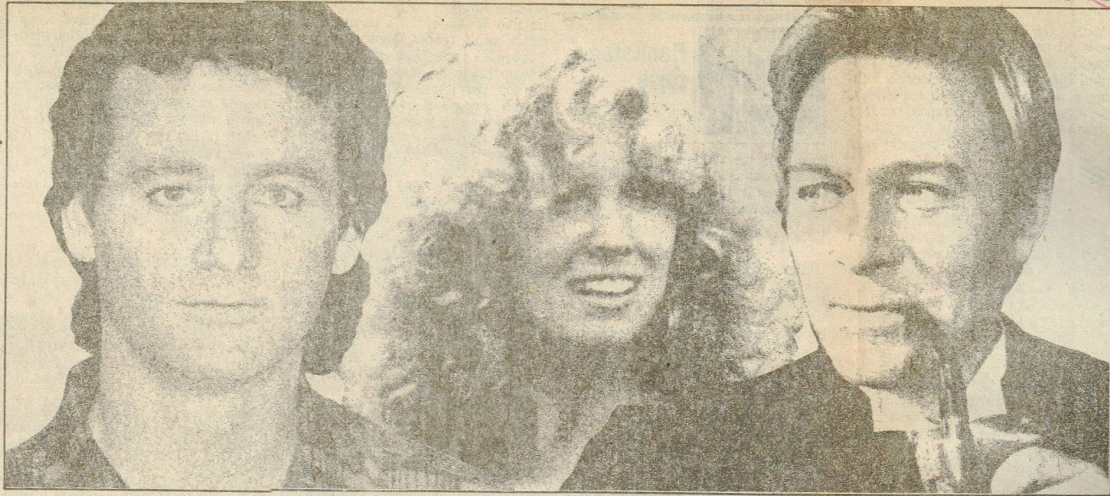




Big name nominees like (left to right) Bill Murray, Susan Anspach and Christopher Plummer add glitter to Canada's film awards but many problems remain.



Genie Awards debut shaky

By Leonard Klady

On March 20th, the Academy of Canadian Cinema will be presenting the first annual Genie Awards. For the uninitiated, the Genies are the successors to the Canadian Film Awards.

It's difficult to discuss Canadian movies — few people see them while others are unaware they even exist.

This trend is changing because of government tax incentives for film investments which have prompted some creative promotion of the new crop of Canadian movies. Films like *Meatballs* and *Murder by Decree* attest to a growing public knowledge of the Canadian film industry. Awards are seen as another way of increasing public interest.

The history of the Canadian Film Awards has been written in disaster and scandal over the past decade.

Quebec protest in 1973

In 1973, the awards were held in Montreal. On the first day of screenings, a delegation of Quebec filmmakers announced they were protesting the slump in film production and would not accept any awards they might be given.

The incident set off a chain reaction which led to the CBC cancelling the live telecast and the disruption of the awards for two years.

Since 1973, the CFA has attempted both international juries and domestic juries, ranging in size from five to 77, to determine the awards. Then, about a year ago, a group of Canadian filmmakers decided to create the Academy of Canadian Cinema, patterned on the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences in the United States.

After a brief power struggle, the



Lanctot played minor role.

Academy became the new home of the Canadian Film Awards. Among other things, they decided that the physical award, the Etrog (named after its designer Sorel Etrog), was in desperate need of a name change. They adopted the Genie, symbolizing the magic of film-making and the hidden genius seeking expression in all creative individuals.

The reaction to the name change ranged from mild amusement to open hostility. One Academy member, after viewing this year's nominated films quipped, "magic isn't enough."

This year the awards feature 22 eligible films competing in 17 categories. As in the American Academy, there is a pre-selection ballot where members of a particular craft vote for five finalists in their field. For example, the actors vote the various performing categories and the directors vote solely

in the direction category. The second ballot has all members voting in all categories.

The Academy has almost 500 members. About 75 per cent of the members come from Toronto. The other major centres of membership are Montreal, Los Angeles and Vancouver. Winnipeg, alas, has no members.

Only six entries released

One problem facing the 1980 Genies is that only six of the 22 entries had been released commercially in Toronto in the previous year. Therefore, it was important to organize a series of screenings for members in Toronto in early January. The process was more difficult than anyone could have imagined.

The Academy was faced with film producers who insisted that only members be allowed into the screenings of their films. Some members arrived at screenings with their spouses only to be turned away and press representatives, invited to screenings by one film's producer, received the same cold shoulder.

An added problem arose because only one French-language movie arrived sub-titled and the level of bilingualism in the film community is notoriously low.

Next year the Academy insists only commercially released films will be eligible for awards. However, the damage has already been done. Some of this year's nominations suggest members voted for them without seeing the film.

This implication is most apparent when assessing the fortunes of French-language and low-budget pictures.

The most glaring error is the nomi-

nation of Micheline Lanctot as Best Actress in a leading role for the film *Mourir a Tue-Tete* (A Scream from Silence). Ms. Lanctot, a former Etrog winner, has a minor role in this film. The leading actress is Julie Vincent. But members assumed that Ms. Lanctot, well known for roles in *La Vraie Nature de Bernadette* and *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz*, must have been the exciting new actress everyone was talking about.

Another source of embarrassment was the Academy's decision to establish special categories for foreign performers. Canada's producers have been criticized for casting foreign and expatriate performers in leading roles in their films and ignoring resident talent. Several acting members of the Academy voiced concern that there were not five Canadian nominees in leading roles to nominate.



Stephen Lack: up for award.

The category also suggests the Academy is hoping to lure foreign nominees like Rod Steiger (*Klondike Fever*), Trish Van Devere (*The Changeling*), Bill Murray (*Meatballs*) and Susan Anspach (*Running*) to the ceremonies. Canadian nominees like Robin Gammell (*Klondike Fever*), Kate Lynch (*Meatballs*), Thomas Hauff (*Summer's Children*) and Claire Pimpare (*Yesterday*) may be overshadowed by these internationally recognized names.

Performer categories are just the tip of the problem. Director Allan Moyle, who was responsible for the low-budget feature *The Rubber Gun*, was less than pleased with the two nominations his film received. The *Rubber Gun* was the most widely lauded Canadian film of the past year, yet Academy members chose to ignore it in the Best Picture category.

Attending to voice protest

Instead, the film received nominations for Best Performance by an Actor in a Leading Role (Stephen Lack) and Best Original Screenplay (Lack, Moyle and John Laing). Moyle feels both nominations could be argued against but the film's original music and film editing are genuinely worthy of high praise. "I'm going to attend just to voice that protest."

The most important award is obviously for Best Picture. The five nominees are *Meatballs*, *Running*, *The Changeling*, *Cordelia* and *Klondike Fever*. *Murder by Decree* which was a minority co-production with Great Britain is not eligible for Best Picture but has been cited in eight other categories.

The Best Picture nominees, sadly, represent Canadian commercial cine-

ma. Quality films like *The Rubber Gun* and *L'Hiver Bleu* receive scant mention in the awards.

Klondike Fever, which received its Canadian premiere last week, has been savaged by the critics. It garnered nine Genie nominations. It was the only Best Film nominee to have its director nominated.

To be fair, 1980 is the first year the



Kate Lynch nominated.

Academy of Canadian Cinema has hosted the Genies. Growing pains are to be anticipated not only in our awards but also in the films we produce.

An Academy voting system, as opposed to juried awards, traditionally opts for commercially popular movies. Although the road to awards night looks rocky, let's hope we'll all be celebrating on March 20.

Leonard Klady is the *Free Press* movie columnist.