

INTERVIEWS

**Robert Morin
Francis Damberger**

From Quebec and Alberta come two "new" filmmakers who, by remarkable coincidence, received four Genie nominations each for their first features. Quebec's Robert Morin (who has a background in video) wrote and directed *Requiem pour un beau sans-coeur*, which was nominated for Best Motion Picture of the year and won the Best Canadian Film Award at Toronto's Festival of Festivals, and Alberta's Francis Damberger (who has a background in theatre) wrote and directed *Solitaire*, which won for veteran Canadian actor Michael Hogan Best Supporting Actor. It is indicative of the failings of the distribution and exhibition system for low-budget, homegrown films in this country that neither director has seen the other's film or even knows about each other. Take 1 is pleased to introduce two of Canada's "up-and-coming" directors.



Gildor Roy in *Requiem pour un beau sans-coeur*

Robert Morin Caught Between—*Entre deux chaises* by Claire Valade



MORIN I'm from Côte-St-Paul, in downtown Montreal. I have always been interested in cinema, like every other kid, but not necessarily in turning it into a "career." Actually, I started out quite late, as a gopher. Cinema classes were boring, so I left them for the real thing. I worked on films, but mostly in television. I did have in mind to do my own films, but it was still very vague for me. I came into film through the back door, doing all kinds of things.

TAKE ONE When did you get started in cinema? Was it forming the Coop Vidéo?

MORIN I had done a lot of camera work in video and I was mostly interested in the creation of images. Around 1976, I met Jean-Pierre St-Louis (the camera operator on *Requiem pour un beau sans-cœur*), Lorraine Dufour (co-producer and editor) and Marcel Chouinard (who did the sound) on a shoot for Vidéographe. We were all tired of their formula, the black and white cameras, and the tedious process of getting access to the equipment. So we founded the Coop Vidéo de Montréal, basically to have our own equipment. Until 1980 I worked on their videos and then I really got into it. I wanted to find meeting points between fiction and documentary and explore the possibilities this would offer in storytelling. When we formed the Coop our main idea was to revolutionize TV. We were twentysomething and full of hope. Of course, we never sold one single video to TV and instead ended up in museums and archives. In the end, we were caught in between television and museums—on *était toujours pris entre deux chaises*. We wanted to push further the *cinéma direct* experience, which was the most important form of filmmaking in Quebec in the 60s and 70s, with the likes of Pierre Perrault and Michel Brault. But going further meant looking inside people's heads, to see their dreams. From a structural point of view, we made films that stood between documentary and fiction, so even in our ideas and stories we were caught in between.

TAKE ONE In 1989, *Tristesse modèle réduit* won the Alberta-Quebec Prize and *La femme étrangère* received the Jury Prize at the 1990 Festival of Nantes. When

did the media first notice your work?

MORIN Well, Canada being a colonized country, we first got recognition when Europeans took interest in our work. But it doesn't really make a difference. We're not seen much anywhere, anyway.

TAKE ONE I always found that we, perhaps particularly in Quebec, are caught between Europe's way of thinking and America's way of working.

MORIN I agree. In this case as well, we are still caught between.

TAKE ONE You had been doing videos for so long, nearly 20 years. Why did you decide to jump into film with *Requiem pour un beau sans-cœur*?

MORIN Precisely for that reason. I came to film a bit out of tiredness of video. I figured it was time to try something else.

TAKE ONE *Requiem* is the story of the last three days in the life of escaped convicted murder Régis Savoie, as seen through the eyes of eight people who touched his life. What gave you this idea of telling the story through eight subjective points-of-views?

MORIN You can say that's inherited from my video past. When we decided to make the film, I wanted to do it with my own gang, and thus bring a way of working that would be reflective of our own style—small crew, working fast, flowing camera, tight shots. I wasn't only interested in the subjective side of the images but also in their subjective side. I wanted to hide some things from the viewer and let the imagination work a bit. The idea is to present the spectator with eight different points-of-views and let him decide whom to believe, whether Savoie was victim or manipulator.


TAKE ONE What fascinated you in this man's last days?

MORIN I wanted to examine what goes on in a criminal's mind and present him as a human being for once. Not someone totally evil, or totally good. I also wanted to look at the world that revolves around him—the professionals, lawyers, cops, journalists, his mother, girlfriend, and best friend.

TAKE ONE There is a bilingual character in *Requiem*, and now you're editing a video about a bilingual guy struggling with a split English-French personality. You make films in Quebec. Aren't you afraid of being accused of betrayal?

MORIN It is a reality, you can't ignore it. As much as I feel proud to be a Québécois, I don't feel threatened by the English or the anglophones. So I create characters like Cindy, the girl from Sault Ste. Marie, or Maki, the Finnish cop. It's just everyday reality. It would be great if cinema took that more into consideration. In fact, nationalism scares me a bit. Because the line between nationalism and fascism is very thin, it turns into a tendency to ghettoize them and ourselves. For me, there's no difference between French and English. There are assholes everywhere, in every language, every society, just as there are nice people. We have to broaden our cultural horizon.

TAKE ONE With today's move towards political correctness, what kind of reaction do you think your film provokes?

MORIN Political correctness is just a new way of avoiding the real issues and it's much too scary and disturbing. *Requiem* was above all a reaction against political correctness. My next feature film continues along that line, but the subject is pretty controversial, so I don't know what will happen yet. It's a very free adaptation of Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* that takes place among the natives, Kurtz being one. For once, I wanted to represent a native who is neither a beast nor a shaman, but simply a human being with good and bad sides, even if the character is as crazy as Savoie. 

Claire Valade is a filmmaker and freelance journalist living in Montreal.

Morin We wanted to push further the cinéma direct experience, which was the most important form of filmmaking in Quebec in the 60s and 70s. But going further meant looking inside people's heads, to see their dreams.



Paul Jarrett as the Cowboy Kid and Sam Bob as Norman Manyheads in *The Road to Saddle River*

Damberger For me, making *Saddle River* was a vision quest. I had a powerful spiritual experience with native elders at Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump, in southern Alberta.