



2002 50m *d* Catherine Martin, *pb* Carlos Ferrand, *s* Hugo Brochu, *mus* Robert M. Lepage.

From John Spotton's *The Railrodder* to Rick Hancox's *Home for Christmas* to William D. MacGillivray's *Stations*, not to mention Pierre Berton's *The National Dream* and *The Last Spike*, the Canadian cinema has a remarkable, pardon the pun, track record in exploring the historical, cultural and mythopoeic resonances of the railroad. Montreal filmmaker Catherine Martin's latest documentary, *Océan*, is a brilliant addition to a certifiably Canadian genre: rail movies. (Incidentally, *Océan* was identified by Toronto International Film Festival's panel of critics and filmmakers as one of Canada's Top Ten films of 2002.) *Océan* takes us from Montreal to Halifax aboard VIA Rail's famed train, The Océan. Largely observational and with no narration, it's an impressionistic and elegiac journey to and through a Canada of small towns and in-between spaces where the accelerations of modernity seem far away indeed. In many ways, like its predecessors in the Canadian rail-movie tradition, *Océan* is a film about the processes by which Canada, in the 21st century, is being changed and redefined by continental North America's economic and social shifts. Out of seemingly prosaic, empirical images of the passing landscapes, the train's staff at work, and interviews with various passengers and small shop owners in the towns and villages along the way, Martin fashions a vivid evocation of those faraway forces eroding the traditional east-west national orientation in Canada. Of course, the wistful irony of *Océan* is that the imperilled orientation was once literally and figuratively inscribed on our landscape by the railroad itself.



At the Quinte Hotel

2002 8m *p* Douglas Bensadoun, Michael Kronish, *d* Douglas Bensadoun; *with* Gordon Downie, Kent McQuaid, Terry Simpson.

Based on the eponymous 1968 poem by the late Al Purdy, *At the Quinte Hotel* concerns a proletariat barfly—played by The Tragically Hip's frontman, Gordon Downie—who waxes poetic about the transcendental qualities of beer. He also intervenes in a fight started by another man. Knocking down the aggressor and sitting on top of him, our visionary poet-warrior then delivers an ode to the bar and its beer, which he describes as "full of flowers." As Downie speaks Purdy's poem, director Bensadoun sets up an echo of Downie's performance with a recorded reading of the poem by Al Purdy himself. This unusual duet of voices is cleverly embroidered throughout the film's brisk and smart editing rhythms, demonstrating the implications of the poem as read and the poem as enacted. Performing with wit and assurance, Downie seems to effortlessly embody the Purdy aesthetic: rugged and insightful, with a paradoxical combination of the charismatic and the self-deprecating. Should his singing days ever end, Downie has a promising acting career ahead of him. Reminiscent of the inventive cinematic adaptation of a Michael Ondaatje poem by Bruce McDonald in *Elimination Dance*, the very impressive *At the Quinte Hotel* was presented at this year's Sundance Film Festival.



2002 5m40s *prod* One Ton Ant Moving Images, *p/d/sc/ph/ed* Brian Stockton, *mus* The Supers.

Once and awhile, Canadians everywhere should quietly and firmly thank the political heavens that Saskatchewan is part of Canada. After all, this modest and relatively small province (at least in terms of population) has delivered to Canada such diversified, bedrock, even monumental people and ideas as Tommy Douglas, Gordie Howe, Joni Mitchell and medicare, to name but a few. Veteran independent filmmaker Brian Stockton, who began his work with the SaskPool Film Co-op back in the mid-1980s, has now given us another reason to be grateful for the land of the big sky and open prairie. His concise and engaging film, *Saskatchewan*, is an unusual sliver of regional autobiography, a beguiling and richly rendered response to a question common to large countries like Canada with geographical distances and mobile populations: where are you from? Using abstract imagery of the prairie landscape as well as more personalized images, layered with a minimalist frisson of spoken memories and musings about where he grew up, Stockton's film becomes surprisingly expansive within its five-and-a-half minute duration. Not only is it a film about the power of origins, it also suggests the complexity and subtlety of how places form us in ways that are at once clear and obscure. A metaphysical postcard from Canada's breadbasket, *Saskatchewan* offers the mental traveller plenty of nourishment.

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