

PAUL SAROSSY'S UNIQUE FRAME OF REFERENCE

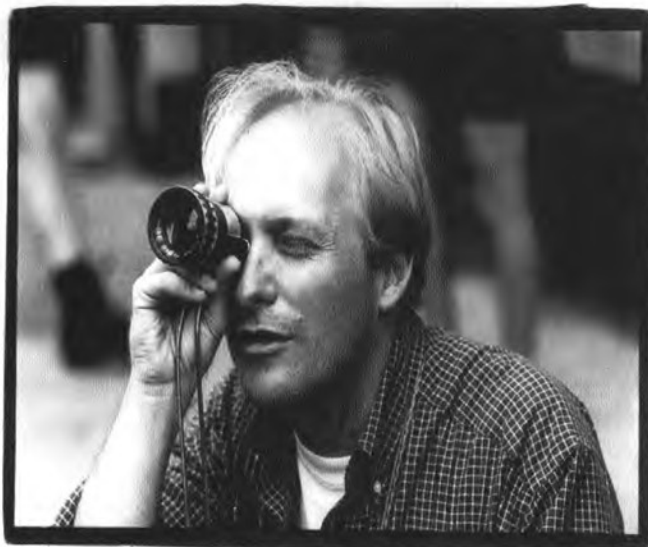
By Paul Eichhorn

Toronto-based, award-winning cinematographer Paul Sarossy began his training when he was a child growing up in Barrie, Ont. His father was a news cameraman with the local TV station, CKVR. Those were the days before videographers with camcorders. Film was actually shot each day for that evening's news broadcast. Sarossy got firsthand knowledge of shooting film from his father, who often brought cameras home. Even though his parents both worked in TV, they disliked the medium. But his father loved film and would often bring home 16mm prints from the station to watch at home.

"I grew up with a steady diet of film. It gave me a chance to learn about the entire medium." Sarossy's familiarity with cameras and film, led to work at CKVR shooting news the old-fashioned way. He recalls how this informal film school gave him the unique experience of shooting, developing, editing and viewing a piece on air in one day. His formal film school was York University. He never intended on just being a cinematographer, but his ease at using equipment meant he often became the shooter on student projects. That led to work on several music videos for Canadian groups including The Dream Warriors. "Almost by proxy I became a cinematographer." Lucky for Atom Egoyan.

Today Paul Sarossy has logged over a decade shooting feature films in Canada, the United States and abroad. His most high-profile work in this country has come through his long association with Atom Egoyan. He has been Egoyan's eye behind the lens on every project since *Speaking Parts* in 1988, Sarossy's second feature. "We have a comfortable and easy relationship. On a visual level, we both think the same way. Since we both share a similar philosophy, it leaves more time for both of us to work on other aspects of shooting a film." Sarossy's relationship with Egoyan has garnered him several awards including Genies for Best Cinematography for *The Sweet Hereafter* and *Exotica*. The two will likely see more accolades for their latest collaboration, *Felicia's Journey*. This film certainly has a higher budget—\$15 million—than their earlier pictures, but Sarossy says it hasn't changed how they work.

"Working under tight budgets has usually meant we have to be very planned and disciplined during a shoot. Yet even with a higher budget, we still took a carefully planned approach to the filming process." The higher budget did give Egoyan and Sarossy the luxury to shoot several key scenes of *Felicia's*



Journey on a well-equipped sound stage. Sarossy likes shooting this way. "I prefer shooting indoors on sets using artificial light. When you work on location, you can't create anything, it's just given to you."

Sarossy may be known for his work with Egoyan but in recent years he is spending more time shooting in the United States on such notable films as *Duets*, *Affliction* and *Picture Perfect*. He points out that his work with other Canadian directors includes films with Denys Arcand, Holly Dale, Srinivas

Krishna and Patricia Rozema. Sarossy, who usually shoots two flicks a year, still manages to work most of the time in his hometown, Toronto. He admits he has been one of the lucky ones who got into filmmaking as it was taking off in Toronto in the mid-to-late 1980s. Sarossy now has the luxury of working on several U.S. productions shot in the area. This fall he was filling in time doing second-unit footage for the big-budget U.S. action film *X-Men*. "Twenty years ago a Canadian cinematographer like myself wouldn't be given work on a U.S. project."

When asked if he would like to direct a feature, he admits he's interested. The self-described "frustrated director" does, at times, find it difficult not to be the one calling the shots. For many years, film credits have called professionals such as Sarossy either director of photography or cinematographer. He calls himself a cinematographer. "The position is a hybrid of artist and technician. It depends on how you began in the business. Since I began shooting right away, I feel more like an artist." Feeling like an artist might be connected to how he was influenced by great European cinematographers, such as Sven Nykvist. On the Canadian side, he found he was most inspired by the work of cinematographers from Quebec—Michel Brault; the Dufaux brothers, Guy and Georges; Bernard Gosselin. "When I was getting into the business, they were the masters."

Sarossy is disturbed by the growing trend of using special effects and digitalization during the postproduction process to clean up and correct footage after the shoot. "It certainly minimizes a cinematographer's role." With the future fast approaching when most "films" will be shot directly onto disk in a digital format, the days of using film in a camera may soon be gone forever. But Sarossy isn't worrying about what the future may bring. "You can't fear technology. You just have to adapt. True, new technology will change the nature of cinematography. I just have to prepare to change and look beyond." ●