

TAKE ONE

Volume 9, Issue No. 28 Summer 2000

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Original group photo taken in Toronto, at the Canadian Filmmakers Distribution Centre, on March 8, 2000 by Anne Levenston.

From left to right: Bruce McDonald, Don McKellar, John Greyson, Patricia Rozema, Ron Mann and Atom Egoyan.

"If it happens in Toronto, it's not interesting. If the same thing happens in Saskatoon, Sask., then it's a story." I was told this in no uncertain terms, without the hint of irony, by a senior Toronto CBC Radio arts producer while I was working for the Mother Corp. as a research assistant some years ago. It's the national broadcaster's policy to deliberately ignore what goes on in Toronto for fear of offending the "regions." Toronto-bashing is politically correct, don't you know, the Rest of Canada's national sport—second only to hockey—and the glue that keeps this country together. When I proposed a special issue on Toronto/Ontario cinema, even members of *Take One's* editorial board were nervous and cautioned against it. What would our Vancouver readers think? What would the Canada Council think? Would our funding be cut off? Well, at the risk of alienating our readers east of the Ottawa River and west of Kenora, *Take One* is pleased to offer an issue devoted entirely to Toronto and Ontario cinema. Remarkably, it has never been done before. And for those in the "regions" who are offended by the word "Toronto" on our cover, I apologize. It won't happen again.

However, I must admit this phenomenon of Toronto-bashing and the lack of a definable Ontario film culture is a bit of an obsession of mine. When I was doing graduate work in film policy at York University in the late 1980s, my thesis adviser was the noted Canadian film historian Peter Morris. I asked him about this notion of an Ontario film culture and how it was impossible to tell if a film was made in the province. There seemed to be no defining characteristic. He agreed. He said that at one point he had tried to put together a festival of films from the identifiable Canadian regions. It was easy to find films that represented the East Coast, Quebec, the West Coast, even the Prairies. But when he came to Ontario, he couldn't do it, so the festival never happened.

In this issue, I decided to revisit this conundrum and once and for all determine if such a thing as an Ontario film culture exists. This, of course, assumes that there is such a thing as an Ontario "region." Within the Rest of Canada, Ontario is not a region but the dreaded and duly hated "Central Canada." Any attempt to define it otherwise is considered unthinkable. No right-thinking Canadian would conceive of a separate Ontario. Separate from what? Itself? Yet there are some of us living here, especially those living in downtown Toronto—ground zero for all that national spite—who wake up some days and just wish the Rest of Canada north of St. Clair Ave. would go away. The heart and soul of indigenous English-Canadian cinema can be found south of St. Clair, and the Rest of Canada is just going to have to get over it. It's true, even if it's treasonous and defiantly politically incorrect to say so.

In this vein, I asked Cameron Bailey, noted film critic for *Now* magazine and on-air host for Showcase television, to write about the point in time—the mid- to late-1980s—when a small group of Toronto filmmakers dramatically broke away from the old, dusty thinking on Canadian filmmaking—documentaries or docudramas and downbeat rural dramas about loss and survival—and made a remarkable series of urban dramas that revolutionized how we see Canadian cinema today. To be deliberately provocative, I asked him to call this period the Toronto new wave. Marc Glassman and Barbara Goslawski write about what happened after the provincial Conservatives came to power under Mike Harris in 1995. The Common Sense Revolution didn't include filmmakers, and Harris's commitment to indigenous arts and culture was—and still is—limited to his golf attire. Cynthia Amsden covers the extraordinary amount of film and television activity in the province, which has made it the fourth-largest production centre in North America, and I have written a short history of Ontario film policy and production. I also interviewed Adam Ostry, CEO of the Ontario Film Development Corp., who talks eloquently about the need for the province to prepare for the future, which is now upon us.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge the support and encouragement I received from Ostry, Sara Morton and Sharon Wilson at the OFDC, Helen Lovekin of the Ministry of Economic Development, Trade and Tourism and the filmmakers themselves—who willingly agreed to come together for our historic cover photo—for the realization of a very personal issue of *Take One*, an attempt to define Ontario cinema—past, present and future.

W. P. Wise