

FILM CRITICISM IN CANADA TODAY

TAKE ONE'S CRITICAL SYMPOSIUM

Take One asked 10 Canadian film critics about what dilemmas they face while reviewing Canadian films. The results are as surprising as they are diverse. The indigenous responses to Don Owen's 1964 film *Nobody Waved Good-Bye* were so extreme they have become Canadian cinematic legend. Critics across the country savaged the film upon its initial release, dismissing it as directionless and dreary. They thought twice, however, after the film opened in New York, where it garnered very favourable notices. The young star, Peter Kastner, was "intriguing," the direction was noteworthy for its nod to cinéma-vérité, and the film was actually saying something about the mental space of young adults. Suddenly, Canadian critics were having second thoughts. The tale says much about Canadians' attitudes about ourselves, but specifically, raises questions about how we review our own films.

Cut to today and our film culture is seen as far more rich and vital. Take the five films nominated for the Genies in any of the past 10 years, say industry onlookers, and you have a watchable movie. But while critics may be more upbeat about the films themselves, the public remains hesitant. Too often, filmgoers have been known to complain Canuck film critics engage in a crude form of jingoistic cheerleading or give films the thumbs-up stamp when they should have been panned. Thus Canadian film critics find themselves in something of a quandary: Do they err on the side of caution? Do they treat homegrown product with kid gloves? Or do they go for the jugular, as they would with the latest Hollywood product?

In the spirit of *Take One's* 10th anniversary, we asked 10 Canadian film critics to discuss their feelings about the dilemmas and intricacies they face while reviewing film from their own country. As might be expected, not everyone agreed on what these dilemmas and intricacies are.

PAUL TOWNEND

CONTRIBUTORS

Ken Eisner, who edits the film section of *The Georgia Straight*, has been a film critic for *Variety* since 1991. Previously, he wrote a music column for the *Victoria Times-Colonist* and published many reviews and features in such California papers as the *San Francisco Bay Guardian* and the *East Bay Express*... **Katherine Monk** is the film critic for *The Vancouver Sun*. She recently finished a book on Canadian film, *Weird Sex & Sneeshoes and Other Canadian Film Phenomena*, for Raincoast Books... **Rick Groen** is a film critic for *The Globe and Mail*. He abstains from having his photo published in papers and magazines... **Brian D. Johnson** writes for *Maclean's* magazine. He is the author of *Brave Films, Wild Nights: 25 Years of Festival Fever*, published by Random House... **Katrina Onstad** is a film critic for *National Post*... **Geoff Pevere** currently writes about movies and popular culture for *The Toronto Star*. He is the co-author, with Greig Diamond, of *Mondo Canuck: A Canadian Pop Cultural Odyssey*, Prentice-Hall... **Denis Côté** is the editor of the cinema section of the cultural weekly *ICI*. While studying cinema, he wrote, produced and directed independent low-budget films, including *Des tortues dans la pluie* (1997), *Mieux* (1998), *Old Fashion Waltz* (2000), *Seconde valse* (2000) and *Kosovolove* (2000)... **Matthew Hays** is film critic and associate editor of the Montreal weekly *Mirror* and a columnist for *The Globe and Mail*. His articles have also appeared in *The New York Times*, *The Advocate*, *This Magazine*, *Take One* and *The Canadian Theatre Review*. His book, *The View from Here: Interviews with Gay and Lesbian Filmmakers*, is due out next year... **Martin Bilodeau** is a film critic for *Le Devoir* and comments on film for Radio-Canada. His articles have also appeared in the weekly *Voir*... **Lee Anne Gillan** is the film critic for Halifax's *The Daily News* and a programmer for the Atlantic Film Festival.