

# TAKE ONE

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Nardina Grande  
Arc Communications  
Phone: (416) 289-7123  
Fax: (416) 289-7375  
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### Mailing address:

P.O. Box 151, 2255B Queen Street East  
Toronto, ON, Canada M4E 1G3

### For Subscription and Editorial Information:

Phone: (416) 535-5244  
Fax: (416) 535-2277  
Email: takeone@interlog.com

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"We're on a mission from God." —Elwood Blues, *The Blues Brothers*

## By Wyndham Wise

**First,** *Take One* wants to heartily congratulate Atom Egoyan on his Oscar nominations for Best Director and Best Adapted Screenplay. By the time this issue hits the stands, *The Sweet Hereafter* will still only be a nomination, but by March 24, we'll know the results of the balloting. It's the first time since Ted Allan's autobiographical *Lies My Father Told Me* (1976) that a Canadian film has been nominated for its screenplay and it's the very first time a Canadian has been nominated for directing a Canadian film. Norman Jewison has been nominated three times and by a strange twist of fate ex-pat James Cameron shares a nomination this year with Egoyan. *Titanic* and *The Sweet Hereafter*, although vastly different in budget and market, they share something special apart from both directors being Canadian—death and coming to terms with grief in a very public manner. The tearful audience response to the death of the 14 children in Egoyan's film and over 1,500 passengers and crew in *Titanic* suggests a form of end-of-the-millennium grieving. The extraordinary public response to the death of Princess Diana adds credence to this phenomenon as history's bloodiest and most horrific century comes to a close.

Second, in *Take One's* survey of the films that played in the Greater Toronto Area in 1997, I predicted, rashly it now seems, that *The Sweet Hereafter* would not do as well as *Exotica* did. In fact, *The Sweet Hereafter* has done better than *Exotica*. One million in domestic box office doesn't sound too impressive, but it's not bad for an English-Canadian film and its distributor, Alliance, is predicting \$10 million in worldwide sales. And for those who constantly harp on the lack of box-office success by Canadian films, Luis Saia's *Les Boys* has done nearly \$5 million in Quebec alone. Knowing the politics of distribution in this country, its chances of finding an English-Canadian audience are slim; however, I am glad to see that I was

also wrong about *La Comtesse de Baton Rouge*. Forcier's best film in a long time will be released on one screen in Toronto in February. Now, how about *Les Boys*? It's a challenge to see the best in Canadian cinema at the best of times.

Which brings us, finally, to Sheila Copps's rushed attempt to launch a new Liberal film policy. It is wise to remember that the last major Liberal film policy was the discredited 100 per cent capital cost allowance of 1974. To be fair, it should be pointed out that the last gasp of the Trudeau Liberals was to transform its creation, the Canadian Film Development Corp., into Telefilm Canada in 1984, which launched the Broadcast Fund. Initially, Telefilm didn't even have a commitment to film, which only came two years later with the Feature Film Fund. Copps could do no worse than to pursue the policy initiative of the Conservative's Flora MacDonald, who bravely tried to license the (mostly) American distributors who have operated with virtual impunity in Canada since the 1920s. Sadly, MacDonald's policy was sacrificed on the higher altar of free trade and it is evident that quotas are a nonstarter. Leaning on the Americans, no matter how gently, only produces a heavy-handed backlash and Jack Valenti, the tough-talking Texan who is head of the Motion Picture Association of America will once again descend on Ottawa like a ton of bricks threatening, in his own subtle, charming way, a scorched-earth policy if one penny of American profits are curtailed. Copps would do better to seriously consider increasing the level of support to Telefilm, especially in the areas of development, production and marketing and take a hard look at getting higher television sales for Canadian features. The minister should apply pressure on Global, Baton and CBC-TV to commit to airing more dramatic features, both Québécois and English Canadian, as a condition of licence renewal. ■

# EDITORIAL

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