

Ding and Dong a French-Canadian Bob and Doug

by Marcus Parmegiani

Ding and Dong is a French-Canadian Comedy about two poor, bumbling, bad comedians who are trying to make it in Montreal.

As the tacky, blithering idiots, Claude Meunier and Serge Thériault are brilliant. After finding that they can't even make drunk lumberjacks laugh, they try something more serious; but they can't stop making wise cracks — even in a CBC News audition — let alone dress reasonably or use a hairbrush.

film
Ding and Dong
directed by Alain Chartrand
starring Claude Meunier and Serge Thériault
produced by Max Films

Homeless and penniless, they miraculously inherit \$30 million. Suddenly they make new friends and predictably split up, only to find that they can't deal with other people without each other. Eventually, the hardships of being rich and stupid lead them to find their niche.

The screenplay was written by

Meunier, although the film is a derived from the characters which the two have created and used on stage in Quebec. They are vaunted as the most popular stand-up comics in Quebec and, as a reflection of this, the film was the highest grossing Canadian film of 1990, even though it only premiered outside of Quebec at the Festival of Festivals, and was released in Toronto last Friday.

Ding and Dong is in French with English subtitles. Even if you only know a little French (not unlikely in

this "bilingual" country of ours) you'll realize that the subtitles aren't even close to being direct translations. They can't be, since most of the jokes are puns and plays on words.

The film has some problems. The way in which *Ding and Dong* inherit their fortune is far-fetched. Worse, because the ending alludes to a Quebecois phenomenon, it has the potential to leave other Canadians baffled.

But Meunier and Thériault are not out to make a great film, merely to make people laugh. The humour is

different, but definitely North American, which makes it appealing. If you can handle slapstick humour Bob and Doug Mackenzie-style for a full length feature film, *Ding and Dong* is for you.

If you're looking for substance or intense direction, look elsewhere. *Ding and Dong* lack any semblance of being real people. Like Bob and Doug, they just fumble through the whole movie with completely one-sided personalities. The only significant difference is that the jokes are a little better.



Ding and Dong (or, is it *Dong and Ding*?) mug for the camera in their first, self-titled film (above). Their idea of comedy is straight forward slapstick combined with bad puns. It might not sound like much, but it works: *Ding and Dong* (Claude Meunier and Serge Thériault) were popular club comics before they entered the movies, and *Ding and Dong* was the highest grossing Canadian film of 1990.

Tomlin's Search proves fruitful

by Ira Nayman

It's very difficult to make a satisfactory film adaptation of a stage play. Your first impulse is to reproduce the elements of the play which appealed to you and made it popular. But you also have to take into consideration the differences between the media — in particular the supremacy of visuals over words in film.

The Search for Signs of Intelligent Life in the Universe, based on Jane Wagner's stage play of the same (wordy) name, tries to have things both ways. About half of the film takes place on a stage; the balance has star Lily Tomlin in costume in stylized sets which, while they don't pretend to reality, do give the film greater visual appeal.

Search is an exhilarating experience, despite its self-imposed limitations, because Wagner's script is hilarious and true, and Tomlin's performance is breathtaking.

Search is a series of approximately 10 vignettes about a variety of women, held together by a bag lady named Trudy. Aliens, searching for signs of intelligent life on earth, have given Trudy an umbrella hat which allows



Lily Tomlin, as Trudy the bag lady, ponders the serious questions in *The Search for Signs of Intelligent Life in the Universe*. The film manages to capture the brilliance of Tomlin's stage performance and Jane Wagner's script.

film
The Search for Signs of Intelligent Life in the Universe
directed by John Bailey
starring Lily Tomlin
produced by Showtime/Tomlin and Wagner Theatricalz

her to live the lives of the other women; the movie is about what she finds.

The scenes on stage accentuate

Tomlin's virtuoso performance. Her movement is precise and brilliantly controlled and her vocalization is carefully crafted; she moves effortlessly from believable character to believable character.

The more filmic scenes help the audience visualize who the characters are. Bouncing back and forth between the two kinds of scenes gives the film visual variety.

The most involved scene follows three women from the feminist activism of the 60s to the self-centred Yuppiedom of the 90s. Wagner traces the changes in the women and their relationships with deadly accuracy; Tomlin brings them to life with tremendous skill.

The various stories grow complex and intertwine, rewarding the attentive viewer. But, you don't have to invest much energy in enjoying it. *Search* has an easy, intelligent sense of humour, laced with affection for the people who are being made fun of, which is effortlessly appealing.

Trudy, trying to explain the difference between life and art to the aliens, shows them a can of Campbell's soup and an Andy Warhol painting of a can of Campbell's soup. Holding up the can, she says, "Soup." Holding up the painting, she says, "Art." She repeats this many times, achieving the quality of a mantra.

See *The Search for Signs of Intelligent Life in the Universe*. It ain't soup.



Lily Tomlin as teenage punk rocker and performance artist Agnus Angst in *The Search for Signs of Intelligent Life in the Universe*.

Wadja's last film is about a true saint

Prasad Bidaye

Even after half a century, many individuals prominent during the Second World War remain unheard of. One of them was Dr. Janusz Korczak, the world's "first pediatrician," who, during the early 40s, struggled to keep 200 orphans "safe" in Poland's Jewish ghetto. That courageous, though

film
Korczak
directed by Andrej Wajda
starring Wojtek Psoniak
released by Alliance Films

tragic, period of his life is now preserved in in Andrej Wajda's latest film, *Korczak*.

the NFB and independents. What makes John Spotton special is that the director often is present for discussion after screenings.

• **Art Gallery of Ontario's Jackman Hall:** 317 Dundas Street West. The entrance is on McCaul Street (west of the St. Patrick subway station).

Like Cinecycle, here you can see more obscure films and video, that vastly underrated medium. They play their film opposite dates from Cinecycle and Innis to allow you to see it all.

• **Euclid Theatre:** 394 Euclid Street. It's a few blocks west of Bathurst, off the north side of college. Here, too, you can see the more "maverick" films and videos being made today, everything from recent films from U of T's Hart House Film Board to the annual Images festival of independent film and video.

Also, look for special screenings by Reg Hartt. He likes to show films at the Bathurst Street Theatre, the Rivoli or any other place that he can. Hartt specializes in rare uncut cartoons and silent and propaganda films. The next time you're downtown, look for his posters, especially along Yonge Street south of Bloor and in the Annex.

film
With the holidays fast approaching, now is a good time to be reminded of some of the alternate film venues around Toronto

connoisseur. Of all the theatres on this list, it shows the most accessible (sic) international films. The Cinematheque is for people who like foreign films by renowned auteurs like Bresson, Cocteau, Jarman, Godard, Ozu and Pasolini.

• **Innis Town Hall:** 2 Sussex Avenue, one block south of Bloor on St. George.

Innis plays a wide variety of films, national and international. You won't see *Terminator 2*, but you will see silent film classics, avant-garde films (yes, even Michael Snow), and rarely seen features like *Daisies*, by Czechoslovakian director Vera Chytilova.

• **National Film Board of Canada's John Spotton Cinema:** 150 John Street, one block south of Queen (opposite the Much Music building).

This is a great place to see recent and old Canadian films. The programmes vary from recent features like *The Falls* to short films made by

A few more venues to see alternative films

by Anthony Pizzari

Toronto is a great place to see serious cinema, you just have to know where to go. This is a short list of alternative film outlets for those of you who are disappointed with commercial films. Schedules are available at the film department at York (2nd floor CFA III) or in the film library in the basement of Scott.

• **Cinecycle:** This place can be hard to find. Its address is 317 Spadina Avenue, but this is of little use. It can be found in the alley between Baldwin and D'Arcy, the street north of the liquor store on the east side of Spadina. If you go, don't be confused by the bicycle repair shop: the cinema is above it.

Here you'll find a lot of international, contemporary avant-garde films. Films by Liaison of Independent Filmmakers of Toronto (LIIFT) members are screened there on the last Monday of every month. Martin Heath runs both the theatre and a cine-club (and has a reputation for making great espresso).

• **Cinematheque:** 31 Balmuto Street, between Bay and Yonge on the south side of Bloor.

Run by the Festival of Festivals, this theatre is for the film classic