutes), and Ron Stannett's lucid cinematography. (But of course this film's not the only victim of the Academy's stupid and irrelevant system of eligibility, nominations, and voting.) Without this plus, I'm afraid *Keeping Track* has little chance of surviving either the lackadaisical tax write-off distribution it will probably get or the absence of responsible film criticism in the English dailies across the country.

Therein lies the tragedy of the doubt-ridden adulthood of our cinema. A mature and thriving national cinema should have room for *Keeping Track*, whether as a decent genre work or as an in-between breathing-space effort by a major artist. After all, *Keeping Track* is in some ways an Anglo genre variant of Quebec's equally middle-aged *Déclin de l'empire américain*. Transferring *Déclin's* climacteric cynicism from the comic genre to the thriller, why shouldn't *Keeping Track* connect with Canadian audiences (even if, as a thriller, it should have had more of the tautness, integrity and audience savvy of another Quebec hit, *Pouvoir intime*)?

I am not the first to wonder why creditable genre work has such a hard time asserting itself among the regional, generational and women's voices that account for whatever youthful vigour now exists in English Canadian cinema. That Robin Spry's understated flair in *Keeping Track* will probably fall through the cracks with all the tax-shelter garbage of the last decade is a sign that English Canadian film fiction - and its audience - still has a lot of growing to do.

Thomas Waugh •

KEEPING TRACK exec. p. Neil Léger p./d. Robin Spry p/w/ Jamie Brown line p. Bob Presner casting d. Nadia Rona Elite prods. prod. man. Peter Bray prod. co-ord Janine Anderton asst. to prod. man. Françoise McNeil office prod. asst. Linda Nadler prod. act. Bernard Lamy bookkeeper Elisabeth Lamy 1st a.d. Lise Abastado 2nd a.d. Jacques Laberge unit man. Michel Chauvin loc. man. Ken Korral cont. Marie Théberge art d. Michel Proulx props Pierre Fournier asst. props. Louis Gascon props buyer André Chamberland props vehicles Fernand Boudrias d.o.p. Ron Stannett 1st asst. cam. Luc Lussier 2nd asst. cam. Andrew Nevard steadicam op. Christian Duguay video cam. op. Eric Sandmark 2nd unit op. Larry Lynn stills photog James Rae gaffer Michel Paul Belisle best boy Marc Hénault 2nd lighting asst. Marion Mailhot gen. op. Michel Canuel key grip Robert Lapierre Jr. grip Guy Bissonette 2nd grip Robert Baylis cost. design. Ginette Magny ward. mistress Denise Lemieux dresser Suzanne Canuel make-up Tom Booth hair André Morneau sd. engineer Don Cohen boom Eric Zimmer sd. trainee Françoise Gingras stunt co-ord Dave Rigby spfx Jacques Godbout driver capt. Jim Disensi driver David O'Donnell, Teddy Wilson, Neil Allan Bibby asst. unit. man. Michel Guay prod. asst. Richard Marsan, Marc Furtado, Hayg Fazlian honeywagon driver Gerardo Manzi craft service Patrice Houx prod. placement Isabelle Létourneau swing crew Don Riordan, Chris Gilmore ed. Diann Ilnicki asst. ed. Borek Sedivek l.p. Michael Sarrazin, Margot Kidder, Alan Scarfe, Ken Pogue, John Boylan, Donald Pilon, Vlasta Vrana, Jim Morris, Shawn Lawrence, Pierre Zimmer, Louis Negin, Terry Haig, Patricia Phillips, Renée Girard, Leo Ilial, Jon Granik, Bob Pot, Michel Pasquier, Joy Boushel, Danette McKay, Linda Smith, Marc Dnis, Phil Pretten, Brian Dooley, Roland Nincheri, James Rae, Catherine Colvey, Mark Burns, Pier Kohl, Thomas Donohue, Claudia Cardian, Danielle Lepage, Roger Clown, John Casuccio, Dave Rigby, Robert Parsons, John Walsh, Bill Haugland, Mark Walker, Rob Roy, Gary Plaxton, Raymond Belisle, Ken Ernhoffer, Jacques Des Baillets stunts Marco Bianco, Ted Hanlan, Alison Reid, T.J. Scott, John Walsh colour 35 mm running time 102.4 min.