

# Canadian film maintains honest—but banal—integrity

By ALEX PATTERSON

Fresh from warm receptions at the Montreal and Toronto film festivals, *90 Days*, the light romantic comedy from the National Film Board of Canada, is now running commercially at the Carlton Cinemas. Neither a deadly earnest, Government-issue Better Citizens film, nor a puerile Hollywood North tax-shelter movie, *90 Days* represents one of those rare moments in Canadian cinema: a product of the bureaucracy that might actually be able to compete in the marketplace.

Director Giles Walker's foray into the model relationship-move genre, *90 Days* is a look at alternatives to conventional courting, marriage and conception that is gentle and easy-going to a fault. The languidly paced story begins with Blue (Stefan Wodoslawsky) narrating in a likea-

ble, casual style about the imminent arrival of Hyang-Sook (Christine Pak), his Korean bride-to-be. Blue insists that she is not a mail-order bride, but rather a pen-pal whom he fell in love with over a period of six months. Hyang-Sook has a visa for 90 days, during which time she must decide whether to marry Blue or return to Korea.

Meanwhile, Blue's sometime friend Alex (Sam Grana) is being thrown out of the house by his wife and rejected by his girlfriend simultaneously. He finds consolation in a bar—not from liquor but from a mysterious, business-like young woman who offers to buy his sperm for \$10,000 on behalf of an unidentified client (providing there are enough of them and they are good swimmers). The two men are as opposite sides of the same, unattached coin: Alex is a husband who

wants to be a swinging single while Blue is a lonely bachelor seeking domestic bliss with a woman he's never met. Each of their stories seems like a subplot to the other one, and only at the movie's close do they converge in any substantial way.

This is a weakness of the script (by director Walker with David Wilson), though not as serious a weakness as the mundane dialogue. Such sparkless conversation as Blue's and Hyang-Sook's exchange of presents ("You open first." "No, you open first." "No, I insist, you open first." etc.) could be forgiven in *cinema verité*, but in a work of imaginative fiction (where the writers presumably sat down and *thought* about this stuff before writing it down), it is premeditated banality. Fortunately the leads give engagingly natural performances—especially Grana and Pak—and if the writing doesn't

give them anything particular to say or do, they remain watchable at all times.

The filmmakers have made the best of their restrictive budget; denied the opportunity for unlimited locations, car chases, etc., they have wisely chosen to exploit their human resources instead. The lighting and cinematography are as sophisticated as possible under the circumstances, which is to say adequate, no more and no less. Walker's camera-handling isn't especially artful, though, again, adequate. David Wilson's editing doesn't always put the camera in the right place at the right time; it lingers on Hyang-Sook when Blue is making an important speech, and vice versa. Also, Walker has inexplicably chosen to place a minor character at the immigration office in extreme close-up, while none of his leads are treated to such intimate examination. These are minor quibbles, but they must be mentioned because they are problems which do *not* arise out of tight economics. Rather, they are problems which money—or lack of it—neither causes nor can fix. What *90 Days* lacks is not a massive infusion of

funds, but a script editor who can be more ruthless with cuts, and a film editor with a better insight for who the audience wants to be watching at any given moment. Perhaps it is the NFB's documentary heritage that influences their fictional films to behave like documentaries, or at least docu-dramas.

The filmmakers must be congratulated, however, for making a Canadian movie which leaves no doubt that we are in Canada. The setting is clearly identified as Montréal (Anglo quarter) and the seasons change from autumn to winter. This may seem inconsequential, but it should be remembered that those tax write-off movies of the 1970s called for Toronto to masquerade as Boston, and for red mail boxes to be replaced with blue ones, while the Canadian public footed the bill to the tune of 100%.

The insistence on filming in the snow is indicative of the integrity of the whole project. *90 Days* is nothing if not honest. It flies in the face of those who say that you can't make a movie about ordinary people with ordinary problems: you *can*, but you have to take extra care not to let them bore the audience. To say that the Canadian commercial cinema has "arrived" would be jingoistic overstatement, but is encouraging to see that it is finally headed in the right direction.

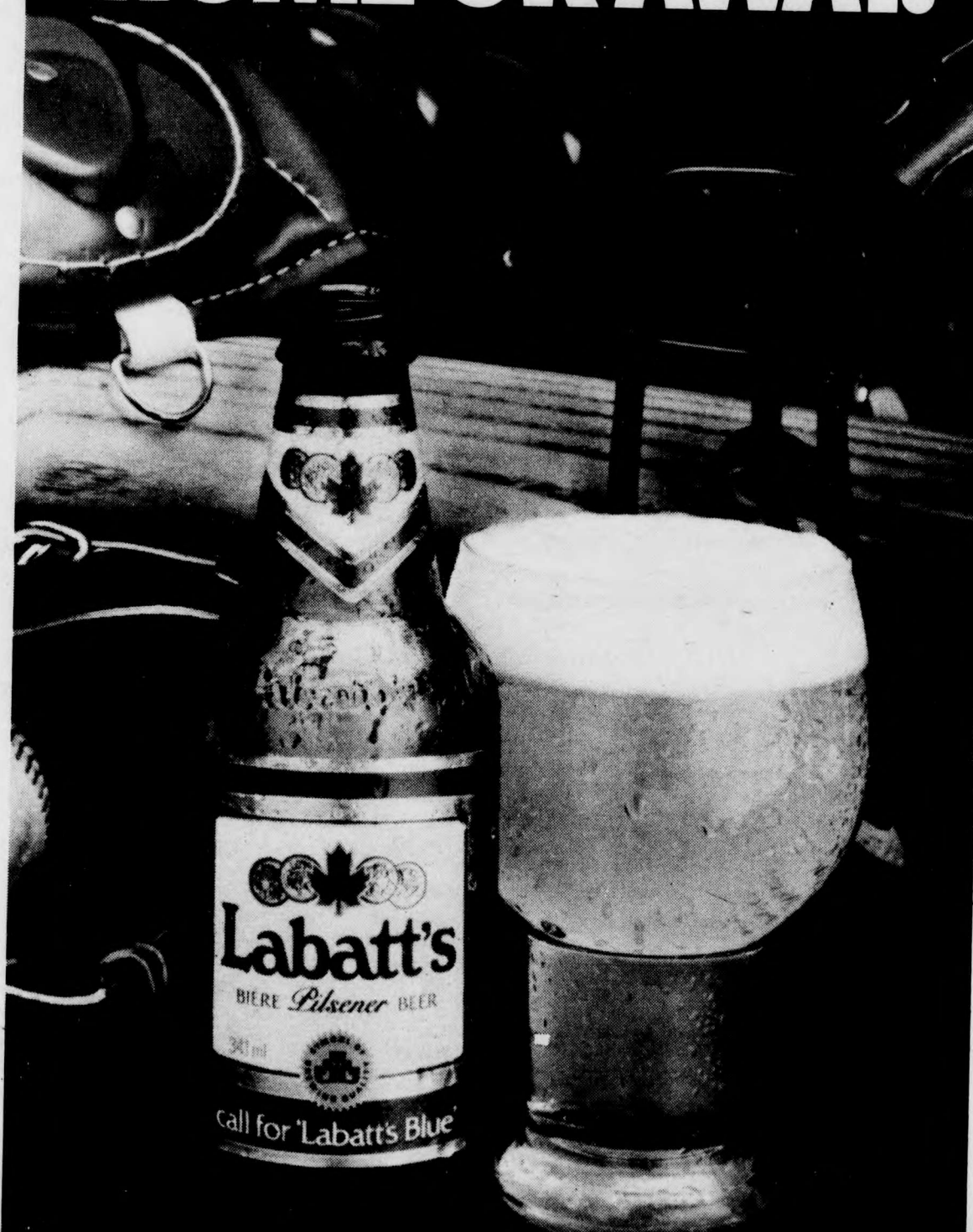
## Northern Lights Dance Theatre

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a ballerina with the Metropolitan Opera Ballet. "Ariadne" is a ballet based on the Greek legend of the mysterious Cretan Moon goddess. Thomson focusses primarily on the goddess's emotions and experiences of pain. By contrast, in "Melodies," Thomson uses "the poetry found in eight French Art Songs," as sung by guest artist Patricia Kern. "The poetry transfers from one sense to another, giving a luscious feeling" within both the dance and the music according to Thomson. The main character is performed by Roxanna Newberry who portrays a woman watching death approach. "Start," the opening piece for the performance, is dedicated to Paul Taylor. The work has no underlying story. Instead, the steps and movement respond to the music of Brahms.

Thomson's ambition looks like it is paying off. The combination of dance modes, music and poetry in the work of Northern Lights Dance Theatre lends itself to a potentially dynamic performance next week.

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