

**Air Bud,
Canada's No. 1 film
in 1997, eh?**

Take One's 1997 Survey

of Canadian Films in the GTA

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 whooping 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. Mislabeled as a Canadian film when it opened Perspective Canada in 1996, it did not qualify because none of its leads 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 antierotic 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 *Le Polygraphe*, which came and went without much notice. The multidirected *Cosmos* only played for a week, but received better notices than *Le Polygraphe* and displayed some fine filmmaking talent coming from a new generation of Québécois cinéastes. André Turpin's cinematography is especially sharp (also to be found in André Forcier's *La Comtesse de Baton Rouge*, another Quebec film that probably will not show up in Toronto) and his humorous and sexy contribution to *Cosmos* is by far and away the best of the lot. Of the other films that didn't make it beyond what I call the "two-weeks-at-the-Carlton" level of success, Guy Maddin's *Twilight of the Ice Nymphs* must be viewed as a disappointment for those who were hoping for a breakthrough from this brilliant, eccentric filmmaker. **Wyndham Wise**

SURVEY

The final figures in this year's survey are as follows:

24 Canadian films played over 36 weeks on a total of 235 screens. For the purpose of this survey, 314 screens (181 Cineplex; 130 Famous; 3 independents) were tracked over 52 weeks for an aggregate total of 16,328 screens. Percentage of Canadian screentime—1.45 per cent.*

See How They Ran

In descending order of length of run, here are the Canadian feature films and documentaries that played in the Greater Toronto Area from November 1, 1996 to October 31, 1997. (The first number in parenthesis represents the total number of weeks the film played; the second the total number of screens.)

Air Bud

Charles Martin Smith, Buena Vista (12/132)

Kissed

Lynne Stopkewich, Malofilm (8/18)

Fire

Deepa Mehta, Malofilm (7/14)

Lilies

John Greyson, Cineplex Odeon (7/8)**

Crash

David Cronenberg, Alliance (7/7)**

The Sweet Hereafter

Atom Egoyan, Alliance (4/11)

Hard Core Logo

Bruce McDonald, Everest (4/6)**

Boys Club

John Fawcett, Alliance (3/6)

Swann

Anna Benson Gyles, Norstar (3/4)

Project Grizzly

Paul Lynch, National Film Board (3/3)

Joe's So Mean to Josephine

Peter Wellington, Alliance (2/3)

Heaven Before I Die

Izidore K. Musallam, CFP (2/3)

Twilight of the Ice Nymphs

Guy Maddin, Alliance (2/2)

Fish Tale Soup

Annette Mungaard, Film Tonic (2/2)

Shoemaker

Colleen Murphy, Cinema Esperança (2/2)

The Cockroach That Ate Cincinnati

Michael McNamara, Polygram (2/2)

Skin Deep

Midi Onidera, Domino Film (2/2)

Le Polygraphe

Robert Lepage, CFP (1/1)

Cosmos

Jennifer Alleen, Manon Briand, Marie-Julie Dallaire, Arto Paragamian, André Turpin and Denis Villeneuve, Malofilm (1/1)

Powder Room

Ann Kennard, National Film Board (1/1)

Starlight

Jonathon Kay, Astral (1/1)

L'Escorte

Denis Langlois, Cinéma Libre (1/1)

Night of the Flood

Bernar Hébert, Antenna (1/1)

Never Too Late Giles Walker, Allegro (1/1)

(* totals are based on listings in the *Globe and Mail*, the *Toronto Star* and *Now*; ** indicates films released prior to November 1, 1996.)