

Congratulations Bob, Claude, Françoise & Gerald!

As any dinosaur will be happy to tell you (if you can buttonhole one), evolution is not a luxury but a question of survival. Things change or they fade away. This year the Canadian Film Awards reached another plateau in its evolution and, surprise, changed. For the first time the CFA went to Quebec and brought back the Québécois. The result was the best film awards ever.

It all began in the late forties as an audio-visual conference sponsored by the Canadian Association for Adult Education. It attempted to recognize merit in an industry that made no features (Quebec as usual excepted) and divided the awards between the National Film Board and a few hardy souls making sponsored films. The CBC easily fitted into this format and things continued unchanged for twenty years because Canadian cinema didn't change.

By the late sixties we had the great feature film boom (thanks to the CFDC) and Gerald Pratley reorganized the dowager awards to better meet this new turn of events. However, the reorganized awards continued the old bias against non-industry filmmakers (like Morley Markson and David Cronenberg) and Quebec filmmakers. This latter bias was not deliberate but existed inevitably since the awards was a Toronto industry event and the Toronto industry simply doesn't know who or what is going on in Quebec (a microcosm of Canada to be sure). The Quebec filmmakers were quite happy to return the indifference, bilingual application forms or not.

Now we come to money. Since the awards has been effectively unicultural (despite the NFB sending ONF films automatically, like *Mon Oncle Antoine*) the federal sources of money have been drying up. Another evolutionary plateau was reached and Quebec participation was a matter of survival for the awards. To make the point clear, the CFDC dangled \$5,000 before the organizers if they could get true Quebec involvement. After all, Quebec features have been more numerous, more profitable, and if you believe the last awards, better than their

anglophone counterparts.

Full credit goes to Bob Crone and Gerald Pratley for convincing Claude Godbout (pres. of the Quebec Producers Association) and Françoise Jaubert (ex-head of the Cinémathèque Québécoise) to participate. Godbout and Jaubert worked extremely hard to get the Quebec industry interested and were a little surprised at their own success. The fact that *Mon Oncle's* eight Etrogs helped it off the distributor's shelf was also a factor. The result was impressive - 11 prizes were won by Quebec films in 17 feature film categories and 10 prizes in 23 other categories.

One overdue evolutionary plateau reached, many still to go. This year the awards managed to completely leave out the experimental category. The Québécois wanted fewer categories but the fact that best sound recording and best sound re-recording were kept while experimental dropped indicates the heavy industry bias. Another example of that bias was the fact the admission fee was raised to \$50 which only hurts the independent filmmaker who doesn't have a company or crown corporation paying it.

Finally, the preselection committee managed to keep some of the best films out of the competition and away from the international jury. The best example was Michael Ondaatje's *Sons of Captain Poetry* which was reviewed in *Take One* as "heavily visual and one has little choice about becoming involved in it. One wants to be: one is . . . both nichol and the film have a particular and beautiful kind of honesty . . . *Sons* contains a remarkable range of images . . . etc". Both Ondaatje and at least one member of the international jury felt a bit cheated at not seeing this film at the awards in competition.

Another example was Michael Asti-Rose's *Mirror, Mirror* which was reviewed in the last issue of *Cinema Canada* and helped its filmmaker win a \$1000 prize from the CFDC. Bob Conway's *Skin Deep* was better thought of by the *New York Times* than the preliminary jury and Tom Radford's *Country Doctor* was bet-

ter thought of by me. The preliminary jury has an admittedly difficult task working through mountains of film with rhyme and reason, but they must do a better job in the future.

Next year the Film Awards must get the non-narrative film and the non-industry filmmakers involved, re-institute the experimental category, and substantially lower the admission fee. The craft awards should be separated from the film awards - best editing or directing is one thing and best film is another.

Where will all this change carry the old Film Awards? Hopefully toward a metamorphosis where no genre of film or style of filmmaker will feel alienated. There is great value in providing a forum for the recognition of talent and merit, but the days when commercials were the only thing keeping the labs busy is gone and the awards has to move faster to keep pace with the immense diversity of film in this country.

Some of the organizers have said that next year the awards will be held in Montreal to further involve Quebec. Another aspect of the future might be an international competition of low-budget features from countries such as Belgium or Switzerland or Czechoslovakia so we can better compare ourselves with our international competition. In this vein the awards would also form a marketplace for these kind of films and perhaps eventually develop into a trade fair (like a *mini-Cannes*?)

If this happens the Awards will have to divide itself into separate sections so that Canadian features and shorts are not lost in the brouhaha. Such an event would also have to have a special meeting place (which was missed this year) and must not be allowed to grow too large.

Whether all this comes to pass or not, it looks like every year will bring a new plateau that must be met and the Film Awards will best meet these by continuing to change and involving *all* Canadian filmmakers. This year's Awards was cause for hope. Congratulations Bob & Claude & Françoise & Gerald. ●