

Stardust and Shadows: Canadians in Early Hollywood • Charles Foster, Dundrun Press, Toronto. 408 pages. \$29.99



Stardust and Shadows is a curious book. The author, Charles Foster, has chosen to take a very personal look at some of the Canadian-born actors and directors he meet in Hollywood during the 1940s; those, he claims in his prologue, who played an important role in the early days of the motion-picture industry. While it is undeniable that some of the 18 names he has chosen to profile – Mary Pickford, Marie Dressler, Allan Dwan, Mack Sennett, Douglas and Norma Shearer – amply qualify, it's who he omits or just mentions in passing that is puzzling.

The book does feature some long-forgotten

personalities like the Christie brothers, Al and Charles, from London, Ont., who were in Hollywood almost from the beginning, first as writers then as producer/directors of comic shorts, and for a while were rivals to Sennett and Hal Roach; and the De Grasse brothers from Bathurst, NB, the producer/director Joseph and his younger brother, Sam, who was one of the most convincing silent villains, often starring opposite Douglas Fairbanks. Then there was Florence Lawrence from Hamilton, Ont., the Biograph Girl, and the first true movie star, before the rise to fame of another Canadian, Mary Pickford. Some very minor names are also included, like Florence La Badie, from Montreal, who was introduced to D.W. Griffith by Pickford, but died tragically at 23; and Marie Prevost, from Sarnia, Ont., who was a Mack Sennett *Bathing Beauty* and starred in three silent comedies directed by Ernst Lubitsch, before starving herself to death in 1937.

But one is pressed to ask why others of greater stature are omitted. Although Foster doesn't make it clear at the start what criteria he used for inclusion, in his end notes he does say, in passing, that to qualify, the individual must have been born before the turn of the century and appeared in silent movies. Given this as his term of reference, where is Richard Day (who, as Hollywood's most influential art director, won more Oscars than anyone else, living or dead), cinematographer Osmond

Borradaile, actors Walter Huston, Fay Wray, Nell Shipman, Fifi D'Orsay, David Manners, or directors John Robertson, Harry J. Edwards and Wallace MacDonald? And one might ask why the criteria is so narrow. Many famous and more recognizable Canadians came into prominence in the early sound era – Walter Pidgeon, Raymond Massey, Deanna Durbin, Jack Carson, Hume Cronyn, John Ireland, Victor Jory, Alexander Knox and Gene Lockhart, to name only a few. Foster tiresomely includes Louis B. Mayer, the first head of MGM, a common error when compiling such a list. Mayer was born in Russia, spent a few years as a child in Saint John, NB, and then his parents moved south. If Mayer is included, then why not Jack Warner? At least he was born in London, Ont., and is no more (or less) a Canadian than Mayer.

In reclaiming our cinematic past, Foster adds to the argument that Canadians made an important contribution to Hollywood's golden era. However, *Take One* compiled its list of the 100 most famous Canadians for the 100th anniversary of cinema back in the summer of 1996 (*Take One* No. 12), which was quickly followed by Geoff Pevere's and Greig Dymond's *Mondo Canuck*, a book that properly puts these early Hollywood stars into the larger context of North American popular culture. Foster's book comes too late and is annoyingly incomplete. ●

And the Genie Goes To...: Celebrating 50 Years of the Canadian Film Awards

Maria Topalovich, Stoddart Publishing, Toronto. 249 pages. \$50.00

This worthy account of the the Canadian Film Awards/Genies is essentially an update of a book that was published in 1984 by the Academy of Canadian Cinema and Television. Originally titled *A Pictorial History of the Canadian Film Awards*, it has been long out of print and it is to the Academy's and its director's, Maria Topalovich, credit that finally a second edition is now available.

So little is written about Canadian film history that anything published is welcome, and as a reference book, *And the Genie Goes to...* is invaluable. The Canadian Film Awards (CFAs), launched in 1949, were erratic at best, and with no feature-film industry to speak of in the 1950s and '60s, a lot of the awards went to television productions and industry shorts, many of which have now disappeared from view. The CFAs were awarded by an "inter-

national jury," leading to strange anomalies. In 1970, an animated short, Bretislav Pojar's NFB-produced *Psychocratie*, won Film of the Year, while Don Shebib's *Goin' Down the Road* was honoured with Best Feature Film. Then in 1973, in an attempt to reach out to a very vocal group of Québécois filmmakers, the awards were held for the first time in Montreal. This actually backfired when the L'Association des Réalisateurs et Réalisatrices des Films du Québec boycotted the ceremonies, which were reduced to a press conference. To make matters worse, that year *Slipstream* won for Best Feature Film over *Kamouraska*, *Paperback Hero*, *Réjeanne Padovani* and *Between Friends*. Perhaps the most inept film ever to win at the CFAs, its victory did a great deal of damage to the credibility of the international jury system. The following year the awards were cancelled altogether.

The time was ripe for change, hence the creation of the Academy in 1980. Initially, the Genies were voted on by Academy members, much like the US system for the Oscars, but this only led to further embarrassment when, in the first year, such "Americanized" features as *The Changeling*, *Meatballs* and *Murder By Degree* walked away with all the major awards. Later the Academy went back to the jury system and now seems settled into a fairly established routine without too many gaffes. However, in a major upset in 1996, David Cronenberg's brilliant and provocative *Crash* was awarded Best Director and Best Adapted Screenplay but denied Best Picture, which went to the underachieving *Lilies*. It seems the Academy, like its big brother in Hollywood, occasionally gets it dead wrong. ●