



**SPORTS MEDICINE SYMPOSIUM
PRESENTS
"THE CANADIAN ATHLETE
IN THE PURSUIT OF EXCELLENCE"**

GUEST SPEAKER: CAROL ANNE LETHEREN,
President of the CANADIAN OLYMPIC ASSOCIATION and
MEMBER, INTERNATIONAL OLYMPIC COMMITTEE.

**THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 14, 1991 7:00 - 7:45 p.m.
THE ATLANTIC BALLROOM HALIFAX HILTON**

*This presentation is OPEN TO THE PUBLIC and is the
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ARTS

Black Robe: a terrifying clash of truths

BY ANGEL FIGUEROA

"FOR THE GREATER Glory of God." Such is the motto of the Order of Jesus, a powerful source of inspiration in the relentless drive of a missionary's arduous journey into the deep wilderness of 17th century New France. Into the very heart of darkness, what ensues is a journey of body and conscience, a tale of adventure and survival, as a mission to baptize Indians transforms into the ultimate test of Faith that leaves one harrowed by the contrast of two opposing truths in the new epic film, *Black Robe*.

FILM
Black Robe
directed by Brian Beresford

From Jesus to Jesuit, Québécois actor Lothaire Bluteau resurrects his title role in Denys Arcand's *Jésus de Montréal* to play Father LaForgue, an ambitious young cleric charged with the task of reaping a harvest of "savage" souls. Tightly based on the gripping novel by Irish-born Canadian Brian Moore, what develops is a story bursting with raw power, a film of brutish reality and stunning naturalism. Directed by Australian film maker Bruce Beresford (*Driving Miss Daisy, Breaker Morant*), his adaption becomes a genuine attempt at authenticity that surpasses *Dances With Wolves*, despite recent criticism that it falls short of true potential. With staggering simplicity that corrects the shortfalls of Moore's book, a riveting feel for the Indian point of view renders *Black Robe* as a terrifying and touching experience.

What unfolds is the tale of a Jesuit's struggle in an untamed wilderness that parallels a struggle of conscience and faith in his own unforgiving awareness. At first driven by the passion to baptize

Indians and dreams of martyrdom for the glory of God, it is his love for the human spirit that prevails over blind fanaticism. Setting off on a 1500km canoe trip to replace a priest at a Catholic mission, he travels with a band of Algonquin Indians and experiences first hand their rough way of life, one dominated by the prophecy of dreams and their stoic struggle of survival.

theme is what Moore explains in the preface to his novel — that he was struck by "the gripping tragedy that occurred when the Indian belief in a world of night and in the power of dreams clashed with the Jesuits' preachments and a paradise after death."

It is this clash that lies at the heart of the matter when a Huron elder explains to LaForgue: "If we make vows to accept your God and give up our belief in the dream, we will be neither Norman or Huron. The way of life we have always known will end for us, and soon our enemies will learn our weakness and wipe us from the earth."

The way of life. These are profound words for the uncompromising blackrobe, who can only speak of a soul that must be saved for an alien paradise after death. It is in near death that an Algonquin elder, after refusing his baptism, confronts LaForgue in a poignant scene that lies at the centre of the film's theme.

"Look around you," he says, "The sun, the forest, the animals. This is all we have. It is because you are deaf and blind that you think this world is a world of darkness and the world of dead is a world of light... We who can hear the forest and the river's warnings, we who speak with the animals and the fish and respect their bones... we know the truth."

Such is the truth of this film which leaves you questioning the values of the Jesuits, whose good-intentions were fatal for the Indians. But what arises more profound than that is a truthful film experience lacking the John Wayne and Tonto of Hollywood. That this is a Canadian film with Métis and Khanawake actors, (and filmed in the beautiful Saguenay-Lac St Jean region of northern Québec), should not make you assume it's not worth seeing.

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It is a life founded on a profound respect for the unforgiving land, but it is a land ruled by the darkness of the night, where the forests speak and the animals have souls, where spirits pervade to influence every act of the living and the dead.

It is into this land "ruled by the donjon of the devil and all his kind," where the harsh elements chastise LaForgue to the limits, and he receives an uncanny penance for a growing sense of doubt in the essence of his mission. Ultimately, his Faith stands fast amid defiance and betrayal, and he triumphs in the greatest lesson of survival, which becomes his greatest triumph in the service of God. But what emerges from this triumph is a sobering cataclysm, as an epilogue chills the reality of the true fate that will befall the Huron village he baptizes. Central to the film's

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