



Philippe Falardeau's *La Moitié gauche du frigo*

La Moitié gauche du frigo

2000 90m prod Quatre Par Quatre Films, p Luc Déry, Joseph Hillel, Josée Roberge, d/sc Philippe Falardeau, ph Josée Deshaies, ed Sophie Leblond, pd André-Line Beuparlant, s ed Sylvain Bellemare; with Paul Ahmarani, Stéphane Demers, Geneviève Néron, Jules Philippe, Alexandrine Agostini, Marie-Andrée Corneille.

Stéphane and Christophe are roommates. Stéphane works in the theatre and is an aspiring filmmaker. Since Christophe, an engineer who has been out of work for several months, is struggling to find gainful employment, Stéphane decides his roommate's search for a job would make a great documentary. The arrangement is that once Christophe lands a job, the filming will stop.

Christophe goes for interviews, but he doesn't seem entirely thrilled about the prospect of actually working. He wants to keep his options open in case something more inspiring comes along. When he applies for severance from his previous employer, Christophe is told that because he left the job voluntarily he stands little chance of any remuneration. When asked why he left, he says it was for "moral reasons."

Meanwhile, Stéphane is getting some interest in his film. A message is left on his answering machine from a producer at Radio-Canada. However, it is clear that the fundamental differences between Christophe and Stéphane are getting on Christophe's nerves. After one interview, Christophe is happy that the meeting went well and that he finally has a prospect. Stéphane points out that the company in question has links to dictatorships and appears to have a track record of putting profits above ethics and morality. Christophe scolds Stéphane,

claiming that "integrity has its limits." He loses patience with Stéphane and his intrusive camera. In a state of financial desperation, the camera captures Christophe hocking his musical instruments, the things he loves the most.

Eventually, Christophe leaves Montreal for Vancouver. There he pursues his dreams of playing in a band, but in order to support his dream he must also sell encyclopedias on the side. Stéphane follows Christophe with his camera to ask him about his new job. Stéphane talks to him briefly, then drives away. The film-within-the-film is over now that Christophe's landed a job. The end titles reveal that Stéphane loses his own job while Christophe teaches music at a secondary school in Vancouver.

The faux documentary has been done before, from the really great (*This Is Spinal Tap*) to the ones I would regard as really bad (*The Blair Witch Project*). Despite the cynical filmmaking trick of telling audiences they're watching the "real thing," filmgoers tend to fall for the hand-held camera and no-budget aesthetic. It is satisfying to report that *La Moitié gauche du frigo*, the first feature by Philippe Falardeau, manages to feel decidedly fresh despite its faux-documentary status. Audiences and critics are responding to its odd and unpredictable hybrid style and Falardeau won the Claude Jutra Award at this year's Genies for best first feature.

Falardeau begins the film on a staunchly political footing. Stéphane (Stéphane Demers) asks his roommate if he can record his struggle to find work. Stéphane, playing quite the nuisance, follows Christophe (Paul Ahmarani) on various jaunts into the corporate sector to seek out an engineering job. When corporate types are encountered, Falardeau freezes the frame and lists their vital stats, such as how much they earn and what position

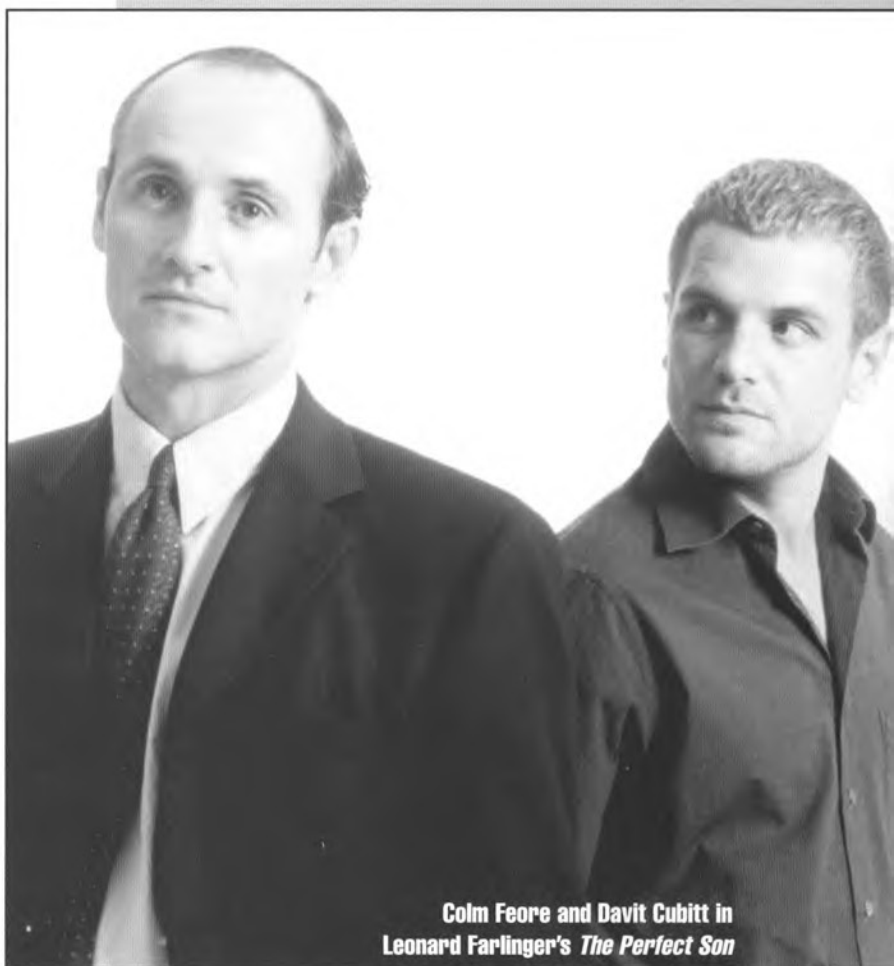
they hold. It's a neo-Marxist, paint-by-numbers guide to the haves and have-nots throughout the film. It also sets up what appears to be the film's tone. In a moment of telling self-consciousness, one of the stuffed suits the filmmaker corners snaps at the camera (and Stéphane behind it), "You're not Michael Moore!"

But just when we think we've got *La Moitié* pegged, Falardeau makes an abrupt shift. The neo-Marxist angle is still there. The scenes of Christophe selling his guitar and trumpet are heart wrenching and the title of the film (in English it means the left side of the fridge) refers to the division of material possessions. But sensing that things weren't quite as bad in the job market as they had once been, Falardeau (as he explains in a director's statement) instead changes the tone and sets out to make a film about the very nature of work itself, and Stéphane and Christophe turn out to be a perfect duo with which to explore this idea.

Although Stéphane is clearly the more ambitious of the two, the brief scene in which we see him at work with a theatrical director (discussing a script he's written) appears to indicate that his work is not terrifically satisfying. Christophe, on the other hand, is an attractive, light-hearted fellow, someone who doesn't want to take work for work's sake but rather wants to enjoy life to its fullest. A scene where he arrives to serenade his hard-working, underpaid cashier girlfriend with a song at her job is both beautiful and funny. It's almost as though Christophe would like to fulfill the dream of so many: to somehow live outside the constraints of work without having to win the lottery in order to do so. When he does find employment, it's even worse than he imagined. He has to help a company dismantle its operations to pave way for a major downsizing. That job ends when a number of the employees rebel.

By the film's final credits, Falardeau appears as intent upon making a personal statement as he does a political one. In keeping with the long-standing Canadian tradition of ambiguous narrative closure, Christophe's fortunes seem mixed. He has escaped his filmmaking roommate, though he had to go across the country to do so. He is playing in a band but has a fight in the street with his boss (the encyclopedia distributor), which we can only assume ends in disaster. The final title tells us Christophe ends up teaching music at a secondary school, which, come to think of it, might be the perfect place for him. Stéphane, however, isn't let off so easily. We are told that he is now unemployed. It's a perfectly biting end to Falardeau's first film, a feature that refuses to be defined. It's a tribute to the director that, despite all the well-worn traps he could have fallen into, he turned out to be no Michael Moore.

Matthew Hays



Colm Feore and Davit Cubitt in Leonard Farlinger's *The Perfect Son*

The Perfect Son

2001 93m prod New Real Films, p Jennifer Jonas, d/sc Leonard Farlinger, ph Barry Stone, ed Glenn Berman, pd Graeme Morphy, c Linda Muir, sr Stuart French, s ed David McCallum, mus Ron Sures; with Colm Feore, David Cubitt, Chandra West, John Boylan, Juan Chioran, Troy Ruptash.

The Perfect Son begins with a shot of a dead man lying on a bed and another man on the phone calling for a body bag. There is then an abrupt cut to a graveyard where two brothers meet, after a long separation, for the burial of their father. One, Ryan, is a successful lawyer. The other, Theo, is a "fuck-up" recently out of rehab. Theo refers to his older brother as the perfect son, the one father loved best.

Theo, who is an aspiring writer and frequent rehab attendee, tells the story in voice over. He has been in and out of rehab so many times he can't remember. He visits a bar, an old haunt, to reconnect with Sarah, his sometime girlfriend. At first it angers her to see him again, but she relents because she is "wasted" and they sleep together. Theo then visits his brother only to dis-