



LES ORDRES

Quebec

Cinema

C L A S S I C A N D L I T E

At the beginning of Gilles Groulx's *Le chat dans le sac* (64), Claude, the film's restless young protagonist, gazes into the camera and tells us he's a "French Canadian," trying to "live intelligently" in a society that prevents him from achieving this elusive goal. Not only did Groulx's influential movie announce and attempt to foster revolt against the forces obstructing the lives of people like Claude, it also proposed a new identity for Quebec cinema. Groulx ignored the conventions of narrative film in favour of the spontaneity and intimacy he, Michel Brault and other moviemakers achieved in NFB documentaries like *Les raquetteurs* (58) and *Golden Gloves* (61).



POUR LA SUITE DU MONDE

These experiments in direct cinema, made by tiny crews using lightweight equipment, captured the expressive faces and body language of ordinary people in images recalling photos by Henri Cartier-Bresson or Robert Doisneau. The exuberant rebelliousness of the documentaries and fiction features that came in their wake demonstrated that québécois people with their ritual activities—even the silly ones—were engaging in a vibrant, self-defining culture that had survived

military conquest and cultural assimilation.

Eventually, direct cinema techniques blended into more formalistic, and even conventional, approaches. But for directors like Groulx, Brault, Claude Jutra, Pierre Perrault, filming intelligently continued to mean seriousness of purpose: the painful groping toward an authentic québécois identity (*à tout prendre*, *Le chat dans le sac*, *Pour la suite du monde* among numerous other pictures); exposure of social and political corruption that is not always redeemed by identity (Denys Arcand's *Réjeanne Padovani*); a fascination with marginalized outsiders (Gilles Carle's *La vraie nature de Bernadette*; André Forcier's *Bar salon*); and an investigation of complex, tormented human relationships (Francis Mankiewicz's *Les bons débarras*).

Parallel to this filmmaking—defined as classically québécois by the cultural media and academics—another tradition pursued less exalted goals. If Classic Quebec Cinema produced *succès d'estime* ranging from Brault's docudrama *Les ordres* to Charles Binamé's *Eldorado* (which

revives the direct cinema style in the 1990s), Quebec Lite has produced most of the popular hits. Over the years, audiences have flocked to erotic comedies (Denis Héroux's *Valérie* and *Deux femmes en or*), slapstick farces (Michel Poulette's *Louis 19, le roi des ondes*), soap operas (Gilles Carle's *Les Plouffe*) and thrillers (Jean-Marc Vallée's *Liste noire*).



LOUIS 19, LE ROI DES ONDES

Interestingly, Lite overlaps with Classic in the way it's often sprinkled with sociopolitical québécois themes and concerns. Both almost invariably zero in on ensembles of characters, presenting the image of a group, a collectivity. From *Les raquetteurs* to *Le déclin de l'empire américain*, *Mon oncle Antoine* to *Le vent du Wyoming*, Quebec films revolve around meals, parties, weddings, funerals, "le gang" having a good time, a miserable one, or both simultaneously. Kinetic in their body language, québécois characters talk, eat, laugh, make love, get depressed, and then reboot the program, seemingly on a different planet from the lonely insurance adjusters, repressed office workers, and tormented hallucinators of numerous English-Canadian movies.

■ Maurie Alioff



LE CHAT DANS LE SAC

TimeLines

FILMS

Labyrinth (Roman Kroitor and Colin Low)
A Place to Stand (Christopher Chapman)
Warrendale (Alan King)
Wavelength (Michael Snow)
What on Earth! (Kaj Pindal and Les Drew)

1968

Events:

- With a budget of \$10-million, the Canadian Film Development Corporation (CFDC) opens for business in February, 1968; however, no effort is made to affect the distribution and exhibition of films in Canada, ensuring that the ones financed by the CFDC will be seen by very few Canadians.
- Roman Kroitor, Graeme Ferguson and Robert Kerr form the Multiscreen Corporation to make films in the new IMAX format.
- FPCC is dissolved and replaced with Famous Players Limited, owned 51 per cent by Gull+Western (Canada) Ltd., which, in turn, is wholly owned by Gull+Western in the U.S.

FILMS

Best Damn Fiddler from Calabogie to Kaldar (Peter Pearson)
Entre la mer et l'eau douce (Michel Brault)
The Ernie Game (Don Owen)
Isabel (Paul Almond)
Rat Life and Diet in North America (Joyce Wieland)

1969

Events:

- Donald Shebib films *Goin' Down the Road* on the streets of Toronto with a minuscule budget. The film receives national distribution when released in 1970 and would become the most influential English-Canadian film of its generation.
- The release of *Valérie*, directed by Denis Héroux, launches a mini-boom of exploitation films in Quebec known as Maple Syrup Porn.
- The Ontario Board of Censors bans John Hofsess's *The Columbus of Sex*, produced by Ivan Reitman and Dan Goldberg, the first Canadian film to be banned outright.

- Gerald Pratley founds the Ontario Film Institute (OFI).
- Toronto-born, NFB-trained animator George Dunning (in England since the mid-1950s) directs *Yellow Submarine*, a feature-length animated film based on the music by The Beatles.

FILMS

Back and Forth (Michael Snow)
A Married Couple (Allan King)
La raison avant la passion (Joyce Wieland)
Stereo (David Cronenberg)
Valérie (Denis Héroux)

1970

Events:

- Denys Arcand shoots *On est au coton*, a gritty, realistic exposé of Quebec's garment industry, for the NFB, but internal politics and censorship prevent the film from being released until 1976.
- The first IMAX film, Donald Brittain's and Roman Kroitor's *Tiger Child*, is projected at the World's Fair in Osaka, Japan.
- Toronto-born director Arthur Hillier receives an Oscar nomination for *Love Story*, one of the most popular "weepies" ever made in Hollywood.

FILMS

The Act of the Heart (Paul Almond)
Crimes of the Future (David Cronenberg)
Deux femmes en or (Claude Fournier)
Goin' Down the Road (Don Shebib)
Hart of London (Jack Chambers)
Un pays sans bon sens! (Pierre Perrault)
Surfacing on the Thames (David Rimmer)

1971

Events:

- The Cinémathèque Canadienne becomes the Cinémathèque Québécoise with Robert Daudelin as director.
- Mon oncle Antoine* wins the Best Feature Film at the Canadian Film Awards and immediately establishes Jutra as Canada's most accomplished director.
- The Nelvana Animation Studios open in Toronto, founded by Michael

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Léa Pool

Director. Born, Switzerland, 1950. Montreal-based Pool has won many festival prizes for such coolly stylized pictures as *La femme de l'hôtel*, *Anne Trister* and *La demoiselle sauvage*, which explore themes of isolation, artistic crisis, identity confusion, and ambiguous sexuality from a feminist perspective. The style and texture of Pool's films are so European *auteure* that in 1994's *Mouvements de désir*, a film set on a train speeding across Canada, the characters might as well be travelling to Geneva. One of her best films, the short *Urgence*, evokes the swirling memories of a woman being rushed to the hospital in the aftermath of an accident.

Christopher Plummer

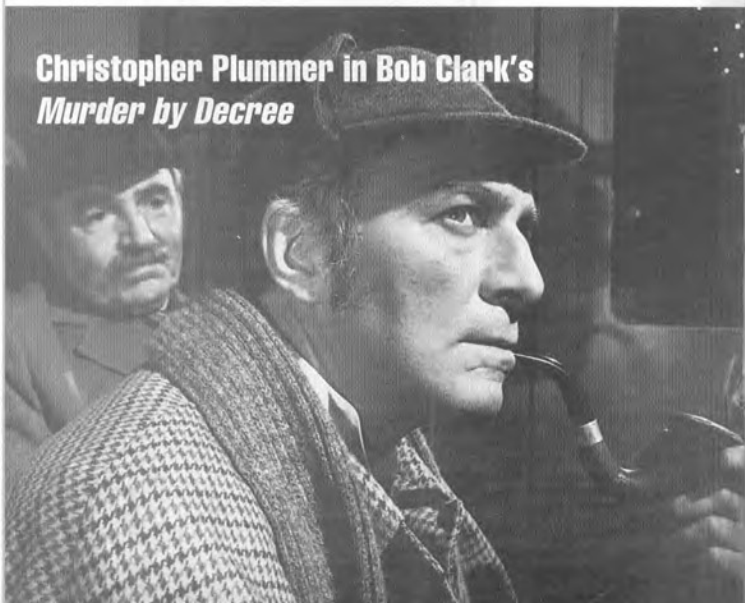
Actor. Born, Montreal, 1927. Plummer is an actor in the classical mold, the kind who has taken on innumerable larger-than-life roles. Working in theatre, film and television in the U.S., England and Canada, Plummer has played *Hamlet*, Rudyard Kipling and, of course, Baron von Trapp opposite Julie Andrews in *The Sound of Music*, one of the most popular films of all time. The most memorable of his many Canadian film roles are as the psychopathic thief who terrorizes Elliot Gould in *The Silent Partner* and as Sherlock Holmes to James Mason's Dr. Watson in Bob Clark's *Murder by Decree*. The father of actress Amanda Plummer, he recently played the mean-spirited detective in *Delores Claiborne* and Brad Pitt's dubious Big Daddy in *Twelve Monkeys*.

Keanu Reeves



Actor. Born, Beirut, Lebanon, 1964. Trained in Toronto, Reeves has moved quickly from the troubled teen in *River's Edge* and *Prince of Pennsylvania*, to the goofy, but good-hearted "dude" in *Bill & Ted's Excellent Adventure* and its sequel, to classical roles in *Dangerous Liaisons* and *Much Ado About Nothing*. His straightforward approach and good looks made him a major star in *Speed*. Reeves has become one of the highest paid actors

Christopher Plummer in Bob Clark's *Murder by Decree*



in Hollywood, and is now the subject of a credit course at UCLA's film school.

Ivan Reitman

Director and producer. Born, Czechoslovakia, 1950. Directing and producing films since his student days at McMaster University, Reitman has been associated with some of the biggest box office successes in Canadian cinema. He produced Cronenberg's first two features, *Shivers* and *Rabid*, directed and produced *Meatballs*, and produced the animated *Heavy Metal*. In the U.S. since the late 1970s, Reitman produced *Animal House*, John Belushi's first film, and went on to build an impressive career as one of the most reliable and successful director-producers in Hollywood with a string of hits such as *Stripes*, *Ghostbusters* (the most successful comedy of all time and a big part of 1980s pop culture), *Twins*, *Ghostbusters II*, *Kindergarten Cop*, *Beethoven* and *Dave*.

Mordecai Richler

Writer. Born, Montreal, 1931. Richler, who grew up in the Jewish immigrant sections of Montreal, is an acerbic satirist with one recurring theme. In various screenplays, including adaptations of his novels *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz* (a credit he shared with Lionel Chetwynd) and *Joshua Then and Now*, both directed by close friend Ted Kotcheff, Richler focuses on the sense of failure that can accompany material success. In the 1975 Oscar-nominated *Duddy*, the twitching hustler played by Richard Dreyfuss, is revealed to be missing something at his core. In an early British picture, the 1965 *Life at the Top*, also directed by Kotcheff, man-on-the-make Joe Lampton (Laurence Harvey) suffers from a double dose of dissatisfaction as he deals with the perils of upward mobility and an unhappy marriage.

Patricia Rozema

Director and writer. Born, Toronto, 1958. Raised in small Ontario towns by Dutch Calvinist parents, Rozema's first directorial feature, *I've Heard the Mermaids Singing*, is the great Cinderella

story of Canadian cinema. Made for \$350,000, *Mermaids* is a rarity: an English-Canadian art film that made a profit for its investors. Rozema won the Prix de la jeunesse at Cannes in 1987, and followed her success with *White Room*, a critique of celebrity-hood, and *When Night is Falling*, a lyrical lesbian romance. Her films are characterized by their sensual cinematic look, quirky protagonists and fairytale story structures.

Mack Sennett

Producer, director and actor. Born Mikall Sinnott, Danville, Quebec, 1880. Died, 1960. The founder of the Keystone Studios and creator of the *Keystone Kops*, Sennett was the self-styled "King of Comedy." He worked the vaudeville circuit until a chance encounter with fellow Canadian Marie Dressler in New York landed him in film. He directed comedy for D.W. Griffith and then set up his own studios in Los Angeles, in 1912. He launched the careers of such comic geniuses as Charlie Chaplin, Mabel Normand, Frank Capra, Harold Lloyd and Fatty Arbuckle. Failing to change his formalistic style of slapstick comedy, Sennett eventually lost favour with audiences. He directed and produced his last film in 1935.

William Shatner

Actor, director and producer. Born, Montreal, 1931. Although his family hoped to enlist him in their *schmatte* business, Shatner turned to acting and eventually transformed a short TV gig (the original *Star Trek* TV series ran from 1966-69) into the creation of an internationally recognized icon. James T. Kirk, captain of the *Starship Enterprise*, operates as a pop culture hero who upholds the value of the human race in the cold darkness of zero gravity. Although Kirk is not exactly an emotional volcano, he champions empathy and compassion over pure logic. Shatner's long-running (7 films in 15 years, from 1979-94) portrayal of this earnest, somewhat absurd figure often displays humour and refreshing self-parody.

Mack Sennett

Helen Shaver

Actor. Born, St. Thomas, Ontario, 1952. Shaver began her acting career at 16 when she won a scholarship to the Banff School of Fine Arts. She played character roles in several Canadian features during the 1970s (*Outrageous!*, *In Praise of Older Women*, *Who Has Seen the Wind*) before she gained attention in 1985 as a repressed teacher who makes a wary, but liberating foray into lesbianism in Donna Deitch's moving *Desert Hearts*. Internationally, Shaver is perhaps best known as Paul Newman's long-suffering wife in *The Color of Money*. She starred opposite Donald Sutherland in Phillip Borsos's ill-fated *Bethune: The Making of a Hero*.

Norma and Douglas Shearer

Norma: Actor. Born, Montreal, 1900. Died, 1983. Douglas: Sound Recording Engineer. Born, Montreal, 1899. Died, 1971. Norma landed her debut role at MGM in 1920 after a successful modelling career. A fortuitous marriage to legendary producer Irving Thalberg elevated her into one of the studio's leading ladies. Shearer led MGM through the first five years of the talkies with a string of hits including, *Private Lives*, *The Barretts of Wimpole Street* and *The Divorcee*, for which she won an Oscar.

Thalberg died unexpectedly in 1936 and left his wife as a major shareholder in MGM. She delivered a witty performance in *The Women* before retiring in 1942. Her brother, Douglas founded the MGM sound department, and was responsible for developing a revolutionary recording head at the dawn of the sound era. He was awarded 12 Academy Awards for technical achievement over the course of his career.

Helen Shaver in *Who Has Seen the Wind*

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