

# Fête on film

## In honour of the weekend's celebrations, a sampling of four decades of Cinéma québécois

Saturday, June 23, 2007  
© Jeff Heinrich

The highs and lows of the underdog – for decades now, that's what Quebec cinema has been about.

From the gritty political *vérité* of *Les Ordres*, to the broad comedy of *Les Boys*, to the coming-out drama of *C.R.A.Z.Y.*, variations on the theme of the archetypal outsider have filled the silver screens of *la nation québécoise*.

In the 1960s and '70s, the subjects were family, Catholicism and nationalism, then came feminism and sex in the 1980s, individualism in the 1990s, and finally, in this century, the twin pulls of the tribal village and the global village.

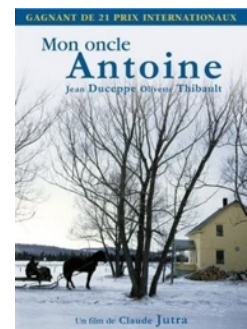
For this long weekend of La Fête nationale (or Fête de la Saint-Jean, if you prefer), here are 10 films you can watch on DVD to relive each era of modern Quebec history, plus another 10 suggestions for further viewing. There are feature films, but also many documentaries and one animated film – genres at which Quebec cinéastes excel as well.

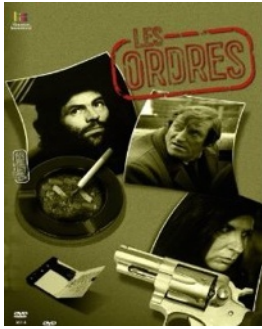
Almost all are available at stores with a decent selection of Quebec blockbusters and classics, or from online retailers.

\* \* \*

### The '70s

**Mon oncle Antoine** (1971) Claude Jutra's muted-colour classic about a mining village on Christmas Eve in 1940 is by turns humorous and tragic, a coming-of-age tale of a 15-year-old boy finding his way in a world of unhappy adults, beginning with his uncle, Antoine, who is the local shopkeeper and undertaker. Christal Films' new DVD is restored and in the original full-frame, with English subtitles and a nice extra: a 12-minute, stop-animation short called *A Chairy Tale*, which Jutra made with Norman McLaren.





**Les Ordres (1974)** The War Measures Act was hard on hundreds of innocents – Parti Québécois militants, trade union activists, separatist artists – who in October 1970 were summarily arrested and hauled off to jail on unfounded suspicion of being connected to the FLQ. This black-and-white film is fiction but looks like reality, mixing direct-to-camera *témoignages* with re-enactments of the drama. Filmoption International released the DVD this spring, with English subtitles – no extras, though, leaving you to figure out the history and context.

## The '80s

**Les bons débarras (1980)** Marie Tifo and Charlotte Laurier play a mother and daughter living alone in the Laurentians, in Francis Mankiewicz's multiple-Genie-winning drama, shot full-frame by Michel Brault with a script from Réjean Ducharme. Great performances all around. Filmoption's edition on DVD is new, but the transfer is unrestored and the image is a bit soft; there are English subtitles, but again, no extras.

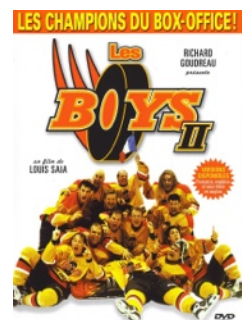


## The '90s

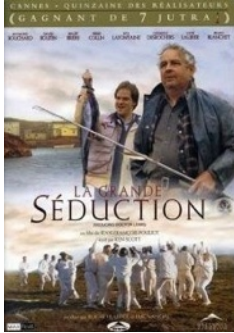


**Yes Sir! Madame ... (1994)** Pioneering videographer Robert Morin directed and starred in this award-winning faux-documentary about a Montreal man coming to grips with his dual French-English identity. Shot on 16mm and video, it's compellingly original. In real time, Morin screens 19 rolls of fake family archival footage and his own material and voices over his increasingly bizarre history. Available on DVD from Vidéographe in a box set called Robert Morin: The Videomaker's Journey.

**Les Boys II (1998)** A sequel that bettered the original box-office smash (made the year before) by taking the story to another country, France. This comedy about a team of amateur hockey players is big on laughs and pratfalls, ridiculous rivalries and on-ice shenanigans, and even sends up Canadian federalism. On Cristal's DVD, you can watch it three ways: in French, in English (dubbed), or in French with English subtitles; the image is cropped to full-frame, though, and non-anamorphic. Extras include a making-of and a road-trip documentary.

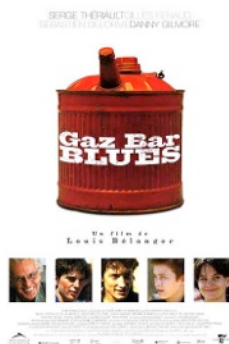


## The 2000s



**La grande séduction** (2003) What does a fishing village do when there are no more fish? Open a plastics factory, of course. But first the place needs a doctor, so the villagers recruit one from the big city, seducing him with all sorts of lies – pretending, for example, that everyone plays his favourite sport, cricket, or enjoys his favourite music, jazz fusion. A fine comedy, with a nice, crisp widescreen (and subtitled) presentation on DVD from Alliance Atlantis.

**Roger Toupin, épicier variété** (2003) Like the proverbial man out of time, Roger Toupin kept his tiny grocery store on Berri Street in the Plateau Mont Royal open long past its due date. When filmmaker Benoît Pilon moved in across the street and started taking an interest, Toupin had almost nothing left to sell, only a tale to tell. A touching portrait of the end of an era and the start of another. The documentary is on DVD from K Films, with English subtitles, extra interviews and deleted scenes.



**Gaz Bar Blues** (2003) In my view, the best-written, best-acted and most convincing Quebec film of this decade. A family drama about an aging father (Serge Thériault) who runs a local gas station in a rundown part of Quebec City with the on-again, off-again help of his three very different sons, the wise counsel of his daughter, and a rogue's gallery of regular patrons. The Alliance Atlantis DVD has trailers, deleted scenes and a slide show of director Louis Bélanger's stills from the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 (yes, it plays a role in the film).

**La Neuvaïne** (2005) A psychological drama about two unlikely allies: a young pilgrim doing a novena (nine days of Catholic devotion and prayer) in Sainte-Anne-de-Beaupré for his dying grandmother, and a Montreal physician he meets who is grieving over the death of a battered mom who was one of her patients. Sober, well paced, a film that leaves a lasting impression. K Films' DVD looks good but has no extras.



**C.R.A.Z.Y.** (2005) Growing up gay means growing up different, and when your teenage years are the post-Quiet Revolution 1970s, it's only a matter of time before you get the urge to come out. So goes the story of young Zac Beaulieu (Marc-André Grondin) in Jean-Marc Vallée's on-the-mark, box-

office smash hit. With a well-integrated soundtrack of rock classics from David Bowie, Pink Floyd, Grace Slick and others. Upgraded with a sharper image on DVD this year by TVA Films in a two-disc collector's edition.

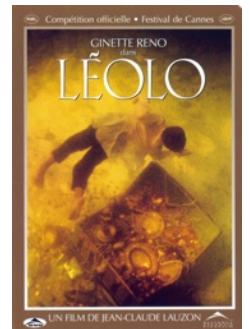
\* \* \*

## 10 more worth a look - five features, five docs

**Valérie** (1968) Quebec's first (and now classic) nudie "film cochon," inspired by American sexploitation flicks, about a Catholic orphan runaway who becomes a topless dancer. Out-of-print but available online.

**Le déclin de l'empire américain** (1986) Denys Arcand's seminal take on Montreal yuppie naval-gazing, sexual exploits and hypocrisy in the '80s. Updated in 2003 in *Les invasions barbares*, which won the Oscar that had eluded Arcand in this one.

**Léolo** (1992) A boy who thinks he's different, a dysfunctional family that surrounds him, a soundtrack with a Rolling Stones song in it – no, this isn't C.R.A.Z.Y, it's Léolo. Directed by Jean-Claude Lauzon, who died in a plane crash five years later.



**Le chemin du Roy** (1997) An early effort from respected documentary filmmakers Carl Leblanc and Luc Cyr, about French president Charles de Gaulle's triumphant drive in July 1967 from Quebec City to Montreal, ending with, "Vive le Québec libre!" (Available in libraries only.)

**Le Neg'** (2002) Another disturbing Morin picture, this time a feature with an ensemble cast. It begins as a small-town police procedural then descends into a horribly wild satire on white-trash bigotry.

**Les Triplettes de Belleville** (2003) Made in Montreal by a director from France (Sylvain Chomet), this double-Oscar-winning, jazz-laced cartoon about a boy cyclist in the Tour de France is a masterpiece of 2D animation. The Quebec DVD is a special two-disc set.

**La classe de madame Lise** (2006) A year in the life of a classroom of Grade One students, all children of immigrants who speak very little French. The teacher, Lise Coupal, has her hands full; by the end, our hearts are full, too – with admiration.

**Symphonie Locass** (2006) Seventy young classical musicians practice, create and play at a summer retreat with popular Montreal hip-hop group Loco Locass. It's a risky musical journey, just *this* short of utter cacophony.

**À force de rêves** (2006) Serge Giguère's affectionate and inspiring (and Prix-Jutra-winning) documentary about five pensioners – a painter, a musician, an antiques dealer and such – who are actively making the most of their lives.

**L'illusion tranquille** (2006) A polemic against the "Quebec model" of state intervention and union power, self-produced by Joanne Marcotte and husband Denis Julien, this doc manages to be fun to watch, too. Not just for fans of Mario Dumont.

\* \* \*

## Top 10 au guichet

These were the most popular Quebec films in cinemas from January 1985 (when statistics were first compiled) to December 2006, in terms of tickets sold.

<u>Title</u>	<u>Tickets</u>
1. <b>Séraphin: un homme et son péché</b> (Charles Binamé, 2002)	1,341,602
2. <b>Bon Cop, Bad Cop</b> (Erik Canuel, 2006)	1,318,801
3. <b>La grande séduction</b> (Jean-François Pouliot, 2003)	1,191,818
4. <b>Les Boys</b> (Louis Saia, 1997)	1,125,182
5. <b>Les Boys II</b> (Louis Saia, 1998)	1,039,578
6. <b>Les invasions barbares</b> (Denys Arcand, 2003)	913,946
7. <b>Les Boys III</b> (Louis Saia, 2001)	910,743
8. <b>C.R.A.Z.Y.</b> (Jean-Marc Vallée, 2005)	758,939
9. <b>Ma vie en cinémascope</b> (Denise Filiatrault, 2004)	724,162
10. <b>Aurore</b> (Luc Dionne, 2005)	687,929

Source: Institut de la statistique du Québec (Observatoire de la culture et des communications)