

Going far — Down the road

By DAN MERKUR

Don Shebib's *Goin' Down the Road* is at long last a truly Canadian, Canadian-made feature film. Of recent years it seemed that the future of feature films in Canada would be NFB documentaries and Allen King; and that the only films to have Canadian content would still be de Mile's "North West Mounted Police" and Kennedy's "The Canadian". Hopefully *Goin' Down* will put an end to all the New Yorkers summering in Toronto with wardrobes out of Nanook of the North.

Goin' Down the Road is the story of two maritimers who head west from Nova Scotia in a beat-up 1960 Chevy convertible and travel 1500 miles to Toronto, arriving with \$30 between them.

Director Don Shebib, a 32-year-old filmmaker (MA in film, UCLA; Assistant editor, Corman's *The Terror*; director, *Good Times*, *Bad Times*) has previously exhibited awareness of social nuances, including class relations, and in *Goin' Down the Road* he displays a keen insight into the maritimer's way of life and way of living, as well as a good ear for their idiom. He delivers the material relatively objectively, and the film might appear as reconstructed history to someone who knows the Toronto maritimers. *Goin' Down the Road* is only slightly sympathetic to its characters: it lets them make their case, but Shebib leaves it to his audience to decide the matter. Although I cannot see how anyone could help but be moved by the characters' plight.

The actors are surprisingly good for an independently produced film of the variety where the filmmakers can't afford to eat for two years afterward. In fact Doug McGrath, himself a maritimer raised in a mining town, has a real feel for the part of a small town guy looking for the golden sidewalks of the city. In the role of Peter, the protagonist, McGrath looks right and moves right. He even sounds right — cadence, idiom and Maritime accent. Paul Bradley, who plays Joey, grew up in Cabbagetown. His understanding of the part is instinctual and insightful. Again the voice is just right, and only a Torontonians can tell his Cabbagetown accent from McGrath's Nova Scotian one. Both are pleasant and effective actors; both are likeable and appropriately non-star calibre.

Jayne Eastwood, who plays Joey's wife, "thinks she is cut out to play Cabbagetown chicks because she can sneer and sound tough" (according to the press releases) which is precisely why she wasn't convincing. The tough cynicism of the Cabbagetown people I know is inherent and integral. With Jayne Eastwood it was only a hard-boiled veneer, the kind that is called over-acting.

The screenplay is well constructed: the story flows at a moderate but engrossing pace. The dialogue is a trifle strained now

Sweetwater sound

If asked about underground music, most people will tell you it is typified by long, heavy, drawn-out interpretive compositions. An end to this stereotype may be coming quickly in the form of an eight pieced chunk of heaven called Sweetwater.

In their album entitled Sweetwater (Reprise 6313) the group uses largely light instruments (keyboards, flutes) and their natural vocal ability to its utmost in excellence. Lead by Mansi Mevins (who has a voice which uncannily resembles that of Gracey Slick in quality and control) Sweetwater manages to perform along classical, folk, rock, or jazz lines at will or combine different parts of classical, folk, rock, jazz and emerge with their own beautiful unique thing.

and then; but the delivery of the actors carries the necessary conviction.

The colour is good and effective, and the grainy texture of the nighttime scenes (necessarily shot on grainy high ASA stock) is well integrated with the rest of the footage, which is to be expected of cinematographer Richard Leiterman (*Will the Real Norman Mailer Please Stand Up?* *A Married Couple*.) The musical score by Bruce Cockburn, country-and-western folksy guitarist and vocalist, is appropriate.

Shebib's direction of the actors is very competent, his choice of sets and locations excellent (the mood of Toronto is more clearly on display than in any other film I have ever seen, and I have seen a lot of local underground films) and the camera direction is pleasant, unobtrusive and effective. Shebib has a very good eye for pretty shots, both in picking the locations and in terms of frame composition.

On the other hand, *Goin' Down the Road* is particularly significant because it is a Canadian-made dramatic feature with Canadian content and of merit. It was made on the proverbial shoestring budget despite a grant from the Canadian Film Development Corporation, and somehow got booked at a local independent "art-house" theatre.

Goin' Down the Road is a very nice film, and it deserves a lot better than it is going to get.

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This review was written in late June, before *Goin' Down the Road* opened. Since then the film has had raves in the *Star* and the *Globe*, and been generally accepted as about the finest Canadian film in recent years, and a pretty fair film by any standards. It is however having a rough time at the box-office, although the New Yorker has been nursing it along just to give it a break. *Goin' Down the Road* is expected to win some competitions, like 1970 Canadian Film Awards, but really, that means piss all to Shebib's career. Or rather it means he can make arty films, but can't make a buck. Anyone at York who is not a native Torontonian must see the film to begin to understand what the hell Toronto is all about on the other side of the fence. And all the kids who have spent their lives on this side of the track can probably do with the vision of Cabbagetown. Personally, I can vouch for the film's authenticity and accuracy. On top of that, it's a pretty damn good film. See it. You can't possibly regret it.



Paul Bradley, Jane Eastwood, and Doug McGrath, in *Goin' Down the Road*.

Countdown Canada

York tv wins nationally

By BRIAN PEARL

Countdown Canada, a fictional TV news show produced by York University Television and shown on the CBC English network on September 8 has provoked a stream of compliment and complaint. The program about a 1978 political union between Canada and the United States earned the praise of Toronto's television critics and the political attentions of Gerald Baldwin, PC house leader.

Countdown was written and produced by Robert Fothergill of Atkinson College and filmed during the summer on the York campus.

Countdown Canada portrays the last night in the history of Canada using the format of a CBC news special, complete with Stanley Burke, Larry Zolf and all those typical CBC gaffs such as bad lighting, sound and miscues. The Prime Minister surrenders under the threat of immense US assaults on Canada's economy unless the union takes place. Quebec and Victoria already lost, the Canadian people acquiesce but do not embrace the union.

The American president, Lamb (the British-Canadian lion and the American Lamb lie together, get it?) gleefully 'welcomes' his new 'fellow Americans' in a speech loaded with pointed remarks about the now-completed Revolution of 1776 (he does not explain how an imperialist victory for the U.S. could be metamorphosized into a

victory for anti-colonialist forces) and the well-known prowess of the Canadian fighting man.

The program's avowed intent was to provoke comment and discussion on the Canadian identity in the classroom, but broadcast to several million people, the program gained much impact, both in comparison to the usually quiet CBC commentaries of the past and the amplification of its own power in the new environment of several million living-rooms.

The comment provoked by Countdown ranged from a doctor's remark, in a letter to YTV, that the program was "excellent preventive medicine" and another viewer's compliment that the show asked "the right questions at the right time."

On the opposite side is Gerald

Baldwin, house leader for the Conservative Party who objected both to the film's tendency to intensify nationalist feelings into he called "ultra-isolationism" and also the divisive effect of portraying a Canada with an independent Quebec. Baldwin charged that the program violated the CBC charter, which states that the Corporation must uphold Canadian unity.

Both Time and McLeans magazines have written articles on "Countdown Canada" and together with dozens of comments by commentators, politicians and private citizens it seems fair to say that "Countdown" has succeeded ably in its designated goal of stimulating discussion and awareness of this national problem.



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