

# WOMEN in Canadian



WHEN NIGHT IS FALLING



MICHELINE LANCTÔT

From its preoccupation with consciousness-raising and documentary realism (driven to a large extent by the now-defunct Studio D), women's film culture in Canada has evolved into a banquet of diverse and rich offerings. Politically engaged and concerned with articulating female desire, women's filmmaking has come a long way since the often earnest efforts of the late 1960s and 1970s, when titles like *This Film is About Rape* pretty much said it all.



LA FEMME DE L'HÔTEL

Building on the best work from that era (in the films by Joyce Wieland, Mireille Dansereau, Paule Baillargeon and Anne Claire Poirier), women in Quebec and English Canada have gradually managed to push their way into an industry that until 1988 was still giving only nine percent of all funding to female directors. Canadian women have now entered the high priesthood of the avant garde (Patricia Gruben, Kay Armatage, Midi Onodera), pioneered hybrid forms (Brenda Longfellow, Cynthia Scott), added new rigour and sophistication to the documentary (Terre Nash, Gail Singer, Alanis Obomsawin, Lynne Fernie and Aerlyn Weissman, to name only a few), and carried on sustained feature filmmaking careers (Léa Pool, Patricia Rozema, Anne Wheeler, Micheline Lanctôt, Sandy Wilson, Deepa Mehta). Women have also established themselves as producers, guiding the business end of such male-authored films as *Le confessionnal*, *Exotica* and *Eclipse*, as well as Rozema's 1987 smash hit, *I've Heard the Mermaids Singing*.

If the films of Canadian women have anything in common (and they are far from homogeneous), it may be a tendency to put smart, capable women at the centre of the action. This comes as no surprise, but it's the naturalness of these portrayals—their lack of *Thelma & Louise* swagger or Bigelowesque bluster—that's unusual and maybe even indigenous. Whether it's Aussie feminist Marilyn Waring holding forth about sex, lies and global economics (*Who's Counting?*, Terre Nash, 1995), Eulalie jumping into a northern lake (*The Far Shore*, Joyce Wieland, 1976), or the nun whistling off to fix a broken bus (*The Company of Strangers*, Cynthia Scott, 1990), the women in these films are firmly positioned as subjects.

The pattern goes right back to Canada's first pro-feminist film, *Back to God's Country*. As screen writer and star of this 1919 mega-hit, Nell Shipman made sure that her character (Delores LeBeau) has plenty to do. She jumps into a river nude; she cavorts with bears and porcupines; and she saves her injured and effete husband, Peter, from the evil of the villain Rydal. She's a thoroughly modern gal, and set a high standard for what would eventually become known as feminist filmmaking in Canada.

While LeBeau's struggles took place in a world full of men, today's female directors have a tendency to put their women together in sometimes unlikely, but crucial alliances. It's partly this sense of political purpose and solidarity-in-diversity that sets films by Canadian and québécoise women apart from the fevered visions of alienation created by so many of this country's male directors. Sometimes the solidarity thing works, sometimes it seems slightly propagandistic, but it's very often there. In films as diverse as *La vie rêvée*, *Mourir à tue-tête*, *La femme de l'hôtel*, *Anne Trister*, *Loyalties* and *When Night is Falling*, women are forever getting it together, ditching or escaping dangerous or unsatisfactory men, setting off to make films, crossing boundaries of culture or race or turning to each other for erotic fulfilment. Even a film like *Sonatine* (Lanctôt), which seemingly reeks of alienation, has at its core the partnership of a pair of young women clinging to each other against a *monde indifférent*. The cruel world may kill them, but there's comfort in the fact that they are found slumped together, in each other's arms.

■ Lee Parpart

MY AMERICAN COUSIN



# TimeLines

## DISTINCTLY CANADIAN 100

Hirsh, Clive Smith and Patick Loubert. It would grow to become Canada's most successful animation company.

- The OFI revives the Stratford Film Festival, which ran briefly during the early 1960s.
- Denys Arcand shoots his first feature film, *La maudite galette*.
- Norman Jewison receives his second Academy Award nomination for *Fiddler on the Roof*.

### FILMS

*Breathing Together: The Revolution of the Electric Family* (Morley Markson)  
*Fortune and Men's Eyes* (Harvey Hart)  
*Mon oncle Antoine* (Claude Jutra)  
*North of Superior* (Graeme Ferguson)  
*La région centrale* (Michael Snow)

### 1972 Events:

- The Ontario Ministry of Industry and Tourism appoints producer John Bassett to head a task force to study the Canadian film industry. He concludes that "a basic film industry exists. It is audiences that need to be nurtured through theatrical exposure. The optimum method of accomplishing this is to establish a quota system for theatres."
- *Cinema Canada* magazine begins publication in Toronto.
- The Council of Canadian Filmmakers (CCFM), an ad hoc group representing unions, ACTRA, the Director's Guild and the Toronto Filmmakers Co-op, is formed.
- The Pacific Cinematheque is formed in Vancouver.
- John Grierson dies in England at the age of 73.

### FILMS

*L'acadie, l'acadie!?* (Pierre Perrault)  
*IXE-13* (Jacques Godbout)  
*Journey* (Paul Almond)  
*La maudite galette* (Denys Arcand)  
*The Only Thing You Know* (Clarke Mackey)  
*The Rowdyman* (Peter Carter)  
*La vie rêvée* (Mireille Dansereau)  
*La vraie nature de Bernadette* (Gilles Carle)  
*Wedding in White* (William Fruet)

### 1973 Events:

- The CFDC is broke and unable meet the challenge of creating a feature film industry. The films that do get made are not being seen in Canadian theatres or on CBC-TV.
- The Canadian Film Awards are held in Montreal, but are boycotted by L'association des réalisateurs et réalisatrices de films du Québec.
- Harold Greenberg buys Astral Films, which will become Astral Bellevue Pathé.
- Ivan Reitman's low-budget *Cannibal Girls* is released and turns a huge profit in international sales.

### FILMS

*Between Friends* (Don Shebib)  
*Cannibal Girls* (Ivan Reitman)  
*Les dernières fiançailles* (Jean Pierre Lefebvre)  
*Kamouraska* (Claude Jutra)  
*La mort d'un bûcheron* (Gilles Carle)  
*Paperback Hero* (Peter Pearson)  
*Réjeanne Padovani* (Denys Arcand)  
*Tendresse ordinaire* (Jacques Leduc)

### 1974 Events:

- Ted Kotcheff's *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz* wins first prize at the Berlin Film Festival, the first Canadian feature to win at a major European film festival. Mordecai Richler would receive an Academy award nomination for his screenplay the following year.
- The CCFM issues its "Winnipeg Manifesto," calling for quotas and "radical and creative solutions" to the problem of getting Canadian films shown in their own country.
- The federal government increases the CCA to 100 per cent and the concept of certification for a Canadian film is introduced.
- Members of L'association des réalisateurs et réalisatrices de films du Québec occupy the Quebec censor board to demand greater provincial support for Quebec cinema.
- The Ontario Film Office is established.
- Founding of the Atlantic Filmmakers Co-operative in Halifax.

### Don Shebib

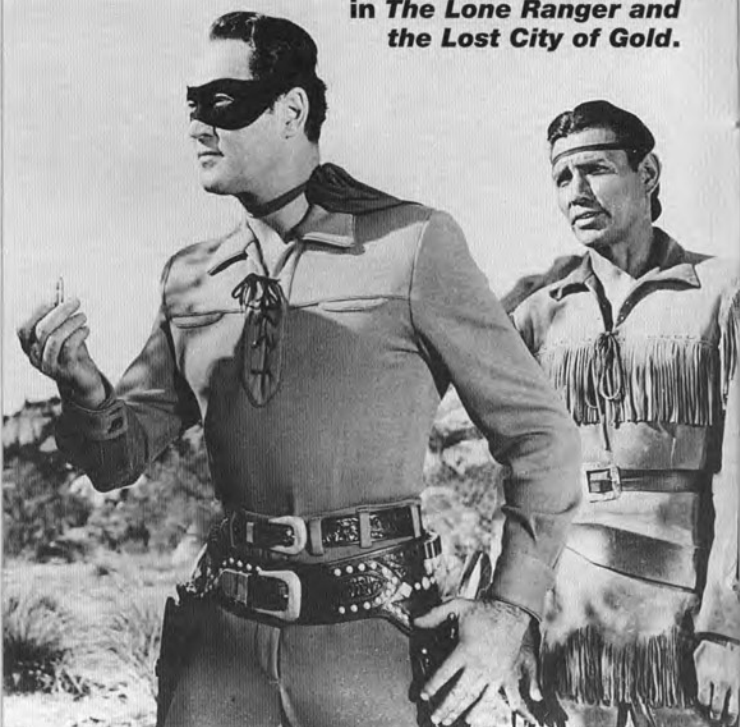
Director. Born, Toronto, 1938. A central figure in the development of English-Canadian cinema and an eloquent, compassionate chronicler of individual alienation and collective Canadian angst, Shebib made several award-winning, lucid

documentaries for the NFB and CBC-TV prior to his feature work. After a remarkable cluster of features in the early 1970s—the seminal *Goin' Down the Road, Rip Off*, and his masterpiece, *Between Friends*—Shebib became frustrated by the process of bureaucratic film funding, chronic distribution problems and subsequent box office disappointments. He returned to form with Margot Kidder and Annie Potts in *Heartaches* in 1981, but since then has worked primarily as a director for television, with only the occasional foray into feature filmmaking.

### Jay Silverheels

Actor. Born Harold J. Smith, Six Nations Reserve, Ont., 1919. Died, 1980. Silverheels (his father changed his name because of his fleetness on the track) was an all-star lacrosse player on the Canadian national team before he broke into movies playing bit parts in B westerns. When the popular *Lone Ranger* radio serial was brought to television in 1949, Silverheels was chosen to play Tonto, the Ranger's faithful sidekick, a role that would make him the most recognizable Native American in TV or film. The series ended in 1957, and Silverheels continued in films up until the early 1970s. Becoming active in Indian affairs, he founded the Indian Actors' Workshop in 1966.

### Jay Silverheels as Tonto in *The Lone Ranger* and *the Lost City of Gold*.



# TimeLines



Poster courtesy of The National Archives of Canada

## Nell and Ernest Shipman

Nell: Actor, writer and director. Born Helen Barham, Victoria, B.C., 1892. Died, 1970. Ernest: Producer. Born, Ottawa, 1871. Died, 1931. Married in 1911, the Shipmans were in Hollywood from 1912, where Ernest promoted films written by and starring Nell. In 1915, Vitagraph produced Nell's script for *God's Country and the Woman*, a film in which she took the starring role. The couple returned to Canada and Ernest produced *Back to God's Country* in 1919, again based on a script by, and starring, Nell. The film became the biggest box office success of any Canadian feature during the silent era, and Nell appeared in the first nude scene in Canadian cinema. The Shipmans separated shortly thereafter, and Nell returned to Hollywood where she established her own production company. Ernest went on to produce six more silent features in Canada.

## FILMS

*The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz* (Ted Kotcheff)  
*Bethune* (Donald Brittain)  
*Black Christmas* (Bob Clark)  
*Canadian Pacific* (David Rimmer)  
*The Hard Part Begins* (Paul Lynch)  
*Janis* (Howard Alk and Seaton Finlay)  
*Montreal Main* (Frank Vitale)  
*Les ordres* (Michel Brault)  
*Rameau's Nephew by Diderot (Thanx to Dennis Young)* by Wilma Schoen (Michael Snow)  
*Wolfpen Principle* (Jack Darcus)

## 1975 Events:

- Secretary of State Hugh Faulkner negotiates a voluntary quota agreement with Famous Players and Odeon Theatres. The chains are to guarantee a minimum of four weeks per theatre per year to Canadian films and invest a minimum of \$1.7-million in their production.
- The Newfoundland Independent Filmmakers Co-op is started, as is the Winnipeg Film Group.
- The first Grierson Film Seminar, sponsored by the Ontario Film Association, is held.
- Quebec passes the Law Concerning Cinema, creating La direction générale du cinéma et de l'audiovisuel to stimulate the film industry.
- David Cronenberg's first feature, *Shivers*, produced by Ivan Reitman, is released.
- Robert Lantos and Stephen Roth establish RSL Films in Montreal. Their first production will be Gilles Carle's *L'ange et la femme*.
- Michel Brault shares the Best Director prize at Cannes for *Les ordres*.

## FILMS

*Bar salon* (André Fiercier)  
*Gina* (Denys Arcand)  
*Lies My Father Told Me* (Jan Kadar)  
*The Man Who Skied Down Everest* (Budge Crawley)  
*Shivers* (David Cronenberg)  
*La tête de Normande St-Onge* (Gilles Carle)

## 1976 Events:

- The CCFM is granted a hearing

before the Royal Commission on Corporate Concentration, but a federal inquiry into its charges that Famous Players and Odeon work in collusion to block the exhibition of Canadian films is not called for. Famous Players responds by attacking the voluntary "quota" system and states: "Clearly the people of Canada do not appreciate the works of most current Canadian filmmakers."

■ The CMPDA inaugurates the Golden Reel Award, "for the producer of the Canadian feature film which has achieved the highest box office gross in Canadian theatres." The first winner is Jan Kadar's *Lies My Father Told Me*. The film, based on a novel by Ted Allan, wins the Golden Globe Award for Best Foreign Film, and Allan receives an Academy award nomination for his screenplay.

- Crawley's *The Man Who Skied Down Everest* wins the Oscar for Best Feature Documentary, the first Canadian feature film to win an Academy award. Mary Pickford receives an Honorary Oscar.
- The first Toronto Festival of Festivals is held.
- The International Animated Film Festival is held in Ottawa, the first time outside of Europe.

## FILMS

*The Far Shore* (Joyce Wieland)  
*On est au coton* (Denys Arcand)  
*The Street* (Caroline Leaf)  
*Volcano: An Inquiry into the Life and Death of Malcolm Lowry* (Donald Brittain)

## 1977 Events:

- The British-owned Odeon Theatres is sold to Canadian interests; however, nothing changes. The federal government gives up on voluntary quotas, which are not working.
- Garth Drabinsky produces his first feature in Toronto, Daryl Duke's *The Silent Partner*, which marks the beginning of the CCA-driven "tax shelter" boom years.
- Monique Mezure shares the Best Actress prize at Cannes for her performance in *J.A. Martin photographe*.
- The first World Film Festival is held in Montreal.
- The Saskatchewan Film Pool is formed in Regina.