

# Toronto 2003

By Ben Viccari

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## CANADIAN FILMS AT THE TORONTO INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL 2003

This year's TIFF left me more optimistic than previously about the future of Canadian films. So many of the Canadian productions I saw have escaped the bondage of former years when I've often felt that too many Canadian filmmakers have been trying too hard to be Hollywood rather than to make movies that are distinctly Canadian, yet accessible to audiences. To me "way out" conception and execution of a film is no substitute for true cinematic communication. The indigenous films I liked at this year's festival show Canadian backgrounds from Winnipeg in the Depression to the seedy Hochelaga quarter in Montreal, to suburban Toronto, to the Arctic barrens. I recall being at a luncheon, in 1982 at Rome's Cinecittà, following the awards of the Circolo Stampa Estera. The buzz was all about Australian films and their surprising vitality. What of Canadian films I was asked? Where are they? I felt embarrassed for my country. Australian films were being received with enthusiasm, for the directness of their approach to stories which showed us the Australian way of life and its people. Can we hope that this is really beginning to happen here?

I was agreeably surprised to experience something I had never heard before, hearty laughter and sustained applause from audiences for Canadian films. These include *Les invasions barbares* (d. Denys Arcand); *Snow Walker* (d. Charles Martin Smith); *La grande seduction* (d. Jean-François Pouliot); *Mambo Italiano* (d. Emile Gaudreault), a truly clever and hilarious comedy; *Dying at Grace*, a full-length documentary by Canada's doyen of the genre, Allan King, who brings us an authentic picture of the last days of five patients in Toronto's Grace Hospital; *Père et fils* (d. Michel Boujenah); *Falling Angels* (d. Scott Smith), from the novel by Barbara Gowdy; *Republic of Love* (d. Deepa Mehta), this too from a novel, by the late Carol Shields; *Rue Darling, 20:17* (d. Bernard Emond); *The Saddest Music in the World* (d. Guy Maddin); *The Bread Maker* (d. Sherry White); *Nothing* (d. Vincenzo Natali) and *A Problem with Fear* (d. Gary Burns).

This was another successful TIFF and one which will resonate as an important milestone in Toronto's post-SARS comeback, the panic over which virtually closed down the city. The staff never wavered however, in their programming and organized planning which brought forth an event that was a credit to them; and the thousands of cinemagoers, to whom film will always be an attraction and the international celebrities who came to support TIFF.

## Author Information

Ben Viccari is a Toronto writer, editor and television commentator. He was a founding director of the resuscitated Toronto Film Society in 1948. Before coming to Canada, Ben Viccari was a story analyst with the Rank Organization and has retained an enduring passion for film.