

ONTARIO'S

New Wave



CALENDAR

Ontario's New Wave is a catchy phrase for a spirited generation of English-Canadian filmmakers who came to cinematic maturity during the early 1980s. Peter Mettler, Bruce McDonald, Atom Egoyan, Patricia Rozema and Ron Mann, along with Camelia Frieberg, Alexandra Raffé, Holly Dale, Janis Cole, Colin Brunton, Janis Lundman and others, came bursting onto the Canadian movie scene with fresh, original films which rejected, equally, Hollywood's conventional dramas and the earlier English-Canadian *cinéastes*, like the Dons (Shebib and Owen), who had made downbeat films about heartbreak and loss.

Although this group of talented artists do not make films with a unified aesthetic, they do have integrity, pizzazz and an overwhelming belief in the power of cinema. Graduates of U. of T.'s, Sheridan College's or Ryerson's film departments, they gravitated to LIFT (the Liaison of Independent Filmmakers of Toronto), a funky film co-op located in a downtown warehouse, which was the spiritual successor to the defunct Toronto Filmmakers Co-op.

Leading the way into features were Mettler, with *Scissère* in 1982, and Mann with two exceptional films on marginal art forms—*Imagine the Sound*, on jazz, and

Poetry in Motion. Egoyan followed in 1984 with a fictional comic feature about identity, *Next of Kin*. Many of the young *cinéastes* (all under 30) worked on each other's films. Mettler shot *Next of Kin*, Rozema's *Passion* and McDonald's *Knock! Knock!* while McDonald edited *Scissère*, Egoyan's *Family Viewing* and Mann's *Comic Book Confidential*. McDonald also guest-edited the 1988 "Outlaw Edition" of *Cinema Canada*, which publicized the existence of this new breed of filmmakers. Despite the lack of a defining manifesto, the largely Toronto-based filmmakers existed through a close-knit sense of cooperation, the kind rarely seen in Canada since the growth of Quebec cinema in the early 1960s.

Two major events came into play in the 1980s which gave credence and cash to these young Ontario filmmakers. In 1984,

Toronto's film festival held the largest retrospective of Canadian films ever held in this country. Its success led to Perspective Canada, an on-going festival series, which has grown into the most prestigious venue for launching English-Canadian features. In 1986, the doors to the Ontario Film Development Corporation opened, providing a much needed alternative to the narrow, experimental restrictions of the Ontario Arts Council and the bureaucratic red tape of Telefilm Canada, headquartered in Montreal. From the start, the OFDC was unofficially mandated to create an Ontario film culture, and under the guidance of its first CEO, Wayne Clarkson (who, as the former head of the Toronto festival, had been responsible for launching Perspective Canada), it proceeded to do so.

HIGHWAY 61



The breakthrough came in 1987 when Rozema's first low-budget feature, *I've Heard the Mermaids Singing*, won the Prix de la jeunesse at Cannes. The film, and Rozema herself, received a tremendous amount of international press attention, and *Mermaids* did an almost unheard of thing for an English-Canadian feature, it made money at the box office. Key New Wave films by Egoyan (*Speaking Parts*, *Family Viewing*, *The Adjuster*, *Exotica*, which won the International Critics' Prize at Cannes in 1994), by Bruce McDonald (*Roadkill*, *Highway 61*) and by Peter Mettler (*Top of His Head*, *Tectonic Plates*) followed in the wake of Rozema's stunning success.

What is remarkable about this group of filmmakers is that they, unlike previous generations, have avoided the easy lure of big money and bigger films in Hollywood. Rather, like their cinematic mentor, David Cronenberg, they have chosen to stay in Canada and do what no other generation of English-Canadian feature filmmakers has done, actually make a living in Canada while practising their chosen profession.

■ Marc Glassman
and Wyndham Wise



1980. In the 1990s, he scored major box office hits with another *SNL* graduate, Michael Myers, in *Wayne's World* and its sequel. Michaels' latest release is *Brain Candy*, starring The Kids in the Hall, another one of his discoveries.

Rick Moranis

Actor. Born, Toronto, 1954. Moranis started in show business as a radio deejay and stand-up comic, jobs which led him to Toronto's famed Second City comedy troupe. In *SCTV*, he teamed with Dave Thomas to create the endearing toque-wearing, beer-swilling McKenzie Brothers in "The Great White North"; their antics spawned the box office hit, *Strange Brew*. Moranis successfully transposed his comic nerd character from *SCTV* to the big time in 1984 in Ivan Reitman's smash hit, *Ghostbusters*. Since then he has starred in Disney's *Honey, I Shrank the Kids*, opposite Steve Martin in *Parenthood* and *L.A. Story*, and as Barnie Rubble in *The Flintstones*.

Michael Myers

Actor. Born, Toronto, 1964. A graduate of Toronto's comedy club circuit and *Second City Revue*, Myers was hired by fellow Canadian, producer Lorne Michaels, to write skits for the long-running *Saturday Night Live*. Myers soon became a regular on-camera player. He extended his popular skit about two suburban dudes with their own local cable show into the hugely successful *Wayne's World* in 1992. Myers' character, Wayne Campbell, is about growing up young and white in Scarborough's suburban mall culture, with Queen cranked up on the radio while driving down the DVP to the Gasworks on a Friday night.

Kate Nelligan

Actor. Born, London, Ontario, 1951. This charismatic performer began her varied and justly celebrated international career on the London stage in the 1970s with the National Theatre of Great Britain and the Royal Shakespeare Company. She won the London Critics' Best Actress Award in 1979.

Since then, she has appeared on Broadway, in Hollywood in films by directors as divergent as Garry Marshall, Barbara Streisand, Woody Allen and most memorably in the title role of *Eleni* in 1985. A performer of passion and intelligence, Nelligan captured this year's Best Supporting Actress at the Genies for her role in Mort Ransen's *Margaret's Museum*.

Leslie Nielsen

Actor. Born: Regina, 1926. The son of a Royal Canadian Mountie and the brother of a Deputy Prime Minister, Nielsen grew up in the North West Territories where, according to him, "there was lots of Viking discipline." After studying voice and acting with Lorne Greene, Nielsen launched a film career in the mid-1950s. He played stolid leading men for over two decades, including the captains in *Forbidden Planet* and *The Poseidon Adventure*. A self-confessed "closet comedian," he reinvigorated his image by sending up those former roles in *Airplane!* and the *Naked Gun* films. His Detective Drebin has become a pop icon of the 1990s.

Alanis Obomsawin

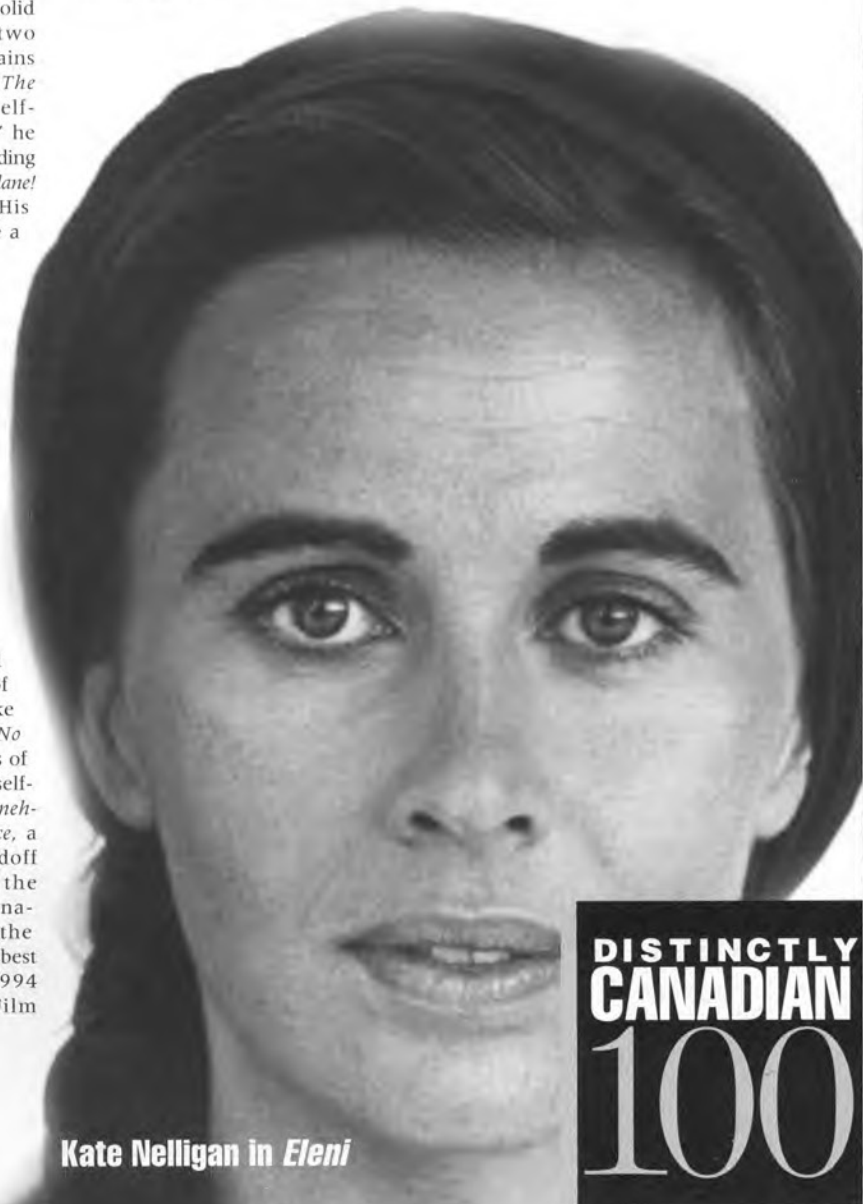
Director. Born, New Hampshire, U.S.A., 1932. After growing up in an Abenaki reservation near Montreal, Obomsawin built a career as a singer-storyteller, performing her own haunting tales and chants, as well as traditional native material. In the 1970s, she began making documentaries celebrating native life and exposing the repercussions of white injustice. NFB films like *Incident at Restigouche* and *No Address* deal with the realities of being victimized, poor and self-destructive. Obomsawin's *Kanehsatake: 270 Years of Resistance*, a retelling of the 1990 standoff between Mohawks and the Canadian army, won international acclaim, including the Toronto City Award for the best Canadian film at the 1994 Toronto International Film Festival.

Catherine O'Hara

Actor. Born, Toronto, 1954. From the North York suburbs of Burnhamthorpe Collegiate, O'Hara landed a job as the hat check girl for Toronto's *Second City Revue* in 1974. A few days later she joined the touring company, and when Gilda Radner bolted for *Saturday Night Live* in New York, she joined the legendary troupe. Her outrageous personas were featured in all 52 episodes of *SCTV*, from 1976-81. Along with her *SCTV* alumni, John Candy, Rick Moranis and Martin Short, she landed in big-budget Hollywood films. O'Hara launched her film career in Martin Scorsese's *After Hours* in 1985, was in Tim Burton's *Beetlejuice*, and played the harried mother in Chris Columbus's mega-hit *Home Alone* and its sequel.

Léo Ernest Ouimet

Exhibitor and distributor. Born, St. Martin, Quebec, 1877. Died, 1972. A trained electrician, Ouimet began showing films in Montreal on a regular basis in 1905 with \$50 and used Lumière equipment. He began Canada's first film exchange in 1906 and opened his first "Ouimetoscope" the same year. By 1907, he had built the largest (1,200 seats) luxury theatre in North America. The next year he experimented with sound equipment in his theatre. Although the Ouimetoscope was well ahead of its time, cheaper Nickelodeons eventually put it out of business. Ouimet continued in the business as both the distributor (he had the Canadian rights to Pathé films) and producer of newsreels.



Kate Nelligan in *Eleni*

**DISTINCTLY
CANADIAN**
100

TimeLines

DISTINCTLY CANADIAN 100

1956 Events:

- The NFB moves to Montreal. The new buildings include laboratories, complete production and post-production services and the largest shooting stage outside of Hollywood.

FILMS

Skid Row (Allan King)

1957 Events:

- Sidney J. Furie shoots his first feature, *A Dangerous Age*, originally planned as a CBC-TV production, in Toronto.
- The Canada Council begins operations.
- The NFB's *City of Gold* wins first prize for documentary at Cannes.

FILMS

A Chairy Tale (Norman McLaren and Claude Jutra)
City of Gold (Colin Low and Wolf Koenig)

1958 Events:

- *A Dangerous Age* is released theatrically in England, but can't find Canadian distribution. Furie shoots his second feature, *A Cool Sound From Hell*, which receives the same fate, so he moves to England. He tells the English press: "I wanted to start a Canadian film industry, but nobody cared."
- ASN, Canada's longest running film production company, closes down.

FILMS

A Dangerous Age (Sidney Furie)
Now That April's Here (William Davidson)
Les raquetteurs (Gilles Groulx and Michel Brault)

1959 Events:

- With the release of *Les raquetteurs*, Michel Brault and Gilles Groulx

become pioneers in a movement that would become known variously as *cinéma vérité*, cinema direct or direct cinema. Either way, its portable, realistic approach to filmmaking captured the attention of French documentary filmmaker Jean Rouch, influenced the French New Wave, and held sway over the documentary movement in Canada for a generation.

- Nat Taylor opens the Toronto International Film Studios in Kleinberg, just outside Toronto, with two of the largest sound stages outside of Hollywood.

1960 Events:

- At the new headquarters of the NFB, the future cream of Quebec cinema—Gilles Groulx, Gilles Carle, Claude Fournier, Jacques Godbout, Michel Brault, Claude Jutra—embark on their careers.

1961 Events:

- Denys Arcand directs his first movie, a student feature, with Denis Héroux and Stéphane Venne.
- Nat Taylor produces *The Mask* in 3-D, the first Canadian feature to be extensively distributed in the U.S. (by Warner Bros.).
- Quebec schools are once again allowed to show NFB films.

FILMS

Golden Gloves (Gilles Groulx)
La lutte (Michel Brault, Claude Fournier, Claude Jutra and Marcel Carrière)
The Mask (Julian Roffman)
Universe (Roman Kroitor and Colin Low)
Very Nice, Very Nice (Arthur Lipsett)

1962 Events:

- Budge Crawley produces his first feature, *Amanita Pestilens*. The film has a number of minor distinctions to its credit, including the first screen appearance of Geneviève Bujold, the first Canadian feature filmed in colour and the first to be shot simultaneously in English and French. It is never released.

Don Owen

Director. Born, Toronto, 1935. While an employee of the NFB, former University of Toronto anthropology student and poet Owen was assigned to direct a half-hour documentary project about a probation officer and a juvenile delinquent in 1964. He did not follow orders, delivering instead an edgy, urgent, now legendary feature called *Nobody Waved Good-bye*. It was the first film to give Toronto an identity. Owen followed up with several shorts, the intriguing *Notes For a Film About Donna and Gail*, and a perceptive drama of late 1960s Canuck *Zeitgeist, The Ernie Game*. After leaving the NFB in 1969, Owen directed several unsatisfactory productions for television, including a sequel to *Nobody Waved Good-bye, Unfinished Business*, in 1984.

Pierre Perrault

Director. Born, Montreal, 1927. The rugged Perrault is the Gilles Vigneault of Quebec cinema—its most traditionally nationalistic filmmaker. After working in documentary radio, Perrault

became known for *Pour la suite du monde*, shot with Michel Brault in 1963, a film which presents the textures of life in rural Quebec by allowing the subjects to speak for themselves. Films such as *La bête lumineuse* in 1982 explore the way *les québécois* communicate while dealing with such topics as nationalist sensibilities and the relationship between man and nature. Perrault, also a poet, makes films that favour traditional occupations like hunting and fishing while lamenting the encroachment of the modern world on deeply rooted ways of life.

Daniel Petrie

Director. Born, Glace Bay, N.S., 1920. After studying communications at Saint Francis Xavier University in his home province of Nova Scotia, Petrie went to the United States to attend Columbia and Northwestern Universities. Working for most of his career in the U.S., Petrie achieved critical acclaim for his screen adaptation of Lorraine Hansbury's play, *A Raisin in the Sun*, which starred Sidney Poitier, in 1961. He has since directed many productions for both cinema and television. In 1984, Petrie captured a Best Film Genie for *The Bay Boy*, which starred a young Kiefer Sutherland and Liv Ullmann, in his semi-autobiographical film about growing up in Cape Breton. His two sons, Daniel Jr. and Donald, are both film directors.



Don Owen's
*Nobody Waved
Good-bye*



Mary Pickford

Actor. Born Gladys Smith, Toronto, 1893. Died, 1979. On the Toronto stage from age four, Pickford was a star on Broadway before appearing in her first film for D.W. Griffith in 1910. Known as Little Mary, "America's Sweetheart," she became the most popular and financially successful woman in silent cinema. In films such as *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm*, *Pollyanna* and *Little Lord Fauntleroy*, Pickford played the heroine with idealism and spunk, and a subtle suggestion of the nymphet. She formed United Artists with Griffith and Charlie Chaplin in 1919 and married Douglas Fairbanks in 1920. Pickford made over 200 films in 25 years and dominated American cinema until the coming of sound, when her Little Mary character went out of favour with audiences. She won the Best Actress Oscar for *Coquette* (29) and an Honorary Oscar in 1976.

Walter Pidgeon

Actor. Born, St. John, N.B., 1897. Died, 1984. Like most talented Canadians of his generation, Pidgeon went south. Although he did work in silent

films, Pidgeon only emerged as a leading man in the sound era, appearing in 85 films from 1928-1978. Durable, and frequently cast as a man of principle or a doting husband, Pidgeon reached his peak in the 1940s as the co-star in Ford's *How Green Was My Valley*, Wyler's *Mrs. Miniver* and LeRoy's *Madame Curie*. While performing opposite Greer Garson in the latter two films, the tactful actor garnered two Oscar nominations.



TimeLines

FILMS

Lonely Boy (Roman Kroitor and Wolf Koenig)

Seul ou avec d'autres (Denis Héroux, Denys Arcand and Stéphane Venne)

1963 Events:

- Don Owen directs *Nobody Waved Good-bye* for the NFB, the first film to give Toronto a cinematic identity. Meanwhile, Claude Jutra is doing the same for Montreal with *à tout prendre*.
- The first feature-length English film made at the NFB, *Drylanders*, is released.
- Pour la suite du monde* is shown on Radio-Canada and draws an audience of one-and-a-half million.
- The Province of Ontario follows the federal lead and creates the Ontario Arts Council, which has a mandate to fund films of an experimental nature.
- Canada signs its first co-production agreement, with France.

FILMS

Drylanders (Donald Haldane)

My Financial Career (Gerald Potterton and Grant Munro)

Pour la suite du monde (Pierre Perrault and Michel Brault)

1964 Events:

- The theatrical release of *Nobody Waved Good-bye* in Toronto marks the very beginning of an English-Canadian feature film culture. The film first opened in New York, and only after favourable reviews did the NFB agree to its release in Canada.
- The federal cabinet approves in principle the establishment of a loan fund to foster and promote the development of a feature film fund.
- The Yorkton, Saskatchewan, Short Film Festival begins, the first continuous film festival in North America.

FILMS

à tout prendre (Claude Jutra)

Le chat dans le sac (Gilles Goulx)

I Know An Old Lady Who Swallowed a Fly (Derek Lamb)

The Luck of Ginger Coffey (Irvin Kreshner)

Nobody Waved Good-bye (Don Owen)

1965 Events:

- O.J. Firestone releases his *Report of Film Distribution: Practices, Problems and Prospects*. He recommends making the CCA more generous for producers, the initiation of joint international film agreements, and the establishment of a film development corporation. Eventually, most of Firestone's recommendations are adopted, but never as a comprehensive package.

FILMS

Memorandum (Donald Brittain)

Pas de deux (Norman McLaren)

Le révolutionnaire (Jean Pierre LeFebvre)

La vie heureuse de Léopold Z. (Gilles Carle)

Winter Kept Us Warm (David Sector)

1966 Events:

- The first issue of the original *Take One* appears, edited by Peter Lebensold and Adam Symansky.
- David Cronenberg shoots his first short, *Transfer*.

1967 Events:

- Christopher Chapman's *A Place to Stand*, a propaganda film for Ontario, is shown on a 30 by 66 ft. screen at Expo 67. Although shot on 35mm, the film is projected in 70mm and is a precursor to the IMAX process.
- The Challenge for Change* program is launched at the NFB. Its goal to promote social change through the use of cinema.
- The Canadian Filmmakers Distribution Centre is established in Toronto, the first of the alternative distribution cooperatives to spring up across the country.
- Toronto-born and CBC-trained Norman Jewison receives an Academy award nomination for his direction of the ground-breaking U.S. racial drama, *In the Heat of the Night*, which wins five Oscars, including Best Picture.