

By Wyndham Wise

François Girard's *The Red Violin* was the best of last year in terms of length of run and number of screens, and this Rhombus Media success story, which only received lukewarm reviews from the Canadian critics at the time of its release, now ranks as one of the most successful films at the box office of all time (in English-Canada). Sturla Gunnarsson's *Such a Long Journey* surpassed all other 1999 releases and demonstrated, after a couple of false starts, that the former documentarian has firmly made the transition into dramatic features. Anne Wheeler's *Better Than Chocolate* performed very well at the box office, much better than anyone would have thought. It's her best film since *Bye Bye Blues* and it caught on with both gay and straight audiences. It should do well at this year's Genies. Don McKellar's *Last Night*, like *The Red Violin* a holdover from 1998, continued well into 1999, and like the Wheeler film, its box-office performance was a pleasant surprise. David Cronenberg's *eXistenZ*, however, didn't really catch on as well as Alliance Atlantis, its distributor, might have hoped for and must be considered the biggest disappointment of the year. It seems that Cronenberg, even in a playful mood, is still an acquired taste. Also Thom Fitzgerald's *Beefcake* disappointed those who thought *The Hanging Garden* was so special. It couldn't find its natural audience the way *Better Than Chocolate* did. Shaftesbury Films' remake of Mordecai Richler's children's classic, *Jacob Two Two Meets the Hooded Fang* (directed by television veteran George Bloomfield), proved moderately successful with a limited release and should do well on video. Jeremy Podeswa's *The Five Senses* captured the best Canadian feature at the Toronto International Film Festival and must be considered a huge improvement over the dreadful *Eclipse*. It should also do well at the Genies. Denis Villeneuve's *Un 32 août sur la tere*, a 1998 film finally released in Toronto, stands out as one of the best of the year, with terrific performances by both leads (Pascale Bussières and Alexis Martin) and great cinematography by André Turpin. Finally, there are three more films that stand out. Two are U.K./Canada coproductions: Richard Attenborough's stodgy retelling of the Grey Owl story with a wildly miscast Pierce Brosnan as the pioneer environmentalist, and Paul Quinn's *This is My Father*, set in Ireland with a great performance by James Caan. The last, but certainly not the least, is Léa Pool's marvellous *Emporte-moi*, featuring a wonderful performance by the teenager Karine Vanasse in a coming-of-age tale set in the early 1960s in Montreal. Poignant and insightful, *Emporte-moi* stands as the best Canadian film of the year. (Of course, this list doesn't include Egoyan's masterful *Felicia's Journey* which was released mid-November and will probably come to dominate the 2000 list as well as this year's Genies.)



The best of 1999:  
Léa Pool's *Emporte-moi*

## SEE HOW THEY RAN

In descending order of length of run, here are the Canadian features and documentaries that played in the Greater Toronto Area from Dec. 1, 1998, to Nov. 30, 1999. The first number in parenthesis represents the total number of weeks the film played; the second the total number of screens. (\* Indicates films released prior to Dec. 1, 1998; \*\* indicates a re-release.)

*The Red Violin* François Girard (24/86)\*; *Such a Long Journey* Sturla Gunnarsson, (15/38); *Better Than Chocolate* Anne Wheeler (11/21); *Last Night* Don McKellar (10/13)\*; *eXistenZ* David Cronenberg (6/94); *Beefcake* Thom Fitzgerald (6/10); *Jacob Two Two Meets the Hooded Fang* George Bloomfield (5/24); *The Five Senses* Jeremy Podeswa (5/8); *Un 32 août sur la terre* Denis Villeneuve (5/5); *Grey Owl* Richard Attenborough (4/44); *Emporte-moi* Léa Pool (4/4); *This is My Father* Paul Quinn (4/4); *Babar, King of the Elephants* Raymond Jafelice (3/31); *Felicia's Journey* Atom Egoyan (3/11); *The Falling* Raul Sanchez Inglis (3/3); *Goin' Down the Road* Don Shebib (3/3)\*\*; *Tops & Bottoms* Cristine Richey (3/3); *Something More* Rob King (2/30); *Dog Park* Bruce McCulloch (2/17); *The Divine Ryans* Stephen Reynolds (2/6); *2 secondes* Manon Briand (2/2); *4 Days* Curtis Wehrfritz (2/2); *Conquest* Piers Haggard (2/2); *C'tà ton tour, Laura Cadieux* Denise Fillatrault (2/2); *The Eternal Husband* Chris Philpot (2/2); *Extraordinary Visitor* John Doyle (2/2); *The Gypsies of Svinia* John Paskievich (2/2); *Heart of the Sun* Francis Damberger (2/2); *Jack & Jill* John Kalangis (2/2); *Men With Guns* Kari Skogland (2/2); *Nô* Robert Lepage (2/2)\*; *Regeneration* Gilles MacKinnon (2/2)\*\*; *Babel* Gérard Pullicino (1/7); *Airborne* Julien Grant (1/1); *Boozecan* Nicholas Campbell (1/1); *Boy Meets Girl* Jerry Ciccoritti (1/1); *Les Boys II* Louis Saia (1/1); *Cube* Vincent Natali (1/1)\*\*; *Desperately Seeking Helen* Eisha Marjara (1/1); *Erotica* Maya Gallus (1/1); *Fire* Deepa Mehta (1/1)\*\*; *Hostile Intent* Jonathan Heap (1/1); *Just Watch Me: Trudeau and the '70s Generation* Catherine Annau (1/1); *The Life Before This* Jerry Ciccoritti (1/1); *Ms. Bear* Paul Ziller (1/1); *A Place Called Chiapas* Nettie Wilde (1/1); *Skin Flick* Bruce LaBruce (1/1); *When Justice Fails* Allan Goldstein (1/1).

**Note: The final figures in this year's survey are as follows:** 47 Canadian films played over 50 weeks on an aggregate total of 496 screens. For the purpose of this survey, 522 screens (248 Cineplex; 187 Famous Players; 74 AMC; 13 independent) were tracked over 52 weeks for an aggregate total of 27,092 screens. Percentage of Canadian screen time—1.85 per cent. (Totals are based on listings in *The Toronto Star* and *Now*.)