The big story about Canadian feature filmmaking in 1997 was its almost invisibility. In the past three years Take One has been tracking our national cinema in the Greater Toronto Area. 1997 hit rock bottom when it came to adding up the percentage of screen time—a whopping 1.45 per cent! In 1995 it was 2.8 per cent; in 1996, 1.75 per cent. The 1995 total was improved by the release of such industrial Canadian features as Johnny Mnemonic, Highlander III, National Lampoon's Senior Trip and Magic in the Water. This year there was only one such film, Air Bud, the little film from British Columbia that succeeded on the surefire combination of a cute boy and his basketball-scoring dog. Air Bud's run in Toronto was the best of any film in 1997 and is a credit to director Charles Martin Smith, a transplanted American ("Toady" to a generation brought up on George Lucas's American Graffiti) who has made a very good living working in and around Vancouver.

In the category of culturally Canadian cinema, there was a very strong showing from Lynne Stopkewich's ode to necrophilia, Kissed, and Deepa Mehta's passionate Fire, a film that only became Canadian due to the intense lobbying of its director. Mislabelled as a Canadian film when it opened Perspective Canada in 1996, it did not qualify because none of its loads were Canadian, a big no-no with the certification office. However, Mehta argued, in part, that precisely because Fire had opened Perspective Canada, that it should be recognized as a bona fide Canadian film. The argument apparently worked. Malofilm issued a press release confirming Fire's change in status in October. With Air Bud successfully disguising itself as an American film and Fire becoming Canadian on the basis of its festival release, is it any wonder nobody in the real world can identify a Canadian film when it hits the cinemas.

Undoubtedly Atom Egoyan's best film to date, The Sweet Hereafter, is the cultural success of the year and it is also doing very well at the box office. However, it is not in the same league as Egoyan's previous box-office hit, Exotica. It is a lot harder to market a downbeat story about the death of a busload of children as opposed to the intensely anti-erotic nature of Exotica. Egoyan has also run into stiff competition from Thom Fitzgerald's debut feature, The Hanging Garden, which won every major festival prize from Halifax to Vancouver. It opened in Toronto in the first week of November (so it should still be in the cinemas in December) and is the one film missing from Take One's list due to the nature of our publication deadline.

Again, it is notable how poorly the films from Quebec have been doing in the largest English-Canadian market. Five were released and none managed to last beyond a week. The major disappointment had to be Robert Lepage's The Sweet Hereafter, 1997 hit rock bottom when it came to adding up the percentage of screen time—a whoop.