

The Fellows Who Dress the Pictures:  
Montreal Film Exhibitors in the Days of Vertical Integration (1912-1952)

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## Abstract

### **The Fellows Who Dress the Pictures: Montreal Film Exhibitors in the Days of Vertical Integration (1912-1952)**

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The city of Montreal offers a valuable case study for the investigation of the multiple ways local film programmes have been shaped by both local agents and vertically integrated transnational organizations in the classical era. This influence negotiated such major transitions as the construction of the first movie palaces in the early 1910s and the later rise of television at the turn of the 1950s. Using data collected in corporate records, newspapers, trade journals, censorship records, official statistics, and even novels and diaries, this thesis posits that Montreal occupied a peculiar position in the continental film market as it was simultaneously integrated in transnational distribution networks and home to a large francophone population. This situation permitted local entrepreneurs to wrest a significant share of the film market from the various distributors and exhibitors affiliated with US producers, largely through the importation and exhibition of French films. The city's varied population and unique nature also helped local exhibitors affiliated with US-based organizations preserve some degree of control over the programming and policies of their theatres, even though this was an era marked by the growing vertical integration and monopolization of the film industry. This thesis further demonstrates that, while vertical integration did marginalize many of the city's exhibitors, the need for alternative attractions, created by the independent theatres' increasingly limited access to US products, emphasized the intermedial nature of film programmes, and consequently facilitated the emergence of local talent. The numerous performers trained in moving picture theatres soon participated

in the creation of a popular theatrical tradition addressing the actual experiences and life conditions of Montrealers and, more particularly, of a French-Canadian population ill-represented by both its own backward-looking elite and the current political system.

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## Introduction

One day in October 1942, John Grierson, famed documentary filmmaker and head of the new National Film Board of Canada, sat down in a CBC studio for a public chat on the elusive art of showmanship with J.J. Fitzgibbons, managing director of Famous Players Canadian Corporation – then the leading Canadian theatre chain – and Ray Tubman, local theatre manager. Grierson opened the ensuing radio broadcast by remarking that:

[Showmanship] is, I know, far more important, far more intelligent and distinguished an art than many people suppose. And you, Fitz, as a head of the largest theatre organization in the country are a master of it.

At the same time, I don't think you could do much without people like Ray Tubman here. He is the showman on the spot, one of the hundreds of exhibitors like him across the country. He is the fellow who dresses the picture and presents it there in front on the marquee. It is he who knows the people and tells you when your pictures are good and not so good. He is indeed a very important person. The man with his finger on the public pulse.<sup>1</sup>

In a few succinct words, Grierson had outlined a tension central to the development of film, but long overshadowed in media historiography by Hollywood's glamour and the awe-inspiring dealings of the moving picture industry's major players. Grierson's show reminded CBC listeners that the film industry had always been dependent not only on the strategies of master planners like Fitzgibbons, but also on the tactics of local film people like Tubman.

The city of Montreal offers a unique opportunity for the study of the substantial but still largely neglected contribution of local showmen to film history. During the years covered by this research, Montreal was simultaneously a North American metropolis fully integrated to transnational film distribution networks and a peripheral market featuring a large French-Canadian population set apart from the primary audience of the then hegemonic US film industry by historical, cultural and linguistic realities. Yet, the unique nature of the city's population did not prevent moving pictures from becoming a massively

popular form of recreation with Montrealers. Dozens of luxurious film theatres were built in the city from 1906 onward, and were subsequently attended by a wide variety of amusement seekers recruited across classes and linguistic communities. The attraction exerted by film entertainment on Montrealers ultimately proved so strong that even a sustained anti-cinema campaign waged by the Province of Quebec's religious, nationalist and cultural elites could seemingly do little to prevent the city's residents from attending its numerous moving picture shows.

The same reasons routinely invoked to explain cinema's international success as both a mass media and a popular form of entertainment no doubt largely account for the strong attraction exerted by moving pictures on Montreal audiences. In Montreal, as in countless other locations across the globe, moving picture theatres offered shows that were varied in content, constantly renewed, characterized by their strong attractional and narrative components, and quite moderately priced. These properties were, however, essentially predicated on the centralized mass production and wide distribution of films, which, in turn, meant that moving pictures were routinely consumed in contexts significantly different from those of their production. This situation intensified the need for local mediators, that is, for local agents who set up the conditions which made it possible for these exogenous texts to become acceptable, and hopefully attractive, to the members of the communities where they were being disseminated.

These mediators could be institutions, such as the numerous censor boards seeking to enforce so-called "community standards" through the imposition of cuts in the film prints circulated in the territories falling under their jurisdiction. Producers, distributors and exhibitors also frequently altered films so as to boost their commercial potential. Films were, for instance, routinely subtitled, dubbed, or equipped with translated intertitles in numerous

national or regional markets. In some cases, they were even re-edited so as to accommodate tastes and expectations at odds with those of their intended primary audience. In Quebec, leading film entrepreneur J.A. DeSève was, for instance, known to regularly tamper with the French productions imported by his organization, France-Film. Titles were modified, scenes were cut or displaced, and, on at least a few occasions, new endings produced in France at the request of the Quebec company. These alterations aimed to provide a better fit between the Catholic morality imposed by influential groups in Quebec society, and maybe – who knows? – to indulge DeSève’s creative impulses.<sup>2</sup> In short, films were frequently not the perfectly reproducible texts that many long assumed them to be.

The most common type of operation aiming to ease the acceptance of imported films by local audiences nevertheless entailed, not their alteration, but rather their insertion in a wider text, that of the show or programme. Just as foreign popular songs were routinely broadcast as part of local radio shows, or as syndicated columns, cartoons and serials regularly appeared in local newspapers, films were systematically integrated to local events or performances also made up of a number of other attractions. It could therefore be argued that the early cinema practice by which film shows were sold piecemeal – view by view or tableau by tableau – actually never went away. Classical era exhibitors generally retained the last word on the composition and organization of their shows, no matter if the various building blocks making up their programmes were reels, acts or titles. The shows programmed by Montreal film theatres throughout the years covered by this study were thus composed, as a general rule, of one or two multi-reel features complemented by a few short films (cartoons, newsreels, comedies and travelogues being the most commonly used added attractions). In a significant number of film theatres, screen attractions were further complemented by live performances. These were especially important in the silent era, when

musicians and, in some instances, lecturers, were hired to accompany the pictures booked by exhibitors.<sup>3</sup>

The programmes presented in local communities by moving pictures theatres offer an ideal site for the study and analysis of the tension between centralized control and local agency that largely shaped film history. Though ultimately selected by local theatre operators, the various attractions, filmic or otherwise, programmed by each venue were essentially determined by, firstly, the latter's place within the film industry, as dictated by ownership, affiliations (or lack thereof) and rank within the hierarchy of local theatres, and, secondly, by the venue's position within a geographically, socially, and culturally situated community. This determination process obviously went both ways, as communities could also be influenced by the texts circulated in their midst. The Province of Quebec was thus long notorious for the fear and resentment of cinema's influence fostered in some of the groups making up its population. This type of reaction to the rise of cinema added yet another dimension to the activities of exhibitors, since theatre programmes could also occasionally be conceived as a form of discourse aiming to placate or assuage the industry's opponents.

Knowledge of one's clientele, opposition, and industry, has always constituted the basis of showmanship. The local showmen active over the years covered by this research did not select the attractions they booked and assembled in their programmes according to a fixed set of rules. To quote a 1931 First National advertisement, they rather relied on "plain common sense" **[Figure 0.1]**, which is to say, on a particular form of knowledge rooted in their experience as participants in both a transnational industry and a local community. The dual nature of the exhibitors' identity generally enabled them to find ways to render the foreign texts showcased in their theatres attractive to their local audiences. The flipside of this mediation process was an almost continual, if sometimes latent, struggle, over theatre

control between local exhibitors and the transnational organizations controlling the film supply and set on acquiring a larger share of box office revenues.

The present research will aim to generate a nuanced account of what being a classical era Montreal film exhibitor entailed, as well as of the struggle between local showmen and vertically integrated organizations controlling both the film supply and the leading theatre chains, whose outcome largely determined what Montrealers could see in their local moving picture houses. It won't contradict the work of reputed historians like Peter Morris, Germain Lacasse, Manjunath Pendakur or Ian Jarvie, who have for the most part emphasized the influence of foreign producers and vertically integrated chains. The facts exposed over the following chapters will indeed show that cinema has been a transnational phenomenon since its inception, and that even in the days preceding its institutionalization and the appearance of luxurious movie palaces, continental theatre chains had represented a significant outlet for film producers. Vertical integration will further be shown to have deeply affected the activities of Montreal exhibitors from the early 1920s onward. The attention granted to these situations will however be counterbalanced in this account by a sustained effort to describe, contextualize and analyze the various tactics developed by local exhibitors to preserve some level of control on their operations.

This side of the research dealing with theatre ownership and control will rely upon an analysis of the programming strategies devised by the various agents involved in moving picture exhibition in Montreal. It will more particularly be argued that, partly as a result of the difficult conditions prevailing in the city, where sizeable francophone, anglophone, and immigrant populations mingled, and where cinema had many powerful opponents, Montreal exhibitors were granted a significant degree of control over their bookings by the heads of the Toronto and New York-based theatre chains. We will also see how some entrepreneurs

eventually managed to bypass the tight control exerted by these transnational organizations on films and established theatre networks by exploiting the need for French-language film entertainments generally left unfulfilled in the Province of Quebec.

The analysis of the programming strategies of Montreal theatres presented here will proceed from the belief that programmes are multifaceted phenomena shaped by multiple factors. These include the affiliations of each theatre and chain, which largely determined the range of films and attractions available, as well as the moment when they could be booked (i.e., the theatre's "run"). As we will see, programmes were also made to fit the make-up of the population served by each theatre, which could significantly vary between downtown and neighborhood houses, or from one neighborhood to the other. The activities of competing venues, too, had a noticeable impact the policies and programming strategies of exhibitors: theatres could attempt to obtain better runs or book better attractions than the opposition, or try to compensate for inferior products by either offering more or charging less. The range of data pertaining to moving picture shows considered in the next chapters will therefore include admission prices, the frequency at which programmes were renewed, general programme formats ("combination," "double bill," etc.), as well as the whole gamut of attractions offered, including feature films, shorts, vaudeville, burlesque, music, songs, lectures, amateur contests, and giveaways. The internal organization of programmes, and more particularly the hierarchy established between headlining and supporting attractions (for instance, was the headlining attraction the imported feature or the local performer?) will further be considered.

This research will as a result emphasize the intermedial aspect of film exhibition, which has generally been overlooked in the context of mainstream, classical era film exhibition in Quebec. Much research has been conducted on the strong intermedial

dimension of early cinema, as well as on the residual practices observed in marginal venues, such as the persistent use of film lecturers documented in some Quebec theatres as late as the 1930s.<sup>4</sup> Most historical accounts however gloss over the actual shows offered by the downtown movie palaces and larger neighborhood theatres that constituted the site of most outings to the cinema. The leading assumption about film exhibition in the classical era thus seems to be that most film theatres were little more than sites dedicated to the consumption of US cultural productions.

A closer look at the activities of theatres primarily dedicated to the exhibition of imported moving pictures in Montreal will nevertheless suggest that these amusement venues did contribute in a significant, albeit indirect, way to the evolution of Quebec culture and society. Beyond the influence of the films presented therein, the sudden appearance of a vast network of venues starved for attractions opened a space where local talent could develop in the early years of the twentieth century. Far from being suppressed by the institutionalization of cinema at the turn of the 1910s, this demand for local attractions seemingly held up, and even possibly grew as a consequence of the relentless movement toward vertical integration that deeply affected Montreal film theatres from the early 1920s onward. In many marginalized independent venues, local performers eagerly stepped in to fill the void created by the growing control exerted on film supply by the leading chains. This phenomenon in turn contributed to the development of a new strand of popular culture more in phase with the actual living conditions of Montrealers. It will more particularly be argued in chapter 7 that the local talent developed on the stages and orchestra pits of Montreal's film theatres furnished an essential contribution to Gratien G  linas's celebrated *Fridolinons* revues, which played a key role in the renewal of the French-Canadian public sphere in the mid-twentieth century.

This claim positing a significant contribution of moving picture theatres to the social, cultural, and even political life of Montreal and the Province of Quebec should however not be taken as implying that exhibitors actively sought to transform society. As we will see, most early twentieth century theatre operators had previously made a living as small merchants (with a disproportionate number of Montreal film men having once been dairymen or confectioners), and obviously still saw themselves first and foremost as retailers. This tendency to treat cinema as just another line of products has irked many groups over time. Canadian film historians have for instance routinely demonstrated a negative bias against the exhibitors, and more particularly against the operators of vertically integrated theatre chains, who have worked to increase the presence on Canadian and Québécois screens of imported features, by far the most profitable type of attraction. I will however contend that a rather different perspective on the relationship between cinema and Quebec society can be conceived if one is willing to expand the range of phenomena covered by the study of film exhibition to include, not only the overt intentions and strategies of theatre operators, but also the actual consequences, both planned and unplanned, of their actions. In the same fashion, the integration to the field of inquiry of the intermedial dimension of commercial film shows permits the emergence of a more rounded approach to the progressive potential of cinema.

The contribution of commercial moving picture shows to democratic life developed along multiple and at times seemingly contradictory lines. In Montreal as in most of the Western world, moving picture theatres first constituted one of the earliest public spaces where men and women of different classes, origins, and age groups freely mingled on a regular basis. We are for instance reminded by Lauren Rabinovitz that simply walking down the city streets was an activity regulated by a complex code for nineteenth century women.

Rabinovitz thus notes in regard to the figure of the flâneur associated with the emergence of modernity that:

It is especially important to define the flâneur as a gendered subject, as a male for whom the streets were accessible, unrestricted public spaces that posed no physical danger or taint of unrespectability. The female flâneur or flâneuse was not possible until a woman could wander the city on her own. For a woman to assume flânerie in the nineteenth century was to risk being viewed as a prostitute: “The flâneur was simply the name of a man who loitered; but all women who loitered risked being seen as whores, as the term ‘street-walker,’ or ‘tramp’ applied to women makes clear.”<sup>5</sup>

Richard Butsch further observes that, as a result of the various concerns associated with the mingling of citizens of different gender and class, most groups tended to congregate in dedicated spaces throughout the nineteenth century: working class men would for instance hang out at the saloon, while their bosses socialized at the club and their bosses’ wives met in tea rooms or salons.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, whereas a majority of nineteenth century entertainment places were technically open to most groups (often with the notable exception of people of color), the social stigma attached with the attendance of some types of venues, including cabarets and burlesque theatres, generally ensured that respectable women, amongst others, would not dare venture in. Some other venues did offer performances aimed at different groups and communities, but still enforced some level of segregation within their precincts. In many nineteenth century theatres, wealthy patron of the arts would for instance seat in boxes, while respectable middle-class citizens occupied the orchestra and working class people were crammed in high-perched balconies.

In the years preceding the advent of cinema, commercial newspapers and, to a lesser extent, “high class” vaudeville shows largely contributed to the creation of the mass audience eventually addressed by moving pictures. But while newspapers disseminated information and debates within communities, and have therefore come to be regarded as an essential precondition to the emergence of rational publics, the fact remains that reading constitutes

an essentially private activity.<sup>7</sup> As for vaudeville, it would never quite, in spite of its undeniable popularity, turn into the mass phenomenon that moving pictures were destined to become in the early decades of the twentieth century. This is more particularly demonstrated by the fact that, while vaudeville acts were presented in conjunction with several other types of attractions, including films, in many Montreal amusement places, only one theatre primarily dedicated to vaudeville, the Bennett's (opened in 1907 and later known as the Orpheum), was ever built in the city.

Moving picture shows nevertheless resembled newspapers and vaudeville theatres in that they strove to offer something to everybody through the integration of many varied features and attractions. Indeed, the success of Hollywood cinema has often been partly attributed to the development and mastery by its creators of formulas combining multiple types of content presumed to be particularly appealing to different segments of the mass audience, such as romance and glamour for women, action and adventure for men, or comedy for children and uneducated people. It has thus been observed by film historian and theoretician Rick Altman that:

whereas film reviews almost always include generic vocabulary as a convenient and widely understood shorthand, film publicity seldom employs generic terms as such. Indirect references to genre are of course regularly used, but they almost always evoke not a single genre but multiple genres.<sup>8</sup>

This strategy predicated on the multiplication of attractions and sales arguments also quite obviously constituted one of the main organizing principles of film theatre programmes. Exhibitors generally aimed to combine films and live performances attractive to different groups, and conversely avoided attractions apt to displease or upset some audience members.

In his groundbreaking work on silent cinema, film historian Richard Abel has sought to emphasize the central role played by local exhibitors in the creation of programmes

deemed attractive by audiences, as well as the democratic potential of the space opened up in local communities by moving picture theatres. According to Abel:

As long as managers retained a degree of local control, their theatres were public places where groups of people, from downtown shopgirls, stenographers, and shoppers to factory workers, from schoolchildren to families from a variety of neighborhoods, could regularly gather and make “their own.”<sup>9</sup>

While Abel’s comment primarily deals with film exhibition in the transitional years of the early 1910s, a similar remark made by Hye Bossin, editor of the *Canadian Film Weekly*, in 1942 suggests that Canadian theatres could still assume a similar function at the height of the classical era. “In cities,” claimed Bossin, “big movie houses are casual gathering places and in small towns, as in urban districts, they come closer to being a common parlor.”<sup>10</sup>

The commercial interests of exhibitors consequently compelled them to act as mediators, not only between the transnational film industry and their local audiences, but also between the multiplicity of groups making up even the most homogeneous local communities. Theatre operators routinely found themselves compelled to find ways to facilitate the cohabitation of the different groups they sought to attract, as different spectators frequently had different takes on the shows they were attending, as well as diverging conceptions of what was expected of them as spectators. Already in the days of nickelodeons and *scopes*, exhibitors had had to find ways to accommodate both the women who wished to show off their new hats (and therefore refused to take them off) and the male spectators who complained about having their view of the screen blocked by these conspicuous displays of the milliner’s art.<sup>11</sup> One exhibitor from Chatham, Ontario, elaborated in a 1942 issue of the *Canadian Film Weekly* on how acting as a mediator between the various groups making up his audience constituted a time-consuming aspect of his work:

[W]e are running [a] picture for the morning salvage shows for the war effort. One morning for the children of the Separate schools and the next morning for those of the Public schools.

The Separate school children get their pictures taken for the paper. But the public school kids think they are being slighted so the old peacemaker has to get busy again.

Then we put on a Sunday evening charity show and a preacher jumps down our throat, calling us tyrants and threatening us with the Lord's Day Alliance. All this in spite of the fact that we raised \$120.00 for the Ladies Auxiliary. To prove to the complainants that we are not pagans we insert a 220-line ad in the Saturday church page of the newspaper, asking the people to go to church on the morrow...<sup>12</sup>

The latter testimonial tends to demonstrate that concerns stemming from the cohabitation of multiple groups still pervaded the film industry in the classical era, and that even small communities were not left unaffected.

The activities of the Montreal theatres discussed over the course of the next chapters further suggest that moving picture houses could frequently be more than spaces where members of different groups cohabited. Indeed, evidence shows that some of the city's smaller neighborhood theatres functioned as gathering spaces where community members could assemble and, through their interactions and continued support of particular shows and performers, tacitly take part in the redefinition of their identities. For instance, the popular characters created on the stages of the Théâtre National, Cartier and Dominion film theatres by comedians such as Rose Ouellette, Juliette Petrie and Manda Parent arguably gave a voice to the women who inhabited the city's working class francophone neighborhoods but had yet to be granted the right to vote in provincial elections.

The present research covers a forty years period beginning with the opening of Montreal's first *bona fide* palace, the Strand, in 1912, and brought to a close by the start of regular television broadcasts by CBC/Radio-Canada in 1952. The events documented in this thesis therefore predate the social, cultural, and political upheaval that unfolded in Quebec in the 1960s. This is not to say, of course, that the Province's film shows had no connection

whatsoever to this eventual turn of event. Indeed, it could be argued that the dissemination of foreign values and ideas facilitated by the era's mass media – newspapers, cinema, and later radio – greatly helped lay the groundwork for Quebec's Quiet Revolution. By showcasing the moving picture shows' indirect yet vital contribution to French-Canadian culture and identity, the story told here will therefore strive to represent cinema as more than the “denationalizing agent” stridently denounced by the nationalist elite of the first half of the twentieth century.

The 1912 opening of the Montreal Strand occurred at a moment where moving pictures, after having been variously marketed as a technological marvel, an amusing novelty, and a plebeian amusement, were finally morphing into a genuine mass media destined to men and women of all classes and origins. In Montreal as in the rest of Canada, cinema's unprecedented popularity, which had rapidly grown in the wake of the opening of the first *scopes* (as early moving picture halls were called in Quebec) and theatoriums in 1905-1906, kept expanding over the first decades of the century, and remained at remarkably high levels for the whole of the four decades examined here. This blessed era for film exhibitors would eventually last until 1952, when television began to deplete theatre audiences and force the film industry to reconsider many of its established practices.<sup>13</sup>

The process that had led to the institutionalization of these practices (and concurrently brought about the marginalization of a wide variety of heterogeneous practices associated with early cinema) was well under way by the time of the Strand's opening. Within a few short years of the appearance of the first movie palaces, it would lead to more stable and homogeneous ways of producing, distributing, and presenting films, as well as to a new, hegemonic, definition of film. By the second half of the 1910s, a “film” had thus come to be widely assumed to be a fictional narrative told with the use of moving pictures (and later

sound), lasting more than an hour but less than two, showcasing stars, displaying high production values, and originating from one of a handful of studios located in Hollywood, California.

This narrow definition of cinema, which in many respects remains current a century later, consecrated one extremely popular use of the new technology of film at the expense of a multiplicity of other past or potential uses of moving images, be they informational, educational, instructional, artistic, or tributary to either local cultures or older media. Still, even the most cursory glance at the programmes advertised by Montreal picture theatres reveals that short nonfiction films, including newsreels, travelogues, and governmental productions, remained an essential part of moving picture shows all through cinema's classical era. On that regard, it is worth noting that, according to Raymond Williams, hegemony is not a unidirectional process permitting one agent to either supplant others, or at the very least forcibly dictate their conduct, but rather a complex, dynamic phenomenon saturating the consciousness of a society to such an extent that it comes to define "the substance and limit of common sense for most people under its sway."<sup>14</sup> This common sense setting limits and exerting pressures however constantly needs to be renewed, recreated and defended, as, still according to Williams, a dominant culture cannot continue to make sense if it grows too detached from the other cultures with which it must cohabit. The strength of hegemonic phenomena consequently lies in their capacity, not to quash, but to incorporate the various subordinate practices, be they residual or emergent, alternative or oppositional, with which they must cohabit.

This incorporation process frequently aims, not to eliminate subordinate cultural practices, but to make them serve the dominant culture. It could therefore be argued that the various informational, educational, and propagandist moving pictures commonly shown

side-by-side with more entertaining views in the early years of cinema were not so much replaced by feature-length fiction films as made to support them. By way of example, classical era Montreal exhibitors seem to have integrated nonfiction films to their programmes partly so as to placate some of the groups critical of the film industry. The exhibition of short nonfiction films endowed with some level of cultural capital or patriotic value was presumably thought to help foster goodwill for movie shows, and consequently to be of some help in the sustained campaign aiming to facilitate the wide-scale importation and presentation of the foreign features actually sought by local audiences.<sup>15</sup>

The particular mixture of imported multi-reel features, short films, and live attractions typical of classical era moving picture theatre programmes became firmly established within a few years of the opening of the Strand. It would remain current up until the early 1950s, when the introduction of television lured many performers away from local theatres and eventually spelled the end of the regular commercial theatrical exhibition of many types of short films, including newsreels, cartoons, and governmental productions. Still, this programme format can be said to have had something of a good run.

The venues where these programmes were exhibited were also characterized by their relative stability over the same period. From the early 1910s until the turn of the 1950s, the majority of film theatres opened in Montreal were comfortable purpose-built venues equipped with proper booths and dual projector setups permitting continuous film screenings. All featured a single screen and auditorium. The locations chosen by exhibitors also remained quite consistent over these four decades: film theatres were either erected in Montreal's central shopping district, which is to say on or near St. Catherine Street, or at the center of the city's various neighborhoods, near public transit routes. This stability of programme formats and theatre sites was further accompanied by that of the distribution

system providing venues with films. Between the turn of the 1920s and the 1950s, the same system based on exclusivity and successive runs separated by protection periods was enforced. This system granted the operators of large, chain-affiliated theatres a privileged access to the few prints circulated by distributors in the Province, and thus vastly contributed to the growing influence exerted by national chains over this period.

It should additionally be noted that the group of agents involved in the Canadian film industry remained surprisingly homogeneous between the 1910s and the 1950s. Moving pictures had been a young man's game in the days of *scopes* nickelodeons, and quite a few of the entrepreneurs and showmen who had first entered the business in the early years of the twentieth century remained active within the industry for most of their active life. Many of the characters featured in the following chapters had entered the industry between 1906 (the Allen brothers) and 1916 (Nathan L. Nathanson), and remained involved until their retirement or passing around the mid-century. The leading Montreal chain, United Amusement, was thus controlled by the same group of local investors led by George Ganetakos from its inception in 1910 until its takeover by Famous Players Canadian Corp. nearly half a century later, in 1959.

The relative stability of the group of individuals and organizations involved in film exhibition in Montreal and Canada between the 1910s and 1950s, combined with that of programme formats, theatre buildings, and distribution models over the same period, arguably makes the four decades covered by this project a coherent unit. Granted, forty years carved out of an eventful recent historical period might seem like a lot of ground to cover in a doctoral dissertation. The fact that some vital aspects of the history of film exhibition in Montreal have already been more than adequately covered by other researchers nevertheless renders it relatively manageable. This dissertation will, for instance, frequently rely on the

research conducted by Dane Lanken, Philip Dombowsky and Pierre Pageau on the style and architecture of Montreal theatres, a topic peripheral yet closely related to the issues of theatre control and programming.<sup>16</sup>

The events unfolding over the some forty years separating the 1912 opening of the Strand from the 1952 beginning of regular television broadcasts in Montreal will be covered in the six chapters (two through seven) following the literature review presented in chapter one. These will be essentially chronological, though emphasis on distinct themes and phenomena will bring about some overlaps between the periods covered by different chapters. Chapter two will be dedicated to the years between 1912 and 1920. In addition to introducing a number of characters destined to play a leading role in the following chapters, this chapter will demonstrate that chains and foreign organizations have always played a significant role in the business of film exhibition in Montreal and Canada. It will further permit me to examine a new type of film theatre introduced in the 1910s, the movie palace, and show how the conception and location of these luxurious establishments reflected cinema's transformation, from a novelty especially popular in the city's francophone neighborhoods, into a mass media truly destined to all groups and classes. The growing rationalization of film distribution, and more particularly the advent of the runs system in the late 1910s will also be covered.

Chapter three, covering the years 1920-1929, will show how these runs came to be separated by lengthy protection periods further strengthening the grasp of chain-affiliated exhibitors on the film market and, in turn, contributing to the marginalization of independent theatres. The chapter's central event will be the creation of Famous Players Canadian Corp., a new national theatre chain led by Nathan L. Nathanson and affiliated to Adolph Zukor's Famous Players-Lasky. The account of Famous Players' first years will more

particularly demonstrate how access to the films produced by the leading US studios largely determined the outcome of the fight between Nathanson and the Allen brothers, whose chain had dominated the Canadian market up until the turn of the 1920s.

The story of Famous Players' rise will moreover illustrate the growing importance of first-run exhibition for the industry, as it will be argued that the national monopoly established by Nathanson by the end of the decade was essentially predicated on Famous Players' takeover of the vast majority of large downtown venues situated across Canada. The issue of Famous Players' control will nevertheless be put into perspective within chapter three by the examination of Nathanson's dealings with the Montreal chain led by George Ganetakos, as it will be revealed that Ganetakos and his partners managed to successfully leverage their in-depth knowledge of local audiences and conditions to keep the control of their theatres in Montreal.

Chapter four and five will deal with the consequences of the two major events affecting the business of film exhibition at the turn of the 1930s: the coming of sound in 1928-1929, and the Great Depression brought about by the 1929 stock market crash. Chapter four will first examine the way established exhibitors reacted to these events. It will be argued that the coming of sound initially contributed to the delocalization of theatre control, as many independents were forced to make deals with Famous Players in order to either fund or hasten the wiring of their theatres. The effects of the Great Depression however seems to have soon offset this situation, as it persuaded chains to return some level of control to local managers in order to fight the early 1930s drop in theatre attendance. This, in turn, permitted local managers to increase their reliance on non-film attractions and policies previously frowned upon, such as double bills, amateur contests, giveaways and bingos.

Chapter five will then permit us to see how the presence of a large French-speaking population in Montreal complicated the local theatre's conversion to sound, and in the process created opportunities for francophone entrepreneurs. Wishing to retain their French-speaking clientele, established exhibitors first experimented with subtitled prints, as well as with the French versions produced with some regularity by US studios in the early years of sound cinema. The discontinuation of the production of French-language versions and prints in the early 1930s however soon gave an edge to the francophone entrepreneurs involved in the importation and exhibition of French pictures. Soon, the popularity and relative abundance of French pictures, boosted by the nationalistic rhetoric of entrepreneurs such as J.A. DeSève, permitted the creation of a network of film theatres essentially dedicated to the presentation of French imports, and thus thoroughly escaping Famous Players' control. This situation led by the decade's end to the establishment of a sort of dual monopoly in Montreal and the Province of Quebec, with Famous Players being involved in the operations of just about every significant theatre or chain showing English-language films, and France-Film in control of numerous venues primarily dedicated to French cinema.

We will then see in chapter six how a new national network engineered by none other than Nathanson, Odeon Theatres of Canada, managed to exploit changing conditions and grab a share of the expanding Montreal film market in the 1940s. Odeon acquired its first Quebec theatres in the wake of an unsuccessful attempt to have the established distribution system favoring Famous Players and its affiliates declared illegal. This situation had visibly convinced the new chain's management to avoid competing head-on with the established chains, and to rather seek to establish its own niche. Odeon thus quickly prospered in Montreal after 1945 by specializing in programmes featuring French-dubbed versions of popular US productions and opening several new theatres in developing francophone

neighborhoods. Introduced in the Province of Quebec by US producers during the 1943-1944 season, dubbing had initially been underutilized by the more established Montreal exhibitors, who might have been somewhat reluctant to step out of their comfort zone.

The continued growth of theatre attendance in the postwar years nevertheless permitted Odeon to develop without doing much harm to established exhibitors, which, in turn, allowed the Montreal film market to reach a renewed stability within a few years of the opening of Odeon's first local venues. While theatre buildings and programme formats were destined to change as a result of the advent of television and the quick growth of car-dominated suburbs at the turn of the 1950s, Famous Players, United Amusement, France-Film and Odeon would eventually stick with the same policies (original versions of US films, French cinema, and French dubs) up until the 1980s.

The final chapter will look at some of the Montreal moving picture theatres marginalized by the trends described in chapters two through six. We will more particularly see how, by making it increasingly difficult for independent exhibitors to obtain films of a relatively recent vintage, vertical integration and the runs system ended up creating much demand for non-film attractions, and thus contributing to the development of the local artistic community. This situation soon led to the rise of new types of popular entertainment such as revues and *burlesque canayen* (different from US burlesque, though derived from the same tradition) particular to Montreal and, to a lesser extent, the francophone regions of the North American Northeast. In time, the pool of local talent developed as a result of the rise of these types of performances enabled the creation of Gratien Gélinas' tremendously popular revues and plays of the late 1930s and 1940s, which were among the very first creations to offer a new portrayal of French-Canadian experience and identity. It will therefore be argued that the appearance of a vast network of moving picture theatres in

Montreal in the early decades of the twentieth century constituted an essential precondition to the revitalization of the French-Canadian public sphere spurred by Gélinas' mid-century work.

As previously stated, the story told by this dissertation does not entirely contradict previous historical accounts. I have nevertheless attempted to seize the opportunity created by the new availability of a number of exceptional historical sources to significantly expand on the various published accounts of cinema's classical era in Montreal and Canada. The current project more particularly relies on a major archival collection recently acquired by Cinémathèque québécoise, the Cinéma Impérial collection. Discovered in the basement of Montreal's Imperial theatre at the time of the latter's transfer by its previous owner, Famous Players, to the Festival des films du monde organization, this collection is made up of about fifteen boxes of assorted documents related to the operations of Famous Players and its Montreal affiliates during the 1920-1990 period. The numerous financial and annual reports, minutes, contracts, and letters contained therein grant us access to a wealth of data pertaining to the management of local theatres, as well as to film bookings, and the evolving relationship of national chains and local exhibitors.

Another exceptional archival resource used over the course of this research is the Régie du cinéma collection held by Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec. Essentially made up of the archives of the board of censors of moving pictures of the Province of Quebec established within a few weeks of the Strand's opening in December 1912, this collection contains, in addition to the censors' notes on just about every film commercially released in Quebec since the board's creation, an incredible amount of data on film distribution in the Province. The board's records have thus variously permitted me to

identify distributors, ascertain release dates, or establish the number of prints available in Quebec for particular titles.

Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec's impressive historical newspapers collection was also extensively used to document the programmes booked by Montreal's numerous film theatres. *La Presse* and the *Montreal Daily Star* were found to have the most complete theatre listings for the years covered by this project, while the digitized version of *La Patrie* made available online by Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec accommodated the constant quick checks necessitated by this research. Several other titles were also intermittently used to gather data on local film shows, including *Le Devoir*, *Le Petit Journal*, *The Montreal Herald*, *The Gazette*, *The Standard*, and *The Axe News*. All of these publications additionally revealed some of the main strands of discourse on cinema in Montreal and the Province of Quebec over the first half of the twentieth century. It should however be noted that the commercial nature of these newspapers generally prevented them from relaying the discourse of the most strident critics of cinema, as moving picture shows were both extremely popular with their mass readership and excellent customers buying advertising spaces on a regular basis. A number of contemporary essays denouncing the corrupting and denationalizing influence of moving pictures have nevertheless been consulted in some of the religious publications unearthed by Quebec film historian Yves Lever.<sup>17</sup>

Another source extensively mined for both data and discourse was the trade press. The *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* edited in Montreal between 1915 and 1918, and then in Toronto until 1957 thus constituted one of the main sources of data on the vertical integration and monopolization of the Canadian film industry in the 1920s. Its colorful editor, Ray Lewis (née Rae Levinsky, and also known as Ms. Joshua Smith), was one of the

very few Canadian women to hold an important position related to the business of film distribution and exhibition. A former child performer, dramatist and scriptwriter, Lewis had briefly been involved in film production in Toronto, New York and California before taking up the editorship of the *Digest* in 1918. These experiences had permitted her to develop a deep understanding of show business and a large network of contacts. The *Digest* was rendered especially valuable by its editor's propensity to put in print the rumors circulating within the industry and otherwise freely express her informed opinions on a wide variety of issues. Lewis also played a major role in the 1931 federal "investigation into an alleged combine in the motion picture industry in Canada" (also known as the White Commission), whose report constitutes another major source of data on the vertical integration and monopolization of the Canadian film industry used by this research. Lewis had long militated for a national public inquiry focusing on Famous Players Canadian Corporation's allegedly monopolistic practices in the *Digest*, and eventually assisted commissioner Peter White when hearings were finally held during the winter of 1931.<sup>18</sup>

The other Toronto-based national trade journal of the era, the *Canadian Film Weekly* edited by Hye Bossin between 1941 and 1964, was rather less indiscreet than its colorful predecessor. It nevertheless contains a massive amount of data on chains, venues, and exhibitors, without which our understanding of the circumstances of the creation and rise of Odeon Theatres of Canada would for instance have been much more limited.

Many US trade journals also commonly published reports dealing with film exhibition in Montreal, partly because Canada was, then as now, regarded as part of the US film industry's domestic market. *The Moving Picture World*, *Wid's*, *The Film Daily*, *The Hollywood Reporter*, and *Variety* have consequently been consulted just as regularly – though less systematically – than their Canadian counterparts. They have proved to be especially valuable

for their numerous pieces revealing the multiplicity of opinions held within the North American film industry in regard to many controversial issues touching on exhibition, such as censorship, centralized scientific management, or the advent of double bills.

It is worth noting that access to many of the aforementioned newspapers and trade journals has been vastly improved over the last few years by the launch of massive digitization projects led by institutions and organizations such as Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec, Google, and the Media History Digital Library.<sup>19</sup> But while this research has indisputably greatly benefited from the availability of these new digital resources, it has also provided much illustration of the limitations of the optical character recognition software (OCR) used to treat many digital collections. A point in case is that of Montreal exhibitor George Ganetakos – possibly the most important character of the story told here – who routinely saw his name misspelled in contemporary sources, and would consequently appear to have led an inconsequential career if the results of OCR enabled searches alone were to be trusted. More importantly, it is my opinion that the exclusive use of automated searches would negate the serendipity that lies at the heart of historical research. With OCR enabled searches, one simply gets what one has asked for, which is to say, more data on what one already knows. The content of the following chapters was, on the contrary, essentially shaped by the results of sustained systematic searches conducted in a wide range of historical sources.

The results of my own personal search expeditions were furthermore augmented by the ambitious researches conducted in Quebec newspapers and periodicals by the Groupe de recherche sur l'avènement et la formation des institutions cinématographique et scénique (GRAFICS), which I have had the opportunity to supervise between 2006 and 2010.<sup>20</sup> This sustained effort has permitted GRAFICS to systematically collect more than 20,000

documents pertaining to moving pictures and amusement places in the issues of *La Presse*, *La Patrie*, and the *Montreal Daily Star* published between 1894 and 1915, and about 10,000 more in a wide variety of Quebec newspapers and periodicals published between 1894 and 1952. It goes without saying that I could not have covered that much ground on my own while researching this humble doctoral dissertation.

The current research's reliance on digital tools and involvement with a wider collaborative effort tend to situate it within the scope of the "new cinema history" described by Richard Maltby.<sup>21</sup> Beyond these superficial affinities, this project also shares new cinema history's "decentred, exploratory and open" practice of historical inquiry and emphasis on systems. In his overview of the multiple new trends in cinema history, Maltby thus claims that:

In short, because the effect of [a film history centered on film production, producers, authorship and films] has been to overlook local irregularities at the microhistorical level in cinema markets (and, indeed, mostly to overlook cinema markets altogether), this has driven an historical account that has significantly elevated the temporal over the spatial or ecological.<sup>22</sup>

While I have sought not to make films entirely irrelevant, this research mostly relies on a wide variety of documents including, but not limited to, corporate records, newspapers, trade journals, insurance maps, official statistics, diaries, and novels to engage the topic of classical era film exhibition in a situated market, that of the city of Montreal.

The approach developed by this thesis could further be said to be ecological in that it posits that film exhibition gains to be situated within a wider context made up of the many heterogeneous agents, groups, practices, and discourses impinging on the activities of local movie shows. It is not sufficient to study the evolution of the practices of an agent over time, as one cannot really understand the programming strategies of a theatre or chain without knowing what the market or opposition was up to. On a more fundamental level,

the local angle of this project further stresses how an industrial media history such as the one proposed here cannot be disentangled from issues pertaining to society, culture, politics, technology, and even from the biographical realities circumscribing the activities of the various agents taking part in it.

The ambiguous status of the agents at the center of this project, that is, of the various film exhibitors active in Montreal, further justifies the syncretic nature of this doctoral thesis. As we will see in the next chapter, studies dealing with cinema have for many decades mostly looked into the production and, to a lesser extent, consumption of films. Exhibitors have therefore tended to fall through the cracks, as they essentially acted as intermediaries between transnational organizations and local audiences. This thesis however aims to demonstrate that if studied from multiple vantage points and properly contextualized, the story of “the fellows who dressed the pictures” can become just as interesting as those of their suppliers and customers, and their contribution shown to be just as essential.

## Endnotes

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- <sup>1</sup> “The Art of Showmanship,” *Canadian Film Weekly* (28 October 1942): 6-7.
- <sup>2</sup> Yves Lever, *J.A. DeSève, diffuseur d'images* (Montreal: Michel Brûlé, 2008), 102-112.
- <sup>3</sup> The definitive work on the contribution of silent film accompanists is Rick Altman's *Silent Film Sound* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004).
- <sup>4</sup> See for instance: Germain Lacasse, *Histoires de scopes: le cinéma muet au Québec* (Montreal: Cinémathèque québécoise, 1988); Germain Lacasse, *Le bonimenteur de vues animées: le cinéma muet entre tradition et modernité* (Quebec City: Éditions Nota bene, 2000); Germain Lacasse, Johanne Massé and Bethsabée Poirier, *Le diable en ville: Alexandre Silvio et l'émergence de la modernité populaire au Québec* (Montreal: Presses de l'Université de Montréal, 2012).
- <sup>5</sup> Lauren Rabinovitz, *For the Love of Pleasure: Women, Movies and Culture in Turn-of-the Century Chicago* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1998), 5-8, quoting Susan Buck-Morss, “The Flâneur, the Sandwichman, and the Whore: The Politics of Loitering,” *New German Critique* 39 (1986): 119.
- <sup>6</sup> Richard Butsch, *The Citizen Audience: Crowds, Publics, and Individuals* (London: Routledge, 2007), 23-39.
- <sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 12-13.
- <sup>8</sup> Rick Altman, “Reusable Packaging: Generic Products and the Recycling Process,” in *Refiguring American Film Genres*, Nick Browne, ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 7.
- <sup>9</sup> Richard Abel, *Americanizing the Movies and “Movie-Mad” Audiences, 1910-1914* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 134.
- <sup>10</sup> Hye Bossin, “On the Square,” *Canadian Film Weekly* (15 July 1942): 3.
- <sup>11</sup> Louis Pelletier and Catherine Russell, “‘Ladies Please Remove Your Hats’: Fashion, Moving Pictures and Gender Politics of the Public Sphere 1907-1911,” *Living Pictures* 1:3 (2004): 61-84.
- <sup>12</sup> “Why Managers Get Young Old; Harland Rankin, One of Them, Gives the Lowdown on the Foibles and Fancies of the Fickle Public – But Maybe He’s Just a Bit Touchy,” *Canadian Film Weekly* (15 April 1942): 6.
- <sup>13</sup> Statistics Canada, Catalog 63-207 (1937-1976), quoted in Pierre-François Hébert and Yvan Lamonde, *Le cinéma au Québec: essai de statistique historique (1896 à nos jours)* (Quebec City: Institut québécois de recherche sur la culture, 1981), 55-57.
- <sup>14</sup> Raymond Williams, “Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory,” in *Culture and Materialism* (London: Verso, 2005), 37. Williams’ discussion of “hegemony” is indebted to Antonio Gramsci’s writings on the subject.
- <sup>15</sup> Abel, *Americanizing the Movies*, 180.
- <sup>16</sup> Philip Dombowsky, *Emmanuel Briffa Revisited*, M.A. thesis, Department of Art History, Concordia University, 1995; Dane Lanken, *Montreal Movie Palaces: Great Theatres of the Golden Era 1884-1938* (Waterloo: Penumbra Press, 1993); Pierre Pageau, *Les salles de cinéma au Québec, 1896-2008* (Quebec City: Les Éditions GID, 2009).
- <sup>17</sup> Yves Lever, *Histoire générale du cinéma au Québec* 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Montreal: Boréal, 1995), 70-79.
- <sup>18</sup> Peter White, *Department of Labour, Canada: Investigation into an Alleged Combine in the Motion Picture Industry in Canada, Report of Commissioner, April 30, 1931* (Ottawa: F.A. Acland, Printer to the King, 1931). On Ray Lewis’s career and involvement in the 1931 White Commission, see: Paul S. Moore and Louis Pelletier, “Une excentrique au coeur de l’industrie: Ray Lewis et le *Canadian Moving Picture Digest*,” *Cinémas* 16:1 (Fall 2005): 59-90.
- <sup>19</sup> Media History Digital Library, <http://mediahistoryproject.org/collections/>, last accessed 19 July 2012.
- <sup>20</sup> I have supervised the selection of titles covered by GRAFICS’ research, as well as the searches conducted by the group’s research assistants and the treatment of the documents thereby collected. In my capacity of scientific coordinator of the websites *Silent Cinema in Quebec*

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([www.cinemamuetquebec.ca](http://www.cinemamuetquebec.ca)) and *Cinema in Quebec: The Talkies and Beyond* ([www.cinemaparlantquebec.ca](http://www.cinemaparlantquebec.ca)) created by GRAFICS in collaboration with Cinémathèque québécoise, the National Film Board of Canada and Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec, and funded by Heritage Canada, I have also had the opportunity to be closely involved with BANQ's digitization projects, and more particularly to recommend the digitization of several newspapers and periodicals of particular interest for film history.

<sup>21</sup> Richard Maltby, "New Cinema Histories," in *Explorations in New Cinema History: Approaches and Case Studies*, Richard Maltby, Daniel Biltereyst and Philippe Meers, eds. (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell Publishing, 2011), 34.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 4, 27.

## Chapter 1

### *A Blind Spot?*

#### *Historians and Classical Era Film Exhibition in Montreal and the Province of Quebec*

A significant number of publications have already covered the early years of cinema in Montreal and the Province of Quebec. The various academic film historians affiliated with the Groupe de recherche sur l'avènement et la formation des institutions cinématographique et scénique (GRAFICS), including André Gaudreault, Germain Lacasse, Jean-Pierre Sirois-Trahan, and Pierre Véronneau, have abundantly published on early film production and exhibition in the Province, as well as on the careers of film pioneers such as Léo-Ernest Ouimet and Georges Gauvreau.<sup>1</sup> But while the work of these researchers has greatly contributed to our understanding of the central role played by cinema in French Canada's<sup>2</sup> encounter with modernity, it has generally restricted itself to the pre-institutional period, which is to say, to the years preceding the completion of the process that eventually turned the new technology of moving pictures into a fully-fledged mass media some time around the mid-1910s.

The years of cinema's acme as a mass media and a form of popular entertainment, which I have argued in my introduction essentially overlap with the period covered by the present dissertation, have paradoxically failed to bring about a commensurate amount of research and publications. Peter Morris's seminal history of film in Canada up until 1939, *Embattled Shadows: A History of Canadian Cinema*, offers a much valuable overview of activities of the numerous organizations and individuals who have attempted to produce films in the country, but provides only cursory remarks on film distribution and the evolution of the

national film market.<sup>3</sup> Morris's pioneering effort was followed by a certain number of studies investigating particular aspects of the history of film production, distribution and exhibition across Canada. These offer a number a tantalizing glimpses on a variety of topics connected to classical era commercial film exhibition in Canada, but consistently eschew a number of fundamental issues and therefore fail to generate a well-rounded picture of this most high-profile and influential phenomenon. Kirwan Cox has for instance researched the rise and fall the Allen theatrical chain, while Paul S. Moore has sketched an invaluable outline of the career of Nathan L. Nathanson and the creation of Odeon Theatres of Canada, and JoAnne Stober examined the coming of synchronized sound in the nation's commercial film theatres.<sup>4</sup> Yet another groundbreaking research is Peter Lester's investigation of itinerant film exhibition and its troubled relationship to the dominant mode of theatrical exhibition.<sup>5</sup>

In Quebec, Véronneau has produced two extremely useful volumes on the distribution and production of French-language features in the Province between 1930 and 1953.<sup>6</sup> These were later complemented by the publication of Yves Lever's thoroughly researched biography of film entrepreneur J.A. DeSève.<sup>7</sup> Lever has also greatly contributed to our understanding of the reaction of the Quebec State and the Catholic clergy to the growing popularity of moving pictures, most notably through his sustained work on the history of film censorship in the Province.<sup>8</sup> The eventful relationship between cinema and the State in Quebec has also been tackled by Christian Poirier. The bulk of the original research presented in the latter's publications however deals with the post-Quiet Revolution era, and thus falls outside the period covered here.<sup>9</sup>

At the national level, Ted Magder has documented the wary attitudes of Canada's elite towards moving pictures as popular entertainment, and showed how the Canadian State has attempted over much of the twentieth century to foster a national film production favoring

other potentials of cinema, such as education, publicity and propaganda. Magder's account of the late development of governmental policies supportive of feature film production however fails to examine the roots of the hegemonic status imparted to multi-reel fiction films since the 1910s. There is simply no attention granted in his otherwise valuable work to the circumstances surrounding the accession of this particular type of production to the most coveted slot of the vast majority of commercial film shows.<sup>10</sup>

The marginal character of Canada's national film production has turned the massive importation of foreign (i.e., US and, to a certain extent, French) films into a central fact of Canadian film history. Many authors have resorted to political economy to explain the omnipresence of foreign films on Canadian screens. Proponents of this approach generally concentrate on media ownership and control, and posit that the structural advantages of large capitalistic organizations significantly restrict access to media, which in turn prevents many groups and individuals from expressing and circulating their experiences, stories, and ideals. This often leads to investigations of how governmental intervention can help restore some level of access to media production, or at least limit the deleterious effects on local and national cultures of the concentration of media ownership. These questions are unquestionably particularly crucial in the field of cinema, where the prohibitive costs associated with both the production and dissemination of films greatly limit from the outset the range of agents permitted to either produce or show moving pictures.

A view shared by many of the authors who have approached film history from a political economy perspective is that the popularity of Hollywood cinema in Canada can essentially be explained by the fact that US studios have long controlled Canadian theatres and deployed superior marketing campaigns. Manjunath Pendakur for instance argues in *Canadian Dreams and American Control: The Political Economy of the Canadian Film Industry* that:

Audiences can only be formed for films that are effectively available to them. The free-choice argument is no more than the myth of consumer sovereignty which masks the demand created by film distributing companies through massive advertising and promotion.<sup>11</sup>

In his volume on the history of governmental film policies in Quebec, Poirier similarly remarks on the wider context of this domination that:

[By 1925], US productions occupied 95% of the British film market, and 70% of the French market. The combined effects of, firstly, the collapse of European film production and, secondly, the fact that US producers could quickly recover their films' negative cost on the domestic market (and thus lower prices on foreign markets) explain this situation.<sup>12</sup>

This approach emphasizing the strategies and structural advantages of the large transnational organizations defending Hollywood's hegemony is obviously not without merit. There are reasons why producers and distributors routinely invest in the marketing of their films sums commensurable with their production budgets.

Still, it is my opinion that Pendakur and Poirier's takes on film history suffer from some of the substantial flaws prevalent in much of the work of film and media experts doing political economy. A first problem area in Pendakur's analysis is that it arguably overestimates the level of control actually exerted by major producers and distributors, who often tend to be depicted by both admirers and opponents as all-seeing and all-knowing master planners. Historical research however seems to relativize the influence exerted by these prominent agents. It is for instance now known, thanks to Susan Ohmer's work on George Gallup, that US producers did not use scientific market studies and opinions polls before the late 1930s. Industry leaders had until then essentially relied on sheer instinct, as seemed to be fitting for the true showmen they imagined themselves to be.<sup>13</sup> It should moreover be reminded that history is replete with situations demonstrating that a film can bomb at the box-office in spite of having benefited from substantial production and marketing budgets. Finally, it does appear that the film industry was on many occasions

seemingly caught short and shaken to its core by situations long foreseen and announced, such as the growing popularity of television in the 1950s or, more recently, the rise of digital technology. That being said, not all studies influenced by political economy prove guilty of overestimating the control actually exerted by industry leaders. Ian Jarvie for instance readily acknowledges in the introduction of his masterly *Hollywood's Overseas Campaign: The North Atlantic Movie Trade* that: “The apparently breezily confident US motion picture industry was far from confident and had a poor grasp of the relevant economic strengths and weaknesses of its major opponent, Britain.”<sup>14</sup>

Jarvie further flags another issue frequently undermining the work of authors doing political economy by noting that, while his research “gives relatively short shrift to the films themselves,” the texts produced by US studios and consumed by local audiences remain central to the explanation of the global hegemony of the US film industry.<sup>15</sup> The present research similarly remains very much informed by my cinephilia and background in film studies, even if it admittedly grants little attention to the style and content of the films exhibited by Montreal theatres. These defining features of my identity as a researcher have permitted me to develop a substantial knowledge and appreciation, not only of Hollywood cinema, but also of several alternative strands of film production, including national (and more particularly Québécois, Canadian, British, and French) cinemas, experimental cinema, documentary, and industrial films. This heightened familiarity with both Hollywood and its alternatives prevents me from entirely subscribing to the analysis of Pendakur and Poirier, for whom the exceptional popularity of Hollywood cinema seems to be a simple function of massive advertising and market control.

Granted, Hollywood's long-standing hegemony is inseparable from the fact that US producers have been permitted to durably define what constitutes “a good film” within a few

decades of the invention of the motion picture apparatus, and thus establish the norms against which most other films (and national film productions) have subsequently been evaluated. I nevertheless agree with the many authors that have argued that this situation does not negate the exceptional qualities of the output of the leading US studios. David Bordwell, Janet Staiger and Kristin Thompson's pioneering in-depth study of classical Hollywood cinema has for instance demonstrated that industrial production was not incompatible with the creation of sophisticated narrative works.<sup>16</sup> Their analysis more particularly foregrounds the fact that the growing economic efficiency of Hollywood's industrial mode of production was reciprocated by that of its narratives, which managed to enforce a series of codes and conventions while making them appear self-evident. Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson's analysis of the complex narrative strategies deployed in the commercial amusements turned out by film studios thus emphasizes the input required from viewers, who must take cues, make deductions, and try to anticipate actions in order to derive gratification from Hollywood's narratives.

Other authors such as Lacasse and Jacqueline Najuma Stewart have further investigated the agency of audiences, who can decide to either play along with the films screened in their local theatres, or attempt to read against the grain, sometimes with the help of external agents such as musicians or lecturers.<sup>17</sup> Their approaches generally reflect the influence of cultural studies, whose main proponents have frequently emphasized the productive dimension of the act of reception.<sup>18</sup> Lacasse and Stewart's studies further share cultural studies' preoccupation with hegemony, identity, subordinate groups, and residual or emergent culture. Their investigation of the actual conditions in which culture, and more particularly cinema, is consumed consequently counters yet another questionable tendency of many of the studies influenced by political economy, which often tend to suggest that the

choices and actions of the individuals making up local audiences are essentially determined by those of industry leaders.

In regard to the study of film as a popular entertainment, the latter tendency generally posits a lack of alternatives to both the texts produced and the venues controlled by major studios. This does not sit well with the work of historians such as Gregory Waller, Jean-Marc Larrue, and André-G. Bourassa, who have documented the wide range of entertainments, theatrical or otherwise, offered in specific communities at particular times, and in the process demonstrated that audiences never were captives of their local moving picture theatres.<sup>19</sup> At the time of the 1912 opening of the Strand, Montrealers seeking amusement could for instance opt to patronize numerous theatrical venues dedicated to legitimate theatre, burlesque, vaudeville and music, attend amateur and professional sport events, or visit amusement parks, penny arcades or wax museums. Outside of the city, options were somewhat less abundant, but still included traditional leisure activities such as sports, games, crafts, reading, dancing, and drinking.<sup>20</sup> In short, historical research clearly shows that one would be wrong to assume that, in Montreal as elsewhere, audiences flocked to US films screenings simply because the transnational organizations controlling venues and distribution networks had crushed all other alternatives.

To posit the reality of the agency of moviegoers and the legitimacy of the attraction exerted by US films is to significantly undermine many of the accounts of how this production came to represent the vast majority of titles screened in Montreal theatres. Lever, Lacasse and Pendakur have all either claimed or suggested that this state of affair was but a simple consequence of the growing control exerted on theatres by vertically integrated organizations.<sup>21</sup> The present research will neither dispute the fact that foreign producers sought to expand their market, nor the ethically questionable character of some of the tactics

deployed by vertically integrated chains in their dealings with independents. It will nevertheless contend that local exhibitors did wish to screen the output of US producers, and that those who eventually consented to join vertically integrated chains did so essentially because they estimated that the ensuing sharing of profits and loss of control over their operations constituted an acceptable trade-off for a steady supply of reliably popular pictures. It must on that regard be emphasized that no exhibitor ever risked being deprived of films to show, as there never was any shortage of old films or non-Hollywood productions lying around. Getting popular pictures before the opposition constituted the main difficulty confronted by exhibitors.

In what follows, I do not primarily describe how US studios sought to impose their productions on Montreal theatres and audiences, but rather how the local film market was structured by the ongoing tension between the interests of foreign film producers and those of local exhibitors. I will more particularly argue that, while the vertically integrated organizations controlled by the studios were primarily trying to maximize their share of box office revenues (which they variously pocketed through rentals, booking fees, and their portion of the net profits of affiliated exhibitors), local exhibitors were mostly preoccupied by their access to films, and more specifically by their run, i.e., their place in the hierarchy of theatres. No exhibitor wanted to be stuck with pictures that had already been in circulation for months and exhibited in several opposition houses. This situation led both camps to make conflicting demands on distributors, as vertically integrated organizations needed films to be withheld from independent screens for as long as possible in order to favor affiliated first and second run venues, while independents wished to show new films as soon as possible after their release.

The diverging needs of vertically integrated organizations and local exhibitors regarding distribution should however not obscure the fact that the interests of both groups frequently coincided. Both parties for instance obviously felt that they benefited from the free circulation of film imports, as demonstrated by the fact that, even at the height of the controversy surrounding Famous Players' treatment of independent theatre owners and block booking (a practice whereby distributors more or less forced exhibitors to contract for groups of pictures typically made up of a few high-profile titles and several lesser productions), no exhibitor ever joined its voice to that of the various politicians and nationalist militants favoring import quotas. A close look at the history of film exhibition in Montreal further suggests that vertically integrated producers at least intermittently understood that their interests could be served by the exertion of a more relaxed form of control on the activities of their local affiliates, as it soon became obvious that locals were best equipped to deal with the difficult conditions prevailing in the city.

Historians have similarly come to acknowledge and investigate the influence exerted by local conditions on the operations of the various agents making up the film industry, as well as on the multiple ways local audiences made sense of the texts disseminated within their community. This newfound interest for localized mediation processes has been fed by the surge in studies dealing with film exhibition over the last few decades. In addition to the aforementioned study on film exhibition and commercial amusement in Lexington, Kentucky, undertaken by Waller, much groundbreaking research on the topic has been conducted by Douglas Gomery, author of the first general history of film exhibition in the United States, *Shared Pleasures: A History of Movie Presentation in the United States*. Gomery has also authored a seminal case study dealing with chain operation and film exhibition in the

city of Chicago, home of the Balaban & Katz chain eventually absorbed by Paramount-Publix, as well as an investigation of the economic rationale for film palaces.<sup>22</sup>

Gomery's pioneering work opened the way for many other research projects dealing with film exhibition and audiences, with Kathryn Helgesen Fuller, Lucy Faire and Mark Jancovich, Russell Merritt, Jeffrey Klenotic, Judith Thissen, and many others contributing essays on a wide range of related issues. Many of these have appeared in anthologies dedicated to film exhibition edited by Waller, Melvyn Stokes and Richard Maltby, and Ina Rae Hark, or in conference proceedings (the Domitor conferences on early cinema have for instance permitted the publication of a great number of local exhibition case studies).<sup>23</sup> These were supplemented by a few valuable biographies detailing the tactics deployed by major figures connected to film exhibition, such as Ross Melnick's recent portrait of quintessential American showman Samuel "Roxy" Rothafel, and Maggie Valentine's insightful monograph on the theatre designs of architect S. Charles Lee.<sup>24</sup>

In Canada, Moore's work on the early years of Odeon Theatres of Canada has shown how the vastly different local conditions prevailing in Toronto, Vancouver and Montreal has led the chain to adopt dissimilar policies in these cities.<sup>25</sup> Lacasse has also conducted much research on early film exhibition in Montreal and the Province of Quebec, and especially on the appropriation tactics devised by traveling exhibitors and local showmen. His work has led him to reassess the relationship between French Canada's oral culture and the new visual media of moving pictures, and more particularly to rediscover the largely forgotten figure of the film lecturer. We now know, thanks to Lacasse's sustained researches on the topic, that film lecturers were employed by some Montreal theatres as late as the 1920s.<sup>26</sup>

The large diffusion Lacasse's work on film lecturers has however had a sort of perverse effect, in that it has led some observers to conclude that the use of film lecturers

still constituted a mainstream or dominant practice in Montreal in the classical era. French scholar Martin Barnier, a leading specialist of early film exhibition, for instance states in a book chapter dedicated to the presentation alternate French-language film versions<sup>27</sup> in Montreal in the early sound era that:

In the 1920s, Quebec's "francophone" theatres were mostly programming US films, whose subtitles were translated and interpreted by Quebecois lecturers. [...] By the end of the 1920s, in the final years of silent cinema, film shows were still essentially oral performances in Quebec.<sup>28</sup>

Lacasse's findings regarding the persistent use of film lecturers by some Montreal theatres in the late silent era certainly constitutes a most fascinating contribution to our knowledge and understanding of local film history. Yet this discovery should not obscure the fact that this practice was ultimately circumscribed to a handful of marginal venues, and consequently not part of the experience of moviegoing for the vast majority of Montrealers, francophone or otherwise. This situation, in turn, establishes the need for more research on the dominant modes of film exhibitions in the classical era, as we have come, quite paradoxically, to know more on peripheral, alternative, and residual practices than we do on the norm that relegated them to the margins.

That being said, several researchers have convincingly demonstrated that, even if film lecturers had ceased to be employed by the vast majority of North American film theatres by the early 1910s, film exhibition largely remained an intermedial phenomenon all-through the classical era. Rick Altman has for instance painstakingly documented the work of the countless musicians hired to accompany silent film screenings up until the coming of synchronized sound in the late 1920s, while Gomery has described the central role played by live prologues in the rise of the theatre chains operated by Balaban & Katz and Paramount-Publix.<sup>29</sup>

Abel and Moore have moreover argued that cinema's eventual transformation into a mass media in the 1910s has largely been facilitated by its symbiotic relationship with newspapers. Their researches have more particularly shown how this relationship went deeper than the fact that the new crop of more luxurious movie theatres that started to appear across North America in the 1910s extensively relied on newspapers for advertisement. Indeed, Moore and Abel have both argued that the commercial press that had quickly developed since the late nineteenth century had greatly contributed to the formation of the mass audience eventually courted by moving pictures. Moore and Abel have moreover outlined the essential role played by newspapers in the creation of the distribution system based on runs enforced throughout the classical era. Their work more particularly suggests that the advent of serial tie-ins in the mid-1910s has greatly helped make explicit the then nascent hierarchy between theatres.<sup>30</sup>

The recent decades have otherwise seen a number of authors turn to the influence of mass media such as newspapers and cinema, and start questioning the numerous charges made against them over the last century by commentators hailing from both the left and the right. Social anthropologist Arjun Appadurai has for instance argued that, contrary to a strand of criticism particularly widespread in progressive circles: “[t]here is growing evidence that the consumption of mass media throughout the world often provokes resistance, irony, selectivity, and, in general, *agency*” [emphasis in original].<sup>31</sup> Appadurai's claim certainly agrees with what we have learned about the narrative strategies of Hollywood cinema in the wake of Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson's influential research, or about the practices of local exhibitors and film lecturers from Lacasse and others.

Still according to Appadurai, this agency often spurred by mass media has the potential to be a factor of social progress:

The imagination – expressed in dreams, songs, fantasies, myths, and stories – has always been part of the repertoire of every society, in some culturally organized way. But there is a peculiar new force to the imagination in social life today. More persons in more parts of the world consider a wider set of possible lives than ever before. One important source of this change is the mass media, which presents a rich, ever-changing store of possible lives, some of which enter the lived imaginations of ordinary people more successfully than others.<sup>32</sup>

To state that mass media can breed progress in spite of being mainly used to introduce a steady flow of exogenous texts in a society or community is not to deny the complex and varied nature of their influence. While I generally subscribe to Appadurai's views on the progressive potential of mass media, it is not my goal to deny *en bloc* the whole case made against the influence of Hollywood cinema on the citizens of Montreal, Quebec, and Canada. It may very well be that cinema's influence was at times either reactionary or, to quote nationalist historian Lionel Groulx, "denationalizing."<sup>33</sup> I nevertheless tend to agree with Charles Acland's assessment of the debate raging in Canada since the advent of mass media at the turn of the last century:

Canadian critics have been notoriously uniform in their apprehension of popular cosmopolitanism as a problem to be attacked and ridiculed, yet they have actively championed other strains of international awareness. The result has been the domination of left critique by a narrow band of rhetoric, squeezing out other progressive possibilities that might give full due to popular practices and understandings.<sup>34</sup>

Though mainly dedicated to the activities of film exhibitors, the current research will attempt to outline some of the progressive possibilities opened by cinema in Quebec, with particular attention being paid to the new medium's contribution French Canada's growing engagement with both modernity and the outside world over the course of the twentieth century.

In addition to fostering agency and generally acting as a carrier for new ideas, values, and "possible lives," cinema has provided a space where, according to Miriam Hansen: "social experience [could be] articulated, interpreted, negotiated, and contested in an

intersubjective, potentially collective, and oppositional form.”<sup>35</sup> Hansen more particularly claims in the seminal *Babel and Babylon: Spectatorship in America Silent Film* that early cinema, “because of its paradigmatically different organization of the relations of reception, provided the *formal* conditions for an alternative public sphere” [emphasis in original].<sup>36</sup> These conditions most notably included the variety format used by early movie shows, as well as a rejection of the rule of silence stifling audience participation in more respectable establishments. Nickelodeons, she argues, “encouraged modes of spectatorial behavior which deviated from middle-class standards of reception – a more participatory, sound intensive form of response, an active sociability, a connection with the other viewer.”<sup>37</sup>

The analysis of early cinema’s alternative public sphere presented in *Babel and Babylon* remains indebted to Jürgen Habermas’s work on the bourgeois public sphere, as well as to Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge’s subsequent examination of, in Hansen’s words, “the historical emergence of competing types of public sphere that cannot be explained in terms of the bourgeois model.”<sup>38</sup> According to Hansen, three distinct but overlapping types of public life collided in early film shows:

the remnants of a bourgeois public sphere (high culture, the Genteel tradition); the new industrial-commercial public spheres (the modern entertainment market with its new middle-class, upwardly mobile, maximally inclusive clientele); the ethnically segregated public spheres drawing on older traditions of working-class and peasant culture.<sup>39</sup>

The institutionalization of cinema, the story goes, eventually diminished the progressive potential of the new media by silencing spectators and uprooting film shows from the multiple local variations on residual working class culture that had shaped them early on. The present research will however demonstrate the persistence of the “scissors effect” described by Hansen, which posits that “the more ambitious and costly the show, the larger and less specific its intended audience.”<sup>40</sup> As we will see, a number of smaller Montreal film

theatres kept showcasing local talent and generally functioning as a meeting place for the members of particular communities all through the classical era.

Still, the fact that the “syncretistic makeup of cinematic publicity” described by Hansen created conditions for appropriation and new meanings does not necessarily imply that this potential for alternative forms of reception was ever actualized on a regular basis. Indeed, Hansen readily concedes that the inaccessible nature of the mental activities of historical audiences renders any kind of empirical demonstration of this phenomenon quite elusive. Taking cues from Negt and Kluge, she nevertheless argues that a potential for “alternative (self-regulated, locally, and socially specific) organization of experience” can be “inferred from the force of negation, from hegemonic efforts to suppress or assimilate any conditions that might allow it.”<sup>41</sup> This claim is reprised by Canadian film historian Scott MacKenzie, who contends in his study of the alternative public sphere conjured by cinema in Quebec that the counterhegemonic potential of moving pictures was mostly demonstrated “by the provincial government’s and the Catholic Church’s fear of the thematic content of films,” as well as by “the concern these institutions had about the large publics which were formed through film screenings.”<sup>42</sup> Outside of the early local actualities produced by Léo-Ernest Ouimet, which in his opinion contributed to the encounter of residual French-Canadian traditions (parades, strong men contests, etc.) with urban modernity, and thus permitted community members to reassess their collective identity in light of changing circumstances, MacKenzie sees little actualization of cinema’s potential as an alternative public sphere in the films produced in Quebec over the first half of the twentieth century.<sup>43</sup>

Work by theatre historians Chantal Hébert, André-G. Bourassa, and Jean-Marc Larrue nevertheless suggests that MacKenzie’s research might have benefited from the inclusion of the whole range of attractions regularly booked by film shows in Quebec to the field of its

inquiry. Hébert, Bourassa and Larrue's findings indeed show that venues initially built and used as moving picture theatres ended playing a major role in the development of a theatrical tradition in Quebec, and more particularly in the local appropriation of foreign theatrical genres such as burlesque and revues.<sup>44</sup> The variety acts and plays presented in Montreal moving picture theatres in-between films permitted local talent to develop, generated local types and stories, and otherwise brought members of groups ill-represented by the current political system to gather and collectively support shows and performers addressing their experiences and actual living conditions.

Sociologist and historian Gérard Bouchard has researched the circumstances that have historically hampered the political representation of the urban working classes in Quebec. In his opinion, this situation was the result of the division of French-Canadian society in the decades following the English Conquest of 1759-1760, and all through the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, between a small elite fixated on the nation's Catholic, rural and pre-revolutionary French heritage, and a population increasingly made up of urban dwellers immersed in North American consumer culture.<sup>45</sup> One notable effect of this schism was the marginalization of the vernacular language spoken in Montreal's working class francophone neighborhoods, which was long eclipsed in public life by the normative Parisian French championed by the elite (and thus used in local highbrow cultural productions) and the English heard in factories, shops, and moving pictures. Lacasse and Hébert have demonstrated that it is partly through the performances of the lecturers and comedians employed by film theatres that this vernacular language emanating from the local population eventually integrated public life.<sup>46</sup>

An exemplary case study delving into the tactics deployed by film exhibitors operating within a marginalized community is Mary Carbine's work on the films shows operating

within the African-American community of Chicago's South Side in the silent era. Carbine's work has more particularly documented the extensive use of black vaudeville performers and musicians fluent in jazz and blues (including Louis Armstrong, Ma Rainey and Bessie Smith) by the South Side's moving picture shows. The data collected over the course of her research has more particularly permitted her to demonstrate that local performers were frequently bigger draws than feature films, as well as to argue that the integration of films and live performances by local talent to the same programmes could significantly alter the dynamic between the film text and the spectator.<sup>47</sup> According to Carbine, this form of "ethnic sponsorship" framing the encounter of immigrant, black and working-class people with mass culture "bolstered community identification and reduced the homogenizing impact of mass entertainment."<sup>48</sup> This, in turn, permits Carbine to claim that "in [the South Side's small, independent] second-run theatres, the practices and products of a national industry were incorporated into both the cultural strategies of the black middle class and the popular activities of black workers."<sup>49</sup>

While one should be careful of hasty comparisons between Chicago's African-American community and Montreal's French-Canadian population, it does appear that both groups resorted to similar tactics when confronted with the new availability of mass cultural texts deemed attractive by their members, but depicting realities ultimately at odds with their experiences. In Montreal as in Chicago, film shows frequently resorted to live performers such as lecturers, comedians or musicians to frame and comment on the films screened. Both cities were moreover the sites of tensions between the boisterous public of lowbrow forms of amusement, be it jazz or French-Canadian burlesque, and a small elite seeking to enforce the norms of an exogenous form of bourgeois respectability.<sup>50</sup>

Carbine's research on Chicago's South Side film shows and Hansen's work on the alternative public sphere of the cinema have provided some of the foundations for Jacqueline Najuma Stewart's insightful analysis of the African-American community's complex relationship to cinema. Stewart's work is of particular interest to the present research for its use of a model positing multiple overlapping public spheres. Her study more particularly describes how:

[...] individuals and groups interacted as constituent parts of larger cultural formations – Black urban public spheres – that coalesced around a variety of overlapping and competing institutions, from traditional, noncommercial venues such as churches to new, commercial entertainments such as the burgeoning film industry.

The notion of overlapping public spheres is central to my conception of Black film culture because it allows me to explore how Black interactions with the cinema were intimately related to other institutions, activities and discourses that were prevalent in Black urban communities in the first two decades of the twentieth century. I seek to describe the way in which the cinema provided space for the production of Black culture, while it also seemed to challenge and circumscribe this process.<sup>51</sup>

Stewart's model consequently permits us to go beyond the hegemonic/counterhegemonic (or alternative) dichotomy, and take into account the full spectrum of groups participating in the ongoing debate on cinema in cities like Chicago or Montreal.

It must however be noted that groups determined by class, economic interests, heritage (ethnic, linguistic, religious), or values (e.g., an interest in art) may not always qualify as public spheres if we are to accept the definition proposed by Nancy Fraser in her critique of Habermas' key concept. Fraser thus describes a public sphere as:

A theater in modern societies in which political participation is enacted through the medium of talk. It is the space in which citizens deliberate about their common affairs, and hence an institutionalized arena of discursive interaction. This arena is conceptually distinct from the state; it is a site for the production and circulation of discourse that can in principle be critical of the state.<sup>52</sup>

Indeed, while many groups maintained venues like newspapers, magazines, clubs, churches, chambers of commerce, and unions where internal debates could be held and wider campaigns launched, some others lacked the means to collectively discuss and define their

interests. It could nevertheless be argued that, as far as cinema was concerned, talk was not the sole means through which the members of marginalized groups could attempt to express themselves and influence things. By way of example, in the years covered by this research, simply going to the pictures on Sunday in Montreal could be decoded a meaningful gesture implicitly countering the influence of a hegemonic group, the Catholic Church, set on imposing its values. In a similar fashion, it also seems quite clear that to attend a type of show scorned by some influential groups, or possibly satirizing established institutions, was a gesture charged with political overtones.

Beyond the question of talk, the model positing multiple public spheres defended by Stewart and Fraser rests on a dynamic conception of identities permitting individuals to be participants in more than one public sphere. According to Fraser, this conception of identity points to a possible way of dealing with situations and conflicts involving multiple public spheres, which would be to use individuals simultaneously attached to the various public spheres concerned by the conflict as mediators. This proposal certainly seems to make sense as far as film exhibition in Montreal is concerned. It thus appears that even in the city's film theatres integrated to national chains, the booking of programmes was often left with local managers who were both experienced showmen (i.e., established members of the transnational film industry) and citizens with deep connections to the local community.

Conversely, the opinions expressed on various issues touching on film exhibition by individuals who were not participants in the film industry frequently seemed to be grossly inadequate. In a 1913 *Montreal Herald* report, a journalist denouncing the fact that about 90% of the films exhibited in the city were US imports for instance militated to have the “dashing, animated storytelling supplied by American [...] firms” replaced in local moving picture theatres by images “of English scenery and waterfalls.”<sup>53</sup> About two decades later,

commissioner Peter White similarly used his prominent position in the investigation of Famous Players' alleged monopoly to launch into an awkward rant against the star-system.<sup>54</sup> His ignorance of the basic facts of film marketing and distribution eventually forced him, as we have seen, to take counsel with the editor of the *Canadian Moving Picture Digest*, Ray Lewis, during the commission's hearings.<sup>55</sup>

The models based on the coexistence and interdependence of multiple public spheres defended by Fraser and Stewart have not simply influenced this research. They may, in actuality, support the main argument in favor of its originality and, thus, legitimacy. Indeed, this dissertation does not relate the "discovery" of a major area of film and communication studies previously ignored, describe a particular practice undocumented in previous historical accounts, or unearth a previously forgotten agent. It does, however, put forward a systemic approach investigating how different groups variously defined by their identities, interests or activities have found themselves involved in complex negotiation processes involving moving pictures. The approach developed here is consequently based on both the extensive original research I have conducted on a range of various heterogeneous phenomena touching on film exhibition in Montreal, and on the advances made in multiple areas by the numerous authors quoted over the last few pages. Such knowledge, and such a systemic approach, cannot be completed definitively by one single researcher. But after more than three decades of sustained research on assorted phenomena related to film exhibition, now might finally be the time to go for it.

## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> See for instance: André Gaudreault, Germain Lacasse and Jean-Pierre Sirois-Trahan, *Au pays des ennemis du cinéma... pour une nouvelle histoire des débuts du cinéma au Québec* (Quebec City: Nuit blanche, 1996); *Filmographie des "vues" tournées au Québec au temps du muet*, <http://cri.histart.umontreal.ca/grafics/fr/filmo/default.asp>, last accessed 20 July 2012.

<sup>2</sup> Throughout this thesis, I have mostly used "French Canada" to designate the French-speaking population concentrated in the Province of Quebec, but also spreading to other Canadian Provinces, as well as to the Northeastern United States, and "French-Canadians" to designate its members. Another historically correct term would have been "Canadiens" (or its jocular equivalent, *Canayen*), which was widely used up until the mid-twentieth century to designate the members of the same French-speaking community – as demonstrated by the fact that the Montreal National Hockey League created in 1909 to represent French-Canada was simply named "Les Canadiens." I have however judged that this particular label would have been too confusing in the context of this thesis. "Québécois/Quebecer," which, to further confuse things, has become since the Quiet Revolution of the 1960s the main label for both the inhabitants of the Province of Quebec as a whole and the Province's francophone culture, has been used here to designate all of the inhabitants of the Province of Quebec, with no regard to the linguistic or ethnic communities with which they might identify.

<sup>3</sup> Peter Morris, *Embattled Shadows: A History of Canadian Cinema 1895-1939* (Montreal/Kingston: McGill/Queen's University Press, 1992 [1978]).

<sup>4</sup> Kirwan Cox, "The Rise and Fall of the Allens: The War for Canada's Movie Theatres," *Loneragan Review* no. 6 (2000): 44-81; Paul S. Moore, "Nathan L. Nathanson Introduces Canadian Odeon: Producing National Competition in Film Exhibition," *Canadian Journal of Film Studies* 12:2 (Fall 2003): 22-45; JoAnne Stober, *Wired for Sound: Conversion to Synchronized Sound in Canada, 1926-1934*, PhD thesis, Department of Communication Studies, Concordia University, 2009.

<sup>5</sup> Peter Lester, *Cultural Continuity and Technological Indeterminacy: Itinerant 16mm Film Exhibition in Canada, 1918-1949*, PhD thesis, Department of Communication Studies, Concordia University, 2008.

<sup>6</sup> Pierre Véronneau, "Le succès est au film parlant français (Histoire du cinéma au Québec I)," *Les dossiers de la Cinémathèque* no. 3 (Montreal: Cinémathèque québécoise, 1979); "Cinéma de l'époque duplessiste (Histoire du cinéma au Québec II)," *Les dossiers de la Cinémathèque* no. 7 (Montreal: Cinémathèque québécoise, 1979).

<sup>7</sup> Yves Lever, *J.A. DeSève: diffuseur d'images* (Montreal: Michel Brûlé, 2008).

<sup>8</sup> Yves Lever, *L'Église et le cinéma*, M.A. thesis, Department of Theology, Université de Montréal, 1977; Pierre Hébert, Yves Lever and Kenneth Landry, *Dictionnaire de la censure au Québec: littérature et cinéma* (Montreal: Fides, 2006); Yves Lever, *Anastasia ou la censure du cinéma au Québec* (Montreal: Septentrion, 2008).

<sup>9</sup> Christian Poirier, *Le cinéma québécois à la recherche d'une identité*, volume 2: *Les politiques cinématographiques* (Quebec City: Presses de l'Université du Québec, 2004).

<sup>10</sup> Ted Magder, *Canada's Hollywood: The Canadian State and Feature Films* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993).

<sup>11</sup> Manjunath Pendakur, *Canadian Dreams and American Control: The Political Economy of the Canadian Film Industry* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1990), 32.

<sup>12</sup> Poirier, *Le cinéma québécois à la recherche d'une identité*, volume 2, 156. Author's translation.

<sup>13</sup> Susan Ohmer, *George Gallup in Hollywood* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006). See also: Leo A. Handel, "Hollywood Market Research," *Quarterly of Film, Radio, and Television* 7:3 (Spring 1953): 304; Arthur Mayer, *Merely Colossal: The Story of the Movies from the Long Chase to the Chaise Longue* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1953), 37-38.

<sup>14</sup> Ian Jarvie, *Hollywood's Overseas Campaign: The North Atlantic Movie Trade, 1920-1950* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992) 8.

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., xiv, 3-12.

<sup>16</sup> David Bordwell, Janet Staiger et Kristin Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985).

<sup>17</sup> Germain Lacasse, *Le bonimenteur de vues animées: le cinéma muet entre tradition et modernité* (Quebec City: Éditions Nota bene, 2000); Jacqueline Najuma Stewart, *Migrating to the Movies: Cinema and Black Urban Modernity* (Berkeley: University Press of California, 2005).

<sup>18</sup> See for instance Stuart Hall's seminal essay, "Encoding/decoding," in *Culture, Media, Language*, S. Hall, D. Hobson, A. Lowe and P. Willis, eds. (London: Hutchinson, 1980), 128-138.

<sup>19</sup> Gregory Waller, *Main Street Amusements: Movies and Commercial Entertainment in a Southern City, 1896-1930* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1995); Jean-Marc Larrue, *L'activité théâtrale à Montréal de 1880 à 1914*, PhD thesis, Department of Études françaises, Université de Montréal, 1987; André-G. Bourassa and Jean-Marc Larrue, *Les nuits de la "Main": cent ans de spectacles sur le boulevard Saint-Laurent, 1891-1991* (Montreal: VLB, 1993).

<sup>20</sup> For an exhaustive list of early twentieth century amusements, see Waller, *Main Street Amusements*, xiv-xvii.

<sup>21</sup> Yves Lever, *Histoire générale du cinéma* 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Montreal: Boréal, 1995), 42; Germain Lacasse, *Histoires de scopes: le cinéma muet au Québec* (Montreal: Cinémathèque québécoise, 1988), 77; Pendakur, *Canadian Dreams and American Control*, 59.

<sup>22</sup> Douglas Gomery, "The Picture Palace: Economic Sense or Hollywood Nonsense?," *Quarterly Review of Film Studies* 3:1 (Winter 1978): 23-36; *Shared Pleasures: A History of Movie Presentation in the United States* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992).

<sup>23</sup> Kathryn H. Fuller, *At the Picture Show: Small-Town Audiences and the Creation of Movie Fan Culture* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1996); Lucy Faire et Mark Jancovich, *The Place of the Audience: Cultural Geographies of Film Consumption* (London: BFI Publishing, 2003); Richard Maltby, Melvyn Stokes and Robert C. Allen, eds., *Going to the Movies: Hollywood and the Social Experience of Cinema* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2007); Gregory A. Waller, ed. *Moviegoing in America*, (Malden, Mass./Oxford: Blackwell, 2002); Ina Rae Hark, ed., *Exhibition: The Film Reader* (London/New York: Routledge, 2002); Frank Kessler and Nanna Verhoeff, eds., *Networks of Entertainment: Early Film Distribution 1895-1915* (London: John Libbey, 2007); Marta Braun, Charlie Keil, Rob King, Paul S. Moore and Louis Pelletier, eds., *Beyond the Screen: Institutions, Networks and Publics of Early Cinema* (London: John Libbey, 2012).

<sup>24</sup> Ross Melnick, *American Showman: Samuel "Roxy" Rothafel and the Birth of the Entertainment Industry, 1908-1935* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012); Maggie Valentine, *The Show Starts on the Sidewalk: An Architectural History of the Movie Theatre, Starring S. Charles Lee* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994).

<sup>25</sup> Moore, "Nathan L. Nathanson Introduces Canadian Odeon," 22-45.

<sup>26</sup> Germain Lacasse, in collaboration with Serge Duigou, *L'Historiographe: les débuts du spectacle cinématographique au Québec* (Montreal: Cinémathèque québécoise, 1985); Lacasse, *Le bonimenteur de vues animées*; Germain Lacasse, "Joseph Dumais and the Language of French-Canadian Silent Cinema," in *Early Cinema and the National*, Richard Abel, Giorgio Bertellini and Rob King, eds. (London: John Libbey, 2008), 206-14; Lacasse, Massé and Poirier, *Le diable en ville*.

<sup>27</sup> Alternate language versions were foreign language versions usually produced concurrently with the original English language version, but with a slightly different cast. See chapter 5.

<sup>28</sup> Martin Barnier, *Des films français made in Hollywood: les versions multiples, 1929-1935* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2005), 175-76. Author's translation.

<sup>29</sup> Rick Altman, *Silent Film Sound* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004); Gomery, *Shared Pleasures*, 50-53.

<sup>30</sup> Richard Abel, "A Marriage of Ephemeral Discourses: Newspapers and Moving Pictures," *Cinema & Cie* no. 1 (Fall 2003): 59-83; Richard Abel, *Americanizing the Movies and "Movie-Mad" Audiences, 1910-1914* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006); Paul S. Moore, "Movie Palaces on Canadian Downtown Main Streets: Montreal, Toronto, and Vancouver," *Urban History Review* 32:2

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- (Spring 2004): 3-20; Paul S. Moore, "Everybody's Going: City Newspapers and the Early Mass Market for Movies," *City and Community* 4:4 (December 2005): 339-357.
- <sup>31</sup> Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1996), 7.
- <sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.
- <sup>33</sup> From a 1918 speech at the Monument National quoted in *L'Action française* (July 1924): 3; in turn quoted in Scott MacKenzie, "A Screen of One's Own: Early Cinema in Quebec and the Public Sphere 1906-28," *Screen* 41:2 (Summer 2000): 197.
- <sup>34</sup> Charles R. Acland, *Screen Traffic: Movies, Multiplexes, and Global Culture* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 238.
- <sup>35</sup> Miriam Hansen, "Early Cinema, Late Cinema: Transformations of the Public Sphere," in *Viewing Positions: Ways of Seeing Film* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1995), 140.
- <sup>36</sup> Miriam Hansen, *Babel and Babylon: Spectatorship in American Silent Film* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), 90.
- <sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 94-96.
- <sup>38</sup> Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1991 [1962]); Hansen, *Babel and Babylon*, 11; Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge, *Public Sphere and Experience: Toward an Analysis of the Bourgeois and Proletarian Public Sphere* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).
- <sup>39</sup> Hansen, *Babel and Babylon*, 114.
- <sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 101.
- <sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 91; "Early Cinema, Late Cinema," 148.
- <sup>42</sup> MacKenzie, "A Screen of One's Own," 183.
- <sup>43</sup> Scott MacKenzie, *Screening Québec: Québécois Cinema, National Identity and the Public Sphere* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), 67-111.
- <sup>44</sup> Chantal Hébert, *Le burlesque au Québec: un divertissement populaire* (Montreal: Hurtubise HMH, 1981); Bourassa and Larrue, *Les nuits de la "Main."*
- <sup>45</sup> Gérard Bouchard, "Une ambiguïté québécoise: les bonnes élites et le méchant peuple," *Présentation* (1985-1986): 29-45; Gérard Bouchard, *Genèse des nations et cultures du Nouveau Monde: essai d'histoire comparée* (Montreal: Boréal, 2000).
- <sup>46</sup> Chantal Hébert, "Sur le burlesque: un théâtre 'fait dans notre langue'," *Jeu: revue de théâtre* no. 18 (1981): 19-31; Lacasse, "Joseph Dumais and the Language of French-Canadian Silent Cinema," 206-214.
- <sup>47</sup> Mary Carbine, "'The Finest Outside the Loop': Motion Picture Exhibition in Chicago's Black Metropolis, 1905-1928," *Camera Obscura* 8:2 (1990): 12, 31.
- <sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.
- <sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.
- <sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 27-31.
- <sup>51</sup> Stewart, *Migrating to the Movies*, 12.
- <sup>52</sup> Nancy Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy," in *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, Craig Calhoun, ed. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992), 110-111.
- <sup>53</sup> *Montreal Herald* (26 April 1913): 1.
- <sup>54</sup> "Pay of Film Stars Outrageous Commissioner Says at Probe," *Toronto Mail and Empire* (5 March 1931).
- <sup>55</sup> Paul S. Moore and Louis Pelletier, "Une excentrique au coeur de l'industrie: Ray Lewis et le *Canadian Moving Picture Digest*," *Cinémas* 16:1 (Fall 2005): 60-63.

## Chapter 2

### *Movie Palaces and the Rationalization of Film Distribution (1912-1919)*

Moving pictures were already firmly established as a democratic pastime by the year 1912, which marked the outset of the movie palace era in Montreal. This state of affairs was largely attributable to the work of the numerous theatre operators and traveling showmen who had tirelessly used and promoted film since the local début of the Edison Kinetoscope in late 1894. This chapter consequently does not concern itself with how cinema entered the daily life of Montrealers, but rather with the initial phase of the rationalization process that transformed film exhibition and distribution between 1912 and 1920, and in the process set the groundwork for the strong push towards vertical integration of the 1920s.

A transnational phenomenon since its inception in the late nineteenth century, the film industry had always been driven to integration and rationalization. The brief survey of the early years of moving pictures in Montreal opening this chapter will thus reveal that chains and foreign agents have been involved in the presentation of films in the city from the very first day. What changed over the years covered by this chapter is not so much the origin of the individuals and organizations involved in film distribution and exhibition in the city as the way commercial film productions were disseminated and presented. This change was epitomized by the local introduction in 1912 of a new type of venue primarily dedicated to moving pictures. Dubbed “movie palaces,” these pretentious structures, which included the Strand (1912), the Imperial (1913), the Théâtre St. Denis (1916), and the Loew’s (1917), sought to expand the new medium’s audience by aligning moving pictures with middle class respectability. The advent of this new class of film theatres accompanied the transformation

of the films themselves, which became over the same period both longer and more ambitious from a narrative point of view.

We will also see how the opening of Montreal's first movie palaces shifted the center of the local film market to the predominantly anglophone west end of the city, and contributed to the creation of a hierarchy of film venues. The latter was determined by the location and physical properties – size, luxurious appearance – of theatres, but also by their level of access to the limited number of film prints handled by local exchanges. This organization of the city's theatres into runs was one of the essential features of the rationalized film distribution model developed concurrently with new types of film productions and exhibition venues. It would soon structure the local film market by accentuating the distinction between downtown palaces showing first-run films and peripheral movie houses making up for their lack of access to recent film productions by frequently booking local comedians, singers or lecturers. The advent of the palace era consequently did not bring the passing of the previous paradigm of film exhibition relying heavily on local agents and intermediality, but rather the widening of the range of experiences offered by film shows. It will consequently be argued that the evolution of the Montreal film market in the late 1910s enabled different types of contribution of the new medium to the life of local communities, as posited by Miriam Hansen.

### **Before the Palace: an Overview of Film in Montreal Between 1894 and 1912**

Moving pictures were first introduced in Montreal in November of 1894 when four Edison Kinetoscopes permitting the individual viewing of moving images were installed in the offices of the *Montreal Daily Star*.<sup>1</sup> This exhibition had been organized by the Holland brothers, stenographers at the Canadian federal Parliament in Ottawa, who had also been

responsible for the opening of the first Kinetoscope parlor earlier the same year in New York City. About a year and a half later, on July 21, 1896, the Hollands arranged for the first motion picture projector marketed by the Edison Co., the Vitascope, to be used in an exhibition held in an Ottawa park.<sup>2</sup> While this event has long been believed to mark the introduction of (projected) motion pictures in Canada, it has eventually been demonstrated that the Vitascope exhibition had actually been preceded by a public demonstration of the Cinématographe Lumière held in Montreal on June 27, 1896, that is, on the exact same day as the New York début of the Lumière's apparatus.<sup>3</sup>

Moving pictures were mostly exploited by traveling showmen over the decade that followed these fairly successful initial exhibitions. In the Province of Quebec, one of the most active early traveling film exhibition outfits was operated by two French Breton expatriates, countess Marie de Kerstrat and her son Henri de Grandsaignes d'Hauterives. Between the fall of 1897 and 1905, the duo took its Historiographe through no less than nine tours covering the Province of Quebec and other adjacent North-American territories.<sup>4</sup> Another traveling company active in Quebec between the spring of 1903 and 1906 was F. Guy Bradford's London Bioscope Co., whose show reprised the title of the popular *Living Canada* film series produced in 1902 and 1903 by Joseph Urban for the Canadian Pacific Railway. Bradford had first come to Canada from England to assist cinematographer Joseph Rosenthal with the production of this series, and later continued to take and exhibit local films while traveling with his show.<sup>5</sup>

Montreal's various theatres and amusement places also frequently used short film screenings to pad their shows in the early years of moving pictures. For instance, the US-based vaudeville chain Proctor's hired Edison licensee William Paley in early 1901 to add moving pictures to the shows it was putting on at the His Majesty's theatre, then one of

Montreal's most prestigious venues. Paley regularly exhibited a mixture of imported and local films taken in and around the city with the help of his Kalatechnoscope until the end of Proctor's tenure at the His Majesty's in late 1902.<sup>6</sup>

Moving pictures were also one of the mainstays of the well-attended shows presented in the vast pavilion of the Parc Sohmer from 1897 onwards. In the early 1900s, the park's main film supplier was the New York-based Kinetograph Co., an Edison affiliate, who put one of its men in charge of the film screenings presented at both the Parc Sohmer and the Théâtre National Français, then controlled by one of the park's promoters, Georges Gauvreau. The park's management however soon found the expenses involved in having the Kinetograph's man come up from New York on a weekly basis excessive, and requested that a gifted electrician at its employ, one Léo-Ernest Ouimet, be permitted to take over the screenings. The New York company acquiesced to the park's demand, and even made Ouimet its Eastern Canadian representative.<sup>7</sup>

Ouimet's new gig as a projectionist seems to have soon convinced him that the commercial potential of moving pictures was still largely untapped in Quebec. The electrician consequently went out looking for a venue where he could run his show on a more permanent basis, and eventually found the Salle Poiré, a modest hall located on St. Catherine East and previously used as a café-concert. Ouimet took a lease on the building and converted it into a moving picture hall, which he proceeded to name the Ouimetoscope. The inauguration of Ouimet's first moving picture theatre on January 1<sup>st</sup>, 1906, came within months of the appearance of the first US nickelodeons, and has rightfully been recognized as a key moment in Canadian film history. It should however be noted that in Montreal, the opening of the Ouimetoscope had actually been preceded by that, one week before, of the Bijou operated by F. Guy Bradford in a hall located on the corner of St. Lawrence Boulevard

and Lagachetière.<sup>8</sup> The Bijou and the Ouimetoscope both programmed the same type of shows (moving pictures interspersed with illustrated songs and variety acts), but did not succeed equally. By the fall of 1906, Ouimet was reaping a fortune at the Ouimetoscope and branching out into film production and distribution, while Bradford had left Montreal and the Bijou for the Maritimes, where he would manage a string of theatres over the next few years.<sup>9</sup>

Ouimet's rapid rise seems to be attributable to several factors, not the least being his vivacious character, keen business sense, and deep connection to the community he was serving. Contrarily to Bradford, Paley, Kerstrat and d'Hauterives, the Laval-born Ouimet had actually lived and worked in Quebec prior to the start of his film career. This strong connection to the community he was serving was reflected in the programmes he assembled for his Ouimetoscope, and more particularly by his use of French-speaking performers and production of local actualities chronicling the life of his French-Canadian fellow citizens.<sup>10</sup> Another situation favoring the initial success of Ouimet's film enterprise was the relatively free access to the output of most major moving picture that producers still granted to exhibitors at the time of the Ouimetoscope's opening. Nothing prevented Ouimet from buying the latest reels released by Edison, Pathé, and the various other US and European producers then active, screening them in his theatre, and then renting them to other exhibitors.

Ouimet's sensational success quickly bred many imitators. In the months following the opening of the Ouimetoscope, several other moving picture halls appeared in Montreal. Soon known locally as "*scopes*", these local variants on the US nickelodeons and Canadian theatoriums could mostly be found in the city's bustling working class and francophone neighborhoods, with St. Catherine Street East, St. Lawrence Boulevard, and Notre-Dame

Street featuring the highest concentrations. In the spring of 1907, Ouimet's old employer, Gauvreau, upped the ante by opening the city's first purpose-built film theatre, the 1,100-seat Nationoscope, a few blocks west of the Ouimetoscope on St. Catherine Street East.<sup>11</sup> Ouimet quickly responded by purchasing the building housing his venue, tearing it down, and building the luxurious 1,200-seat film theatre known to historians as the "second Ouimetoscope." Montreal thus boasted two relatively large purpose-built film theatres by the fall of 1907, at a time when most other North American cities, including New York and Toronto, were exclusively equipped with converted moving picture halls seating a few hundreds.<sup>12</sup> The manager of British Gaumont, Alfred Claude Bromhead, gave testimony to this situation at the conclusion of a North American tour in April 1908 by stating to *The Moving Picture World* that "the best shows of all" could be found in Montreal.<sup>13</sup> This statement was later corroborated by none other than Marcus Klaw, from the mighty New York-based Klaw & Erlanger theatrical organization, who declared some time around 1910 to a *Montreal Daily Star* reporter that: "It is only since my present visit to Montreal, and seeing your motion picture theatres, that I realized the possibility of such entertainments, or their popularity."<sup>14</sup>

The exceptional early success of moving pictures in Montreal might have been somewhat related to the quick growth of the city's French-speaking community. Fed by the influx of French-Canadians trying to escape the difficult conditions plaguing Quebec's rural areas, this group, which had been a minority in Montreal for most of the nineteenth century, got to account for more than 50% of the city's population by the turn of the 1910s.<sup>15</sup> Various facts indeed suggest that Montreal's growing French-Canadian community was starved for amusement at the turn of the twentieth century. The modest size of the local market, to begin with, had likely hampered the development of the francophone artistic

community. It also did not help that most local venues dedicated to legitimate theatre, burlesque and vaudeville were at the time integrated to North American touring circuits, and consequently mostly booked US acts, companies and shows. According to theatre historian Jean-Marc Larrue, the J.B. Sparrow Theatrical and Amusement Co., which was at the time the Montreal representative of the New York-based Syndicate controlling much of the North American theatrical market, operated in 1905 most of the leading Montreal theatres, including the Académie de Musique, the Théâtre Français, the Théâtre Royal, and the His Majesty's theatre (which it had just taken back from Proctor's). Larrue further estimates that by 1903 Montreal's four leading English theatrical venues – the Proctor's, the Théâtre Royal, the Académie de Musique, and the Théâtre Français (the only French thing about the last three theatres being their name) – totaled 9,000 seats, against 3,200 for the city's main two French theatres, the Théâtre des Nouveautés and the Théâtre National.<sup>16</sup>

Ouimet prospered between 1906 and the early 1910s by offering a novel form of amusement in a location situated near the center of Montreal's French-Canadian community. His shows managed to create a truly local form of entertainment out of programmes largely composed of imported moving pictures, most notably through the use, both during projections and in-between reels, of local performers such as musicians, singers and lecturers. The latter, it should be noted, did much more than translate the titles inserted in foreign films: as thoroughly documented by Germain Lacasse, the lecturers commonly employed by the city's *scopes* often deployed appropriation strategies adding new layers of meaning to the films they were accompanying. They often contributed additional narrative information, explained the foreign customs depicted, or otherwise freely commented on the films screened. Some of them also tried to create a bond with the *scopes*' public by using the local vernacular, while others touted their use of normative French as educational. In the still

largely oral culture of French Canada, the performances of lecturers such as Alex Silvio and Joseph Dumais could render them just as popular with audiences as the films they were supposedly accompanying.<sup>17</sup>

Beyond the type of shows he pioneered, Ouimet's early success can also be explained by the fact that he had chosen to treat other exhibitors more like potential customers than rivals. By the summer of 1907, Ouimet had thus become Eastern Canada's main provider of films, having opened film exchanges handling Pathé (then the world's leading film manufacturer), Edison, Vitagraph, Méliès, Selig, Kalem and Biograph releases in Montreal, Saint John (New Brunswick) and Toronto.<sup>18</sup> Many of the local actualities produced for exhibition at the Ouimetoscope over these years were also distributed through this network.<sup>19</sup>

Difficulties however soon piled up for Ouimet and the other film exhibitors and distributors operating in Quebec, largely as a result of the Province's Catholic clergy growing opposition to cinema. Visibly worried by the phenomenal popularity of moving pictures, the Church had launched into an all-out war against this new form of popular entertainment in the months that followed the opening of the Nationscope and second Ouimetoscope. Seeing that its prohibition on commercial amusements on Sundays had little effect on its followers, who massively attended moving picture shows on what often constituted their sole day of rest, the Church launched a campaign aiming to prevent the *scopes* from operating on the Lord's Day. It pressured the local and provincial authorities into plugging the loopholes in the extant blue laws that appeared to permit the operation of commercial moving picture shows on Sundays and taking action against the offending *scopes* operators. The Sunday question ended up being debated in court over the course of several suits and countersuits before it was (temporarily, as we will see in Chapter 4) brought to a close by a

decision of the Supreme Court of Canada in May of 1912. The country's highest court determined that the recent municipal and provincial bans on Sunday screenings adopted in Quebec encroached on a federal jurisdiction, and consequently declared them invalid. This made Quebec the sole Canadian Province where such screenings remained legal, as it seems that no Canadian exhibitor dared to invoke the ruling of the Supreme Court in order to have the ban annulled in other Provinces.<sup>20</sup>

But the fight over Sunday screenings was only one of the many fronts on which the Catholic clergy opposed moving pictures. By the early 1910s, the Church was also militating for a ban on the admission of children in commercial moving picture theatres, as well as for film censorship. On these fronts, it would soon obtain some satisfaction. On March 24, 1911, a law preventing moving picture shows from admitting children under fifteen years of age unaccompanied by a guardian was sanctioned by the provincial government.<sup>21</sup> While this law seems to have never been strictly enforced, another law sanctioned on December 4, 1912 (tellingly, only three days before the opening of Montreal's first movie palace, the Strand) proclaimed the creation of the Board of Censors of Moving Pictures of the Province of Quebec. It would durably affect the Province's young moving picture industry. The new law stated that, starting on May 1<sup>st</sup>, 1913, all 35mm films exhibited in the Province would have to be examined to abide by the Board's exhaustive list of prohibitions, which included "violent and immoral scenes," divorces, suicides, "fights with suggestive outcomes," "scenes liable to warp the moral judgment of children and lead them to confuse good and evil," "scenes injurious to patriotism," and "scenes where religion and its ministers are mocked." Films found to be in contravention of the Board's list of prohibitions would then either be cut or outright banned. After a few high-profile controversies in the first few months of operation of the Board, the censors decreed that they would not divulge their proceedings.<sup>22</sup>

The Board's opacity and often quite esoteric list of prohibitions ensured that much resentment would be bred by its *modus operandi* and decisions over the following decades.<sup>23</sup>

These unending confrontations with the Catholic clergy and its allies diverted much of the time and resources of Quebec exhibitors. Ouimet's involvement in the Sunday fight had for instance forced him to squander a good deal of his time, money, and energy in a legal fight at a time when most agents active in the field across North America were fast expanding. Exhaustion actually forced Ouimet to semi-retire from the business in 1910, when he contracted dysentery while filming the Montreal Eucharist Celebrations, possibly in the hope of assuaging the Catholic clergy. Ouimet would only return to the film business in 1914 for the creation of Pathé's Famous Feature Films Syndicate of Quebec, later known as Specialty Film Import.<sup>24</sup> The nascent Quebec film industry consequently found its foremost pioneer out of commission by the time of the appearance of the first movie palaces in 1912-1913. Ouimet would eventually entirely get out of the exhibition sector in the mid-1910s as a result of his distribution deal with Pathé, which prevented him from competing with the theatres he was supplying films to.<sup>25</sup> The Ouimetoscope was leased, and then sold by Ouimet.

Ouimet's difficulties at the turn of the 1910s had further been compounded by the formation in 1908 of the Motion Picture Patents Co. by a group of producers led by the Edison Film Manufacturing Co. Soon after its organization, the Patents Co. decided to release its films through its own Canadian representatives rather than through the Ouimet Film Exchange.<sup>26</sup> According to Ouimet's nephew and biographer, Léon H. Bélanger, the Patents Co. had been pressured into taking the Edison franchise back from the Montreal entrepreneur by two vaudeville chains, Bennett's and B.F. Keith, that had recently turned to moving pictures in order to boost attendance.<sup>27</sup> Based in London, Ontario, Bennett's had

just inaugurated a luxurious “high-class” vaudeville theatre in Montreal in 1907. As for the Boston-based Keith organization, it had opened between April 1907 and January 1908 a string of Nickel Theatres in Saint John (New Brunswick), Sydney, Halifax, St. John’s (Newfoundland), Quebec City, Montreal, Ottawa and Toronto. Film pioneer F. Guy Bradford had been put in charge of Keith’s Canadian film theatres, while the management of the Montreal Nickel had been entrusted to Howard Conover, who would eventually remain at the employ of the chain until the takeover of Keith’s Montreal assets by Famous Players in 1929.<sup>28</sup>

The fact that Montreal’s Nickel and Bennett’s theatres were among the very first venues primarily dedicated to film to appear on St. Catherine Street West suggests that both chains primarily targeted the city’s anglophone community. This might be because the presence of several *scopes*, including the large Ouimetoscope and Nationoscope, in francophone neighborhoods gave the impression that the market was already saturated in the east end, or more simply because the owners of the Keith and Bennett’s chains felt that they had a better grasp on the city’s anglophone market. The latter hypothesis seems to be corroborated by the failure of Bennett’s short-lived occupation of the Théâtre des Nouveautés located on St. Catherine Street just east of St. Lawrence Boulevard. Converted into the “Bennett’s-Nouveautés” in December 1908, the venue briefly attempted to lure customers with shows made up of moving pictures and other assorted attractions, which it advertised as “10 Big Acts for 10c.”<sup>29</sup> The enterprise was harshly criticized by the weekly satirical journal *Le Canard*, which saw it as an ill-advised attempt by a foreign chain to take advantage of French-Canadian amusement seekers:

The “Bennett’s-Nouveautés” has recently opened for business, and *les Anglais* who make up its direction try their hardest to attract French-Canadians, but only succeed in provoking laughter in Montreal’s French-speaking population.

[*Le Canard*] has already brought to the attention of its readers the countless literary gems that adorn the immaculate [...] front of the new theatre.

But here is something even better, something that will certainly not help increase the already pretty scarce French clientele of the theatre, in spite of the numerous complimentary tickets that materialized in many a mailbox over the last week.

The direction of the Bennett's-Nouveautés has recently announced that all views would be explained [“*expliquées*”] in French [...]. And indeed, a lecturer [“*explicateur*”] has just been hired by the theatre, though we cannot say if he actually does his spiel [“*boniment*”] in French. Here is, by way of example, the senseless story told by one of his running commentaries:

*“Les savages ils tuzent tous les personnes d’un caravane, mais pas un petit gas et un petit fille trouvés par des mineurs dans la désert.” (“La désert” sur l’écran, est une forêt.) “Un vieu aveugle du chanquier des mineurs emmène le petit gas et le petit fille à la ville où que le vieu aveugle il ‘voira’ à leurs zinstructions.”*

In a word, a true master class in gibberish. [...] The whole augmented by a very prominent English accent (to please his boss), and droned [“*psalmodié*”] in a dead voice perfectly suited for a burial service while the clarinetist commits some real beauties as far as false notes go.

What is most amusing is that in the printed programme the lecturer bears a very *Canadien* and very French name, which does not fool anybody.<sup>30</sup>

There is some indication that *Le Canard*'s criticism may have reached the theatre's management, as the review of the Bennett's-Nouveautés' show published in the *Montreal Daily Star* the following week reported that: “One thing was missed last evening [from the Bennett's-Nouveautés' programme], and that was the descriptive talk in French, which proved so very interesting last week.”<sup>31</sup> In any case, Bennett's was out of the Théâtre des Nouveautés, and out of French Montreal, by April of 1909.<sup>32</sup>

### **The Strand: Montreal's First Movie Palace**

The advent of a new class of film theatres soon dubbed “movie palaces” throughout North America in the early to mid-1910s marks a key moment in the institutionalization process of cinema. In Montreal, the first film theatre worthy of the “palace” label was arguably the Strand inaugurated by Independent Amusement, a local enterprise, on

December 7, 1912. The Strand's majestic appearance, central location, and prestigious attractions all suggest that the nascent chain, which also was operating an east end *scope* at the time, the Moulin Rouge, was seeking to expand its audience by making its shows more palatable to the middle class. Independent Amusement thus found itself in sync with the many agents active in the North American film industry in the early 1910s who also believed that moving pictures would have to rely on middle-class patronage in order to significantly increase their profitability, and that bourgeois respectability was the key to this fast expanding market segment. Many key industry members more particularly believed that the imitation of established art forms was one way to make cinema respectable. This widespread opinion had most notably led to a contest aiming to find a more respectable name – “photoplay” – as a replacement for “moving pictures” in 1910, as well as to a number of deals between film manufacturers and established theatrical producers, such as the partnerships between Biograph and Klaw & Erlanger, or that of Lubin and Schubert.<sup>33</sup>

This concern over the respectability of the new medium likely caused the operators of movie palaces to shun film lecturers, whose performances, in addition to being rendered more or less superfluous by the rapid development of the new narrative strategies that would soon define classical cinema, could not be tightly monitored for inappropriate content. According to film historian Jennifer Wild, the same phenomenon might also have contributed to the sudden disappearance of illustrated songs from moving picture shows. A popular type of attraction combining lantern slides and live singing by both the venue's hired singer and audience, illustrated songs had once been one of the types of attraction most widely used in nickelodeons and *scopes* to entertain audiences during reel changes. They had however lost one of their main *raison d'être* in the early 1910s with the advent of two-projector set-ups permitting continuous film projection in most film theatres. Wild is

nevertheless of the opinion that the quick demise of illustrated songs in US theatres around 1913-14 was also attributable to the fact that illustrated songs were often produced locally. (It is for instance known that the slides for many of the illustrated songs performed at the Ouimetoscope had been produced by Ouimet.) This situation allegedly worried industry leaders, who feared that unsupervised local agents resisting the trend towards gentility might sneakily attempt to use the opportunity afforded by such local creations to “spice up” their programmes.<sup>34</sup> Wild’s observation seems to be corroborated by a *La Patrie* editorial published on the occasion of the adoption of the law instituting the Quebec Board of Censors in December of 1912, which argued that:

Film censorship should be supplemented by that of the songs and live acts accounting for a rather large portion of the programmes offered by film shows.

One can see and hear some truly extraordinary things in many of these establishments open to children, and it can generally be said that, the smaller the theatre, the spiciest the programme.<sup>35</sup>

Indeed, back in 1908, Ouimet had been forced to fire the *artiste* who had sung in his theatre: “Isn’t it something, you poor kid, the hump I had on my back has made its way to your belly” (“*C’est épatant ma pauvre gosse, la bosse que j’avais dans le dos, tu l’as maintenant par devant*”).<sup>36</sup>

It further seems that, in addition to these moral issues, quality was on the minds of the industry leaders whose decisions and policies lead to the marginalization of local attractions in movie palaces. The purported lack of talent of the singers hired by nickelodeons and *scopes*, as well as the songs’ frequently soppy subject matter were indeed regularly singled out for scorn in contemporary media. An item published in the *Montreal Daily Star’s* humor column in February of 1909 for instance claimed that: “Dante pictured some terrible punishment, but even his imagination never conceived of the torture endured by adventurous persons who sit through some of the sentimental drivel called songs in 5-cents show.”<sup>37</sup>

In Montreal, the decision not to programme illustrated songs or hire lecturers taken by the operators of the Strand and of the other movie palaces built during the remaining years of the silent era might also have been fostered by the city's peculiar bilingual nature. It thus seems likely that the owners and managers of these costly venues were trying to avoid needlessly cutting their potential audience in half by limiting it to the members of one linguistic community. That being said, the sudden demise of singers and film lecturers in Montreal's most prestigious movie houses did not spell the end of non-film attractions in local moving picture shows. As we will see in chapter 7, many of the film theatres competing with the new movie palaces eventually turned to local stage performers in order to enhance their shows and draw customers.

It must moreover be emphasized that the prestige of silent era movie palaces largely depended on the type and quality of the live musical accompaniment they offered. Indeed, the various advertisements published on the occasion of the Strand's inaugural stressed the fact that "An important feature of the [theatre] is the engagement of Willie Eckstein, the well-known wonder pianist."<sup>38</sup> Poached from the Lyric Hall, a converted church which had briefly been the west end's leading film theatre at the turn of the 1910s, the 24 year-old Montreal native was by the time of the Strand's opening recognized as one of the city's foremost musical talents. A former child prodigy, Eckstein had received a classical training, but been forced by circumstances to become a vaudeville performer and, later on, silent film accompanist. Eckstein's virtuosity, combined with his fluency with both the classical repertoire and the current popular styles (he would in time become one of the city most renowned ragtime and jazz pianists), made him perfectly suited to the needs of the Strand. Patrons were simultaneously impressed by his incomparable skill and repertoire, and diverted by his lightweight touch and showmanship.<sup>39</sup> Eckstein's talent as an accompanist also seems

to have been unequalled. A year after the opening of the Strand, the *Montreal Daily Star* for instance testified that Eckstein continued “to make the pictures shown far more realistic by his marvellous playing.”<sup>40</sup> Independent Amusement milked its prestigious partnership with Eckstein by painting a large mural showing the musician at the keys on the western wall of the Strand, as well as by eventually making him musical director of its expanding chain of moving picture theatres.<sup>41</sup>

The quest for respectability of the Independent Amusement also largely determined the location of Montreal’s first movie palace. The Strand was built on St. Catherine Street West, close to the sites where Birk’s, Ogilvy’s, Morgan’s and most of the other department stores and commercial establishments catering to affluent Montrealers had moved when the city’s previous retail district centered on St. James Street had been taken over by financial institutions in the 1890s and early 1900s.<sup>42</sup> Many other major theatres and entertainment venues had also been built on or near St. Catherine Street West since the turn of the century, including the Her Majesty’s theatre (1898), the Bennett’s (1907, later the Orpheum), the Princess (1908), and the Gayety (1912, not to be confused with the 1909 Gaiety, which later became the System theatre). The Strand nevertheless was the first purpose-built film theatre erected in this part of town.

While the 791-seat Strand may have been surpassed in term of size by many of the adjacent department stores and theatres, it still managed to make itself prominent on Montreal’s main commercial artery.<sup>43</sup> This was mostly accomplished through its striking white terra cotta façade, which caught the eye of the assorted shoppers and amusement seekers strolling on St. Catherine Street without resorting to the excessive use of signs, electric lights, and mass-produced ornaments typical of *scopes* and nickelodeons. Posters were displayed, but limited to few street-level cases. The Strand’s façade consequently broke with

the look previously associated with the lowly moving picture shows, and aligned itself visually with the more reputable venues dedicated to legitimate theatre and high-class vaudeville.

Inside, the Stand featured a luxurious decoration scheme equaling that of any legitimate theatre in town. It was also equipped with Montreal's first postless balcony, as well as with an ample and well-situated fireproof projection booth. The latter seems to have been fitted with two projecting machines from the opening day onwards, as suggested by the fact that the Strand did not feature either a real stage or loges for performers, and never advertised any act that could have entertained the audience during reel changes.<sup>44</sup> Some other features of the Strand further helped legitimize Independent Amusement's various claims regarding the safety of its new house. The Strand had for instance been fitted with many fire hoses and extinguishers, and offered no less than nine emergency exits.<sup>45</sup> In an era where theatre fires – many of them caused by the highly flammable nitrate film base used for commercial theatrical film exhibition – sadly remained a common occurrence, these were likely regarded as more than incidental features by many filmgoers.<sup>46</sup> The same goes for the large ventilation fan installed on the ceiling of the auditorium which, in addition to keeping conditions hospitable inside the Strand, may have helped silence the numerous critics who were at the time denouncing the unhygienic conditions bred by the lack of air circulation in many moving picture shows. The issue had for instance been satirized in a series of humorous comments published in the *Montreal Daily Star* at the turn of the 1910s. One of these argued that “In the 5-cent shows the management should be made to shovel out the air between the acts”, while another admonished film exhibitors to “Ventilate the minor play houses. There is no popular demand for fine scents in our 5-cent shows.”<sup>47</sup>

The progress marked by the appearance of a new class of moving picture theatre was nevertheless duly noted by the *Montreal Daily Star* in an editorial dealing with film censorship published a few days before the opening of the Strand:

It is rather the irony of Fate that serious efforts to legislate in the interests of patrons of Moving-Picture “theatres” should have awaited the time when the Moving Picture business, by its natural growth, had surpassed the more malignant of its early evils. There has long been “big money” in the business and there is also a fair prospect of permanence. Consequently pretentious looking structures, with some claims to consideration as theatres, are gradually replacing the delapidated [*sic*], impromptu halls, extemporized out of shops, where for years a calm defiance of all the essential by-laws has proven its possibilities in the way of profits. They bring with them the last word in the way of “photo-plays,” and “photo-plays” are a theatrical commodity which can well stand censoring.<sup>48</sup>

This connection between the increasingly pretentious photoplays then pushed by some producers and the fancy new palaces opened by exhibitors is perfectly illustrated by the Strand’s case. Labeled “Montreal’s Photoplay Theatre De Luxe” in the Independent Amusement’s early advertisements, the Strand had screened on its opening night a film adaptation of Victorien Sardou’s *La Tosca* produced in France by Le Film d’art and featuring none other than Sarah Bernhardt in the leading role.<sup>49</sup> **[Figure 2.1]** The antique character of this two-reeler produced in 1908 suggests that it had not been chosen for its innovative storytelling or dashing cinematic style, but rather for the cultural capital associated with *La Tosca* and Bernhardt.<sup>50</sup> The following year, the Strand announced that it would have the exclusivity in Montreal of the screen adaptation of the version of *Tess of the D’urbervilles* (J. Searle Dawley, 1913) produced for the stage by Daniel Frohman and featuring Minnie Maddern Fiske, as well as of all the other releases of the new Famous Players Film Co.<sup>51</sup>

The stars of the stage however soon gave way to the first stars of the screen in the Strand’s programmes. Two months after its exhibition of *Tess of the D’urbervilles*, the Strand thus announced that it would now show “The moving pictures’ most popular star, Mary Pickford, [...] in Mrs. Fiske’s most famous success, *Caprice* [J. Searle Dawley, Famous Players

Film Co., 1913].”<sup>52</sup> This suggests that, like many other agents active in the North American film industry, the Strand’s owners and manager were getting to realize that the industry’s seemingly exponential growth was driven more by the new type of dynamic moving pictures harnessing the narrative possibilities opened by the nascent medium, and thus featuring a new class of performers, than by names and titles connoting genteel respectability. The Strand consequently did not solely rely on stage and literary adaptations. Its programmes included from the outset many representatives of the class of films geared more towards thrills than dramatic posturing that had ensured the great success of *scopes* and nickelodeons.<sup>53</sup> The theatre also exhibited newsreels on a weekly basis, and even managed to insert some level of local content through the occasional screening of actualities produced in and around Montreal by Bert Mason, who was at the time working for the Montreal office of the Mutual Film Corp. of Canada.<sup>54</sup> The range of pictures exhibited at the Strand was further expanded over the years leading to the First World War by the regular inclusion of French and British pictures in the theatre’s programmes.<sup>55</sup>

The Strand’s building was the property of the McCombe family, who had owned the piece of land where it stood since 1854, but seems to have been erected thanks to the initiative of the local enterprise that would occupy and manage it until its eventual demolition in 1973.<sup>56</sup> Going by the name of Independent Amusement by the time of the Strand’s opening, this enterprise also operated the Moulin Rouge, an east end *scope* opened on September 17, 1910 in a converted commercial space located on St. Catherine Street East about midway between the Ouimetoscope and the Nationoscope. During its first years of operation, the Moulin Rouge had offered shows largely relying on live acts, and therefore quite different from those later presented at the Strand. A press release published in Montreal newspapers on the occasion of the Moulin Rouge’s inaugural had for instance

promised: “carefully selected moving pictures, French comedy, English illustrated songs, and New York vaudeville.”<sup>57</sup>

Attractions of a different nature were also offered next door from the theatre at the Moulin Rouge ice cream parlor. This juxtaposition of a venue exhibiting moving pictures and of a space dedicated to frozen treats is far from innocuous, as it highlights the more than incidental role played by food and snacks in popular culture in general, and in the history of the Independent Amusement chain in particular.<sup>58</sup> Most of the Independent Amusement’s founders had indeed been connected to the food industry prior to their involvement with the film business. George Ganetakos, who would act as the chain’s general manager from the early 1910s until his passing in 1955, and in the process become one of the most influential film men in Canada, had for instance operated both a fruit stand and a confectioner’s shop on St. Catherine Street in the 1900s.

An immigrant like many other Montreal film entrepreneurs, Ganetakos had been born in 1877 or 1878 in a small village located in Laconia, Greece, where he had first made a living by working as a blacksmith. He had left his homeland in 1900 to join the small Greek community that had begun to form in Montreal as a result of the economic crisis then plaguing Greece. (Much to the confusion of film historians, Ganetakos adopted soon after his arrival a more anglo-sounding name, George Nicholas, which he would intermittently use until the 1920s.)<sup>59</sup> According to an apocryphal story, Ganetakos had first discovered the popular appeal of moving pictures some time around 1908, when the films occasionally screened on the walls of the St. Catherine Street West ice cream parlor he was at the time running with his uncle, the Cosy Parlor, turned out to be more of a draw than the assorted snacks and drinks sold by the establishment.<sup>60</sup>

Ganetakos's partners in the opening of the Moulin Rouge and the creation of the Canadian Amusement Co., Ltd., which eventually morphed into the Independent Amusement in early 1912, had mostly been recruited from his associates and suppliers at the Cosy Parlor. As was fairly typical of *scopes* and nickelodeons, none of the individuals involved in the venture seemed to have had any prior experience with show business. The board of directors of the Canadian Amusement was thus initially composed of Ganetakos, Demetre Zarafonites (another Greek immigrant involved in the affairs of the Cosy Parlor), William Bell (a fruit wholesaler), James Seath Smith (the architect responsible for the conversion of the Moulin Rouge building into a theatre), and David Allen Murray (a cashier).<sup>61</sup> According to the generally well-informed Dane Lanken, one of the Moulin Rouge's main backers was Ernest A. Cousins, a British immigrant who had gained a prominent position in the local dairy industry following his arrival in Montreal in the 1880s, and had thus eventually become the Cosy Parlor's ice cream supplier.<sup>62</sup> Initially listed as a simple director, Cousins soon replaced Bell as president of the company, a position he would also occupy at United Amusements, Ltd. between 1919 and 1924, and then at United Amusement Corp., Ltd. between 1924 and 1947.<sup>63</sup>

The last key participant in the opening of the Moulin Rouge was the owner of the property where the theatre stood, Léon Payette.<sup>64</sup> A hotel-keeper and horse dealer by trade, Payette was well-known to the farmers and merchants who patronized the inn and stables he operated near Bonsecours market, where he may have first met the various fruit sellers and dairy men that became his partners in the operation of the Moulin Rouge.<sup>65</sup> A few months after the opening of the Moulin Rouge, Payette had stepped up his involvement with the Canadian Amusement by selling the property comprising the Moulin Rouge (the theatre remained under the management of the company) to George Rabinovitch for a reported

\$100,000.<sup>66</sup> Some of this money had most likely been subsequently invested by Payette in the building of the Strand, which was already in the plans by the time of the opening of the Moulin Rouge.<sup>67</sup> Payette's substantial participation in the affairs of the Moulin Rouge and Strand likely led to his becoming a director of the Independent Amusement at the time of the company's creation in the winter of 1912.<sup>68</sup> He would eventually remain with group led by Ganetakos until 1936.<sup>69</sup>

Payette's contribution to the group organized around Ganetakos was not solely financial, since his nomination, as that of insurance broker Isidore Crépeau around the same time, permitted the nascent chain to claim some kind of connection to the French-Canadian population accounting for roughly half of Montreal's population.<sup>70</sup> Over the coming decades, the chain would remain careful to present a public face emphasizing its connection to the multiple communities making up Montreal's citizenry, most notably by splitting its three most high-profile positions between an anglophone (Cousins, president), a francophone (Crépeau, vice-president), and a Greek immigrant (Ganetakos, general-manager). **[Figure 2.2]**

### **Foreign Chains in Montreal**

Independent Amusement's Strand theatre did not remain Montreal's sole movie palace for long. By the time of its December 1912 opening, another palace just as luxurious and twice as big, the Imperial, was already being built a few blocks east.<sup>71</sup> A project of the B.F. Keith chain, the new house was set to replace the Nickel theatre then operating on the opposite side of the St. Catherine Street West and de Bleury junction.<sup>72</sup> According to Lanken, the Imperial had been drafted by a regular collaborator of the Keith chain, Albert Westover, an architect based in Philadelphia, and completed by Montreal architect Ulric

Asselin, most likely so as to ensure that the building would conform to local regulations and variations in taste.<sup>73</sup>

A combination house, the 2,000-seat Imperial specialized from its opening day until the end of the silent era in combination shows featuring both films and touring vaudeville acts. Keith seems to have been aware that the exhibition of moving pictures in its new palatial house might still be frowned upon by members of the cultural elite of the day. In an interview with the *Montreal Daily Star* published shortly before the opening of the Imperial, the chain's general manager, E.F. Albee, felt compelled to preemptively defend the new form of popular amusement:

“There is business for all theatres,” asserted Mr. Albee. “The picture theatres make their own public by attracting those who would not as a general rule patronize the higher priced theatres. Once started these people demand all kinds of entertainment and the regular theatres get increased patronage.”<sup>74</sup>

The advertisement for the April 26, 1913, grand opening of the Imperial implicitly addressed concerns over the respectability of moving pictures by labeling the new theatre “Montreal's most beautiful playhouse devoted to motion pictures and photo plays of the highest order,” as well as by describing it as a “a metropolitan theatre which New York would be proud to possess.”<sup>75</sup> **[Figure 2.3]**

Interestingly, the Imperial's leading attractions in its first few months of operation were not the moving images thrown on its screen or the live acts featured on its stage, but the two peculiar sound reproduction systems it had been equipped with. Much of the early discourse on the theatre thus centered on the mighty Wurlitzer Hope-Jones Unit Orchestra, which had been installed under the supervision of the “celebrated English organist” Robert Hope-Jones himself.<sup>76</sup> The unit was said to be able to reproduce sixty different instruments, and to have cost no less than twenty thousand dollar.<sup>77</sup> The *Montreal Daily Star* described the

unit orchestra as the Imperial's "chief attraction," and more particularly lauded the versatility it displayed:

A feature of this appliance is the fact that while it is almost impossible to train an orchestra for every one of the hundreds [sic] of pictures shown in the large picture houses each week, it is a comparatively easy task for one man in charge of a Unit Orchestra to produce music appropriate to every scene shown on the curtain.<sup>78</sup>

Advertisements published by Wurlitzer's local representative eventually went one step further by claiming that, thanks to their phenomenal versatility, Unit Orchestras would "soon pay for themselves" by permitting theatres to dramatically reduce the wages paid to musicians.<sup>79</sup>

In an era where moving picture theatres largely established their rank and individuality through the type of musical accompaniment they offered (some could afford either a large orchestra or a smaller band centered on a star performer, while many other others had to make do with a single pianist), the acquisition of the Hope-Jones Unit Orchestra readily established the Imperial as one of Montreal's top moving picture theatres. Still, the sensation reportedly caused by the organ was not enough for Keith. Visibly determined to start out with a bang, the chain added yet another sensational novelty, the Kinetophone, to the Imperial's bill by the theatre's second week of operation.<sup>80</sup> By doing so, it no doubt hoped to benefit from the prestige derived from the use in its advertisements of the name of Thomas Edison, who had taken credit for the invention of this system permitting the exhibition of short films featuring a synchronized soundtrack. The Kinetophone reportedly created a "favorable impression" at the Imperial, but was ultimately destined to be short-lived, plagued as it was by amplification and synchronization issues.<sup>81</sup>

Another US theatre chain active in Montreal in the early 1910s, the Mark and Brock Co., resorted to a different technological innovation, color cinema, as a way to establish its identity and boost its business in Montreal. One of the chain's founders, Henry J. Brock, had

struck a deal with the US-born British film entrepreneur Joseph Urban, who was at the time heavily promoting the Kinemacolor natural color process on both sides of the Atlantic. In March of 1912, Brock and Urban had visited Montreal in order to advertise their new joint venture, the Kinemacolor of Canada, a company dedicated to the production and distribution of films using a proprietary color process. Brock and Urban had announced to journalists that the new company was about to set up shop in the city and hire hundreds of employees to take care of the “plays to be reproduced, films to be processed, and instruments to be manufactured” locally.<sup>82</sup>

Coming as it was in the midst of an epidemic of delusional schemes and scams targeting a public dazzled by the rapid rise of the glamorous new medium, such an announcement might have been met with considerable skepticism, had it been uttered by lesser personalities. But Urban and Brock were far from being unknown. A pioneer producer and distributor of travelogues, actualities and educational films, Urban had gained some notoriety in Canada a decade earlier in the wake of the production of the Living Canada series, which had brought such renowned film men as Rosenthal and Bradford to the Dominion. As for Brock, the theatre chain he was at the time operating with Mitchell Mark out of Buffalo, New York, had managed to become one of the most prestigious in the northeastern U.S. and eastern Canada in the early 1910s. By 1912, Mark-Brock operated large theatres in Toronto (where it had opened the city’s first downtown movie palace, the Strand, in August of 1911) and Ottawa. The chain would earn a prominent place in US film history in 1914 by opening on Broadway the 3,000-seat New York Strand, whose first manager was none other than S.L. “Roxy” Rothapfel.<sup>83</sup>

Mark-Brock’s first Montreal operation had been the 2,000-seat Théâtre Français, which it had taken over in the spring of 1910.<sup>84</sup> To mark the elevated standing of the venue,

Mark-Brock had extensively renovated the building and contributed to various local events, such as a fly swatting contest organized by the civically minded *Montreal Daily Star*, whose winners were rewarded with season passes to the Français.<sup>85</sup> Under Mark-Brock's direction, the Français had mostly programmed vaudeville shows interspersed with a few reels of moving pictures in the early 1910s.

Mark-Brock soon expanded its Montreal operations through the building of a new theatre located near the intersection of Mount-Royal Avenue and St. Denis Street in the Plateau district, the 800-seat Alexandra, as well as through a partnership with the New York State-based Duchess Amusement Co. (possibly a subsidiary), which built two large moving picture theatres in the city in 1912.<sup>86</sup> The largest of these two new theatres, the 1,400-seat Family (later known as the Corona) was located on Notre-Dame in the working class neighborhood of St. Henri. Opened some time around September of 1912, the Family occasionally exhibited color films during its first years of operations, having been equipped with projectors permitting the presentation of reels using the Kinemacolor process.<sup>87</sup> And while the activities of Kinemacolor's Canadian branch certainly never took off the way Urban and Brock had predicted it would, the presentation of a series of Canadian patriotic Kinemacolor views at the Family's in the early months of the Great War demonstrates that the venture did at least lead to the production of a few short films.<sup>88</sup> The opening of the Family was followed in November 1912 by that of the Duchess Amusement Scala theatre. Located on St. Lawrence at St. Catherine, this 1,200-seat theatre quite mysteriously advertised "reversed vaudeville and prismatic photoplays" in its first months of operation.<sup>89</sup>

The acquisition and construction of these four theatres cast Mark-Brock as a leading film exhibitor in Montreal. By the end of 1912, the chain controlled two large theatres located at the heart of the city's bustling entertainment district, and two up-to-date movie

houses situated in the lively neighborhoods of St. Henri and the Plateau. The fact that two of these establishments, the Théâtre Français (now the Métropolis) and the Family/Corona, are still being operated as show venues a century later further demonstrates, if any need be, that its theatres were not too shabby. And yet the chain failed to make it in Montreal. In January of 1914, Mark-Brock leased the Scala theatre, which it had opened a little over a year before, to the Lawand family. It hung to the Alexandra, Family and Théâtre Français a little longer, but nevertheless seems to have entirely gotten out of the Montreal market by 1917.<sup>90</sup>

The vacuum created by the withdrawal of the Mark-Brock interests from the city led to some skirmishes between Montreal showmen. In April 1918, the *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* for instance reported a sensational fight between the Family's new owner, one Ogulnik, and the manager of the French stock company then occupying the theatre, Edmond Desmarteau. Wanting to revert to a moving picture policy, Ogulnik had dispatched a new manager to the Family, A.J. Aubrey. The latter had however been met by "twenty or thirty thugs armed with blackjacks, baseball clubs, rubber hose, and revolvers." The ensuing mêlée had resulted in an innocent employee of the local Famous Players exchange receiving the scare of his life, two detectives of the Burns agency being "pretty badly beaten up," and Desmarteau being "taken to the cooler."<sup>91</sup>

Lack of data pertaining to the local activities of the Mark-Brock Co. nevertheless prevents us from ascertaining the reasons that forced the chain to get out of Montreal so soon after the opening of the Family and its other local theatres. Obviously, Brock's sudden death in a car crash in September 1917 did nothing to improve the affairs of the company.<sup>92</sup> Still, it remains possible that Mark-Brock's Montreal operations had already been compromised many years before by Brock and Urban's decision to share the Kinemacolor system with competing theatres, which might have partly negated the competitive edge of

Mark-Brock houses. In Montreal, the most widely advertised screenings of Kinemacolor films had thus been held, not at the Théâtre Français or Family, but at the Princess and Imperial.<sup>93</sup> It may also be that the imported small-time vaudeville acts featured in most of the chain's theatres failed to connect with Montreal's population, or that the chain had proved unable – or unwilling – to recruit individuals sufficiently well-grounded in the city's culture to run its theatres.<sup>94</sup> Whatever its causes, the failure of the Mark-Brock Co. to establish a profitable chain of theatres in Montreal demonstrates that the booming conditions generally prevailing in the motion picture industry in the 1910s were not sufficient to ensure the success of all film ventures.

Mark-Brock's Montreal misadventure would soon be echoed by that of the promoters of the luxurious Théâtre St. Denis inaugurated on March 4, 1916. The new palatial theatre had initially been a project of the St. Denis Theatre Co. incorporated in Montreal a year and half before, in September 1914. The latter company however seems to have been somehow related to the Keith chain, whose main Montreal representative, H.W. Conover, ended up managing the 2,400-seat St. Denis at the time of its well-attended grand opening.<sup>95</sup> It should also be noted on that regard that the St. Denis had, just like Keith's Imperial, been equipped with an expensive Hope-Jones Orchestra Unit.

Contemporary reviews of the St. Denis reveal that it had explicitly been conceived to serve the needs of the east end francophone population. The architectural journal *Construction* for instance noted in the admiring piece it published on the St. Denis that the theatre was “located in that portion of Montreal favored by the French-Canadian as a residential section, and mainly for their use, yet so readily accessible from other parts of the city.” *La Presse* further remarked that the theatre's “exceedingly polite” staff spoke French and that, “much to the pleasure of the vast majority of the east end's French-speaking population,” the

theatre's direction had announced that both the programmes it printed and the subtitles of the films it booked would be in French.<sup>96</sup>

The St. Denis however soon proved unable to turn a profit for its owners. Less than two months after the theatre's opening, *Variety* reported that its manager was already thinking about hiring a French stock company and discontinuing film bookings. Things seemingly went from bad to worse over the next few months. After being taken over in the summer of 1916 by one E.L. Perry said to be based in Philadelphia, the St. Denis reverted to a first-run pictures and vaudeville policy, hired a thirty-piece orchestra – and went further in debt. It was soon dropped by Perry and sold by auction in June 1917.<sup>97</sup> The forlorn east end palace ended up attracting the attention of none other than Nathan L. Nathanson, who eventually operated the St. Denis for over a year in 1917-18, as well as of Marcus Loew and Nick Schenck, who traveled to Montreal in January 1918 to assess the venue's potential.<sup>98</sup> In the end, none of these illustrious entrepreneurs succeeded in turning the St. Denis into a profitable operation. Within less than three years of its grand opening, the theatre was being described as a white elephant by the trade press.<sup>99</sup>

Part of the St. Denis' problem might have been the lack of protection granted to its leading attractions during its first years of operation. The five-reel feature that had headlined its inaugural programme, *Satan Sanderson* (John W. Noble, Rolfe Photoplays/Metro, 1915), had for instance been screened no more than two days after the St. Denis' opening at the Windsor, a small downtown theatre installed in a converted gothic chapel previously used by a Methodist congregation.<sup>100</sup> The fact that *Satan Sanderson* had actually first been released almost a full year before, in March 1915, further suggests that the St. Denis' difficulties might have been compounded by the growing scarcity of prints featuring French titles.<sup>101</sup> It should be reminded that at the time of the incorporation of the St. Denis Theatre Co., the

war was but a few weeks old, and French producers such as Pathé and Gaumont were still leading players in the global film industry. Things were obviously different by the time of the theatre's opening in 1916. More and more prints were coming from the U.S., and no intertitle translation services seem to have been offered to local exchanges until the 1920s.

The trade press nevertheless attributed the St. Denis' difficulties, not to distribution or language issues, but to socioeconomic factors. The *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* for instance argued in March 1918 that:

The St. Denis, the big house in the East End, is not, can not, or will not ever make any money at the present prices. The people who live in that end of the town are in the majority poorly paid and have large families to support. Ten or fifteen cents at the most is their limit, and regardless of the attraction they will not pay twenty-five. Few pictures that have played there have pulled good business at two bits, but it was because they had an appeal that brought people from the other parts of the city.<sup>102</sup>

The St. Denis' main problem, in a nutshell, seems to have been that while it might have been able to attract sizable audience, it could not balance its admission prices with its overhead, film rentals, and advertising expenses.<sup>103</sup> The theatre would as a result be cast aside all through the end of the silent era by the three leading continental or national chains: Keith, Loew's, and Famous Players. According to Véronneau and Lacasse, the interests close to Famous Players who ended up controlling the St. Denis in the 1920s and early 1930s were content to let a local entrepreneur, Jos. Cardinal, struggle with it.<sup>104</sup>

The last major film palace built in Montreal in the 1910s was the 3,100-seat Loew's conceived by famed US architect Thomas W. Lamb and opened on November 19, 1917 by US theatre magnate Marcus Loew. Said to be Canada's largest theatre at the time of its opening, the Loew's could be found a few yards west of Independent Amusement's Strand on St. Catherine Street West.<sup>105</sup> Once described as "the Henry Ford of show business" by George M. Cohan, Loew had first been involved in the operation of a New York penny arcade in partnership with Adolph Zukor in 1903. Sensing a tremendous business

opportunity in the creation of shows combining vaudeville and moving pictures, he had soon left Zukor to establish a new partnership with brothers Nick and Joe Schenck. The trio had not wasted any time in building and acquiring theatres: by the time of the opening of its first Montreal house, the Loew's chain was operating more than one hundred theatres across the U.S. and Canada. As noted by Douglas Gomery, Loew's commercial strategies in the 1910s and 1920s were fundamentally different from those of his equally successful former associate Zukor: while the latter eventually returned to the exhibition business so as to guarantee an outlet for the films of the producer-distributor he had created, Paramount, Loew would launch into film production with the acquisition of Metro in 1920 and the subsequent creation of Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer in 1924 mainly so that he could provide his extensive theatrical network with quality attractions.<sup>106</sup>

In Montreal, the combination shows offered by Loew's gigantic new venue filled the niche left open by Mark-Brock's recent withdrawal from the city, as well as by Keith's current policy at the Imperial, which favoured first-run Paramount-Artcraft pictures over vaudeville.<sup>107</sup> The Loew's and Mark-Brock chains had both quickly expanded at the turn of the 1910s by offering combination shows charging more for admission than moving picture shows, but still less than venues dedicated to high-class vaudeville.<sup>108</sup> *Variety* had even reported in 1910 that: "While the two circuits are not affiliated, there is an understanding between them through which they may 'split' weeks in the west; also remaining out of one another's territory."<sup>109</sup> This "understanding" could of course explain Loew's relatively late arrival in Montreal, where Mark-Brock's Théâtre Français had for a while presented vaudeville acts booked through the Loew Circuit office.<sup>110</sup> In any case, vaudeville would remain a highlight of the Montreal Loew's programmes well into the 1930s.

## Montreal's Movie Market at the Turn of the 1920s

By the time of the creation of Nathanson's Famous Players Canadian Corp. in 1920 (which we will cover in more details in chapter 3), no less than sixty-three commercial theatres were showing moving pictures on the territory of the city of Montreal. While about a dozen of these venues were holdovers from the *scope* era holding less than five hundred seats, at least fourteen theatres held over one thousand seats. The continued expansion of the local film market in the 1910s was further demonstrated by the fact that the city's four largest theatres by the decade's end – the Loew's (1917, 3,062 seats), the Théâtre St. Denis (1916, 2,397 seats), the Princess (1917, 2,335 seats)<sup>111</sup>, and the Imperial (1913, 1,904 seats) – were all venues originally conceived for shows combining moving pictures and live attractions.<sup>112</sup>

Twenty-five of the sixty-three Montreal theatres exhibiting moving pictures in 1920 were part of one of the nine chains then operating in the city, as shown in Table 2.1.

**Table 2.1: Moving Picture Theatre Chains Operating in Montreal, 1920**

<i>Elie Berzansky</i>		<i>Independent Amusement [Ganetakos]</i>	
North Star	263 seats	Moulin Rouge	708 seats
Lux Palace	463 seats	Strand	791 seats
Boulevardoscope	307 seats	Regent	1,012 seats
<i>total</i>	<i>1,033 seats</i>	<i>total</i>	<i>2,511 seats</i>
<i>H.B. Miller</i>		<i>Arthur St. Germain</i>	
Canada	577 seats	Crystal Palace	922 seats
Model Palace	412 seats	Family	1,137 seats
Victoria	416 seats	Mount Royal	710 seats
<i>total</i>	<i>1,405 seats</i>	<i>total</i>	<i>2,769 seats</i>
<i>Keith</i>		<i>Loew's</i>	
Imperial	1,904 seats	Loew's	3,062 seats
<i>total</i>	<i>1,904 seats</i>	<i>total</i>	<i>3,062 seats</i>
<i>Nicholas Lazanis</i>		<i>Lawand and Tabah Families</i>	
Lord Nelson	761 seats	King Edward	882 seats
Napoleon Palace	769 seats	Maisonneuve	757 seats
Alhambra	503 seats	Laurier Palace	861 seats
<i>total</i>	<i>2,033 seats</i>	Maple Leaf	643 seats
<i>Allen Enterprise</i>		Dominion	993 seats
Westmount	1,067 seats	<i>total</i>	<i>4,136 seats</i>
New Grand	1,049 seats		
Allen	[under construction]		
<i>total</i>	<i>2,116 seats</i>		

Source: *Wid's Yearbook, 1920-21*

Interestingly, this survey of the various chains operating in the city in the months leading to the 1921 opening of Famous Players' first Montreal theatre, the Capitol, fails to reveal the future leaders of the local exhibition market. Ganetakos's Independent Amusement, for instance, still controlled in 1920 fewer seats than Arthur St. Germain, and fewer venues and seats than the chain operated by the Lawand and Tabah families. This survey further shows that most chains were not national or continental operations, but local enterprises that were often quite modest in scope. By way of example, the total number of seats installed in the three theatres operated by Elie Berzansky on St. Hubert Street (the North Star and Boulevardoscope) and Notre-Dame West (the Lux Palace) barely exceeded one thousand. As for the three continental chains in operation in Montreal at this point, only one, Allen, seemed (as we will see in the next chapter) geared towards local expansion. The two others, Keith and Loew's, seemed content with just one large flagship theatre.<sup>113</sup> This could partly be explained by the fact these two chains were largely dedicated to a form of commercial amusement – high-class vaudeville – whose leading attractions could not be duplicated and disseminated as easily as moving pictures.

The state of flux that still characterized the opening, closing, and control of Montreal film theatres at the turn of the 1920s did not preclude the stabilization of some other aspects of the business of exhibition in the city of Montreal. It must for instance be noted that St. Catherine Street West was by this point firmly established as the center of Montreal's film market. That this part of the city where the largest retail establishments had recently congregated would become the film industry's primary outlet may seem like a foregone conclusion. Canadian film historian Paul S. Moore nevertheless reminds us that: "the association of cinema-going with downtown's main street was neither immediate nor obvious when cinema first entered into the modern mixture of consumption and amusement

in Canadian cities.”<sup>114</sup> Indeed, in Montreal as elsewhere in Canada, film screenings had first been held more or less haphazardly in a wide range of venues (including variety theatres, amusement parks, and community halls) located in both central and peripheral areas. The itineraries of the traveling showmen largely responsible for the dissemination of early moving pictures had further not been dictated by zones and runs, or by any other attempt at rationalized distribution, but more simply by transportation networks and the availabilities of venues.

The eventual appearance of Montreal’s first movie palaces on an artery dominated by commercial establishments rather than, say, colleges and universities, is in itself quite telling. This choice reveals that, for all the industry discourse on the educational potential of moving pictures, the definition of film as a form of commercial entertainment was quickly gaining hegemonic status within the film industry by the mid-1910s. Commercial exhibitors would continue to book the Canadian travelogues and newsreels produced by Ouimet’s Specialty Film Import (1915-1922), the Canadian Government Motion Picture Bureau (1917-1941), Associated Screen News (1920-1959) and, later, the National Film Board of Canada (created in 1939), but one senses that the exhibition of these films largely aimed to facilitate the dissemination of the imported multi-reel fiction films that had become firmly established as the industry’s most profitable class of products by the late 1910s. Exhibitors might have more specifically hoped that the insertion of a few vaguely educational and patriotic reels in programmes headlined by foreign films would somewhat mollify the various groups critical of moving picture shows.

Other facts may help explain why the center of Montreal’s film market migrated west of St. Lawrence Boulevard in the early 1910s. One contributing factor might be that the larger venues built by the leading exhibitors in 1910s (the 1917 Loew’s was for instance

almost thrice as big as the 1907 Ouimetoscope) needed to attract the widest possible range of patrons in order to generate profits. The east end moving picture theatres that had dominated local exhibition between 1906 and the early 1910s appear to have succeeded in attracting audiences recruited from both the working and middle classes. They however seem to have failed to draw members of the city's sizable anglophone community in significant numbers, possibly because anglophones preferred to patronize the venues showing the same films at roughly the same time on St. Lawrence, Notre-Dame, or St. Catherine West. This was nothing new: even before the advent of venues primarily dedicated to moving pictures, the various theatres operating in the city's east end had only infrequently advertised in English-language newspapers, while the various amusement places located on St. Catherine Street West extensively advertised in French-language newspapers. It consequently may very well be that the promoters of the new palaces built in the 1910s expected francophones to be generally more willing than anglophones to cross the established boundary represented by St. Lawrence Boulevard in order to attend moving picture shows.

Some troubling limitations affecting the strategies aiming to integrate different groups and communities in Montreal theatres devised by exhibitors nevertheless came to light as a result of a 1919 case involving one Sol Reynolds, described in contemporary sources as a "colored man." In what was eventually revealed to be a test-case initiated by local Black activists, Reynolds had been denied the right to sit in the orchestra section of the Loew's after having purchased the appropriate ticket. Reynolds consequently instigated proceedings against the Loew's, and initially succeeded in having the Superior Court recognize his right to sit wherever he pleased. The Superior Court's decision was however soon reversed by the Court of Appeal's Judge Pelletier, who argued that:

The proprietor of a theatre has the right to seat the spectators where he wishes within the limits of place corresponding to the price the spectator has paid for his ticket of admission. The proprietor is master in his own house and has the right to make regulations accordingly. It is shown in the proof that the presence of colored people in the orchestra seats of Loew's theatre prevents other people from going to the theatre, and the appellant (Loew's) is not obliged to suffer a loss of revenue which would result from that fact.<sup>115</sup>

The *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* (which, it should be noted, was not at the time edited by the generally more progressive Ray Lewis) reacted to the case by publishing a piece commending the Court of Appeals' decision, and reporting that: "This is a case which has considerably exercised the minds of moving picture proprietors and managers in this city who are one and all delighted that the way is now cleared for them to make a general rule excluding people of color from their entertainment."<sup>116</sup> Black activists quickly reacted by announcing that they would collect funds and pursue the case all the way up to the Privy Council in London if necessary. Their action however seems to have soon petered out, undermined as it was by the modest size of the local Black community, which, incidentally, probably also explains why film exhibitors could afford to so casually declare Black citizens unwelcome in their houses.<sup>117</sup>

The activists' decision to target the Loew's for their 1919 test-case is probably more of a reflection of the local pre-eminence of this venue than of the particular character of its admission policy. Indeed, the *Digest* comments on the case suggest that most Montreal houses informally applied the same discriminatory policy. The Loew's rather stood out by the fact that it was the largest and most prestigious of the new crop of west end movie palaces that had appeared in the 1910s, and in the process outclassed the older east end *scopes* in size and luxury. The new palaces' superior buying power further granted these venues first pick on the latest film releases, which resulted in the city's numerous other film theatres

having to wait a little longer in order to be able to book films that had already been exhibited locally.

On the topic of film distribution, it is essential to understand that the distribution models that were emerging at the time were fundamentally different from those governing the dissemination of printed materials or sound recordings. Whereas literary or musical publishers could aim to sell a book, a gramophone plate or sheet music to just about any individual interested by the work inscribed therein, the high costs associated with the manufacturing of both film hardware (i.e., the projectors) and software (the reels of 35mm film) required consumers to share both screening venues and prints, and incited distributors to use as few prints as possible to cover each regional market. According to the evidence collected by commissioner Peter White in 1931, it cost “in the neighbourhood of from three to four hundred dollars” to strike a positive print of a six-reel feature at the turn of the 1930s – a figure that cannot be much more higher than it had been a decade before. The data uncovered by White also shows that between four and ten prints were generally prepared for each title distributed in Canada in 1931, with eight being the most common number for features.<sup>118</sup> Once again, it seems rather unlikely that prints had been more numerous at the turn of the 1920s, when no established film laboratory existed in Canada. The archives of the Board of Censors of the Province of Quebec further reveal that for the entirety of 1912-1952 period covered by this research, distributors rarely used more than two prints of each title to cover the whole of the Province of Quebec.<sup>119</sup>

As noted by Moore, the brief but intense serial craze of the mid-1910s marked a key moment in the institutionalization of film, as it greatly helped establish the distribution system based on differently priced runs that would largely frame and determine the activities of film exhibitors all-through the classical era.<sup>120</sup> In Montreal as pretty much everywhere in

North America, the fad began in earnest early in 1914 with the appearance in local theatres of *The Adventures of Kathlyn* (Selig Polyscope Co., 1914), generally regarded as the first cliffhanger serial.<sup>121</sup> *Kathlyn* was soon followed by many other similar serials, including *The Perils of Pauline* (Pathé Frères, 1914), *The Exploits of Elaine* (Wharton, 1915), and *The Diamond from the Sky* (American Film Manufacturing Co., 1915). Released on a weekly or bi-weekly basis, serial episodes remained one of the mainstays of the programmes assembled by film theatres until the late 1910s, when the formula seems to have finally exhausted the patience of many moviegoers. Still, serials can be said to have greatly contributed to the differentiation of movie theatres in the few short years that separated their sensational appearance from their sudden demotion to children's matinées and the lower half of neighborhood theatres' programmes. This process was largely accomplished with the help of newspaper tie-ins inciting audiences to seek the latest episode. As the scarcity of prints prevented each episode from being exhibited in more than one or two local theatres at any given time, exhibitors came to be organized in a hierarchy determined by the rank they occupied in the long list of theatres booking each serial. Known within the industry as the theatres' "run", this rank could easily be deducted by filmgoers through a quick glance at the various theatre advertisements published side by side in local newspapers.

Distributors occasionally went as far as to inform filmgoers of each theatre's run by publishing advertisements delineating the complete itinerary followed by each new serial episode. An advertisement published in *The Standard* in June 1915 by the local exchange handling *Who Pays?* (Balboa Amusement Producing Co./Pathé Exchange, 1915) **[Figure 2.4]** for instance shows that each new episode was first screened for two days at the Imperial – then the city's largest moving picture theatre – before being programmed in three other Montreal houses (the Passe-Temps, the Ouimetoscope, and the Arcade) by the end of

its first week of exhibition. The advertisement further lists the theatres where the serial's four previous episodes could be seen the same week. All in all, it appears that no less than fifteen Montreal theatres were implicitly assigned a rank in the hierarchy of theatres showing an episode of *Who Pays* every week. Another advertisement published two years and a half later by Specialty Film Import for *The Hidden Hand* (Pathé Exchange, 1917-18) [Figure 2.5] illustrates the growing emphasis placed by distributors on first-run exhibition in the late 1910s. The advertisement does list all of the thirteen movie theatres exhibiting the serial on the island of Montreal, but clearly highlights the one venue getting the first-run of each new episode, Independent Amusement's Strand.

These advertisements however also reveal that, while the runs system favouring downtown movie palaces was pretty much established by the late 1910s, individual runs were at this point in time still quite short (between one and three days, with two-day runs being the most common) and, more importantly, not yet separated by protection periods. As we will see in chapter 3, it appears that protection periods only started to be enforced when the leading exhibitors became big enough to prevent distributors from renting the films they had just shown to the opposition. Protection does not seem to have been pushed by distributors, who would likely have preferred to get the most of the titles they handled while the publicity and word of mouth generated by their first-run exhibition was still at its highest.<sup>122</sup>

This absence of protection period permitted the continuous (as opposed to staggered) circulation of new film releases throughout the 1910s, a fact strengthening the arguments made by the media historians concerned with the creation of a mass public. Moore for instance argues that:

the serial film, and its fictionalized accompaniment printed in weekend newspapers, overtly encouraged an entire continent to "see" the same movie together, even as it solidified a spatial and temporal hierarchy among increasingly distinct types of theatres. [...]

If all of the film episodes, all of the fiction installments, and the continentally syndicated promotion in key magazines and newspapers are considered altogether to make up a single film text, then by 1915, nearly all of the film-going audience of North America could have been *aware* that the film they were watching was in some form being seen by almost everyone else, everywhere else. The serial story-film made film-going a truly mass medium by overtly demonstrating the films' widespread availability.<sup>123</sup>

Indeed, it appears that the serial fad of the mid-1910s brought large numbers of individuals across North America, including the Province of Quebec and Montreal, to collectively hold their breath for Kathlyn, Pauline or Elaine. On a more elementary level, the growing popularity of film also contributed to the creation of a mass public by causing men, women and children from both the working and middle classes of Montreal's francophone, anglophone and immigrant communities to congregate in public spaces where they could to some degree interact.

Still, it could also be argued that audience interaction and the dissemination of shared cultural references through moving pictures sometimes played against each other, in the sense that, then as now, the more audience members interacted, the less attention likely ended up being paid to the action unfolding on the screen. It consequently seems likely that these two potential contributions of cinema to the development of communities developed in different ratios at the two opposite ends of the hierarchy of film theatres then in the process of being institutionalized. While data on audience behaviour is admittedly scarce, there is enough anecdotal evidence to suggest that filmgoers generally behaved differently in large downtown movie palaces and in small neighbourhood theatres. Miriam Hansen thus remarks that the movie palaces' luxurious surroundings and abundant staff fostered a certain decorum, which, in turn, enforced a more reverential form of spectatorship. The films exhibited in these venues, which tended to be recent releases accompanied by first-rate musicians, consequently seem to have commanded most of the attention of the various

individuals making up the audience. On the other end of the spectrum, the audiences congregating in neighborhood theatres seem to have been more inclined to be vocal and to interact, both with each other and with the attractions assembled by these venues, which tended to be largely composed of beat-up prints of older film releases.<sup>124</sup>

The data assembled in this chapter show that, by the turn of the 1920s, the Montreal movie market was already largely structured by the “scissor effect” observed by Hansen in silent era film exhibition, which posits that “the more ambitious and costly the show, the larger and less specific its intended audience.”<sup>125</sup> Local conditions also seem to support Hansen’s claims regarding the consequences, both planned and unforeseen, of the commercial strategies of exhibitors. Hansen thus argues that, even after the advent of movie palaces and rationalized film distribution, the actions and policies of exhibitors could not uniformly be said to cause the homogenization of cultures:

As long as an exhibitor catered to [particular ethnic and racial constituencies], the show was likely to maintain a locally specific, potentially interactive and aleatory dimension. If it did so, this was not because the individual exhibitor believed in defending communal culture against the onslaught of monopolization, but because the format was profitable and competitive.<sup>126</sup>

Vertical integration and its corollary, the monopolization process mentioned by Hansen, had yet to begin in earnest in Montreal by 1920. The great majority of the city’s film theatres were still controlled locally, and while several continental, regional and local chains had been involved in film exhibition since the very first experiments with moving pictures, none seemed poised to take control of the local film market.

The conditions whereby one organization could seize control of the film market had however largely been created. The sensational growth of film as a mass entertainment over the years 1912-1920 had essentially been predicated on the development of a very specific type of film production: multi-reel fiction film featuring stars and high production values. By

the end of 1913, most of the programmes booked by Montreal's pioneering film palace, the Strand, had thus been headlined by a 4 or 5-reel Famous Players production. Within months, all of Montreal's moving picture theatres would follow suit. This enthusiasm for costly feature films raised the cost of entry to the film production sector, and consequently acted to limit the number of potential suppliers for the city's theatres. This tendency was further aggravated by the First World War, which greatly diminished the production and export capabilities of European organizations. As a result, the feature films headlining the bills of virtually all Montreal movie shows by the end of the 1910s originated from an ever-shrinking number of US producers, which were in turn increasingly dependent on the new crop of large movie palaces to screen and promote their expensive productions. It was now becoming clear that whoever assumed control of the leading first-run venues could gain a very favorable position within the industry.

## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> *Montreal Daily Star* (29 November 1894); *Montreal Daily Star* (21 December 1894): 4.

<sup>2</sup> The Edison Co.'s phonographs permitted both sound recording on wax cylinders and playback, and were consequently first marketed to stenographers. Hence the relationship between Edison and the Holland brothers. See: Geo. C. Holland, "A Voice from the Canadian Parliament Stenographic Corps.," *The Phonogram* 7:2 (July 1892): 153-55; Hye Bossin, "At the Very Beginning: The Holland Bros. of Ottawa Ushered in the World Motion Picture Industry," *Film Weekly Year Book of the Canadian Film Industry* (1952-1953): 45-49; Peter Morris, *Embattled Shadows: A History of Canadian Cinema 1895-1939* (Montreal/Kingston: McGill/Queen's University Press, 1978), 3-11.

<sup>3</sup> "Le Cinématographe – une des merveilles de notre siècle – la photographie animée – intéressante expérience samedi soir," *La Presse* (29 June 1896): 1; Germain Lacasse, "Cultural Amnesia and the Birth of Film in Canada," *Cinema Canada* no. 108 (June 1984): 6-7. For a detailed account of the introduction of moving pictures in the Province of Québec, see: André Gaudreault and Germain Lacasse, "L'arrivée du Cinématographe Lumière en sol canadien," in André Gaudreault, Germain Lacasse and Jean-Pierre Sirois-Trahan, *Au pays des ennemis du cinéma... pour une nouvelle histoire des débuts du cinéma au Québec* (Quebec City: Nuit blanche, 1996), 21-31.

<sup>4</sup> Germain Lacasse, in collaboration with Serge Duigou, *L'Historiographie: les débuts du spectacle cinématographique au Québec* (Montreal: Cinémathèque québécoise, 1985).

<sup>5</sup> "Living Canada," *Montreal Daily Star* (3 May 1905): 10; *Montreal Daily Star* (21 April 1906): 10; Hye Bossin and Cliff Denham, "The Film and Canada: The Motion Picture Played a Part in Populating Our Country," *Canadian Film Weekly* (11 July 1951): 4-5.

<sup>6</sup> "Opening of Proctor's," *Montreal Daily Star* (26 February 1901): 8. *Filmographie des "vues" tournées au Québec au temps du muet*, <http://cri.histart.umontreal.ca/grafics/fr/filmo/>, last accessed 16 September 2011.

<sup>7</sup> Germain Lacasse, *Histoires de scopes: le cinéma muet au Québec* (Montreal: Cinémathèque québécoise, 1988), 12; Jean-Pierre Sirois-Trahan, in collaboration with André Gaudreault, "Quand le Nationoscope dama le pion au Ouimetoscope," in Gaudreault, Lacasse and Sirois-Trahan, *Au pays des ennemis du cinéma*, 163-74; Pierre Véronneau, "Edison in Quebec (1894-1913): Shedding a Foreign Light on the Origins of Cinema in Canada," *The Moving Image* 2:2 (Fall 2002): 101-102.

<sup>8</sup> *Lovell's*, multiple editions; *Montreal Daily Star* (21 December 1905): 4; *Montreal Daily Star* (26 December 1905): 12

<sup>9</sup> *Boxoffice* (24 September 1938): 96; [Hye Bossin], "The Movies Come to the Maritimes," *Canadian Film Weekly* (8 May 1963): 6.

<sup>10</sup> One of Ouimet's most discussed local actualities was the 1907 *Concours des sacs de sel*. See: <http://cri.histart.umontreal.ca/grafics/fr/filmo/viewrec.asp?lang=fr&id=168>, last accessed 26 October 2011.

<sup>11</sup> Sirois-Trahan, in collaboration with Gaudreault, "Quand le Nationoscope dama le pion au Ouimetoscope," 179-81.

<sup>12</sup> André Gaudreault et Jean-Pierre Sirois-Trahan, "Quand les Canadiens français damèrent le pion au... reste du monde," in Gaudreault, Lacasse and Sirois-Trahan, *Au pays des ennemis du cinéma*, 169-74.

<sup>13</sup> "Mr. A.C. Bromhead, of Gaumont & Co.," *Moving Picture World* 2:15 (11 April 1908): 318.

<sup>14</sup> "How Montreal Pioneered Moving Picture Business," *Montreal Daily Star* (6 April 1912): 22. Klaw's declaration is dated from "a few years ago" within the article.

<sup>15</sup> Robert Rumilly, *Histoire de Montréal* tome 3 (Montreal: Fides, 1972), 413-20.

<sup>16</sup> Jean-Marc Larrue, *L'activité théâtrale à Montréal de 1880 à 1914*, PhD dissertation, Département de Littérature française, Université de Montréal (1987), 515, 697-700; Mireille Barrière, "Sparrow, John Bolingbroke," *Dictionary of Canadian Biography Online*, [www.biographi.ca](http://www.biographi.ca), last accessed October 28, 2011.

- <sup>17</sup> Germain Lacasse, *Le bonimenteur de vues animées: le cinéma muet entre tradition et modernité* (Quebec City: Éditions Nota bene, 2000); "Joseph Dumais and the Language of French-Canadian Silent Cinema," in *Early Cinema and the National*, Richard Abel, Giorgio Bertellini and Rob King, eds. (London: John Libbey, 2008), 206-214; Germain Lacasse, Johanne Massé and Bethsabée Poirier, *Le diable en ville: Alexandre Silvio et l'émergence de la modernité populaire au Québec* (Montreal: Presses de l'Université de Montréal, 2012).
- <sup>18</sup> Lacasse, *Histoires de scopes*, 20; *Le Passe-temps* 13:322 (27 July 1907): 317.
- <sup>19</sup> See for instance the file for *Le concours des sacs de sel* on the *Filmographie des "vues" tournées au Québec au temps du muet*, <http://cri.histart.umontreal.ca/grafics/fr/filmo/>, last accessed 16 September 2011.
- <sup>20</sup> "La loi du dimanche," *La Patrie* (9 May 1912): 3; Lacasse, *Histoires de scopes*, 21-33; Yves Lever, *Anastasia ou la censure du cinéma au Québec* (Montreal: Septentrion, 2008): 25-28.
- <sup>21</sup> Lever, *Anastasia*, 28-30.
- <sup>22</sup> "Movie Censors Condemn Their First Picture," *Montreal Daily Star* (18 April 1913): 22; Lever, *Anastasia*, 30-38, quoting the minutes of the meetings of the Board of Censors, Régie du cinéma collection, BANQ. Author's translation.
- <sup>23</sup> Louis Pelletier, "'A Moving Picture Farce': Public Opinion and the Beginnings of Film Censorship in Quebec," in *Beyond the Screen: Institutions, Networks and Publics of Early Cinema*, Marta Braun, Charlie Keil, Rob King, Paul S. Moore and Louis Pelletier, eds. (London: John Libbey, 2012), 94-103; Pierre Hébert, Yves Lever and Kenneth Landry, *Dictionnaire de la censure au Québec: littérature et cinéma* (Montreal: Fides, 2006).
- <sup>24</sup> "Pathe Now Have Quebec Branch," *The Standard* (19 December 1914): 27; *Moving Picture World* 26:2 (9 October 1915): 305.
- <sup>25</sup> Léon-H. Bélanger, *Les Ouimetoscopes: Léo-Ernest Ouimet et les débuts du cinéma québécois* (Montréal-Nord: VLB éditeur, 1978), 176.
- <sup>26</sup> Lacasse, *Histoires de scopes*, 28-29.
- <sup>27</sup> Bélanger, *Les Ouimetoscopes*, 109-10.
- <sup>28</sup> Dane Lanken, *Montreal Movie Palaces: Great Theatres of the Golden Era 1884-1938* (Waterloo, Ont.: Penumbra Press, 1993), 38; Paul S. Moore, "Early Picture Shows at the Fulcrum of Modern and Parochial St. John's, Newfoundland," *Newfoundland and Labrador Studies* 22:2 (2007); [Bossin], "The Movies Come to the Maritimes," 4; "Albee Name Passes from Montreal Show Business," *Film Daily* (7 August 1929): 7; "Picture Men Form an Organization," *Montreal Daily Star* (20 January 1909): 6; *Lovell's*, multiple editions.
- <sup>29</sup> *The Gazette* (12 December 1908): 14; *Montreal Daily Star* (6 February 1909): 10.
- <sup>30</sup> Trebla, "À propos du Bennett's Nouveautés," *Le Canard* (10 January 1909): 4. Author's translation.
- <sup>31</sup> *Montreal Daily Star* (19 January 1909): 16.
- <sup>32</sup> "Le Théâtres des Nouveautés," *La Patrie* (5 April 1909).
- <sup>33</sup> Lee Grieveson, *Policing Cinema: Movies and Censorship in Early-Twentieth-Century America* (Berkeley: University Press of California, 2004), 1-3; "The Word Is Photoplay," *The Nickelodeon* (15 October 1910): 226; *Variety* (4 July 1913): 8.
- <sup>34</sup> Jennifer Wild, "Sur le déclin d'un dispositif culturel: la chanson illustrée," *1895* no. 47 (2005): 9-12. On the production of illustrated songs by Ouimet, see the entries for *Fou de jalousie* and *L'ange bleu* in the *Filmographie des "vues" tournées au Québec au temps du muet*, <http://cri.histart.umontreal.ca/grafics/fr/filmo/default.asp>, last accessed 22 August 2012.
- <sup>35</sup> "La taxe sur les 'cinéma'," *La Patrie* (4 December 1912): 4. Author's translation.
- <sup>36</sup> Minutes of the Ouimet-Fleure trial, Léon-H. Bélanger collection, Cinémathèque québécoise, quoted in: Lacasse, *Histoires de scopes*, 28.
- <sup>37</sup> "The Passing Hour," *Montreal Daily Star* (8 February 1909): 4.
- <sup>38</sup> *Montreal Daily Star* (7 December 1912): 2; *The Standard* (7 December 1912): 30.
- <sup>39</sup> "Willie Eckstein, Pianist and Composer (1888-1963)," *The Virtual Gramophone*, <http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/gramophone/028011-1008-e.html>, last accessed 1 November 2011; *Montreal Daily Star* (7 October 1911): 10.

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- <sup>40</sup> “Two Dramatic Reels Shown at the Strand,” *Montreal Daily Star* (30 December 1913): 2.
- <sup>41</sup> Lanken, *Montreal Movie Palaces*, 17-18, 25, 47-48.
- <sup>42</sup> Communauté urbaine de Montréal, *Répertoire d'architecture traditionnelle sur le territoire de la Communauté urbaine de Montréal: les magasins, les cinémas* (Montreal: Communauté urbaine de Montréal, 1985), xix-xx.
- <sup>43</sup> *Julius Cabn-Gus Hill Theatrical Guide and Moving Picture Directory* (season 1921): 66A.
- <sup>44</sup> Cinémathèque québécoise, Cinéma Impérial collection, 2001.0010.FD, blueprints of the Strand drafted by D.J. Crighton in June 1927; Lanken, *Montreal Movie Palaces*, 46-49.
- <sup>45</sup> Blueprints of the Strand drafted by D.J. Crighton in June 1927, CIC.
- <sup>46</sup> The only documented fire in the Strand's history occurred in 1930. Thanks to the theatre's safety features, it was circumscribed to the projection booth and only briefly interrupted the show. The IATSE-affiliated projectionist was eventually blamed for the incident. Roméo Vandette deposition, CIC, B13 F348.
- <sup>47</sup> “The Passing Hour,” *Montreal Daily Star* (15 February 1909): 4; “The Passing Hour,” *Montreal Daily Star* (23 February 1909): 4.
- <sup>48</sup> “The ‘Movies’,” *Montreal Daily Star* (29 November 29 1912): 12.
- <sup>49</sup> *The Standard* (7 December 1912): 30.
- <sup>50</sup> Much mystery subsists over the film adaptation of *La Tosca* headlining the Strand's inaugural programme. An advertisement published by the film's North American distributor, Universal Features, in the *Moving Picture World* [14:1 (5 October 1912): 109] claims that it was a Le Film d'art production featuring Sarah Bernhardt. The Fondation Jérôme Seydoux-Pathé's filmography however states that the Film d'art adaptation of *La Tosca* was a 1909 one-reeler featuring Cécile Sorel rather than Bernhardt [<http://filmographie.fondation-jeromeseydoux-pathe.com/index.php?id=3883>, last accessed 18 August 2012.] Part of the mystery is dispelled by the definitive Le Film d'art filmography prepared by the editors of *1895* [no. 56 (2008): 343], which explains that a first version featuring Bernhardt had indeed been produced in summer 1908 and briefly exhibited in Paris in December of the same year. It however seems that Bernhardt opposed any further exhibition of this production, which prompted Le Film d'art to shoot a new version with Sorel in the title role in January 1909. How Universal Features managed to get its hands on Le Film d'art first version and release it in North America four years after its production remains to be explained.
- <sup>51</sup> *Montreal Daily Star* (11 November 1913): 2; *American Institute Catalog of Feature Films*, <http://www.afi.com/members/catalog/AbbrView.aspx?s=1&Movie=16343>, last accessed November 4, 2011.
- <sup>52</sup> *La Patrie* (10 January 1914): 6. Author's translation.
- <sup>53</sup> See for instance the programmes advertised in *La Patrie* on 29 November 1913 (p. 16), 27 December 1913 (p. 10) and 3 January 1914 (p. 6).
- <sup>54</sup> *The Standard* (28 June 1913): 21, 26, 27; *Montreal Daily Star* (11 November 1913): 2; *La Patrie* (29 November 1913).
- <sup>55</sup> Examples include *Le message de la mort* (production company unknown, France) [*La Patrie* (29 November 1913): 16]; *David Copperfield* (Hepworth, Great Britain, 1913) [*La Patrie* (3 January 1914): 6].
- <sup>56</sup> CIC, B5 F132.
- <sup>57</sup> *La Presse* (17 September 1910): 15; *La Patrie* (17 September 1910): 28.
- <sup>58</sup> Advertisement published in the Sohmer Park 11 July 1915 programme, Municipal Archives of Montreal, Aegedius-Fauteux collection; Insurance Plan of City of Montreal, Quebec, Canada, Volume III (1915), map 1920, Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec.
- <sup>59</sup> George D. Vlassis, *The Greeks in Canada* 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Ottawa: 1953), 92, 139; Peter D. Chimbos, *The Canadian Odyssey: The Greek Experience in Canada* (Ottawa: McLelland and Stewart, in association with the Multiculturalism Directorate, Department of the Secretary of State and the Canadian Government Publishing Center, Supply and Services, Canada, 1980), 19; Sophia Florakas-Petsalis, *To Build the Dream: The Story of the Early Greek Immigrants in Montreal* (Montreal: Sophia Publications, 2000); “An Hellenic Tribute,” *Boxoffice* (19 November 1938): 94.

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- <sup>60</sup> Dane Lanken, "Movies Sold Ice Cream," *The Gazette* (25 February 1984): I-8; Lanken, *Montreal Movie Palaces*, 24; Florakas-Petsalis, *To Build the Dream*, 40; advertisement published in the Bennett's theatre 19 October 1909 programme, Montreal Municipal Archives, Aegidius-Fauteux collection. According to film historian Kira Kitsopani, film screenings were at the time frequent in French bars and restaurants (personal communication to the author, 5 November 2011). Outside of Lanken and Florakas-Petsalis's second-hand testimonies, I could not trace any historical source suggesting that such screenings were actually organized in Quebec restaurants in the early years of the twentieth century.
- <sup>61</sup> *The Canada Gazette* 43:36 (5 March 1910): 2619; *Montreal Daily Star* (5 March 1910): 1; Florakas-Petsalis, *To Build the Dream*, 165-66.
- <sup>62</sup> Lanken, *Montreal Movie Palaces*, 24; *Montreal Old and New* (1914): 364; *Ernest Cousins Limited*, <http://www.ernestcousinslimited.com/index.html>, last accessed 9 November 2011; *Laiteries du Québec*, <http://laiteriesduquebec.com/dairies/mtl-cousins.htm>, last accessed 9 November 2011. (It must however be noted that no document linking Cousins to the affairs of the group led by Ganetakos before the creation of the Independent Amusement in March 1912 has turned up over the course of the present research. The earliest reference to Cousins can be found in the announcement of the creation of the Independent Amusement published in the *The Canada Gazette* on March 23, 1912.
- <sup>63</sup> *Lovell's*, multiple years.
- <sup>64</sup> Municipal Archives of Montreal, 1909 Evaluation.
- <sup>65</sup> *Lovell's*, multiple years; interview with Michel Choquette, great-grandson of Léon Payette, 27 September 2007.
- <sup>66</sup> *Montreal Daily Star* (31 December 1910): 16.
- <sup>67</sup> "Au 'Moulin Rouge'," *La Presse* (17 September 1910): 15.
- <sup>68</sup> *Lovell's* (1913-14): 678. CIC, B8 F201. The letters patent for Independent Amusement were issued on March 12, 1912.
- <sup>69</sup> Minutes of the meetings of the board of directors of the United Amusement Corp., Ltd., CIC, B8 F234.
- <sup>70</sup> *Lovell's* (1906-07): 873.
- <sup>71</sup> "New Picture Theatre," *Montreal Daily Star* (19 August 1912): 3.
- <sup>72</sup> The Nickel was taken over by another exhibitor and operated as the Tivoli for some time.
- <sup>73</sup> Lanken, *Montreal Movie Palaces*, 55-56.
- <sup>74</sup> "Movies Don't Interfere with Vaudeville Houses," *Montreal Daily Star* (24 March 1913): 15.
- <sup>75</sup> *Montreal Daily Star* (25 April 1913): 14.
- <sup>76</sup> "Will Install Unit-Orchestra in New Theatre," *Montreal Daily Star* (24 April 1913): 2.
- <sup>77</sup> *Montreal Daily Star* (25 April 1913): 14.
- <sup>78</sup> "Unit Orchestra Made a Hit at Picture Theatre," *Montreal Daily Star* (26 April 1913): 2. The *Star* was reporting on a show organized for various guests of the theatre's management the night before the grand opening.
- <sup>79</sup> *La Presse* (30 March 1916): 7. Author's translation.
- <sup>80</sup> *Montreal Daily Star* (5 May 1913): 2; "Talking Movies, Perfect Unison for Eye and Ear," *Montreal Daily Star* (8 May 1913): 6.
- <sup>81</sup> "The Imperial," *Montreal Daily Star* (24 May 1913): 21.
- <sup>82</sup> Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec, raisons sociales de Montréal (1849-1939), Vol. 32, no. 1008, Kinemacolor of Canada, Ltd., incorporation papers, 16 November 1911; "Mr. Henry J. Brock, New Manager of Kinemacolor," *Moving Picture News* 5:4 (27 January 1912): 14; "La photographie en couleur et les vues animées," *La Patrie* (2 March 1912): 27.
- <sup>83</sup> Paul S. Moore, *Now Playing: Early Moviegoing and the Regulation of Fun* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2008), 99-102.
- <sup>84</sup> "Four Big Small Timers," *Variety* (2 April 1910): 8.

- <sup>85</sup> *Lovell's*, multiple years; *Montreal Daily Star* (6 July 1912): 22; "Season Passes to Theatre for Fly Killers Who Do Their Work Best," *Montreal Daily Star* (19 July 1912): 9.
- <sup>86</sup> "How Montreal Pioneered Moving Picture Business," *Montreal Daily Star* (6 April 1912): 22.
- <sup>87</sup> The Kinemacolor process required both the cameras and projectors to be equipped with shutters fitted with blue and red filters. Both apparatuses had to be operated at about twice the film rate of standard film equipment. "How Montreal Pioneered Moving Picture Business," *Montreal Daily Star* (6 April 1912): 22; *Montreal Daily Star* (27 April 1912): 24; Lanken, *Montreal Movie Palaces*, 50-53.
- <sup>88</sup> *Montreal Daily Star* (19 September 1914): 19.
- <sup>89</sup> *Montreal Daily Star* (27 April 1912): 24; "New Picture House," *Montreal Daily Star* (17 May 1912): 19; *The Standard* (16 November 1912): 27.
- <sup>90</sup> "Pay \$30,000 for 10-Year Lease of Movie Theatre," *Montreal Daily Star* (28 January 1914): 22. *Lovell's* lists the Mark-Brock Enterprising Co. as the owner of the Théâtre Français up until 1917, but does not list the owner of the theatre in 1918-1919. The list of Montreal theatre chains published in the 1920-21 (p. 193) edition the *Wid's Yearbook* contains no mention of Mark-Brock.
- <sup>91</sup> *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* (20 April 1918): 10, quoted in Lacasse, *Histoires de scopes*, 53.
- <sup>92</sup> *Variety* (14 September 1917): 27, 52-3.
- <sup>93</sup> *La Patrie* (9 September 1911): 6, 17; *Montreal Daily Star* (27 August 1913): 2.
- <sup>94</sup> *Variety* (9 August 1912): 7; *Variety* (16 January 1914): 9.
- <sup>95</sup> Declaration of Incorporation of St. Denis Theatre Co., Ltd. issued on December 28, 1914, author's collection. One Joseph A. Mackay of Montreal was President of the company. *Variety* (25 February 1916): 29; *Variety* (3 March 1916): 25; "Broke All Records," *Variety* (10 March 1916): 23; "L'ouverture du Théâtre Saint-Denis," *La Presse* (6 March 1916): 3.
- <sup>96</sup> Pierre Véronneau, "Le succès est au film parlant français (Histoire du cinéma au Québec I)," *Les dossiers de la Cinémathèque* no. 3 (Montreal: Cinémathèque québécoise, 1979): 5; "St. Denis Theatre, Montreal," *Construction* 9:7 (July 1916): 215; "L'ouverture du Théâtre St. Denis," *La Presse* (6 March 1916): 3. Author's translation.
- <sup>97</sup> "Stock and Pictures," *Variety* (21 April 1916): 32; "New Policy at St. Denis," *Variety* (4 August 1916): 17; *Variety* (15 September 1916): 47; *Variety* (18 May 1917): 37; "St. Denis Theater Under Hammer," *Moving Picture World* (2 June 1917): 1481.
- <sup>98</sup> *Variety* (14 September 1917): 33; "Loew's 2d in Montreal?," *Variety* (25 January 1918): 8; *Variety* (20 September 1918): 37; "Pop in Montreal's St. Denis," *Variety* (11 October 1918): 21; *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* (16 November 1918): 7.
- <sup>99</sup> "St. Denis Theater Under Hammer," *Moving Picture World* (2 June 1917): 1481; *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* (5 October 1918): 12.
- <sup>100</sup> *La Patrie* (11 March 1916): 16.
- <sup>101</sup> *La Presse* (4 March 1916): 12, 13; American Film Institute *Catalog of Feature Films*, <http://www.afi.com/members/catalog/DetailView.aspx?s=1&Movie=16621>, last accessed November 15, 2011.
- <sup>102</sup> Merrick R. Nutting, "Conditions in Quebec Are Very Bad Due to a Number of Causes," *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* (2 March 1918): 6.
- <sup>103</sup> Merrick R. Nutting, "Fifty-Fifty," *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* (19 January 1918): 5; *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* (7 September 1918): 8; *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* (28 September 1918): 9.
- <sup>104</sup> Lacasse and Véronneau both claim that the Théâtre St. Denis was owned by interests close to Famous Players Canadian in the 1920s. Véronneau, "Le succès est au film parlant français," 5; Lacasse, *Histoires de scopes*, 80.
- <sup>105</sup> *La Patrie* (20 November 1917): 7; *Construction* (February 1918): 45-51.
- <sup>106</sup> Douglas Gomery, *The Hollywood Studio System: A History* (London: BFI Publishing, 2005), 27-36.
- <sup>107</sup> Lanken, *Montreal Movie Palaces*, 75; *La Patrie* (15 December 1917): 21; *Montreal Herald and Daily Telegraph* 19 January 1918): 9.
- <sup>108</sup> Gomery, *The Hollywood Studio System*, 28.
- <sup>109</sup> "Four Big Small Timers," *Variety* (2 April 1910): 8.

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<sup>110</sup> “Française’s [sic] \$1,000 Shows,” *Variety* (2 August 1912): 8. See also: *Variety* (20 August 1910): 8.

<sup>111</sup> Inaugurated in 1917, the Princess replaced a smaller theatre of the same name, which had mysteriously been seriously damaged in a fire just as it was about to host the Montreal premiere of D.W. Griffith’s *Birth of a Nation* in September 1915. The new Princess frequently alternated between moving pictures, vaudeville, and legitimate theatre policies over its first years of operation. See: “Le feu au Princess,” *La Patrie* (23 September 1915): 1; “Spotlight Wire Likely Cause of Princess Fire,” *Montreal Daily Star* (28 September 1915): 9; “Cannot Find Cause of Princess Fire,” *Montreal Daily Star* (29 September 1915): 16; Lanken, *Montreal Movie Palaces*, 71-73.

<sup>112</sup> All figures from: *Julius Cabn-Gus Hill Theatrical Guide and Moving Picture Directory* (season 1921): 65A-66A. These figures do not include theatres operating in the towns of Verdun or Lachine.

<sup>113</sup> It should however be noted that Keith had opened and operated the Théâtre St. Denis for a few months in 1916. Loew’s would also briefly integrate the Théâtre Français (then known as the Loew’s Court) to its chain in the early 1920s. See: *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* (1 September 1919): 27.

<sup>114</sup> Paul S. Moore, “Movie Palaces on Canadian Downtown Main Streets: Montreal, Toronto, and Vancouver,” *Urban History Review* 32:2 (Spring 2004): 3.

<sup>115</sup> “Colored Line Defined in Montreal,” *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* (24 January 1920): 14.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>117</sup> “Colored Citizens Indignant,” *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* (7 February 1920): 10.

<sup>118</sup> Peter White, *Investigation into an Alleged Combine in the Motion Picture Industry in Canada, Report of Commissioner* (Ottawa: Department of Labour, Canada, 30 April 1931), 145.

<sup>119</sup> For tentpole releases and other major productions, a third print was sometimes borrowed for a few weeks from the distributor’s Toronto branch office. Bibliothèque et Archives Nationales du Québec, Régie du cinéma collection, E188.

<sup>120</sup> Paul S. Moore, “Everybody’s Going: City Newspapers and the Early Mass Market for the Movies,” *City and Community* 4:4 (December 2005): 350-53.

<sup>121</sup> *The Adventures of Kathlyn* was serialized in the *Montreal Daily Star* between January 10 and June 27, 1914. It was followed by the serialization of *The Million Dollar Mystery* (Thanhouser, 1914), which began in the *Daily Star* issue containing the last installment of *The Adventures of Kathlyn*.

<sup>122</sup> On that regard, see the exchange between the Commissioner and the Colonel Cooper in: White, *Investigation into an Alleged Combine in the Motion Picture Industry in Canada*, 137.

<sup>123</sup> Moore, “Everybody’s Going,” 350-51.

<sup>124</sup> Miriam Hansen, *Babel and Babylon: Spectatorship in American Silent Film* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1991), 95-96.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, 101.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, 100-1.

## Chapter 3

### *Famous Players in Montreal:*

#### *Vertical Integration and Local Agency in the 1920s*

The period covered by this chapter constitutes a rare instance of history actually fitting the decade-by-decade periodization that is often imposed upon it. We will thus see over the next few pages how an organization created in January 1920, Famous Players Canadian Corp., managed to quickly build a national network of prestigious film theatres, quash or annex most of its opposition, and elevate itself to a position from where it could virtually control the whole Canadian film industry by the time its formidable expansion was suddenly halted by a number of 1929 events, including the stock market crash and the industry's conversion to sound.

Historians such as Manjunath Pendakur, Ian Jarvie, Kirwan Cox, and Germain Lacasse have previously chronicled the seemingly unstoppable rise of Famous Players on the national scene in the 1920s, and argued that the new chain was largely responsible for the quick demise of the pioneering Canadian chain built by the Allen family between the mid-1900s and the early 1920s.<sup>1</sup> In many cases, their accounts also emphasize the deleterious effects of the alleged monopolistic practices of the US-controlled chain. The main thrust of their work will neither be disproved nor discredited by the new data exposed here, as the assembled data leaves no doubt that Famous Players was a vertically-integrated organization seeking to gain a monopoly position in the Canadian film market. The current chapter will further emphasize the growing importance of first-run exhibition foregrounded by Pendakur, Jarvie and others, and show how distribution, and more particularly access to the output of the

leading US studios, increasingly shaped the film market as protection periods started to be enforced by exchanges between runs.

It will however be argued that a close look at regional markets – in this particular case that of Montreal in the 1920s – reveals that Famous Players' expansion was not always as simple and unopposed as some accounts make it to be. The national chain may have developed privileged relations with the major distributors controlling most of the films released in Canada by the mid-1920s, but local exhibitors still had the in-depth knowledge of local communities required to maximize the popular appeal of movie shows. This knowledge was, as we will see, especially crucial in a bilingual and multicultural city like Montreal, where a multiplicity of linguistic communities, governmental organizations, civil and religious groups sought to control the new form of popular entertainment. This tension between the growing influence of national organizations and the agency of local exhibitors will more particularly be made visible by the examination of the relationship developing between Nathanson's Famous Players and George Ganetakos's Montreal chain.

### **Allen Theatres and Famous Players Enter the Montreal Market**

The spring of 1921 saw two new awe-inspiring movie palaces, the Capitol and the Allen, being inaugurated within less than two months of each other in Montreal's main retail district. The opening of these two majestic venues surpassing in luxury any other theatre built in the city until then did more than consolidate St. Catherine Street West's position as the main site for moviegoing in Montreal. It also brought two national organizations originating from outside the Province of Quebec to the forefront of the local film market, and ushered a new era of heightened competition between exhibitors. Moving pictures were now firmly established as a mass medium widely patronized by both the working and middle

classes, and had as a result come to be regarded as a potentially highly profitable line of business. Quite predictably, big business had entered the fray and started to finance the expansion of national theatrical networks.

The most prominent organization in the Canadian exhibition market at the turn of the 1920s was Allen Theatres, a national chain managed by brothers Jule and Jay J. Allen, a pair of US-born Jewish entrepreneurs who had actually entered the exhibition business while still in their teens. Built with the help of their father Barney, brother Herbert, and associates from the Rosenfeld family, the Allens' theatrical enterprise had been steadily growing since the opening of the brothers first nickel show in Brantford, Ontario, in 1906.<sup>2</sup> **[Figure 3.1]** Between 1906 and the early 1920s, the Allens had opened a series of increasingly luxurious film theatres in Ontario and Western Canada. According to Kirwan Cox, author of the most detailed account of the eventful rise and fall of the Allens' theatrical empire, the chain controlled more than forty Canadian moving picture theatres by 1919.<sup>3</sup> These would be joined by several additions to the chain over 1920 and 1921, as the Allens simultaneously opened many more Canadian theatres and sought to expand out of the country with the opening of their largest film palace to date, the 3,003-seat Cleveland, Ohio, Allen theatre (still standing), and other prestigious projects in Detroit and on London's Leicester Square.<sup>4</sup>

The Allens' seemingly boundless ambitions had however not prevented them from waiting no less than twelve years before making their first foray east of the Outaouais River, a fact suggesting that the brothers were quite aware of the particular challenge represented by the Quebec market. The chain nevertheless came in with a bang in the late summer and early fall of 1918, when it opened no less than three theatres on the island of Montreal within five weeks. All three of the Allens' new theatres had been acquired from other theatrical enterprises.<sup>5</sup> The chain's first venture on the island, the 1915 Royal Alexandra

theatre located in suburban Lachine, had thus been bought and rebuilt by the chain after having been forced to close following a fire earlier in 1918.<sup>6</sup> (The Allens' presence in Lachine was however destined to be short-lived: the Royal Alexandra was closed and sold to the Rosenbloom family, which owned another Lachine film theatre, the next spring.<sup>7</sup>)

The opening of the reconstructed Royal Alexandra was followed a few weeks later by that of the Westmount theatre, a fancy 1,100-seat theatre actually located in adjacent Notre-Dame-de-Grâce, as the city of Westmount did not permit the building and operation of moving picture theatres on its territory at the time. **[Figure 3.2]** Though inaugurated as an Allen theatre, the Westmount had initially been a project of the Majestic Theatre Co., which had started work on the building nearly a year and a half before, in May 1917, but had proved unable to defray the whole of the \$58,000 of the theatre's construction costs.<sup>8</sup> Two weeks after the opening of the Westmount, the Allens took over the downtown New Grand. Once the west end's leading film theatre, the New Grand had been outclassed between 1912 and 1917 by the successive openings of the Strand, Imperial, and Loew's theatres. Its current manager, George Rotsky, had however developed a reputation as one of the top showmen in Montreal, which not only permitted him to stay with the New Grand, but landed him a position as supervisor of the Allens' Montreal theatres.<sup>9</sup>

The chain pursued its expansion in the Province of Quebec in 1919 with the acquisition of two theatres in Quebec City, the *Canadien* and the prestigious *Auditorium* (still operated as a show venue in 2012, the *Capitole*).<sup>10</sup> In August of that year – that is, less than a year after the opening of the Allens' first venue on the island of Montreal – word also started to get out that the chain was about to build a new house on St. Catherine Street West. Construction work eventually began in mid-1920 on a massive new theatre located within two blocks of the Loew's and Strand theatres.<sup>11</sup> Like the Loew's, the Allens' new

house actually stood some distance from the street, where land was less expensive, and connected to a narrow St. Catherine Street façade through a long corridor.

The chain's majestic 2,600-seat Allen theatre was finally inaugurated on May 14, 1921. Designed by the same Detroit-based architect that had conceived most of the Allens' theatres since 1918, C. Howard Crane, the Montreal Allen was by far the largest theatre erected in Canada by the organization.<sup>12</sup> Press announcements reported that the new theatre would be placed in the expert hands of George Rotsky, and rapturously described the "sumptuous palace's" marble stairs, thick Italian red carpets, and decorating scheme "mixing art and opulence." Mentions were also made of the venue's 25-piece orchestra, which was specially directed on opening night by Luigi Romanelli, musical director of Allen theatres. *La Patrie* further praised the new theatre's management for the opening night's bilingual speeches and printed programmes.<sup>13</sup>

Conspicuously missing from the advertisements published by Allen Theatres on the occasion of the Montreal Allen's inaugural was any definite information pertaining to the films to be exhibited at the new venue. The Allen's copy simply promised "the utmost in photoplay attractions" ("*ce qu'il y a de plus beau en attractions cinématographiques*" in French papers) without hinting at any title or trademark to be featured at the theatre.<sup>14</sup> This absence can in all likelihood be linked to the major setback suffered by Allen Theatres in late 1919, when the Allen-controlled Famous Players Film Service had lost the Canadian franchise that had for many years granted the chain's theatres a privileged access to the output of the most popular and most productive US film producer.

Like their contemporary Léo-Ernest Ouimet, the Allens had understood very early on that the operation of exchanges would solve their supply issues while opening additional revenue streams through rentals to other exhibitors. Cox has shown how the sustained

growth of Allen Theatres between the mid-1900s and late 1910s had largely been predicated on the Allens' control of the output of many leading film producers in the territories the chain was operating in. The Allens' first exchange, the Canadian Film Co. opened in 1907, for instance handled Pathé, Laemmle and IMP products in its early days.<sup>15</sup> The Allens' distribution outfit was eventually renamed the Famous Players Film Service in 1914, so as to advertise Jule and Jay J.'s decision to drop their Universal franchise and sign up with William Hodkinson's Paramount. The latter handled the films produced by Adolph Zukor's new Famous Players Film Co., and had been the first distributor to guarantee exhibitors two features a week. The Allens' exchanges also acquired the rights to the films produced by Paramount's main competitor, the exhibitors' cooperative Associated First National, a few years later. By the turn of the 1920s, the Allens also handled a fair number of British pictures, which had for the most part been obtained through Sam Smith, an associate of Max Aitken (Lord Beaverbrook), and Ray Lewis. The latter had temporarily relinquished her editorship of the *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* to spend a year abroad investigating the British film industry and acquiring films for Jule and Jay J. in 1919-1920.<sup>16</sup>

Distribution issues played just as big a role in the Allens' downfall as it had in their rise. The chain's eventual fate further demonstrates the growing entanglement of the Canadian and US film industries. According to the accounts pieced together by Douglas Gomery and Cox, a key moment in the process leading to the vertical integration of the North American film industry was the creation in 1917 by several American and Canadian theatre-owners of an exhibitor's cooperative dedicated to moving picture production, the aforementioned Associated First National. The new outfit promptly signed some of leading stars of the era, including Charles Chaplin and Mary Pickford, which in turn permitted it to enlist even more exhibitors. This situation led Zukor, who had recently ousted Hodkinson

from Paramount and arranged the merger of the Famous Players Film Co. and the Jesse L. Lasky Feature Play Co., to start buying theatres.<sup>17</sup> Zukor eventually tried to justify his theatre acquisition campaign in a 1921 statement reproduced in the *Canadian Moving Picture Digest*:

Famous Players-Lasky Corporation entered the exhibition field only after certain exhibitors entered the field of producing and distributing pictures and put forth an organized effort to take from us our stars and directors. [...]

Our distribution was threatened and there was no alternative but to acquire theatre interests in localities in which conditions beyond our control seemed to make it necessary in our best judgment to safeguard our business.

Only by a wide distribution of Paramount Pictures can we insure the revenue necessary to maintain the quality that exhibitors and the public demand. The prosperity of each exhibitor is linked with the producers. He must have a steady supply of good pictures. We must have a wide outlet for our pictures.<sup>18</sup>

According to film historian Benjamin Hampton, Zukor successfully raised ten million dollars by turning to Wall Street and having Loeb and Co. sell Famous Players-Lasky preferred stock – a first for a moving picture company.<sup>19</sup> The funds raised by this operation then permitted him to build or acquire many first-run theatres, as he had grown to believe that this class of theatres held the key to the control of the industry.

With Paramount's theatre-acquisition campaign well underway in the U.S. by 1918, Zukor set his sights on the Canadian market. His first move allegedly was to propose a partnership to the Allens. The offer was however swiftly declined by Jule and Jay J., who did not feel like taking orders from Zukor. According to an apocryphal story reported by Cox, it is at this point that Jay J. committed a capital mistake by bragging about telling Zukor off to one of his Toronto neighbors. Enter Nathan L. Nathanson (1886-1943), billboard salesman and budding film entrepreneur.<sup>20</sup> **[Figure 3.3].**

A native of Minneapolis, Nathanson had been involved with various ventures since his arrival in Canada in the 1900s. Like Montreal's George Ganetakos, Ernest Cousins and, later on, J.A. DeSève, he had been involved for a while in the dairy business, having operated ice

cream stands, first at Toronto's Scarboro Beach Amusement Park in 1907, and then at Montreal's Dominion Park – an experience which later led him to take credit for the introduction of the ice cream cone in Canada.<sup>21</sup> Nathanson's first actual film enterprise had been Toronto's Regent theatre, a downtown palace opened in 1916 by E.L. Ruddy, then Nathanson's employer, and millionaire broker J.P. Bickell. According to Moore, Nathanson only assumed control of the Regent's company when it started to build or acquire other Ontario venues. He then managed, with the financial backing of Bickell, J.B. Tudhope and W.J. Sheppard, to reorganize the enterprise, which became Paramount Theatres Ltd.<sup>22</sup> Nathanson also, as we have seen in chapter 2, became involved with the affairs of the Montreal Théâtre St. Denis for some time in 1917-1918.

It should therefore come as no surprise that Nathanson, who by 1918 found himself at the helm of a steadily expanding chain of theatres, promptly seized the opportunity opened by his neighbor Jay J.'s ill-advised confidence on the Allens' aborted deal with Zukor. Things rapidly proceeded from there. In May 1919, the *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* reported that Nathanson was making "very frequent trips to New York," and that on at least one occasion he and some of his associates had been in conference "for quite some time" at the executive offices of Famous Players-Lasky.<sup>23</sup> In September, the *Digest* announced that the Allens' Famous Players-Lasky franchise would not be renewed, and that "the entire product from the Famous Players-Lasky studios and their affiliated companies" would from now on be distributed by the producing organization's own Canadian distribution branch, the newly created Famous-Lasky Film Service represented by six exchanges throughout the Dominion.<sup>24</sup>

Famous Players Canadian Corp. was finally organized in February 1920. The *Digest* reported on that occasion that:

The strength of the financial and executive associations of the new company is indicated by the presence on the board of influential Canadian business leaders, among whom are Sir Herbert Holt, president of the Royal Bank of Canada; W.D. Ross, director, Bank of Nova Scotia and I.W. Killam, president, Royal Securities Corporation.

It is understood that the new corporation will be capitalized at \$15,000,000 of which there is shortly to be offered by Royal Securities Corporation [...] for public participation \$4,000,000 cumulative first preferred shares. [...]

The new financing is for the purpose of building and acquiring 15 large theatres in addition to the 16 already controlled which early in 1921 will give the new combination a seating capacity of 45,000.<sup>25</sup>

Missing from this epoch-making announcement was any mention of the fact that Zukor actually filled the president's seat on the new company's board.<sup>26</sup> The extent of Famous Players-Lasky involvement with Famous Players Canadian Corp. would indeed become a contentious point as the 1920s proceeded. At the time of the company's creation, the *Digest* merely mentioned a series of trips undertaken by Zukor to the Toronto head offices of the Famous Players Canadian Corp. and Famous-Lasky Film Service in the early 1920s.<sup>27</sup>

The new Famous Players Canadian Corp. clearly did not intend to split the Canadian market with the opposition. As noted by Moore, the chain readily engaged in head-on competition with the Allens, most notably through the building of theatres located in close proximity to Allen houses.<sup>28</sup> In Montreal, Famous Players actually scooped the more established Allens with the inaugural of its first local theatre, the palatial 2,600-seat Capitol theatre, on April 2, 1921 – six weeks before the opening of the Allen theatre located just on the other side of McGill College Avenue. The opening of the Capitol was framed as a momentous event in local film history by Nathanson and Famous Players-Lasky, who sent a party of more than a dozen film stars, personalities and executives from New York to parade on the theatre's stage on opening night.<sup>29</sup> **[Figure 3.4]** Famous Players however shrewdly decided to have a local film personality be the main speaker at this star-studded affair. The *Digest* thus reported that:

Naturally the greatest amount of interest was taken in the opening, which was marked by a worthy compliment being paid to Mr. L. Ernest Ouimet, president of the Specialty Film Import, Limited, who was asked by the Famous Players' directors to open the new theatre, on account of his being recognized throughout the moving picture world as the pioneer of the moving picture industry in Canada. It was realized that nothing could be more appropriate than a gentleman who has devoted his life's ambition to the progress of the motion pictures, should be called upon to present the latest advance in theatres to an interested community.

Mr. Ouimet, who was loudly cheered as he appeared before the screen, said he felt pleased to think that his pioneer efforts had been so complimented, and said that he had dreamt for many years of a Photoplay Palace which would rival the greatest institutions in the world. He had always hoped that this theatre would be built in Montreal, Canada's foremost city. Here they had a fitting monument to the Motion Picture Industry. An industry that is today still in its infancy; but an industry that had, in his estimation, greater possibilities than any other business. [...]

Mr. Ouimet said that he was especially happy in the success of Mr. N.L. Nathanson, managing director of the Famous Players Canadian Corporation, for there they had a structure which was after his own ideas.<sup>30</sup>

Ouimet's Specialty Film Import would incidentally be acquired less than a year later, in March 1922, by the Nathanson-controlled Regal Films for an undisclosed sum.<sup>31</sup>

The branding of Famous Players as a Canadian organization was further emphasized by the Capitol's slogan – "More than a theatre, a national institution" – as well as by the content of the theatre's inaugural programme. The show for instance opened with a performance of *God Save the King*, and included both the most recent issue of Specialty's British-Canadian Pathé News and the very first Kinogram Travelogue produced by Montreal's Associated Screen News, *Quebec Old and New*. The two other films on the Capitol's inaugural bill were *Neighbors*, a Buster Keaton Metro comedy, and the headlining feature *Forbidden Fruit*, a Famous Players-Lasky production directed by Cecil B. DeMille and concerned with "a woman's fight between love and duty."<sup>32</sup>

Famous Players' selection of live attractions for the Capitol's grand opening clearly aimed to amplify the gentility implied by the luxurious setting. The evening's programme thus included an overture by the 25-piece Capitol Symphony Orchestra and a scene from

*Romeo and Juliet*. That being said, Famous Players seems to have been aware that too strong an emphasis on Shakespeare and classical music might have caused some to view the Capitol as a somewhat stuffy establishment. The inclusion of the Capitol Jazzemans in the theatre's inaugural programme consequently suggests an attempt to strike a balance between "respectable" performances and modern popular attractions.<sup>33</sup>

This tension between tradition and modernity was also inscribed in the Capitol building itself. Newspaper accounts of the theatre's opening combined elaborate descriptions of the usual vaulted ceilings, exotic marbles and thick rugs with admiring mentions of the modern communications technologies installed at the Capitol, such as the "intercommunicating telephones [...] provided throughout the house." Some peculiar features of the theatre's projection booth, which had been integrated to the structure supporting the balcony, were also emphasized by reporters. *The Standard's* description for instance explained that:

From the lounge-room patrons may view the picture machine [*sic*] in operation, as the wall of the operating room is constructed entirely of glass. The operating room provides the most modern projection equipment, machines being built of white enamel, floor and walls of white tile.<sup>34</sup>

This unusual – almost clinical – set up simultaneously added the display of the latest moving picture technology to the spectacle offered by the Capitol and constituted a curious throwback to the early days of animated pictures, when the apparatus could be as much of an attraction as the images it produced.

Beyond the particular choices made by their respective decorators, the neighboring Capitol and Allen theatres were actually nearly identical in terms of size and general conception. Both offered the same array of amenities (check-rooms, gentlemen's smoking rooms, ladies' retiring rooms, etc.), and programmed weekly shows combining a first-run multi-reel feature film with live acts and short films (typically: a newsreel, a travelogue, and a

comedy). To the average moviegoer, the main distinction between the two establishments most likely rested in the feature films headlining each theatre's bill on any given week. A survey of the newspaper advertisements published by the Capitol and the Allen over 1921 and 1922 reveals that, quite unsurprisingly, the Capitol mostly booked Famous Players-Lasky productions, with some United Artists, Realart, Hodkinson and Metro titles thrown in.<sup>35</sup> It is also worth noting that the Capitol seems to have been the first St. Catherine Street West palace to advertise bilingual prints on a regular basis.<sup>36</sup> At the Allen, most headlining slots were given to First National features, with a selection of Fox, Goldwyn and United Artists productions filling in the gaps. Famous Players-Lasky releases seem to have been entirely kept out of the Allen chain by the Nathanson-controlled Famous-Lasky Film Service, but First National titles were occasionally booked by the Capitol.<sup>37</sup> The predominance of First National titles at the Allen can be explained by the fact that the Allens had secured First National subfranchises for all of their Canadian theatres in the wake of the loss of their Famous Players-Lasky franchise in 1919.<sup>38</sup> The film headlining the Montreal Allen's 1921 grand opening had thus been a First National product, the Constance Talmadge vehicle *Lessons in Love* (Chester Withey, Constance Talmadge Film Co., 1921).<sup>39</sup>

While the films booked by the Montreal Allen were by no means shabby, Famous Players' Capitol appears to have had access to a more continuous flow of US productions featuring the most prominent stars of the era. Rudolph Valentino for instance appeared on the Capitol's screens for three weeks in a row in the late spring of 1922, when a bilingual print of the tremendously popular *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse* (Rex Ingram, Metro, 1921) was held for a second week, and then followed by *Beyond the Rocks* (Sam Wood, Famous Players-Lasky, 1922), also in a bilingual version.<sup>40</sup>

The Allen theatre tried to compete by occasionally booking prestigious European productions, such as Ernst Lubitsch's spectacular historical drama *Madame DuBarry* (Projektions-AG Union, 1919), starring Pola Negri. Retitled *Passion* by its North American distributor, First National, this first German production to be exhibited in Canada since the armistice had initially been sternly denounced as an "immoral spectacle" by Canadian women and veterans' groups a few months before its first Montreal run at the Allen. It had nevertheless been defended by Lewis's *Digest*, who had called it "a revelation of what the Screen can give us in the perfection of its art." It was, in any case, held for a second week in the fall of 1921 at the Allen where, quite unsurprisingly, the theatre's publicist chose to emphasize the film's "European star" and French settings rather than German origin.<sup>41</sup> Another notorious German production exhibited at the Allen in May 1922 was *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (Robert Wiene, Decla-Bioscop, 1920).<sup>42</sup> It would be followed a few weeks later by *Teodora*, an epic Italian production set in Ancient Rome (Leopoldo Carlucci, Ambrosio-Zanotta, 1921).<sup>43</sup>

Lack of data pertaining to the box office receipts of the various films exhibited at the Allen and Capitol in the early 1920s does not permit any definite statement regarding the results of each house's programming strategy to be made. The fact that no Montreal exchange ever attempted to market European features on a large-scale however suggests that popular demand for European films was generally believed to be quite low within the industry. Montreal's most prominent importer of European features in the 1920s, Charles Lalumière, was an independent entrepreneur, and his films were rarely, if ever, booked by Famous Players-affiliated theatres.<sup>44</sup> In the final years of the silent era, only exceptional productions such as Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* or Abel Gance's *Napoléon* occasionally reached the city's leading movie palaces.<sup>45</sup>

This disaffection for European films appears to have extended to the British pictures imported by a few exchanges, including the Allens'. Ray Lewis, who would remain throughout her career a strong supporter of Canada's Imperial connection in general and of British film in particular, reported in 1923 that the British pictures introduced on the national market by the Allens since the end of the war had "met with a varied success."<sup>46</sup> She would later publish in the *Digest* a series of editorials putting the blame for the lack of interest for these films on the British film industry itself. British productions, Lewis argued, relied too heavily on gloomy themes, were poorly made, and badly promoted. In a 1927 open letter to the Federation of British Industries, she remarked:

I have seen some of the recent English-made pictures, most of them are at least fifty per cent ahead of the former releases, but most of them have still another fifty per cent to go to reach that state of satisfaction which a well-produced German, or US picture give up when it is produced, with a view towards entertaining a world trade.<sup>47</sup>

Many film historians, including the author of the first substantial British film history, Rachel Low, would eventually come to share Lewis's poor opinion of the late-silent era British film production.<sup>48</sup>

The Allens' supply woes were soon compounded by financial worries in the early 1920s. According to Lewis, these difficulties were rooted in the chain's ambitious foreign expansion campaign.<sup>49</sup> Allen Theatres had attempted at the turn of the 1920s to fund its Canadian and foreign expansion plan through a five millions dollars preferred shared offering, but eventually failed to raise enough money. Cox opines that Allen Theatres simply could not compete for the investors' money with the new Famous Players Canadian Corp., whose stock offering was handled by Montreal's prestigious Royal Securities. The latter's president, Killam, later admitted that the fact that Nathanson held for a guaranteed twenty years the Famous Players-Lasky franchise previously controlled by the Allens had been "essential to assure the stability of the investment of the large amount of money being spent

on theatres.” In his opinion, the franchise could be considered the foundation of Famous Players’ original financing.<sup>50</sup>

The short but severe 1920-21 depression further hurt Allen Theatres, and forced Jule and Jay J. Allen to take desperate action. The brothers invested a large sum owed to creditors in German Marks in the hope that the quickly devaluing currency had hit rock bottom. It had not, and Allen Theatres found itself in crisis by the time of the opening of the Montreal Allen. As both leading film supplier and largest creditor of Allen Theatres, First National felt compelled to intervene by offering the Canadian chain a substantial advance.<sup>51</sup> The cooperative knew that the failure of Allen Theatres would cost it dearly, and additionally put Famous Players in good position to acquire total control of film exhibition in Canada. This situation was to be avoided at all cost, as it would in turn permit Zukor and Nathanson to squeeze First National out of Canada’s first-run houses, or at the very least dictate their prices and conditions when booking the cooperative’s productions.<sup>52</sup>

The most detailed account of Allen Theatres’ last two years can be found in Cox’s piece on the Allens, which was partly based on interviews with surviving family members, and narrates Nathanson and J.P. Bickell’s multiple attempts to acquire the family’s theatres.<sup>53</sup> Between the fall of 1921 and the spring of 1923, Famous Players’ representatives made a series of bids for the acquisition of Allen’s theatres. These were all turned down by the Allens or their creditors until G.T Clarkson, whose company had announced a personal assignment for the benefit of Jule and Jay J. Allen in May 1922, suddenly and unexpectedly authorized the sale of twenty of the best Allen theatres to Nathanson’s chain on June 6, 1923. The sale proceeded for the incredibly low price of \$392,073, which represents an average price of \$19,604 per house – less than 12% of the valuation of the theatres. Various undue pressures and conflicts of interest were surmised in relation to the transaction by

industry observers, and later historians, but never proven.<sup>54</sup> Famous Players' acquisition of the key Allen houses strongly reinforced Nathanson's grasp on the first-run exhibition market, and thus on the Canadian film industry.

The transaction granted 53.3% of the stock interest of the Montreal Allen theatre to Famous Players, who eventually added the venue to its chain in the fall of 1923.<sup>55</sup> The Allen was left in George Rotsky's capable hands, but rechristened the Palace on November 11, 1923 so as to reflect the change in ownership.<sup>56</sup> Famous Players first attempted to turn the Palace into a roadshow venue where exceptional films would be shown during multi-week engagements at higher prices (\$1.50 top) and on a reserved seat basis. The first film exhibited under this new policy was Rex Ingram's *Scaramouche* (Metro, 1923), a period drama featuring Ramon Novarro. It was followed in December 1923 by one of the greatest commercial successes of the silent era, *The Covered Wagon* (James Cruze, Famous Players-Lasky, 1923).<sup>57</sup> The Palace's roadshow policy however seems to have met with limited success. Within a few months of its rechristening, the theatre was back to a regular first-run policy – which is not to say, of course, that the luxurious venue had fell into disregard. Together with the Capitol, the Palace would keep on being one of Montreal's two leading first-run theatres for about half a century, and remain part of Famous Players' chain until the building's eventual conversion into a short-lived virtual reality amusement center in 2000.

The other major Montreal Allen theatre, the Westmount, was excluded from the transaction between Famous Players and the Allens, having been sold by the Majestic Theatre Co. to the Independent Amusement on April 26, 1923, a few weeks before the fire sale of Allen Theatres' main assets. The venue nevertheless remained under the management of the Allen family, who would keep operating it as the Allen's Westmount for nearly three more years.<sup>58</sup> As for the Allens' third Montreal house, the New Grand, it closed soon after

the dismantling of Allen Theatres. This converted church had presumably outlasted its useful life as a downtown moving picture theatre by the mid-1920s.

Famous Players scored another major coup in the spring of 1923 when it took over the Loew's, still Montreal's largest theatre. According to the evidence gathered by commissioner Peter White in 1931, the Loew's subsidiary operating the theatre, Loew's Montreal Theatres Ltd., had been undergoing financial difficulties since the early 1920s. This permitted Famous Players to seize control of the prestigious theatre through a \$100,000 loan agreement signed on March 21, 1923. The deal provided for the acquisition by Famous Players of Loew's Montreal Theatres Ltd. as a going concern, and the creation of a new company, Mansfield Theatre Co. (named after the street adjoining the theatre), to operate the Loew's. Famous Players was granted 51% of the common shares of the new company, a booking fee of \$100 per week, and a promise by Loew's not to become involved in the operation of any other Montreal venue. For Montreal theatre-goers, the transaction's most visible immediate consequence was that the theatre's vaudeville acts, which used to be booked from Loew, were now obtained from Pantages.<sup>59</sup>

The acquisition of the Montreal Allen and Loew's theatres in the spring of 1923 suddenly elevated Famous Players – a company that had opened its first Montreal theatre, the Capitol, only two years before – to the position of leading local film exhibitor. The chain's control of the three most prestigious downtown film palaces left distributors with very little leverage when negotiating for dates and terms with Nathanson and his local representatives, as the remaining downtown theatres not affiliated with Famous Players were either older and smaller (the Strand and Imperial), or primarily dedicated to other types of entertainment, be it vaudeville (the Orpheum), burlesque (the Gayety), or legitimate theatre (the His Majesty's and Princess theatres).

Famous Players' strong bargaining position largely rested on the fact that producers and distributors badly needed to have their films exhibited in large downtown first-run movie palaces. The first and most obvious of the multiple reasons justifying this situation was that venues of the Loew's, Capitol, and Palace's class held more seats, charged higher admission prices, and had longer runs (one week or more against two to four days) than second or subsequent run theatres, and consequently generated more revenues. In his 1933 study of the US film industry, Howard T. Lewis, claimed that "40% of the total revenue of all pictures [was] secured from the first-run showing in one hundred key centers," and that "about 50% of the total revenue of a picture [was] obtained within the first ninety days after its release."<sup>60</sup> In Canada, commissioner White reported in 1931 that the nation's distributors estimated that between 50% and 72% of their revenues were generated by downtown first-run theatres located in a few key cities.<sup>61</sup>

First-run theatres further became entrenched as an essential phase of film marketing at the turn of the 1920s, when the industry's advertising campaigns came to be increasingly centered on downtown movie palaces. In Montreal, as in presumably most North American cities, the advertisements published in newspapers by first-run houses were generally much larger and eye-catching than those published by lesser houses. According to H.T. Lewis, this widespread practice led many industry members to believe that films were "of little or no value to the neighborhood house and smaller towns" until they had received "exploitation and advertising in a show-window theater."<sup>62</sup> Similar observations were later made by film historians Richard Koszarski, Ian Jarvie, and Robert Sklar. According to the latter:

Possession of the first-run theaters allowed [leading film] companies to shape the dominant discourse about movies. Advertising, publicity, and commercial tie-ins whetted the public's interest far beyond the theaters in which first-run movies were actually playing, and they sustained moviegoers desire and demand as films flowed from center to periphery.<sup>63</sup>

Even Ray Lewis, who sought to oppose the growing influence exerted by chains (i.e., Famous Players) in the 1920s, and consequently attempted to downplay the importance of first-run exhibition, had little choice but to concede that: “Exhibitors also come in for the benefits which the first-run houses confers, for in playing the picture after its first-run, they have a product which is already advertised.”<sup>64</sup>

In short, Famous Players’ domination of the first-run exhibition market – a firmly established fact by mid-1923 – did more for Nathanson than simply permit him to get favorable conditions for his theatres from distributors. It also put him in a position from where he could launch indirect, but still very effective attacks, against competing exhibitors, as it permitted Famous Players to threaten to deny access to its key venues to any distributor granting favorable conditions to opposition theatres.

### **Independent Amusement, United Amusements, and the Rise of the Neighborhood Theatre**

We have just seen how the opening of the Capitol and the subsequent takeover of the Allen and Loew’s theatres established Famous Players as the leading Montreal exhibitor in the early 1920s. A few facts nevertheless suggest that the local film market had not fully stabilized by the end of 1923, and, furthermore, that Nathanson’s ambition had not yet been fully sated. S. Morgan-Powell, celebrated drama critic for the *Montreal Daily Star* and Montreal correspondent for the *Canadian Moving Picture Digest*, thus testified in the summer of 1924 that:

The theatrical situation here [in Montreal] is still tangled up in a most mysterious manner, though there are not wanting indications that it may shortly be straightened out. With the Capitol, the Palace, and Loew’s theatre all under the aegis of the Famous Players Canadian Corporation, the element of beneficial competition has been almost entirely eliminated, and whether the results will be for the good of the film is not at all certain just now. One thing seems sure – it is impossible, under existing conditions, to

show three first-class films each week at these houses in a city like Montreal, where a large percentage of the movie patrons live in the suburbs and wait for the feature films to be exhibited at the suburban houses at greatly reduced prices. What that will lead to, time alone can tell.<sup>65</sup>

The growing significance of the theatres established in Montreal's various neighborhoods or "suburbs" (a label applied to areas such as the Plateau, Rosemount, Mile End, Outremont, Westmount, and St. Henri, which were then seen as outlying) in the early 1920s can partly be attributed to the expansion of George Ganetakos's chain, then made up of the theatres controlled by the jointly operated Independent Amusement and United Amusements companies.

United Amusements has been organized by Ganetakos and his partners in December 1919. It operated the theatres owned by the organization, leaving the leased houses (the Moulin Rouge and the Strand) to Independent Amusement.<sup>66</sup> Both companies were headed by boards of directors composed of the same individuals – Ernest A. Cousins (president), Isidore Crépeau (vice-president), George Ganetakos (managing-director), J.E. Brooks, D.A. Murray, Demetre Zarafonites, and Léon Payette –, while bookings for all of the group's theatres were made at the chain's head office located in the Albee Building adjoining the Imperial theatre.<sup>67</sup> Theatre managers were consulted on matters of bookings and policy, but ultimately had to forfeit control to the chain's executive committee. Advertisements for Independent and United theatres were also systematically grouped in newspapers.

Ganetakos and his partners presumably chose to expand in "the suburbs" in the years following the opening of the St. Catherine Street Moulin Rouge (1910) and Strand (1912) theatres because they understood that their organization was in no position to compete downtown with Keith, Loew's and, later, Allen Theatres and Famous Players. The first suburban house opened by Independent Amusement was the Regent, located on Park Avenue at Laurier in the quickly developing Mile End district. The company had bought the

land where the theatre stood in July 1915, and then partly funded its construction through a public offering of \$40,000 worth of Independent Amusement shares. Labeled “the photoplay house palatial” in the chain’s advertisements, the Regent was, together with the Théâtre St. Denis inaugurated on the very same day – March 4, 1916 –, the most luxurious film theatre built outside of the downtown core of the city by this point. With its white terracotta façade, its postless balcony, and its opulent decoration, the Regent generally reprised the model set by the Strand, but on a larger scale (it held 1,200 seats, against 800 for the Strand), which should come as of no surprise, since both theatres had been designed by the same architect, D.J. Crighton.

The Regent was managed at the time of its opening by Frank Warnicker, who would remain connected to Ganetakos’s group for many years. Another notable Regent employee was Vera Guilaroff, its film accompanist. A protégée of Independent Amusement’s musical director, Willie Eckstein, Guilaroff came from a rather illustrious family: her sister Olga also was a pianist of note, while her brother Sydney would eventually become MGM’s lead hairdresser. As for the theatre’s location, it seems to have been selected as carefully as its personnel. The *Montreal Daily Star* thus noted that, partly thanks to its proximity to many public transit lines, the Regent could draw customers “from all north of Fletcher’s Field [now Jeanne-Mance Park], including Outremont, and from the mountain as far as people care to come.”<sup>68</sup>

The few Independent Amusement annual statements available (summarized in Table 3.1) show that the company’s new suburban theatre managed to draw sizable audiences.

*Table 3.1: Revenue and net profits, Independent Amusement 1915-1920*

	Revenue, year ending April 30, 1915	Net profits, year ending April 30, 1919*	Net profits, year ending April 30, 1920
Moulin Rouge	\$7,032.24	\$4,651.15	\$10,557.38
Strand	\$25,680.74	\$20,549.41	\$46,084.17
Regent	n/a	\$18,270.97	\$15,559.81**

\* Montreal theatres had been closed for business for several weeks in the fall of 1918 due to the Spanish flu epidemic.

\*\* For the eight months preceding the theatre's transfer to United Amusements.

Source: Statements reproduced in *Montreal Daily Star* (23 August 1915): 8, and available in *CIC, B9 F307*.

The same statements however also reveal that, while the Regent generated sizable profits, Independent Amusement's most profitable operation remained its downtown theatre, the smaller Strand. As for the chain's original theatre, St. Catherine Street East's Moulin Rouge, it remained profitable a decade after its opening, but generated much less revenues than the fancier Strand and Regent.

The sizable profits generated by Independent Amusement's three houses all-through the late 1910s however failed to convince the chain's management to quickly expand their operations. As a matter of fact, no new theatre would be opened by Ganetakos and his partners for more than five years after the Regent's 1916 inaugural. This substantial lull in the enterprise's growth remains hard to explain as, contrarily to the Second World War, the Great War did not bring any governmental measures preventing the erection of new amusement venues. As we have seen, many large theatres, including the St. Denis, the Loew's, and the Allen's Westmount, were indeed built and inaugurated in Montreal during the war.

Ganetakos's group waited until January 1920 to launch its next theatre project on a piece of land situated on Papineau Avenue at Mount-Royal, in the Plateau district. This choice of location sparked a prolonged turf war with the Lawand and Tabah families

operating the Dominion theatre directly facing United Amusements' new property.<sup>69</sup> One should however be careful not to reduce the relationship between the Dominion and United's new house to sheer competition, as both chains were likely aware of the advantages to be derived from the operation of theatres located in close proximity to other entertainment venues. The construction of several large downtown movie palaces on a short stretch of St. Catherine Street West had more particularly exemplified how entertainment hubs effectively amplifying the drawing power of each venue could be created for the benefit of all involved.

Ganetakos's new United Amusements issued \$250,000 worth of shares in order to finance the building of its new house, which was once again to be designed by D.J. Crichton, in collaboration with painter Guido Nincheri and plasterer Anthony De Giorgio.<sup>70</sup> Upon its April 16, 1921 opening, United's new 1,500-seat venue featured a Hope-Jones unit orchestra, and promised "all the luxury of the downtown theatre close to home." The chain wisely tailored its new venue's marketing strategy to suit the population of the predominantly francophone district where it was located. The new house was thus named after one of the most highly esteemed character in French-Canadian history, nineteenth century politician and Patriotes Rebellion leader Louis-Joseph Papineau (1786-1871), whose portrait sat atop the theatre's vertical sign. Another well-known member of the French-Canadian community, Léo-Ernest Ouimet, contributed to the Papineau's opening by furnishing the latest issue of his current Canadian newsreel, the British-Canadian Pathé News, as well as by dispatching two US screen personalities to the event, June Caprice and Lucy Fox. The announcement of the Papineau's opening published by United Amusements in *La Patrie* was also, incidentally, signed by Isidore Crépeau and French-sounding Ernest Cousins, but not by the company's managing director, George Ganetakos.<sup>71</sup>

The construction of the Papineau theatre marked the opening of a sustained expansion campaign for the chain jointly operated by Ganetakos's Independent Amusement and United Amusements. Between 1920 and 1923, the chain's directors looked into the acquisition of properties located on Notre-Dame Street at St. Augustin in St. Henri, on St. Catherine Street West at Mackay, as well as into the rental or acquisition of the Laurier Palace (St. Catherine Street East, in Hochelaga-Maisonneuve), Ouimetoscope (St. Catherine Street East), Mount-Royal (Laurier near Park, Mile End), Crystal Palace (St. Lawrence at St. Catherine), Théâtre Français (St. Catherine near St. Lawrence), Tivoli (the old Nickel, at St. Catherine Street West at de Bleury), and Théâtre Victoria (Quebec City).<sup>72</sup> As we have seen, Ganetakos and his partners ultimately chose to invest in the more up-to-date Allen Westmount, as well as in the St. Henri Family theatre. The latter was acquired and closed for renovation by Independent Amusement on July 23, 1923. It would reopen under a new name, the Corona, on October 6, 1923, after having been refurbished by Crighton and Briffa.<sup>73</sup>

The largest transaction involving the group headed by Ganetakos was however completed just two months after the opening of the Papineau, on June 14, 1921. It involved the takeover of the assets of the St. Lawrence Amusement Co. and Northern Amusements, Ltd., two companies headed by one of the foremost members of the local Greek community, Demetre-Eustrate Pergantes, a.k.a. P.G. Demetre. One of the very first Greek immigrants to settle in Montreal in the early 1890s, the industrious Demetre had, like Ganetakos, first operated various fruit and confectionary stores. He had then moved into real estate, where he had managed to amass a sizable fortune. Demetre's first film venture had been the Starland theatre installed in the ground floor of the Monument National building on St. Lawrence Boulevard, which he had operated for a few years in the early

1910s.<sup>74</sup> A few years later, on November 20, 1920, Demetre's St. Lawrence Amusement had inaugurated the Belmont theatre, a 1,200-seat neighborhood palace located near the intersection of Mount Royal Avenue West and St. Lawrence Boulevard. The theatre was renowned for its series of paintings by celebrated artist Guido Nincheri, which, according to *The Standard*, depicted various "scenes taken from Greek mythology" on the walls of the auditorium, while "twelve beautiful women in graceful pose [representing] the working hours of the theatre" adorned the ceiling.<sup>75</sup> Seven months after the Belmont's opening, Demetre's group agreed to lease the venue to United Amusements for a \$3,500 yearly rental, a \$35,000 payment, and \$165,000 worth of United shares.<sup>76</sup>

The June 14, 1921, transaction between the Ganetakos and Demetre groups also resulted in the transfer of the theatre then being constructed by Northern Amusements on St. Hubert Street at Beaubien to United Amusements, in exchange for \$13,000 cash and \$14,000 worth of United shares.<sup>77</sup> Crighton was then hired to enlarge the structure built by another regular collaborator of both Ganetakos and Demetre, general contractor James Atsalinos. A few months later, in December, United Amusements' board of directors ratified a deal with illustrious theatre decorator Emmanuel Briffa. The outline of the agreement was recorded in the meeting's minutes:

The Managing Director [George Ganetakos] advised that he had arranged with Mr. E. Briffa (of [Detroit's] Jagwin and Co.) to do this on a time and material basis, we to supply the material and pay all men in his employ on the job \$1.00 per hour and double time for himself, this being the arrangement which the Company had formerly employed him to their satisfaction.<sup>78</sup>

The Plaza theatre was finally inaugurated on 17 February 1922 under the management of Eugène Lefebvre, who had been recruited from Ouimet's ailing Specialty Film Import.<sup>79</sup> It was the sixth theatre operated by Ganetakos's group, and the third to be added to United Amusements' roster in less than a year.

The final property involved in the transaction between the Ganetakos and Demetre groups was a piece of land situated on Park Avenue south of Bernard Street, in the Mile End district, which was sold by Northern Amusements to United Amusements for \$126,000. United Amusements issued \$200,000 worth of shares to fund this acquisition, as well as its takeover of the Belmont and Plaza. The transaction left Demetre as United Amusements' largest individual shareholder. United's board of directors was altered to reflect this situation in February 1922, when P.G. Demetre was elected director in replacement of Demetre Zarafonites.

The P.G. Demetre deal arguably sheds some light on Ganetakos's sustained success as an entrepreneur between the opening of the Moulin Rouge in 1910 and his 1955 passing. While most of the testimonies of his contemporaries depict him as a tough character (Léo Choquette, who was United's office boy at the outset of his long film career, for instance describes in his diary a burlesque boxing exhibition given by Ganetakos at a Kiwanis benefit presented at the St. Denis in 1923<sup>80</sup>), United Amusements' managing director seems to have favored partnerships with fellow Greek entrepreneurs over hostile takeovers. As we will see in the following pages, the Demetre deal would soon be followed by similar deals with the local theatrical enterprises operated by the Sperdakos and Lazanis families. The story of the organization led by Ganetakos thus gains to be contrasted with that of Famous Players Canadian Corp., whose tumultuous history was marked by much infighting, betrayals, and hostile acquisitions.

All of this is not to say that Ganetakos's organization could not be a determined competitor, as the Syrio-Lebanese Lawand and Tabah families surely realized in the 1920s. The first serious skirmish between the two chains revolved around the Park Avenue property acquired by United Amusements in 1921. Trade journals had at the time of the

transaction reported United's intention to build a new theatre, but the lack of availability of the chain's favored architect, Crichton, delayed the project. By the time of the approval of Crichton's plans by United's board in February 1924, the chain had been scooped by the Lawands, who had just launched construction work on a large theatre located just on the other side of Park Avenue. Presumably fearing the effect of this competition on the attendance of its projected theatre, as well as on that of the nearby Regent, United Amusements entered into talks with the Lawands. The two parties eventually came to an agreement in April: United Amusements would buy the lease on the Lawand theatre currently under construction for \$60,000 and a promise not to become interested in any theatre located within a mile of the Laurier Palace and Maisonneuve theatres operated by the Lawands in Hochelaga-Maisonneuve.<sup>81</sup> United Amusements' new Park Avenue theatre, the 1,400-seat Rialto, was completed in the fall and inaugurated on December 27, 1924.<sup>82</sup>

**[Figure 3.5]**

The deal between United Amusements and the Lawands happened at the same time as Independent Amusement's decision not to renew its lease on the first theatre opened by the Ganetakos organization, the Moulin Rouge.<sup>83</sup> This turn of event gave the Lawands an edge in Montreal's east end, as Ganetakos and his partners had chosen to prioritize the building and acquisition of theatres located in the city's northern and western suburbs between 1916 and 1924. Both chains however conceded the downtown area to Famous Players: by 1924, no theatre had been built in the city's commercial center by either Ganetakos or the Lawands and Tabahs since the 1912 Strand.

**Nathanson, Ganetakos, and the Creation of United Amusement Corp., Ltd.**

Early in July 1924, as construction work quickly proceeded on the new Rialto theatre, the directors of United Amusements received a letter from Famous Players' managing director, N.L. Nathanson. Within two months, this communication would lead to one of the most influential deals in the history of film in Montreal. The content of the letter received by United Amusements is unfortunately not disclosed by the papers part of the Cinéma Impérial collection held by Cinémathèque québécoise. It nevertheless remains possible, through the parallel accounts of the trade press and of United's surviving company records, to reconstitute much of the events that unfolded over the few weeks separating the reception of this communication and the subsequent signature of a series of epoch-making agreements between the groups led by Nathanson and Ganetakos.

United Amusements' directors found Nathanson's missive sufficiently important to warrant the examination of the proposal contained therein by a specially appointed committee. On July 24, the latter presented a report clearing some of the mystery surrounding Nathanson's proposition, as it contained various recommendations on "the advisability of amalgamating our Company with the Independent Amusement Ltd. by forming a new Company," as well as on "the purchase from the Famous Players Canadian Corp., Ltd. of an interest in their film franchise rights for the island of Montreal." The committee's recommendations were approved one week later during a meeting where the board also resolved to proceed "as set forth in [Nathanson's] letter." A meeting with Nathanson was then set up on August 21, 1924 at the Montreal Ritz-Carlton. It would conclude with United's board unanimously voting in favor of Famous Players' latest proposal.

The agreement setting up the new United Amusement Corp., Ltd. (note the singular "Amusement") was finally signed on September 9, 1924 by the representatives of Famous

Players, Independent Amusement, and United Amusements.<sup>84</sup> It was promptly ratified by Independent Amusement and United Amusements shareholders, and on October 21, the new company received its letters patent. A second agreement signed on October 24 then officially launched the new company by rendering effective the terms of the September 9 deal.<sup>85</sup>

While the chronology of the negotiations leading to United Amusement's creation is fairly easy to establish through the paper records left behind by the company and its predecessors, a fair deal of conjecture still hangs over the goals and motives of the two groups involved in the deal. For Nathanson and Famous Players, participation in Ganetakos's prosperous chain probably meant more than a share of the profits generated by the Montreal organization. The Toronto-based chain also likely aimed to facilitate the booking of the films of its parent company, Zukor's Famous Players-Lasky, in key Montreal theatres. Zukor and Nathanson no doubt further hoped that this situation would, in turn, greatly narrow the outlets available to competing producers and distributors.

It is on that regard worth noting that Independent Amusement and United Amusements theatres were known to be good customers of Associated First National. In May 1924, A.L. Gorman, Montreal branch manager for First National, had for instance stated to the *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* that:

The City of Montreal is a First National stronghold, each zone being represented by a Franchise holder and subsequent runs are sold solidly on every release. These exhibitors who present First National pictures week in and week out are confirmed boosters of our company and consist of the most successful show men in this province. Especially is this true of the Independent and United Amusements Company who plays our pictures with surprising regularity.<sup>86</sup>

Gorman incidentally attributed his organization's success in Quebec to the fact that all prints of First National pictures distributed in the Province featured bilingual titles. Earlier reports from the *Digest* suggest that the preferred relationship between Ganetakos and First National

was fairly well established by the turn of the 1920s. The trade paper for instance reveals that during a party thrown in 1921 by First National for Eastern Canadian exhibitors: “Mr. George Nicholas of the United Theatres, Montreal, proved to be the orator of the occasion and his talks were forceable [*sic*] and did much to cement the feeling of fellowship that was so prominent a feature of the ‘Get Together’.”<sup>87</sup> **[Figure 3.6]** This testimony points to yet another reason why Famous Players seemed determined to do business with United Amusements and Independent Amusement, which is that by 1924 George Ganetakos had proved to be a very effective manager, an energetic leader, and a well-connected member of both the film industry and the local business community. In short, he was not somebody one wished to have as competitor, or could hope to easily replace as manager.

Before we look into the interests of Ganetakos and his associates in regard to the agreement signed on September 9, 1924, a contemporaneous development in Montreal’s theatrical world must be examined. The purpose of this digression is to permit us to assess if the joint direction of Independent Amusement and United Amusements entered into negotiations with Famous Players of its own free will, or if pressure tactics had been used to bring it to the table. The event in question is the sudden takeover of the Mount Royal theatre by United Amusements on October 4, 1924.<sup>88</sup>

A modest 710-seat theatre located on Laurier just east of Park, the Mount Royal had been showing moving pictures in the North End since 1913.<sup>89</sup> Once part of Arthur St. Germain’s chain, which also included the Crystal Palace and Family for some time, the Mount Royal had been transferred to Athanasias “Jim” Sperdakos in early 1921.<sup>90</sup> Like Ganetakos and Demetre, Sperdakos had first operated a confectioner’s shop with family members before entering the movie business in 1908 with the opening of the Fairyland on Notre-Dame West. The Sperdakos brothers had soon added a Maisonneuve theatre, the

Alhambra, to their nascent chain. By 1912, Jim Sperdakos had become sufficiently established as a local showman to be elected president of the Association of Montreal film exhibitors.<sup>91</sup>

Sperdakos seems to have been more than a competitor to Ganetakos. Indeed, the latter had back in 1918 taken over the organization of the stag party “feting [Sperdakos’s] bridegroom.” According to the *Digest’s* report on the party, which had been held at the Ritz-Carlton and attended by nearly a hundred local film men, Ganetakos had notably used the event to teach his fellow exhibitor how to “keep the baby quiet” through the use of an electrically heated milk bottle, among other “friendly tips [...] regarding married life.”<sup>92</sup> (The event would have some sort of epilogue in 1947, when Ganetakos’s United Amusement agreed to lease the Mount Royal to Sperdakos’s recently demobilized son, so as to help him provide for his family. The deal – contrarily to Sperdakos’ marriage – was however left unconsummated.<sup>93</sup>)

The Mount Royal theatre had long seen its activities closely monitored by the management of the nearby Regent. The *Digest* had for instance reported in October 1918 that:

A fact that has caused a good deal of talk and conjecture during the week has been the sight of the heads of Paramount exchange in company with their contractor viewing the estate and location of the Mount Royal theatre in the North End of the city. Although nothing official has been given out, it is regarded as pretty certain that they have ulterior designs on that theatre. [...] It is understood that the management of a North End theatre very close to the Mount Royal are viewing the situation with some concern.<sup>94</sup>

Concerns over the competition offered by the Mount Royal however seems to have abated in the wake of the takeover of the theatre by Sperdakos in 1921. Ethnic and fraternal ties presumably ensured that rivalry between the two Mile End venues would not become too heated, and that, if need be, the local community – be it of Greek expatriates or exhibitors – could be called upon to arbitrate. This situation does seem to support Ray Lewis’s belief that

destructive competition tended to be the domain of delocalized combines. Lewis more particularly argued in the *Digest* that:

The independent exhibitor is satisfied to go on running his theatre at a living profit, but Big Combines are after Big Money and are not satisfied with small returns. The Independent exhibitor who has established himself in a certain city or town has become a part of the life of that city or town, his children have been born there, they are being educated there, he has made his friends there, he is in fact an integral part of the centre in which he is carrying on his business. He is most unlikely to “pull up stakes.” A Combine or Company have their head offices elsewhere, they send their paid managers to manage a theatre, changing him about as suits their convenience. This company is no part of a city or town, it means nothing to the company save a financial loss or gain to give the landlord back his theatre.<sup>95</sup>

While a trifle simplistic, Lewis’s conception of local competition might help explain the relative scarcity of conflicts and hostile takeovers within the Montreal film market in the years preceding Famous Players’ arrival on the scene. It thus seems likely, for instance, that Ganetakos would have alienated many members of his community had he decided to corner or otherwise unfairly treat Sperdakos.

So why did United Amusements suddenly felt the need to annex the Mount Royal, a theatre older, smaller, and much less luxurious than most of its houses, on September 11, 1924?<sup>96</sup> Circumstantial evidence suggests that Famous Players’ was somehow involved in the transaction. For starters, the records left by Independent Amusement and United Amusements contain no trace whatsoever of negotiations between Sperdakos and Ganetakos. What’s more, the Mount Royal deal was signed only two days after the agreement between Ganetakos and Nathanson’s organizations. It consequently seems quite likely that the transaction had actually been set up by Nathanson, presumably so that he could place Ganetakos’s organization in front of two options: either it agreed to the creation of a new company partly-owned by Famous Players and inherited the Mount Royal theater, or it resigned itself to see Famous Players take control of a venue located at the heart of its Northern stronghold. It should be reminded that, in addition to the Regent located two

blocks west on Park, United Amusements controlled two theatres located within walking distance of the Mount Royal, the Belmont and the soon-to-be-opened Rialto, as well as two other houses located within the same general area, the Papineau and the Plaza. The 1931 White Report indeed reveals that Famous Players routinely resorted to this kind of pressure tactics against stubborn independent exhibitors.<sup>97</sup> Had it been taken over by Famous Players, the Mount Royal would have been treated with better dates and conditions, as well as permitted to offer lower admission prices for as long as it would take to bring Ganetakos down. Famous Players' national network could support a few money-losing houses if their continued operation helped weakening the opposition.

It further appears that, by allegedly forcing Ganetakos to take over Sperdakos's Mount Royal and agree to the creation of the new United Amusement Corp., Nathanson effectively hit two birds with one stone. In one of the two *Digest* editorials she devoted to the Mount Royal affair, Ray Lewis thus revealed that, in addition to leading to the acquisition by Famous Players of an interest in Ganetakos's profitable enterprise, the transaction permitted Nathanson to serve a lesson to independent exhibitors. Lewis explained that:

It is perhaps due to the efforts of Mr. Sperdakos to protect the Independents that he was "squeezed out." Mr. Sperdakos is the treasurer of the M.P.T.O. [Motion Picture Theatre Owners] of Canada and has been among its most ardent and zealous workers.

The Mount Royal was sandwiched between two theatres recently acquired by the Famous Players Canadian Corp. through their affiliation with the United Amusements Ltd. The Mount Royal was in a zone, the north end of Montreal, which was completely controlled by Famous Players Corp. with one exception the Dominion theatre managed by N. Lawand. Mr. Sperdakos, unable to get product, and here we blame the Independent producers for this stringency, has leased his theatre to the United Amusements Ltd., for a term of ten years; and no doubt at terms which Mr. Sperdakos could not dictate.<sup>98</sup>

The Mount Royal affair indeed reveals the extent of Famous Players' control on Canadian film distribution. By the fall of 1924, even "suburban" exhibitors could at best hope to get a subsequent run of the films handled by just about any exchange.

As suggested by Lewis, this situation was for the most part a consequence of the deal between Nathanson and Ganetakos's organizations. One of the central clauses of the agreement carved the island of Montreal into two territories to be primarily exploited by either Famous Players or the new United Amusement. In exchange for a promise by Famous Players not to "erect, acquire, operate or be interested, directly or indirectly" in any moving picture theatre located outside of a downtown perimeter delineated by St. James Street (now St. Jacques) in the south, de Bleury Street in the east, Sherbrooke Street in the north, and Guy Street in the west, United Amusement bound itself not to become interested in venues located within this perimeter or outside the island of Montreal. An exception was however made for the Strand theatre, by this point the oldest active theatre erected by Ganetakos's organization, which United Amusement was permitted to keep and operate as a first-run theatre.<sup>99</sup> Famous Players no doubt calculated that the Strand's limited capacity would not permit it to compete with its own theatres for the first-run of major releases.

Another central clause of the agreement between Ganetakos and Nathanson's organizations dealt with the Famous Players-Lasky franchise held by Famous Players, which guaranteed a steady supply of films to Famous Players until 1939. The national chain undertook to share with United Amusement its Famous franchise, together with any other it might obtain over the course of the agreement. This meant that, on the island of Montreal, Famous Players' downtown theatres would get the first-run of Famous Players-Lasky products, while United Amusement would be the first to exhibit the same films in outlying districts. Independent (i.e., not affiliated with either Famous or United) theatres were consequently prevented from booking the popular Famous Players-Lasky pictures before they had been exhibited for a whole week downtown and had made the round of United Amusement's increasingly numerous neighborhood theatres. As Nathanson's influence

ensured that even non-Famous Players-Lasky films would largely follow the same route, the agreement gave United Amusement theatres a considerable competitive edge over the opposition.

The September 9 and October 24 agreements further specified that, in return for the privileged access to Famous Players-Lasky productions it would give United Amusement and the territorial concessions it had made, Famous Players would be granted a sizable participation in the Montreal chain. This was clearly reflected by the ownership of the United Amusement Corp. As determined by the 1924 agreements, the new company's authorized capital was fixed at \$3,000,000, divided in 30,000 shares of a par value of \$100. Famous Players received as per the agreements 7,020 ordinary voting shares, in additions to \$3,500 in cash and the right to buy 350 privileged shares. Control of the United Amusement however remained in the hands of the Ganetakos group, who was granted a grand total of 7,980 ordinary voting shares and 7,155 privileged shares after the exchange of Independent Amusement and United Amusements shares, as shown in Table 3.2.

**Table 3.2: United Amusement Corp., Ltd., Issued Shares, 1924**

	Ordinary voting shares		Privileged cumulative 8% non-voting shares	
<b>Independent Amusement</b>	<b>2,340</b>		<b>2,925</b>	
<b>United Amusements</b>	<b>5,640</b>		<b>4,230</b>	
<b>Total Independent + United</b>		<b>7,980</b>		<b>7,155</b>
<b>Famous Players</b>		<b>7,020</b>		<b>350</b>

The transaction put Famous Players in control of \$702,000 worth of United Amusement voting shares without having to invest an actual dollar in the enterprise (safe for the \$35,000 worth of privileged non-voting shares it was permitted to buy at par value).

United Amusement's board of directors reflected the company's dual ownership. Two directors, Nathanson and J.P. Bickell, were Famous Players nominees, while the remaining

seven – Ganetakos, Cousins, Crépeau, Demetre, Payette, James E. Brooks, and D. Allen Murray – represented the Montreal group. Cousins (president), Crépeau (vice-president), Ganetakos (managing-director), Murray (comptroller), and Nathanson formed the executive committee.<sup>100</sup>

The question of United Amusement’s control was however complicated by a second set of agreements signed on September 9. These set out the terms of the transfer by Famous Players of 1,500 of its 7,020 ordinary United Amusement voting shares to the Montreal group. The stated purpose of this operation was to obtain “the hearty co-operation of the directors and officials” who had successfully carried the businesses of the Independent Amusement and United Amusements since 1910. The situation addressed by Famous Players through this manœuvre was outlined in H.T. Lewis’ 1933 study of the film industry:

After a company has faced [the] problems of expansion and has acquired its theaters, it is then confronted by the problems of theater management. One of the most important of these, and one to which due attention is not always given, is the securing of capable theater managers [...] The former owners frequently are in no mood to cooperate with new policies nor are they of the temperament which renders them capable of working well under the direction of someone else. [...] It is, of course, true that, if the former owner still maintains a substantial or controlling interest in the business, an additional incentive for cooperation is provided.<sup>101</sup>

175 of the shares returned by Famous Players were handed out to United Amusement theatre managers and collaborators such as D.J. Crighton, Willie Eckstein, William Lester, and future theatre chain owner Léo Choquette, then an eighteen-year-old office boy working for the company of his grandfather, Léon Payette.<sup>102</sup>

The remaining 1,325 shares transferred to the Montreal group by Famous Players were, as per a second agreement, entrusted to the Montreal Trust Co. and integrated to a voting trust, that is, to a pool of shares voting in block at the company’s general assemblies. The Montreal group added 2,075 shares to this trust, while Famous Players contributed 4,500 more. Famous Players consequently ended up controlling a majority (4,500 out of

7,900) of the shares placed within the voting trust controlling the majority of voting United Amusement shares (7,900 out of 15,000). However, to complicate things even further, Famous Players agreed to have this voting trust directed by a committee composed of seven voting trustees on which its nominees were outnumbered five to two by those of the Montreal group.<sup>103</sup> Control of the new United Amusement thus ultimately remained in the hands of the group of Montreal entrepreneurs and investors that had built the chain operated by Independent Amusement and United Amusements between 1910 and 1924.

Still, the best guarantee that control of the United Amusement would not leave Montreal arguably lay, not in this complicated series of agreements, but rather in the experience, connections, and deep understanding of local conditions that made Ganetakos and his partners hard to replace at the helm of the chain. For as long as the Montreal chain continued to successfully meet local conditions and generate sizeable profits (net profits would indeed go up from \$117,729 in 1924-1925 to \$296,452 in 1929-1930<sup>104</sup>), Nathanson likely saw no reason to risk alienating the chain's efficient management by requesting greater control. It could also be argued that, by 1924, Famous Players' sheer size and influence often rendered outright control of its subsidiaries redundant. The national chain had just demonstrated with the takeover of Allen Theatres that it could crush or starve any chain or exhibitor that dared go against its will. It is finally worth noting, regarding the issue of local control, that after more than a decade of nationalistic agitation branding cinema as a foreign influence variously threatening local identity and culture – be it labeled British, Canadian, or French-Canadian – Famous Players might have deemed preferable to blur the tracks leading from its local Canadian theatres to Adolph Zukor's New York office.

## **Famous Players and United Amusement Consolidate Their Position in the Montreal Market**

United Amusement did not immediately launch into an aggressive building and acquisition campaign in the months following the signature of the agreement granting it a privileged access to many of the most lucrative US film productions. As a matter of fact, the new company continued the relatively conservative expansion policy that had well served Independent Amusement and United Amusements in the 1910s and early 1920s. United Amusement would add several venues to its network between 1925 and the onset of the Depression at the turn of the 1930s, but only through the targeted acquisition and construction of well-situated first-rate neighborhood theatres. This steady expansion without common measure with those of the much more ambitious Allen Theatres and Famous Players was largely funded through the profits generated by the chain's theatres, with minimal recourse to credit.

The second half of the 1920s saw United Amusement pursue an expansion strategy primarily aiming to, according to the organization's own press releases, "provide additional theatres for the city of Montreal as the population increases and new districts develop to the point where additional accommodation is required for recreation."<sup>105</sup> The company's first project thus consisted in the building of a new theatre on St. Denis Street at Bélanger, in a developing neighborhood where it would "serve virgin territory with a large and growing population to draw upon."<sup>106</sup> Approved in June 1925 by the board of directors, the project was executed by the usual team made up of architect Crichton, decorator Briffa, and plasterer De Giorgio. **[Figure 3.7]** Following on a request made by the chain, Crichton designed a large 1,600-seat theatre devoid of balcony, but equipped with an auditorium comprising a rear section separated by a promenade and featuring a steeper slope. In a few

years time, this new type of auditorium offering superior acoustics would become quite popular with theatre designers. United's management otherwise opted for an opulent "Italian Renaissance" decoration scheme making much use of the *fleur de lys* motif, which prompted *La Presse* to report upon the theatre's December 18, 1926 inauguration that "every Canadian of French heritage will recognize a familiar symbol suggesting ease and familiarity as soon as he sets foot in the theatre."<sup>107</sup> **[Figure 3.8]**

That the French-Canadian population inhabiting the Rivoli's neighborhood could identify with the new theatre's sign and walls probably was a good thing, because Canadian (or even French, for that matter) films would prove extremely scarce on the theatre's screen over the next decades. *La Presse* explained at the time of the theatre's opening that, "thanks to the vast number of theatres [operated by United Amusement], and to their popularity," the Rivoli had "the first pick on the films of the biggest publishers: Paramount, United Artists Corp., Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, First National, Universal, Warner Brothers, Producers Distributing Corp., Film Booking Office, Fox, Pathé, Educational, etc."<sup>108</sup> At the Rivoli as in the chain's other theatres, Canadian images would be restricted to the occasional travelogue or newsreel segment.

The continuing success of Ganetakos's organization in the late 1920s nevertheless suggests that the attraction exerted by US productions greatly helped bringing customers recruited from both Montreal's anglophone and francophone communities to the chain's neighborhood theatres. As had been hoped at the time of the creation of the company in 1924, United's "first pick" on much of the US film production granted its theatres a considerable edge over the opposition. This had been demonstrated during the construction of the Rivoli in the spring of 1926, when the acquisition by the Lawands of a piece of land located just on the other side of the St. Denis-Bélanger junction had set off a new episode of

the ongoing turf war between the two chains. Hoping to dispose of this potential opposition before it could threaten its largest theatre to date, United had used its franchise to entice the Lawands into discussing a sort of takeover of their chain. Talks had led in May to a draft memorandum of agreement between United Amusement and Najeeb and Ameen Lawand, which set the terms of the creation of a new company, National Theatres, Ltd., destined to take over the United's Rivoli, as well as the Lawands' neighboring St. Denis property, Maisonneuve theatre, Laurier Palace, and Dominion theatre. National Theatres was to be jointly owned and controlled by the two groups, granted access to United's Famous Players-Lasky franchise, and managed by Najeeb and Ameen Lawand, though United reserved the right to determine the policies of the new company's theatres. The deal had nevertheless fell through at the last minute for undisclosed reasons, leaving the Lawands in control of their property adjoining the Rivoli.<sup>109</sup> More than five years would however elapse before the opening of the Lawands' new St. Denis theatre, the Château, in January 1932.<sup>110</sup>

The abandonment of the National Theatres project had left the Lawand brothers as the sole operators of the infamous Laurier Palace, where on January 9, 1927 – less than a month after the opening of the Rivoli – seventy-eight children died as a result of a panic triggered by a minor fire. This traumatic event would have long-lasting consequences for the local film industry. It first forced local authorities to have a closer look at what was happening in amusement places and be less lax with the enforcement of existing safety laws. Within a few days of the fire, thirty-one of Montreal's fifty-eight film theatres were forbidden to present live acts, thought to be a significant fire hazard – even if the Laurier Palace fire had not originated on stage (or in the operator's booth, for that matter), but in the balcony.<sup>111</sup> This decision of the authorities proved especially harmful to independent exhibitors, who, as we will see in chapter 7, often relied more extensively on live attractions.

The current operator of the east end Ouimetoscope, Casino and Arcade theatres, Jos. Cardinal [Figure 3.9], refused to bow to the authorities and discontinue theatrical representations, only to be threatened with the closure of his venues by the city's chief fire prevention officer.<sup>112</sup> Cardinal was eventually forced to renovate his theatres, as also were the owners of the Globe and King Edward theatres, both located on St. Lawrence Boulevard. Five other small theatres – the Broadway, Boulevardoscope, Alhambra, Sun, and Ideal – were less lucky and had to be closed.<sup>113</sup> Evidence nevertheless suggests that exhibitors and public officials ended up hammering out a compromise on the topic of stage shows in film theatres, as most of the venues singled out in the wake of the Laurier Palace tragedy ultimately kept operating and booking live acts in the late 1920s and early 1930s.

A more lasting consequence of the 1927 tragedy was the infamous provincial ban on the attendance of commercial moving picture shows by children under sixteen years of age, which would only be repealed in the 1960s. This measure was largely the result of the renewed anti-cinema agitation led by the Catholic clergy in the wake of the Laurier Palace fire. Religious leaders had been quick to point out the deficiencies of the previous law governing the admission of children in moving picture theatres when an inquiry conducted a few days after the fire revealed that, like many other Quebec theatres, the Laurier Palace was in the habit of selling admission tickets to unsupervised minors. It was thus estimated that 300 children crowded the theatre's balcony with nearly no adult in sight when the first cries of "Fire!" resounded on January 9. The Laurier Palace inquiry was followed in the spring of 1927 by a Royal Commission on the deeper causes of the tragedy and, more generally, cinema in Quebec. In his report, the Judge presiding over the Commission, Louis Boyer, argued in favor of a ban on the attendance of commercial moving picture theatres by children, but paid no heed to the Catholic clergy's renewed demands for the mandatory

closing of theatres on Sundays. On this sensitive issue, his recommendations rather followed the opinions expressed by many workers groups during the Commission's hearings, which had argued that workers had a right to take part in entertainments during their sole day of rest. Judge Boyer's statement on Sunday shows constituted a significant victory for the film industry in the midst of the whole Laurier Palace debacle.<sup>114</sup>

Montreal exhibitors operated in damage-control mode in the months following the fire. Members of the Montreal Theatrical Managers Association, which did not include the Lawands, convened on the day of the fire and immediately pledged \$10,000 towards the victims' families.<sup>115</sup> Theatre operators also made sure to emphasize the safety measures offered by their buildings. Much of the copy sent to newspapers by United Amusement on the occasion of the opening of its new Rosemount theatre on April 9, 1927 – three months to the day after the Laurier Palace fire – for instance describes the numerous safety features of the theatre. The chain even felt necessary to remind its prospective customers that the Rosemount could “protect both moviegoers and performers from eventual lightning strikes.”<sup>116</sup>

While some authors claim that theatre attendance dropped for several months in Montreal after the Laurier Palace tragedy, available data tend to show that established exhibitors did not see much of a drop in box office revenues in 1927.<sup>117</sup> The *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* for instance noted in a report published one year after the fire that: “Attendance at all Montreal theatres was visibly affected after the fire but conditions returned to normal quickly.”<sup>118</sup> This statement seems to be corroborated by United Amusement's annual net profits, which went up from \$172,601 for the year ending August 31, 1926 to \$202,022 for the year ending August 31, 1927 (though it should be noted that the chain had added no less than four theatres to its chain between the fall of 1925 and the summer of 1927).<sup>119</sup> Revenues

from the civic amusement tax collected by the city of Montreal also grew by about four per cent over the same period.<sup>120</sup> All of this suggests that the industry's public relation campaign was somewhat successful or, more likely, that moving pictures were by this point sufficiently entrenched in urban life and popular culture to weather such contingencies. Deadly fires were a common occurrence in all types of public spaces, including schools, hospitals or factories, and most Montrealers likely felt that the Laurier Palace fire – which, once again, had been proven not to be connected in any way with the use of flammable nitrate film – raised safety issues going far beyond moving pictures and commercial amusements.

Astonishingly, one of the organizations that contributed the most to the continued growth of the moving picture industry in Montreal in the late 1920s was the chain operated by the Lawand and Tabah families. Far from being crushed by the Laurier Palace tragedy, the business of these two associated Syrio-Lebanese families actually surged in the late 1920s. The unexpected expansion of this enterprise, which had never managed to operate more than a handful of minor moving picture theatre since the early 1910s, was partly enabled by the fact that the criminal charges pressed against Ameen Lawand in connection with the fire had been thrown out by both the Royal Commission's Judge Boyer and the Court of Appeal. That, in spite of the fact that the inquiry conducted after the fire had established that the Lawands' theatres had routinely violated safety laws over the years.<sup>121</sup>

Letters patent for a new company controlled by the Lawand and Tabah families, Confederation Amusements Ltd., were issued four months after the fire, on April 4, 1927.<sup>122</sup> The new company took over the Maisonneuve and Dominion theatres, and soon started to work on an ambitious building programme similar to that of the United Amusement, in that it mostly centered on the construction of large theatres situated in Montreal's developing residential neighborhoods. The theatres erected by Confederation in the late 1920s and early

1930s could however easily be distinguished from opposition houses, thanks to the company's enthusiastic adoption of the new modern style (later dubbed art deco), at a time where United Amusement was still exclusively using flashy revival styles for its new venues.

Confederation's first new theatre, the Empress located on Sherbrooke Street in Notre-Dame-de-Grâce, was built and decorated in a striking art deco variation on the Egyptian revival style in vogue in the years following the 1922 discovery of Tutankhamun's tomb. The erection of the Empress unnerved the operator of the nearby Westmount theatre, United Amusement, who mandated Nathanson to meet with the new theatre's owners in order to negotiate its acquisition. Nathanson however failed to convince Confederation to sell, which brought United to retaliate by launching a new Notre-Dame-de-Grâce theatre project. The inauguration of Confederation's Empress on May 19, 1928, would thus be followed two years later, on March 7, 1930, by that of the nearby United Amusement Monkland theatre.<sup>123</sup>

Interestingly, the press did not disclose the fact that the Lawands were connected to the Empress at the time of the theatre's opening. Newspaper accounts of the event simply reported that the theatre was managed by a well-known local film man, Charles Lalumière. As for the *Digest*, it simply identified F.A. Tabah, "well-known locally as retail merchant," as owner of the theatre.<sup>124</sup> One week after the Empress' opening, Ray Lewis sternly denounced the provincial authorities rumored to have just granted a theatre building permit (possibly for the Cartier) to Ameen Lawand, and in the process demonstrated why Confederation might have felt necessary to conceal certain facts pertaining to its ownership and management.<sup>125</sup>

Confederation Amusements pursued its expansion by opening three more theatres between 1929 and 1932: the Cartier (1929), located in St. Henri in the vicinity of the United Amusement Corona; the Outremont (1929), on Bernard a few block west of United's Rialto; and the aforementioned Château (1932), across the street from the Rivoli. Within a few

decades, the Empress, Outremont and Château, which had all been decorated by the versatile Briffa, would come to be recognized as three of the most significant examples of the art deco style in Montreal.

The ambitious expansion of the new Confederation Amusements was not left unmatched by United Amusement. Boosted by Nathanson's tactical support, as well as by its privileged position vis-à-vis distributors, United opened, as we have seen, two new large moving picture theatres between 1926 and 1930, the Rivoli and the Monkland. It also annexed over the same years several theatres built by unaffiliated entrepreneurs, such as the aforementioned Rosemount, acquired by United after long and arduous negotiations with the theatre's builder, one Émile Gobet. **[Figure 3.10]** The fact that Gobet was a local building contractor with no connection to the film industry, and that United had previously made public its intention to expand in Rosemount, suggests that the Rosemount had been built in the hope that its builder would be approached by United with some kind of offer.<sup>126</sup> United also leased the Seville theatre inaugurated on March 22, 1929 on St. Catherine West, just outside of the territory controlled by Famous Players. A large theatre decorated in the new atmospheric style by Briffa and De Giorgio, the Seville was a project of Benjamin Isaacs, whose main lines of business were fur and insurances – which again suggests that the theatre's promoter did not intend to operate it himself. United obtained the Seville's lease for \$10,000 per year for ten years.<sup>127</sup>

Other theatre takeovers were a little less straightforward. On June 1<sup>st</sup>, 1926, United Amusement signed a deal granting it the management of the last two theatres operated in Montreal by the Allen family, the Westmount and the Amherst. A 1,800-seat theatre designed by C. Howard Crane and owned by George Rabinovitch, the Amherst stood on the site of the old Moulin Rouge, on St. Catherine Street East, and had been inaugurated less

than five months before, on February 7, 1926.<sup>128</sup> Under the management of Herbert Allen (younger brother of Jule and Jay. J) and Louis Rosenfeld (Herbert's brother-in-law), the Amherst had first booked combination shows made up of four or five vaudeville acts and a feature film. The Universal, First National, and sometimes British pictures playing the Amherst however seem that to have failed to draw much patronage, as less than two months after the theatre's opening the top of the theatre's bill came to be regularly occupied, not by the feature film, but by the vaudeville acts.<sup>129</sup> Without quality films to show, the fancy Amherst was on the verge of becoming another east end white elephant.

This situation compelled the desperate Allens to turn to United Amusement for help. On June 1<sup>st</sup>, 1926, the two organizations signed a set of complementary agreements. The first transferred the management (but not the lease) of the Amherst to United Amusement, who undertook to use its privileged position vis-à-vis distributors to obtain newer and better films for the Allens' house. In return, United obtained a management fee and the cancellation of the Allens' lease on the Westmount theatre, which consequently became a full-fledged United Amusement theatre three years after its acquisition by Ganetacos's organization in 1923. The Amherst and Westmount were hereafter pooled (meaning that the two theatres were made to share both profits and losses) so as to let the Allens soak up the accumulated debt of the Amherst, and later permit United to partake in the profits eventually generated by the east end venue. Business for both theatres seems to have quickly improved in the wake of this agreement, as indicated by the fact that United's directors were already describing the pool's returns as "very gratifying" by January 1927. The Amherst-Westmount pool remained in operation for many years, and eventually grew to include the Monkland opened in 1930, which could have been perceived as a competitor of the Allen interest involved in the affairs of the Westmount theatre operating in the same district.<sup>130</sup>

The second deal signed on June 1<sup>st</sup>, 1926 had the Allens, in the persons of Herbert, Jule, and Jay J. Allen, as well as Louis Rosenfeld, binding themselves not to become involved in the operation of any Montreal theatre other than the Amherst and Westmount.<sup>131</sup> This deal largely enabled by Famous Players' control of Canadian film distribution thus permitted Nathanson and Ganetakos to further neutralize what had once been Canada's most prominent theatrical network. Over the following decades, the Allens would limit their activities to the operation, in partnership with Famous Players, of a network of secondary Ontario theatres. They would never attempt to cross the Outaouais River again.<sup>132</sup>

Another complex series of agreements with a different set of brothers – Denis N., Nicholas A., and George A. Lazanis – permitted United Amusement to add one more large neighborhood theatre, the Maisonneuve Granada, to its chain in March 1930. **[Figure 3.11]** Like countless other exhibitors, the Greek-born Lazanis had first operated an ice cream parlor before turning to the moving picture business in the late 1910s. Their chain had soon grown to include four modest east end theatres, the Lord Nelson, Napoleon Palace, Operascope, and Alhambra.<sup>133</sup> The Lazanis brothers appear to have felt ready to move on to bigger things by the second half of the 1920s, when they turned to Ganetakos to secure funding for the construction of a large neighborhood theatre in Maisonneuve.

Talks between the two groups were initiated in 1926, but other projects prevented United from getting involved with the project for more than two years. In the spring of 1929, a first agreement finally saw both parties agree on a \$150,000 loan from United to the Lazanis, as well as on the shared management of the theatre, which was to be owned by the Lazanis. But soon after the March 28, 1930, inaugural of the luxurious 1,685-seat Granada, financial difficulties caused the Lazanis to ask for a new \$100,000 loan from United. Further financial worries, no doubt connected to the quickly deteriorating economic conditions in

the early 1930s, however soon prevented the Lazanis brothers from making good on their payments. This situation led to the creation of a new company, Granada Theatres Ltd., in the spring of 1932. In exchange for the cancellation of the mortgage owned by United, the Lazanis permitted \$300,000 worth of the new company's shares to be issued to Ganetakos's organization, while keeping \$50,000 worth of shares under their control. United's directors finally determined in 1936 that it would be in their company's interest to fully integrate the Granada into its network. A deal arranging the exchange of the Lazanis's remaining Granada Theatres shares for United Amusement shares was consequently proposed by United, and soon approved by the Lazanis brothers, whose sole condition was that they be permitted to remain involved in the operation of their former theatre, now fully owned by United.<sup>134</sup>

In addition to these deals granting United Amusement management of theatres erected by other organizations, Ganetakos's organization also signed a number of booking agreements with independent exhibitors. These let the independents manage their theatres, but prevented them from booking films on their own. As per these agreements, bookings were to be exclusively arranged by United, in exchange for either a flat fee or a share of the theatre's profits. The first of these deals was initiated by Nathanson and signed on September 17, 1926 with the Midway theatre located on St. Lawrence Boulevard at St. Catherine. While United did not risk much by entering into this agreement (the Midway theatre being the sole party responsible for the payments of the rental of the films obtained for it), it also seems to have benefited very little from the deal. The minutes of the meetings of United Amusement's board of directors indeed reveal that the lessees of the Midway spent most of the duration of the contract evading payment of the sums owed to United. This fact however did not prevent the Nathanson-orchestrated agreement between United and the Midway to be renewed for more than a decade, which suggests that the deal primary

raison d'être might not have been to swell United's revenues, but simply to render one more Montreal screen unavailable to independent film producers and distributors.<sup>135</sup>

A similar deal was made in late November 1927 with the Dunning family's Standard Amusement Co. then operating two southwest theatres, the Verdun Park and the Ville Émard Century. The signature of this agreement had been delayed for more than two years by the fiercely independent Dunnings, whose resistance had brought Nathanson and Ganetakos to eventually resort to various pressure tactics, including the acquisition of a Verdun property by United Amusement in 1926. The Dunnings ultimately refused to sell or lease the Park theatre eyed by Nathanson and Ganetakos, but nevertheless agreed to sign a booking agreement with Famous Players (even though the negotiations had been conducted under the guise of the United Amusement, which demonstrates the level of cooperation between the Toronto and Montreal organizations in the late 1920s.) Famous would once again simply provide films on which rental had not yet been paid in return for a fifty per cent participation in the Park theatre's profits. This share of the profits would then be integrally transferred by Famous to United Amusement (partly owned by the former anyway) as per the 1924 territorial agreement between the two organizations. This constituted a pretty good deal for United and Famous, who had literally nothing more to do than pick films and sign booking contracts. The fact that the Dunnings eventually resigned themselves to be part of such an agreement once again demonstrates how difficult it had become for independent exhibitors to secure a steady supply of popular moving pictures by the second half of the 1920s.<sup>136</sup>

United Amusement's western expansion continued in 1929 and 1930 with the signature of booking agreements with Lachine's Empress and Royal Alexandra theatres. The first house to sign in September 1929 was the Empress operated by brothers William, Max,

and Adolph Goldwater. The Goldwaters' company, Empress Amusement, retained ownership and management of the Empress, but forfeited the right to book films and deal with distributors to United. Profits and losses were to be divided between the two organizations. A significant difference between the booking agreements signed with the Midway and the Park theatres however was that the Goldwaters' Empress was henceforth "known and operated as a United Amusement theatre."<sup>137</sup>

The deal visibly gave the Empress a competitive edge over its main opposition, the Royal Alexandra theatre located on the opposite side of the Notre-Dame Street and 9<sup>th</sup> Avenue junction. Once operated by brothers Gus, Mayer, and Leon Schlesinger (who would become a leading Hollywood personality in the 1930s as the producer of the hugely popular Looney Tunes cartoons<sup>138</sup>), the Royal Alexandra was by 1930 controlled by the Rosenbloom brothers' Lachine Amusements Ltd. The Rosenblooms reacted to this heightened competition by signing their own booking agreement – nearly identical to the Empress's – with United Amusement in the fall of 1930. To limit competition between its two new Lachine partners, United undertook to alternately let the managers of the Empress and Royal Alexandra get the first pick of the films it had booked for the week. Both theatres also agreed to charge the same admission prices (20¢ for matinées, 34¢ for evenings, with a special 25¢ rate for "indigents" at the worst of the Depression) and to pool their losses and profits, which were to be subsequently divided equally between Lachine Amusements, Empress Amusements, and United Amusement. Obviously very profitable for United Amusement, and thus Famous Players, these booking agreement would be periodically renewed until the 1950s.<sup>139</sup>

By the time Depression halted the construction of new moving picture theatres in Montreal in the early 1930s, United Amusement owned, leased, or controlled through

booking agreements sixteen large and up-to-date neighborhood theatres covering the island of Montreal from Maisonneuve to Lachine. It further operated the downtown Strand, and partook in the affairs of two independent houses, the Midway and Verdun Park theatres.<sup>140</sup> The only venues of any significance that still eluded United's control outside of Montreal's downtown core were the theatres operated by Confederation Amusements.

### **Consolidated Theatres: A New Famous Players Subsidiary?**

Famous Players did not lay idle as United Amusement was busy expanding its network of neighborhood theatres. Over the second half of the 1920s, the Toronto-based chain actively sought to consolidate its control of the theatres operating in the downtown core of the city of Montreal. Lack of primary sources however hinders research on this phase of Famous Players' local activities. Still, it does appear that, from 1927 onward, Nathanson increasingly relied on a Montreal entrepreneur established in the United States since the late 1910s, J. Arthur Hirsch, to manage its growing Quebec network. Hirsch had first worked between 1905 and 1915 for his family's Montreal business, J. Hirsch and Sons, "distillers and cigar importers and manufacturers," before getting involved with the Feature Film Co. of Canada some time around 1914. By the early 1920s, Hirsch had moved to New York, where he operated several moving picture theatres located in Harlem and the Bronx.<sup>141</sup>

Hirsch later became involved with a Montreal company unambiguously named Publix Theaters Corp. at the time of its creation in the spring of 1927, but given the somewhat less telling name of Consolidated Theatres Corp. a few months later. In early 1928, the new company announced that it would "not build any theatres," but instead "acquire existing theatres in villages and in the outlying sections of large cities." Indeed, Consolidated's first acquisition was Rodolphe Vallée's Sherbrooke chain, made up of the His Majesty's, Premier,

Casino, and Victoria theatres.<sup>142</sup> This acquisition was followed over the winter and spring of 1928 by that of the several minor Montreal houses, including the Théâtre National, Théâtre Canadien (the old Ouimetoscope), Starland, Gayety, and Verdun Palace.

Consolidated Theatres Corp. was then reorganized into Consolidated Theatres Ltd. in December 1928. The memorandum of agreement signed on this occasion confirms that the organization was at this point directed by Hirsch (president), with the help of J.J. Rosenthal (secretary) and Alex Adilman (treasurer).<sup>143</sup> 1929 saw Consolidated take over all three of the remaining large Montreal downtown theatres still escaping Famous Players' control: the Orpheum, the Princess, and the His Majesty's. The advertisements published by the chain in the wake of these acquisitions clearly outlined the policies devised by Consolidated for its downtown theatres: the Princess was turned into a "super-talkie playhouse [...] offering exclusive talking pictures [...] for special extended runs," while the Orpheum promised "popular talkies," and the Gayety "bigger and better burlesque." As for the His Majesty's, still mostly dedicated to legitimate theatre and opera, it was branded by Consolidated as "Montreal's leading theatre."<sup>144</sup> **[Figure 3.12]** Consolidated however chose to emphasize its focus on moving pictures by leasing both the Gayety and the Orpheum (originally a vaudeville theatre) to Tom Conway in 1930.<sup>145</sup> The chain also dropped all of its Montreal houses located outside of the city's downtown core (with the exception of the Verdun Palace) at roughly the same time, possibly so as to keep out of the territory conceded by Famous Players to United Amusement.

Consolidated Theatres' close relationship to Famous Players might not have been obvious to contemporary observers. Indeed, only circumstantial evidence such as Consolidated's original name permit us to state that Hirsch's company had from its inception been part of Famous Players' network. The relationship between the two

organizations would nevertheless become more explicit in 1936, when Famous Players finally resolved to transfer the direction of the Palace, Capitol and Imperial<sup>146</sup> theatres to Consolidated. When the Loew's followed suit in 1938, Consolidated found itself in charge of all of the theatres operated by Famous Players in Montreal.<sup>147</sup> Hirsch's organization however never superseded neither Famous Players nor its local theatre managers in the public's eye, which might help explain why Consolidated Theatres' contribution to local film history remains inadequately documented and studied. Downtown first-run palaces generally remained closely identified with the high-profile figures of their managers, such as the Imperial's Howard Conover or the Palace's George Rotsky, who were both very much involved in the branding of the theatres they managed for decades. **[Figure 3.13]**

Furthermore, while United Amusement and Confederation Amusements routinely delegated company directors to be interviewed for *La Presse's* annual reviews of the local theatres' coming attractions, Conover, Rostky, and the Capitol's Harry Dahn, rather than Hirsch (or for that matter Nathanson), generally spoke to journalists and had their picture in the papers.<sup>148</sup>

Some of the extant contracts signed by Famous Players and Consolidated Theatres suggest that the main function of Hirsch's organization was to centralize data and records pertaining to the operation of Famous Players' Quebec theatres. The information collected was then transmitted to Famous Players' Toronto head office via weekly or even daily reports.<sup>149</sup> Major decisions pertaining to the theatres' operation and policy were likely made following direct talks between Famous Players representatives and local theatre managers. This purported modus operandi could in any case help explain how Hirsch and his main partner in the operation of Consolidated, J. Rosenthal, could administer the company while being based in New York.<sup>150</sup>

The fact that Consolidated Theatres leased some of its houses almost as soon as it acquired them is quite revealing, as it once again seems to indicate that Hirsch and his Famous Players partners were not simply looking for profitable venues to operate.<sup>151</sup> Consolidated and Famous Players' coordinated acquisition spree obviously also aimed to protect Famous Players' more than favorable bargaining position towards distributors by preventing other exhibitors from getting their hands on venues that could be turned into competing first-run moving picture theatres.

It should be acknowledged that the dominating position of Famous Players and its regional associates was essentially predicated on the fact that by the 1920s no organization outside of the small group of distributors handling the productions of the main US studios could offer Canadian exhibitors a steady supply of quality pictures (i.e., of films with enough popular appeal to entice a significant number of Montrealers to chose an outing at the cinema over the numerous other leisure activities then offered by the Canadian metropolis). British and European pictures were available for importation but, as we have seen, rarely acquired by Canadian distributors, who obviously had grown to believe that such films would at best receive a lukewarm reception from moviegoers used to Hollywood's narratives, stars, and production values. Canadian productions were also so scarce that when George Rotsky decided to hold an "All-Canadian Week" at the Palace in November 1925, a *Our Gang* short had to be edited "so that the scenes in Arizona became Saskatchewan and an American city became Toronto," and a Felix the Cat cartoon augmented with "a new introduction [showing] the cat expressing his pleasure at being in Montreal for Canadian Week."<sup>152</sup>

Official statistics quoted by Ian Jarvie indeed show that the Canadian film market was thoroughly dominated throughout the 1920s by the US films on which Famous Players

Canadian Corp. generally had first pick. The earliest figures unearthed by Jarvie indicate that this trend was already firmly entrenched by 1922, when US film accounted for 97.3% of the footage imported in Canada. By 1926, this figure had risen to 98.7%. Over the same period, British producers saw their share of Canadian film imports drop from 2.2% to 1.2% – but still did better than their French counterparts, who went from a puny 0.6% to a nearly insignificant 0.06%.<sup>153</sup> This almost complete reliance on US imports made Canada the second largest customer of the US film industry, right behind the United Kingdom. Industry representatives thus estimated that by the mid-1920s Canada accounted for 3.6% of the American film industry's gross. Interestingly, Quebec's share of this figure was believed to be lower than Ontario's (0.8% against 1.2%), in spite of the fact that Quebec still was the Confederation's most populous Province.<sup>154</sup> It is further worth noting on the topic of imports that the Montreal theatres affiliated with Famous Players also extensively relied on US talent for the live attractions integrated to their shows. Most vaudeville acts were for instance obtained from New York agencies. The only local talent on display in Famous Players houses could generally be found in the orchestra pit.

### **Opposition to Famous Players' Monopoly**

Concerns over the lack of Canadian content in the nation's film theatres, combined with growing indignation over Famous Players' alleged monopolistic practices, did not take long to arouse opposition. One of the chain's most early – and vocal – opponents was none other than the *Canadian Moving Picture Digest's* editor, Ray Lewis, who started publishing in 1921 a series of increasingly fiery editorials denouncing Nathanson and Zukor's monopolistic aims in general and poor treatment of independent exhibitors in particular.<sup>155</sup> This led Nathanson to allegedly threaten to put the *Digest* out of business in the summer of

1923, which in turn incited Lewis to have her journal appointed official organ of the newly organized Canadian branch of the Moving Picture Theatre Owners of America representing independent exhibitors.<sup>156</sup> Things steadily grew from bad to worse between the *Digest* and Famous Players until March 1926, when Lewis sued Nathanson for \$50,000 damages. An out-of-court settlement however brought these two larger-than-life characters back on speaking terms by the end of the year.<sup>157</sup>

Still, the truce between Lewis and Nathanson did not spell the end of the movement opposing Famous Players' actions and policies, whose members kept petitioning politicians in the late 1920s. This sustained agitation eventually succeeded in having the federal government set up a national inquiry under the Combines Investigation Act in the early 1930s. Public hearings were held in Toronto for a few weeks in the winter of 1931 by commissioner Peter White, with the assistance (unacknowledged in the final report submitted on April 30, 1931) of Ray Lewis.<sup>158</sup> In his report, the commissioner concluded that a combine had existed in the Canadian motion picture industry since at least 1926, and cited as participants Paramount Publix Corp., the Motion Picture Distributors and Exhibitors of Canada (a.k.a. the Cooper organization), most leading Canadian distributors, and eight Canadian exhibitors, including Famous Players, United Amusement, and the Mansfield Theatre Co. then operating the Montreal Loew's. Consolidated Theatres was however left out of the commissioner's report, which suggests that Hirsch and his partners were still successfully hiding their connection to Famous Players in the early 1930s.

While generally short on data collected from Quebec exhibitors (a situation that can partly be explained by the fact that none of them had been summoned by White), the findings published in the commissioner's report fit squarely with the various deals and situations exposed in this chapter. White thus asserted that the combine operated not only

through the acquisition – sometimes under threats – of theatres by Famous Players, but also through booking arrangements and operating agreements. His report further emphasized the fact that these deals – which required virtually no investment from Famous Players – had permitted the national chain to grab about half of the profits generated by its partners, all the while increasing its purchasing powers. This, in turn, permitted Famous Players to enlist in the operation of the combine the many distributors that relied on its extensive network of first-run theatres. White more particularly blamed the combine for the discriminatory conditions imposed on independent exhibitors by most of the exchanges controlled, either directly or indirectly, by Famous Players. His inquiry had for instance revealed that independents were generally charged higher prices and given much less flexibility in their bookings than Famous Players houses.<sup>159</sup>

White also singled out for attack the selectively enforced practice of block booking, as it had been demonstrated during the inquiry that while Famous Players was permitted to cherry-pick the films it wished to play in its theatres, independents were discouraged to contract for single films by the exchanges pricing schemes. For them, prices would only come down when films were bought in blocks generally made up of a few high-profile titles and of several “programme” – i.e., run-of-the-mill – pictures (or, in Ray Lewis’s words, of “weak sisters with a few Amazons to carry them”<sup>160</sup>). Block booking was often practiced in tandem with blind booking, another widely condemned scheme involving the sale of films that had yet to be completed.

Block and blind booking were actually rooted in the “services” offered to exhibitors by exchanges since the late 1900s, and thus preceded both vertical integration and the rise of Zukor and Nathanson’s organizations. Advocates of these practices contended that they permitted distributors to significantly cut their expenses, and consequently helped keep film

prices down. Another argument invoked in favor of block and blind booking was that most exhibitors were not in a position to select individual pictures anyway. It is worth remembering that the operator of a typical neighborhood theatre showing double bills and changing its programme thrice weekly had to contract for no less than 312 features annually, in addition to the hundreds of cartoons, newsreels and short films also required by his shows.

This gargantuan appetite for celluloid, combined with the fact that for most titles the first and second runs had already been used up by Famous Players and its affiliates, brought about a scarcity problem for many exhibitors. White commented on this situation in his report:

It is quite apparent to me [...], from the attitude of the independent exhibitors who appeared as witnesses, that there is on their part a real anxiety as to whether they will be able to obtain a supply of suitable pictures at reasonable prices to enable them to operate their theatres.<sup>161</sup>

This situation led many independents to overbuy, mainly so that they would not be caught short when films ended being cancelled by the producer or condemned by the board of censors. Opponents of block booking contended that this practice often resulted in independent exhibitors needlessly getting into trouble with distributors over films they had contracted for, but either could not play or could not pay for. It was also argued that block booking prevented theatres from properly selecting the films they screened, and therefore from developing an individual identity. Many further suspected that the organizations involved in the combine enforced this practice partly so as to squeeze independent distributors and producers out of the market. Block booking was thus seen as one of the main obstacles preventing the production of commercial film entertainment in Canada.<sup>162</sup>

Another industry practice criticized by commissioner White was that of protection. Not to be confused with the racket associated with gangsters, protection was defined in the

commissioner's report as: "the withholding of a picture from a second or subsequent run for a period of time after the close of a first or previous run."<sup>163</sup> Protection periods had originally been enforced mainly so as to encourage exhibitors to increase their marketing activities. Part of the argument was that exhibitors would be more willing to buy advertisement and ballyhoo knowing that they, and not the opposition theatres showing the same picture simultaneously or soon after, would reap the full results of their effort. Protection periods were also meant to protect the business of first-run theatres generating a large chunk of the industry's revenues. According to H.T. Lewis, it was widely believed within the industry that the moviegoers' preference for the lower admission prices of subsequent run houses was often counterbalanced by their desire to see pictures while they were new and talked about.<sup>164</sup>

Many Canadian opponents of protection, including commissioner White and Ray Lewis, observed that protection periods largely increased in Canada as Famous Players tightened its control of the national film market. In her testimony at the White Commission, Lewis for instance remarked:

I don't remember [hearing] that word 'protection' [at the time of the creation of the Moving Picture Theatre Owners association in 1923]. I think it is a disease that has just struck the industry lately in its most virulent form. It may have been a latent microbe, but it seems to have developed in the last two or three years with amazing rapidity.<sup>165</sup>

Evidence gathered at the Commission indeed demonstrated that Famous Players had begun to more or less dictate the protection periods to be granted to its theatres by distributors in the late 1920s. The advent of sound more particularly permitted the chain to request for its Capitol and Palace theatres a protection period of ninety days against all subsequent runs venues operating in Montreal, as well as against all other theatres located within a radius of sixty miles of the island. The only venues not subjected to this protection period were the theatres operated by United Amusement, which were permitted to book films sixty days after the Capitol and Palace.

Distributors generally opposed prolonged protection periods delaying returns on their investments and threatening to lessen the value of the titles they controlled (as films were believed to quickly lose the appeal they held for the moviegoing public<sup>166</sup>), but ultimately had no choice but to heed to Famous Players' requests. The chain's influence on distributors did not go unnoticed by White, who concluded in his report that Famous Players had obtained protection periods both longer than necessary and imposed on theatres not competing in any way with its own. The Commissioner further argued that this situation had been engineered so as to lessen competition, and could therefore be said to be detrimental to the public.<sup>167</sup>

White's enlightening report however failed to bring about any significant reform of the Canadian film industry. In his meticulously researched account of the events surrounding the White Commission and its aftermath, Jarvie explains that soon after the publication of White's report in the spring of 1931 a concerted action was undertaken by most of the nation's provincial administrations, which appeared to have jurisdiction over the matter. Ontario was selected to lead the charge, since the head offices of most of the organizations accused of being part of the combine, including Famous Players, were located in Toronto. The Province succeeded the next fall in having Famous Players and its co-defendants indicted for multiple charges ranging from compelling the public to pay higher prices to enforcing protection and restricting the proper supply of films to others. The parties accused of being part the combine were finally tried over three weeks in the winter of 1932.

On March 7, 1932, the case against the alleged combine unexpectedly came to an end when Justice Charles Garrow of the High Court of Justice for Ontario acquitted Famous Players and its co-defendants of all charges. In spite of the massive evidence collected the preceding year by commissioner White, Judge Garrow saw no shortage of films or price

fixing in the Canadian film industry, and claimed that discrimination against independent exhibitors had not been proven. Jarvie contends that Garrow's judgment could have been contested on many grounds. The historian for instance argues that the Judge's talk of an oversupply of films was simply ill-informed, as the availability of a large number of films that no one wants to see cannot by any means be said to constitute an oversupply. In that regard, the Judge's opinion is quite representative of the point of view of the members of the nation's cultural elite, who for the most part could not conceive that mass cultural products such as feature films could have formal qualities, and thus be distinguished from one another. Yet, no further proceedings were undertaken against Famous Players, possibly as a result, in Jarvie's opinion, of a lack of public interest for the case, as well as of the more pressing crisis brought about by the quickly deteriorating economic conditions in the early 1930s.<sup>168</sup>

The inquiry led by commissioner Peter White at the height of Famous Players' influence on the Canadian film market must nevertheless not be brushed aside as totally ineffective and devoid of results. Indeed, it seems likely that increased scrutiny and the threat of governmental intervention at least somewhat curbed the chain's monopolistic tendencies for a while. What's more, White detailed report constitutes a very detailed, and consequently potentially very useful description of the coercive strategies deployed by the vertically integrated Famous Players in its quest for supremacy.

That being said, by concentrating on the strategies and actions of Famous Players, the White Report also somewhat obscured the leverage and, thus, the agency granted to independent exhibitors by their heightened familiarity with local conditions and communities. This local agency was most visible in the Province of Quebec generally overlooked by the Commission, where major linguistic and cultural differences would have

rendered the operation of local theatres by Toronto administrators and executives largely ineffective. Famous Players' founder, Nathan L. Nathanson, seems to have essentially understood this situation, as demonstrated by the facts exposed in this chapter, and more particularly by his dealings with George Ganetakos's group in the 1920s. The film industry's transition to sound and the Depression would only amplify the leverage of local agents in the Quebec film market in the coming years.

## Endnotes

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- <sup>1</sup> Manjunath Pendakur, *Canadian Dreams and American Control: The Political Economy of the Canadian Film Industry* (Toronto: Garamond Press, 1990), 45-78; Ian Jarvie, *The North Atlantic Movie Trade, 1920-1950* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 25-76; Germain Lacasse, *Histoires de scopes: le cinéma muet au Québec* (Montreal: Cinémathèque québécoise, 1988), 77-90; Kirwan Cox, "The Rise and Fall of the Allens: The War for Canada's Movie Theatres," *Loneragan Review* no. 6 (2000): 44-81.
- <sup>2</sup> Paul S. Moore, "Theatre Opening for Allen Theatres," *Marquee* 41:3 (third quarter 2009): 31.
- <sup>3</sup> Cox, "The Rise and Fall of the Allens," 61. Cox's essay had actually been researched and drafted many years before its eventual publication in 2000. Most of the data pertaining to the Allens' theatrical enterprise published in Pendakur's *Canadian Dreams and American Control* actually originate from Cox's draft, still unpublished at the time.
- <sup>4</sup> Ray Lewis, "It Is Time to Compliment the Masses," *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* (15 April 1921); Moore, "Theatre Opening for Allen Theatres," 31; Cox, "The Rise and Fall of the Allens," 57-58.
- <sup>5</sup> Moore, "Theatre Opening for Allen Theatres," 31.
- <sup>6</sup> *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* (7 September 1918): 8; Dane Lancken, *Montreal Movie Palaces: Great Theatres of the Golden Era 1884-1938* (Waterloo, Ont.: Penumbra Press, 1993), 62.
- <sup>7</sup> C.W. Lane, "Allen's Close Lachine House," *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* (19 April 1919): 5.
- <sup>8</sup> Privilege by J. Gilletz and Co. vs Majestic Theatre Co. Ltd., 19 January 1918, author's collection; *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* (7 September 1918): 8; *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* (5 October 1918).
- <sup>9</sup> *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* (16 November 1918): 7.
- <sup>10</sup> Moore, "Theatre Opening for Allen Theatres," 31.
- <sup>11</sup> *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* (1 September 1919): 27; "Un nouveau théâtre," *La Patrie* (7 February 1920): 21; *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* (4 September 1920): 112.
- <sup>12</sup> The second largest Canadian Allen theatre was the 1,983-seat Winnipeg Allen, opened in December 1919. See: Moore "Theatre Opening for Allen Theatres," 31; Philip Dombowsky, "C. Howard Crane's Allen Theatres," *Marquee* 41:3 (third quarter 2009): 7-8, 18-19.
- <sup>13</sup> "Le nouveau théâtre Palais Allen," *La Patrie* (14 May 1921): 20, author's translation; "Luigi Romanelli," *The Canadian Encyclopedia*, <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com/articles/emc/luigi-romanelli>, last accessed 10 February 2012.
- <sup>14</sup> *Montreal Daily Star* (14 May 1921); *La Patrie* (14 May 1921): 21.
- <sup>15</sup> As business grew, Phil Kaufman, Clair Hague and Louis Rosenfeld – all destined to become prominent members of the Canadian film industry – were put in charge of the various regional Allen exchanges.
- <sup>16</sup> Cox, "The Rise and Fall of the Allens," 50-52; Douglas Gomery, *The Hollywood Studio System: A History* (London: BFI Publishing, 2005), 17; Ray Lewis, "All About Myself," *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* (20 August 1927): 10; Ray Lewis, "An Open Letter to the Federation of British Industries, Attention of Sidney Rogerson," *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* (12 November 1927): 5-7; Cox, "The Rise and Fall of the Allens," 62-63.
- <sup>17</sup> Gomery, *The Hollywood Studio System*, 18-19; Cox, "The Rise and Fall of the Allens," 62-63.
- <sup>18</sup> "Adolph Zukor Replies to Attack Upon Business Methods of Famous-Lasky," *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* (15 June 1921): 9. See also the statement made by Zukor during a Harvard lecture reprinted in Joseph P. Kennedy, ed., *The Story of Films* (Chicago: A.W. Shaw, 1927), 55-76, and quoted in Gomery, *The Hollywood Studio System*, 18.
- <sup>19</sup> Benjamin B. Hampton, *History of the American Film Industry* (New York: Dover Publications, 1970 [1931]), 243-44, quoted in Cox, "The Rise and Fall of the Allens," 63.
- <sup>20</sup> Cox, "The Rise and Fall of the Allens," 63-64; Pendakur, *Canadian Dreams and American Control*, 56-57.
- <sup>21</sup> [Hye Bossin], "He Had the Common Touch," *Canadian Film Weekly* (2 June 1943): 6-7.

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- <sup>22</sup> [Bossin], "He Had the Common Touch," 6-7; Cox, "The Rise and Fall of the Allens," 63-64; Paul S. Moore, "Nathan L. Nathanson Introduces Canadian Odeon: Producing National Competition in Film Exhibition", *Canadian Journal of Film Studies* 12:2 (Fall 2003): 25-26.
- <sup>23</sup> "Paramount-Artcraft to Obtain Interest in Canadian Chain of Theatres?," *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* (31 May 1919): 4.
- <sup>24</sup> "Famous-Lasky Film Service to Distribute Paramount Artcraft Pictures," *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* (15 September 1919).
- <sup>25</sup> "Famous Players Canadian Corporation Has Strong Financial Backing," *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* (20 February 1920): 11.
- <sup>26</sup> For more information on the creation of Famous Players Canadian Corp., see: Peter White, *Department of Labour, Canada: Investigation into an Alleged Combine in the Motion Picture Industry in Canada, Report of Commissioner, April 30, 1931* (Ottawa: F.A. Acland, Printer to the King, 1931), 16-18. Zukor (president), Nathanson (managing director), Ross, and Killam were joined on Famous Players' first board of directors by J.P. Bickell (vice-president) and J.B. Tudhope. White's claim regarding the presence of Lord Beaverbrook on Famous Players' board of director has however been proved erroneous by Cox ("The Rise and Fall of the Allens," 80).
- <sup>27</sup> "Zukor and Grauman in Toronto," *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* (18 October 1919): 18; "Adolph Zukor Visits Toronto Offices, Pleased with Canadian Progress," *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* (15 March 1921): 12.
- <sup>28</sup> Moore, "Nathan L. Nathanson," 27.
- <sup>29</sup> "To Attend Montreal Showing," *Wid's Daily* (2 April 1921): 1; *The Standard* (2 April 1921): 25.
- <sup>30</sup> "L.E. Ouimet Opens Capital [*sic*], Montreal, for Famous Players Canadian Corp.," *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* (15 April 1921): 3.
- <sup>31</sup> For more information on the mysterious end of Specialty Film Import, see: Léon-H. Bélanger, *Les Ouimetoscopes: Léo-Ernest Ouimet et les débuts du cinéma québécois* (Montréal-Nord: VLB éditeur, 1978), 190-93.
- <sup>32</sup> "Capitol Theatre, Montreal's New Million-Dollar Playhouse Was Formally Opened Tonight," *The Standard* (2 April 1921): 25.
- <sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>34</sup> "Capitol Is Last Word in Theatre Builder's Art," *The Standard* (2 April 1921): 26.
- <sup>35</sup> This survey is based on a sample made up of the advertisements placed by the Allen and the Capitol theatres in *La Patrie* in May 1921, October 1921, and May 1922.
- <sup>36</sup> "Un programme en français au Capitol," *La Patrie* (16 April 1921): 23.
- <sup>37</sup> *Bob Hampton of Placer* (Marshall Neiland, Marshall Neiland Productions/Associated First National Pictures, 1921) was for instance booked at the Capitol. See: *La Patrie* (15 October 1921): 20.
- <sup>38</sup> Only the Allen houses located in Ottawa were excluded from the May 1920 deal between First National and the Allens. *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* (18 May 1921): 10.
- <sup>39</sup> *La Patrie* (14 May 1921): 21.
- <sup>40</sup> *La Patrie* (20 May 1922): 22; *La Patrie* (27 May 1922): 22; *La Patrie* (3 June 1922): 23.
- <sup>41</sup> Ray Lewis, "The Guillotine," *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* (1 March 1921): 1-2; *La Patrie* (22 October 1921): 16; *La Patrie* (29 October 1921): 18.
- <sup>42</sup> *La Patrie* (8 April 1922): 23. *Caligari* was distributed by Goldwyn in North America.
- <sup>43</sup> *La Patrie* (13 May 1923): 21. *Teodora* had also been obtained through Goldwyn.
- <sup>44</sup> Lacasse, *Histoires de scopes*, 81-82.
- <sup>45</sup> *Metropolis* was exhibited at the Palace. See *La Patrie* (8 October 1927): 37. *Napoléon* was booked by the Loew's at the end of 1928. See *La Patrie* (29 December 1928): 36.
- <sup>46</sup> Ray Lewis, "Take the British Film Seriously," *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* (8 December 1923).
- <sup>47</sup> Ray Lewis, "An Open Letter to the Federation of British Industries, Attention of Sidney Rogerson," *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* (12 November 1927): 7.
- <sup>48</sup> See for instance: Ray Lewis, "Here's a Nice Kettle of Fish: More Anti-American Film Propaganda to Carry British Pictures Over," *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* (1 September 1927): 10-11; Ray Lewis,

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“A British Film Industry: Ray Lewis Writes Complete Expose of Conditions,” *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* (18 August 1928): 7-8; Rachel Low, *The History of the British Film, 1918-1929* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1971), 298, quoted in Jarvie, *Hollywood's Overseas Campaign*, 54.

<sup>49</sup> Lewis claimed that 80% of the Allens' Canadian theatres were actually making money in the early 1920s. Ray Lewis, “Who Will Get Allen Theatres?,” *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* (20 May 1922).

<sup>50</sup> White, *Investigation into an Alleged Combine*, 17.

<sup>51</sup> “First National May Buy Allen Canadian Theatres,” *Variety* (30 May 1923): 18.

<sup>52</sup> Cox, “The Rise and Fall of the Allens,” 67-72.

<sup>53</sup> Cox most notably interviewed Bertha Rosenfeld, widow of Herb Allen.

<sup>54</sup> Cox (“The Rise and Fall of the Allens,” 70-73) states that thirty-five Allen theatres were acquired for \$650,000. His source might have been *Variety's* report on the transaction, which stated that the assets of Allen Theatres comprised thirty-six Canadian theatres but did not actually claim that the whole Allen network had been acquired by Famous Players. See: “Allen Houses Sold to C.F.P. for \$600,000 – Purchased for Receiver – 36 Theatres in Dominions of Canada,” *Variety* (14 June 1923): 19. Both Famous Players' fourth annual report (1 September 1923), available at Cinémathèque québécoise, and commissioner White (*Investigation into an Alleged Combine*, 54) claim that twenty Allen theatres were acquired by Famous Players. For more details on the transaction, see: Ray Lewis, “Who Will Get Allen Theatres?,” *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* (20 May 1922); “Rumour No. 3 States N.L. Nathanson Makes New Offer to the Allens,” *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* (22 July 1922): 5; “Allens Given Extension of Time Managing Committee Appointed,” *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* (5 August 1922): 10; “Famous Players Canadian Own Sixty-Four Theatres,” *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* (Christmas Issue 1923): 42; “Famous Players Pays \$392,073 for Allen Theatres in Canada,” *Exhibitors Herald* (5 January 1924): 38. The issues of the *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* published between January and June 1923 are unfortunately missing from the collections of Library and Archives Canada, Cinémathèque québécoise, and the New York Public Library.

<sup>55</sup> The theatre was transferred to a new company, Palace Theatre Montreal, Ltd., in October 1923, and then finally sold to Famous Players in December 1927. White, *Investigation into an Alleged Combine*, 83; “Famous Players Canadian Own Sixty-Four Theatres,” *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* (Christmas Issue 1923): 42; “Notice to the Registrar of the Registration Division of Montreal re Supplemental Trust Deed of Mortgage and Pledge, Allens Montreal Theatre Limited and National Trust Co. Ltd.,” 23 May 1924, authors' collection; “Palace Theatre Is Sold for \$175,000,” *The Gazette* (22 February 1928): 19.

<sup>56</sup> “Will Rotsky Remain with Montreal Allen?,” *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* (7 July 1923): 106; *La Patrie* (3 November 1923): 30; “Policy Changed,” *Film Daily* (30 November 1923): 2; “Rotsky Manager of Palace,” *Film Daily* (5 December 1923): 2.

<sup>57</sup> *La Patrie* (10 November 1923): 30; *La Patrie* (7 December 1923): 35. Famous Players also experimented with a roadshow policy at the Toronto Tivoli, which had also been acquired from the Allens. See: *Variety* (8 November 1923): 21.

<sup>58</sup> R. Faribaut, letter to United Amusement Corp. Ltd., 24 April 1925, CIC, B3 F76; United Amusements Corp., minutes of the board of directors, 28 September 1923, CIC, B9 F271. See also United Amusement Corp., Ltd., minutes of the board of directors, 30 January 1925, CIC B8 F232.

<sup>59</sup> In February 1924, trade journals reported the sale of the Montreal Loew's theatre to Famous Players for \$325,000. White, *Investigation into an Alleged Combine*, 21, 83; “F.P. Buys New Montreal House,” *Film Daily* (4 April 1923): 1; “Famous Players Acquire Loew's Theatre, Montreal,” *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* (21 July 1923): 4; “Loew Interest No Longer in Montreal; House Opens in Fall on Pantages Time,” *The Axe News* (27 July 1923): 2; “F.P. Buys Loew's Montreal,” *Film Daily* (1 August 1923): 1; “Mansfield Theater Co. Formed,” *Film Daily* (19 August 1923): 4; “Incorporate New Company to Control Montreal Loew's,” *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* (25 August 1923): 13; “Famous Players Canadian Own Sixty-Four Theatres,” *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* (Christmas Issue 1923): 42; “Loew's Montreal House Purchased by Famous,” *Exhibitors Herald* (9 February 1924): 29; “Montreal Theater Transferred,” *Film Daily* (24 February 1924): 12.

- <sup>60</sup> Howard T. Lewis, *The Motion Picture Industry* (New York: D. Van Nostrand Co., 1933), 201. Historian Douglas Gomery estimates that, in the United States, the five main vertically integrated theatre chains eventually came to control “three-quarters of the average box office of Hollywood’s films.” Douglas Gomery, *Shared Pleasures: A History of Movie Presentation in the United States* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992), 60. See also: Douglas Gomery, “The Picture Palace: Economic Sense of Hollywood Nonsense?,” *Quarterly Review of Film Studies* 3:1 (Winter 1978): 26.
- <sup>61</sup> White, *Investigation into an Alleged Combine*, 128.
- <sup>62</sup> H.T. Lewis, *The Motion Picture Industry*, 188.
- <sup>63</sup> Robert Sklar, “Introduction,” in Michael Putnam, *Silent Screens: The Decline and Transformation of the American Movie Theater* (Baltimore/London: John Hopkins University Press, 2000), 5. See also: Jarvie, *Hollywood’s Overseas Campaign*, 33-34; Richard Koszarski, *An Evening’s Entertainment: The Age of the Silent Feature Picture, 1915-1928* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 72.
- <sup>64</sup> Ray Lewis, “First Run Bunk,” *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* (16 December 1922). See also: White, *Investigation into an Alleged Combine*, 129.
- <sup>65</sup> S. Morgan-Powell, “Pictures in Montreal,” *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* (23 August 1924): 10.
- <sup>66</sup> Minutes of the meetings of the board of directors, United Amusements, CIC, B9 F271.
- <sup>67</sup> By the time of the creation of United Amusement Corp., Ltd. in 1924, Independent Amusement held \$268,900 worth of United Amusements shares. Most of these had been traded for the Regent theatre in January 1920. Minutes of the meetings of the board of directors, United Amusements, CIC, B9 F271.
- <sup>68</sup> “New Movie House Costing \$50,000 on Park Avenue,” *Montreal Daily Star* (27 July 1915): 5; *Montreal Daily Star* (23 August 1915): 8; *Montreal Daily Star* (3 March 1916): 2; *Montreal Daily Star* (4 March 1916): 20, 21; *La Presse* (18 March 1916): 4; Lancken, *Montreal Movie Palaces*, 18, 64-67, 169.
- <sup>69</sup> The 1913 Dominion was at the time managed by Nicolas Tabah. Minutes of the board of directors, United Amusements, CIC, B9 F271; *Lovell’s* (1920-21).
- <sup>70</sup> Briffa listed the Papineau as one of his “Montreal accomplishments,” according to Lancken (*Montreal Movie Palaces*, 96). Credit for the “painting and decorations of all the plaster and woodwork” of the Papineau was however given to Nincheri in the announcements of the theatre’s opening. See: *The Standard* (16 April 1921).
- <sup>71</sup> Minutes of the meetings of the board of directors, United Amusements, CIC, B9 F271; *The Standard* (16 April 1921): 27-29; *La Patrie* (16 April 1921): 23; *Le Passe-Temps* (30 April 1921): 179.
- <sup>72</sup> Minutes of the meetings of the board of directors, United Amusements, CIC, B9 F271.
- <sup>73</sup> R. Faribault, letter to United Amusement Corp., Ltd., 24 April 1925, CIC, B3 F76; *La Presse* (6 October 1923): 31; *Montreal Daily Star* (8 October 1923): 6.
- <sup>74</sup> *Lovell’s*, multiple editions; *Moving Picture World* 10:5 (4 November 1911): 370; *Montreal Daily Star* (27 November 1912): 15; *Montreal Daily Star* (11 February 13): 16; “‘Movies’ Must Pay Lawyer,” *Montreal Daily Star* (10 March 1914): 8; “An Hellenic Tribute,” *Boxoffice* (19 November 1938): 94; George D. Vlassis, *The Greeks in Canada* 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Ottawa: n.d., 1953), 139, 143.
- <sup>75</sup> *The Standard* (20 November 1920): 16-17.
- <sup>76</sup> Minutes of the meetings of the board of directors, United Amusements, CIC, B9 F271.
- <sup>77</sup> Ibid. Most Northern Amusements shareholders were of Greek descent. The company’s president, Harry Pulos, also operated the St. Lawrence Midway theatre for many decades. See: *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* (28 December 1918): 6; *Lovell’s*, multiple years.
- <sup>78</sup> Minutes of the meetings of the board of directors, United Amusements, CIC, B9 F271.
- <sup>79</sup> *The Standard* (18 February 1922): 22-23; *Film Daily* (27 February 1922): 4.
- <sup>80</sup> “Le festival kiwanien 1923 attire tout Montréal au St-Denis,” *La Patrie* (16 Novembre 1923): 14; Léo Choquette diary, Michel Choquette collection.
- <sup>81</sup> Minutes of the meetings of the board of directors, United Amusements, CIC, B9 F271; *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* (1 July 1921): 5; *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* (1 August 1921): 5; *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* (1 October 1921): 4; *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* (26 January 1924): 4; *Film Daily* (12 March 1924): 5.

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- <sup>82</sup> *La Presse* (27 December 1924): 29; *Montreal Daily Star* (27 December 1924): 16-17; *The Standard* (27 December 1924): 33-35.
- <sup>83</sup> "Moulin Rouge, Montreal, for Rent in May," *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* (1 March 1924): 22. The Moulin Rouge was operated by an independent exhibitor for about a year before it was demolished in the spring of 1925. See: *La Presse* (7 May 1925): 3.
- <sup>84</sup> Minutes of the meetings of the board of directors of United Amusements, CIC, B9 F271; 9 September 1924 agreement, CIC, B13 F371.
- <sup>85</sup> Letter to Independent Amusement and United Amusements shareholders, 12 September 1924, CIC, B12 F455; United Amusement Corp., Ltd., letters patent, CIC, B8 F201; Memorandum of agreement between Famous Players Canadian Corp., Ltd., and United Amusement Corp., Ltd., 24 October 1924, CIC, B13 F371.
- <sup>86</sup> A.L. Gorman, "Conditions in Quebec," *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* (24 May 1924): 7.
- <sup>87</sup> "Associated First National Regional 'Get Together' Held at Montreal," *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* (15 December 1921): 17.
- <sup>88</sup> Agreement between Athanasias K. Sperdakos and United Amusements Ltd., 4 October 1924, CIC, B5 F137.
- <sup>89</sup> "Mount Royal Theatre Greets Public To-Day," *Montreal Daily Star* (25 October 1913): 27. The Mount Royal's architect, Joseph-Arthur Godin, had also designed the Dominion theatre opened the same year. See: Lanken, *Montreal Movie Palaces*, 60.
- <sup>90</sup> *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* (15 February 1921): 9.
- <sup>91</sup> *Lovell's*, multiple years; *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* (7 September 1918): 8; Lacasse, *Histoires de scopes*, 42.
- <sup>92</sup> "Feting the Bridegroom of Athanasios K. Sperdakos," *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* (19 January 1918): 12.
- <sup>93</sup> Draft agreement, CIC, B5 F136. It is worth noting that the Mount Royal was losing money by this point.
- <sup>94</sup> *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* (5 October 1918): 12.
- <sup>95</sup> Ray Lewis, "Messrs. Minshall and Sperdakos," *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* (8 November 1924).
- <sup>96</sup> Lease agreement, CIC, B5 F137.
- <sup>97</sup> White, *Investigation into an Alleged Combine*, 230-31.
- <sup>98</sup> Ray Lewis, "Messrs. Minshall and Sperdakos," *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* (8 November 1924). See also: Ray Lewis, "The Trust Busting Act," *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* (18 October 1924), 9 September 1924 agreement, CIC, B13 F371.
- <sup>99</sup> 9 September 1924 agreement, CIC, B13 F371.
- <sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*; minutes of meeting of the board of directors, United Amusement, 19 November 1924, CIC, B8 F232.
- <sup>101</sup> Howard T. Lewis, *The Motion Picture Industry*, 346.
- <sup>102</sup> Letter to United Amusement's secretary-treasurer, CIC, B12 F455; Léo Choquette diary, Michel Choquette collection.
- <sup>103</sup> CIC B8, F222; R.W. Bolstad memo, 12 March 1936, CIC B8 F369; unsigned draft letter to George Ganetakos, 22 November 1933, CIC, B8 F221; unsigned draft letter to George Ganetakos, 6 July 1936, CIC, B8 F222.
- <sup>104</sup> Figures taken from United Amusement's annual reports to shareholders, CIC, B9 F307.
- <sup>105</sup> "The New Rivoli Theatre," *Montreal Daily Star* (18 December 1926): 27.
- <sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>107</sup> "L'inauguration du théâtre Rivoli," *La Presse* (20 December 1926): 8.
- <sup>108</sup> "Ce soir, ouverture du théâtre Rivoli, le plus beau du Nord de la ville," *La Presse* (18 December 1926): 49.
- <sup>109</sup> Minutes of the meetings of the board of directors, United Amusement, 28 April 1926, CIC, B8 F232; Memorandum of agreement between United Amusement Corp., Ltd., Najeeb Lawand and Ameen Lawand, May 1926 [unsigned draft], CIC, B7 F158.
- <sup>110</sup> "Le nouveau théâtre Château," *La Presse* (23 January 1932): 47.

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- <sup>111</sup> The theatres forbidden to present stage shows were the Palace, Midway, Crystal, Mount-Royal, Rialto, Regent, Maisonneuve, Nelson, Papineau, Dominion, Ouimetoscope, Electra, Lord Nelson, Arcade, Napoleon Palace, Belmont, Globe, Casino, Alhambra, Starland, Rex, Majestic, Centre-Palace, Lux-Palace, Star, Sun, Passe-Temps, Century, Salle Perron, Broadway, and Boulevardoscope. "L'usage de la scène est interdit à 31 théâtres," *La Presse* (12 January 1927): 3.
- <sup>112</sup> "Fire Inspector Names Theatres Ordered Closed," *Montreal Daily Star* (14 January 1927): 3.
- <sup>113</sup> Lacasse, *Histoires de scopes*, 93.
- <sup>114</sup> "New Inquiry on Montreal Fire," *Film Daily* (25 January 1927): 2; "To Investigate Morals," *Film Daily* (20 June 1927): 1; "Chas. C. Pettijohn Before Royal Commission," *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* (25 June 1927): 6, 14; *La Patrie* (31 August 1927): 1, 8, 14, 15; "Sunday Shows, Ban on Kids Asked in Quebec," *Film Daily* (1 September 1927): 1, 8; Ray Lewis, "'Honky-Tonks' Must Go!," *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* (3 September 1927); Lacasse, *Histoires de scopes*, 94-95.
- <sup>115</sup> George Ganetakos (general manager, United Amusement) and George Rotsky (manager, Palace theatre) were respectively president and vice-president of the organization. "Theatre Heads Pledge Relief Fund of \$10,000," *Montreal Daily Star* (10 January 1927): 4.
- <sup>116</sup> "La United Amusement Corporation inaugurerà ce soir le Rosemont, son douzième théâtre montréalais," *La Presse* (9 April 1927): 51.
- <sup>117</sup> Lacasse (*Histoires de scopes*, 96), quoting *La Presse* (31 December 1927), for instance claims that Quebec distributors and exhibitors had been through a slump in 1927.
- <sup>118</sup> "Amusement Returns Increased in Quebec," *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* (3 March 1928): 12.
- <sup>119</sup> United Amusement, annual reports of the directors, CIC, B9 F307.
- <sup>120</sup> Revenues from the civic amusement tax went from \$780,235 in 1926 to \$813,979 in 1927. "Amusement Returns Increased in Quebec," *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* (3 March 1928): 12.
- <sup>121</sup> Ameen Lawand and two of his employees had first been found guilty of manslaughter by the Court of the King's Bench. Montreal Police Department report, 10 January 1927, Pierre Pageau collection; "Trial Opens as Montreal Disaster Aftermath," *Film Daily* (26 October 1927): 2; "Manslaughter Finding in Montreal Disaster," *Film Daily* (27 October 1927): 1, 4; "Operator of Montreal 'Fire Trap' Appeals," *Film Daily* (3 November 1927): 1, 4; "Three Freed in Fire Disaster at Montreal," *Film Daily* (23 May 1928): 1; "Court of Appeal Quashes Sentence Against Lawand," *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* (26 May 1928): 7; Lacasse, *Histoires de scopes*, 96.
- <sup>122</sup> Letters patents, Confederation Amusements Ltd., Library and Archives Canada.
- <sup>123</sup> Minutes of the meetings of the board of directors, United Amusement, 20 July 1927, 8 August 1927, CIC, B8 F232; *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* (23 July 1927): 12; *La Presse* (19 May 1928): 73.
- <sup>124</sup> "Ouverture du théâtre 'Empress'," *La Presse* (21 May 1928): 8; "Empress Montreal Owned by Confederation Amusements Ltd.," *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* (16 June 1928): 11.
- <sup>125</sup> Ray Lewis, "Ray Presents," *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* (26 May 1928): 5.
- <sup>126</sup> Minutes of the meetings of the board of directors, United Amusement, CIC, B8 F232; Correspondence between United Amusement and Émile Gobet, CIC, B14 F917.
- <sup>127</sup> Minutes of the meetings of the board of directors, United Amusement, CIC, B8 F232; "La United Amusement inaugure brillamment le 'Seville,' hier soir," *La Presse* (23 March 1929): 71; Samuel Morgan-Powell, "United Amusement to Open Their Fourteenth Local Theatre Tonight," *Montreal Daily Star* (22 March 1929): 8.
- <sup>128</sup> *La Patrie* (6 February 1926): 39, 40.
- <sup>129</sup> Amherst advertisements published in *La Patrie*, between February and May 1926.
- <sup>130</sup> Minutes of the meetings of the board of directors, United Amusement, 28 May 1926, 28 June 1926, CIC, B8 F232.
- <sup>131</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>132</sup> Louis Rosenfeld and the Allens also successfully distributed Columbia Pictures in Canada. Cox, "Rise and Fall of the Allens," 74-75.

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<sup>133</sup> *Lovell's*, multiple years; Julius Cabn-Gus Hill *Theatrical Guide and Moving Picture Directory* (Season 1921): 66a; *Wid's Year Book* (1920-21): 193; "Several New Theatres Opened in Montreal," *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* (27 October 1923): 15; *Film Year Book* (1926): 602.

<sup>134</sup> Minutes of the meetings of the board of directors, United Amusement, 26 January 1927, 1 August 1928, 24 April 1929, 16 April 1930, 16 May 1930, 8 January 1931, 29 January 1931, 25 February 1931, 25 March 1931, 26 June 1931, 2 May 1932, 26 May 1932, 21 November 1932, 30 June 1936, 6 December 1937, CIC, B8 F232, F233 and F234; "La United Amusement ouvrirait hier le plus vaste de ses cinémas," *La Presse* (29 March 1930): 65, 66

<sup>135</sup> Minutes of the meetings of the board of directors, United Amusement, 9 September 1926, 26 September 1926, 27 June 1927, 23 November 1927, 7 April 1930, 16 May 1930, 26 November 1930, 7 July 1931, 18 January 1932, 26 May 1932, 6 July 1932, 1 August 1932, 16 May 1933, 26 October 1933, 5 February 1934, 18 August 1938, CIC, B8 F232, F233 and F234.

<sup>136</sup> "New Theatre at Verdun," *Montreal Daily Star* (4 December 1913): 27; minutes of the meetings of the board of directors, United Amusement, 1925-1927, CIC, B8 F232; memorandum of agreement between Famous Players, United Amusement and Standard Amusement, 1 November 1927, CIC, B12 F455; memorandum of agreement between Famous Players and United Amusement, 14 November 1927, CIC, B13 F369.

<sup>137</sup> Memorandum of agreement between Empress Amusement Co., William and Adolph Goldwater, an United Amusement Corp., Ltd., 18 September 1929, CIC, B1 F43.

<sup>138</sup> "Flahsbacks," *Canadian Film Weekly* (15 March 1944): 11.

<sup>139</sup> Memorandum of understanding by Mr. Isaac Rosenbloom regarding proposed arrangements to be made with United Amusement Co. in connection with Lachine theatre, CIC, B1 F43; memorandum of agreement between Lachine Amusements Ltd. and United Amusement Corp., 1 October 1936, CIC, B5 F135; memorandum of agreement between Empress Amusement Co., William and Adolph Goldwater, and United Amusement Corp., 8 December 1936, CIC, B1 F44; draft agreement between Lachine Amusements Ltd., United Amusement Corp., and Lakeshore Theatres Ltd., c.1952, CIC, B14 F407.

<sup>140</sup> Ganetakos and Nathanson's organizations had also collaborated on the construction and 1929 opening of United Amusement's first theatre located outside of the island of Montreal, the Sherbrooke Granada.

<sup>141</sup> *Lovell's*, multiple years. The *Montreal Daily Star* (10 September 1912: 19) also mentions one "Arthur M. Hirsch" in connection with the 1912 sale of the Montreal Passe-Temps and Colonial theatres. Hirsch's main partner in the Gotham Amusement Co. was J. Rosenthal. The chain also employed Leon Schlesinger, previously of the Lachine Royal Alexandra, as manager. See: "Washington Height's Gotham with 64 Loges for Smokers," *Variety* (27 January 1927): 44.

<sup>142</sup> "Quebec Publix Firm," *Film Daily* (19 May 1927): 8; "Montreal Firm Changes Name," *Film Daily* (30 September 1927): 2; *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* (7 April 1928): 7; Serge Malouin and Antoine Sirois, *Sherbrooke ville de cinéma-s* (Sherbrooke: Éditions GGC, 2002), 53-54.

<sup>143</sup> Memorandum of Agreement between Consolidated Theatres Corp. and Consolidated Theatres Limited, 15 December 1928, CIC, B14 F418.

<sup>144</sup> "Montreal Chain Adds Another," *Film Daily* (19 April 1929): 10; "'Legit' Manager Quits When House Goes Sound," *Film Daily* (11 July 1929): 7; *La Patrie* (7 December 1929): 36.

<sup>145</sup> *La Presse* (30 August 1930): 67.

<sup>146</sup> The Imperial had first been leased by Consolidated Theatres from Radio-Keith-Orpheum's Montreal subsidiary in 1929. White, *Investigation into an Alleged Combine*, 84.

<sup>147</sup> "Montreal Theater Combine," *Film Daily* (13 July 1936): 20; "Famous Players, RKO End Canadian Pool," *Film Daily* (1 August 1936): 1, 8; "Consolidated Shows Gain," *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* (2 April 1938): 14; "Hirsch Sews Up Montreal," *Variety* (24 August 1938): 23; Memorandum of agreement between Consolidated Theatres Ltd. and J. Arthur Hirsch, 1 September 1938, CIC, B14 F387.

<sup>148</sup> See for instance *La Presse* (30 August 1930): 61-67.

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- <sup>149</sup> See for instance: memorandum of agreement between Famous Players Canadian Corp. Ltd., Consolidated Theatres Ltd., Canadian Theatres Ltd., and J. Arthur Hirsch, 19 August 1942, CIC, B14 F[957].
- <sup>150</sup> The addresses of Consolidated Theatres' directors and officers are listed in a prospectus issued on December 15, 1947 and available in CIC, B11 F307.
- <sup>151</sup> "Montreal Vaude Comeback Falters," *Variety* (2 November 1938): 49.
- <sup>152</sup> The programme's headlining feature was *The Knockout*, a First National drama of the "northwoods." *La Patrie* (7 November 1925): 32; "Ingenuity in Programme Building," *Film Daily* (18 December 1925): 4.
- <sup>153</sup> Ottawa Consul to State Department, 16 March 1927, Library and Archives Canada, RG 59 1912-1929 842.4061, Motion Pictures – Canada, microfilm M 1435, roll 19, quoted in Jarvie, *Hollywood's Overseas Campaign*, 49, 53. Additional figures available in "Canadian Film Imports" *Film Daily* (28 March 1927): 2. A measly 9,896 feet of film were imported from other countries in 1926, which represents about ten reels, or one two-hour feature.
- <sup>154</sup> "Import Jump," *Film Daily* (3 May 1921): 4; "Know Your Industry, No. 27: Canada," *Film Daily* (31 October 1926): 5, 15.
- <sup>155</sup> See for instance: "Muzzle the Lung-Exercisers," *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* (15 June 1921): 1-2; "We're Agin It," *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* (5 August 1922).
- <sup>156</sup> "Montreal Dominion Headquarters for Moving Picture Theatre Owners of Canada," *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* (15 September 1923): 15; "Harrison's Reports," *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* (25 April 1925): 5.
- <sup>157</sup> "Digest Sues for \$50,000 Damages," *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* (6 March 1926): 4. For a more detailed account of the conflict between Lewis and Nathanson, see Paul S. Moore and Louis Pelletier, "Une excentrique au coeur de l'industrie: Ray Lewis et le *Canadian Moving Picture Digest*," *Cinéma* 16:1 (Fall 2005): 72-74.
- <sup>158</sup> White, *Investigation into an Alleged Combine*; Famous Players file, Médiathèque Guy-L.-Coté, Cinémathèque québécoise; Moore and Pelletier, "Une excentrique au coeur de l'industrie," 60-62. For more information on the White Commission, see Jarvie, *Hollywood's Overseas Campaign*, 25-43.
- <sup>159</sup> White, *Investigation into an Alleged Combine*, 230-234.
- <sup>160</sup> Ray Lewis, "Looney Legislation," *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* (4 February 1928): 14.
- <sup>161</sup> White, *Investigation into an Alleged Combine*, 147.
- <sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*, 9, 146-157. On the practice of block booking and its history, see also: H.T. Lewis, *The Motion Picture Industry*, 142-180.
- <sup>163</sup> White, *Investigation into an Alleged Combine*, 10.
- <sup>164</sup> H.T. Lewis, *The Motion Picture Industry*, 204.
- <sup>165</sup> White, *Investigation into an Alleged Combine*, 154.
- <sup>166</sup> See: Ray Lewis, "First Run Bunk," *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* (16 December 1922).
- <sup>167</sup> White, *Investigation into an Alleged Combine*, 128-145. H.T. Lewis reached similar conclusions in the U.S. two years later (*The Motion Picture Industry*, 201-229).
- <sup>168</sup> Jarvie further believes that the concerns giving rise to the combine investigation and proceedings against Famous Players were not economic, but cultural. The historian argues that the case had been instituted by the members of an Anglo-Canadian elite defining itself first and foremost as British, and thus apt to feel threatened by the massive importation of US popular cultural productions. Jarvie, *Hollywood's Overseas Campaign*, 35-42.

## Chapter 4

### *Sound, the Great Depression, and the Vindication Mongrel Circuits (1928-1939)*

The final months of the 1920s ushered a set a challenging new circumstances for film exhibitors. Granted, the coming of sound over 1928-1929 and the Great Depression precipitated by the October 1929 stock market crash did not radically alter the activities of established Montreal film exhibitors in the 1930s. Most of the theatre chains then active in Montreal, including Famous Players and United Amusement, operated on a generally sound financial basis by the time of the stock market crash, and thus managed to pull through the worst of the Depression without going in the red.<sup>1</sup> Still, the advent of the talkies and the changing habits of moviegoers during these trying times soon caused exhibitors to review their relationship with the vertically integrated organizations that had been on the ascent since the mid-1910s and experiment with new policies.

As we will see, Montreal entered the sound era in September of 1928 when Famous Players' Palace became the first Canadian film theatre to switch to a sound policy on a permanent basis.<sup>2</sup> The conversion of the city's numerous other film theatres would however proceed with some delay, mostly due to continuation of the long-standing fights over Sunday openings and censorship, which had been rekindled in the wake of the 1927 Laurier Palace tragedy. By the fall of 1929, the vast majority of the city's theatres had nevertheless been wired. This process initially favored established chains such as Famous Players and United Amusement, whose theatres were generally the first to receive sound equipment. This development further placed chains in a position to increase their influence over independent houses, which sometimes had to turn to them to finance the installation of sound equipment.

The data set out in this chapter however suggests while exhibitors coasted through the most of the year 1930, the novelty of sound eventually wore off by 1931. Between the opening of Confederation Amusements' Château theatre in January 1932 and that of United Amusement's Snowdon in 1936, no new film theatre would be built in Montreal. Falling revenues in the early 1930s forced exhibitors to seek alternative attractions and policies offering more to Depression-era audiences, such as double bills, giveaways, draws, contests and raffles. Another important factor favoring the growing popularity of these strategies with exhibitors was the setbacks suffered in the U.S. by Paramount-Publix in the early 1930s. This situation forced this much influential organization to review its corporate strategies, and more particularly to temper its faith in centralized scientific management. This, in turn, increased the leeway of its Canadian affiliates.

### **Synchronized Sound in Montreal**

The history of synchronized sound in Montreal actually stretches back to the fall of 1907, when the city's two leading moving picture theatres, the Ouimetoscope and the Nationoscope, both conducted short experiments with the exhibition of moving pictures featuring a synchronized soundtrack. Film pioneer's Léo-Ernest Ouimet remembrance of the events of 1907 suggests that language issues were from the outset central in the dissemination and marketing of sound technologies. According to a story relayed by his nephew and biographer Léon Bélanger, Ouimet's old employer, Georges Gauvreau, was the first Montreal exhibitor to plan the installation of a system permitting the exhibition of sound films, the Gaumont Chronophone, in his theatre. Gauvreau's plan had however been leaked to Ouimet, who had reacted by hurrying to New York to purchase his own sound apparatus. There he had managed to acquire for a very reasonable price the Cinéma-gramo-

théâtre system manufactured in France by Georges Mendel, as – in a curious reversal of things to come – the latter’s New York agent was pretty well aware that French-Canada was about the sole North American outlet for this system for which only French singing films had been produced.<sup>3</sup>

According to film historian Jean-Pierre Sirois-Trahan, the Chronophone and Cinéma-gramo-théâtre initially met with some success in Montreal, but were soon done in by a combination of synchronization, amplification and maintenance issues, as well as by the limited range of subjects available to exhibitors. The same issues also led to the demise of the Cameraphone system exploited in a small makeshift theatre located on St. Catherine Street in the winter of 1909, as well as to that of the Edison Kinetophone featured at the Imperial theatre in the spring of 1913 – both sound on disk systems.<sup>4</sup>

According to an account of the 1928 conversion to sound of the Montreal Palace theatre published in 1946 by journalist Marc Thibeault, this second coming of sound to Canada had been somewhat delayed by the various difficulties that had arisen during the manufacturing of the first Canadian theatre sound systems by Northern Electric. The delays brought on by these difficulties had allegedly forced Famous Players’ general manager, Nathan L. Nathanson, to turn to American movie mogul William Fox (with whom, as we will see, Nathanson appears to have been engaged in negotiations at the time) to obtain the required sound equipment. The latter had eventually agreed to send three sound reproducing systems to Canada in exchange for a promise by Nathanson to feature Fox films during the sensational premieres of Famous Players’ newly wired theatres.<sup>5</sup> While Thibeault’s 1946 account of the events of 1928 is not backed by any known period source, it is supported by at least one major piece of circumstantial evidence: the fact that the first sound feature exhibited at the Palace was *Street Angel* (Frank Borzage, 1928), a Fox production using the

Movietone process for sound effects, musical accompaniment and, intermittently, recorded dialogue (as most of the film still relied on intertitles). The famed Warner production *The Jazz Singer* (Alan Crosland, 1927) using the Vitaphone process would only be exhibited three months later at the Palace, during the week of December 1<sup>st</sup>, 1928. A few weeks later, on January 5, 1929, Warner's *The Terror* (Roy Del Ruth, 1928) became the first "all-talking" picture to be exhibited in Montreal, still at the Palace.<sup>6</sup>

Famous Players' second most favored Montreal theatre, the Capitol, converted to a sound pictures policy some four months after the Palace, on December 29, 1928.<sup>7</sup> The following week, the Capitol management solemnly announced that, for the benefit of its French-Canadian patrons, it had arranged for bilingual intertitles to be inserted in its latest headlining attraction, the Garbo vehicle *A Woman of Affairs* (Clarence Brown, MGM, 1928), as well as in all the other titles featuring a synchronized soundtrack it would exhibit in the future. The theatre's advertisement insisted on the "humongous" costs of this operation, which, it claimed, represented a first "in the history of the universe."<sup>8</sup> Montreal filmgoers must have wondered what all the fuss was about, since most of the local exchanges handling the films of leading US producers, including Famous Lasky Films, Regal Films, Associated First National Pictures, United Artists Corporation, Canadian Educational Film, Canadian Universal Company, and Dominion Films, had regularly used the intertitles translation services offered by Montreal's Associated Screen News in the 1920s. The latter's promotional material explained that:

The experience of years of Canadian film distribution has shown the commercial necessity of supplying feature pictures to be circulated in French-Canadian territories with bilingual titles.

Foreign producers have often been betrayed into humorous but expensive errors by employing translators to put their titles into Parisian French. The French-Canadians is some centuries away from France and has evolved a language and idiom of his own. Successful motion picture titles for Lower Canada must be written in that idiom.<sup>9</sup>

Still, the fact remains that, even if the Capitol's management might have ever so slightly exaggerated its accomplishments, it was markedly more complicated, and thus costly, to insert a new set of intertitles into prints featuring a synchronized sound effect and music soundtrack than into a *bona fide* silent film – especially if the film used a sound on film optical soundtrack. Thankfully for the various exchanges operating in Montreal, film versions featuring both a synchronized soundtrack and intertitles were not produced for very long.

On February 9, 1929, the Palace exhibited the first talking picture produced in Quebec, a Fox-Movietone newsreel, showing the speech given – in French – by Quebec prime minister Louis-Alexandre Taschereau at the opening of the Assemblée nationale's new session.<sup>10</sup> Ironically, it is during this parliamentary session that Taschereau's Liberal government would vote the much-reviled amendments to the provincial *Loi du cinéma* effectively banning children under sixteen years of age from commercial moving picture theatres.<sup>11</sup> This extraordinary prohibition, which had no equivalent in the Western world, was immediately denounced by several groups and labor organizations, including the Montreal Trades and Labor Council and the International Association of Machinists, who felt that the new law would particularly affect the working class.<sup>12</sup> The amendment would nevertheless remain in the books until 1961.

As we have seen in the previous chapter, the ban on children in commercial film theatres was actually part of a renewed offensive on cinema jointly launched by the Province's Catholic clergy and elected government in the wake of the January 9, 1927, Laurier Palace tragedy. It would cause local conditions, which had long been not too favorable to film exhibitors, to quickly go from bad to worse. A *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* headline quite tellingly asked on September 1<sup>st</sup>, 1928 – the very day of the talkies' première at

the Montreal Palace – if prime minister Taschereau was “hostile to moving picture theatre owners.”<sup>13</sup> A few months later, in April 1929, the *Digest* advanced that:

Theatre building operations and the installation of synchronized mechanisms in Montreal and other cities of the Province of Quebec have been more or less held up because of the possibility that the Quebec Government may clamp on the Sunday closing law.<sup>14</sup>

Indeed, it is only in May of 1929 that a third Montreal theatre, the St. Catherine Street Théâtre Français, would be wired for sound.<sup>15</sup> This relatively slow transformation seemingly contradicted the massive success of the first synchronized programmes exhibited by Famous Players at the Palace and Capitol.

By reviving the long dormant campaign aiming to put an end to Sunday screenings, the Taschereau government willingly aligned itself with the more conservative elements of Quebec society. It thus explicitly disavowed the opinion of the Judge Louis Boyer, who had led the inquiry into the Laurier Palace fire, and had famously refused to kowtow to the Catholic clergy by condemning Sunday screenings in his much-discussed report submitted on August 25, 1927.<sup>16</sup> (While many Quebec film theatres operating outside of the cities of Montreal, Quebec and Sherbrooke chose to close on Sunday, presumably so as not to provoke the conservative elite, it actually never was illegal to show moving pictures on Sundays. Montreal film theatres were all open for business seven days a week in the late 1920s.) The provincial government’s renewed fight against Sunday screenings soon led to criminal proceedings being instituted against United Amusement’s Regent theatre in the spring of 1928. In a judgment rendered in November of the same year, the Superior Court however ruled that the Regent test case encroached on a federal jurisdiction, and consequently supported the right of film exhibitors to conduct business on Sunday. The provincial government nevertheless threatened to contest this decision, thus creating much uncertainty for Quebec exhibitors in this most critical period.

Interestingly, United had been greatly helped in the Regent test case by the intervention of Léo-Ernest Ouimet, who had first succeeded in getting the right of Quebec exhibitors to do business on Sundays recognized by the Supreme Court of Canada in 1912.<sup>17</sup> Sunday screenings were far from being a trivial issue for exhibitors. In his deposition to the 1927 Boyer commission, George Rotsky, manager of the downtown Palace, had for instance declared that a large proportion of his Sunday attendance “came from the working classes,” and consequently could not attend any other day of the week.<sup>18</sup> This suggests that, while exhibitors – starting with Ouimet and Gauvreau twenty years before – had succeeded in making film shows attractive to middle-class patrons, the film business still conceived its public as a mass audience including working class amusement seekers.

A report detailing the weekly and Sunday receipts for many Montreal theatres<sup>19</sup> during one unidentified 1926 or 1927 week submitted to the Boyer commission does indeed demonstrate that Sunday screenings generated much more than one seventh (14.3%) of the weekly receipts of Montreal film theatres, and that theatres located in working class francophone neighborhoods were bound to lose the most should Sunday screenings be prohibited. (Table 4.1) Quite tellingly, the report shows that the two houses most dependent on Sunday patronage were the east end’s two most high-profile venues, the Théâtre St. Denis (38.4% of weekly receipts taken on Sunday) and the Amherst (37.8%), while the theatre at the very bottom of the list was none other than the one quintessential west island venue, the Allen Westmount (15.5%). The document further reveals that, with the exception of the Allen Westmount, neighborhood theatres all depended more on Sunday patronage than the five leading downtown palaces (the Palace, Loew’s, Strand, Imperial and Capitol), who all took up between 16.3% and 23.1% of their weekly receipts on the Sunday of the particular week selected for the report. The report incidentally confirms that the Capitol,

Loew's, and Palace were Montreal's three most profitable film theatres, with the Imperial closely following in fourth position.

*Table 4.1: Montreal theatres receipts, weekly and Sundays, c.1926-1927*

Theatre	Weekly receipts	Sunday receipts	Percentage of weekly receipts taken on Sunday
Théâtre St. Denis	\$4,952.43	\$1,901.31	38.4%
Amherst	\$15,713.91	\$5,938.89	37.8%
Crystal Palace	\$9,463.11	\$3,471.65	36.7%
Mount Royal	\$6,065.33	\$2,207.24	36.4%
Casino	\$704.34	\$205.80	35.6%
Arcade	\$2,596.32	\$915.51	35.3%
Belmont	\$13,413.86	\$4,239.48	31.6%
Papineau	\$17,104.31	\$5,261.42	30.8%
Théâtre National	\$4,800.13	\$1,457.45	30.4%
Plaza	\$12,083.76	\$3,596.87	29.8%
Midway	\$11,513.00	\$3,405.80	29.6%
Corona	\$16,878.15	\$4,959.57	29.4%
Ouimetoscope	\$1,673.71	\$489.05	29.2%
Fairyland	\$5,267.05	\$1,453.94	27.6%
Regal	\$3,322.73	\$858.12	25.8%
Regent	\$11,335.42	\$2,917.60	25.7%
Rialto	\$15,977.71	\$4,098.88	25.7%
Chanteclerc	\$2,920.59	\$735.70	25.2%
Capitol	\$68,091.06	\$15,754.86	23.1%
Imperial	\$40,667.44	\$8,928.01	22%
Strand	\$14,513.20	\$2,786.40	19.2%
Loew's	\$48,576.24	\$9,020.64	18.6%
Palace	\$42,289.83	\$6,899.82	16.3%
Allen Westmount	\$8,473.72	\$1,313.01	15.5%

*Source: "État comparatif des recettes des théâtres de Montréal, la semaine et le dimanche, comprenant les établissements sous obligation de garantie seulement," Pierre Pageau collection.*

The exhibitors' eventual victory on the Sunday front had nevertheless come at a great cost, as much of their time, energy and revenues had been diverted by this seemingly endless legal fight. United Amusement's directors were for instance informed in August of 1929 that the various legal actions connected with the admission of children and Sunday screenings had cost their company no less than \$35,871.<sup>20</sup> Soon afterwards, in April of 1930, the

Province of Quebec Theatre Managers Association revealed that the Provincial government's legal actions had left it with a \$60,000 deficit.<sup>21</sup>

Other recurring issues such as high taxes and censorship problems continued to plague Quebec exhibitors in the years marked by the coming of sound. In 1926, the threat of a boycott of the Quebec market by the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America, which was fed up with the alleged wholesale rejection and mangling of the films by Quebec censors, had seemingly only granted Prime Minister Taschereau an opportunity to showboat at the expenses of the film business.<sup>22</sup> In an interview with *Le Devoir*, Taschereau had declared:

If motion picture producers threaten us with a boycott unless we renounce our right to censor, let them keep their films. We will relinquish neither our right to censor nor our Board of Censors. Many judges believe that cinema is the cause of many crimes committed by young people, and it is my belief that they are right.<sup>23</sup>

The threat of boycott soon vanished, but not the problems caused by the intransigent attitude of the Quebec Board of Censors.<sup>24</sup> Five years later, in April of 1931, the US trade journal *Variety* still called the Province of Quebec the “toughest censoring point on [the] globe.”<sup>25</sup>

It should also be noted, still on the topic of censorship, that the advent of sound briefly created additional problems for exchanges and exhibitors by foregrounding in a most unsubtle fashion the various cuts made by censors. Early sound on disk systems did not permit actual cuts to be made to the soundtrack, which forced distributors to replace banned scenes by black leader in release prints so as not to lose synchronism with the disk containing the recorded sound track. As a result, filmgoers were frequently forced to stare at a dark screen for several seconds or minutes.<sup>26</sup> In the many instances where the censors' cuts had rather been motivated by dialogues, projectionists were instructed to drop the volume while the film was being projected. In order to ensure that its decisions would be enforced,

the board of censors had exchange representatives swear under oath that projectionists would be properly supervised. Theatres were for instance asked by the Quebec censors to fade out every instance of the word “divorce” when showing *The Furies* (Alan Crosland, First National, 1930). One wonders how projectionists, who had many other things to keep themselves busy with, acquitted themselves of this absurd task.<sup>27</sup>

In spite of all these hurdles, things picked up quite fast in the late spring of 1929 when the industry’s complete conversion to sound seems to have finally been deemed inevitable by Montreal exhibitors. As we have seen, the Théâtre Français became the third Montreal theatre to convert to sound, in mid-May. It was soon followed by the Princess (June 14), the Loew’s (June 16) and, over the months of July and August, by most of the theatres operated by United Amusement.

Surprisingly, Ganetakos’s chain forewent the Northern Electric system favored by Famous Players. It instead opted for the DeForest Phonofilm system developed by one of the inventors of the optical sound track, Lee DeForest (though the Phonofilm system was also equipped for sound on disc). Up until then, all but one of the Montreal moving picture theatres wired for sound had been equipped with the Northern Electric system.<sup>28</sup> Created in 1895, Northern Electric was a subsidiary of the Bell Telephone Co. of Canada, for whom it produced various apparatuses. Its synchronous sound film system was a licensed version of the system developed in the US by Western Electric, the manufacturing arm of American Telephones and Telegraphs (AT&T).<sup>29</sup> On May 11, 1928 – the single most important date in the advent of sound cinema in North America according to Douglas Gomery – AT&T had signed a contract with Paramount and MGM providing for the conversion to sound of their entire production and exhibition operations.<sup>30</sup> United could have used its Paramount connection in order to obtain the much in demand Northern Electric systems before its

competitors, but just as vertical integration cannot single-handedly determine local programming strategies, high-level corporate relationships do not entirely override the multiple identities, activities and allegiances of the agents making up local organizations. In this particular case, the salient fact was that United's president and vice-president, Ernest Cousins and Isidore Crépeau, also held key positions in DeForest Phonofilm of Canada.<sup>31</sup> The DeForest system, however, soon proved unsatisfactory, forcing United to retrofit most of its theatres with Northern Electric systems before the end of 1930.<sup>32</sup>

United's main competitor, Confederation Amusements, opted for the RCA Photophone system compatible with both the Northern Electric and the DeForest systems. On October 4, 1929, Confederation's new Outremont theatre became the first Montreal motion picture theatre to present talking pictures from its very first day of operation.<sup>33</sup> By mid-October, at least thirty-seven theatres operating in Montreal, Lachine and Verdun were equipped with synchronous sound systems. With the exception of two small neighborhood houses, the Rex and the Electra, all were equipped for both sound on film and sound on disc.<sup>34</sup>

Conversion to sound clearly became a matter of survival for film exhibitors as 1929 drew to a close, with the announcement by US producers that no new "titles versions" (or even new prints of old silent films) would be manufactured after the end of the 1929-1930 season. The "end of silent films" would eventually be proclaimed by *Variety* in October of 1931. By this point, out of 22,000 theatres showing films in the United States, less than 1,500 theatres "mostly of the barn and store types" had still not been wired for sound.<sup>35</sup> Available evidence suggests that, while the coming of sound might have initially lagged behind by a few months in Canada, by 1931 the wiring of commercial film theatres was just as advanced in Canada as in the U.S.

The transition to sound obviously came at a cost for Montreal theatres. Converting a theatre to sound involved more than the purchase and installation of the required sound equipment. The acoustic properties of many theatres also had to be enhanced through renovations. United Amusement for instance decided to install carpeting, which had until then been deemed unhygienic and thus rarely used in auditoriums, to dampen the sound coming out of the speakers.<sup>36</sup> The cost of the entire conversion process for the United network was estimated at \$200,000 by the company's comptroller. The chain financed the operation through the conversion of 25,000 of its non-issued shares into class B non-voting shares. These were first offered to the company's shareholders at the unitary price of \$25, and then, when the shareholders' response proved lukewarm, to the chain's employees.<sup>37</sup>

The coming of sound somewhat contributed to the vertical integration of the industry in the late 1920s, as some independent exhibitors had no choice but to make deals with chains to finance the wiring of their theatres. Denis and Nicholas Lazanis were for instance forced to borrow \$5,000 from United Amusement on May 15, 1929, to pay for the wiring of the two small neighborhood theatres they operated in the Montreal's east end, the Napoleon Palace and the Lord Nelson.<sup>38</sup> It is also possible that the decision of the Goldwater family, who operated the Empress theatre in Lachine (not to be confused with the Empress operated in Notre-Dame-de-Grâce by Confederation Amusements) to join United Amusement in the late summer of 1929 was in part motivated by their need to find backers for the wiring of their theatre.<sup>39</sup>

### **Showmanship and the Depression**

The sums invested by exhibitors in the wiring of theatres would soon prove to be money well spent, as available data suggests that talking pictures significantly softened the

blow of the stock market crash of October of 1929 for film exhibitors. United Amusement for instance reported its highest annual net earnings, \$296,452, since its inception for the year ending August 31, 1930 – a figure that would not be bettered before 1949.<sup>40</sup> And while the Depression eventually caught up with exhibitors in the early 1930s, it does not seem to have impacted their operations nearly as severely as it did most other commercial activities. United's annual net earnings might have fell down to \$37,961 by 1934, but at least the company remained profitable all-through the Depression, as also did Consolidated Amusements, Famous Players, and newcomer France-Film.<sup>41</sup> Actually, it might very well be that only thing that United lost to the Depression was its vice-president, Isidore Crépeau, whose main line of business was insurance. On December 30, 1932, Crépeau “fell” from the window of his office located on the seventh floor of the Bank of Toronto building, on St. James Street, and was instantly killed.<sup>42</sup>

Montreal exhibitors seem to have first felt the effect of the Depression over the 1930-1931 season, that is, once the novelty of talking pictures had worn off. In July of 1931, *Variety* reported that the revenue from the amusement taxes collected by Montreal theatres had dropped by \$50,000 over the preceding year, and deduced that theatres revenues had likely fell down by more than half a million dollars over the same period.<sup>43</sup> A few weeks later, a laconic report by *Variety*'s Montreal correspondent read: “Worst summer in seven years for flickers, nabes all in red.”<sup>44</sup> In October, another report claimed that: “[Montreal] Nabes are doing fairly except in the east end of the city, where unemployment is more felt.”<sup>45</sup> The temporary closure of the Canadian Pacific's Angus Shops, which reportedly affected no less than 50,000 people, was more particularly blamed for the difficulties of east end theatres.<sup>46</sup>

Exhibitors reacted to the new set of difficulties brought on by the Depression by slashing expenses, and more particularly payroll. In January of 1933, United Amusement

applied cuts varying between 5% and 12% to the fees and salaries of all its employees, executives and directors.<sup>47</sup> As an exceptional temporary measure, all salaries and fees were further reduced by 50% for the duration of the summer of 1933, at the nadir of the Depression.<sup>48</sup>

Most exhibitors also strove to counter the effects of the Depression in more proactive ways, most notably by experimenting with programme formats. Double bills thus became the policy most commonly used to lure value-conscious consumers back in theatres in the 1930s. This programme format offering two feature-length films (to which shorts films and live acts were still commonly added) became more or less standard in neighborhood houses in the summer of 1930 when Confederation Amusements, following United Amusement's lead, decided to use it in its theatres.<sup>49</sup> By 1936, a trade report quoted in the *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* estimated that up to 90% of Canadian moving pictures houses were presenting double bills.<sup>50</sup> First-run downtown palaces largely accounted for the remaining 10%: in Montreal, Famous Players' leading house, the Palace, steered clear of double bills all-through the 1930s, while the Loew's and Capitol only used them intermittently. The only two first-run theatres to show double bills on a regular basis in the 1930s were the Théâtre St. Denis and the Cinéma de Paris operated (as we will see in chapter 5) by newcomer France-Film.

Double bills had first been introduced in United Amusement theatres before becoming common in theatres operated by Confederation Amusements, Famous Players, and France-Film during the Depression. In a 1930 interview, veteran United Amusement theatre manager Frank Warnicker actually claimed to have invented the double bill late one night while trying to devise ways to bring more customers to the Regent.<sup>51</sup> While Warnicker's eureka moment is most likely destined to remain an apocryphal story, newspaper advertisements do show that the Regent explicitly advertised double bills as early as January

1918. The policy spread out to other United houses in the early 1920s.<sup>52</sup> By the fall of 1929 – a mere few months after the wiring of the chain’s theatres – almost all of the chain’s neighborhood houses were already “double featuring” talking pictures. **[Figure 4.1]** According to the *Canadian Moving Picture Digest*, United was one of the very first North American circuits to adopt this policy, which was still at this point sufficiently novel to be described as a “stunt.” This double talkie policy reportedly succeeded in filling United theatres to capacity for some time.<sup>53</sup>

Double bills however soon proved to be just as unpopular with producers and distributors as they were popular with audiences. In the United States, many major producers, including MGM, Paramount and Warner Bros., pressured distributors into adding “anti-dualing” clauses in their exhibition contracts in the early 1930s. This measure soon led to a protracted legal battle, as the pro-double bill element of the industry rallied to denounce these clauses as being in violation of US Anti-Trust legislation.<sup>54</sup> Producers and distributors were supported in their fight by a wide range of social organizations, including the General Federation of Women’s Clubs, the Parent-Teachers Associations and religious organizations, who did not hesitate to describe “dualing” “as a vicious practice [...] injurious to the public.”<sup>55</sup> These groups more particularly argued that by unduly lengthening shows, double-bills “reduced the intrinsic value” of pictures, produced eye strain, over-stimulated filmgoers, disturbed children’s sleep pattern (obviously a non-issue in Quebec), and caused harmful crowding in theatres and lobbies.<sup>56</sup>

In Canada, double bills were vigorously opposed all through the 1930s by the *Canadian Moving Picture Digest’s* Ray Lewis, who argued that producers and distributors actually used double bills “to get rid of ‘weaker sisters,’” and thus were partly to blame for the epidemic.<sup>57</sup> Lewis also accused exhibitors booking double bills of poor showmanship. Like many others,

she believed that “the showman who builds up his show with a news reel, a short subject by way of novelty, a comedy, and a feature, shows that he understands the public’s desire for variety, and also reveals how good a showman he is, by his assembling of his show.”<sup>58</sup>

Lewis’s Depression-era anti-double bills campaign echoed some arguments first voiced in the early 1910s, when the film industry’s growth was felt to be dependent on cinema’s ongoing quest for respectability. Lewis’s campaign for instance assumed that the prosperity of the film industry was dependent on a race for quality driven by product differentiation, mostly through the use of stars and trademarks. To pad a show with a second starless, B-grade feature consequently was anathema to the proponents of a truly respectable, genteel cinema. Lewis summarized the main concern of the “anti-dualing” forces when she wrote that double bills tended “to degenerate, not elevate the Motion Picture Industry, [to drag] it down to the level of a Midway.”<sup>59</sup> Which goes to prove that, more than two decades after the appearance of the first movie palaces, the various commercial strategies devised by film industry leaders still took cinema’s cultural and moral standing into account.

All this agitation nevertheless seems to have had little to no impact on the double bill format’s popularity with the movie-going public. When Ray Lewis asked the listeners of her weekly radio broadcast to send her letters detailing their feelings on the issue of double bills in March of 1938, fewer than twenty-five letters out of the three hundred she received professed a preference for single features. One pro-double bill listener gave a new twist on Lewis’s argument in favor of balanced programmes by writing that “a double bill offers a pleasing change of scene, and is not too much fare at one sitting,” while another explained that a second feature could make up for a disappointing picture.<sup>60</sup> Taken collectively, the testimonies collected by Lewis demonstrate that by 1938 double bills could not be described

as a stunt or a fad anymore. They simply were what most Canadians expected when they chose to go to the movies.

Double bills were not the sole commercial tactic extensively used by North American exhibitors in the 1930s to draw strong criticism from within the industry. The most vilified features of Depression-era film shows actually were the draws and contests variously known as “banko,” “bank night,” “screeno,” or “bingo” used by numerous exhibitors to lure cash-starved patrons. Some other theatres did not raffle money, but basic foodstuffs. Comedian Juliette Petrie for instance describes in her memoirs how the manager of an unnamed theatre established in a working class neighborhood of the east end of Montreal used to raffle grocery bags full of canned food on “grocery nights” held three nights a week. These would alternate with “meat nights” [*soirées de boucherie*], during which a butcher would climb onstage during the intermission to cut the pieces of beef offered to raffle winners.<sup>61</sup>

Raffles were actually nothing new in east end theatres. Germain Lacasse, Johanne Massé and Bethsabée Poirier have thus discovered that raffles and gifts to patrons were two of the main promotional tactics employed by notorious French-Canadian showman Alex Silvio in the 1920s.<sup>62</sup> A September of 1923 piece published in *La Patrie* for instance describes the raffling at the Théâtre National, then operated by Silvio, of a crate filled with potatoes, carrots, onions, grapes, canned meats, ham, as well as a “splendid unbreakable pearl necklace.”<sup>63</sup> A few months later, the St. Lawrence Starland, then dedicated to photoplays and burlesque, also promised: “2 100 lbs. bags of potatoes, 20 lbs. sugar, 100 lbs. flour, [...] 10 lbs. butter, 20 lbs. sausage” and “chickens, both alive and dead, always a succulent dish for Friday’s dinner.”<sup>64</sup> It therefore seems that, like the poverty that had begotten them, these tactics did not appear out of nowhere in the 1930s: they simply spread out of working-class neighborhoods.

Unsurprisingly, the trade press soon accused the organizers of these “meat night,” bingos, and other “screenos” of “lowering theatre standards.”<sup>65</sup> In the U.S., industry pundit Epes Sargent further accused the theatre operators resorting to these practices of unwittingly fostering competition to film shows:

In one Brooklyn locality, two independently operated circuits introduced Bingo with a view to offsetting the real or imaginary handicap of deferred release. For a time the game helped the receipts, but presently the societies moved in and now, on nights when there is an outside bingo game – and there are three or four on different nights – the theatres play to quarter houses or less while the neighbors crowd into some stuffy hall or lodge room to the limit of its capacity.<sup>66</sup>

The legality of draws also raised issues in many territories. In Montreal, a test case was instituted in March of 1938 when the city recorder, Pacifique Plante, was asked to determine if the bank nights held at Jos. Cardinal’s Théâtre Canadien (once the Ouimetoscope) constituted an illegal lottery.<sup>67</sup> The ubiquitous Ray Lewis soon jumped into the debate by stating that “a Dominion-wide opposition should be staged against Bank Night,” which she characterized as an “American get-rich-quick” scheme.<sup>68</sup>

Lewis was also quite critical of the theatres offering free gifts such as China, cutlery or dinnerware to ladies. **[Figure 4.2]** These giveaways operated under the assumption – also strongly reminiscent of transitional era commercial strategies – that the female patrons attracted by these offers would come to theatres with husbands (and, outside of Quebec, children) in tow. Giveaways might have been devoid of the gambling stigma, but still smacked of lazy, self-defeating showmanship to Lewis, who argued that:

The theatre, in the days prior to Motion Pictures, lived for centuries without prizes. The people went on to see a show. As soon as your public talks about dishpan, or a lucky number draw, instead of talking about the stars and players, you, as exhibitors, may as well get ready to haul your seats and advertise a parking garage.<sup>69</sup>

This type of attraction nevertheless steadily grew in popularity as the 1930s went on. By the fall of 1938, the *Digest* could report that fifteen of Winnipeg’s twenty-three second-run theatres advertised them.<sup>70</sup> In Montreal, the Amherst, Rosemount, Granada and Corona – all

theatres operated by United Amusement in working class neighborhoods – held “dinnerware service nights” thrice a week in the winter of 1937.<sup>71</sup> The downtown Orpheum (which at the time was independently operated by Joe Lightstone and exhibiting first-run United Artists pictures as a result of a fight between United Artists and Famous Players) also regularly held “dinnerware nights” later in 1937, reportedly to great success.<sup>72</sup> As noted by Lacasse, Massé and Poirier, the theatre going public was not only attracted by the prizes offered by these raffles, contests, and auctions.<sup>73</sup> Patrons seemingly also enjoyed being part of the show and, if they somehow had failed to win the prize themselves, seeing members of their community being invited on stage to collect their envelope, ham, or pearl necklace.

This need to become part of the show was further milked by the numerous Montreal moving picture theatres holding amateur contests during the Depression. In spite of their sudden surge in popularity in the 1930s, amateur contests, just like draws and raffles, were actually nothing new. It is now well-known that audience participation had been encouraged in the first *scopes* and nickelodeons, both in the auditorium and, occasionally, onstage. Advertisements published in Montreal newspapers document the city theatres’ renewed interest for shows making use of local amateur talent during the Depression. Random examples of contests held in the 1930s include the “future stars of the screen” contest launched by France-Film, *La Presse* and CKAC at the Imperial in the summer of 1932 (for which twenty-four candidates were actually filmed), and the amateur contest making the round of United Amusement theatres in the fall of 1938, in which participants competed for a trip to Hollywood and a screen test.<sup>74</sup>

Besides the obvious advantages to exhibitors of these low cost and bridge-building attractions bound to be attended by the participants’ extended family, friends and neighbors, the various amateur nights organized by the city’s moving picture theatres also indirectly

served show business by facilitating the development of a local artistic community. The aforementioned contest held at the Imperial in 1932 was for instance won by Germaine Giroux, who would go on to have a decades-long career on radio and television. Rose Ouellette, a.k.a. “La Poutine,” one of the most popular French-Canadian comedians of the twentieth century, and one of the very few French-Canadian women to become a theatre manager, also reminisces in her memoirs about her first experiences onstage, some time in 1917 or 1918 when she was about fourteen, during the weekly amateur contests held at the Ouimetoscope. Ouellette more particularly claims that her mother’s disapproval of the stage would no doubt have nipped her histrionic career in the bud, had it not been for a sympathetic aunt and the amateur nights of the neighboring Ouimetoscope, then managed by Silvio.<sup>75</sup> Her exceptional show business career would eventually last until 1993.

### **Scientific Management in the 1930s**

Another factor possibly contributing to the increased use of double bills, bingos, giveaways and amateur contests in Montreal theatres in the 1930s is the relative decline of centralized scientific management during the Depression. This type of management has been largely associated with Sam Katz, the ruthless founder of the Paramount-Publix theatre chain, whose rapid rise and fall had much impact on Montreal exhibitors at the turn of the 1930s. **[Figure 4.3]** According to Douglas Gomery, it is while managing the quickly growing chain of Chicago moving picture theatres he operated with the Balaban brothers in the 1910s and early 1920s that Katz had first thought of adapting the management principles of chain stores to film exhibition. Balaban & Katz’s unprecedented success soon prompted other developing theatre chains to copy Katz’s methods, which notably relied on the standardization of both products and human resources, as well as on hierarchies favoring the

knowledge of “experts” over the judgment of field operatives (even though Katz himself had never graduated from college).<sup>76</sup>

A manual issued in 1926 for instance provided Balaban & Katz managers with a dizzying array of advices and directives on just about any aspect of theatre operation, from film bookings to the maintenance of the house tank. A detailed “Emergencies and Unusual Conditions” section more particularly instructs managers on how to deal with “fire, panic, sickness, hysterics, intoxicated persons, and morons,” as well as “death or taking of poison by a patron.”<sup>77</sup> The manual’s rather unsettling section on the “Specific Requirements for Employees” deserves to be quoted at length, as it provides the perfect illustration of the extreme to which the strand of “scientific” management promoted by Katz was taken to in the 1920s (as well as for just about any form of class, race and gender stereotype then prevalent in US society):

Your footman should be a colored man, about six feet in height, medium height, erect, about fifty years of age, preferably with some gray hair, approaching the old southern coachman type; one who thoroughly appreciates, and through previous training has learned the rudiments of courteous service. Your greatest difficulty in selecting and holding footmen will be in obtaining one who will graciously refuse the many gratuities which are offered.

Cashiers should be young ladies about twenty-five years of age having a very pleasing personality and voice. It is not necessary that they be beautiful girls, but should be of refined type, not using too much rouge or lipstick, and wearing their hair in a conservative style rather than in an extreme fashion.

Your maids should be colored girls about twenty-five years or thirty years of age, well past the frivolous and playful age, of a serious and quiet nature, of medium stature, preferably those who have been trained as domestic servants in the homes of cultured people. [...] You should keep in mind that these maids do most of their work in the Ladies Rest Rooms where there is absolutely no supervision.

You should not be satisfied with any other type of ushers other than young men of seventeen to twenty-one years of age, of average height, about five foot seven, and of normal weight for their age, of about one hundred thirty-five to one hundred forty-five pounds. They should be keenly alert, both physically and mentally. These young men should show by their appearances that they have had the advantages of environment and home training. Their work is of such a character as to be of distinct benefit to any young man in any walk of life. If you are satisfied with any different type for your

ushers you will find yourself very much handicapped in building up an organization of our standard and qualification.<sup>78</sup>

As for managers, the manual specifies that the position “does not require physical beauty, but rather a clean, manly, and wholesome presence.”<sup>79</sup> Balaban & Katz’s management principles were eventually reprised by Publix, the theatre chain organized across the U.S. by Katz following Balaban & Katz’s 1925 alliance with Famous Players-Lasky.<sup>80</sup>

Publix also reprised and expanded the prologue idea developed in Balaban & Katz theatres. By the late 1920s, luscious stage show units pre-packaged in New York were sent on forty-week tours of Publix houses, where they were used to introduce thematically related feature films, and incidentally largely replaced local talent. Through the chain’s in-house weekly, the *Publix Opinion*, local managers received pre-written stories and instructions on how to sell the show (or, to quote the *Opinion*’s management speak: “facsimiles and interpretations of outstanding or repeatable effort and achievement.”)<sup>81</sup>

In Montreal, Publix stage units eventually replaced vaudeville at the Capitol in the fall of 1930. The event spelled the end of the theatre’s house orchestra, whose contract was not renewed upon expiration on August 31.<sup>82</sup> Publix units would however soon prove to be a flop at the Capitol, in spite of personal appearances during the fall of 1930 by Helen Kane, the original Boop-Oop-A-Doop girl, and Fifi D’Orsay, née Yvonne Lussier, the Montreal-born actress who had just starred in a string of films directed by Raoul Walsh, Frank Borzage and Alex Korda.<sup>83</sup> Publix units disappeared from the Capitol’s bill in January of 1931, thus leaving the Toronto Imperial as the sole Canadian theatre to feature them.<sup>84</sup> According to the *Canadian Moving Picture Digest*: “One reason for the defection [of Publix presentations] in Montreal was that the French-speaking population did not take kindly to the stage acts.”<sup>85</sup>

The trial run of Publix presentations at the Capitol had been organized in the wake of a tour of Montreal theatres by Katz on May 30, 1930. According to the *Digest*, Katz’s brief

sojourn had been arranged “for the purpose of checking up details arising out of the transfer of control of [Famous Players Canadian] to Paramount-Publix.”<sup>86</sup> The visit did indeed come on the heel of the May 25 consummation of the deal decreeing the exchange of Famous Players Canadian shares for Paramount-Publix shares, which had been arranged by Adolph Zukor in the months following Nathanson’s (temporary, as it would turn out) departure from Famous Players Canadian in September of 1929.<sup>87</sup> Famous Players Canadian new managing director, Arthur Cohen, accompanied Katz on his Montreal tour, as also did J.J. Fitzgibbons, who had just resigned as Publix’s New England division manager to become Famous Players Canadian’s new director of theatre operations.<sup>88</sup>

Katz used his Montreal visit to exert pressure on the direction of the partly owned, but still locally controlled United Amusement chain, which he hoped to fully integrate into the Famous Players Canadian/Paramount-Publix organization.<sup>89</sup> A few weeks before his visit, the *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* had prematurely announced that:

Famous Players Canadian Corp. will shortly absorb United Amusements, Limited [*sic*], Montreal, which operates 20 modern theatres in the Province of Quebec, it is announced. [...] The absorption will bring the Quebec company under direct control in the matter of organization, policy and advertising.<sup>90</sup>

Katz’s plans were however thwarted by United’s strong-willed direction, which managed to prevent Famous Players Canadian from seizing outright control by putting up a unified front with the company’s Montreal shareholders. The *Digest* consequently reported in its June 14 edition that:

A further bid for the 20 handsome theatres operated by United Amusement, Limited, Montreal, has been made by Famous Players Canadian Corp., the latest offering having been made by J.J. Fitzgibbons of Paramount-Publix and Arthur Cohen, managing director of Famous Players Canadian Corp. The latter company now holds considerable common stock in United Amusement but outright control is desired. Intimation has been made by United Amusement officials that there is no immediate inclination to sell.<sup>91</sup>

Indeed, control of the United Amusement chain would not leave Montreal until the sudden death of John G. Ganetakos, the son and successor of the company's long-standing general manager, in 1959.

The quick deterioration of the North American film market over the last quarter of 1930 brought an abrupt reversal of fortune for the main proponent of centralized scientific management. According to Gomery, the sudden fall of Paramount-Publix's revenues following their September 1930 peak, combined with the heavy debt contracted during the Katz-supervised expansion of its theatre chain, eventually caused the organization to go into receivership in 1932. Katz was then forced out of Paramount-Publix.<sup>92</sup>

As the crisis worsened over 1931, *Variety* published several pieces reporting on the increased leeway accorded by large theatre chains to their local representatives. In March, Paramount-Publix for instance announced that:

It has been found [that] local men are in a better position to determine policy. Permission to spot bookings with more local leeway is also known to be helping in various operations that were previously up against home office orders that could not always be appealed.<sup>93</sup>

*Variety* further reported in October that:

Local operation of Publix theatres [...] through partnership deals on turnbacks and with independents who have been brought into the fold, has increased [within the past year], to the point where approximately 25% of the total number of Publix houses are on that basis.<sup>94</sup>

The latter piece further explained that, while Publix remained in charge of the booking and buying of pictures, local exhibitors operating under this type of deal had full jurisdiction over the theatres under them. Still, there is no indication that Publix ever contemplated returning any of its larger groups of theatres, including Famous Players Canadian, "to strict field management."<sup>95</sup> The Canadian chain would nevertheless recapture some level of autonomy

in May of 1933, with the return of Nathanson at its helm – an event signaling “a re-assertion of Canadian control over the company” according to Paul S. Moore.<sup>96</sup>

In a summer 1931 statement, the future president of Twentieth Century-Fox, Spyros Skouras, then in charge of one of the main regional theatre chains part of Publix’s organization, also declared himself in favor of a “mongrel type of circuit” as a solution to chain operation problems. Himself the quintessential self-made man, Skouras argued that there were “many capable independent owners who have a pride and zest which few house managers, trained and assigned in a home office, can be expected to possess.” His statement invoked three main arguments in defense of “mongrel” circuits:

1. It is a life saver to the independent entering the deal, since he retains not only 50% of his property but maintains his position as head of the house.
2. It provides the home office of the circuit with the assurance of having a specialist in each locality, one who knows better than anyone else the local boxoffice barometer in fan taste as well as political and social conditions.
3. It eliminates the need to overbuild to meet competition.<sup>97</sup>

The change of minds of US industry leaders over the role of local managers may not have made much of an impact on the business of film exhibition in Montreal in the early sound years. As we have seen, the “mongrel” circuits presented as novelties by the US trade press in the early 1930s were already commonplace in Montreal in the 1920s, as also were “partnership deals” between national chains and local exhibitors. Still, this new openness to local initiatives must have been most welcomed by Montreal exhibitors, who at the time had to rise up to a most urgent challenge: the selling of a form of entertainment now relying almost exclusively on English-language dialogues to a population half made up of francophones.

Other contemporary developments provide additional context for the rejection by United of the offer made by Publix in the spring of 1930. It more particularly seems that the Montreal group led by Ganetakos felt that its options were not limited to selling out to

Famous Players Canadian/Publix or going back as a wholly independent operation (and losing its privileged access to the cream of the US film production in the process). A third option appears to have been given to United by none other than Nathanson, who had hurried to Montreal a mere few days after Katz's visit to "[go] into [a] huddle with several local managers," and subsequently remained in "close touch" with Ganetakos.<sup>98</sup> According to *Variety*, Katz's and Nathanson's Montreal visits bred "Undercurrent gossip sizzling with rumors of all kinds of new combos, theatres, options, etc."<sup>99</sup> The most sensational of these rumors claimed that Nathanson was working on the creation of a new Canadian chain with Fox, an organization boosted by the massive success of its Movietone sound process in the late 1920s. Fox had acquired several US regional chains over 1928 and 1929, and amalgamated in March of 1929 with the Loew's chain (of which the Montreal Loew's wasn't part of at the time, as we have seen in chapter 3). By 1930, Fox's US theatre chain was second in size only to Paramount-Publix's.<sup>100</sup>

In Canada, it was rumored that Fox had backed British Gaumont Theatres in its summer of 1929 bid for Famous Players Canadian. The failure of the latter deal had notoriously led to the resignation of Nathanson, who had engineered it without consulting the two other members of the voting trust then controlling Famous Players, Zukor and Killam.<sup>101</sup> This setback had however not put an end to Fox's Canadian project. One of the many rumors reported by *Variety* over the first half of 1930 thus had the Montreal Loew's coming out of Famous Players Canadian to form the nucleus of a new chain together with a new St. Catherine Street 5,000-seat super-palace.<sup>102</sup> Some reports further suggest that Confederation Amusements' quickly growing chain of luxurious neighborhood houses (the Empress, Cartier and Outremont had just opened in 1928 and 1929) was also coveted by both Publix and Fox.<sup>103</sup> While somewhat speculative, this scenario would at least help

explain the mysterious rise of the Tabahs and Lawands' chain in the months and years following the tragic death of seventy-eight children in one of their theatres. It does indeed seem quite possible that Confederation's founders were privy to some information, and that they had developed their chain in order to be bought out or taken over by a national chain.

In the end, Nathanson's projected new chain seems to have been undone by Fox's growing difficulties, which had been largely brought on by the massive debt incurred by the organization before the stock market crash.<sup>104</sup> In the months following Fox's withdrawal from the project, Nathanson appears to have held some hope that his projected new Canadian chain would become a reality through the intervention of one of the country's most prominent (and reviled) capitalists, Sir Herbert Holt, who was said to be ready to invest no less than 25 million in the scheme.<sup>105</sup> But, as we have seen, the effects of the Depression finally caught up with the film industry over the second half of 1930, and Nathanson had to forego his plan for a second Canadian chain – for the time being.

United Amusement's distant attitude towards Famous Players' new management seems to have led the latter to retaliate against the Montreal chain. In August 1930, a few weeks after the chain had turned down Fitzgibbons' and Cohen's final offer, the *Digest* announced that: "New booking contracts in Montreal provide 90-day protection for first-run houses in place of 30 days, which has been the leeway between first and second runs up to date."<sup>106</sup> Unsurprisingly, Ganetakos's opposition to the new policy was soon announced by *Variety*.<sup>107</sup> A second conflict developed over film censorship in November, when second and subsequent run exhibitors alleged that films were being cut after their first-run "to prejudice fans against neighborhoods."<sup>108</sup> Trying to ascertain if these alleged cuts had been arranged by Famous Players, or if they simply constituted yet another instance of inconsistent action by the provincial board of censors would obviously be close to impossible. This story

nevertheless remains indicative of the deterioration of the relations between Famous' new management and the regional circuits that used to be closely allied to the national chain under Nathanson.<sup>109</sup>

The tensions exacerbated by Publix's meddling and attempted takeover brought the Montreal shareholders of United Amusement to take measures to further ensure that control of their company would not leave for Toronto or New York. The Montreal investors and entrepreneurs responsible for the creation of the United chain thus set up in 1931 a second voting trust agreement aiming to prevent Famous from seizing control of United. While the voting trust's official stated purpose was to "ensure proper management for the United Amusement Corp.," internal communications between United's Montreal shareholders reveal that the agreement's undisclosed objective indeed was "to prevent control passing to the Famous Players Canadian Corp."<sup>110</sup>

The shareholders represented by the second voting trust further endeavored to dissolve the first voting trust created in 1924 and renewed for twenty years in 1927.<sup>111</sup> As we have seen in chapter 3, Famous Players controlled the majority of the stock deposited under this voting trust, but had consented to let United's Montreal shareholders nominate five of the seven voting trustees. Famous Players had thus recognized that the "hearty cooperation" of the Ganetakos group was essential to the continuing success of the Montreal chain. Changing relations between the two chains at the turn of the 1930s had however visibly affected the trust of United's Montreal shareholders in Famous' goodwill. As a result, the members of the Montreal group sought in the early 1930s to transfer the shares they had deposited in the first voting trust to the second voting trust. Ganetakos and his Montreal associates consulted at length with their attorney, Henry N. Chauvin, who drafted different

scenarios leading to the eventual lawful dissolution of the first voting trust and the subsequent transfer of shares.<sup>112</sup>

This operation aiming to grant control of a majority of United voting shares to a second voting trust entirely controlled by the company's Montreal shareholders was however never completed. The company's papers preserved in the Cinéma Impérial collection do not reveal any definite reason for this change of plan, but one can conjecture that Nathanson's return to Famous Players in May of 1933 eventually initiated some kind of thaw in the relations between United Amusement and the Toronto-based chain. United had likely grown to trust that, contrarily to Publix's Sam Katz, Nathanson was sufficiently familiar with the Quebec market to realize that he did not have a sufficient grasp on it. Nathanson had shown himself to be too wise a businessman to get rid of the local agents, such as Ganetakos and his partners, who were successfully handling difficult local conditions and generating sizable profits for Famous in the process.

In any case, the terms of the 1924 agreement between United Amusement and Famous Players were eventually extended until the end of 1959 through a new agreement signed on October 27, 1936, that is, more than three years before the original agreement was set to expire on December 31, 1939. This suggests that changing conditions, including Nathanson's return at the helm of Famous Players, had somewhat renewed both chains' faith in this partnership.

United had nevertheless been forced to launch into yet another fight for its autonomy in the months leading to the renewal of its partnership with Famous Players. A communication from United's attorney explaining the situation is worth quoting at length:

In 1924 United Amusement Corporation allotted Famous Players a block of stock for an agreement to respect each other's territory during a period of fifteen years. For a renewal of this agreement Famous Players in the first place requested a further allotment of shares. United objected and offered to pay 15% of its net profits.

Famous Players never invested a dollar in the United Amusement Corporation. The investment was made by United Directors and their friends.

The United Company is a small company compared with Famous Players and it desired to reach a position where it could carry on peaceably and without fear of being forced out of business by the larger company. Famous Players now wish matters so arranged that should they acquire a majority of the shares of the United they will get control.

This defeats the very purpose the United had in view, namely, to keep their Company to themselves.<sup>113</sup>

United eventually prevailed... at the cost, as stated by chain's counsel, of 15% of its net profits. As per the 1936 agreement, United was also required to grant Famous an option on 5,000 non-voting shares, and ensure that new voting shares would be offered pro rata to current shareholders. The two parties further agreed that the sale of the United chain, or of any of the theatres it owned, would have to be approved by the votes of 75% of the shares, so as to give Famous an effective veto on any such proposed transaction. Other clauses of the agreement specified that three of United's ten Directors, and two of the members of the executive committee were to be nominated by Famous Players.

In return for these concessions, Famous forfeited the right to exhibit second run pictures (except at the theatres it operated at the time of signature of the agreement) and undertook to respect United's territory. It additionally committed itself to offer United a 50/50 participation in its future ventures in the Province of Quebec (outside of downtown Montreal, Hull, Three Rivers and Quebec City, Sherbrooke, Rouyn and Noranda), and to "assist the United company in every reasonable manner [...] in the purchase of films for all theatres in which the United Company is or shall be interested." Famous Players finally guaranteed that it would not "require any increase in the delay presently observed in the City and District of Montreal between the first-run of a picture and its second run."<sup>114</sup>

Famous Players might have its own interest in mind with this last promise. Indeed, documents reveal that the chain started planning around the time of the renewal of its

partnership with United Amusement the opening of a new St. Catherine Street West theatre – the first since the 1929 Seville. Eventually known as the York, this theatre was from its inception described as a second run house. The site chosen by the chain for its new theatre was located on a block situated between Mackay and Guy – right on the border of United Amusement’s territory. Famous Players tacitly admitted that the projected theatre would compete with United houses, and more particularly with the nearby Seville, by offering United a 50% participation in the theatre.<sup>115</sup> Ganetakos agreed to become part of the project, but “strongly objected” to the fact that Famous Players ultimately reserved the right to operate the theatre.<sup>116</sup>

Ganetakos was granted leverage in the negotiations over the projected theatre by the fact that none of Famous’ Montreal representatives was sufficiently qualified to finalize the deal with the owners of the building where the York was to be located, which was to include stores and apartments, and supervise construction work.<sup>117</sup> Nathanson therefore had no choice but to ask Ganetakos to take charge of the project “as a special favor.” Ganetakos soon replied that “he [did] not wish to meddle with it at all unless he [could be] assured of the management,” thus forcing Nathanson to enter into a new round of negotiations that eventually dragged on for six months.<sup>118</sup> The York operating agreement finally signed on August 9, 1937 outlined the compromise worked out by Famous and United: it granted the management of the theatre to United, but permitted Famous to take over the theatre anytime it wished, provided it had given United a three-month notice. It should however be noted that, in the discussions leading to the agreement, Famous had promised United that it would refrain from taking over the new theatre as long as Ganetakos remained in charge of the Montreal chain.<sup>119</sup> The 1937 agreement further specified that the new theatre’s programmes were to be booked by United, while profits and losses were to be shared equally

between United and Famous (after a management fee representing four per cent of the gross weekly receipts had been paid to United).<sup>120</sup> The York finally opened as a United theatre on November 18, 1938, seemingly to the mutual benefice of United Amusement and Famous Players. The event ushered a new era of stability for the two chains, whose collaboration would uneventfully continue along the lines of their 1924 and 1936 partnership agreements for the next two decades.

## Endnotes

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- <sup>1</sup> Famous Players Canadian Corp., annual reports (Médiathèque Guy-L.-Coté, Cinémathèque québécoise); United Amusement Corp., Ltd., annual reports, Cinéma Impérial collection, B9 F307-F310, Cinémathèque québécoise.
- <sup>2</sup> For a detailed look at the various experiments that opened the way for this event in Montreal and Canada, see: JoAnne Stober, *Wired for Sound: Conversion to Synchronized Sound in Canada, 1926-1934*, PhD thesis, Department of Communication Studies, Concordia University, 2009.
- <sup>3</sup> Ouimet allegedly obtained his Cinéma-gramo-théâtre from Miles Bros. for \$500. Léon-H. Bélanger, *Les Ouimétoscopes: Léo-Ernest Ouimet et les débuts du cinéma québécois* (Montréal-Nord: VLB éditeur, 1978), 86-89; “Georges Mendel,” <http://cinematographes.free.fr/mendel.html>, last accessed 9 March 2011.
- <sup>4</sup> For a detailed account of these early experiments with sound cinema in Montreal, see: Jean-Pierre Sirois-Trahan, “The Reception of ‘Talking Pictures’ in the Context of Quebec Exhibition (1894-1915),” *Film History* 11:4 (1999): 433-443.
- <sup>5</sup> Marc Thibeault, “Parlons cinéma,” *Le Canada* (15 June 1946): 5.
- <sup>6</sup> *La Patrie* (1 December 1928): 38; *La Patrie* (12 January 1929): 35.
- <sup>7</sup> “Films parlés au Capitot à partir du 29 décembre,” *La Patrie* (22 December 1928): 38.
- <sup>8</sup> *La Patrie* (5 January 1929): 30.
- <sup>9</sup> Associated Screen News, “Titles for French Canada,” *Pictures for Industry* (Montreal, c.1925-1929), Médiathèque Guy-L.-Coté, Cinémathèque québécoise.
- <sup>10</sup> *La Patrie* (9 February 1929): 35.
- <sup>11</sup> Yves Lever, “Loi du cinéma,” in *Dictionnaire de la censure au Québec: littérature et cinéma*, Pierre Hébert, Yves Lever and Kenneth Landry, eds. (Montreal: Fides, 2006), 420-421.
- <sup>12</sup> “Organized Labor Protest Children’s Bill, Quebec – Taschereau Theatre Act Not Popular with Masses,” *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* (26 May 1928): 10.
- <sup>13</sup> “Premier Taschereau Attitude Hostile to Moving Picture Theatre Owners?,” *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* (1 September 1928): 10.
- <sup>14</sup> *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* (6 April 1929): 13.
- <sup>15</sup> *La Presse* (25 May 1929): 67.
- <sup>16</sup> Yves Lever, “Rappor Boyer,” in *Dictionnaire de la censure au Québec*, 571-573.
- <sup>17</sup> Germain Lacasse, *Histoires de scopes: le cinéma muet au Québec* (Montreal: Cinémathèque québécoise, 1988), 21-33; “La loi du dimanche,” *La Patrie* (9 May 1912): 3; “United Amusement Scores in Theatre Fight,” *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* (23 June 1928): 7; “Ray Presents,” *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* (1 December 1928): 6; “La loi du dimanche s’applique-t-elle aux vues animées?,” *La Presse* (19 November 1928): 11; “Les représentations dans les cinémas ne sont pas interdites le dimanche,” *La Presse* (28 November 1928): 15.
- <sup>18</sup> “Banning Sunday Shows Might Shut Many Theatres,” *The Gazette* (3 May 1927): 4; “Montreal Commission Enlarging Picture Scope of Its Investigation,” *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* (18 June 1927): 13.
- <sup>19</sup> The document only lists establishments “sous obligation de garantie.” Many houses, including those operated by the Lawand and Lazanis families, are therefore not listed. “État comparatif des recettes des théâtres de Montréal, la semaine et le dimanche, comprenant les établissements sous obligation de garantie seulement,” Pierre Pageau collection.
- <sup>20</sup> Minutes of meeting of the board of directors of United Amusement, 20 August 1929, CIC, B8 F233.
- <sup>21</sup> *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* (5 April 1930): 9.
- <sup>22</sup> Memorandum to Will Hays, 3 October 1924, *The Will Hays Papers*, Douglas Gomery, ed. (Frederick, Maryland: University Publications of America), Part I, reel 18; “Montreal and Quebec Face a Film Boycott,” *New York Times* (17 April 1926): 15.
- <sup>23</sup> *Le Devoir* (19 April 1926), quoted in Léo Pelland, *Comment lutter contre le mauvais cinéma* (Montreal: L’Oeuvre des tracts, c.1926), 14. Author’s translation.

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- <sup>24</sup> For more details on the censorship crisis of 1926, see Jacque Portes, “Hollywood et le Québec: une autre version de la crise de 1926,” *Les Cahiers d'histoire du Québec au XX<sup>e</sup> siècle* no. 7 (Spring 1997): 179-187.
- <sup>25</sup> “World Wide for Hays Code – Start Made in Quebec, Canada,” *Variety* (15 April 1931): 5. See also Pettijohn’s report on his March 30-April 2, 1926, Montreal visit, reproduced in *The Will Hays Papers*, part 1, reel 26.
- <sup>26</sup> The *Digest* reports that in another Canadian city, Ottawa, a projectionist used to project lantern slides bearing the mentions “Scene deleted by the censors” while the black leader ran and “Dialogue is deleted by censors” when the players lips were moving silently. *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* (20 July 1929): 17.
- <sup>27</sup> A. Gorman, letter to R. de Roussy de Sales, 9 April 1930, BANQ, Régie du cinéma collection, censorship files for April 1930. See also: Warner Bros., letter to the Quebec Board of Censors, 13 June 1930, BANQ, Régie du cinéma collection, censorship files for January 1930.
- <sup>28</sup> The management of the Princess had chosen the RCA Photophone system. “RCA Photophone To Be Used at Princess for Talking Pictures,” *Montreal Daily Star* (1 June 1929): 18; “Sound Theatres in Canada,” *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* (12 October 1929): 14.
- <sup>29</sup> “Nothern Electric: A Brief History,” [http://www.porticus.org/bell/northern\\_electric\\_history.html](http://www.porticus.org/bell/northern_electric_history.html), last accessed 4 September 2010.
- <sup>30</sup> Douglas Gomery, *The Coming of Sound* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 1.
- <sup>31</sup> DeForest Phonofilm Claim Patents Right Injunction,” *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* (22 September 1928): 7; “DeForest Trial Now in Courts,” *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* (6 October 1928): 7; “Action Over Film Rights in Court,” *The Gazette* (24 October 1928): 4; *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* (15 June 1929): 17; *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* (17 August 1929): 10; Dane Lancken, *Montreal Movie Palaces: Great Theatres of the Golden Era 1884-1938* (Waterloo: Penumbra Press, 1993), 82.
- <sup>32</sup> Minutes of meeting of the board of directors of United Amusement, CIC, B8 F233. The three leading systems adopted by film theatres (RCA Phonophone, DeForest Phonofilm and Northern Electric) were all compatible.
- <sup>33</sup> *Montreal Daily Star* (4 October 1929): 6.
- <sup>34</sup> “Sound Theatres in Canada,” *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* (12 October 1929): 14; *Variety* (26 March 1930): 79.
- <sup>35</sup> “End of Silent Films,” *Variety* (20 October 1931): 1, 62; Gomery, *The Coming of Sound*, 2.
- <sup>36</sup> Minutes of meeting of the board of directors of United Amusement, 9 July 1929, CIC, B8 F233.
- <sup>37</sup> Minutes of meeting of the board of directors of United Amusement, 24 April 1929, 4 June 1929, 14 June 1929, 20 August 1929, CIC, B8 F233.
- <sup>38</sup> Minutes of meeting of the board of directors of United Amusement, 29 January 1931, CIC, B8 F233.
- <sup>39</sup> Agreement between Empress Amusement Co., William and Adolph Goldwater, and United Amusement, 18 September 1929, CIC, B1 F43.
- <sup>40</sup> Figures not adjusted for inflation.
- <sup>41</sup> Annual Reports, United Amusement Corp., Ltd., CIC, B9 F307-F310.
- <sup>42</sup> “Isidore Crépeau Plunges to Death,” *Montreal Daily Star* (31 December 1932): 1; “Fin tragique de M. Isidore Crépeau hier,” *La Patrie* (31 December 1932): 15.
- <sup>43</sup> *Variety* (21 July 1931): 44.
- <sup>44</sup> *Variety* (11 August 1931): 48.
- <sup>45</sup> *Variety* (3 November 1931): 8.
- <sup>46</sup> *Variety* (6 October 1931): 46.
- <sup>47</sup> Minutes of meeting of the board of directors of United Amusement, 21 November 1932, CIC, B8 F233.
- <sup>48</sup> Minutes of meeting of the board of directors of United Amusement, 8 May 1933, CIC, B8 F233.
- <sup>49</sup> *La Presse* (6 September 1930): 73.

- <sup>50</sup> “Ray Presents,” *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* (12 December 1936): 4. *Variety* estimated in early 1938 that between 60% and 75% of US film theatres were “dualers.” “Poor Pix Force Dualing – Exhibs Must Twin Weakies,” *Variety* (9 March 1938): 25.
- <sup>51</sup> “M. Frank Warnicker,” *La Presse* (30 August 1930): 67. A *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* item published on 6 April 1918 (p. 9) does mention that the Regent was one of four Montreal film theatres (the others being the Moulin Rouge, the St. Denis, and the Tivoli) then experimenting with “double feature bills.”
- <sup>52</sup> *The Standard* (5 January 1918): 27; *Montreal Daily Star* (3 January 1920): 21; Belmont, Plaza and Papineau advertisements, *The Standard* (7 October 1922): 40-41.
- <sup>53</sup> *Montreal Daily Star* (5 October 1929): 27; *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* (1 March 1930): 7.
- <sup>54</sup> “Dualing Victory in Philly Courts Creates No Stampede on Twin Pix,” *Variety* (23 March 1938): 7; “Duals Put Up to U.S. Court,” *Variety* (15 June 1938): 5. The legal fight surrounding double bills had been ongoing since at least 1934.
- <sup>55</sup> “Duals Put Up to U.S. Court,” *Variety* (15 June 1938): 5.
- <sup>56</sup> *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* (29 August 1936): 4; “B&K ‘Previews’ Irk Chi’s Anti-Dual Proponents; Mull B’d of Health Beefs,” *Variety* (26 January 1938): 25; “Chicago May Ban Duals,” *Variety* (23 February 1938): 27; “See Doubles in to Stay,” *Variety* (16 March 1938): 21; “Pro-Dualers Clock Several N.Y. Houses to Prove Single Pictures Oft Unreel Longer Than Twin Bills,” *Variety* (6 April 1938): 21.
- <sup>57</sup> “Double Bills Popular,” *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* (19 March 1938): 3. See also: “Exhibs Must Twin Weakies,” *Variety* (9 March 1938): 25.
- <sup>58</sup> Ray Lewis, “The Double Feature Menace,” *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* (12 August 1933): 6.
- <sup>59</sup> Ray Lewis, “Ray Presents,” *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* (29 August 1936): 4.
- <sup>60</sup> “Double Bills Popular,” *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* (19 March 1938): 3; “Letters for and Against Double Bills,” *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* (19 March 1938): 5. See also, “B&K ‘Previews’ Irk Chi’s Anti-Dual Proponents; Mull B’d of Health Beefs,” *Variety* (26 January 1938): 25; “Triplets Without Fame,” *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* (21 May 1938): 3.
- <sup>61</sup> *La Presse* (20 June 1936): 26; Juliette Petrie, *Quand on revoit tout ça! Le burlesque au Québec, 1914-1960* (Montreal: Productions vieux rêves, 1977), 105; *Le Petit Journal* (10 January 1937): 21.
- <sup>62</sup> Germain Lacasse, Johanne Massé and Bethsabée Poirier, *Le diable en ville: Alexandre Silvio et l’émergence de la modernité populaire au Québec* (Montreal: Presses de l’Université de Montréal, 2012), 250, 283.
- <sup>63</sup> “Le Théâtre National pris d’assaut par la foule avide de gâité et de cadeaux,” *La Patrie* (25 Septembre 1923): 8, quoted in Lacasse, Massé and Poirier, *Le diable en ville*, 250.
- <sup>64</sup> *The Axe News* (29 February 1924): 6; “Starland,” *The Axe News* (18 April 1924): 8; “Starland,” *The Axe News* (23 May 1924): 6.
- <sup>65</sup> “Put Commersh Pix on Pan,” *Variety* (13 July 1938): 11.
- <sup>66</sup> Epes W. Sargent, “Indies Likewise to Blame,” *Variety* (20 July 1938): 9.
- <sup>67</sup> “‘Bank Night’ Trial Under Advisement,” *The Gazette* (16 March 1938): 11.
- <sup>68</sup> Ray Lewis, “Where Do We Go from Here,” *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* (18 June 1938): 3.
- <sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>70</sup> Merryl Lea, “The Spotlight,” *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* (1 October 1938): 11.
- <sup>71</sup> *Film Daily* (12 March 1937): 7.
- <sup>72</sup> A.C. MacNeish, “Canadian B.O. Spurt Reflects Biz Upturn,” *Film Daily* (13 May 1937): 26; “Nathanson Gets ‘Drums’ in First Step for Renewed Peace Between FP-Can and UA; 2-Year-Old Feud,” *Variety* (26 October 1938): 3.
- <sup>73</sup> Lacasse, Massé and Poirier, *Le diable en ville*, 252-53. Auctions were organized at the Imperial in the winter of 1937. “Auction Nights Reach Canada,” *Film Daily* (9 January 1937): 3.
- <sup>74</sup> Pierre Véronneau, “Le succès est au film parlant français (Histoire du cinéma au Québec I),” *Les dossiers de la Cinémathèque* no. 3 (Montreal: Cinémathèque québécoise, 1979): 12-13; *La Presse* (16

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January 1932): 61; “Un des gagnants du concours d’amateurs des cinés United,” *La Presse* (8 October 1938).

<sup>75</sup> Rose Ouellette, *La Poutine: vous faire rire c’est ma vie* (Montreal: Québecor, 1983), 20-25.

<sup>76</sup> Douglas Gomery, *Shared Pleasures: A History of Movie Presentation in the United States* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992), 40-59. See also the testimony of Arthur Mayer, who worked under Katz at Paramount-Publix at the turn of the 1930s in *Merely Colossal: The Story of the Movies from the Long Chase to the Chaise Longue* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1953), 93-114.

<sup>77</sup> Balaban & Katz Corp., *The Fundamental Principles of Balaban & Katz Theatre Management* (Chicago: Balaban & Katz Corp., 1926), 33, Médiathèque Guy-L.-Coté, Cinémathèque québécoise. See also: “Manual Issued for District Manager,” *Publix Opinion* 3:56 (3 October 1930): 1-2.

<sup>78</sup> Balaban & Katz, *The Fundamental Principles*, 17-20.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>80</sup> Gomery, *Shared Pleasures*, 43.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 58. Publication of the *Publix Opinion* began on 24 April 1927 and ran at least until 2 December 1932 (last issue held by Cinémathèque québécoise). The quote is from the introduction of the first volume of bound reproductions edited by Benj. H. Serkowich.

<sup>82</sup> *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* (22 November 1930): 13. Judging that they had been locked out, the members of the Capitol orchestra appealed from the decision to the Federal Minister of Labor, G.D. Robertson, to no avail. *Variety* (10 September 1930): 71; *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* (18 October 1930): 13.

<sup>83</sup> *La Patrie* (8 November 1930): 20; *Variety* (12 November 1930): 79; *Variety* (6 May 1931): 45.

<sup>84</sup> *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* (17 January 1931): 13.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>86</sup> *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* (7 June 1930): 9.

<sup>87</sup> Paul S. Moore, “Nathan L. Nathanson Introduces Canadian Odeon: Producing National Competition in Film Exhibition,” *Canadian Journal of Film Studies* 12:2 (Fall 2003): 28; “Press Headlines Nathanson Resignation,” *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* (21 September 1929): 6-7, 10.

<sup>88</sup> “Fitzgibbons Won Rapid Promotion,” *Publix Opinion* 3:64 (26 December 1930): 7; “Publix Taking Can. Neighbourhooders,” *Variety* (4 June 1930): 4; “Canada and Midwest Publix Div. Heads,” *Variety* (11 June 1930): 27. A second visit by Fitzgibbons in late June was described by *Variety* as a “second move towards general consolidation under [Paramount-Publix] of all Montreal theatres.” *Variety* (25 June 1930): 258.

<sup>89</sup> *Variety* (16 April 1930): 37.

<sup>90</sup> *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* (26 April 1930): 21.

<sup>91</sup> *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* (14 June 1930): 9.

<sup>92</sup> Gomery, *The Hollywood Studio System*, 87.

<sup>93</sup> “Local Option for Circuit Managers Seems to Be Working Out So Far,” *Variety* (25 March 1931): 31.

<sup>94</sup> “25% of Publix Now Locally Operated, Any Further Increase Thru Pooling,” *Variety* (27 October 1931): 23.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>96</sup> Moore, “Nathan L. Nathanson Introduces Canadian Odeon,” 28.

<sup>97</sup> “Skouras Sees Mongrel Type of Circuit Solution of Chain Operation – May Have 50 Houses,” *Variety* (1 September 1931): 25.

<sup>98</sup> *Variety* (11 June 1930): 62; *Variety* (16 July 1930): 63.

<sup>99</sup> *Variety* (11 June 1930): 62.

<sup>100</sup> Douglas Gomery, *The Hollywood Studio System* (London: BFI Publishing, 2005), 42-43.

<sup>101</sup> Moore, “Nathan L. Nathanson Introduces Canadian Odeon,” 27-28; “B-G, FP-Canadian Deal Hangs on Fox Situation,” *Variety* (29 January 1930): 9.

<sup>102</sup> *Variety* (15 January 1930): 63.

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- <sup>103</sup> *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* (2 November 1929): 13; “Publix Taking Can. Neighborhooders,” *Variety* (4 June 1930): 4.
- <sup>104</sup> *Variety* (8 January 1930): 130; Gomery, *The Hollywood Studio System*, 43-44.
- <sup>105</sup> “Nathanson’s Backer Has Never Seen a Picture,” *Variety* (29 January 1930): 18; *Variety* (29 June 1930): 94.
- <sup>106</sup> *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* (30 August 1930): 13; *Variety* (27 August 1930): 77; *Variety* (17 September 1930): 71.
- <sup>107</sup> *Variety* (6 August 1930): 69.
- <sup>108</sup> *Variety* (5 November 1930): 69.
- <sup>109</sup> On the censors inconsistency, see: Louis Pelletier, “‘A Moving Picture Farce’: Public Opinion and the Beginnings of Film Censorship in Quebec,” in *Beyond the Screen: Institutions, Networks and Publics of Early Cinema*, Marta Braun, Charlie Keil, Rob King, Paul S. Moore and Louis Pelletier, eds. (London: John Libbey, 2012), 94-103.
- <sup>110</sup> The second voting trust agreement was signed on 25 September 1931. It was steered by a committee made up of George Ganetakos, Ernest Cousins, Isidore Crépeau, P.G. Demetre, James E. Brooks and D. Allan Murray. 19,909 class “A” voting shares (out of 66,246 outstanding shares) were soon deposited under it. See: [Anonymous, report to George Ganetakos], 22 November 1933, CIC, B8 F221; R.W. Bolstad, [internal report to Famous Players Canadian management], 12 March 1936, CIC, B13 F369.
- <sup>111</sup> The first voting trust controlled 33,600 voting shares since the subdivision of class “A” shares. A majority of these shares (20,000) had been deposited by Famous Players (18,000) and Nathanson (2,000).
- <sup>112</sup> [Anonymous], report to George Ganetakos, 22 November 1933, CIC, B8 F221; R.W. Bolstad, [internal report to Famous Players Canadian management], 12 March 1936, CIC, B13 F369; [anonymous], report to George Ganetakos, 6 July 1936, CIC, B8 F222.
- <sup>113</sup> Henry N. Chauvin, letter to George A. Montgomery, 19 October 1936, CIC, B10 F375.
- <sup>114</sup> Memorandum of agreement between United Amusement Corp., Ltd., and Famous Players Canadian Corp., Ltd., 27 October 1936, CIC, B13 F369.
- <sup>115</sup> Memorandum of agreement between United Amusement Corp., Ltd., and Famous Players Canadian Corp., Ltd., 27 October 1936, CIC, B13 F369.
- <sup>116</sup> T.J. Bragg, letter to Henry N. Chauvin, 16 February 1937, CIC, B14 F834.
- <sup>117</sup> The building was owned by Noah A. Timmins Jr., whose father and uncle had amassed a fortune in mining. See: Lanken, *Montreal Movie Palaces*, 158-164. Ganetakos intervened during construction to request that more adequate stage equipment be installed, that the marquee be enlarged and embellished, that better acoustical material be used, and that tiles be installed to prevent defacement of the washrooms. George Ganetakos, letter to the N.A. Timmins Corp., cc Perry, Luke and Little, architects, 16 July 1937, CIC, B14 F834.
- <sup>118</sup> Henry N. Chauvin, letter to T.J. Bragg, 17 February 1937, CIC, B14 F834; note dictated by Henry N. Chauvin, 18-19 February 1937, CIC, B14 F834.
- <sup>119</sup> Henry N. Chauvin, letter to R.W. Bolstad, 14 July 1937, CIC, B14 F834.
- <sup>120</sup> Memorandum of agreement between United Amusement Corp., Ltd., and Famous Players Canadian Corp., Ltd., 9 August 1937, CIC, B14 F834.

## Chapter 5

### *Talking Pictures, Francophone Audiences and Local Entrepreneurs:*

#### *The Rise of France-Film (1929-1940)*

At the time of the wiring of Montreal's Palace theatre in the summer of 1928, Nathan L. Nathanson's Famous Players Canadian Corporation seemed in complete control of the Canadian film market. The film industry was now officially big business, and thus seemingly closed to newcomers lacking the proper connections to US producers or the financial backing of a Lord Beaverbrook. Yet within less than ten years, Famous Players would have to concede a major segment of the Quebec film market to a new organization led by a Montrealer that had still been scraping by as an office clerk when the first talkies were screened at the Palace. The story of this organization, France-Film, is the story of how local agents tactically used many of the situations that developed in the 1930s to build a new film network and assert their autonomy vis-à-vis Famous Players' monopolistic organization.

The introduction and eventual commercial success of French-produced talking pictures in Quebec, and of the Montreal organization that would soon assume control of this market, was the result of a number of tortuous deals demonstrating that Famous Players did not have a monopoly over ethically dubious schemes and manoeuvres. These however remain quite difficult to document and reconstruct, mostly as a result of the absence of archival resources, as well as of the relative lack of coverage granted to this segment of the film market by the various trade journals published Toronto<sup>1</sup>, New York and Los Angeles. The research undertaken by Pierre Véronneau and Yves Lever on the events surrounding the rise of France-Film and the career of J.A. DeSève nonetheless point towards a number of

key dates and events in the history of French cinema in Quebec, and have thus permitted me to proceed to a number of targeted complementary researches in period newspapers, magazines, and trade journals.<sup>2</sup> The Cinéma Impérial collection held by Cinémathèque québécoise has moreover yielded a number of documents shedding much light on the evolving relationship between the agents involved in the distribution and exhibition of French films in Quebec and the multiple organizations connected to Famous Players, including Regal Films, United Amusement and, later on, Confederation Amusements.

### **Francophone Audiences, Talking Pictures and Established Networks**

Film history has long acknowledged the initial adverse reactions to talking pictures of many of the leading practitioners of silent cinema. Luminaries such as Charles Chaplin, King Vidor, René Clair, F.W. Murnau, Vsevolod Poudovkine, and Sergei M. Eisenstein all initially bemoaned the death of the silent art, killed by ceaseless chatter just as it was finally reaching maturity.<sup>3</sup> Much less attention has however been granted to the numerous audiences who may have felt shortchanged by the transition to sound across the globe. Montreal's francophone movie fans for instance appear have had somewhat ambivalent feelings toward the introduction of talking pictures. In a statement published in *La Presse* in May of 1929, the management of one of the east end's leading film theatres, the Amherst, thus promised that: "as long as it will remain possible, the Amherst will preferably show films with French intertitles rather than sound films with English intertitles. The Amherst will only show sound films when it will not be possible to get them with French intertitles anymore."<sup>4</sup>

It is worth recalling that the same francophone population that seems to have balked at talking pictures in 1929 had earlier counted among the most enthusiastic cinema supporters in North America, if not the world.<sup>5</sup> As we have seen in chapter 2, no less than

two proto-movie palaces, the Nationoscope and the Ouimetoscope, had been built on St. Catherine Street East as early as 1907. Three years later, in 1910, the site later occupied by the Amherst theatre had seen the opening of the first link of what eventually became the United Amusement chain, the Moulin Rouge. The east end's many theatres had also largely contributed to development of the lively tradition of the film lecturer, and made stars out of local figures such as Alex Silvio in the process. One can consequently understand why Montreal's francophone moviegoers did not necessarily view the coming replacement of their silent film entertainment – be it accompanied by a popular *bonimenteur* or, as was more frequently the case in the late 1920s, by bilingual titles produced by local outfit Associated Screen News – as an obvious form of progress.

Local journalists and commentators relayed some of the francophone moviegoers' concerns stemming from the advent of talking pictures. Prominent critic Henri Letondal for instance observed that:

While some people – mostly English-speaking filmgoers – may be ravished by talking pictures, our French-Canadian fellow countrymen have much more difficulty putting up with an entire programme of talking pictures, especially when dialogues are recited in a language that Shakespeare himself would not recognize.<sup>6</sup>

Letondal's criticism of the American slang prevalent in pre-code Hollywood films is, as we will see, typical of the discourse of the French-Canadian elites of the time, in that it simultaneously worries about the "popular" and denounces a purported loss of identity through foreign influences. (Ironically, Letondal later left Montreal for an acting career in Hollywood, where he was on many occasions called upon to play stereotypical Frenchmen, most notably in Howard Hawks' 1953 adaptation of Anita Loos's *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*.)

The francophone elite's stance on English-language talkies might have been exacerbated by some exaggerated reports on their influence on Quebec's French-speaking population. A November of 1928 *Motion Picture News* piece (later reprinted in Ray Lewis's

*Canadian Moving Picture Digest*) for instance claimed that not only “the English language spoken by the film stars” had brought “no objection” from francophones, but that “Montreal may soon be talking English exclusively, thanks to talking pictures.”<sup>7</sup>

As usual, the truth most likely stood somewhere in between the contradictory statements made by Letondal and the *Motion Picture News*, as it does seem likely that francophones simultaneously enhanced their grasp on the English language through their continued attendance of moving picture shows *and* craved for French-language talkies. Lewis’s *Digest* would soon grow to acknowledge this demand for French films and versions. By November of 1930, the journal’s editor had come to be of the opinion that the industry, not audiences, would have to adapt. Lewis’s preferred solution to Quebec’s language issues mainly relied on the simultaneous release of different versions in different theatres. Interestingly, this policy would eventually come to be widely adopted by Quebec exhibitors half a century later, following the adoption of stricter language laws by the Provincial government.<sup>8</sup>

The francophone community’s need for entertainment in its own language was eloquently demonstrated by the massive success of the first French-language sound films exhibited in Montreal. Anticipation likely boosted the attendance of the first French talkies exhibited locally, as more than a year had elapsed between the Palace’s conversion to sound in September of 1928 and the belated premiere of the first talking feature to offer some French-language content in the week of January 18, 1930 – also at the Palace. The film exhibited on that occasion was a sort of embryonic alternate language version of Ernst Lubitsch’s *The Love Parade* (Paramount, 1929) featuring Maurice Chevalier and mixing English dialogues with French songs. This novelty brought the Palace’s manager, George Rotsky, to do some extra work to market the film to Montreal’s francophone population.

Advertisements published by the Palace in French-language newspapers thus featured a personal message from Rotsky to the city's French speakers, in which the Palace manager did not hesitate to "personally recommend this first French version of a Super Paramount talking picture to the city's French public." **[Figure 5.1]** Rotsky's marketing effort was greatly abetted by Paramount-Famous Lasky's local representative, Eddie English, who arranged for French subtitles to be added to the print exhibited at the Palace.<sup>9</sup> English's initiative – a first in Montreal – was praised by the French-language dailies, who went on to express the hope that the process would be used for the majority of prints used locally. *The Love Parade* ended up grossing \$35,000 during the first of its two-week run at the Palace, a figure singled by *Variety* as easily the highest since Montreal's leading film theatre had "gone talker."<sup>10</sup>

Francophone Montrealers would nevertheless have to wait a few more months to see – and hear – their first *bona fide* French-language talkie, *La grande mare* – an alternate language version of another Paramount Chevalier vehicle, *The Big Pond* (Hobard Henley, 1930). *La grande mare* had been one of the first alternate language versions to come out of Paramount's studios following the company's decision to launch into the large-scale production of versions destined to non-English speaking markets. Generally shot on the same sets as the original productions but with slightly different casts and crews, these versions were produced in Paramount's Long Island and Hollywood studios, as well as, starting in early 1930, in the Joinville studios located in the suburbs of Paris, where the Hollywood majors were turning out films and versions in no less than twelve languages.<sup>11</sup> In Montreal, the availability of French and English versions of *The Big Pond* permitted Rotsky to experiment with 11pm screenings of *La grande mare* on the week of May 31, 1930, when the film headlined the Palace's bill.<sup>12</sup>

*La grande mare* later turned up at the Théâtre Français (August 10) and at Jos. Cardinal's Théâtre St. Denis (August 23).<sup>13</sup> The St. Denis' publicist deployed on that occasion an argument bound to become a trope of the local promotion of French films by lauding *La grande mare* for its "gallic spirit" ("*esprit gaulois*," whereby "esprit" simultaneously means "spirit" and "wit"). The alternate French-language version was thus praised in local newspapers not only for being a superior entertainment for francophones, but also for quite simply being a better film:

The 100% French film is 100% better. *The Big Pond* could not be a true reflection of the *esprit gaulois* of the original French play and of Maurice Chevalier's thoroughly Parisian acting style. [...] There is as much difference between *La grande mare* and *The Big Pond* as there is between a painting and a reproduction.<sup>14</sup>

In the following years, much of the efforts deployed for the promotion of French films in Quebec would likewise rely on an opposition between the purported sophisticated nature of French cinema and the alleged coarseness of US films.

The Palace expanded its late show strategy in October of 1930 by adding early (9:30am) screenings of *Le petit café*, the alternate French version of Chevalier's next film, *Playboy of Paris* (Ludwig Berger, Paramount, 1930). This initiative, combined with Chevalier star power, gave the Palace its best gross in months, \$22,500.<sup>15</sup> The film then turned up for its second run at the Théâtre Français, located somewhat closer to the heart of the city's francophone community, where alternating screenings of *Playboy of Paris* and *Le petit café* were held all through the afternoon and evening.<sup>16</sup>

The late show strategy tested at the Palace ended up being praised in the December 26, 1930, issue of the *Public Opinion*, which included a piece encouraging exhibitors operating in areas with large "foreign language speaking" populations to reach out for extra receipts by judiciously using the versions turned out by the Paramount studios. Other strategies suggested by the *Public Opinion* (though seemingly never used in Montreal) included the

simultaneous exhibition of original and alternate versions in neighboring theatres, as well as the showing of different language versions on successive days. (The *Publix Opinion* piece also cited as an example the wide success of *Une femme a menti* [Charles de Rochefort, 1930], the French version of Paramount's *The Lady Lies* [Hobart Henley, 1929], in New England towns featuring a large French-Canadian population.<sup>17</sup>)

The success of the Palace's scattered experiments with late and early screenings of alternate French versions gains to be compared with the failure of the Capitol's short-lived experiment with French versions. In 1930, during what was at the time generally regarded as one of the slowest months the theatrical year, August, the Capitol manager, Harry S. Dahn, and publicist, Wilfrid Launceston, let the moviegoing public know that they intended to "do for the city's French element what no other West-End theatre was doing" by "turning the Capitol into Montreal's first French film theatre." It is not known if Famous Players' Toronto management, who was at the time struggling to find the policy that would render the Capitol as lucrative as the Palace, was responsible for the experiment, or if it rather was a personal initiative of Dahn. Period sources nevertheless reveal that the latter enthusiastically promoted the new policy through numerous interviews to French dailies. Dahn also did not hesitate to insert in the theatre's newspaper advertisements a personal appeal to the city's French-Canadian population explaining that "If the Montreal public wants French pictures to become a permanent fixtures in our city, it will need to help us by showing its immediate support."<sup>18</sup> **[Figure 5.2]**

Presented on August 9, 1930, the Capitol's first French-language bill was headlined by one of the earliest French films produced in Paramount's Joinville studios, *Un trou dans le mur* (René Barberis, 1930).<sup>19</sup> The theatre's copy certainly made it difficult to ignore that it was featuring a French production:

This French work (the comedy from which it was adapted is by the popular Parisian author Yves Mirande, and was a tremendous success in Paris) has been produced in France, in Paramount's studios, under the direction of a French director, René Barberis, and features the most renowned artists of the French stage and screen.<sup>20</sup>

A few weeks later, Dahn announced that the Capitol would feature in the fall forty-minute stage shows specially prepared for Montreal's French-Canadian population, which led *La Presse* to conclude that the theatre aimed to become the "home of the French language" in the western part of the city.<sup>21</sup>

The Capitol's efforts seemingly were not sufficient to convince francophone filmgoers to head west to the Capitol: *Un trou dans le mur* grossed a mere \$10,000, against the Palace's \$17,000 and the Loew's \$14,000 the same week. Three weeks later, *L'énigmatique monsieur Parkes* (Louis J. Gasnier, Paramount, 1930), the alternate French version of *Slightly Scarlet* (Louis J. Gasnier/Edwin H. Knopf, 1930), met with the same fate.<sup>22</sup> This succession of flops appears to have led the Capitol to quietly put an end to its French experiment less than a month after its launch. As we have seen in chapter 4, the Capitol did not feature French-language stage-shows and features in the fall of 1930, but Publix stage units and English-language films. Later that fall, the booking of a few others French films and versions in Famous Players' downtown palaces also failed to attract sizable audiences.<sup>23</sup> *Un trou dans le mur's* poor performance at the Capitol contrasts with the film's reported success during its second and subsequent runs in east end neighborhood theatres.<sup>24</sup> This situation suggests that it was not the film, but the downtown Capitol that had failed to attract French-speaking patrons, which furnishes yet another demonstration of the fact that, from an exploitation point of view, there is no such thing as a good or a bad films; there simply is the right film for the right theatre.<sup>25</sup>

In any case, the eventual disappearance of alternate French versions from Montreal screens did not proceed from the local audiences' lack of interest, but from the

discontinuation of this type of production.<sup>26</sup> By the end of 1931, the main US producers had grown to believe that alternate versions could simply not generate sufficient revenues to make their production profitable. Studio heads moreover felt that, by substituting local talent for US stars, versions actually undermined one of Hollywood's main selling points. Universal's Carl Laemmle Sr. for instance did not hesitate to state that: "direct foreign versions and synced pictures have proved there's no substitute for American films."<sup>27</sup> It was also getting more and more obvious at this point that alternate language versions could never be the sole – or even the main – solution to the majors' talking pictures export problem, as there never could be as many versions as there were linguistic markets.<sup>28</sup>

As for subtitled prints, they remained – in spite of Eddie English and George Rotsky's early hopes – non-starters in Quebec and, indeed, North America, as most distributors and exhibitors felt that subtitles were too taxing for audiences. The Capitol's Dahn and Launceston for instance expressed the belief that subtitles would be incapable of stirring up audiences.<sup>29</sup> Subtitled prints consequently seem to have been rarely, if ever, used in Montreal theatres throughout the 1930s. A contributing factor to this situation might have been the clear rejection of subtitles by France's moviegoers documented by film historian Martin Barnier, which necessarily impacted the availability of subtitled versions in Quebec.<sup>30</sup> This lack of trust in subtitles does not elicit any surprise from a contemporary perspective: in Quebec as elsewhere in North America, most 21<sup>st</sup> century mainstream audiences still cringe at the prospect of having to watch a subtitled print.

More surprising than the great scarcity of subtitled prints is the almost total absence of dubbed prints in Quebec in the 1930s. By mid-1931, satisfactory dubbing techniques had been devised by US studios, in good part thanks to the work of MGM's Westmount-born sound department head, Douglas Shearer (brother of Norma).<sup>31</sup> This breakthrough soon led

*Variety* to laud the new process as the US film industry's "foreign savior."<sup>32</sup> *Variety*'s opinion was evidently shared by Paramount, which converted its Joinville studio into a dubbing factory before the end of the year.<sup>33</sup> Dubbing became commonplace in many territories as the 1930s went on. By way of example, around 150 dubbed titles were released annually in France by US producers by the end of the decade.<sup>34</sup> But while the mass importation of French productions in Quebec had, as we will see, quickly gotten under way in the early 1930s, very few French dubbed prints appear to have made their way to the Province. One rare exhibition of a dubbed film was that of *Pur sang*, French-language version of *Sporting Blood* (Charles Brabin, MGM, 1931) booked at the St. Denis on the week of August 5, 1933 – two years after the release of the original English version.<sup>35</sup> This almost total absence of dubbed prints in the Quebec market is most puzzling: one would for instance think that Regal and Famous Players would have relied on dubbed prints of US films for the French circuit they attempted to organize in Quebec in the late 1930s, but that was clearly not the case.<sup>36</sup> As we will see in Chapter 6, dubbed versions were still regarded as a novelty when they finally started being exhibited on a regular basis in the Province of Quebec in 1943 and 1944.

### **An Opportunity for Francophone Entrepreneurs**

As previously stated, Famous Players and its affiliates seemed to exert an almost total control on the Montreal film market by the time most local theatres were wired for sound in 1928-1929. Nathanson had crushed its main national competitor, the Allen chain, in the early 1920s, and now controlled all of Montreal's first-run film theatres. As we have seen in the preceding chapter, this situation arguably permitted Famous Players to dictate its conditions to the leading exchanges, who all relied on downtown palaces to launch the commercial

career of the films they handled. Nathanson's influence had been further reinforced by Famous Players' 1924 alliance with Montreal's leading chain of neighborhood theatres, United Amusement. One of the consequences of Famous Players' increasingly tight grip on the Canadian film market was that by the late 1920s this industry, which had turned many penniless immigrants into prosperous film entrepreneurs in the first decades of the century, now seemingly offered little in the way of opportunity to small-time exhibitors. The few independents that tried to compete with Famous Players and United Amusement had to make do with a very limited access to quality first and second run products, and consequently struggled.<sup>37</sup>

A major window of opportunity nevertheless opened up for independent exhibitors and francophone entrepreneurs in the wake of the industry's conversion to sound. On that regard, it must first be noted that changing conditions at the turn of the 1930s had somewhat improved the competitive position of neighborhood houses vis-à-vis downtown palaces. This reversal of fortune can be partly attributed to the loss of the competitive advantage that the employment of large orchestras and virtuoso film accompanists such as Willie Eckstein had granted palaces in the silent era. This situation was compounded by the fact that the palaces' cavernous auditoriums were less suited to talking pictures than those of the more moderately sized neighborhood theatres.<sup>38</sup> Evidence further suggests that, with the onset of the Depression, an increasingly large number of Montreal moviegoers were willing to trade the novelty and prestige associated with first-run exhibition and downtown palaces for the significant savings on transportation and admission allowed by the attendance of neighborhood theatres.<sup>39</sup>

Still, the main factor enabling the emergence of new distribution outfits and screen networks owned and managed by francophones in the 1930s unquestioningly remains

Famous Players' inability to bring French-language films to Quebec on a more than occasional basis. Famous Players, Famous Lasky Film Service, and Regal (MGM's Canadian distributor), all more or less forfeited the Province's French film market following the end of their scattered experiments with subtitled prints and alternate French version.

Before we take a look at the rise of the organizations that would soon seize control of the emerging French film market in Quebec, a few observations pertaining to Famous Players' affairs at the turn of the 1930s are worth reiterating. First, it is worth noting that Nathanson's 1929 departure from Famous Players had somewhat left the chain in disarray. By the end of 1930, it was becoming obvious that the reforms aiming to more fully integrate Famous Players into Paramount-Publix attempted by Katz had failed, partly through the lack of collaboration of the regional chains that, like United Amusement, had closely worked with Nathanson over the preceding years. The close scrutiny to which Famous Players' activities were submitted over the months leading to the 1931 White Commission may also have prevented the chain from aggressively moving in on the nascent French film market.

The most important development related to the advent of a new French-language film circuit in Quebec did not, however, take place in North America, but in France's film studios, where filmmaking activities were on the rise in the 1930s. This situation led to the production of fiction feature films that turned out to be: a) attractive to Quebec's francophone audiences; b) in sufficient quantity to supply a chain exclusively dedicated to French-language shows and; c) not controlled by either Paramount-Publix, Famous Players, or any of the exchanges either directly or indirectly controlled by them. What's more, the failure of French-language films at the Palace and Capitol had demonstrated that French film distributors would not gain much by having their films booked in Famous Players' downtown palaces. These factors permitted the circuit dedicated to French-language screen

entertainment that eventually emerged in Quebec in the early 1930s to remain largely independent from the established vertically integrated networks. Another relevant fact is that all-through the 1930s Famous Players remained operated from Toronto by anglophones, including many Americans, such as J.J. Fitzgibbons. It is therefore not too surprising to see a small group of French-Canadian entrepreneurs attuned to the particular needs of Quebec audiences seize, with the help of a few French citizens with connections, the Quebec French film market from Famous Players in the 1930s.

There is yet another possible explanation for Famous Players' puzzling lack of opposition to the rise of a competing network dedicated to French films in the early sound era. Several period sources indeed suggest that established distributors and exhibitors felt that, rather than taking their business away, the emerging French network was actually expanding the Quebec film market. In an oft-quoted letter written in the last days of silent pictures, Canadian Universal manager Clair Hague had for instance explained to Universal's New York head office that: "a town of 7 or 8,000 in Quebec is really no better than a town of 3 or 4,000 in any other territory."<sup>40</sup> The truth-value of Hague's assertion – which would admittedly be most difficult to establish – is not particularly relevant here. What is significant is the fact that this opinion seems to have been widely held within the industry.

The findings of a group of Paramount representatives sent on a European mission in early 1930 are also worth quoting in regard to the larger issue of US films and foreign non-English speaking markets. The group's outlook was on the whole positive on the "development of native French dialog talkers," as it was felt that French talkies were "bound to have a large effect in building picture-patronizing public." Paramount's envoys further believed that French pictures would "educate the people to a new type of entertainment," and that once a wider audience had been established, American pictures were bound to be

found “of superior quality,” and thereby reap the benefits of French cinema’s momentary popularity.<sup>41</sup> Given the perceived underdevelopment of the Quebec film market at the turn of the 1930s, it is quite likely that a similar attitude toward French productions was held by Famous Players’ management.

The Montreal premiere of the first all-talking French picture, *Les trois masques* (André Hugon, Pathé-Natan, 1929)<sup>42</sup> was eventually held on the same day – May 31, 1930 – as that of the first alternate French version, *La grande mare*, exhibited at the Palace.<sup>43</sup> *Les trois masques* might have been shown in Quebec earlier, had the Province’s board of censors not forced its distributor, Canadian Universal Film Co., to produce a reconstructed print before it authorized the film’s exhibition in Quebec.<sup>44</sup> This “*première vue parlante en français*” was showcased at the St. Denis, where its success prompted the theatre’s management to hold it for a second week.<sup>45</sup>

Situated on the street of the same name, east of the downtown core of the city where the Loew’s, Strand, Palace, Capitol, Orpheum, Princess, and Imperial were located, the 2,400-seat St. Denis had, as we have seen in chapter 2, come to be regarded as a white elephant, too spacious and too luxurious for the largely working class French-Canadian community it served. All through the late 1910s and 1920s, the St. Denis’ successive tenants had struggled to find the policy that would finally turn the theatre into a profitable operation.<sup>46</sup> In November of 1929, Jos. Cardinal, who at the time rented the St. Denis from the Toronto-based St. Denis Corp. (whose president, J.P. Bickell, also happened to be vice-president of Famous Players), had for instance announced that the theatre would offer weekly bills combining plays presented by Fred Barry and Albert Duquesne’s celebrated theatre company with silent features with bilingual titles.<sup>47</sup> This policy stood out from those of the other Montreal film theatres, which had almost all converted to sound by then.

Comedian Charles de Roche later testified that this plan aiming to turn the St. Denis into a leading French-Canadian cultural institution had to some extent been thwarted by the new provincial law barring children (and thus families) from commercial moving picture theatres. According to de Roche, the law had brought a significant drop in attendance at the theatre.<sup>48</sup>

*Les trois masques* was followed at the St. Denis by the occasional French short over the months of June and July 1930. It is only with the coming of the fall season that Cardinal's theatre permanently converted to a French talkies policy.<sup>49</sup> On August 9, *Le mystère de la villa rose* (René Hervil/Louis Mercanton, Les établissements Jacques Haïk, 1930), French alternate version of the British production *At the Villa Rose* (Leslie S. Hiscott, Julius Hagen Productions, 1930) began a two-week run at the theatre.<sup>50</sup> The film was distributed by Téléphore Latourelle's Film de Luxe, an independent outfit organized in Montreal in the mid-1920s, and mostly handling European imports.<sup>51</sup> *Le mystère de la villa rose* was followed at the St. Denis on August 23 by *La grande mare*, then on its third run, and on August 30 by *Un trou dans le mur*, which had been exhibited at the Capitol only three weeks before.<sup>52</sup>

The St. Denis' September 6, 1930, programme constitutes a turning point in Quebec's film history, as it marked the first time that a French film, *La route est belle* (Robert Florey, Les établissements Braunberger-Richebé, 1930), imported by the newly created La Compagnie cinématographique canadienne was exhibited in the Province. Cardinal emphasized this momentous event by inserting in the week's programme a short film in which the Province's secretary, Athanase David, could be seen and, most importantly, heard, greeting French cinema in Canada.<sup>53</sup> **[Figure 5.3]**

La Compagnie cinématographique canadienne was, in spite of its name, the brainchild of a French Paramount employee, Robert Hurel, who had first had a hunch regarding Quebec's untapped French film market while passing through the Province on his way back

from a New York convention in late 1920s. Hurel had visited the Province for a second time in 1929, this time with the express intention of making contacts and assessing the Quebec's potential as a market for French talking pictures, most notably by visiting film theatres in Montreal, Verdun, Quebec City, Three-Rivers and Hull. Hurel's plan had finally come to fruition in the summer of 1930. On July 9, he had met in Paris with the representatives of the leading French film producers, who had agreed to entrust him with the distribution of their films in Quebec. Hurel had then returned to Quebec, where he had set out to find the proper venues to screen French imports in Montreal and Quebec City.<sup>54</sup> On August 23, La Compagnie cinématographique canadienne had published in *La Presse* a large advertisement announcing the coming release of thirty French talking features over the 1930-31 season.<sup>55</sup> Hurel made good on this promise: La Compagnie cinématographique canadienne submitted no less than ninety-three films (including shorts) to the board of censors between August 1930 and April 1931. The number of titles submitted by Hurel's organization eventually rose to 197 for the twelve months between May 1931 and April 1932, and to 214 the following year.<sup>56</sup>

The rapidly expanding number of French productions released in Quebec by La Compagnie cinématographique canadienne soon forced it to seek a second outlet in Montreal. This led Hurel to the Roxy, a small (600-seat) theatre located next door to the Palace on St. Catherine Street West. The Roxy was at the time operated by Charles Lalumière, an industry veteran who had first been active in the distribution field in the early 1910s. Lalumière had also worked for Léo-Ernest Ouimet's Specialty Film Import and, for some time in the 1920s, operated the Théâtre St. Denis. He had further been involved, still in the 1920s, in the affairs of two distribution outfits mostly handling European products: the short-lived Europa Films, which he had created, and Latourelle's Film de Luxe.<sup>57</sup>

Following his takeover of the Roxy on November 8, 1929, Lalumière had attempted to carve a niche for his theatre by counter-programming the other downtown film theatres. The Roxy thus branded itself as “The house of silent pictures/*Le foyer de l’art silencieux*” at a time where the opposition had fully made the transition to talking pictures. The Roxy further stood out through Lalumière’s championing of French, British, Austrian, and even Indian productions, which he had often imported to Quebec himself. It is for instance through the efforts of Lalumière that Montrealers were permitted to see films such as the Indian-made *Shiraz* (Franz Osten, British Instructional Productions, 1928) or Carl Theodor Dreyer’s *La passion de Jeanne d’Arc* (Société générale des films, 1928).<sup>58</sup> In short, while the opposition presented its theatres as amusement places, the Roxy was explicitly marketed by Lalumière as Montreal’s first “cinéma d’art.”<sup>59</sup> **[Figure 5.4]**

If *Variety*’s weekly Montreal reports are to be trusted, Lalumière’s courageous counter-programming tactic regularly succeeded in bringing patrons to the Roxy. On some weeks, the Roxy could gross up to \$4,500 – about a quarter of what the neighboring Palace, Loew’s or Capitol could bring in.<sup>60</sup> These enviable results may have been facilitated by Lalumière’s aggressive marketing campaigns, as the Roxy’s advertisements frequently dwarfed those of the opposition in French-language newspapers.<sup>61</sup> The rapid disappearance of silent products, combined with the scarcity of outlets for the type of films exhibited at the Roxy however soon put Lalumière in a tight spot. The latter first attempted to compromise by installing sound equipment at the Roxy in October of 1930, before the end of his first year at the theatre.<sup>62</sup> Things however failed to improve, which seemingly convinced Lalumière to transfer the theatre to Hurel, who reopened it on February 14, 1931, under a new moniker: Cinéma de Paris.<sup>63</sup> The French policy introduced by Hurel soon proved to be perfectly

suiting to this small downtown venue. The Cinéma de Paris would thrive until the interruption of French film exports caused by the 1940 German invasion of France.

The success of the French policies adopted by the Théâtre St. Denis and the Cinéma de Paris incited other French-Canadian entrepreneurs to enter this promising new line of business. One of the first to get involved was Édouard Garand, a publisher of popular novels and magazines, who incorporated Les Films des éditions Édouard Garand in July of 1931. Garand's entry into the field was facilitated by the fact that France's film industry was at the time much less centralized than its US counterpart, which left plenty of producers unbound by agreements with Hurel's Compagnie cinématographique canadienne, and plenty of films to pick.<sup>64</sup> Garand and Hurel, in any case, do not seem to have been bothered by each other.

In March of 1932, Famous Players launched a new attempt to tap Montreal's French market by introducing a new all-French policy at the Imperial theatre, which it had recently taken over.<sup>65</sup> The chain's management had likely decided to go ahead with this new experiment in the wake of the Imperial's successful exhibition of Marcel Pagnol's *Marius* (Alexander Korda, Paramount/Les films Marcel Pagnol, 1931) in January of the same year.<sup>66</sup> The French-language films booked at the Imperial in the spring of 1932 were for the most part French-made Paramount productions or U.S.-made French alternate versions of Paramount productions.<sup>67</sup> The results of this renewed experiment with French films however proved, once again, unsatisfactory. On June 18, 1932, Famous Players transferred the Imperial to Hurel, less than three months after the adoption of the theatre's French policy.<sup>68</sup>

By mid-1932, Hurel was in charge of two Montreal theatres, the Cinéma de Paris and the Imperial, in addition to two Quebec City houses, the Canadien and the Imperial, and one

Three-Rivers theatre, the Palace. His organization would also soon take over the Sherbrooke Victoria Hall, henceforth known as the Cinéma de Paris. Hurel was additionally renting films on a regular basis to two other Montreal theatres, the St. Denis and the His Majesty's, as well as to an increasingly large number of independent theatres throughout the Province.<sup>69</sup> This steady growth led Hurel to reorganize the activities of his organization. A few days before Hurel's acquisition of the Imperial, a new company, France-Film, had been created to take over the organization's distribution activities. The established Compagnie cinématographique canadienne would from now on confine itself to the acquisition and importation of French productions.<sup>70</sup>

Things kept moving fast in the Quebec French film market over 1933 and 1934. Pierre Véronneau and Yves Lever have documented the rapid series of complicated – and frequently covert – operations that most notably led to the merger of Garand and Hurel's organizations by the end of this period.<sup>71</sup> These years also saw an ambitious new player, J.A. DeSève, enter the film business and become the driving force behind the consolidation of the interests involved in the importation, distribution and exhibition of French films in Quebec.

Indubitably one of the most influential characters in the history of film, media and communications in Quebec, Joseph-Alexandre DeSève had been born in the Montreal working class district of St. Henri in 1896. **[Figure 5.5]** For most of the 1910s and 1920s, he had worked as a clerk for realtors and banks, where he had eagerly grasped every opportunity to get himself acquainted with commercial law and learn the tricks of the trade from the lawyers and notaries he was working under. The driven DeSève had further enriched his education by getting an accounting degree through a correspondence course.<sup>72</sup>

DeSève had shown little interest for moving pictures in the silent era. It is only after seeing the all-talking musical extravaganza *The Broadway Melody* (Harry Beaumont, MGM, 1929) in the spring of 1929 that the entrepreneur had allegedly first come to see film as a ripe business opportunity. Impressed by the spectacle he had witnessed, DeSève had soon grown convinced that whoever could bring French talkies to Eastern Canada's francophone population was bound to reap a fortune. In the months following this epiphany, he had supposedly discussed the creation of a new film distribution and exhibition network with a trio of industry veterans made up of Jos. Cardinal (who was at the time operating a few east end theatres, including the St. Denis), Raoul Rickner (Cardinal's manager), and Eddy English (Famous-Lasky's local representative). DeSève's first foray into the film business had however been quashed by the stock market crash.<sup>73</sup>

After having dealt with limited success in real estate he the early 1930s, the indefatigable DeSève had acquired a small chain of convenience stores, the "*Crémeries Papineau*," before entering the movie business some time in 1933.<sup>74</sup> As we have seen in chapter 2 and chapter 3, DeSève hardly was the first entrepreneur to make the jump from the commerce of milk products to film exhibition. This milk connection is far from trivial, as it provides yet another demonstration of the role played by self-made men (and, occasionally, women) rising up from the popular classes in the rapid development of the North American film industry. Having had prolonged contacts with the groups patronizing the moving picture shows, this class of entrepreneurs instinctively understood what moviegoers sought. Hye Bossin's eventually summarized this situation in an excerpt from his eulogy of Nathan L. Nathanson: "[He was] of the people, knew their needs and they rewarded him with fame and fortune."<sup>75</sup> The same could have been said of DeSève.

The events surrounding DeSève's entry in the film business further suggest that the St. Henri native's ruthlessness could also match Nathanson's. Véronneau and Lever have thus been able to painstakingly document how DeSève managed to quickly take over the businesses of Garand, Cardinal and Hurel through a series of morally questionable manoeuvres that left him in control of Quebec French film market by the end of 1934. DeSève's carefully planned two-pronged attacks on the businesses of the pioneer entrepreneurs who had first tested and developed the market for French films in Quebec reveal a deep understanding of the interdependence of the exhibition and distribution sectors. DeSève appears to have first infiltrated Édouard Garand's film distribution company, possibly as a partner, some time before the summer of 1933.<sup>76</sup> His attention then turned to the Théâtre St. Denis, generally perceived to be the key to the French film market in Quebec. An opportunity to seize the theatre materialized when the St. Denis' manager, Rickner (whose friendship DeSève had cultivated since their first ill-fated common project in 1929), leaked the information that the St. Denis' lease was up for renewal. Rickner further informed DeSève that the current lessee, Cardinal, was struggling to keep the theatre in the black, and consequently trying to get his rent reduced from \$27,000 to \$23,000 yearly. DeSève promptly got in touch with the theatre's owners and offered to buy the property for \$250,000 – an offer promptly rejected, as DeSève probably expected. DeSève's display of interest for the theatre nevertheless brought the St. Denis Corp. to offer him the theatre's lease for \$27,000 yearly. DeSève accepted, and on July 28, 1933, found himself in charge of the Théâtre St. Denis, in partnership with Rickner.<sup>77</sup>

The deal came up as a total surprise to Cardinal, whose option had in the process been blatantly ignored by the St. Denis Corp., and who was in fact not even informed of the transfer of the lease to DeSève. On the first day of the new lease, August 5, Cardinal showed

up at the St. Denis at noon, only to discover that the locks had been changed and that the screen, projectors, and even carpets he had installed in the theatre had been taken out and put in a pile overnight. All of the attractions booked by Cardinal for the following weeks were cancelled, as DeSève closed the theatre for renovations until August 19. In a letter published in *La Patrie*, Cardinal threatened to turn to the courts to have his option on the St. Denis' lease recognized. He however seems to have quickly decided not to waste any more time, money and energy on the St. Denis, and to concentrate on the three east end theatres he was still – for the time being – operating: the National, the Canadien, and the Arcade.<sup>78</sup>

DeSève's takeover of the St. Denis demonstrates more than his understanding of the interrelated nature of film exhibition and distribution. In a 1960 interview, DeSève revealed that he had initially hoped to make money out of the St. Denis through the cross-marketing of dairy products and film entertainment. The plan involved the distribution of free passes for the St. Denis to every customer of the Crémeries Papineau buying five pounds of butter. "I knew my customers," DeSève explained. "They were good [*bons*] French-Canadians. I knew they'd be way too proud to come to my stores and only buy butter! And I was right. They came over, bought butter – and everything else!"<sup>79</sup> DeSève thus hoped that, by pooling – sort of – the operating costs and earnings of the Crémeries Papineau and Théâtre St. Denis, he could turn a profit. That, without having to plead with the St. Denis Corp. to have the theatre's rent lowered. There is however no indication that DeSève attempted to sell ice cream or snacks at the St. Denis in the 1930s.

While it remains unclear if the free passes scheme was used for very long, the weekly boxoffice figures reported by *Variety* suggest that DeSève had succeeded in turning the St. Denis into a profitable operation by the time he parted with the last of his eight

Crémeries Papineau in 1936.<sup>80</sup> By 1938, the St. Denis' gross averaged between \$4,000 and \$5,000 weekly – roughly the same figures as Consolidated's Princess, which contained just as many seats (2,300), but charged higher admission prices (25¢-34¢-50¢ against 20¢-34¢ for the St. Denis). (The slightly bigger [2,700 seats] Capitol and Palace exhibiting first-run US features generally grossed between \$5,000 and \$10,000 weekly, depending on the time of the year and on what was on the bill, with admission tickets going for 25¢-45¢-55¢.<sup>81</sup>)

In the months following his bold takeover of the St. Denis in the summer of 1933, DeSève set out to seize control of the distribution outfit operated by Garand, which, as we have seen, he had infiltrated earlier that year. According to Georges Arpin, who at the time acted as Garand's accountant, DeSève did not hesitate to take advantage of Garand's alleged alcoholism by getting him drunk and then making him ratify a reorganization of the company which, unsurprisingly, left none other than DeSève in charge. The latter then proceeded to have Les Films Édouard Garand morph into Franco-Canada Films early in 1934. With the help of the company's general manager (none other than Léo-Ernest Ouimet, newly returned from a prolonged stay in California), sales manager (Maurice West), and Parisian buyer (Werner R. Bader), Franco-Canada Films acquired close to fifty French titles, which it planned to release over the 1934-1935 season in the more than thirty Quebec theatres with whom it was doing business by this point.<sup>82</sup>

On April 30, 1934, Franco-Canada Films momentarily gained a supplementary outlet when it acquired the lease of the struggling Montreal Imperial, which in recent months had mostly offered French revues and operettas under the management of Jos. Bourdon. This renewed experiment with French-language films at the Imperial was however destined to be short-lived: by the end of June, US films and vaudeville were back at the de Bleury theatre.<sup>83</sup> DeSève nevertheless retained control of the Imperial, possibly in the hope that this potential

outlet for Franco-Canada Films' products would serve him in future negotiations. According to Véronneau, DeSève put none other than Howard Conover, who had for more than twenty years managed Keith's Montreal houses, in charge of the Imperial's return to English-language shows.<sup>84</sup>

DeSève pulled yet another coup in the spring of 1934 when he managed to snatch another Cardinal house, the Théâtre National. The National wasn't as large or luxurious as the St. Denis, but it had the advantage of being strategically located on the same block as the old Ouimetoscope on St. Catherine Street East, at the heart of the east end French-Canadian community. Rickner was put in charge of the National, allegedly because DeSève wanted to get rid of him at the St. Denis. Shortly after the takeover, the National was closed so that the auditorium could be redecorated and a new RCA Photophone system installed. The May 12 opening night programme was typical of depression era shows, in that it certainly emphasized quantity: a French-Canadian burlesque company featuring local favorites Olivier Guimond (Ti-Zoune) and Juliette Béliveau headlined a bill also offering a pair of feature films made up of a French Paramount production (*Un soir de réveillon*, Karl Anton, 1933) and of a US film (*Walls of Gold*, Kenneth MacKenna, Fox, 1933). DeSève's first experiment with French-Canadian burlesque at the National was however destined to be short-lived. Burlesque vanished from the National's bills in late June, when the theatre settled for long programmes (four hours and a half) combining a five-act play, a live melodrama, turns by local singers, short films, and a French feature.<sup>85</sup>

By the summer of 1934, DeSève controlled one distribution company supplying films to an expanding network of film theatres, three key Montreal theatres (the Théâtre St. Denis, the Imperial, and the Théâtre National), and two Quebec City theatres (the Princess and the Empire). The nascent competition between DeSève's Franco-Canada Films and Hurel's

France-Film does not seem to have affected the relations between the two organizations, which remained cordial: independent theatres were free to contract with both companies, and even France-Film and Franco-Canada theatres regularly booked films handled by the other company to fill empty slots in their schedules. The St. Denis for instance announced at the start of the 1934-1935 season that it would regularly fill out its double bills with French features exhibited a few weeks before at France-Film's Cinéma de Paris.<sup>86</sup> Still, Hurel and DeSève were both pretty well aware of the fact that this cohabitation could soon prove detrimental in their dealings with French producers.

The escalation of this potentially harmful competitive situation was suddenly cut short by the merger of France-Film and Franco-Canada Films in the fall of 1934. Extant sources relay at least two accounts of how this merger came to be. According to Véronneau, who has conducted interviews with many of the participants in the complex early history of French cinema in Quebec, talks between Franco-Canada Films and France-Film had been initiated in the summer of 1934 by a new member of France-Film's direction, Alban Janin. A building contractor by trade, Janin had been nominated on France-Film's board of directors on March 12, 1934, following a large purchase of shares that had made him one of the company's leading shareholders. An experienced businessman, Janin no doubt soon realized that no good could come out of the situation that had developed since DeSève had taken over France-Film's main competitor. Janin nevertheless seems to have also understood that, while he himself had more capital to invest in the film business, DeSève undoubtedly had more drive, as well as a better understanding of the film market.<sup>87</sup>

The second account of the France-Film - Franco-Canada Films merger comes from a notably unreliable source: J.A. DeSève himself.<sup>88</sup> In a 1960 interview, the entrepreneur claimed to have first signed a three-year contract with Hurel for the rental of fifty-two films

yearly soon after his takeover of the St. Denis. One of the conditions supposedly laid down by Hurel at the time of the contract's signature was that DeSève invest \$10,000 in France-Film. DeSève allegedly agreed, and thus found himself involved in France-Film's affairs as early as 1933. The St. Denis' France-Film contract however left DeSève – a staunch believer in the double-bill format all-through his career – short of at least fifty-two French feature films yearly. DeSève likely obtained the missing films during a trip to Paris, where he possibly acted as a representative and buyer for Les Films Édouard Garand. In any case, this multiplication of Canadian buyers prompted the French film producers to raise their prices. As a result, Hurel, who in 1933 had negotiated with DeSève on the basis of the prices he could get from French producers before competition started to drive up prices, soon began to lose money on the St. Denis deal. Hurel's only way out of this tricky situation was to propose a merger to DeSève, who by this point already was a France-Film shareholder anyway. It should however be noted that, according to Lever, the credibility of DeSève's account of the Franco-Canada Films - France-Films merger is somewhat undermined by the fact that it inexplicably leaves Garand (whose contacts in the French film industry DeSève no doubt used) and Janin out of the picture.<sup>89</sup>

Both accounts of the France-Film - Franco-Canada Films merger nevertheless make it clear that, by 1934, most of the individuals involved in the distribution of French films in Québec (and, to a lesser extent, Eastern Canada) were of the opinion that a merger was preferable to a competitive situation.<sup>90</sup> Worries over the negative effects of competition were durably allayed when a merger proposition submitted by France-Film to DeSève was accepted by the latter on September 24, 1934. Consummated no more than a week later, on October 1<sup>st</sup>, the deal provided for the transfer of Franco-Canada Film's theatres and films to France-Film, and thus established a virtual monopoly on the distribution of French films in

Quebec. Hurel remained president of the newly expanded France-Film, while DeSève was nominated vice-president. According to Véronneau, Édouard Garand, whose enterprise had been quickly taken over by DeSève, retired from the film business at the time of the deal and was not even mentioned in the official announcements of the merger.<sup>91</sup>

A similar fate awaited Hurel, who would soon be pushed aside during a later reorganization of France-Film. Overpowered by DeSève and Janin, Hurel would agree in November of 1936 to sell his shares of La Compagnie cinématographique canadienne and France-Film to Janin for \$20,000, and to retreat to the Parisian office of La Compagnie cinématographique canadienne, where he was to buy ninety French films yearly for the Quebec market. The 1936 reorganization permitted France-Film to triumphantly announce in newspapers that it was now entirely controlled by French-Canadian interests. Soon after his return to France, Hurel committed suicide.<sup>92</sup>

### **France-Film and Established Chains**

The exhibition of French films in the 1930s was not confined to the theatres eventually consolidated under the France-Film banner. One of the chains extant at the time of the arrival on the Quebec market of the first French talking features, Confederation Amusements, had also been quick to seize the opportunities opened by this novelty. As we have seen in chapter 3, Confederation had been organized by members of the Lebano-Syrian Tabah and Lawand families in the wake of the 1927 Laurier Palace tragedy. All of the chain's theatres were located in Montreal's outlying districts, where Confederation tried to compete with the houses of the Lawands' long-standing rival, George Ganetakos's United Amusement.

Between 1928 and 1932, Confederation built four neighborhood palaces located near United Amusement theatres: the Empress, the Cartier, the Outremont, and the Château. These were further supplemented by two houses inherited from the Lawands' previous chain: the Dominion, facing United's Papineau in the center of the Plateau Mont-Royal district, and the Maisonneuve theatre, situated in the same area as the Granada, in Hochelaga.<sup>93</sup> Interestingly, the King Edward, which had been the first theatre operated by the Lawands back in 1910, was never integrated to the Confederation chain, even though it remained operated by the family until its eventual takeover by Jos. Cardinal in 1934.<sup>94</sup>

While Confederation's modern theatres had nothing to envy to the more old fashioned United theatres, continued lack of access to Hollywood products seems to have hurt the chain's results in the early 1930s. As we have seen, Confederation had been organized at a time when it was widely believed that a new national chain backed by Fox and British Gaumont was about to burst on the national scene and break Famous Players' virtual monopoly. The new chain's eventual failure to materialize had left the upstart Confederation in a rather tight spot. In May of 1930, *Variety* reported that Confederation, and more particularly its two most prestigious houses, the Empress and the Outremont, were "not doing so well" and that, according to a rumor circulating in Montreal, the chain was about to be taken over by United Amusement. (Amusingly, another rumor printed on the very same page claimed that United was itself about to be absorbed by Famous Players.)<sup>95</sup> The minutes of the meetings of board of directors of United Amusement indeed reveal that negotiations had indeed been undertaken by the two chains some time in 1930. These had however been left in abeyance by United in the spring of 1931.<sup>96</sup>

Confederation's supply problem, combined with the fact that many of the chain's theatres were located in neighborhoods with large francophone populations, make it easy to

understand why the chain came to be an early adopter of French talking pictures. As early as August of 1930, the chain's secretary-treasurer, E.N. Tabah, announced that Confederation would occasionally book French talking features over the coming theatrical season.<sup>97</sup>

Confederation followed up on this promise, and became the first chain to join the nascent network of film exhibitors and distributors offering French talking pictures to the Quebec public. When the first annual Congress of the Province's French film distributors and exhibitors convened at Montreal's prestigious Mount-Royal hotel on July 29, 1931, Najeeb and Ameen Lawand were in attendance.<sup>98</sup>

A few weeks after the Congress, Tabah told *La Presse* that Confederation would keep on showing French films at the Dominion, Cartier and Maisonneuve, as well as at the soon to be opened Château, during the 1931-32 season. Tabah's announcement more generally reveals how Confederation aimed to circumvent its lack of access to the productions of the US majors in its other theatres through counter-programming tactics. These most notably included the booking of "all-British" bills at the Notre-Dame-de-Grâce Empress, which was caught between United's Monkland and Westmount theatres. While they failed to meet with the same level of success as the French films exhibited in other Confederation theatres, British films would remain a regular feature of the Empress' programmes for many years. The Empress' pro-Brit policy managed to gain the active support of members of the local cultural elite, including that of the *Montreal Daily Star's* influential drama critic, S. Morgan-Powell.<sup>99</sup> Tabah's statement also revealed that the Outremont would specialize in the exhibition of films produced by US "independents," such as Columbia and RKO.<sup>100</sup> (Confederation would also make a deal with Universal later in the 1930s.<sup>101</sup>) While the Outremont began to offer the occasional "reprise" (late night screening of a popular success) of French features later in the 1930s, it never really integrated French films to its regular

schedule under Confederation's management.<sup>102</sup> One possible explanation for this lack of emphasis on French products at the Outremont could be that the francophone business elite populating the neighborhood was largely fluent in English, and thus more favorably disposed towards US talkies.

The Tabahs and Lawands' partnership with the various distributors importing French films in Quebec steadily grew over the first half of the 1930s. In June of 1934, Confederation, La Compagnie cinématographique canadienne and France-Film proudly issued a joint press release announcing that they were moving into the fourth year of their partnership, Confederation having committed itself to show France-Film's entire output for the 1934-1935 season.<sup>103</sup> This mutually beneficial partnership would however soon be troubled by United Amusement, who had shown little interest for French cinema over the first half of the 1930s, possibly as a result of its more than adequate supply of recent US films. (Indeed, a *La Presse* article dealing with the chain's plans for the 1931-32 season bore the revealing title: "United Amusement can see no reason why it should alter its programming policy."<sup>104</sup>) United nevertheless seems to have grown at least intrigued by French cinema's commercial potential by the middle of the decade. In March of 1935, United's directors convened to ratify a proposed contract with France-Film. Nathanson took part to the meeting and, according to the minutes, took much interest in the deal, which was finally approved by the chain's directors.<sup>105</sup> The agreement was publicized six months later through a full-page advertisement published in the September 28, 1935, issue of *La Presse*. **[Figure 5.6]** Described as a "momentous event in the history of film in Montreal," the United Amusement - France-Film alliance aimed to bring a French double-bill once a week for two days in seven United theatres located in predominantly French-speaking neighborhoods: the Corona, Rivoli, Papineau, Plaza, Belmont, Rosemont and Granada.<sup>106</sup>

The United Amusement - France-Film deal however met with the disapproval of the management of Confederation Amusements, who claimed that its agreement with France-Film was of an exclusive nature. According to Véronneau, the validity of Confederation's claim was eventually recognized by the court in June of 1936. Newspaper advertisements indeed show that French films had disappeared from United theatres by mid-1936 (except at the Plaza theatre, where French films would be regularly exhibited at least until 1938), less than a year after their introduction.<sup>107</sup> On September 1<sup>st</sup>, Confederation entered into a new six-year deal with France-Film.<sup>108</sup>

While the fragmentary nature of the available data does not permit a clear cause and effect relation to be established, Confederation's annual auditor's reports show that the chain's results got markedly better the year following the demise of the United Amusement - France-Film deal. The chain's net profits climbed up to \$32,387 for the year ending April 30, 1937, up from \$7,234 the preceding year, and from a net loss of \$3,311 for the year ending on April 30, 1935.<sup>109</sup> True, Confederation's results could hardly be compared with United's, whose net profits climbed up from \$72,095 in 1935 to \$101,134 in 1936.<sup>110</sup> One should nevertheless keep in mind that Confederation operated six theatres in 1936, against United's seventeen. By 1936-37, Confederation houses were therefore generating net profits of \$5,398 on average, against \$5,949 for each of the seventeen theatres operated by United Amusement.

Given this marked improvement of Confederation Amusements' results over the years 1936 and 1937, it is permissible to think that the deal through which United Amusement finally gained control of Confederation in the fall of 1937 – after more than ten years of intermittent talks with the Lawand and Tabah families – had been pushed by United rather than by a desperate Confederation. With this deal, United simultaneously annexed an

increasingly threatening competitor and grabbed a sizable piece of the lucrative French film market in Montreal.

The United - Confederation deal seems to have been precipitated by yet another episode of the ongoing turf war between the two chains, this time ignited by Confederation's acquisition of a parcel of land located at the intersection of Queen Mary and Trans-Island Avenue, a stone's throw from United's Snowdon theatre. Inaugurated with great pomp earlier the same year, on February 26, 1937, the latter had been the first film theatre to be built in Montreal since the 1932 Château.<sup>111</sup> The modern Snowdon had also been the first Montreal theatre to be conceived in the then current streamlined style and equipped with a *bona fide* air conditioning system. It consequently represented a sizable investment for United.<sup>112</sup> One can therefore imagine United's displeasure with the announcement, made by Najeeb Lawand to *La Presse* on September 4, 1937, of Confederation's plans for its new property, which involved the construction of a new theatre to be named the Queen Mary. Lawand further explained that the project was part of a larger building campaign involving the erection of one or two "splendid theatres" in the city's "best districts" every year.<sup>113</sup>

Confederation's Queen Mary project made perfect sense at face value: Notre-Dame-de-Grâce, then a fast developing anglophone middle-class neighborhood, was just the sort of place where a theatre chain would want to expand as soon as possible. It nevertheless does seem likely that Confederation's acquisition and announcement had very much to do with its negotiations with United, which had been reactivated in the early months of 1937. The minutes of the meetings of United's board indeed reveal that a "proposed working, participating, and purchasing agreement" between United and Confederation had been submitted on May 14 to the company's directors, who had at the time unanimously resolved to proceed with the negotiation. Discussions between the chains however seem to have

lapsed again until the next fall, when *Variety* reported that negotiations were “again under way” between United and Confederation.<sup>114</sup>

Chronology issues make it difficult to assess the role played by Confederation’s Queen Mary project in the chain’s ongoing negotiations with United. The exact purchase date of the Queen Mary property, for instance, remains unknown. It is known that the transaction was completed between April 30 and early September of 1937, but not if it actually preceded the meeting of the United Amusement board of directors on May 14.<sup>115</sup> It consequently remains quite difficult to determine if the talks had actually been triggered by Confederation’s Queen Mary project and, thus, to ascertain if this latest round of negotiations between the two chains had been initiated by Confederation or United.

The long-delayed deal between United and Confederation was, in any case, finally signed on November 30, 1937. The agreement preserved Confederation’s identity as a chain and ensured that its management would remain closely involved in the administration of its theatres, but granted control of the company to United through a complicated exchange of bonds and shares. Confederation’s board of directors was altered so as to reflect this new dual ownership. As per the agreement, four directors of the new board were to be appointed by pre-takeover Confederation shareholders, and six by the United group (including one Famous Players representative). It was further agreed that only pre-takeover Confederation shareholders would be entitled to participate in the election of Confederation’s president and secretary. George Ganetakos and his son, John G. Ganetakos, P.G. Demetre, H.N. Chauvin, and D.A. Murray were selected to represent United on Confederation’s board, while Famous Players delegated Nathan L. Nathanson.<sup>116</sup>

The memorandum of agreement further provided guarantees that Najeeb Lawand, Ameen Lawand and E.N. Tabah would all retain their executive positions at Confederation.

Najeeb Lawand's position as managing director was protected for ten years. Ameen Lawand, office assistant to the general manager, and E.N. Tabah, secretary and bookkeeper, were also to be retained by the "new" Confederation for a minimum of five years.<sup>117</sup> The contract specified that Najeeb Lawand would remain "the sole person authorized to purchase films for the Confederation Amusements" (though all of his purchases had to be approved by the board of directors), and that Ameen Lawand would remain in charge of theater bookings. Najeeb Lawand, Ameen Lawand and E.N. Tabah agreed not to become involved, either directly or indirectly, with any other moving picture business operating within the Province of Quebec for the duration of their guaranteed employment by Confederation.<sup>118</sup>

A second agreement signed concurrently with the one granting control of Confederation to United aimed to curb the competition between the two chains. Its central clauses provided that neither company could become interested in or build a theatre located within a radius of one mile of a theatre managed by the other company without having first offered a 50% interest in the new operation to the other company. Another clause, most likely drafted by Nathanson, prevented Confederation from "building, operating or being interested in a theatre in the downtown district of Montreal and other places in the Province."<sup>119</sup>

This second agreement quashed Confederation's plans for its Queen Mary property, which was eventually sold to another quintessential Montreal chain operation, Steinberg's Wholesale Groceries, in June of 1938.<sup>120</sup> In exchange for this concession, United agreed to sell to Confederation half of the Verdun property it had just acquired in September and was at the time in the process of converting into a moving picture theatre, the Savoy.<sup>121</sup> Management of the new house was also transferred to Confederation, which soon placed it in the capable hands of Eugene Maynard, who had worked as a pianist at the Théâtre

Français and Rialto in the silent era, and later managed the Outremont. Confederation and Maynard soon agreed on an English-language policy for the Savoy.<sup>122</sup> The programme presented on the Savoy's February 26, 1938, opening night reflected Confederation's newly improved access to recent US films, as the film featured on that occasion, *Tovarich* (Anatole Litvak, Warner Bros., 1937), was simultaneously booked at the Strand, United's downtown first-run house.<sup>123</sup>

Events transpiring in early 1938 suggests that United's takeover of Confederation might not have been a strictly local affair. In February of that year, *Le Devoir* published a front-page exposé claiming that the "North American film trust" (i.e., Famous Players, which had just approved, and possibly facilitated, the United - Confederation deal<sup>124</sup>) was about to re-enter the Quebec French film market. This exposé and its follow-up, published in early March, contain a slew of fact and rumors that cannot be verified in the incomplete corporate records preserved in archives. They nevertheless seem to have been written by somebody with deep insider knowledge of the Canadian film industry and, in any case, fit nicely with the events and situations documented elsewhere.<sup>125</sup>

As outlined in *Le Devoir's* piece, Famous Players' plan provided for the conversion of Consolidated's Princess and United's Amherst into French-language first-run theatres at the start of the 1938-1939 theatrical season. This projected change of policy would have placed the two houses in direct competition with France-Film's two leading theatres, the Cinéma de Paris and the Théâtre St. Denis. Second and subsequent runs of the films exhibited at the Princess and Amherst would have been granted to a number of United and Confederation theatres located in francophone neighborhoods. Famous Players also seems to have planned to include many of the theatres it already controlled in Quebec outside of Montreal, including the Quebec City Capitol and Arlequin, as well as the Three-Rivers Capitol, in its

French-language circuit. According to *Le Devoir*, Famous Players had further threatened to cut off the supply of US films of several independent exhibitors operating outside of Montreal if these were to keep getting their French films from France-Film rather than from Regal, who was to be the new circuit's main supplier of French films. Regal was, incidentally, directed by Henry Nathanson, brother of Nathan L. By the time *Le Devoir's* exposé was published, Regal had been operating a Paris bureau and buying French films for at least a few months.<sup>126</sup>

Famous Players and Regal's meddling in Quebec's French film market was evidently opposed by France-Film, which risked losing a large number of patrons and outlets for the films it was distributing. It is also quite likely that DeSève and Janin anticipated that this renewed competition would drive up the prices asked by French producers. France-Film was however quite unexpectedly helped in its opposition to Famous Players' projected French circuit by the provincial board of censors, which, as documented by Yves Lever, rejected many of the French productions imported by Regal. The files of the board of censors indeed reveal that between December 1937 and May 1938 no less than eleven French features submitted by Regal had been rejected. These included star products such as *Pépé le Moko* (Julien Duvivier, Paris Film, 1937) and *Orage* (Marc Allégret, Productions André Daven, 1938).<sup>127</sup> Clearly, the grasp of the Toronto-based Regal on the working of the Quebec board of censors as well as, more generally, on the idiosyncrasies of the Quebec market was no match for that of its competitor, as evidenced by the fact that France-Film would later manage to get many of these films approved for exhibition in Quebec.<sup>128</sup>

Growing tensions over the issue of French film distribution and exhibition in Quebec forced the two groups organized around France-Film and Famous Players to convene a summit at Montreal's select Mount Stephens Club on April 22, 1938. France-Film was

represented at the meeting by Janin and DeSève; United Amusement (and thus Confederation Amusements) by Bill Lester. Regal was, tellingly, represented by Nathan L. Nathanson.<sup>129</sup> While United's counsel, Henry Chauvin, later reported that "the conflicting interests of the parties [had] created several difficult situations," both the France-Film and the Famous Players groups seem to have recognized that the situation developing in early 1938 was potentially harmful to all parties, and that compromises had to be made.<sup>130</sup>

The biggest compromise made over the course of the ensuing negotiations appears to have been made by Nathan L. Nathanson. According to Chauvin's report on the negotiations, Nathanson essentially agreed "not to have any dealings in French pictures either directly or indirectly" for a period of ten years.<sup>131</sup> Regal consequently agreed to get out of the French film business and sell the French films it had acquired to France-Film. In return, France-Film guaranteed 104 features yearly – enough for one new double-bill each week – to the United and Confederation chains, who reciprocated by undertaking not to book French films from any other source.<sup>132</sup> Discussed but finally left out of the signed agreements was a clause in which "the parties reciprocally [obligated] themselves not to be interested in a theatre within a radius of a mile and a half of their present respective theatres."<sup>133</sup>

After several weeks of vigorous but otherwise cordial negotiations, three memoranda of agreement were signed on June 13, 1938. The first two covered Regal's commitment not become involved in the distribution or exhibition of "French talking motion picture films," as well as the transfer of the French films it had acquired to France-Film.<sup>134</sup> The third memorandum of agreement dealt with the exhibition of French films by United and Confederation (whose March 13, 1936, contract with France-Film was thereby cancelled and superseded). It determined that, in Montreal, the Cinéma de Paris and Théâtre St. Denis would retain the first and second runs of the French films handled by France-Film. After a

four-week protection period following their exhibition at the St. Denis (who generally exhibited France-Film products after the downtown Cinéma de Paris), films would become available for third and subsequent runs to the United and Confederation chains (where runs typically lasted for two or three days, as opposed to one week in first-run houses such as the Cinéma de Paris and the St. Denis). **[Figure 5.7]** The contract between United, Confederation and France-Film did not provide for protection periods between United and Confederation houses, but required France-Film to wait thirty days after the last showing of one of its films in a United or Confederation theatre before it could make it available to its other Montreal houses or lease it to a third party. For this privileged access to French moving pictures, United and Confederation agreed to transfer 22.5% of the gross receipts generated by their theatres' French programmes to France-Film.<sup>135</sup>

Another clause of the agreement between France-Film, United and Confederation is worth quoting, as it provides us with a contemporary, industry-sanctioned definition of “programme.” The agreement thus states that France-Film was to supply United and Confederation each week with “what is known in the trade as a ‘programme’ which, generally speaking, at present consists of a full double bill programme of not less than fourteen reels of one thousand feet each, a news reel [*sic*], trailers, photographs and posters and any other advertising material.”<sup>136</sup> The wording of this clause suggests that, while the film industry permitted some level of flexibility in the way “programmes” were defined and assembled, it nevertheless remained fully aware that, a quarter of a century after the supposed end of “variety programmes,” moving picture theatres still engaged, not in the exhibition of films per se, but in the presentation of “programmes.”

The events outlined in this chapter demonstrate that, in spite of the adverse conditions brought about by the threat of governmental intervention (see chapter 3) and the Great Depression (chapter 4), monopoly control of the film industry actually increased during this decade. True, a group of francophone entrepreneurs did manage to successfully wrest a significant part of the Quebec film market from Famous Players. Yet it could be argued that this situation did not so much break Famous Players' monopoly as establish a sort of dual monopoly, which was eventually formally recognized by the agreements signed in June of 1938 by Regal, United Amusement, Confederation Amusements, and France-Film. By the late 1930s, the newcomer could hold its own against Famous Players and Regal: France-Film distributed films to more than eighty Quebec film theatres, and operated many key houses located in Montreal and across the Province.<sup>137</sup> Soon, it would even produce its own feature films. The interruption of French film exports in the wake of the German invasion of France in the spring of 1940 would eventually cause France-Film to temporarily pare down its activities and revise its policies, but by then the enterprise was sufficiently established in the Quebec film market to weather this contingency. As for Famous Players, the 1937 takeover of Confederation Amusements by United Amusement did finally bring the last independent theatres of any note involved in the exhibition of US films in Montreal within Nathanson's extended network.

The groups led by Famous Players and France-Film obviously did not stop competing for patrons, but at least they had made sure that they would not increase their expenses by competing for product. Their cohabitation also entailed some positive side effects for the industry as a whole, as it most likely helped increase the presence of moving pictures in the public consciousness and daily life of the Province. Famous Players and France-Film's dual networks likely stimulated demand by ensuring that most Quebec cities, neighborhoods and

towns were well served by different chains of theatres offering French and English-language products. In Montreal, the movies undoubtedly remained the default option to anybody seeking entertainment in the 1930s.

## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> Ray Lewis's *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* grew both thinner and increasingly detached from the day-to-day activities of the Canadian film industry in the 1930s. As for Hye Bossin's *Canadian Film Weekly*, it would not start publication until 1941.

<sup>2</sup> Pierre Véronneau, "Le succès est au film parlant français (Histoire du cinéma au Québec I)," *Les dossiers de la Cinémathèque* no. 3 (Montreal: Cinémathèque québécoise, 1979); Yves Lever, *J.A. DeSève: diffuseur d'images* (Montreal: Michel Brûlé, 2008). Both Véronneau and Lever have interviewed individuals involved in the early years of French sound cinema in Quebec.

<sup>3</sup> Georges Sadoul, *Histoire générale du cinéma* volume 6, *L'art muet 1919-1929* (Paris: Denoël, 1975), 532.

<sup>4</sup> "Film de Griffith avec sous-titres français au Amherst," *La Presse* (4 May 1929): 59. Author's translation. The original French version uses "sous-titres" instead of "intertitres," in accordance with contemporary usage.

<sup>5</sup> See: André Gaudreault, Germain Lacasse et Jean-Pierre Sirois-Trahan, *Au pays des ennemis du cinéma... pour une nouvelle histoire des débuts du cinéma au Québec* (Quebec City: Nuit blanche, 1996).

<sup>6</sup> Henri Letondal, "Cinéma parlant: le nouveau foyer," *La Patrie* (31 May 1930): 20. Author's translation.

<sup>7</sup> "Bi-Lingual Montreal Adapting Itself to Talkies," *Motion Picture News* (10 November 1928); "Montreal Learning Film English Through Dialogue – No Request Yet for French Dialogues," *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* (24 November 1928): 7. Both versions of the article mistakenly claim that a provincial law made bilingual titles mandatory in Quebec.

<sup>8</sup> "Ray Presents," *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* (1 November 1930): 4.

<sup>9</sup> *La Presse's* description of the process makes it clear that the said "subtitles" were superimposed, that is, that they were not what we now call "intertitles."

<sup>10</sup> As a point of comparison, the Loew's, which actually held 500 more seats than the Palace, grossed \$18,000 on the same week. *La Patrie* (18 January 1930): 52; "Satisfaction donnée au public français par la Paramount-Famous Lasky," *La Presse* (18 January 1930): 55; "Montreal Main Stems Scamper for \$100,000," *Variety* (29 January 1930): 12, 94; *Variety* (5 February 1930): 61. See also: Martin Barnier, *Des films français made in Hollywood: les versions multiples 1929-1935* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2004), 71, 36-37.

<sup>11</sup> Douglas Gomery, *The Coming of Sound* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 107-108. Barnier, *Des films français made in Hollywood*, 13.

<sup>12</sup> Martin Barnier has emphasized Maurice Chevalier's central contribution to the renewal of transnational film culture in the early sound era. See: Barnier, *Des films français made in Hollywood*, 57-97.

<sup>13</sup> *La Patrie* (9 August 1930): 20; *La Patrie* (23 August 1930): 20.

<sup>14</sup> "Maurice Chevalier dans *La grande mare* au Théâtre St-Denis," *La Patrie* (23 August 1930). Author's translation. *La Presse* (23 August 1930): 61.

<sup>15</sup> *Variety* (5 November 1930): 9. Interestingly, the Montreal exhibition of *Le petit café* at the Palace seems to have preceded the French version's New York and Paris premieres, which were respectively held on January 20 and May 8, 1931.

<sup>16</sup> *La Patrie* (3 January 1931): 21.

<sup>17</sup> *La Presse* (31 May 1930): 69; "Foreign Version Films Swell Box-Office Draw," *Public Opinion* (26 December 1930): 4. A New Orleans chain of theatres also arranged to have *The Big Pond* and *La grande mare* exhibited simultaneously upon their release in May. See: "Two Versions in Same Town," *Variety* (15 January 1930): 8.

<sup>18</sup> *La Patrie* (9 August 1930): 20. Author's translation. See also: "Le Capitol se consacrera au film français," *La Patrie* (30 August 1930): 21.

<sup>19</sup> While *Un trou dans le mur* was not an alternate version of an English production, Swedish and Spanish versions were also produced at Joinville.

<sup>20</sup> *La Patrie* (9 August 1930): 20. Author's translation.

- <sup>21</sup> “M. Harry-S. Dahn,” *La Presse* (30 August 1930): 63.
- <sup>22</sup> *La Patrie* (30 August 1930): 21.
- <sup>23</sup> *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* (25 October 1930): 9; *Variety* (5 November 1930): 9.
- <sup>24</sup> *Variety* (20 August 1930): 8; *Variety* (5 November 1930): 69.
- <sup>25</sup> Critic Léon Franque did not hesitate to label *Un trou dans le mur* an “inferior” production in a later account of the early days of French cinema in Montreal. Léon Franque, “L’oeuvre d’un homme,” *La Presse* (17 May 1934).
- <sup>26</sup> See Barnier’s flawed but invaluable overview of the Montreal career of alternate language versions: “Les films en double version au Canada,” in *Des films français made in Hollywood: les versions multiples 1929-1935* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2004), 175-199.
- <sup>27</sup> “Superimposed Titles Only Chance, Laemmle Says, Despite Program,” *Variety* (8 December 1931): 17. See also: “U.S. May Drop Versions,” *Variety* (7 January 1931): 7; “Indie Prod of Foreign Versions Solution for Multi-Linguals Here,” *Variety* (13 May 1931): 34; Gomery, *The Coming of Sound*, 108.
- <sup>28</sup> “Dubbing Foreign Savior?,” *Variety* (4 August 1931): 5.
- <sup>29</sup> “Le Capitole se consacrera au film français,” *La Patrie* (30 August 1930): 21.
- <sup>30</sup> Barnier, *Des films français made in Hollywood*, 66.
- <sup>31</sup> David Parkinson, *100 Ideas that Changed Film* (London: Laurence King Publishing, 2012), 96.
- <sup>32</sup> “Dubbing Foreign Savior?,” *Variety* (4 August 1931): 5; “M-G’s Foreign Prints,” *Variety* (1 December 1931): 11.
- <sup>33</sup> Gomery, *The Coming of Sound*, 108.
- <sup>34</sup> “Dubbed 154 US Pix,” *Film Daily* (2 March 1937): 10; “First-Come-First-Served Dubbing in France Draws Disfavor of US Pic Concerns as They Fall Behind,” *Variety* (13 July 1938): 13. Barnier claims that dubbing became commonplace in France around 1933-34. Barnier, *Des films français made in Hollywood*, 11.
- <sup>35</sup> *La Presse* (5 August 1933): 35; Internet Movie Database, <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0022425/releaseinfo>, last accessed 28 October 2010. Lever notes that *Pur sang*’s run at the St. Denis was cut short by the J.A. DeSève’s takeover of the theatre in the wee hours of August 6, 1933. See: Yves Lever, *J.A. DeSève: diffuseur d’images* (Montreal: Michel Brûlé, 2008), 68.
- <sup>36</sup> “Le trust nord-américain du cinéma veut s’emparer du film français,” *Le Devoir* (26 February 1938): 1.
- <sup>37</sup> *Variety* (7 May 1930): 79.
- <sup>38</sup> Echo for instance seems to have been a major issue at the Théâtre St. Denis. See: Véronneau, “Le succès est au film parlant français,” 12.
- <sup>39</sup> See: Ray Lewis, “Ray Presents,” *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* (9 March 1935): 5.
- <sup>40</sup> Letter dated 31 May 1929 quoted in: Peter White, *Department of Labour, Canada: Investigation into an Alleged Combine in the Motion Picture Industry in Canada, Report of Commissioner, April 30, 1931* (Ottawa: F.A. Acland, Printer to the King, 1931), 86.
- <sup>41</sup> “Americans Redoubling Drive on World Markets; See Native Talkers as Trade Stimulator,” *Variety* (29 January 1930): 5.
- <sup>42</sup> *Les trois masques* had actually been shot in a British studio due to a lack of sound equipment in France.
- <sup>43</sup> *La Patrie* (31 May 1930): 20, 22. In *Le succès est au film parlant français*, Véronneau states that Charles Lalumière’s Roxy theatre had been the first to exhibit a French talking picture, *La grande épreuve*, in Montreal on 8 November 1929, an assertion reprised by Barnier in *Des films français made in Hollywood* (p. 177). Period sources however give no indication that the version of the film exhibited at the Roxy featured a recorded soundtrack. The *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* moreover reveals that sound equipment was only installed at the Roxy in October of 1930. *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* (25 October 1930): 9.
- <sup>44</sup> Lever, *J.A. DeSève*, 58; Fiche d’inscription de films, 3 March 1930, 4 April 1930, Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec, Régie du cinéma collection.

- <sup>45</sup> “Au Théâtre Saint-Denis: *Les trois masques*,” *La Patrie* (7 June 1930): 22.
- <sup>46</sup> Véronneau, “Le succès est au film parlant français,” 13; *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* (5 October 1918): 12.
- <sup>47</sup> Véronneau, “Le succès est au film parlant français,” 5; “Une innovation au théâtre Saint-Denis,” *La Patrie* (9 November 1929): 34; *La Patrie* (23 November 1929): 34.
- <sup>48</sup> “Jos. Cardinal,” *La Presse* (30 August 1930): 63. Charle de Roche is quoted in: Germain Lacasse, Johanne Massé and Bethsabée Poirier, *Le diable en ville: Alexandre Silvieo et l'émergence de la modernité populaire au Québec* (Montreal: Presses de l'Université de Montréal, 2012), 91.
- <sup>49</sup> *La Patrie* (14 June 1930): 20.
- <sup>50</sup> Barnier, *Des films français made in Hollywood*, 178.
- <sup>51</sup> Fiche d'inscription de films, 3 March 1930, BAnQ, Régie du cinéma collection; Véronneau, “Le succès est au film parlant français,” 13.
- <sup>52</sup> *La Patrie* (23 August 1930): 31; *La Patrie* (30 August 1930): 22.
- <sup>53</sup> *La Presse* (6 September 1930): 69; *La Patrie* (6 September 1930): 21. The producer of this short film is not known.
- <sup>54</sup> “M. R. Hurel – Enfin ! Le film français aura sa chance ici,” *La Presse* (2 September 1930): 8; “Les films français dans notre province,” *La Presse* (5 September 1931): 61; Véronneau, “Le succès est au film parlant français,” 9; Lever, *J.A. DeSève*, 61-62.
- <sup>55</sup> *La Presse* (23 August 1930): 64. The advertisement lists productions by Pathé-Natan, Production de Merly, Gaumont Franco-Film Aubert, Productions Braunberger & Richebé, and Les Établissements Jacques Haïk.
- <sup>56</sup> “Films soumis au Bureau de censure par les firmes présentant normalement des films en français,” Véronneau, “Le succès est au film parlant français,” 139.
- <sup>57</sup> *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* (21 December 1918): 24; Véronneau, “Le succès est au film parlant français,” 13; Germain Lacasse, *Histoires de scopes: le cinéma muet au Québec* (Montreal: Cinémathèque québécoise, 1988), 41, 71, 81-82. Véronneau and Lacasse relay different information on Lumière's involvement with Film de Luxe: the former implies that he was not involved in the company's creation, while the latter states that he was. As we have seen in chapter 3, Lumière had also managed Confederation Amusements' Empress at the time of the theatre's opening in 1928.
- <sup>58</sup> *La passion de Jeanne d'Arc* was exhibited at the Roxy during the week of June 21, 1930. Fiches d'inscription des films, 1 April 1930, 2 June 1930, BAnQ, Régie du cinéma collection; “*La passion de Jeanne d'Arc* au cinéma d'art Roxy,” *La Patrie* (21 June 1930).
- <sup>59</sup> Sworn statement by Charles Lumière on Roxy letterhead, fiches d'inscription des films, 4 June 1930, BAnQ, Régie du cinéma collection; “Brillante ouverture du cinéma ‘Roxy’,” *La Patrie* (9 November 1929): 37; *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* (19 April 1930): 9; Henri Letondal, “La lutte en faveur du film européen,” *La Patrie* (21 June 1930): 20;
- <sup>60</sup> See for instance: *Variety* (15 January 1930): 13; *Variety* (22 January 1930): 13.
- <sup>61</sup> See for instance: *La Patrie* (21 June 1930): 21.
- <sup>62</sup> *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* (25 October 1930): 9.
- <sup>63</sup> “Nouveau ciné: le Cinéma de Paris,” *La Patrie* (7 February 1931): 21; *La Patrie* (14 February 1931): 24. The theatre's multiple changes of name are, in a way, evocative of the city's unresolved colonial history. Before being branded as the home of French *cinéma*, the theatre had also been explicitly been associated with British imperial culture at the time of its 1912 opening, when it had been known as the Colonial. It had later become the Connaught (after the Duke of Connaught, then Governor General of Canada) during the Great War. Between 1920 and its rechristening by Lumière in 1929, the theatre had been known as the Regal. See: *The Standard* late news edition (7 September 1912): 10; “Colonial Theater, Montreal, Canada,” *Moving Picture World* 25:13 (25 September 1915): 2165; “World Film Takes Over Colonial,” *Moving Picture World* 26:7 (6 November 1915): 1170; “Montreal Theatre Re-Named,” *Moving Picture World* 43:2 (10 January 1920): 243.
- <sup>64</sup> Véronneau, “Le succès est au film parlant français,” 8-9; Lever, *J.A. DeSève*, 64.
- <sup>65</sup> Lever, *J.A. DeSève*, 64; *La Patrie* (26 mars 1932): 17.

- <sup>66</sup> “À l’Impérial: la première de *Marius*, tiré de la célèbre comédie de Marcel Pagnol,” *La Patrie* (9 January 1932): 17.
- <sup>67</sup> The original French Paramount productions exhibited at the Imperial included *Il est charmant* (Louis Mercanton, 1932) and *Tu seras duchesse* (René Guissart, 1932). *Une heure près de toi* (George Cukor/Ernst Lubitsch, Paramount, 1932) was one of the U.S.-made French alternate versions booked by the theatre. *La Patrie* (26 March 1932): 17; *La Patrie* (9 April 1932): 16; *La Patrie* (16 April 1932): 16.
- <sup>68</sup> Véronneau, “Le succès est au film parlant français,” 12.
- <sup>69</sup> Véronneau, “Le succès est au film parlant français,” 9-12; Lever, *J.A. DeSève*, 62.
- <sup>70</sup> “France-Film” had been La Compagnie cinématographique canadienne’s telegraphic address since its inception in 1930. Véronneau, “Le succès est au film parlant français,” 12-13; Lever, *J.A. DeSève*, 62-64.
- <sup>71</sup> Véronneau, “Le succès est au film parlant français,” 6-25; Lever, *J.A. DeSève*, 57-98.
- <sup>72</sup> DeSève willfully emphasized the “rags to riches” aspect of his life by frequently reminding acquaintances and journalists that he had been born in St. Henri. Lever’s research however suggests that DeSève’s background might have been more middle class than working class. Lever, *J.A. DeSève*, 22-28, 35-42.
- <sup>73</sup> Rudel-Tessier, “Les confidences de M. J.A. DeSève,” *Photo-Journal* (3 December 1960): 16, quoted in: Véronneau, “Le succès est au film parlant français,” 8, 13-14; Lever, *J.A. DeSève*, 42-45.
- <sup>74</sup> While “*crémèriè*” can literally be translated by “dairy shops,” the establishments acquired by DeSève also sold a few other essential foodstuffs, much like present days *dépanneurs*. Véronneau, “Le succès est au film parlant français,” 8-9; Lever, *J.A. DeSève*, 49-51.
- <sup>75</sup> Hye Bossin, “He Had the Common Touch,” *Canadian Film Weekly* (2 June 1943): 6.
- <sup>76</sup> Véronneau, “Le succès est au film parlant français,” 8.
- <sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.
- <sup>78</sup> “Le théâtre St-Denis fait peau neuve,” *La Patrie* (13 August 1933): 16; “À propos du Théâtre St-Denis,” *La Patrie* (19 August 1933): 16; Véronneau, “Le succès est au film parlant français,” 13-14; Lever, *J.A. DeSève*, 65-68.
- <sup>79</sup> Rudel-Tessier, “Les confidences de M. J.A. DeSève,” *Photo-Journal* (3 December 1960): 16, author’s translation.
- <sup>80</sup> Lever, *J.A. DeSève*, 50.
- <sup>81</sup> See for instance *Variety* (9 November 1938): 8.
- <sup>82</sup> Véronneau, “Le succès est au film parlant français,” 15; Lever, *J.A. DeSève*, 70; Léon-H. Bélanger, *Les Ouimétoscopes: Léo-Ernest Ouimet et les débuts du cinéma québécois* (Montreal-Nord: VLB éditeur, 1978), 225.
- <sup>83</sup> *La Patrie* (28 April 1934): 54; *La Presse* (12 May 1934): 42; *Le Petit Journal* (17 June 1934): 18.
- <sup>84</sup> Véronneau (“Le succès est au film parlant français,” p. 15-16) notes that on November 17, 1934, the Imperial was taken over by Ouimet, who first stuck with English pictures before attempting yet another experiment with a French policy in September of 1935. A minor fire at the Imperial on the evening of May 14, 1935, in which four young ballet dancers were severely burned eventually hastened Ouimet’s definitive retirement from the film business. “Quatre danseuses en robes de tulle se tordent dans les flammes,” *La Patrie* (15 May 1935): 4-5; Bélanger, *Les Ouimétoscopes*, 227-230.
- <sup>85</sup> *La Presse* (12 May 1934): 41; *La Patrie* (12 May 1934): 54; *La Presse* (8 September 1934), quoted in Véronneau, “Le succès est au film parlant français,” 16; Lever, *J.A. DeSève*, 85-86.
- <sup>86</sup> Lever, *J.A. DeSève*, 79.
- <sup>87</sup> Véronneau, “Le succès est au film parlant français,” 14, 16.
- <sup>88</sup> On DeSève’s reliability – or lack thereof – as a source of information on his own life and career, see Lever, *J.A. DeSève*, 11-12.
- <sup>89</sup> Rudel-Tessier, “Les confidences de M. J.A. DeSève,” *Photo-Journal* (3 December 1960): 16, quoted in Lever, *J.A. DeSève*, 77-79.
- <sup>90</sup> Lever, *J.A. DeSève*, 78-79.
- <sup>91</sup> Véronneau, “Le succès est au film parlant français,” 16.

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- <sup>92</sup> “À l’administration de la France-Film,” *La Presse* (26 November 1936): 12; “France Films [*sic*], Montreal, Elects Vallee as Head,” *Film Daily* (1 December 1936): 19. For more details on the 1936 reorganization of France-Film, see: Véronneau, “Le succès est au film parlant français,” 22.
- <sup>93</sup> The Maisonneuve was sold by Ameen and Najeeb Lawand to Maisonneuve Theatre Inc. (of which the brothers controlled 2992 of the 3000 shares) a few days after the Laurier Palace tragedy in January of 1927. In April of 1928, Maisonneuve Theatre Inc. sold the theatre to Confederation for \$92,400. Minutes of the meetings of directors of Maisonneuve Theatre Inc., BAnQ, Maisonneuve Theatre Inc. collection.
- <sup>94</sup> “Les salles de vues animées,” *La Presse* (29 April 1910): 14; *La Presse* (30 August 1930): 63, 67; *Lovell’s* (1933-34, 1934-35).
- <sup>95</sup> *Variety* (7 May 1930), 79.
- <sup>96</sup> Minutes of the meetings of the board of directors of United Amusement Corp., Ltd., 18 May 1931, Cinéma Impérial collection, B8 F233.
- <sup>97</sup> *La Presse* (30 August 1930): 67.
- <sup>98</sup> “Premier congrès des exploitants du film français,” *La Presse* (30 July 1931): 8.
- <sup>99</sup> “Empress, Montreal, Presents All-British Bill,” *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* (7 April 1934): 6.
- <sup>100</sup> “Prochaine saison cinématographique,” *La Presse* (5 September 1931): 61. Confederation’s programming strategies regarding French, British and US pictures remained more or less unchanged five years later. See: “Choix de beaux films à la Confederation Amusements,” *La Presse* (5 September 1936): 24.
- <sup>101</sup> “Universal-Montreal Deal,” *Film Daily* (13 August 1936): 7; Memorandum of Agreement between Najeeb Lawand, Ameen Lawand, Tabah Cousins Ltd. and Fahed Tabah, and United Amusement Corp. Ltd. signed on 30 November 1937, CIC, B3 F83.
- <sup>102</sup> “Reprises de films au cinéma Outremont,” *La Presse* (29 August 1936): 22.
- <sup>103</sup> “Confederation Amusements Ltd., se voue de nouveau au film parlant français,” *La Patrie* (23 June 1934): 58.
- <sup>104</sup> “La United Amusement n’a aucun motif pour changer sa politique,” *La Presse* (5 September 1931): 61.
- <sup>105</sup> Minutes of meeting of the board of directors of the United Amusement Corp., Ltd., 22 March 1935, CIC, B8 F234.
- <sup>106</sup> *La Presse* (28 September 1935): 43; *La Presse* (5 October 1935): 43. It should be noted that United Amusement’s plan involved the exhibition of French films on weekdays, never on weekends.
- <sup>107</sup> Véronneau, “Le succès est au film parlant français,” 18; *La Presse* (23 November 1936): 8; “Le trust nord-américain du cinéma veut s’emparer du film français,” *Le Devoir* (26 February 1938): 1; Memorandum of Agreement between United Amusement Corp., Ltd., Confederation Amusements, Ltd., and Compagnie France-Film, 13 June 1938, CIC, B15 F924.
- <sup>108</sup> It should be noted that France-Film’s contract with Conederation Amusements had been renewed on March 13, 1936, that is, before the court recognized the exclusive nature of the previous contract between the two companies. The 1936 contract is mentioned in the Memorandum of Agreement between Najeeb Lawand, Ameen Lawand, Tabah Cousins Ltd. and Fahed Tabah, and United Amusement Corp. Ltd. signed on 30 November 1937, CIC, B3 F83, and in the Memorandum of Agreement between United Amusement Corporation, Ltd., Confederation Amusements, Ltd., and Compagnie France-Film dated 13 June 1938, CIC, B15 F924.
- <sup>109</sup> Confederation Amusements Ltd., annual reports for the years ending 30 April 1935, 30 April 1936 and 30 April 1937, Robert Tabah collection.
- <sup>110</sup> Years ending 31 December 1935 and 31 December 1936. Annual Reports, United Amusement Corp., Ltd., CIC, B9 F308.
- <sup>111</sup> The acquisition is mentioned in the Memorandum of Agreement between Najeeb Lawand, Ameen Lawand, Tabah Cousins Ltd. and Fahed Tabah, and United Amusement Corp. Ltd. signed on 30 November 1937, CIC, B3 F83.

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<sup>112</sup> The Château had been inaugurated on January 25, 1932. The Snowdon was insured for \$175,000 by United, which made it the company's fourth most valuable property, after the Sherbrooke Granada (\$215,000), the Montreal Granada (\$210,000), and the Rialto (\$198,500) (all figures including building and contents). Minutes of a meeting of the Board of Directors of United Amusement Corp., Ltd., 31 March 1939, CIC, B8 F234. See also: "\$200,000 Montreal Film Theater Nears Completion," *Film Daily* (21 November 1936): 7; "Brillante inauguration du Snowdon," *La Presse* (27 February 1937): 39.

<sup>113</sup> "À la Confederation," *La Presse* (4 September 1937). See also: "New Montreal Theater," *Film Daily* (11 September 1937): 6.

<sup>114</sup> *Variety* (3 November 1937): 60.

<sup>115</sup> Memorandum of Agreement between Najeeb Lawand, Ameen Lawand, Tabah Cousins Ltd. and Fahed Tabah, and United Amusement Corp. Ltd. signed on 30 November 1937, CIC, B3 F83; "À la Confederation," *La Presse* (4 September 1937).

<sup>116</sup> The contract dictated that Confederation would transfer 3,275 of its preferred shares and 11,543 of its common shares, collectively valued at \$385,215, to United, in return for \$292,500 worth of the latter's first mortgage twenty year sinking fund bonds, \$42,715 in cash, and \$50,000 in promissory notes payable within ten months. The transaction consequently did not grant any voting United share to Confederation, while transferring 60% of Confederation's issued capital stock to United. The remaining 40% still controlled by Confederation's original shareholders was subsequently converted into a new type (class "A") of shares, so as to create two distinct groups of shareholders.

Memorandum of Agreement between Najeeb Lawand, Ameen Lawand, Tabah Cousins Ltd. and Fahed Tabah, and United Amusement Corp. Ltd. signed on 30 November 1937, CIC, B3 F83; Supplementary Letter Patents, Confederation Amusements, Ltd., recorded 25 May 1938. Library and Archives Canada, file 301-1; minutes of a meeting of the board of directors of United Amusement Corp., Ltd., 29 November 1937, 31 January 1938, CIC, B8 F234.

<sup>117</sup> According to a *Canadian Film Weekly* news item, E.N. Tabah had become Confederation Amusements' general manager by early 1945, only to be replaced in May of that year by John G. Ganetakos. "President Tabah Sues Confed'n," *Canadian Film Weekly* (31 January 1951): 1,3.

<sup>118</sup> Memorandum of Agreement between Najeeb Lawand, Ameen Lawand, Tabah Cousins Ltd. and Fahed Tabah, and United Amusement Corp. Ltd. signed on 30 November 1937, CIC, B3 F83.

<sup>119</sup> Minutes of a meeting of the board of directors of United Amusement Corp., Ltd., 29 November 1937, CIC, B8 F234.

<sup>120</sup> Resolution, minute of the meetings of the board of directors of United Amusement Corp., Ltd., CIC, B8 F234.

<sup>121</sup> Emmanuel Briffa had once again been hired to work on the theatre's decoration. Resolution, minutes of the meetings of the board of directors of United Amusement Corp., Ltd., 21 September 1937, CIC, B8 F234; "New House for Verdun," *Film Daily* (3 November 1937): 10; Minutes of the meetings of the board of directors of United Amusement Corp., Ltd., 29 November 1937, CIC, B8 F234.

<sup>122</sup> *Canadian Film Weekly* (9 June 1943): 1; Dane Lankester, *Montreal Movie Palaces: Great Theatres of the Golden Era 1884-1938* (Waterloo: Penumra Press, 1993), 18, 109-110, 136.

<sup>123</sup> *La Presse* (25 February 1938).

<sup>124</sup> Minutes of the meetings of the board of directors of United Amusement Corp., Ltd., 29 November 1937, CIC, B8 F234.

<sup>125</sup> "Le trust nord-américain du cinéma veut s'emparer du film français," *Le Devoir* (26 February 1938): 1; "Le trust nord-américain du cinéma: la 'Famous Players Canadian Corporation' et ses filiales montréalaises," *Le Devoir* (7 March 1938): 3.

<sup>126</sup> Regal's Paris bureau was managed by one W.R. Bader. "Le trust nord-américain du cinéma veut s'emparer du film français," *Le Devoir* (26 February 1938): 1; Regal Films, letter to France-Film, June 1938, CIC, B15 F925. The files of the provincial board of censors show that Regal was already handling French films in the Province of Quebec by December of 1937.

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<sup>127</sup> Data collected from the files of the board of censors (Régie du cinéma collection, Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec) by Telesforo Tajuelo and Yves Lever and communicated to the author.

<sup>128</sup> [Yves Lever], “Distributeurs et exploitants de salles,” <http://www.cinemaparlantquebec.ca/Cinema1930-52/pages/textbio/Textbio.jsp?textBioId=64&lang=fr>, last accessed 27 January 2011.

<sup>129</sup> Bill Lester, letter to Henry N. Chauvin, 26 April 1938, CIC, B15 F925.

<sup>130</sup> Henry N. Chauvin, letter to T.J. Bragg, Famous Players Canadian, 14 June 1938, CIC, B15 F925.

<sup>131</sup> Bill Lester, letter to Henry N. Chauvin, 26 April 1938, CIC, B15 F925.

<sup>132</sup> Chauvin, letter to T.J. Bragg, Famous Players Canadian Corp., Ltd., 14 June 1938, CIC, B15 F925. United’s Chauvin and Famous’ Bragg also discussed the legal implications of a possible interruption of France’s film production by cause of war. Their conclusion was that France-Film could not legally be held responsible for its failure to meet the needs of United and Confederation houses should such an event happen.

<sup>133</sup> Henry N. Chauvin, letter to Arthur Vallée, 8 June 1938, CIC, B15 F925; Chauvin, letter to T.J. Bragg, Famous Players Canadian Corp., Ltd., 14 June 1938, CIC, B15 F925.

<sup>134</sup> Memoranda of agreement between Regal Films, Ltd., and Compagnie France-Film, 13 June 1938, CIC, B15 F924.

<sup>135</sup> Memorandum of agreement between United Amusement Corp., Ltd., Confederation Amusements, Ltd., and Compagnie France-Film, 13 June 1938, CIC, B15 F924.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid.

<sup>137</sup> According to *La Presse* (4 June 1935, p. 8), France-Film supplied films to as many as 84 theatres, with 59 being the average number of Quebec theatres showing its releases on any given week.

## Chapter 6

### *British Theatres, US Pictures and French Dubs:*

#### *Odeon in Montreal, 1941-1952*

In Canadian film history, 1941 is generally remembered as the year where Nathan L. Nathanson left Famous Players Canadian Corporation and organized Odeon Theatres of Canada. The new organization soon proceeded to become the first theatre chain to successfully compete with Famous Players in much of the country. In Quebec, however, the arrival of Odeon was complicated by a few issues, none the least being the sudden passing of Nathanson in the spring of 1943.<sup>1</sup> In addition to being the main character behind the new chain, Nathanson was the sole Odeon executive with any real experience of the Quebec market. More than three years would consequently elapse between the opening of Odeon's first theatres in Toronto and Vancouver and the acquisition of the chain's first Quebec theatres in the winter of 1945.

This chapter will concentrate on Odeon's early years in Montreal, as well as on the series of events that seemingly prepared the chain's entry on the local market. Much of the events covered here will thus revolve around the last film theatre erected in Montreal before war regulations suspended the building of new cinemas between 1941 and 1946, the Notre-Dame-de-Grâce Kent theatre. We will follow the Kent from its erection by a small independent chain, Superior Theatres, through its years as an Odeon theatre, and its subsequent acquisition by Montreal's largest theatre chain, United Amusement, in 1951. In addition to having been operated by no less than three chains in ten years, the Kent was also involved in an important series of legal proceedings aiming to reform the national film market. Stretching over most of 1944, these proceedings instituted by the Kent's initial

owners, Jules Laine and Ben Garson, were closely followed by industry leaders in Toronto and New York, and shed much light on the conditions framing the arrival of Odeon Theatres of Canada in the Province of Quebec. Through them, a better understanding of the state of the local film market, as well as of the programming strategies devised by the Quebec Odeon theatres in the postwar years can be developed.

The story of the Kent theatre and of the early years of Odeon in Quebec further provides a useful example the various processes by which a system will strive to reach a renewed state of relative equilibrium after a new agent is introduced. The evidence exposed in this chapter reveals a wide range of tactics and strategies deployed by exhibitors to gain or maintain a favorable position in the film market. New theatre chains like Superior and Odeon either managed to get the more established exhibitors to concede a portion of the market – often one that they had been unwilling or ill-equipped to satisfy – or quickly disappeared.

The events reconstructed through the collected data presented in this chapter also illustrate how the actions of the various agents participating in a system are largely shaped by the actions of other agents, as well as by ever-changing external circumstances. The Odeon case more particularly provides an eloquent demonstration of the fact that tracking down and identifying a theatre or chain's corporate owners does not suffice to explain its programming strategies. As we will see, success finally came to Odeon in Quebec when, listening to the advice of its local managers, the chain phased out the programming of feature films produced by its British corporate owners and started to emphasize the exhibition of French-dubbed versions of US pictures in its Montreal theatres. Evidence shows that the chain's eventual success had less to do with Odeon Theatres of Canada's connection with British film producers than with the fact that its main opposition in

Montreal, Famous Players and United Amusement, had long failed to seize the commercial potential of these dubbed versions, which, as we have seen in chapter 5, had been widely produced in France in the 1930s. Had Odeon been a simple marketing tool for British pictures, it would have been doomed from the start in Quebec.

Faraway events seemingly disconnected from the local business of film exhibition also contributed to Odeon's success. For instance, the fact that many US film producers decided to launch the production of French dubs on a large scale in the mid-1940s – which greatly helped Odeon carve a niche in the Montreal market – was but a direct consequence of the Liberation of France from German occupation in 1944. The analyses of the various commercial tactics outlined in this chapter must consequently be set against the larger historical context, while remaining focused on the particular conditions under which film exhibitors operated in Montreal. Paul S. Moore has already convincingly demonstrated how Odeon's eventual success was contingent on its adoption of a different set of tactics in each of the various markets in which it operated. It is very unlikely that Odeon would have succeeded, had it used the same commercial tactics in Montreal, Toronto or Vancouver.<sup>2</sup>

But Odeon's management was crafty, and, as we will see, the new chain managed to firmly establish its presence in Montreal by the early 1950s. This situation brought the various theatre chains then doing business in Montreal to quickly reach a tacit agreement over a new *de facto* division of the market, which would remain effective for many decades. This unspoken agreement benefited the established exhibitors – a category now including Odeon – by simultaneously lessening competition between the established chains and making it very difficult for new agents to enter the market. As a result, the years covered by this chapter saw no repetition of the much-discussed Famous Players - Allen Theatres war of the early 1920s. The new Odeon national chain managed to firmly establish its presence in

Montreal without taking much of the markets served by Famous Players, Consolidated Theatres, United Amusement, Confederation Amusements, and France-Film.

This seemingly paradoxical situation can be explained quite simply. In spite of the rationing and building regulations, the war years were marked by a strong continuous growth for the Canadian film industry. And, contrarily to what happened in the United States, where available data shows a steady fall in theatrical moviegoing beginning in the last months of 1946, attendance in Canadian moving picture theatres actually kept rising right until the beginning of regular television broadcasts in 1952.<sup>3</sup> According to data collected by the Dominion Bureau of Statistics (Table 6.1), while it had taken more than a decade for

*Table 6.1: Canadian film theatres annual receipts, 1930-1952*

<b>Year</b>	<b>Theatres</b>	<b>Receipts</b>	<b>Admissions</b>
1930	907	\$ 38,479,500	—
1933	762	24,954,200	—
1934	796	25,338,100	107,354,509
1935	859	27,173,400	117,520,795
1936	956	29,610,300	126,913,547
1937	1,044	32,499,300	133,668,450
1938	1,130	33,635,052	137,381,280
1939	1,183	34,010,115	137,898,668
1940	1,229	37,858,955	151,590,799
1941	1,240	41,369,259	161,677,731
1942	1,247	46,461,097	182,845,765
1943	1,265	52,567,989	204,677,550
1944	1,298	53,173,325	208,167,180
1945	1,323	55,430,711	215,573,267
1946	1,477	59,888,972	227,538,798
1947	1,693	62,865,279	220,857,594
1948	1,950	69,657,248	222,459,224
1949	2,200	78,559,779	232,998,545
1950	2,387	83,959,073	235,881,982
1951	2,440	92,485,670	243,992,927
1952	2,500	100,554,173	253,096,281

*Source: Dominion Bureau of Statistics, quoted in "Still Going Up!," Canadian Film Weekly (28 October 1953): 5*  
*Figures do not include drive-ins and itinerant operators. 1949-1952 figures include Newfoundland.*

Canadian film receipts to get back to their 1930 level (\$38,479,500, and that's not even taking inflation into account), receipts more than doubled between 1940 and 1949. By 1952,

Canadian theatres' receipts collectively reached the impressive sum of \$100,554,173.

Admissions almost doubled between 1939 and 1952, going from 137,898,668 to 253,096,281.<sup>4</sup>

Chains benefited the most from this growth, as shown in tables 6.2-6.5.

*Tables 6.2-6.5: Independent exhibitors and chains, Canada, 1930-1952*

1930

No. of theatres operated	% of Theatres	% of Gross	% of Atndnce
1 theatre	71.7	41.4	n.d.
2-3 theatres	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.
4-19 theatres	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.
20 and over	18.2	41.9	n.d.

1945

No. of theatres operated	% of Theatres	% of Gross	% of Atndnce
1 theatre	46.7	18.8	21.4
2-3 theatres	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.
4-19 theatres	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.
20 and over	28.0	60.1	56.6

1937

No. of theatres operated	% of Theatres	% of Gross	% of Atndnce
1 theatre	54.3	28.7	31.9
2-3 theatres	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.
4-19 theatres	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.
20 and over	24.6	53.6	48.4

1952

No. of theatres operated	% of Theatres	% of Gross	% of Atndnce
1 theatre	50.5	20.1	22.4
2-3 theatres	11.3	8.1	n.d.
4-19 theatres	12.9	13.8	n.d.
20 and over	25.3	58.0	54.1

*Source: Dominion Bureau of Statistics, quoted in Canadian Film Weekly (30 December 1953): 1-2*

*Figures do not include drive-ins, community enterprises, and itinerant operators.*

According to the Dominion Bureau of Statistics, independents (defined as the “individuals or firms operating only one theatre”) went down from taking 28.7% of the national gross in 1937 to 20.1% in 1952, while the proportion of Canadian theatres they represented went down from 54.3% to 50.5% over the same years. Between 1937 and 1952, the proportion of cinemas operated by chains controlling twenty or more theatres remained relatively stable, going from 24.6% to 25.3%. These, however, went on from taking 53.6% of the national gross in 1937 to 58% in 1952.

Still, Odeon did much more than simply surf on the sustained growth of the Canadian film market between 1941 and 1952. In Montreal, the chain gained a prominent position by concentrating on both the new products available and the territories developed during this second golden age of the business of film exhibition. Odeon thus emphasized the building and acquisition of theatres located in the outlying neighborhoods developed in the postwar

years. When French-dubbed versions of Hollywood films became available with greater frequency in the mid-1940s, it also seized the chance to serve more fully the French-speaking population that accounted for roughly half of Montreal's million inhabitants.<sup>5</sup> In the months preceding the advent of French dubs in Montreal in the spring of 1944, the number of local moving picture theatres exhibiting French-features on a regular basis had been down to one (France-Film's Théâtre St. Denis), due to the interruption of French imports caused by the war. In the opinion of Hye Bossin, editor of the leading Canadian film trade journal of the era, the *Canadian Film Weekly* (launched in 1941), this "coming of Hollywood dubs" represented one of the main developments responsible for the rise in attendance in Quebec in the second half of the 1940s.<sup>6</sup> The exhibition of dubbed films in Odeon theatres must consequently be regarded as one of the most essential developments of the film business in postwar Montreal – the one opportunity that permitted the new Odeon chain to take its place alongside the various Famous Players-affiliated chains (Consolidated Theatres, United Amusement and Confederation Amusements) and France-Film in the local market.

### **Born to Lose: Superior's Kent Theatre**

Odeon did not build its Montreal circuit from scratch, nor did it know right from the start what to programme in its Quebec theatres. On both counts, Odeon's eventual success largely rested on the groundwork established in the early 1940s by a small independent chain, Superior Theatres.

A key date in Superior Theatres' history was the June 20, 1941 grand opening of its flagship theatre, the Kent. Located in the predominantly anglophone middle-class neighborhood of Notre-Dame-de-Grâce, in Montreal's west island, Superior's latest was a modern but rather modest theatre seating 675. According to the weekly *Standard*, some of

the opening's highlights were a parade led by the Royal Montreal Regiment band, an informal dance held in the theatre's upper lounge, and a personal appearance by none other than Canadian-born Fay Wray – nowadays a cult figure thanks to her leading role in *King Kong* (Merian C. Cooper and Ernest B. Schoedsack, RKO, 1933), but then a mere B-movie actress on the decline. In spite of the presence of a *bona fide* Hollywood personality, the true star of the evening turned out to be Flight Lieutenant Hartland Molson, a veteran of the Battle of Britain then in the midst of a promotional tour for the “Wings for Britain” fund. Newspaper advertisements proudly proclaimed that the gross receipts for the Kent's first week of operation would be donated to this fund aiming to provide Britain with new fighter planes.

Conspicuously missing from *The Standard's* account of the Kent's opening night was any mention of the films presented. This is not entirely surprising, given that the best feature that the Kent management could get its hands on for its grand opening was *Who Killed Aunt Maggie?* (Arthur Lubin, 1940), a run of the mill Republic Pictures production. In most theatres, this type of B-picture was only used for the lower half of double bills.<sup>7</sup> The Kent thus found itself in the underdog position from its opening night, lacking as it was the privileged access to the products of the leading film producers that its opposition benefited from.

Situated at the intersection of Sherbrooke Street West and Hingston Street, between a farm and railroad tracks, the Kent mainly competed for patronage with the four theatres then operated by United Amusement and Confederation Amusements in the Notre-Dame-de-Grâce district. **[Figure 6.1]** Its nearest competitor, the Empress theatre, stood ten blocks east on Sherbrooke Street, and had benefited since the 1937 takeover of Confederation by United Amusement from the latter's privileged access to the output of Hollywood's leading

producers.<sup>8</sup> Further east on Sherbrooke Street, just the outside of the city limits of Westmount, stood United's Westmount theatre, in which the Allen family still had an interest.<sup>9</sup> The two other commercial film theatres doing business in Notre-Dame-de-Grâce at the time of the Kent's opening were directly operated by United Amusement. The oldest of the two, the Monkland theatre located on the avenue of the same name had been opened in 1930 by United as an answer to Confederation's Empress, then a competitor.<sup>10</sup> Its Spanish-atmospheric décor sharply contrasted with that of the neighborhood's most recent United theatre, the 1937 Snowdon, whose streamlined white façade and black sign stood out on Decarie.<sup>11</sup>

By the time of the Kent's opening, the Snowdon had come to occupy a special position in the Montreal film market. Conveniently located near a major transportation hub in the predominantly English-speaking west end of the city, this modern theatre built in a style reminiscent of that of the British Odeon theatres had become, following a change of policy in the spring of 1940, the "home of first-run British pictures" in Montreal.<sup>12</sup> (The Snowdon also regularly exhibited second-run US pictures when no British films were available.) This granted the theatre a special status. According to a statement made by United's solicitor, H.N. Chauvin: "the exhibitors treated the Snowdon as a theatre apart from all others, drawing its patrons from anywhere and everywhere just as do the first-run theatres in the centre of the City to a greater degree."<sup>13</sup>

The Kent's owners, Benjamin A. Garson and Jules Laine, no doubt knew beforehand that obtaining films of relatively recent vintage for their Notre-Dame-de-Grâce theatre would prove quite difficult.<sup>14</sup> They were, after all, hardened industry veterans. The New York-born Jules Laine had for instance been active in the Canadian film business since 1913. Prior to his partnership with Garson, he had mostly been involved in film distribution,

having been associated over most of the 1920s and 1930s with the Allens, as well as with Columbia Pictures of Canada.<sup>15</sup> Laine had also been in charge of Montreal's Amherst theatre for some time in the 1930s.<sup>16</sup> As for Ben Garson, who had once been an exhibitor in Ontario, he had been the owner of a Montreal poster exchange, Cinema Service Registered, since the early 1930s.<sup>17</sup>

Just like the Allens and Confederation Amusements before them, Laine and Garson had first attempted to solve their supply issues by striking a deal with the well-connected United Amusement. The two parties had entered negotiations just as construction on the Kent was about to start in the winter of 1941, not long after Laine and Garson had learned that United was considering getting a lease on the 835-seat theatre that a private contractor, Jas. H. Maher, was about to build on Queen Mary Road just east of Decarie. United's directors were at the time told by their president, Ernest Cousins, that:

Messrs. Laine and Garson had considered building a theatre in the vicinity but on being informed that the United Company were interested in the Maher proposition, informed the United Company that they were willing to cancel all arrangements they had made if they could come to some partnership agreement with the United Company in this new deal. They expressed a desire to be interested to the extent of 33.3% in this venture.<sup>18</sup>

As a result, United bought a half interest in the still unfinished Kent, as well as in another Laine-Garson theatre still under construction, the Villeray (8046 St. Denis) on March 11.<sup>19</sup> The deal was ratified by United's directors on July 7, a few weeks after the Kent's opening. It however seems to have never been consummated, and was eventually cancelled by United before the year's end, on December 16.<sup>20</sup> The Kent deal might have been affected by Maher's failure to launch construction work on the Queen Mary Road theatre before the war regulations suspending the building of new theatres came into effect in October of 1941. It seems likely that United's intention was to pool the two new Laine-Garson theatres, the Kent and the Villeray, with its projected Queen Mary Road theatre.<sup>21</sup>

Sometime in the fall of 1941, a few months after the Kent's opening, Laine and Garson organized their various Montreal operations into Superior Theatres.<sup>22</sup> In addition to the Kent and the Villeray, Superior took over two fairly ancient theatres: the Midway, located on St. Lawrence Boulevard at St. Catherine, and Verdun's Perron Hall. Superior also added to its circuit the more recent Beaubien, erected in 1937 in Rosemont, which Laine and Garson had just acquired from France-Film, as well as the Rex, located in St. Jérôme, sixty kilometers north of Montreal.<sup>23</sup> The new chain also inherited from the Verdun Palace leased by Garson from Consolidated Theatres since 1936, and the St. Catherine Street East Electra operated by Garson since at least 1938.<sup>24</sup> Superior's theatres typically presented double-bills changed twice a week. As the modest advertisements regularly published by the chain in *La Presse* and the *Montreal Daily Star* reveal, the films its theatres exhibited came from a wide range of Hollywood major and poverty row studios. The one thing they had in common, however, is that they were always at least a few months – if not years – old.

Laine and Garson's first attempt to reform the Montreal film market and gain access to better and newer films came in March 1942, less than a year after the Kent's opening, when they submitted a formal complaint to the Wartime Prices and Trade Board. It claimed that over the winter of 1942, United Amusement had pressured distributors into suspending the rental of films to Superior theatres in-between dates in United's Montreal theatres, and that this request contravened established industry practices. They argued that, up until then, distributors had been permitted to lease prints to independent Montreal theatres or out-of-town theatres when there was a few days gap in-between bookings in United theatres.<sup>25</sup> Laine and Garson maintained that the practice had long been tolerated, as long as the United theatres located in the vicinity of the independent being offered the film had already played it. Superior consequently claimed that United's alleged attempt to suppress these spot

bookings contravened Wartime Order 99, which permitted the board's administrator of services to "regulate the supply, distribution and exhibition of films [...] to prevent a change in policy which, if allowed, will result in a restraint of trade contrary to the public interest."<sup>26</sup>

Laine and Garson's first complaint was rejected by the board. The pair nevertheless returned with another complaint the following year, on March 5, 1943. This time, Superior went more directly to the point and accused United Amusement of violating a provision of the Wartime Prices and Trade Regulations stating that:

no person shall acquire, accumulate or withhold from sale any goods or services beyond an amount which is reasonably required for the ordinary purposes of his business [or] unduly prevent, limit or lessen the manufacture, production, transportation, sale, supply or distribution of any goods or services.<sup>27</sup>

Superior's lawyer, Hellman Swards, made a point to remind the Board that this provision was to "all intents and purposes similar in scope to [...] provisions of the Combines Investigation Act." Superior's complaint was nevertheless denied for the second time. In his reply to Swards, the board's administrator of services bluntly declared that "it would require a much stronger case [...] to justify any action on our part interfering with contract rights enjoyed by exhibitors under basic contracts."<sup>28</sup> The administrator even suggested that United's contract was actually beneficial to other exhibitors, since it had been amended to limit United's run to ninety days and did not provide for any clearance period. Films consequently became available to other Montreal exhibitors the day after their last showing in a United theatre. The administrator noted that, in the city where he was based, Toronto: "the system seems to be to grant a clearance of fifty-six days over a theatre which is within a very short distance of the first-run theatre, and to grant clearances of from [*sic*] fourteen to forty-two days over theatres otherwise located."<sup>29</sup>

The board nevertheless hinted at the fact that conflicts between Montreal exhibitors could eventually be diminished by a reform of the distribution system. As noted in the

administrator's reply, film distribution did not follow the dominant North American model in Montreal, meaning that, contrarily to most American and Canadian cities, Montreal was not zoned for the purpose of exhibition. This echoed the preamble of Superior's initial complaint, where the chain representatives also noted that the overriding reality of Montreal's film market wasn't zones, but chains. Independent exhibitors could not gain access to new releases until they had made the round of the various Famous Players and United Amusement theatres scattered across the city. (Interestingly, Superior does not mention France-Film in the rapid sketch of the Montreal film market included in its 1942 complaint, a most intriguing omission in light of the future programming policies of its successor, Odeon's General Theatres.) By the time they finally became available to independent exhibitors, films were at least several months old, and had already been seen all over the city.<sup>30</sup>

Presumably sensing that they were unlikely to convince the court that the public was being defrauded by a combine, Swards, Laine and Garson decided to change their strategy. Instead of launching a frontal attack on the exhibitors and distributors allegedly part of the combine, they would attempt to make the distribution system unravel by exposing compromising facts through a seemingly innocuous court case. Possibly taking the hint dropped by the administrator of the Wartime Prices and Trade Board, Swards, Laine and Garson decided to make zones the focal point of their next action.

Superior's next move came in January of 1944 when United's Snowdon theatre started to advertise the Warner feature *Watch on the Rhine* (Herman Shumlin, 1943) as a coming attraction through posters, newspapers ads, and by exhibiting a film trailer. Convinced that the Kent had the right to play the film first, Laine and Garson informed United that the coming exhibition of *Watch on the Rhine* at the Snowdon "would constitute a violation of

[Superior's] contractual rights and of the Wartime Regulations and Orders as well as of the custom and practice established over a period of years."<sup>31</sup> United's refusal to yield to Superior promptly ignited the year-long series of legal proceedings, charges and countercharges that would in time come to be known to newspaper readers as "*la guerre des films*" – "the films war."<sup>32</sup>

The wide coverage granted by trade journals and daily newspapers to the Kent's case suggests that much more than the priority rights of one neighborhood movie house over another was at stake in this "films war." In an internal communication, United's counsel, Henry N. Chauvin, outlined what he believed to be the central point of the Plaintiff's case:

it is not contended that [the] delay of eight weeks is unreasonable, but that the system employed by the United in contracting for all its pictures en bloc and its determining the order in which the pictures should be played in its theatres, is in itself illegal and in restraint of trade.<sup>33</sup>

Thus, in the words of Frank Chauvin – son of Henry and part of United's legal team:

it seems [...] that the principle involved in [...] our present litigation with Kent Theatres, is whether the conditions of the United contracts with distributors are reasonably necessary for the proper conduct of United's business, or whether these conditions or any of them have been imposed upon the distributor for the purpose of injuring a competitor or competitors.<sup>34</sup>

The Kent priority case must therefore be situated within the wider context of the Canadian film market. On this regard, a first relevant fact is that the turmoil caused by the creation of Odeon Theatres of Canada in the winter of 1941 and the second (and final) departure of Nathan L. Nathanson from Famous Players in May of the same year had still not settled on a new quietly agreed upon division of the Canadian film market by 1944.<sup>35</sup> While the new Odeon had managed to acquire more than ninety-four theatres accounting for nearly 66,000 seats nation-wide (against 327 theatres and 306,995 seats for Famous Players), and become well-entrenched in Toronto and Vancouver, it had yet to make inroads in some territories, like Quebec.<sup>36</sup> For independent exhibitors like Laine and Garson, this ongoing struggle

between Famous Players and Odeon might have seemed like the first real opportunity in two decades to break the virtual monopoly of Famous Players and its affiliates.

Evidence shows that many leading industry members and representatives also were of the opinion that the Kent priority case had the potential to upset established hierarchies in the field of exhibition. The *Canadian Film Weekly's* Hye Bossin for instance observed in a March of 1944 piece that: "The doings in Montreal may have a wide effect on Canadian distribution methods."<sup>37</sup> Some months later, after the final judgment in the case had been rendered, J.J. Fitzgibbons, who had succeeded Nathanson at the head of Famous Players, transmitted to Henry Chauvin and the United Amusement the congratulations of Barney Balaban and Autin C. Keough, respectively head and chief attorney of Paramount Pictures, who had apparently been following the case in New York. Fitzgibbons further told Chauvin that: "The importance of this decision to the Industry was the reason I suggested the inquiries which were made of you by the trade paper writers."<sup>38</sup>

Laine's and Garson's case, as outlined in the petition presented by Superior Theatres to the District of Montreal Superior Court on January 26, 1944, attempted to use the Snowdon's aforementioned exceptional status against its operator, United Amusement.<sup>39</sup> Still "the home of British first-run pictures," the Snowdon was not mentioned in the contracts signed by the Kent theatre with the main distributors of US films. For instance, the Kent's contract with Vitagraph (who distributed Warner in Montreal, and consequently was United's co-respondent in the case) only specified that the Kent theatre was entitled to show Warner films after the Westmount or Empress (both theatres being pooled) and the Monkland. This was interpreted by the Kent's owners as "third run in the zone."<sup>40</sup> Superior further argued that the exhibition of Warner features in an additional United Theatre located in the same zone as the Kent violated the orders issued by the Wartime Prices and Trade

Board. In order to curb competition during wartime, the Board forbade distributors to alter the runs established over the “basic period,” i.e. the four-week-long snapshot of the industry taken as the Board was about to enforce its new orders in 1941.<sup>41</sup>

The interim injunction by which the Kent theatre sought to prevent the showing of *Watch on the Rhine* at the Snowdon was however denied on January 31, 1944. In his judgment, Justice Pierre Casgrain explained that “the Kent theatre had not proved that it had an acquired right of priority over the Snowdon for this particular picture.”<sup>42</sup> Laine and Garson reacted by claiming that the defendant had defeated the ends of justice by means of false evidence by testifying that, firstly, the Kent and the Snowdon were not in the same zone and, secondly, that there were actually no zones in Montreal.<sup>43</sup> They consequently decided to appeal from judge Casgrain’s decision. Their amended petition for interim or interlocutory injunction was deposited on March 13. It claimed that:

Since at least 1937, the said Respondent United Amusement Corporation Limited, by and as a result of its method of contracting en bloc illegally with the Respondent Vitagraph Limited as aforesaid, and with others, for all the available motion pictures or photoplays released and distributed in Montreal, except French productions, for all its thirty or more theatres and of itself determining the priority of exhibition of the said productions in its twenty or more theatres in the district of Montreal, and by and as a result of illegally preventing the said Kent Theatre and others from exhibiting all the said motion pictures or photoplays until the same had been first exhibited in all the said twenty or more theatres of the said Respondent United Amusement Corporation Limited, the latter has violated and contravened the law, in that it has operated an illegal combine and monopoly unduly limiting the facilities for supplying and dealing in the exhibition of motion picture films; has unduly restricted and injured trade in relation thereto; and has unduly prevented, limited or lessened competition in the rental, purchase, sale, supply and exhibition thereof; the whole contrary to the provisions of section 496 and 498 of the criminal code.<sup>44</sup>

Judge Louis Cousineau consented to hear Laine and Garson’s case, and additionally granted Superior Superior an interim injunction prohibiting the Snowdon to show Vitagraph films not yet exhibited at the Kent.<sup>45</sup>

Hearings for the priority case were set to begin at the Montreal Superior Court on March 17, 1944. In their pleas, the Defendants presented tightly coordinated defenses –

which should come as no surprise, since United had from the outset agreed to foot the bill for Vitagraph's defense and to pay up any eventual damages awarded to Superior Theatres.<sup>46</sup> (It could be argued that this situation reveals more about the power and influence of the Famous Players-affiliated United Amusement than it does about Vitagraph's own interests in the case.) Superior reprised an argument it had already made in 1942 in its first case to the Wartime Prices and Trade Board, and claimed that Vitagraph's long-standing policy of renting films to independent exhibitors in-between runs in United theatres had been "brusquely changed upon the insistence of United Amusement." A Vitagraph notice informing Superior that a number of previously agreed upon play dates in their theatres had been cancelled due to "circumstances beyond [the exchange's] control" was produced in court by Superior.<sup>47</sup>

Unsurprisingly, United Amusement and Vitagraph disputed most of the claims of the Kent theatre's operators. Vitagraph stated in its testimony that the Kent "[did] not possess any of the contractual rights which it [pretended] to have." This bold assertion evidently proceeded from Vitagraph's main claim, which was that the Kent theatre had actually let its Vitagraph contract lapse through "negligence, delay and carelessness." The claim at the core of both Vitagraph's and United Amusement's arguments however remained that "the zone system which the Plaintiff pretends to exist has, in fact, become quite obsolete in the City and District of Montreal since at least fourteen years." This assertion was supported by some distributors outside of court. In a letter to Henry Chauvin, RKO's Montreal branch manager, H.F. Taylor, defined a "zone" as "a competitive area agreed upon by a Board of Distributors and Exhibitors," and argued that "as no such Board ever sat in Montreal, then there is no zoning for the mutual use of exhibitors and distributors."<sup>48</sup> United stated in its plea that the disappearance of zones in Montreal had been brought by its method "of

contracting for all its theatres en bloc and determining the order of priority in which the pictures are exhibited by its various theatres.”

Through the months-long series of proceedings that followed, a wealth of data regarding the practices and operations of Montreal’s vertically integrated distributors and exhibitors was – much to the benefits of future historians – made public through the pleas, testimonies and documents produced in court. Taken as a whole, this evidence constitutes a fascinating snapshot of Montreal’s film market in the months leading to the coming of Odeon. It confirms that the downtown movie palaces operated by the Famous Players-affiliated Consolidated Theatres remained entitled to the first-run of most of the productions handled by the leading distributors of English-language films. This could be followed by a second downtown run at Consolidated’s Imperial if a film had done well during its first-run. Each film then became available to the United Amusement circuit forty-nine days after the conclusion of its first-run (thirty-five if it had been shown as part of a double-bill). United benefited from a ninety days (nearly thirteen weeks) period to show the film in its theatres scattered across the island of Montreal.<sup>49</sup> The circuit’s representatives however testified in court that seven or eight weeks were generally sufficient to cover United’s twenty theatres.

**[Figure 6.2]**

A secondary claim made by United’s legal team was that the issue of zones was ultimately trumped by that of prints in the local film market. By the early 1940s, distributors were still striking two prints for the Quebec release of most titles, with a third print being sometimes borrowed from a neighboring Province and made available to United for the first weeks of its exclusivity period (see chapter 2). The limited availability of prints permitted Henry Chauvin to claim in a letter to RKO’s Montreal bureau that: “When an exhibitor in the west end of the City states that he should not have to wait upon a theatre in the east end,

he raises a question that does not exist, the point being that he has to wait because there is no print available for him.”<sup>50</sup> United thus claimed in court that its centralized booking system actually benefited independent exhibitors. The chain’s main argument on that regard was that, by making it possible to cut down the time necessary to cover its twenty Montreal theatres from thirteen to eight weeks, its centralized booking system actually granted independent exhibitors a better access to most film releases. United further emphasized the fact that it was not asking for any protection period, and that competing theatres were consequently free to book films the day after their last showing in a United theatre.

Superior Theatres meanwhile attempted to demonstrate that Famous Players and its affiliates were actually responsible for the distributors’ allegedly unfair practices. Swards produced a special witness in the person of Archie J. Mason, an independent exhibitor from Springhill, Nova Scotia, and the Chairman of the National Council of Independents. Mason appeared before Judge Cousineau on April 3, after a brief adjournment of the hearings. In his testimony, the Nova Scotia exhibitor asserted that Famous Players had pressured distributors into subjecting his Springhill theatre to an abusive clearance period (a claim familiar the readers of the 1931 White Report) in order to protect the theatre it was operating sixteen miles away. Mason’s testimony did not worry United’s legal team, who judged most of his claims irrelevant.<sup>51</sup>

Mason nevertheless caused United Amusement’s counsel some discomfort by stating that, as a Famous Players affiliate, the Montreal chain benefited from the Paramount, RKO and Fox franchises held by Famous. Mason then reiterated the central claim made by commissioner Peter White back in 1931, namely that Famous Players controlled most distributors through these franchises, as well as through the massive combined buying power of its chain and various affiliates. Judging that this line of argument had to be countered,

Chauvin requested some complementary data on these franchises from Famous Players. “I would like to know,” explained Chauvin, “the worst that could be proven against us. I am not nervous about the result but I do not wish to be taken by surprise.”<sup>52</sup> United and Famous eventually determined that two lines of argument could be used to counter Mason’s claim. They could first bring out the fact that similar charges had been dismissed when Famous Players had been prosecuted in Ontario under the Combines Act in 1932 (see Chapter 3).<sup>53</sup> The defense could, secondly, attempt to demonstrate that, contrary to Mason’s claim, United did not benefit from the various franchises held by Famous Players.<sup>54</sup>

In court, tension mounted as Superior’s counsel, Swards, summoned George Ganetakos to be questioned. United’s managing-director proved to be either a “difficult” or “splendid” witness depending on which side of the case one sat.<sup>55</sup> In a letter to Fitzgibbons (who had also been summoned), Chauvin lauded Ganetakos for his ability to throw his opponent without falling into contempt of court. Chauvin’s letter also reveal the mounting level of acrimony between the case’s appellants and defendants:

I understand you have arranged to have your evidence taken in Toronto instead of coming here to suffer from the nasty tongue of Mr. Swards. George is proving to be a match from the swollen headed lawyer, but unless you have got your Irish up, it is better to avoid insults under the protection of the Court.<sup>56</sup>

Sadly, Ganetakos’s lengthy testimony does not appear to have been preserved. It nevertheless seems that nothing much was revealed over the many days – eleven in all – during which Ganetakos was examined by Swards between April 3 and May 29, as United’s managing-director proved most adept at deflecting Swards’s increasingly pointed questions.

On the issue of franchises, Ganetakos merely stated that he had never made any direct use of the Famous-Lasky franchise transferred by Famous Players to United Amusement in 1924. Ganetakos for instance explained that while the agreement provided for a percentage deal, he favored flat prices for rentals. In a private communication with

Famous' management, United's counsel remarked that the Famous-Lasky franchise had actually expired on the last day of 1940.<sup>57</sup> Another claim made by Ganetakos was that the various franchises listed by Swards actually only covered the films' first-run, which Famous Players used in its own theatres. This was substantiated by Chauvin's analysis of the franchise contracts provided by Famous Players. In a letter to Fitzgibbons, United's counsel explained that he had concluded upon examining Famous Players' RKO franchise that: "if the others are in similar terms, Famous is unable to pass on any benefits to United and the distributors are free to contract freely with United."<sup>58</sup> United's general manager nevertheless admitted in court that he had always considered that the franchise had given him a "certain amount of assurance that he would always be able to get the Paramount programme." As for the United Amusement shares allotted to Famous Players in 1924 and 1936 (see chapters 3 and 4), Ganetakos testified that "the principal consideration [...] had been the undertaking by Famous not to build outside the down town district of Montreal."

This confusion over the scope and provisions of the various franchise agreements held by Famous Players is in a way very telling. It suggests an industry still largely governed, not by lawyers and written contracts, but by verbal agreements made by a few key players behind closed doors. It also reveals the familiarity and informality typical of the relations between most of the agents involved in the Canadian film industry – a consequence of the industry's relative stability over the preceding two decades. Up until the advent of Odeon Theatres of Canada, most of the exhibitors and distributors seemed to have known their place in the industry's hierarchy, and to have more or less willfully stuck to it. All appear to have been well aware that the slightest hint of discord would have greatly helped the cause of the proponents of governmental intervention.

It could be noted that this *modus operandi* inherited from the industry's wild and woolly early days (in which most of the key individuals involved in the Kent case had participated) may also be linked to the confusion and infighting that had followed the expiration of the voting trust governing Famous Players in 1939. Moore has described how Nathanson fell out with his US partners when it became clear that the new head of Paramount, Barney Balaban, would not honor an unwritten promise purportedly made by his predecessor, Adolph Zukor, at the time of his return to the company back in 1933. According to various sources, Nathanson had been led to believe that he would gain official control of Famous Players at the expiration of the voting trust, which obviously did not happen.<sup>59</sup>

Ganetakos's apparent lack of interest for written contracts did not prevent Swards from questioning him on a particular clause of the agreement signed by Famous Players and United Amusement on October 27, 1936, which specified that:

Famous Players obliges itself [...] to assist the United in every reasonable manner during the currency of these presents in the purchase of films for all theatres in which the United Company is or shall be interested.<sup>60</sup>

Ganetakos claimed that the assistance he had received had been "limited to information in respect to any request that he might make upon Famous." He added that Famous had "means of knowing in advance of each contract season the pictures that were outstanding," and thus could give him a general idea of the value of each distributor's forthcoming programme. Swards tried to get Ganetakos to confess that Famous had "used its influence with the distributors in United's favor," but could not get anything out than the admission that, while "Famous might [...] have put in a good word for him," he himself "could not prove it."<sup>61</sup> Swards nevertheless managed to establish that United and Ganetakos had sold their privileged access to the films of the leading distributors to a few selected independent exhibitors. The Laval, Orléans and Lord Nelson theatres were identified as three of the

Montreal independents that had obtained a better run than Superior's theatres in exchange for "a small remuneration" to Ganetakos and/or United.<sup>62</sup>

In their private communications, United Amusement and Famous Players shared some more relevant information with their legal team. The letters preserved in the Cinéma Impérial collection thus give us a valuable insight into the management of the United chain, as well as the current state of its relationship with Famous Players' Toronto management. Through these, it becomes possible to somewhat gauge the influence exerted by various agents on the booking of United's theatres. In one of his letters, Henry Chauvin for instance made the much revealing observation:

I understand that since the late Mr. Nathanson severed his connection with Famous Players, United has contracted freely for its own pictures. As a matter of fact, I understand Nathanson's interest was to see that the United contracted with distributors, with whom he had a personal connection, rather than exercising any Franchise in Famous Players favour.<sup>63</sup>

Chauvin most likely referred to Regal Films, which distributed MGM in Canada, and still was managed by Nathan L. Nathanson's brother, Henry Nathanson.

In another letter, Chauvin noted that United was buying its films "under a selective contract," meaning that it was not obliged to book all of the pictures handled by the distributors with which it contracted.<sup>64</sup> United reported having contracted for 223 pictures in 1942-1943, out of 489 actual releases (554 had been announced). The chain's minimum requirement was 208 pictures (two features for each show, two changes of programme per week, fifty-two weeks a year). Chauvin explained that: "An exhibitor must contract for more than he actually requires, because some pictures are failures and are not exhibited, or their exhibition is cut short, and every exhibitor knows the producers never produce all they plan to produce."<sup>65</sup> Once a film had been rejected by United, it could be offered to the competing exhibitors.<sup>66</sup>

United further argued that the priority it enjoyed over Superior theatres and its other independent competitors was more than a contractually guaranteed right. In the opinion of the chain's counsel, it quite simply was a most fair and natural situation:

[The distributor's] interest is to have the films widely exhibited. The more exhibitions, the greater his profit. An exhibitor having 26 theatres and there being two prints available, rents the two prints for thirteen runs. How does that discourage other exhibitors. The exhibitors who have to wait are compensated by a lower price. The Kent theatre plays after the United but its admission prices are the same and the cost of its pictures is about one-tenth of the cost paid by the Snowdon theatre. All of which proves the absence of discouragement.<sup>67</sup>

Distribution sheets produced in court by United Amusement (see figure 6.2) showed that rental prices widely varied even between the chain's own theatres, depending on capacity, admission prices, run duration, and priority. The Warner feature *Northern Pursuit* (Raoul Walsh, 1943) was for instance leased for sums varying from \$295.10 (Théâtre Français, four days) to \$30 (Mount Royal theatre, three days), with nine United theatres paying more than one hundred dollars. As for the Kent, it would later pay \$27.50 to obtain the privilege to exhibit the film. United's counsel claimed that exhibitors simply had to pay for "the main advantage that one exhibitor can obtain over another," priority. Chauvin further argued that: "this priority of run is a legitimate aim, it does not prevent or lessen competition in any way."<sup>68</sup> With this argument, United conveniently skirted round one of the case's main issues, which was that a huge chunk of the Montreal film market was blocked by the chain. Indeed, in order to compete with United, an independent exhibitor would have to be ready to pay more than \$300 for each film rental, or be prepared to wait several months in order to obtain the same title for less than \$30. Very little could be accomplished between these two extremes.

In his June 12, 1944, judgment, Judge Cousineau stated that Superior Theatres "had proven that there was a prima facie case of illegal combine and undue trade in the Montreal

area.” Superior was thus granted an interim injunction forbidding United’s Snowdon theatre to play Warner features before the Kent theatre until the petition for permanent injunction could be heard on October 30.<sup>69</sup> United responded by sticking to its claim that the Superior Court had no jurisdiction over the case. The chain’s counsel asserted that, by effectively changing the runs for which United Amusement and Kent Theatres had contracted since 1941, the injunction contravened the War Measures Act, which stated that only the Wartime Prices and Trade Board could intervene in such matters. United’s counsel further argued that this four months injunction would actually outlast the debated contracts, which were set to expire on August 31, 1944.<sup>70</sup> Beyond these technicalities and jurisdiction issues, United’s attorneys also contested Judge Cousineau’s comments on the main issue at stake, by stating that:

[United]’s method of contracting for all its theatres at one time is not illegal and is the most natural method possible, and the fact that [United] determines the order in which the films shall be exhibited in its various theatres, is a reasonable method of operating and does not alter the position of others having later runs from what it would have been had [United] contracted for a specific run for each one of its theatres.<sup>71</sup>

United predictably announced its intention to appeal from Judge Cousineau’s decision within hours. Orders were nevertheless given on June 12 to all United theatre managers to refrain from exhibiting the Warner pictures covered by the injunction.<sup>72</sup>

United’s appeal was granted in early July.<sup>73</sup> The specifics of what happened then remain hazy, as very few documents dealing with the ensuing proceedings seem to have been preserved. The eventual outcome of the series of proceedings instituted by Superior Theatres in January of 1944 has however been recorded and commented upon in trade journals and newspapers, as well as well as in the internal communications of United Amusement and Famous Players. From these, we can learn that on December 29, 1944 – that is, eleven months after Superior Theatres’ initial complaint to the Superior Court – the

Court of Appeal denied the jurisdiction of the Superior Court over film contracts, and thus put an end to Montreal's "Films War."<sup>74</sup>

United was once again free to sign contracts granting its more than twenty theatres priority over all the other Montreal theatres located out of the downtown area, as well as to let its head office determine which neighborhoods would see the pictures first. As for Superior Theatres, it was required to reimburse part of the legal expenses incurred by United. In the letter forwarding the payment received from Superior Theatres to George Ganetakos, a gloating Henry Chauvin could not refrain from making some snide comments: "I am sending you [...] Garson's letter enclosing the cheque [covering the costs] – I thought perhaps you might like to have both cheque and letter photostated and framed..."<sup>75</sup> In another letter to Famous Players' president, J.J. Fitzgibbons, Chauvin tried to give a positive spin on the bitter fight that had threatened to force United and Famous to significantly alter their business methods:

One very satisfying result of the litigation is the failure of the opposite party to make anything out of his contention that the methods employed by United Amusement Corporation Limited erected a monopoly, or that its contracts with [Famous Players] or with the distributors were in restraint of trade.

Our opponent made a great effort to make good his contentions that there was a monopoly and also restraint of trade and because of this effort its failure is all the more gratifying. Even the trial Judge, who was at all times most favourably disposed towards our opponents [...] did not express any opinion on the questions of monopoly or restraint of trade, and if he did not, we can be sure it was because he could not.<sup>76</sup>

Chauvin declared himself confident that no further actions would be brought out in the case.

One might however suspect that the priority fight still had some valuable outcomes for Superior Theatres and its backers. The independent chain had, after all, managed to force United Amusement to produce in court a large number of documents pertaining to the management and programming of its theatres, including:

- All motion picture contracts entered into by United Amusement since the year 1937 with all distributors of motion pictures, including Vitagraph, in the District of Montreal;
- All contracts under which United Amusement had acquired theatres since its organization in 1924;
- All contracts between United Amusement and its associates in the exhibition of motion picture film.

The 106 documents produced “under protest” by United in court included contracts with all established Canadian film distributors (the one exception being, once again, France-Film), as well as multiple contracts with Famous Players, Confederation Amusements, Standard Amusement and many film theatres, including Lachine’s Royal Alexandra and Empress theatres, Verdun’s Savoy, St. Hyacinthe’s Maska, Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu’s Imperial, as well as Montreal’s Seville, Granada, Plaza, Rialto, Rosemount, Laval and Amherst.<sup>77</sup> The wealth of data concerning United’s activities contained therein most assuredly did not fail to interest the chain’s competitors.

### **Odeon Steps In**

A first reference to a possible takeover of the Superior circuit can be found in the aforementioned December 6, 1944, letter sent by Henry Chauvin to Famous Players’ Fitzgibbons. “I understand,” wrote Chauvin, “that our opponents have made or are in the process of making a deal.”<sup>78</sup> The following week, the *Canadian Film Weekly* did indeed announce on its front page that, according to a story having reached New York from British sources, Odeon Theatres of Canada was in the process of negotiating the purchase of the eight theatres operated in Montreal and St. Jerome by Jules Laine and Ben Garson.<sup>79</sup> Over

the next few weeks, the *Canadian Film Weekly* would make several other references to Superior and Odeon's "noisy secret."<sup>80</sup>

Odeon Theatres of Canada's own circuitous history might help us understand why rumors of its takeover of Superior Theatres first emanated from British sources. As Moore has demonstrated, while the chain had ostensibly been created as a Canadian enterprise in 1941, British interests had always been involved in the affairs of the Canadian Odeon.<sup>81</sup> Following the 1943 death of the new chain's mastermind, Nathan L. Nathanson, the association with J. Arthur Rank's Odeon Theatres Ltd. had been rendered official by his son Paul, then president of Odeon Theatres of Canada. **[Figure 6.3]** Paul Nathanson would eventually sell out completely to Rank in 1946.<sup>82</sup>

The Odeon Theatres of Canada - Superior Theatres deal was finally consummated on February 14, 1945. The *Weekly* would later report that Odeon had acquired Laine and Garson's chain for a rumored price of \$1,250,000.<sup>83</sup> The acquisition of Superior's venues permitted Odeon to make its first foray in the Montreal market, as well as to suddenly quintuple the number of theatres it controlled in the Province of Quebec: to the Capitol and Alexandra theatres it had recently acquired in Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu and Rouyn, Odeon added the St. Jerome Rex, the Verdun Palace and Perron Hall, as well as the Montreal Kent, Villeray, Beaubien, Electra, and Midway theatres. Odeon chose to retain Superior's personnel (keeping Don Guald as the Quebec chain's supervisor), but decided to give the regional circuit a new name: General Theatres (Quebec) Limited.<sup>84</sup> Superior's builders retired from Montreal soon after the signature of the deal with Odeon. Jules Laine went into the electronics business in Toronto, where he would die of a heart attack in 1948 at the age of fifty-one.<sup>85</sup> Ben Garson sold his poster exchange to Tommy Trow and John G. Ganetakos in 1947, and subsequently acquired a few small-town film theatres in Ontario.<sup>86</sup> He would

however make a comeback as a Montreal showman in the 1950s, when he took over the St. Catherine Street West Seville theatre previously operated by United Amusement and turned it into a concert venue. Some of the acts booked by Garson at the Seville in the 1950s included Tony Bennett, Peggy Lee and Harry Belafonte.<sup>87</sup>

As anticipated by Chauvin, Odeon's takeover of Superior Theatres put a definitive end to the Kent priority case. The transaction also brought closure to an ongoing fight opposing Superior and the Quebec government that had dragged on since February of 1944, when the chain had been charged with the unlawful admittance of children at the Verdun Palace.<sup>88</sup> Superior, had replied – quite ironically, given the outcome of the Kent's case – by contesting the provincial government's jurisdiction over two issues looming large in the minds of Quebec exhibitors: censorship and the admission of children in commercial moving picture theatres.<sup>89</sup>

Legal proceedings in the Verdun Palace's case dragged on for more than a year, and eventually caused none other than Quebec prime minister Maurice Duplessis to intervene. Back in power after having defeated Adélard Godbout's liberals in the August 8, 1944 provincial election, Duplessis personally suspended the Verdun Palace's license in the winter of 1945. Duplessis stated that his government would not let any violation of the laws of the Province of Quebec go unpunished, and further added that: "if these people wish to give the spectacle of contempt of law, we will treat them as they deserve, [...] and if our law is not sufficient, we will pass other laws."<sup>90</sup> This show of strength undoubtedly aimed to assuage the nationalists groups, including André Laurendeau's Bloc Populaire and the Société St-Jean-Baptiste, that had been most vocal in their criticism of the film industry in recent years. The Verdun Palace's new owner, General Theatres (Quebec), quickly put an end to this fight

by publicly stating that it had every intention of observing the provincial law banning the admission of children. An Odeon representative explained that:

The policy of challenging the law by admitting children under sixteen was continued automatically, it having been overlooked by Odeon executives, who were preoccupied with reorganization of Superior as General Theatres (Quebec) as well as the Canadian structure. There was a lull in legal action prior and during the change of ownership and the policy escaped attention until it came up in the House.<sup>91</sup>

General Theatres' decision seems to have assuaged the provincial government, which returned the Verdun Palace's license after a suspension that had lasted for all of one day.

One could be forgiven for questioning Odeon's explanation for its Verdun Palace snafu – or, for that matter, for doubting that a small independent circuit such as Superior Theatres could on its own simultaneously pick up fights with United Amusement and the provincial government. Jules Laine and Ben Garson most assuredly knew that some very influential groups – Famous Players, the Catholic clergy, nationalist organizations – would inevitably come to the help of their opponents in the Kent and Verdun Palace cases. The synchronicity of the two cases, furthermore, remains quite surprising. A few odd facts suggest that this wasn't exactly a coincidence brought by random events. In the petition it had presented to the Superior Court in the Kent priority case, Superior Theatres had for instance stated that, though it had been aware of an illegal practices for many years, it had only acquired sufficient evidence “a few days ago.”<sup>92</sup> It had however proved reluctant – or incapable – to reveal exactly what that evidence was when questioned by United's counsel. The synchronicity of the Kent and Verdun Palace cases may consequently point, not to the sudden discovery of new evidence, but to the intervention of some powerful, hidden interest.

While documents establishing Odeon's involvement in the Kent and Verdun Palace cases have yet to turn up, the possibility that the new national chain might have stage-

managed or bankrolled both cases prior to its acquisition of Superior should not be ruled out. A plausible scenario would have Odeon striking a deal with Laine and Garson over the winter of 1944, whereby in exchange for a promise to eventually buy Laine's and Garson's theatres, Odeon would obtain the right to first send the doomed Superior Theatres on a few suicide missions. Using Superior as a front would have been a clever move on Odeon's part. The Kent and Verdun Palace cases undoubtedly helped Odeon by permitting it – be it as a stage manager or as an external observer – to gauge resistance and assess possible courses of action in relation to the three main issues hampering film exhibition in Quebec: Famous Players' monopoly, censorship, and the admission of children. That, without compromising its reputation in Quebec, and without antagonizing the distributors and exhibitors connected to Famous Players. As demonstrated by the pardon readily granted by Duplessis to the Verdun Palace, Odeon's reputation was indeed intact when the chain first entered the Montreal market in the winter of 1945. Contrarily to Laine and Garson's Superior Theatres, it had never attempted to upset hierarchies and local customs.

By the time it officially acquired Superior Theatres in the winter of 1945, Odeon Theatres of Canada knew that it could not beat Famous Players and United Amusement at their own game. The Kent case had not left any doubt regarding Famous and United's tight grip on the output of the major US studios, which rested on its extensive network covering both the city's downtown area and outlying neighborhoods.<sup>93</sup> Odeon's national management would however prove crafty enough to seize the new opportunities developing in the postwar years. Moore has already described how Odeon had made the most of seemingly adverse situations by tailoring its strategies to local conditions across Canada in its first years. In Vancouver, Odeon had successfully exploited the vogue for the new modern, streamlined style of architecture with the theatres it built or acquired, and had in the process managed to

make Famous Players' older movie palaces seem outmoded. In loyalist Ontario, the chain had rather chosen to emphasize its connection to British Odeon and the Rank organization. Many of the chain's Ontario theatres were thus built in a style evoking the theatres designed by Harry Weedon for Oscar Deutsch's British Odeon. The British connection was further emphasized by the exhibition of British films at the grand openings of several Ontario Odeon theatres.<sup>94</sup> In short, Odeon managed to gain a prominent position in several regional markets nation-wide, not by competing directly with the deeply entrenched Famous Players, but rather by devising a set of practices and policies suited to local conditions and attuned to changing circumstances.

In the mid to late 1940s, changing conditions meant two things to Montreal film exhibitors: dubbing, and new territories. On November 23, 1943, Quebec City's Capitol, a Famous Players operation, had been the first Quebec theatre to exhibit *Le ciel et toi*, the French-dubbed version of *All This, and Heaven Too*, a Bette Davis vehicle first released by Warner in the summer of 1940. At the end of the film's run, Warner representative Wolfe Cohen explained to the *Canadian Film Weekly* that "the engagement [had been] in the nature of a test," and that "its success [would] help determine the extent to which other French versions [would] be exhibited in the Province of Quebec."<sup>95</sup>

*Le ciel et toi* had been dubbed in Hollywood by co-star Charles Boyer and a host of French exiles. These were soon joined by many French-Canadians brought to Hollywood to work on dubbed versions over the first months of 1944.<sup>96</sup> The liberation of France by the allied troupes seemed imminent, and Hollywood studios were getting ready to take back the French market with four years-worth of already paid for productions. Quebec would greatly benefit from this bounty of French-language products.

The exhibition of *Le ciel et toi* at the Quebec City Capitol proved to be an unprecedented success. Initially booked for four days, the film ended up playing for an exceptional nine-days run, during which it set a new all-time house record for the theatre. The *Canadian Film Weekly* reported that more than 25,000 “French-Canadians” had turned up to see the film. An excited Hye Bossin went on to call the event “one of the most interesting experiments in Canadian motion picture history,” and to solemnly declare that:

Films of this type will mean a great deal to the future unity of Canada. Imported French films have expressed the ideas of the Old World and Hollywood product was hindered in its good intentions by the language barrier.

The coming of films to Quebec, each of which makes plain modern ideas that have value in spreading general understanding, is an event of importance. Nor must it be forgotten that our French-speaking fellow-Canadians can now get the same pleasure from motion pictures as English-speaking peoples, for whom they are primarily made.<sup>97</sup>

The discourse surrounding the success of *Le ciel est à toi* thus reveals some troubling attitudes toward the French language and French-Canadian culture. This, of course, was nothing new, as demonstrated by the commentary stating that “Montreal may soon be talking English exclusively, thanks to talking pictures” published by the *Motion Picture News* and reprised by the *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* at the time of the Montreal debut of the talkies in 1928 (see chapter 5).<sup>98</sup>

Beyond their superficial shift of focus from language to culture, what the two last quotes from the trade press reveal is a disquieting ignorance of French-Canadian culture. From the vantage point of New York and Toronto’s trade journals, French Canada seems to have been a void to be filled, be it by “Old World” or “plain modern” ideas. Francophones were not defined by the language they used, but rather by their lack of command of the language of the Canadian imagined community, English. By the mid-1940s most of the agents participating in the Canadian film business had yet to recognize the fact that some

French-Canadian artists, writers and performers, were engaged in the creation of a genuine French-Canadian mass popular culture.

To be fair, Hollywood's opponents in Quebec also contributed to the marginalization of French-Canadian culture. The various religious and nationalist groups denouncing the denationalizing influence of Hollywood cinema routinely presented the national cinema of a foreign country, France, as well as the ideals of a transnational organization, the Catholic Church, as two of the main standard bearers of French-Canadian patriotism.<sup>99</sup> One would for instance be hard-pressed to distinguish a French-Canadian accent in Quebec's first theatrical feature-length talking picture, *Le père Chopin*. Shot in the Laurentians and Montreal in the late summer of 1944, this Renaissance films production was directed by a Russian émigré, Fedor Ozep, and employed several French actors and technicians.<sup>100</sup> Mostly confined to secondary roles, the French-Canadian actors appearing in the film spoke a sort of generic *français international*. While this situation could partly be explained by Renaissance films' hope to get its first feature distributed in liberated France, it still appears to be a product of the reverence of the French-Canadian elite for France's "high culture."

This undue reverence had just been lampooned in Gratien Gélinas' 1942 short film comedy *La dame aux camélias, la vraie* ("The Real Camille"), in which the character of Fridolin, a boy from Montreal's east end, masquerades as a movie mogul ("Sam Fridolinovitch") and undertakes to narrate Alexandre Dumas Jr.'s classic story from his particular point of view. In Fridolin's version, "Margot" Gauthier and "Joseph-Armand" Duval's torrid love affair comically unwinds in snack bars, bingo halls and tombolas. Significantly, *La dame aux camélias, la vraie* had entirely been produced and exhibited outside the film industry: it had been shot on 16mm Kodachrome by non-professionals, and exhibited in the theatres where Gélinas' annual revue was presented.

The resounding success of *Le ciel et toi* would however contribute to the slow awakening of the film industry to the needs of the French-Canadian community. A few weeks after the film's premiere at the Quebec City Capitol, Warner announced that at least eighteen other pictures recently dubbed in French in Hollywood would be released in the Province of Quebec before the end of the 1943-1944 season. As had been the case with *Le ciel et toi*, these versions were first exhibited at the Quebec City Capitol. Several months would elapse before the Montreal public was permitted to view them in the spring of 1944, once again in a Famous Players theatre, the downtown Orpheum.<sup>101</sup> **[Figure 6.4]** An old vaudeville house located on St. Catherine Street West at City Councillors, the Orpheum had just been acquired by Famous Players through its subsidiary Consolidated Theatres in January of 1944, in a transaction also involving the Gayety Theatre, a burlesque house built in 1912.<sup>102</sup>

A revealing fact pertaining to Consolidated Theatres' acquisition of the Gayety is that the Famous Players-controlled chain did not attempt to change the theatre's policy from burlesque to moving pictures in the months following the transaction. (This decision incidentally permitted the Gayety to be the site of a momentous event in Montreal's cultural history a few months after its acquisition by Famous Players: the local debut of "beautiful streamlined dancing sensation" Lili St. Cyr.<sup>103</sup>) This suggests that Consolidated did not acquire the Gayety because it needed an additional venue to screen films, but because it wanted to prevent Famous Players' new competitor, Odeon, from breaking its monopoly on downtown first-run theatres. A contemporary *Variety* news item indeed reported that "interests connected with the Odeon picture theatre circuit in Toronto" had also been dickered for the acquisition of the Orpheum and Gayety theatres.<sup>104</sup> The whole story actually was a repeat of the sale of the building of the Montreal Loew's theatre, which

Consolidated fully integrated to its chain in the fall of 1942 in order to prevent Nathanson's Odeon from seizing one of Montreal's top three film theatres.<sup>105</sup>

The four months gap between the introduction of dubbed versions in Quebec City in November of 1943 and in Montreal in April of 1944 can partly be explained by the experimental nature of the first Capitol bookings. That being said, it may also be that Famous Players simply wished to wait for a sufficient supply of French-language products to build up before it changed the Orpheum's policy to a mixture of French versions and French films. In any case, the Montreal theatres' grosses published weekly by *Variety* suggest that the Orpheum's French policy was largely successful. In July of 1944, *Blanche-Neige et les sept nains*, the French version of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (David Hand, Walt Disney Production, 1937), for instance filled the Orpheum to capacity for the duration of its two weeks engagement. *Blanche-Neige's* success is made even more significant by the fact that the film's original English version was concurrently playing on the other side of the street at another Consolidated theatre, the Princess.<sup>106</sup> Popular demand for French-dubbed versions could therefore not be more clearly demonstrated.

In the two short years following their introduction at the Quebec City Capitol in the fall of 1943, French versions became one of the mainstays of film exhibition in the Province of Quebec. In June of 1946, the *Canadian Film Weekly* thus reported that over a half of the Province's moving picture theatres played "all" or "half-French" programs. According to the same *Weekly* report, French pictures and French dubs were by then accounting for seventy-five per cent of the operating hours of Quebec theatres. Still playing the Hollywood vs. French cinema angle, the *Weekly* claimed that "Hollywood films dubbed in French have proved more popular with the public than made in France features, largely due to superior

technique and stars of established appeal.” Hye Bossin went on to offer more observations on the appeal of dubbed pictures:

A peculiarity of that type of exhibition is that films excessively talky [...] acquire superior earning power when their French prints are played. People of Quebec who patronize English language features learn through word-of-mouth that a superfluity of dialogue will tax their understanding of the tongue and stay away, biding their time until the arrival of the French version...<sup>107</sup>

The same *Weekly* piece also revealed that a J. Arthur Rank-controlled distributor, Eagle-Lion of Canada, was planning to bring French-produced films to Quebec exhibitors.<sup>108</sup> It moreover claimed that, while Warner was at the time the sole distributor to offer French short subjects, the Quebec market was “being eyed by others in the brevities business.”

As predicted by the *Weekly*, the market for French language films kept expanding over the second half of the 1940s. In August of 1948, a new *Weekly* report claimed that: “The French-Canadian market, concentrated in Quebec, has proved to be quite profitable and almost every distributing company will be represented in it with dubs or originals.” These included MGM, Twentieth Century-Fox, Warner, Columbia, Eagle-Lion, RKO, Paramount, Empire-Universal, France-Film, Astral Film and Alliance Films.<sup>109</sup>

Bossin’s decision to quote “operating hours,” and not the more commonly used admission or revenue figures, in his aforementioned June of 1946 discussion of the French-language film market nevertheless points a most salient fact regarding the early history of the exhibition of French-language films in the Province of Quebec. In order to make for a punchier report, the *Weekly*’s editor made sure to pick the one figure giving more weight to smaller non-metropolitan theatres. Indeed, it does appear that, throughout Quebec, small-town independent theatres had been much more swift and enthusiastic in their adoption of French-dubbed versions than the larger theatres operated in Montreal by Famous Players, United Amusement and Confederation Amusements. This was duly noted by Bossin, who

remarked in his June 1946 piece that French-language films were not getting the playing time they would have seemed to warrant in Montreal.

This situation was mainly caused by the fact that, in spite of the initial success of French-dubbed versions at the Quebec City Capitol and Montreal Orpheum, Famous Players refused to embrace French-language pictures on a large scale in Montreal. After more than four years as a French-language theatre, the Orpheum for instance reverted to a first-run English policy in August of 1948.<sup>110</sup> It still was at the time the only downtown theatre showing French versions. (Famous Players would eventually get back in the game four years later with the 1952 opening of the Alouette theatre, a new downtown theatre dedicated – as its name hinted – to French-language films.<sup>111</sup>) In Montreal's various neighborhoods, the theatres operated by United Amusement also rather infrequently booked French-language films.

Part of explanation for the established chains' lack of enthusiasm for French-dubbed versions might be related to the fact that these were generally more expensive to book than original English versions – a situation that had led Bossin to claim that “while the [Quebec] public prefers the dubbed product, the exhibitor does not, since the other kind usually costs him less.”<sup>112</sup> Famous Players and United Amusement may also have had slightly different additional reasons for not using French-language pictures more extensively. The former might have been put off by the long delays involved in the production of French versions: Hollywood films had to be sent to France to be dubbed, and then shipped back across the Atlantic to Quebec. This process took time: by the late 1940s, it was not uncommon for a film's French-dubbed version to be released in the Province of Quebec more than two years after the original English version. Years old pictures are not the type of thing that one usually wants to see – or exhibit – in a 2,500-seat downtown palace. (According to Quebec

exhibitor Jacques Martin, this long delay could also be partly attributed to the fact that Canadian film distributors had discovered that a few years' gap between the releases of the English and French versions was often profitable, as many francophone moviegoers did not mind seeing for the second time a film they barely remembered.<sup>113</sup>)

The location of Famous Players' theatres might also have deterred the programming of French-language films. While French-dubbed versions films could in all probability only attract customers recruited from the francophone half of Montreal, English-language films could simultaneously pull patrons from the anglophone half of the city and from a significant chunk of the francophone population. Given the central location of Famous Players' downtown picture palaces, it would have been surprising to see the chain give up on the anglophone community by emphasizing its programming of French-dubbed versions. Location might have been less of an issue for United, who operated several theatres in neighborhoods harboring a large francophone population. Yet United's privileged access to Hollywood's recent production remained the most important thing setting its theatres apart from the opposition. There consequently seems to have been very little incentive for it to change a programming strategy that had up until then proved highly successful.

Bossin nevertheless noted in his 1946 piece on French-language films in Quebec that French-dubbed versions had at least one proponent in the greater Montreal area: Odeon's "suburban circuit."<sup>114</sup> The "suburban" angle was actually as important to Odeon's postwar tactics as its extensive use of French-dubbed versions – in fact, both tactics appear to have been rendered effective by the other. In the aftermath of the Kent priority case, Odeon had conceded the downtown area to Consolidated Theatres and the various neighborhoods situated close to the city's core to United Amusement and Confederation Amusements. The second half of the 1940s would however see Odeon trying to establish a strong presence in

the outlying east end francophone neighborhoods, which had been somewhat underscreened in the years when Hollywood films had only been available in English.

Odeon additionally sought to establish itself in the new territories opened by the expansion of the city of Montreal in the postwar era. According to figures quoted by a leading expert on the historical development of the city of Montreal, Jean-Claude Marsan, two-thirds of Montreal population had lived within a 6 km radius from the center of the city in 1941. By 1951, the area harboring the same proportion of the city's population had expanded to reach a 10 km radius.<sup>115</sup>

United Amusement was the first chain to move into Montreal's rapidly developing north end. It opened in late 1946 the city's first postwar theatre, the Ahuntsic, a few blocks east of St. Denis Street on what is now Henri-Bourassa Boulevard. Odeon's postwar building campaign would however prove more sustained.<sup>116</sup> On October 9, 1947, Odeon opened the Crémazie theatre at 8610 St. Denis. The new theatre was located a few blocks north of the Villeray theatre (8046 St. Denis), which Odeon had acquired from Superior Theatres in 1945.<sup>117</sup> In the east end, where it already operated the old Electra at 1114 St. Catherine Street East, Odeon opened the Mercier (4260 St. Catherine Street East) on January 15, 1947, and the Champlain (1815 St. Catherine Street East, at Papineau), on March 28, 1948.<sup>118</sup>

All of the new theatres opened in Montreal by Odeon in the postwar years were built and decorated in a late variation on the streamline style particular to Montreal, and consequently stood apart from both the baroque silent era palaces operated by Famous Players and United Amusement, and the fancy art deco theatres built by Confederation. This choice further distinguished Odeon's Quebec theatres from those erected by the chain in Ontario, which were more strongly influenced, as we have seen, by the clean modern style

associated with British Odeon theatres. The programmes exhibited by the north end and east end Odeon theatres also reflected the specificity of the neighborhoods in which they were operating. According to the *Canadian Film Weekly*, the Mercier, Villeray, Electra and Champlain theatres, as well as the Verdun Palace, were part of the “Cinéma canadien” group, a subset of Odeon theatres regularly showing “French originals from Paris, French versions of J. Arthur Rank English releases completed in Paris, and dubbed versions of Hollywood films.”<sup>119</sup> The aforementioned “French originals” were mostly French Gaumont productions acquired by J. Arthur Rank and distributed through Eagle-Lion of Canada.<sup>120</sup>

**[Figure 6.5]**

Advertisements for Odeon’s Quebec flagship, the Montreal Champlain, did indeed proudly proclaim that the new theatre would be “dedicated to first-run French pictures.” The testimony of Odeon insider Jacques Martin however reveals that the chain’s national management had initially been less than enthusiastic about the theatre’s French policy.

**[Figure 6.6]** According to Martin, who had risen through the ranks at Odeon to become the Mercier’s manager in the 1950s and then Odeon’s Quebec regional manager in the 1960s, the programming of French-language films in the organization’s Quebec theatres was a simple consequence of the fact that by 1948 the British pictures that the chain had initially planned to feature in its theatres had proved to be a definite flop, and that first or second run US pictures continued to be generally impossible to get.

Martin’s unpublished memoirs further disclose that clashes were frequent between Odeon’s unilingual anglophone head programmer, who allegedly showed very little interest for French-language films, and the chain’s French-Canadian theatre managers. According to Martin, a key figure in that struggle was that of Art Bahen. A native Montrealer of Irish descent, Bahen had first been hired by Ben Garson to manage the Verdun Palace in 1936. In

the early 1940s, he had been transferred to the Electra, and then to the Kent. After surviving both a stint in the RCAF and the sale of Superior Theatres to Odeon, Bahen had received some recognition for his managerial skills when he had been put in charge of the prestigious Champlain theatre in 1948. He would later become supervisor of Odeon's Quebec theatres in 1952, and eastern division manager in the late 1950s. Martin claims that Bahen more than made up for whatever deficiencies he might have had as a French speaker by surrounding himself with a group of talented and well-connected francophones, who could help him select and promote the attractions featured in Odeon's Quebec theatres. These included Bernard Heudes, publisher of *Cinécran* magazine; Jacques LaRoche (a.k.a. Jean Béraud), writer for *La Presse*; Rolland Côté, director of *Photo-Journal*; Roger Baulu, celebrated radio announcer; as well as Gérald Danis and his wife ("tante Lucille") from *Le Petit Journal*. Over the years, Bahen came to be regarded as a reliable ally by the francophones part of Odeon's organization in Quebec. The chain's Quebec managers had for instance quickly realized that, in order to have some input in the programming of their houses, the best strategy was to ignore the chain's head programmer and speak directly to Bahen.<sup>121</sup> In short, Martin's testimony reveals that the fruitful French-language policy adopted by many Quebec Odeon theatres was pushed by the chain's local representatives rather than imposed from above.

That being said, the promotional discourse surrounding the grand opening of the leading Quebec Odeon theatre, the 1,300-seat Champlain, on March 28, 1948, did not dwell as much on language as it did on another relative novelty: color. Having secured the Canadian premiere of the French production *Le mariage de Ramuntcho* (Max de Vaucorbeil, Films de France, 1947) for the event, Odeon actually was in a position to promise Montreal filmgoers something they had never seen before: a color French feature (*Le mariage de Ramuntcho* had been shot on Agfacolor stock, most likely seized from German sources at the

end of the war). [Figure 6.7] This novelty however did not prevent reviewers from throwing a few backhanded compliments at the grand opening's headlining attraction. *La Presse's* Jean Luce for instance commented that "while it does not sparkle like Technicolor, or even Cinecolor, the Agfacolor process does permit the taking of some very nice scenes, especially as far as landscapes of a lighter hue are concerned."<sup>122</sup> Color had also been the star attraction of the opening of Odeon's Crémazie on October 9, 1947 which had offered a double bill of Universal Technicolor features: *Song of Scheherazade* (Walter Reisch, 1947) and *The Michigan Kid* (Ray Taylor, 1947).<sup>123</sup> Both had originally been released more than half a year earlier. *The Michigan Kid* would also be featured at the grand opening of Odeon's Mercier on January 15, 1948.<sup>124</sup>

The various newspapers articles reporting on the Champlain's opening also emphasized the presence of many well-known personalities at the event. Montreal's mayor, the colorful Camillien Houde attended, as also did François-Philippe Brais, president of General Theatres, "British screen and stage star" Michael Redgrave, and J. Earl Lawson, president of the Canadian branch of the J. Arthur Rank organization. Still, to most filmgoers, the evening's most glamorous guest undoubtedly was André Dassary, the Basque operetta singer who had played the male lead in *Le mariage de Ramuntcho*. Dassary was in Montreal for the multi-weeks engagement of the operetta *Chanson gitane* at the Monument-National.<sup>125</sup>

The Champlain would remain the east end's most prestigious film theatres for many years. In an autobiographical novel set in 1955, writer Michel Tremblay describes the awe that the theatre still aroused in moviegoers a few years after its opening:

The Champlain had just been renovated, and I could not believe my eyes: we now had in the east end a theatre just as beautiful and even more modern than the Palace, Loew's and Capitol, pride of west end, where projection was the best in the world – or so we were told by the newspapers. I was convinced that projection would be even more perfect at the Champlain, and that *les Anglais*, O! naivety!, O! innocence!, would come all the way up to the corner of St. Catherine and Papineau to admire it...<sup>126</sup>

The Champlain's prestige was further enhanced in the francophone community by regular personal appearances by French stars of the stage and the screen, including Charles Trenet, Fernandel, Bourvil, Georges Guétary, and Andrex.<sup>127</sup>

Local talent was also regularly featured in Montreal Odeon theatres. At the time of the Mercier's opening, the *Canadian Film Weekly* for instance reported that:

House manager, Alf Goulet, a radio and stage producer, will also be responsible for a stage presentation, "Parade des vedettes" which will be included one night weekly in the regular bill. A French variety show, the stage presentation also plays a circuit of Odeon-GTQ houses in the Montreal area.<sup>128</sup>

The Maisonneuve Mercier would remain a major venue for the development of French-Canadian talent all through the 1950s.<sup>129</sup>

### **A New Equilibrium**

By the turn of the 1950s, the various theatre chains doing business in Montreal had once again reached some kind of tacit agreement over the products they would offer and the territories they would cover.<sup>130</sup> Consolidated Theatres' downtown palaces still exhibited first-run US films in their original English version. United Amusement and Confederation Amusements' extensive networks covered the city's outlying neighborhoods, where they were the first to show the US films exhibited downtown by Consolidated a few weeks before. France-Film, which had returned *en force* after the war, exhibited French films in its theatre network covering both the city's downtown and francophone neighborhoods, and additionally supplied French pictures to the few United and Confederation houses alternating between French and English programmes. Odeon theatres, as we have seen, specialized in French programmes of a different nature, being essentially made of French-dubbed versions of US features. The last chain to arrive on the Montreal scene did not

operate any theatre downtown, and mostly covered the francophone neighborhoods developing some distance to the north and to the east of downtown.

Odeon most notably signaled its acceptance of this *de facto* division of the market – which would remain essentially unchanged until the 1980s – by parting with its sole west end operation, the Kent theatre. Once the leading theatre of Ben Garson and Jules Laine’s independent chain, the Kent had proven increasingly difficult to programme as the years went by. In the second half of the 1940s, it had exhibited a mixture of B movies and older A class films (often initially released more than a year before), complemented by the occasional booking of some more highbrow works. Laurence Olivier’s *Hamlet* for instance had an exclusive engagement at the Kent simultaneous with its first New York run in October of 1948.<sup>131</sup> *Rome, Open City* (*Roma, città aperta*, Excelsa Films, 1945), Roberto Rossellini’s groundbreaking neorealist masterpiece, also had a two-weeks run at the Kent in the fall of 1949. This type of art-house fare sat quite awkwardly with the Kent’s regulars, as indicated by the fact that Odeon thought necessary to explain in its *Rome, Open City* publicity campaign that “English sub-titles enable everyone to easily follow every action, every word.”<sup>132</sup>

The Kent had been the site of an even wilder experiment in the summer of 1946 when its manager had attempted to branch out into the restaurant business by offering a complete evening meal in the theatre’s Café Lounge. Though it seems to have quickly failed, this experiment certainly succeeded in getting the attention of the national trade press. Hye Bossin jokingly predicted in the *Canadian Film Weekly* that, influenced by the Kent’s groundbreaking experiment:

Showmanship will take new twists [...]. Depending on the origin of the neighborhood folks, waves of aromas of spaghetti, gefilte fish, Irish stew, fish and chips and so on will be let loose on the street for an hour before the dining room opens. The cinema will give way to the smellodeon.<sup>133</sup>

The Kent's case thus provides us with a useful reminder of the fact that showmanship does not solely consist in the selecting and promoting of screen attractions. It also involves essential decisions regarding programme formats, as well as the place of non-film attractions. Bossin's comment further underlines how exhibitors, while undoubtedly partaking in a transnational business, had to adapt to local conditions in order to survive. While the Kent's manager decision to serve meals in his theatre most probably had something to do with the fact that the national chain for which he was working could not help him get the films that would have drawn crowds to his neighborhood theatre, one still cannot rule out the possibility that his decision might also have been influenced by the specifics of his situation, as well as by a number of unfathomable events or conditions. Contrarily to his east end colleagues, the Kent manager might not have had access to popular local comedians. He might, however, have had an unemployed cook for brother-in-law – who knows?

Experiments with international art cinema and meals still did not make the Kent any more profitable for Odeon, and by the early 1950s the chain was actively seeking out buyers. On March 19, 1951, Confederation Amusements, which was still operating the nearby Empress theatre, turned down a \$200,000 sale offer from Odeon. Three days later, the board of directors of the Westmount Theatre Co., a United Amusement subsidiary operating the Westmount theatre, convened to discuss the purchase of the Kent. The Westmount Theatre Co.'s board of directors was at this point composed of George Ganetakos, general manager of United Amusement; his son John G. Ganetakos, managing-director of Confederation Amusements; William Lester, United Amusement's second vice-president; and Harry Feldman. Both Ganetakoses opposed the acquisition, with George stating that he "did not like the Kent Theatre" and "was strongly against the purchase." They were however outvoted by Feldman and Lester (who, as president of the Westmount Theatre Co., could

cast an extra vote). The Kent was consequently purchased by the Westmount Theatre Co., and soon integrated the United Amusement chain.<sup>134</sup> Lester and Feldman had voted for the acquisition of the Kent mostly out of concern for the Avenue theatre, a large modern film theatre erected in 1946 and seating over 1,100. Also a United Amusement theatre, the Avenue was a personal project of Lester's, who had worked hard to obtain the first theatre building permit ever granted by the posh city of Westmount. The Avenue's operators obviously relished the occasion to wipe out the last remnants of competition in the west end.<sup>135</sup>

Throughout this chapter, we have successively seen two theatre chains follow very different paths, and yet reach complementary conclusions. As a newcomer in the Montreal market of the late 1930s, Superior Theatres discovered that the fact that its organization could count on a few capable managers well-versed in the specificities of their local market was not sufficient to insure its success if it could not also rely on the connections, financial backing, and buying power of a national organization. Lacking the privileged access to recent Hollywood films that its opposition benefited from, it tried to carry on by programming a mixture of older films and B pictures, but failed to carve itself a niche. As for its successor, Odeon, its strong financial backing permitted it to acquire Superior Theatres and build several state of the art theatres in the new neighborhoods developed in the postwar years. The national chain was however soon forced to recognize that successful policies for its theatres could only be devised in collaboration with its local managers and employees. In that regard, the new chain's experience reflected that of Famous Players, which also had also been forced to recognize the unique expertise of the builders of the United Amusement chain in the 1920s and 1930s.

## Endnotes

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- <sup>1</sup> Hye Bossin, "He Had the Common Touch," *Canadian Film Weekly* (2 June 1943): 6.
- <sup>2</sup> Paul S. Moore, "Nathan L. Nathanson Introduces Canadian Odeon: Producing National Competition in Film Exhibition," *Canadian Journal of Film Studies* 12:2 (fall 2003): 22-45.
- <sup>3</sup> Douglas Gomery, *Shared Pleasures: A History of Movie Presentation in the United States* (University of Wisconsin Press, Madison: 1992), 84.
- <sup>4</sup> The quoted receipts and admission figures do not include drive-ins and itinerant operators.
- <sup>5</sup> Montreal's population grew from 903,007 in 1941 to 1,036,542 in 1951. Source: Ville de Montréal, *Montréal en bref*, [http://ville.montreal.qc.ca/portal/page?\\_pageid=2076,2453865&\\_dad=portal&\\_schema=PORTAL](http://ville.montreal.qc.ca/portal/page?_pageid=2076,2453865&_dad=portal&_schema=PORTAL), last accessed 7 December 2009.
- <sup>6</sup> "Plenty PQ Playing Time for French-Dub Films," *Canadian Film Weekly* (22 July 1953): 1, 3.
- <sup>7</sup> *The Standard* (21 June 1941): 22.
- <sup>8</sup> Memorandum of agreement between Najeeb Lawand, Ameen Lawand, Tabah Cousins Limited, Fahed Tabah and United Amusement, 30 November 1937, Cinémathèque québécoise, CIC, B3 F83.
- <sup>9</sup> In January of 1942, a few months after the Kent's opening, the Westmount and Empress theatres were pooled, meaning that profits or losses were pooled and then split evenly between the two houses. This pooling agreement aimed to reduce competition between United Amusement's two partners in the operation of the Empress and the Westmount, Confederation Amusements and the Allens. Minutes of the meetings of the board of directors of United Amusement Corp., Ltd., 30 January 1925, 22 April 1925, 28 May 1926, 29 June 1926, 26 January 1942, CIC, B8 F232, F235.
- <sup>10</sup> Minutes of the meetings of the board of directors of United Amusement Corp., Ltd., 20 July 1927, 8 August 1927, 7 September 1927, 24 October 1929, CIC, B8 F232; "United Amusement Co. to Open New Monkland Theatre this Evening," *Montreal Daily Star* (7 March 1930): 16.
- <sup>11</sup> Dane Lanken, *Montreal Movie Palaces: Great Theatres of the Golden Era 1884-1938* (Waterloo: Penumbra Press, 1993), 152-153.
- <sup>12</sup> Plea of Vitagraph Ltd., in Kent Theatres, Ltd. vs United Amusement Corp., 15 February 1944, CIC, B3 F83.
- <sup>13</sup> Letter from H.N. Chauvin to L.M. Gouin, 8 February 1944, CIC, B6 F148.
- <sup>14</sup> Court of King's Bench, appellant's factum on injunction appeal, 12 September 1944, CIC, B3 F86.
- <sup>15</sup> "Jules Laine Stricken Fatally," *Canadian Film Weekly* (13 October 1948): 1, 4; "Jules Laine of Toronto Wills \$591,995 Estate," *Boxoffice* (26 March 1949): 112.
- <sup>16</sup> "Maurice Davis, Montreal, passes," *Canadian Film Weekly* (11 February 1942): 1-2.
- <sup>17</sup> "Ben Garson Enters Ontario Scene," *Canadian Film Weekly* (21 January 1947): 2; *Lovell's Montreal Directory*, multiple years.
- <sup>18</sup> Minutes of the meetings of the board of directors, United Amusement Corp., Ltd., 26 February 1941, CIC, B8 F235.
- <sup>19</sup> The Villeray would be inaugurated six weeks after the Kent. "Le cinéma Villeray a été inauguré hier soir," *La Presse* (2 August 1941): 37.
- <sup>20</sup> Minutes of the meetings of the board of directors, United Amusement Corp., Ltd., 26 February 1941, 7 July 1941, 16 December 1941, CIC, B8 F235.
- <sup>21</sup> Court of King's bench United Amusement Corp. Ltd., appellant, vs. Kent Theatres Ltd., respondent, and Vitagraph Ltd., mis-en-cause, 12 September 1944, CIC, B3 F86. On the cancellation of the Maher deal, see: Minutes of the meetings of the board of directors, United Amusement Corp., Ltd., 24 October 1945, CIC, B8 F235.
- <sup>22</sup> Moore, "Nathan L. Nathanson Introduces Canadian Odeon," 35. Advertisements for the Kent, Villeray, Perron, Beaubien, Midway and Electra theatres are grouped together for the first time in the 27 October 1941 issue of *La Presse* (p. 10).
- <sup>23</sup> In the suit that he brought in 1945 against J.A. DeSève, Alban Janin alleged that, more than France-Film's obvious supply problems during the war, DeSève's negligent management had brought

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the fire sale of the Beaubien and the Rex. Pierre Véronneau, "Le succès est au film parlant français (Histoire du cinéma au Québec I)," *Les dossiers de la Cinémathèque* no. 3 (Montreal: Cinémathèque québécoise, 1979), 28-29.

<sup>24</sup> Memorandum of agreement between Consolidated Theatres Ltd., B.A. Garson, and Dominion Sound Equipments Ltd., 11 April 1936, CIC, B15 [F1330]; *Film Daily* (9 July 1936): 12; *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* (5 February 1938): 7.

<sup>25</sup> Court of King's bench, appellant's factum on injunction appeal, 12 September 1944, CIC, B3 F86.

<sup>26</sup> Letter, Hellman Swards to the Administrator of Services, Wartime Prices and Trade Board, 13 March 1942, CIC, B3 F83.

<sup>27</sup> Letter, Hellman Swards to the Administrator of Services, Wartime Prices and Trade Board, 5 March 1943, CIC, B3 F83.

<sup>28</sup> Letter, M. W. McCutcheon, Administrator of Services, Wartime Prices and Trade Board, to Hellman Swards, 19 April 1943, CIC, B3 F83.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Letter, Hellman Swards to the Administrator of Services, Wartime Prices and Trade Board, 13 March 1942, CIC, B3 F83.

<sup>31</sup> Letter, Hellman Swards to United Amusement Corp., Ltd., 20 January 1942, CIC, B6 F148.

<sup>32</sup> "La guerre des films en Cour supérieure," *Le Canada* (12 February 1944): 11; Adolph Nantel, "La guerre des cinémas terminée par un arrêt de la Cour d'appel," *Le Canada* (30 December 1944): 14.

<sup>33</sup> Letter, Henry N. Chauvin to Rosario Genest, 31 March 1944, CIC, B6 F148.

<sup>34</sup> Letter, Frank B. Chauvin to John J. Fitzgibbons, 17 April 1944, CIC, B6 F148.

<sup>35</sup> Moore, "Nathan L. Nathanson Introduces Canadian Odeon," 29.

<sup>36</sup> "Odeon Tops Par in Can. Theatre War," *Variety* (19 April 1944): 18.

<sup>37</sup> "Trade Watches Montreal Case: Protection Battle May Have Effect on Distribution," *Canadian Film Weekly* (22 March 1944): 1-2.

<sup>38</sup> Letter, John J. Fitzgibbons to Henry N. Chauvin, 2 January 1945, CIC, B6 F148.

<sup>39</sup> The petition was actually presented by Kent Theatre Ltd. Since Ben Garson and Jules Laine stood behind both Kent Theatre Ltd. and the "Superior Theatres" chain, I have chosen to substitute "Superior Theatres" for "Kent Theatre" in the following pages in order to simplify the narrative reconstructing the ensuing events.

<sup>40</sup> Letter, Kent Theatres to Warner Bros. Pictures, 15 April 1942, quoted in the petition presented to the Superior Court of the district of Montreal by Kent Theatres on 26 January 1944, CIC, B5 F126.

<sup>41</sup> The basic period unfolded between September 15 and October 11, 1941. Petition, District of Montreal Superior Court, Kent Theatres, United Amusement Corp., Ltd., and Vitagraph, 26 January 1944, CIC, B5 F126.

<sup>42</sup> "Theatre Denied Interim Injunction," *Montreal Daily Star* (31 January 1944): 3.

<sup>43</sup> Declaration, Kent Theatres, 8 March 1944, CIC, B5 F126.

<sup>44</sup> Amended Petition for interim and/or interlocutory injunction presented by Kent Theatres Limited, 13 March 1944, CIC, B3 F84.

<sup>45</sup> Judgment of the Honourable Mr. Justice Louis Cousineau, 2 February 1944, CIC, B5 F126; "Kent's 2<sup>nd</sup> Round in Montreal Fight," *Canadian Film Weekly* (16 February 1944): 1. United's subsequent failure to refrain from advertising the Warner production *Princess O'Rourke* (Norman Krasna, 1943) brought Swards to promptly institute yet another set of proceedings leading to United's actions being declared in contempt of court on April 3. This decision would however be reversed in the fall by the Court of Appeal. In his notes, Justice J.L. St. Jacques stated that "an 'intention' to make the said picture the 'next attraction,' and intention or menace was not an actual breach of the order on injunction." "La guerre des films en Cour supérieure," *Le Canada* (12 February 1944): 11; Judgment rendered by Judge Louis Cousineau, 3 April 1944, CIC, B3 F84; "Appeal Granted in Mont'l Case," *Canadian Film Weekly* (6 December 1944): 13.

<sup>46</sup> Letter, Henry N. Chauvin to George Ganetakos, 29 June 1944, CIC, B6 F149.

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- <sup>47</sup> Letter, Hellman Swards to the Administrator of Services, Wartime Prices and Trade Board, 13 March 1942, CIC, B3 F83.
- <sup>48</sup> Letter, H.F. Taylor to Henry N. Chauvin, 7 March 1944, CIC, B7 F188.
- <sup>49</sup> Supplementary agreements between United Amusement and Twentieth Century Fox (1942-1943), Empire-Universal (1943-1944), CIC, B7 F188.
- <sup>50</sup> Letter to RKO Distributing Corp. of Canada, 8 March 1944, CIC, B6 F148.
- <sup>51</sup> Letter, Henry N. Chauvin to Norman S. Robertson, 17 April 1944; letter, Robertson to Chauvin, 19 April 1944, CIC, B6 F148.
- <sup>52</sup> Letter, Henry N. Chauvin to Norman S. Robertson, 25 April 1944, CIC, B6 F148.
- <sup>53</sup> Letter, Norman S. Robertson to Henry N. Chauvin, 19 April 1944, CIC, B6 F148.
- <sup>54</sup> Letter, Henry N. Chauvin to John J. Fitzgibbons, 15 May 1944, CIC, B6 F148.
- <sup>55</sup> "Kent Versus United Action Resumed," *Canadian Film Weekly* (17 May 1944): 1; letter, John J. Fitzgibbons to Henry N. Chauvin, 2 January 1945, CIC, B6 F148.
- <sup>56</sup> Letter, Henry N. Chauvin to John J. Fitzgibbons, 15 May 1944, CIC, B6 F148.
- <sup>57</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>58</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>59</sup> Moore, "Nathan L. Nathanson Introduces Canadian Odeon," 29. Moore notably refers to claims made by Ray Lewis in the *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* (5 June 1943).
- <sup>60</sup> Letter, Frank B. Chauvin to John J. Fitzgibbons, 17 April 1944, quoted in CIC, B6 F148.
- <sup>61</sup> Letter, Henry N. Chauvin to John J. Fitzgibbons, 15 May 1944, CIC, B6 F148.
- <sup>62</sup> Amended Petition for interim and/or interlocutory injunction presented by Kent Theatres Limited, 13 March 1944, CIC, B3 F84.
- <sup>63</sup> Letter, Henry N. Chauvin to Norman S. Robertson, 17 April 1944, CIC, B6 F148.
- <sup>64</sup> Letter, Henry N. Chauvin to Hatton Taylor, 5 May 1944, CIC, B6 F148.
- <sup>65</sup> United Amusement Corp., Ltd., factum on injunction appeal, 12 June 1944, CIC, B3 F86.
- <sup>66</sup> Letter, Henry N. Chauvin to W. Elman, 18 May 1944, CIC, B6 F148.
- <sup>67</sup> Amended Petition for interim and/or interlocutory injunction presented by Kent Theatres Limited, 13 March 1944, CIC, B3 F84.
- <sup>68</sup> United Amusement Corp., Ltd., factum on injunction appeal, 12 June 1944, CIC, B3 F86.
- <sup>69</sup> Judgment rendered by Judge Louis Cousineau of the Superior Court, 12 June 1944, CIC, B3 F86; "Injunction Won in Montreal," *Canadian Film Weekly* (21 June 1944): 1-2.
- <sup>70</sup> Petition for leave of appeal, United Amusement Corp., Ltd., 13 June 1944, CIC, B3 F85; "Appeal Granted in Montreal," *Canadian Film Weekly* (12 July 1944): 1-2.
- <sup>71</sup> Petition to Suspend Injunction Pending Appeal, United Amusement Corp., Ltd., appellant, 23 June 1944, CIC, B3 F86.
- <sup>72</sup> Series of letters sent by William Lester to United Amusement managers, 12 July 1944, CIC; letter, William Lester to William Trow, 13 June 1944, B7 F188.
- <sup>73</sup> "Appeal Granted in Montreal," *Canadian Film Weekly* (12 July 1944): 1-2.
- <sup>74</sup> "WPTB Jurisdiction Argued in Mont'l," *Canadian Film Weekly* (29 November 1944): 1-2; Adolph Nantel, "La guerre des cinémas terminée par un arrêt de la Cour d'appel," *Le Canada* (30 December 1944): 14.
- <sup>75</sup> Letter, Henry N. Chauvin to George Ganetakos, 9 January 1945, CIC, B6 F149.
- <sup>76</sup> Letter, Henry N. Chauvin to John J. Fitzgibbons, 6 December 1944, CIC, B6 F149.
- <sup>77</sup> Court of King's Bench, petition by respondent United Amusement Corporation Limited, 9 August 1944, CIC, B3 F86.
- <sup>78</sup> Letter, Henry N. Chauvin to John J. Fitzgibbons, 6 December 1944, CIC, B6 F149.
- <sup>79</sup> "Odeon Said Buying Out Garson-Laine," *Canadian Film Weekly* (13 December 1944): 1.
- <sup>80</sup> "Montreal Battle Back to WPTB: Court of Appeals Upholds United Amusement," *Canadian Film Weekly* (10 January 1945): 1, 8; "Noisy Secret," *Canadian Film Weekly* (17 January 1945): 4.
- <sup>81</sup> The *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* first reported in the fall of 1938 that Oscar Deutsch, chairman of the British Odeon Theatres Ltd. was "directing his gaze towards Canada." The chain's chief architect,

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Harry W. Weedon, arrived for a tour of Canada's theatres on September 16 of that year. Merryl Lea, "The Spotlight," *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* (24 September 1938): 15; *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* (1 October 1938): 7.

<sup>82</sup> Moore, "Nathan L. Nathanson Introduces Canadian Odeon," 24.

<sup>83</sup> "Jules Laine Stricken Fatally," *Canadian Film Weekly* (13 October 1948): 1, 4.

<sup>84</sup> "Odeon Acquires Superior Chain," *Canadian Film Weekly* (7 March 1945): 19.

<sup>85</sup> "Rites for Jules Laine, 51, Pioneer Theatre Operator," *Boxoffice* (23 October 1948): 103.

<sup>86</sup> "Ben Garson Enters Ontario Scene," *Canadian Film Weekly* (21 January 1947): 2; Hye Bossin, "On the Square," *Canadian Film Weekly* (2 July 1947): 8.

<sup>87</sup> "Vaude in Seville," *Canadian Film Weekly* (17 January 1951): 5; *Canadian Film Weekly* (25 July 1951): 9; Lanken, *Montreal Movie Palaces*, 132; Jacques Martin, *L'identité culturelle du Québec face au cinéma américain*, unpublished manuscript, Médiathèque-Guy-L.-Coté, Cinémathèque québécoise, 22.

<sup>88</sup> "Is Censorship Unconstitutional," *Canadian Film Weekly* (27 February 1946): 1, 3, 8.

<sup>89</sup> "Quebec Juve Law Is Challenged," *Canadian Film Weekly* (16 February 1944): 1-2.

<sup>90</sup> "Lift Suspension of Verdun House," *Canadian Film Weekly* (4 April 1945): 1, 17.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Amended Petition, Kent Theatres, 13 March 1944, CIC, B3 F84.

<sup>93</sup> In October of 1945, United Amusement's run was bumped up to second when Consolidated Theatres decided to turn the Imperial theatre into a first-run house. Between 1936 and 1945, the Imperial had officially been the only second run house in Montreal. "Imperial, Montreal, Is First Run House," *Canadian Film Weekly* (24 October 1945): 1.

<sup>94</sup> Moore, "Nathan L. Nathanson Introduces Canadian Odeon," 32-39.

<sup>95</sup> "H'wood French Pic Bows in Quebec," *Canadian Film Weekly* (1 December 1943): 1, 7.

<sup>96</sup> The French-Canadian performers hired by Hollywood studios for dubbing work would however soon find themselves out of a job when France's new government decreed in the fall of 1944 that dubbed versions had to be produced within the country. More than sixty years later, this controversy over the site of the recording of the dubbed soundtracks and the nationality of the personnel involved still causes frictions between the French and Quebec film industries. "French Call Halt to Hollywood Dubbing; Must Be Done Abroad," *Variety* (8 November 1944): 35.

<sup>97</sup> Hye Bossin, "Important Event," *Canadian Film Weekly* (15 December 1943): 2.

<sup>98</sup> "Bi-Lingual Montreal Adapting Itself to Talkies," *Motion Picture News* (10 November 1928); "Montreal Learning Film English Through Dialogue – No Request Yet for French Dialogues," *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* (24 November 1928): 7.

<sup>99</sup> See, for instance, the speech presented by the French consul at the first Congrès du film parlant français held on July 28 1931, quoted in: Véronneau, "Le succès est au film parlant français," 10.

<sup>100</sup> Véronneau, "Le succès est au film parlant français," 38-45.

<sup>101</sup> "Warners Announce Six French Pictures," *Canadian Film Weekly* (15 December 1943): 1, 7; "18 French Pix from Warners," *Canadian Film Weekly* (29 December 1943): 1, 7; "Des films français au cinéma Orpheum," *Montréal-Matin* (11 March 1944): 7.

<sup>102</sup> "Two Montr'l Houses to Famous Players," *Canadian Film Weekly* (19 January 1944): 7. Both theatres had been part of Consolidated Theatres' network at the turn of the 1930s, but later dropped by the chain. See figure 3.12.

<sup>103</sup> Lanken, *Montreal Movie Palaces*, 41.

<sup>104</sup> "Consolidated Acquires Gayety, Orph, Montreal," *Variety* (19 January 1944): 11; "Par Adds Montreal 2, Sews up Town 100%," *Variety* (26 July 1944): 3.

<sup>105</sup> The Loew's had been operated since 1923 by a Famous Players subsidiary, Mansfield Theatre Co. (see chapter 2). "Consolidated, Odeon Bid on Mansfield, M't'l," *Canadian Film Weekly* (28 October 1942): 1; "Consolidated Gets Loew's, Montreal," *Canadian Film Weekly* (11 November 1942): 1-2.

<sup>106</sup> *Le Canada* (1 July 1944): 5; *Variety* (12 July 1944): 14.

<sup>107</sup> "Canada's Bi-lingual Biz Booms," *Canadian Film Weekly* (26 June 1946): 1, 5.

- <sup>108</sup> In September of 1948, two French exiles, Jean-Pierre and Marie Desmarais, would become Eagle-Lion's Quebec representatives. See: Véronneau, "Le succès est au film parlant français," 38.
- <sup>109</sup> "Big PQ Play for French Dubs," *Canadian Film Weekly* (25 August 1948): 1, 3.
- <sup>110</sup> "Montreal Switch," *Canadian Film Weekly* (18 August 1948): 1.
- <sup>111</sup> Located on St. Catherine Street West at de Bleury, the Alouette theatre later became a celebrated live music venue, Le Spectrum.
- <sup>112</sup> "Canada's Bi-lingual Biz Booms," *Canadian Film Weekly* (26 June 1946): 1, 5.
- <sup>113</sup> Martin, *L'identité culturelle du Québec face au cinéma américain*, 27.
- <sup>114</sup> "Canada's Bi-lingual Biz Booms," *Canadian Film Weekly* (26 June 1946): 1, 5.
- <sup>115</sup> Jean-Claude Marsan, *Montréal en évolution: historique du développement de l'architecture et de l'environnement urbain contemporain* 3<sup>rd</sup> edition (Laval: Éditions du Méridien, 1994), 320.
- <sup>116</sup> "New Theatres Open or Being Erected," *Canadian Film Weekly* (1 January 1947): 1-2.
- <sup>117</sup> *La Presse* (9 October 1947): 19.
- <sup>118</sup> *La Presse* (15 January 1948): 13; *La Presse* (27 March 1948): 57.
- <sup>119</sup> "Odeon's Mercier Opens in Montreal," *Canadian Film Weekly* (4 February 1948): 8.
- <sup>120</sup> "Canada's Bi-lingual Biz Booms," *Canadian Film Weekly* (26 June 1946): 1, 5.
- <sup>121</sup> *Lovell's Montreal Directory*, multiple years; "Fire destroys New Palace, Verdun, Que.," *Canadian Film Weekly* (8 April 1942): 3; "Odeon Honors Jacques Martin," *Canadian Film Weekly* (14 October 1953): 1, 5; "Art Bahen Is Selected Pioneer Man of Year," *Boxoffice* (13 April 1964): 60; Martin, *L'identité culturelle du Québec face au cinéma américain*, 25-26, 33.
- <sup>122</sup> Jean Luce, "Le plus beau cinéma de la ville présente le premier film français en couleurs," *La Presse* (29 March 1948): 14.
- <sup>123</sup> *La Presse* (9 October 1947): 19.
- <sup>124</sup> *La Presse* (15 January 1948): 13.
- <sup>125</sup> *La Presse* (27 March 1948): 57; *Canadian Film Weekly* (7 April 1948): 1-3.
- <sup>126</sup> Michel Tremblay, *Les vues animées* (Montreal: Leméac, 1990), 82. Author's translation.
- <sup>127</sup> "Champlain Observes 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary as Montreal French Film Theatre," *Boxoffice* (31 March 1958): K-1.
- <sup>128</sup> "Odeon's Mercier Opens in Montreal," *Canadian Film Weekly* (4 February 1948): 8.
- <sup>129</sup> On that topic, see: Jacques Martin, *L'identité culturelle du Québec face au cinéma américain*, 36.
- <sup>130</sup> Jacques Martin claims that by the 1960s Odeon's and Famous Players' programmers were still meeting privately from time to time to carve up the Canadian film market and discuss rental prices. Martin, *L'identité culturelle du Québec face au cinéma américain*, 43.
- <sup>131</sup> *Montreal Daily Star* (2 October 1948): 23.
- <sup>132</sup> *Montreal Daily Star* (1 October 1949): 14.
- <sup>133</sup> "Food for Thought (Stock Title)," *Canadian Film Weekly* (31 August 1946): 7.
- <sup>134</sup> Letter from John G. Ganetakos to Dave Griesdoff, 19 May 1951, CIC, B3 F86; Minutes of the meetings of the board of directors of Westmount Theatre Co., 22 May 1951, B3 F81.
- <sup>135</sup> "Lester Plans House for Westmount," *Canadian Film Weekly* (6 March 1946): 12; "Westmount Theatre," *Canadian Film Weekly* (27 March 1946): 16; "Theatre for Westmount," *Canadian Film Weekly* (17 April 1946): 1; "More Theatres Open and Others Start," *Canadian Film Weekly* (11 June 1947): 1, 8.

## Chapter 7

### *From Ti-Zoune to Fridolin:*

#### *Burlesque, Revues, and the Renewal of the French-Canadian Public Sphere*

On the evening of September 14, 1938, one of Montreal's largest film theatres, France-Film's 2,400-seat Théâtre St. Denis, was reportedly forced to turn away no less than 6,000 customers, being "crowded to the last seat."<sup>1</sup> The sensational attraction headlining the bill at this theatre once described by the *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* as "the rendezvous of the French-Canadians" wasn't the latest Raimu or Fernandel vehicle, but a stage show featuring a local comedian just fresh out of amateur theatre and bit parts in *radioromans*: Gratien Gélinas, a.k.a. Fridolin.<sup>2</sup> **[Figures 7.1 and 7.2]** The preceding winter, Gélinas had scored a major hit with the first edition of the annual revue *Fridolinons*. The show had grossed \$11,000 on its first week on the stage of another venue closely associated with Montreal's French-Canadian community, the Monument-National.<sup>3</sup> As a measure of Gélinas' sudden popularity, Disney's *Snow White* had grossed \$18,000 during its opening week at the 2,700-seat Palace the preceding month, a sum said to be the "biggest in years" in Montreal by *Variety*.<sup>4</sup>

The fortunate theatregoers who had managed to get a seat at the St. Denis on the evening of September 14 were treated to the first installment of Gélinas' new show, *Le train de plaisir*. Those left stranded on St. Denis Street might have found solace in the knowledge that Gélinas' show would be broadcast live by CKAC every week, thanks to the sponsorship of Dawes, maker of the popular Black Horse beer. **[Figure 7.3]** In a striking example of intermediality and media convergence, the broadcast of this film theatre stage show was discussed and advertised in many newspapers, including *La Presse*, the daily that had set up CKAC – Montreal's first French radio station – back in 1922. **[Figure 7.4]** A few weeks

before, *Variety* had announced that Gélinas' \$300/week salary constituted a new high for a radio entertainer in Canada.<sup>5</sup> *Variety* also stated in the same issue that the Province of Quebec had been the site of the largest increase of new radio set licenses over 1937-1938, a phenomenon that could not have been entirely unrelated to the emergence of local radio personalities such as Fridolin.<sup>6</sup>

Gélinas wasn't the sole local comedian to meet with unprecedented success in the interwar period. In many other Montreal theatres, comedians such as Arthur and Juliette Petrie, Rose Ouellette (*La Poune*), Olivier Guimond Sr. (*Ti-Zoune*), and Juliette Béliveau drew crowds week after week. Together, they participated in the creation of a new type of show unique to French-Canada: "*le burlesque*." Like its American counterpart, French-Canadian burlesque evolved from a tradition of plebeian variety shows mixing broad humor, risqué songs, and lightly clad dancers. It had emerged in Montreal in the 1910s, and coexisted with American burlesque in Montreal until the turn of the 1950s, albeit in different circuits. From 1912 until 1953, the downtown Gayety theatre was for instance integrated to US touring circuits such as the Columbia wheel, whereas French-Canadian burlesque was mostly circumscribed to theatres operated by Confederation Amusements, Jos. Cardinal, and France-Film on St. Lawrence Boulevard – "the Main" – and in working-class francophone neighborhoods.<sup>7</sup>

Both strands of burlesque were further separated by their respective pools of talent, which did not overlap. This situation was partly caused by the fact that French-Canadian burlesque extensively relied on its connection to the vernacular culture and language of Montreal's working class francophone neighborhoods for effects, which prevented its circulation beyond the French-speaking communities of Northeastern North America. *Bricolé* at the request of film exhibitors marginalized by vertical integration and the runs system, this

new *burlesque canayen* (jocal for “*canadien*”) articulated a French-Canadian identity that was resolutely North American, urban, and working class.<sup>8</sup> It thus found itself odds with the francophilia and backward-looking ideals of the French-Canadian elite, as historian and sociologist Gérard Bouchard and theatre historian Chantal Hébert have argued.<sup>9</sup>

I aim to demonstrate in this chapter that the popular entertainment tradition that bred this particular strand of burlesque, and which also encompassed other types of attractions commonly featured in the numerous Montreal film theatres marginalized by vertical integration, such as film lecturers and revues, contributed in a significant fashion to the renewal of the French-Canadian public sphere in the mid-twentieth century. I will more particularly argue that these live attractions frequently booked by film theatres paved the way for the seminal series of annual revues presented by Gratien Gélinas at the Monument-National between 1938 and 1946, which arguably reflected the actual living conditions and concerns of French-Canadians and vastly contributed to the legitimization of their popular culture. Granted, Gélinas’ *Fridolinons* revues clearly lay outside the scope of both the film industry and the burlesque shows booked in local film theatres. They however made, as we will see, extensive use of the talent developed for the various attractions, including burlesque acts, presented on the stages (and in the orchestra pits) of local moving picture theatres since the turn of the century.

I will further argue that the *Fridolinons* revues mark a key moment in French-Canadian cultural history precisely because they managed to constitute a mass audience more inclusive than that of burlesque or, at the other end of the spectrum, than that of the cultural productions supported by the Province’s francophone elite. Just like Charles Chaplin, who had succeeded in making cinema respectable in the 1910s – and to whom Fridolin was often compared – Gélinas managed to reach all segments of French-Canadian society through his

comedy. His creations greatly helped bridge the gap that had long kept popular entertainment and high art in entirely distinct realms. In the seminal *Automatiste* manifesto *Refus global*, whose 1948 publication is generally regarded as one of the main events sparking what would become the Quiet Revolution at the turn of the 1960s, painter Paul-Émile Borduas thus describes:

A little people, that multiplied in generosity of flesh, if not of spirit, in the north of this immense America, with its sprightly band of golden-hearted youth and its superficial morality; spellbound by the annihilating prestige of remembered European masterpieces, and disdainful of the authentic creations of its own oppressed.<sup>10</sup>

It is of course impossible to ascertain if Borduas had the French-Canadian performers discussed in this chapter in mind when he committed these lines to paper, even though there can be no doubt that the creations of both Gélinas and Montreal's leading burlesque comedians fit the bill as far as authenticity goes. I will nevertheless argue here that Gélinas and Borduas largely shared the same objectives. Indeed, the annual *Fridolinons* revues helped conjure a space where members of all classes of Quebec society mingled and implicitly supported a playful but persistent critique of the forces hampering the development of French-Canada – be they the community's own religious, political and cultural elites, or the agents of foreign (English-Canadian, British, American, French) domination.

The role played by cinema in the emergence of an oppositional French-Canadian public sphere has already been theorized by Scott MacKenzie.<sup>11</sup> I believe, however, that MacKenzie has somewhat underestimated the actual influence of cinema on the transformation of Quebec society and culture as a result of his strict focus on the handful of motion pictures produced in the Province between the 1906 opening of the Ouimetoscope and the 1952 beginning of regular television broadcast in Quebec and Canada. His analysis consequently remains blind to the concrete manifestations of a public sphere which, taking cues from Miriam Hansen, he can only perceive through its negative determination, or, in

other words, through the “hegemonic efforts to repress it.”<sup>12</sup> I aim to show that, not only this oppositional French-Canadian public sphere was more than a potential by the mid-twentieth century, but also that cinema, in spite of being accused of being a denationalizing agent by influential members of French-Canadian society, had been central, if not essential, to its formation.<sup>13</sup> Through this argument, I further hope to demonstrate that the theoretical analysis of this public sphere is inextricable from the study of the material conditions of its emergence, and therefore from the economic history of cinema. This last chapter thus generally concerns itself with the flipside of the monopolization process scrutinized over the preceding chapters, which have mostly covered the fight for the right to show the popular, and therefore lucrative, films turned out in quantity by foreign producers.

### **Montreal Film Theatres and the Rise of French-Canadian Burlesque**

Theatre historians Chantal Hébert, André-G. Bourassa and Jean-Marc Larrue have over the last few decades initiated research on French-Canadian burlesque, a theatrical tradition previously denounced as a lowly plebeian phenomenon by the local elite and consequently neglected by intellectuals. Their groundbreaking efforts have however been somewhat hampered by the relative lack of records pertaining to the activities of burlesque companies and performers, which has prevented them from piecing together a detailed factual history of burlesque in French Canada.<sup>14</sup> Not only were burlesque acts, bits, and sketches largely ad-libbed, but burlesque companies and theatres infrequently relied on newspapers to advertise their shows. That being said, Bourassa, Larrue, Hébert, and burlesque pioneer Juliette Petrie all seem to agree that a local variation on the burlesque tradition started to develop in Quebec in the mid-1910s and eventually reached its mature form in the early 1920s.<sup>15</sup> Burlesque thus emerged precisely as the film industry was

instituting the runs systems outlined in preceding chapters, which made it increasingly difficult for small independent theatres to obtain up-to-date screen attractions. Bourassa and Larrue duly claim that the increased space given to live acts in the shows put together by the film theatres operating on St. Lawrence Boulevard in the late 1910s and early 1920s was a direct consequence of the relative weakness of their film programmes, which could not hope to compete with those of the luxurious, vertically-integrated moving picture palaces operating on St. Catherine Street.<sup>16</sup>

The rise of French-Canadian burlesque can consequently be conceived as the logical counterpart to the advent of film palaces, stars, and features in the transitional and early classical eras of film history. During these years dominated by the film industry's quest for respectability, the implementation of a segregation of theatres on the basis of location, size, material properties, and affiliation variously affected the programming strategies of film theatres. In the more prestigious houses, live attractions became much scarcer as programmes came to be dominated and, indeed, structured by the multi-reel feature films turned out in ever greater numbers by producers (though it must be emphasized that stage acts never completely disappeared from movie palaces). But in the generally older, smaller, and unaffiliated theatres marginalized by this process, live acts often constituted a handy way to fill out programmes with cheap yet popular attractions.

As noted by Hébert, Bourassa and Larrue, the burlesque shows introduced in Quebec theatres in the 1910s and 1920s were influenced by multiple comedic traditions going as far back as the Italian *commedia dell'arte*. The leading influence nevertheless remains that of the North American variety show tradition, which had been quite well represented in Montreal since the nineteenth century. The Côté Street Théâtre Royal had for instance been integrated to North American burlesque circuits since the 1880s. It mainly presented US burlesque

shows until 1912, when a new construction, the St. Catherine Street West Gayety theatre, replaced it as the most prominent venue dedicated to burlesque in the city.<sup>17</sup> As for burlesque's more respectable cousin, vaudeville, it had first appeared in Montreal in 1883.<sup>18</sup> In 1907, the St. Catherine Street West Bennett's (later the Orpheum), part of the American chain of the same name, had become the first Montreal theatre to be built specifically for "high-class vaudeville."<sup>19</sup> The shows offered by these burlesque and vaudeville theatres were generally booked by American syndicates and mostly made up of acts put together by American performers and companies.<sup>20</sup>

The nascent French-Canadian burlesque tradition shared many features with its American counterpart. It for instance made little use of acrobats, animal trainers and acts requiring elaborate sets. Instead, it mostly favored collections of bits and sketches largely relying on stereotypes and dealing with daily life (with money, city life, mothers-in-law, booze, and cheating spouses being some of the themes most frequently broached upon), but otherwise not unified under a common theme or narrative thread, as was commonly the case with revues. French-Canadian burlesque further reprised the defining feature of American burlesque, the chorus line – "*la ligne de filles*."<sup>21</sup> In the fall of 1923, Montreal burlesque fans could thus choose between Olivier Guimond's shows at the Starland, which featured "18 People – Mostly Girls," and the shows presented on the other side of St. Lawrence Boulevard at the King Edward by Arthur Petrie, which promised "fifteen dainty damesels [*sic*]."<sup>22</sup> This feature helped separate burlesque shows from vaudeville, which never incorporated this particular attraction revealing – in the words of one local proponent of burlesque – "the freshness and appeal of winsome maidenhood."<sup>23</sup>

The eroticism of Guimond and Petrie's shows was however more subdued than that of American burlesque: French-Canadian burlesque shows for instance never featured

stripteases or other risqué acts, though off-color jokes seem to have been one of the genre's mainstay. While this particular characteristic of French-Canadian burlesque may not have been totally unrelated to the strict control exerted by the Catholic clergy on the various entertainments presented in the Province, it probably remained first and foremost attributable to the fact that French-Canadian burlesque largely relied on female patronage. It is further worth noting that many of its most popular personalities, including Juliette Petrie, Rose Ouellette and Juliette Béliveau, were middle-aged female comedians personifying types light-years removed from that of an Eva Tanguay or a Lili St. Cyr. Contrarily to its American counterpart, French-Canadian burlesque's first aim was not to bring titillation to male spectators, but to entertain working class audiences.

Part of the explanation for burlesque's quick rise in popularity in Montreal appears to have laid in its sustained use of the vernacular language spoken in the city's francophone working class neighborhoods. On that regard, the local take on burlesque was once again in step with the American burlesque tradition, which extensively relied on ethnic humor and dialects. This constituted a significant novelty in Montreal, as most of the theatrical entertainments that had been offered to the city's inhabitants in the years leading to the rise of burlesque had been produced in either English or continental French by the foreign traveling companies, French expatriates, and local comedians educated in Paris that had long presided over the city's cultural life.<sup>24</sup> One notable exception was the work of film lecturers which, as Germain Lacasse has documented, had frequently used the local vernacular during the first decades of the twentieth century.<sup>25</sup> The performances of film lecturers thus constituted an important precedent for the burlesque performers who frequently worked side by side with them during burlesque's formative years.<sup>26</sup>

Interestingly, the vernacular language of Montreal's working class francophone neighborhoods was eventually introduced on the city's stages by two Ontario natives, Arthur Petrie and Olivier Guimond Sr. (who was often billed as "Oliver Guimond" in the early years of his burlesque career).<sup>27</sup> The two leading personalities of the early years of burlesque in Quebec, Petrie and Guimond had – allegedly at the request of the owners of the St. Lawrence Boulevard theatres where they worked – first performed in English the bits and formulas they borrowed, adapted, or sometimes downright stole from US burlesque shows. According to Juliette Petrie (who married Arthur in 1921), it is only around 1920 that Arthur Petrie, noticing that the loudest laughs were coming from the French-speaking members of the audience, started to instruct the members of his company to utter their lines twice: first in English, and then in French. Punch lines were first delivered in French, so as to further strengthen the bond with the francophone community that obviously represented the most receptive market for this type of entertainment in Montreal.<sup>28</sup> This strategy was seemingly reprised by other burlesque companies, as suggested by this contemporary account of a Ti-Zoune show presented at the Starland in 1923:

One peculiar thing about the gentleman is the bi-lingual quality of his production. Patter is now in English, now in French – almost every line is "shot" in each language – yet there is an absolute absence of slowness or drag in the show, so lively is the work of its leading character.<sup>29</sup>

This peculiar practice seems to have succeeded in bringing a wide and varied public to the first burlesque shows presented on the lower Main. According to one newspaper report:

Starland's claim to fame is that it presents a bill in both French and English by the same players, and at the same performances. To those who expected the venture to be a failure in that the performers would speak one language well and the other brokenly, a disillusionment has been waiting. From the versatile Tizoune down to number eighteen of the chorus, each must pass the test of a hundred percent batting average in both French and English before they are given an engagement – and they have all passed it.

One of the results has been that Starland has been drawing its audiences from all sections of the city; from Maisonneuve to Lachine and from the waterfront to Model

City [either Mount Royal or Outremont], and they come back again judging by the lineups that say “Gimme two” at the box office at every performance.<sup>30</sup>

One of the many French expatriates then involved in Montreal’s theatrical life, Henry Deyglun, later testified that the comedians responsible for burlesque’s success in Quebec:

spoke a sort of franco-american language, half *joual* and half slang, similar to what could be heard in the streets and factories. Montreal never spoke a more bastardized language than in the roaring twenties. Burlesque comedians (which, it should be noted, were generally highly talented) used this language to create some remarkable comic effects.<sup>31</sup>

The local vernacular described by Deyglun gradually pushed English aside as burlesque shows grew in popularity during the 1920s.

The two main sites of the creation and early development of French-Canadian burlesque, the King Edward and the Starland theatres, faced each other on St. Lawrence Boulevard at Dorchester (now René-Lévesque Boulevard). While the Main constituted the dividing line between the anglophone and francophone communities, it was anything but a no man’s land. As noted by Bourassa and Larrue, the lower part of St. Lawrence Boulevard actually constituted a sort of free zone where the control exerted by police forces and clerical authorities was reputed to be more lenient.<sup>32</sup> The Main’s colorful reputation had also been boosted by the many successive waves of immigrants that had settled on it over the years. The King Edward and Starland theatres were thus located near the heart of what was at the turn of the twentieth century the heart of the city’s Jewish community, and just outside of what was in the process of becoming Chinatown.

The Starland and the King Edward had originally been operated as *scopes* by some of these recently landed immigrants. Opened some time in 1909 or 1910, the King Edward had been the first moving picture theatre operated by the Lebano-Syrian family later associated with Confederation Amusements, the Lawands.<sup>33</sup> As for the Starland, which occupied a space located on the ground floor of the Monument-National building (where Gratien

Gélinas would later present *Fridolinons*), it had first been converted into a moving picture theatre in 1907. Between 1910 and 1912, it had been operated by P.G. Demetre, the Greek immigrant who would eventually become United Amusement's vice-president and largest shareholder. The Starland had been acquired in 1918 by one J. Assad, presumably of Syrian descent, who eventually retained ownership until the early 1930s.<sup>34</sup>

Both the King Edward and the Starland were typical *scopes*. They were established in converted spaces of modest dimensions, and equipped with only the bare necessities. The Starland for instance occupied a room previously leased by a bookstore, whose flat floor it had been forced to retain.<sup>35</sup> The two venues further operated in a rowdy part of town more readily known for its pool and dance halls, "automatic theatres" (penny arcades), and wax museums (the infamous Musée Eden could be found in the basement of the Monument-National building) than for its respectable show places (as the Société Saint-Jean-Baptiste, promoter of the Monument-National, had realized soon after the building's inauguration in 1893.)<sup>36</sup> **[Figure 7.5]** The King Edward, the Starland and the other lower Main *scopes* were therefore quickly outclassed by the new crop of purpose-built movie palaces erected in the 1910s on St. Catherine Street West, where the trendy department stores had relocated at the turn of the century. These included the Strand (1912), the Keith-Albee Imperial (1913) and the Loew's (1917).<sup>37</sup> Lacking the amenities and privileged access to the recent film production of these luxurious movie palaces, the King Edward and Starland seemingly had no choice but to emphasize the live portion of their shows as the 1910s progressed.

According to Bourassa and Larrue, Olivier Guimond Sr., who went under the stage name of Ti-Zoune (or Tizoune), first tread the boards of the Starland in 1918.<sup>38</sup> Guimond had allegedly been discovered back in 1912 by Arthur Petrie in an Ottawa train station where he worked as a shoe-shine boy.<sup>39</sup> His rapid success as a performer had however soon

permitted him to leave Petrie and assemble his own burlesque company (though he would occasionally work with Arthur and Juliette Petrie throughout his career).

The two leading Canadian burlesque companies at the turn of the 1920s, Guimond and Petrie's, frequently switched theatres and exchanged personnel. A snapshot of the chaotic lives of burlesque companies in the early 1920s is provided by *The Axe News*, a peculiar pro-prohibition (the axe being, of course, a reference to the weapon favored by the disciples of the infamous prohibitionist Carrie Nation) and pro-burlesque (both Columbia and *canayen*) paper published weekly in Montreal.<sup>40</sup> *The Axe News* was one of the few Montreal newspapers to give coverage to local burlesque companies, whose activities it extensively chronicled over the year stretching between October 1923 and September 1924. It thus reveals that, by the fall of 1923, Guimond's company's was performing at Assad's Starland. The theatre was at the time managed by Harold Vance, who would remain one of the main proponents of burlesque in Montreal over the following decade. Guimond's "musical comedy tabloid" shows featured songs, dances, sketches, and parodies, such the "Palmoliva" ballet presented concurrently with Anna Pavlova's performances at the Théâtre St. Denis. Guimond's main partners in these Starland shows were his wife, dancer Effie Mack, and comedian Bert Fassio ("Hooligan").<sup>41</sup> Starting in January of 1924, the Chicago novelty orchestra, which was also part Guimond's show, was broadcast every evening live from the Starland by CKAC – *La Presse's* radio station, created in the fall of 1922.<sup>42</sup> A few yards away from the Starland, on the eastern side of St. Lawrence Boulevard, the King Edward presented in the fall of 1923 "La Troupe Germaine," a musical comedy company featuring Juliette Béliveau and Arthur Petrie's company.<sup>43</sup> By the winter of 1924, Petrie was off to Quebec City, and Béliveau performing in the revues presented by Alex Silvio at the St. Catherine Street East Théâtre National.<sup>44</sup> Petrie's company eventually returned to

Montreal in May 1924 to replace Guimond at the Starland. It was at this moment joined by Fassio, as well as by a new rising star: Petrie's wife, Juliette. Guimond was in turn replaced at the Starland by Charles Ross's "Klean and Klassy" Manhattan Musical Comedy Co. in August.<sup>45</sup> Things came full circle when Guimond's company, joined by Fassio, finally reintegrated the Starland on September 15, 1924.<sup>46</sup>

This constant shifting around of burlesque companies might have been partly caused by the long shows and frequent change of programmes that soon came to be some of the defining features of French-Canadian burlesque. Once they had exhausted their repertoire in a theatre, burlesque performers possibly had little choice but to move to the next theatre or locality. Lengthy shows nevertheless seem to have benefited theatres, which could advertise a good value for the money. An *Axe News* item on the Starland for instance reported that:

In addition to an hour or so of side-splitting burlesque, feature films are shown in conjunction with a performance priced to fit the pocketbook of one and all. Manager Vance declares that prices are low because of the volume of business maintained at the theatre. "It's a big house," he declares, "and we are filling it at every show." There's a reason.<sup>47</sup>

This strategy seems to have contributed to burlesque's long-lasting success with Montreal's value-conscious working class audiences. When Gratien Gélinas satirized the city's burlesque shows in a remarkable sketch from the 1939 edition of *Fridolinons*, "Le Théâtre du Tricentenaire," this emphasis on quantity was singled out for mocking:

FRIDOLIN (*wearing a worn out suit and a slanted straw boater, he is now acting the part of a side-show Barker* [obviously for a burlesque show, as this segment of the sketch is entitled "The 'Burlesque' Company"]): Come in, come in! Pick a good seat in front before it fills up so that you can have a good look at the pretty girls. For eleven cents, we'll give you a full show with three features, the serial, five shorts, a stage drama, and the comedy! Entire new bill seven times a week.<sup>48</sup>

Period newspaper advertisements and testimonies by burlesque veterans suggest that Gélinas barely exaggerated the prodigality of Montreal's burlesque shows. In her memoirs, Rose Ouellette for instance remembers that, during her days at the Théâtre National in the 1930s

and 1940s, one twenty cents ticket granted access to a show including two French features, a newsreel, a cartoon, in addition to the live show put on by the fifteen comedians and five musicians (excluding guests) working under her direction.<sup>49</sup> The sustained production of such long shows renewed up to three times a week was facilitated by the fact that the live components of burlesque shows routinely relied on simple plots (typically involving unfaithful spouses and/or inebriated characters) and improvisation.

Yet the main factor enabling such rapid turnover and long shows ultimately remains the rise of cinema as a mass entertainment in the first decades of the twentieth century. Indeed, cinema begot both the venues (the *scopes* outclassed as moving picture venues by the new palaces erected in the 1910s) where this theatrical tradition emerged, and the cheap and abundant attractions – the films – that padded almost all burlesque shows. Evidence shows that, while moving pictures rarely constituted the main point of burlesque shows (whose advertisements only infrequently bothered to list the titles of the films included in each programme), most theatres dedicated to the genre relied quite heavily (double bills being common in burlesque theatres) on the exhibition of poverty row productions and ancient major studio releases. Burlesque theatre managers sometimes tried to make the most of this situation by using in their advertisements the publicity garnered by the films they booked during their previous runs. The King Edward for instance advertised in November of 1923 “*On the Banks of the Wabash*, a Vitagraph spectacle which had first-run recently at the Français, where it did excellent business and proved enjoyable to the crowd which witnessed it.”<sup>50</sup> The persistent use of these lesser film attractions in burlesque shows nevertheless seems to indicate that they retained some attractive power on value-conscious burlesque patrons. It could consequently be argued, paradoxically, that while French-Canadian burlesque had developed in marginalized moving picture theatres seeking alternative (i.e.,

non-film) attractions, its emergence was largely rendered possible by the abundance of cheap films.<sup>51</sup>

Cinema also shaped burlesque in other ways. It is no secret, for instance, that the screen's hugely popular slapstick comedians – most of whom had been trained in variety, vaudeville and music-hall – provided a major influence on the acting styles and performances of the burlesque comedians active in Montreal. It should moreover be noted that cinema, which by 1920s was becoming a hegemonic mass entertainment that set norms for other forms of popular distractions, also provided burlesque comedians with rich subject matter. During the week of November 12, 1923, Guimond for instance offered Starland patrons a show entitled “The Moving Picture Studio” featuring “impersonations of film favorites.” According to the *Axe News*'s laudatory “review”: “Tizoune's effort this week carry him into a motion picture studio on the Pacific coast, and the production of pictures in general has been made background for one of Tizoune's most hilarious comedies as yet produced by the clever little company on St. Lawrence Street.”<sup>52</sup> Fascination with Hollywood glamour remained strong in the 1930s, when another leading burlesque personality, Manda Parent (who had a long career as part of a duo completed by Eugène Martel, aka “Joseph”), for instance presented a stage comedy entitled “*Manda fait sa Mae West*” (“Manda Thinks She's Mae West”) at the Théâtre National.<sup>53</sup>

The lure of cinema proved so strong for local burlesque performers that, a few weeks after the presentation of his 1923 “Moving Picture” stage show, Guimond visited a real moving picture studio to produce the first of what was purported to be a series of thirteen short (two-reel) film comedies featuring his Ti-Zoune character. The studio was located on the corner of St. Catherine Street East and St. Denis, and owned by Jean Arsin. The latter had just produced and directed *La primeur volée*, a feature film sponsored by *La Presse* and the

Loew's theatre, where its premiere had been held on June 3, 1923.<sup>54</sup> Starland manager Vance, who might have had the initiative of this comedy series, was given credit for assisting the production "with advice." Outdoor scenes were shot in Lafontaine Park, in the east end of Montreal, and within days the film was being exhibited at the Starland, where Ti-Zoune's fans allegedly "revell[ed] in this new proof of their idol's greatness."<sup>55</sup> Arsin, Vance and Guimond however failed to come up with the promised follow-up to this first effort. Period sources do not reveal the reason for the abandonment of the projected series. One can surmise that the first film had, in spite of the *Axe News*' positive commentary (most likely written by the Starland manager or press agent anyway), failed to live up to expectations, or that its promoters had realized that, in their situation (Vance was not yet part of Famous Players' growing network), film production was doomed to remain a money-losing proposition. It is also possible that, like Gélinas with *La dame aux camélias, la vraie* twenty years later, Guimond and company had found out that Montreal audiences preferred to see their favorite comedians in the flesh.<sup>56</sup>

In the mid-1920s, Olivier Guimond and Eli Lawand discovered among the performers entertaining the patrons of the infamous Hochelaga Laurier Palace the comedian that would soon become burlesque's leading female personality: Rose Ouellette. Having performed since the late 1910s on the stages of several east end *scopes*, including the Ouimetoscope (as we have seen in chapter 4), the Lune Rousse, the Alcazar and the Casino, Ouellette already was an experienced singer and comedian by the time of her "discovery."<sup>57</sup> Guimond and Lawand first had her perform at the King Edward, where she was given the stage name "Casserolle" ("Saucepan"). She later worked at the Quebec City Imperial with Guimond, where the latter, deeming both "Rose Ouellette" and "Casserolle" unsatisfactory stage

names, picked a new moniker for Ouellette: “La Poune.”<sup>58</sup> It would soon become one of the most durably famous names in French-Canadian popular culture.

In her memoirs, Ouellette claims that it was on the train taking her back to Montreal after this Quebec engagement with Guimond that Najeeb Lawand first offered her the direction of the Cartier theatre. She accepted the position, and subsequently spent “the eight most important years” of her career at the Cartier.<sup>59</sup> Described by Dane Lanken as a “handsome, but modest” moving picture palace, the Cartier had been inaugurated by Confederation Amusements on May 25, 1929. It stood on Notre-Dame Street West, a few blocks away from United Amusement’s Corona theatre, in St. Henri, a working class district with a sizable French-Canadian population.<sup>60</sup>

It should incidentally be noted that Ouellette’s long stay at the Cartier, which has come to be viewed as one of the key events of the history of French-Canadian burlesque, has proven rather hard to document over the course of this research project. Indeed, none of the contemporary sources consulted can attest of her involvement with the theatre before 1935.<sup>61</sup> Newspaper advertisements show that “French musical comedy review[s]” were part of the Cartier bill from the opening night, but do not reveal the names of either the performers or theatre manager.<sup>62</sup> One newspaper advertisement further reveals that in September of 1929, Charles Ross (Pic-Pic) was performing at the Cartier while Rose “Welleite” played in a Paul Hébert comedy at the Théâtre Arcade. A modest east end moving picture theatre built in 1913, the Arcade was at this point operated by the King Edward owner, Abraham Lawand, and offering French-language plays and revues.<sup>63</sup> Between 1930 and 1936, the Cartier stage hosted Paul Hébert, Charles Ross, Moe Levy (“*le Juif canadien*”), Rosenberg (“Pizzy-Wizzy”), Paddy Shaw (“Swifty”), and even singer La Bolduc (née Mary Travers). Ouellette’s name however remains elusive in the Cartier ads published

before September of 1935 collected over the course of this research project.<sup>64</sup> That being said, it admittedly remains entirely possible that this situation is but a simple but unfortunate consequence of the necessarily incomplete nature of the sample collected. Or could it be that as a female theatre director – a most exotic thing in Quebec at the time – Ouellette was not permitted to take full credit for her work?

What we know for sure is that by September of 1935 Rose Ouellette was presenting her “*grande comédie française*” every week in no less than two Confederation houses, the Cartier and the Dominion.<sup>65</sup> In her memoirs, Juliette Petrie, who, together with her husband Arthur, worked for Ouellette at the time, describes her hectic schedule on weekends, when Ouellette’s company was required to perform thrice at the St. Henri Cartier and twice at the Plateau Dominion every day:

First show at the Cartier in the early afternoon. A truck would then wait for us near the theatre’s entrance. We piled in props, costumes and scenery, and off to the Dominion. After the 4pm show, we had to move everything back to the Cartier for the second show, at 6:30pm. Same kerfuffle for the 8pm show at the Dominion. At 9:30pm, everything had to be back at the Cartier for the last show of the evening.<sup>66</sup>

Petrie’s testimony suggests that, in Montreal at least, the diffusion of French-Canadian burlesque was restricted, not by demand, but by the availability of its most talented performers. This situation echoes an observation made by Gerben Bakker in *Entertainment*

*Industrialised:*

When Charlie Chaplin was nineteen years old he appeared in three music halls a night. On one fine day he started in the late afternoon at the half-empty Streatham Empire in London. Directly after the show he and his company were rushed by private bus to the Canterbury Music Hall and then on to the Tivoli. This constituted the maximum number of venues an entertainer could visit on an evening, and thus the inherent limit to a performer’s productivity.

Yet, barely five years had passed before Chaplin would appear in thousands of venues across the world at the same time. His productivity had increased almost unimaginably. Most of this efficiency jump translated into lower prices, far lower than ticket prices for music hall. Chaplin himself, therefore, was able to capture only a small percentage of revenues. Yet this tiny cut made him the world’s highest-paid performer.

Chaplin's experience epitomises the massive increase in productivity that modern service technologies have made possible.<sup>67</sup>

The case of French-Canadian burlesque however reminds us that in the field of the performing arts, increases in productivity are not necessarily consubstantial with a qualitative expansion of the public reached. Chaplin managed to gain a larger public by simultaneously exploiting a new reproduction technology *and* working to make his comedy more palatable to a wider audience made up of members of both the working and middle classes.<sup>68</sup> As we will see, Gratien Gélinas arguably accomplished something similar with *Fridolinons* without resorting to the mechanical reproduction or electronic broadcast of his revues (although the latter were definitely influenced, publicized, and otherwise supported by the mass media). Yet, for a variety of reasons falling outside the bounds of the present research, French-Canadian burlesque never managed to expand its public beyond the working class. As a result, burlesque's quantum leap in productivity only came at the end of the period covered by this project with the advent of television, and more particularly of Montreal's first private station, J.A. DeSève's Télé-Métropole, whose studios occupied the old Arcade theatre.

The theatre owners and managers that booked the Petries, Guimond Sr., Ouellette and their contemporaries knew that burlesque was condemned to remain a working class pastime, as opposed to a "popular" or "mass" phenomenon. In the words of famed Québécois stand-up comic Yvon Deschamps:

while burlesque met with phenomenal success in Quebec, it remained thoroughly despised by the elite. Its practitioners were scorned, and those who took pleasure in it were looked down upon. Purists were convinced that its success was born out of the fact that it aimed for the lowest common denominator: big laffs for the lowly classes [*du gros rire pour le gros peuple*].<sup>69</sup>

It is therefore unsurprising to note that, in spite of burlesque's convincing success at the Cartier and Dominion, Confederation never attempted to book burlesque companies in its theatres operating in neighborhoods with more prosperous francophone populations, such

as the Outremont, or even the Château in Rosemount. The productivity of burlesque artists was already stretched to the limit, and it seemed likely that the population of these neighborhoods would have simply resented this working class intrusion. Instead, Confederation opted to treat the patrons of its moving picture shows operating in Outremont and Rosemount with vaudeville acts obtained through booking agencies.<sup>70</sup>

In the collection of autobiographical short stories entitled *Les vues animées* (“*The Movies*”), Michel Tremblay provides an amusing testimony on the vast divide separating the Montreal working class districts – where most theatres employing burlesque performers were operating – and the more respectable neighborhoods where moving picture rather resorted to vaudeville to enhance their shows. One of the stories for instance relates the campaign waged by the young Michel, born in a modest Plateau family, to convince his mother to take him to see *Cinderella* (Walt Disney Productions, 1950). The main difficulty met by the protagonist proceeds from the site of the screening: the film is not playing at the Passe-Temps theatre (located two blocks west of Confederation’s Dominion on Mount-Royal avenue) usually patronized by the Tremblay family, but at the faraway Outremont theatre. “It’s at the other end of the world! I don’t even know where that is!” protests his mother. “Three streetcars! You’re going to ride three streetcars to get there! You’re crazy!,” opines an aunt who, when asked if she has ever set foot in Outremont replies: “Are you crazy? I’m not even sure that the place even exists.”<sup>71</sup> Tremblay then explains that “most of our expeditions outside of the Plateau Mont-Royal were limited to what we called the lower city [*le bas de la ville*’], in other words St. Catherine Street.”<sup>72</sup> In their respective memoirs, Ouellette and Petrie concur by stating that the audiences of the theatres where they performed – mainly the Cartier, the Dominion and the National – were largely made up of working class patrons, and more particularly of housewives and unemployed laborers.<sup>73</sup>

It is worth noting that the Cartier, the Dominion, as well as most of the other theatres presenting French-Canadian burlesque shows in the 1930s and 1940s remained first and foremost moving picture theatres. Their bills were unquestionably headlined by films, often French in origin. Burlesque would however return as a headlining attraction at Ouellette's next Montreal venture after the Cartier, the Théâtre National. France-Film recruited Ouellette sometime in late 1935, and first sent her to Quebec City to manage the faltering Théâtre Canadien where, according to her own testimony, she managed to revitalize the show and bring back audiences. Ouellette was then called back to Montreal in the summer of 1936 to manage the Théâtre National, which, as we have seen in chapter 5, France-Film had wrested from Jos. Cardinal in 1934.<sup>74</sup> Charles Ross, Paul Hébert and the Petries had all allegedly previously declined the position, having heard about the National's poor showings over the preceding summers. Ouellette signed for ten weeks, but eventually stayed at the theatre for seventeen epoch-making years.<sup>75</sup> Under her management, the Théâtre National would turn into one of the most important venues associated with working class culture in Montreal, and soon become one of the few obligated Montreal stops for visiting small-town French-Canadians, together with the Oratoire St. Joseph, the wax museum *catholique canadien*, and the Parc Belmont.<sup>76</sup>

Located on St. Catherine Street East at the heart of Montreal's French-Canadian community, on the same block as the pioneering Ouimetoscope, the Théâtre National (first named the Théâtre National Français) had had a long and varied career before Ouellette's arrival in 1936. It had been built by theatre director Julien Daoust, but sold soon after its inauguration on August 12, 1900 to local entrepreneur Georges Gauvreau, who would later be responsible for the construction of the Nationscope. Gauvreau had eventually retained control of the theatre for two decades, during which he had hired some of the era's most

reputed local directors, including Daoust, Paul Cazeneuve and Fernand Dhavrol. Under his management, the National had become a major venue for both French and French-Canadian theatre in Montreal. The National had also been, as noted by Jean-Pierre Sirois-Trahan, one of the very first Montreal theatres to include moving pictures in their shows on a regular basis at the turn of the century.<sup>77</sup>

In the early 1920s, the National had been taken over by Alex Silvio, who was also involved at the time with a few other east end theatres, including the Chanteclerc and the Canadien-Français.<sup>78</sup> Under his management, the National had mainly presented stage shows influenced by French *revues d'actualité* and US revues. As demonstrated by Lacasse, Johanne Massé and Bethsabée Poirier, Silvio helped established revue as a major French-Canadian theatrical tradition (still represented in the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century by the annual *Bye Bye* annual televised revues.) While they could be distinguished from the burlesque tradition by their unified themes, their written (as opposed to improvised) texts, and their topicality, Silvio's revues had actually been closely related with the emerging French-Canadian burlesque tradition, with which they largely shared their variety formats, performers, and public.

It is therefore not too surprising to see Silvio's revues be replaced by burlesque at the National following Jos. Cardinal's takeover of the theatre in the late 1920s.<sup>79</sup> (It should also be noted that the National had also been favored by fate in 1927, in that it had been one of the few east end theatres permitted by the authorities to keep exhibiting live acts in the wake of the Laurier Palace fire.<sup>80</sup>) By 1929, the theatre had been home to Guimond, Béliveau, and many other burlesque performers.<sup>81</sup> In 1930, Harold Vance, previously associated with the Starland but now working for Consolidated Theatres, had taken over the management of the National. Vance had attempted to turn the theatre into the leading venue for burlesque by

assembling an all-star company for the 1930-31 season. The two star couples of burlesque, Guimond-Mack and the Petries, had thus been reunited, together with Juliette Béliveau and Charles Ross. **[Figure 7.6]** Juliette Petrie however reports in her memoirs that Vance's super-company had soon unraveled, undermined by the constant infighting bred by the long-standing rivalries between some of its key members.<sup>82</sup> Control of the National had eventually returned to Cardinal, who had maintained the theatre's successful burlesque policy in the early 1930s by booking performers such as Béliveau, Ross, Guimond, and Oscar Valade.<sup>83</sup>

When France-Film finally took over the National in the spring 1934, it overhauled the sound system used for the exhibition of talking pictures, but refrained from shifting the emphasis of the theatre's programmes from stage to screen. Tellingly, the first Théâtre National bill featuring the new RCA Photophone system was headlined, not by the two feature films programmed (*Un soir de réveillon* [Karl Anton, Paramount, 1933] and *Walls of Gold* [Kenneth MacKenna, Fox, 1933]), but by Guimond and Béliveau's comedy. For the 1934-1935 season, DeSève experimented with melodrama at the National, before eventually reverting to burlesque in 1935-1936. The theatre's bills were headlined by Manda and Joseph's company in the months leading to the presentation of the first show directed by Rose Ouellette at the National on June 20, 1936.<sup>84</sup>

The primacy of burlesque at the National in the 1930s is eloquently demonstrated by the fact that at the time of the creation of Vance's all-star company in the late summer of 1930 the theatre was still exhibiting silent pictures, a full year after the majority of Montreal's film theatres had converted to sound. By 1938, the National still only had the twelfth run on France-Film products, even though it was operated by DeSève's organization.<sup>85</sup> But while the National, contrarily to Confederation's Cartier and Dominion, did not use burlesque as a

mere supporting act for moving pictures, it still extensively relied on films to fill its programmes, even during La Poutine's heyday in the late 1930s and 1940s. Double-bills of French features thus routinely preceded the burlesque comedy headlining the National's bill.

**[Figure 7.7]** In *La duchesse et le roturier*, a novel partly set at the Théâtre National, Michel Tremblay describes how the theatre's audience would routinely have to shush the comedians, who could not care less about covering the films' dialogues with the racket they made backstage while getting ready for the "big comedy."<sup>86</sup>

This extensive use of stage attractions would eventually help carry France-Film through the Second World War, when the company's film supply was momentarily cut off. From 1941 to 1944, DeSève regularly booked concerts and operas presented by Canadian Concerts (a company set up by Nicolas Koudriavtzeff and DeSève himself) at the Théâtre St. Denis.<sup>87</sup> The Théâtre Arcade, another France-Film house seized in 1936 from Jos. Cardinal (who had in turn acquired it from Abraham Lawand), turned to drama during the war years.<sup>88</sup> This theatre previously dedicated to triple bills of French imports (it had the 10<sup>th</sup> run on France-Film products) thus became one of the city's leading venues for legitimate theatre and melodrama *en français* in the 1940s.<sup>89</sup> It was famous for being the home of the two leading stars of the French-Canadian stage, sisters Germaine and Antoinette Giroux (daughters of photographer Lactance Giroux, who had once been Léo-Ernest Ouimet's cinematographer). The Arcade also regularly featured Henri Letondal, Jeanne Demons and French émigrée Janine Sutto.<sup>90</sup> The plays and melodramas presented at the Arcade (which included the infamous *Aurore l'enfant martyr*) shared the predominantly female public of the Théâtre National, located a few blocks west on St. Catherine Street.<sup>91</sup> In the fictional but well-documented *La duchesse et le roturier*, Michel Tremblay describes rows of housewives knitting, mending clothes and chatting while attending the Arcade's matinées.<sup>92</sup>

## Between Popular Audiences and Cultural Elites

France-Film's reliance on the plebeian theatrical genres of burlesque and melodrama seemingly contradicted the company's rhetoric. Since the company's inception in the early 1930s, its copywriters had strove to cast it as a bold defender of the great French tradition in North America. France-Film had not shied away from military metaphors on occasion: in a 1931 press release, the company's copywriter for instance described with almost religious fervor a "phalanx of exhibitors once dedicated to American films but now devoted to the French idea." A recurrent "holy war" theme is also in evidence in a striking full-page advertisement published in *La Presse* in the spring of 1935, which depicts a pair of (presumably French) knights in armor, and goes on to describe the company's work as a "heroic crusade."<sup>93</sup> [Figure 7.8] The advertisement then proceeds to vaunt France-Film's efforts to "protect" the mother tongue of the "French population" of Quebec, as well as its "battle [...] for the defense of French art and spirit."

France-Film's crusade further posited a fundamental difference between French and American cinema. At the fifth annual French Film Congress organized in 1935 by France-Film and the Compagnie cinématographique canadienne, the Université de Montréal's secretary, Édouard Montpetit, for instance explained that: "essentially different from *yanki* [*sic*] cinema, the French film understands satire, exhibits a cheerful, honest disposition, and reveals a taste for proper language. It can be witty, and even spicy or sentimental, without being idiotic."<sup>94</sup> This dichotomy conveniently helped France-Film add patriotic overtones to what was first and foremost a commercial enterprise. For Montpetit, French cinema thus constituted a most effective opponent to the "uninterrupted flow of Americanism introduced in Quebec by modernism's multiple manifestations."<sup>95</sup> This argument echoed the

point made in 1931 by one of the guests of honor of the first French film congress, French consul Édouard Carteron:

Putting aside the commercial side of the proposition, theatre owners and managers booking French films in this Province must realize that they are actually contributing to a wonderful patriotic enterprise. With this most amazing weapon, they help fight the spread of americanism in the popular classes. Through its dynamism and intellectualism, the French film elevates and cultivates the spirit.<sup>96</sup>

An essential corollary to the anti-americanism professed by some of France-Film's propagandists (others were willing to concede American cinema's technical know-how and entertainment value) lay in the perceived "affinity" of the French and French-Canadian populations. This affinity, which supposedly rested on shared "mores and language," was obviously deemed to supersede French-Canada's continental identity.<sup>97</sup> This opinion was reprised by none other than Quebec prime minister Louis-Alexandre Taschereau, who praised French cinema's contribution to the development of French Canada's "ethnic individuality" at the 1934 French film Congress.<sup>98</sup>

Paradoxically, the consensus among the participants to the annual French film congresses held in the early to mid-1930s seems to have been that French cinema's main contribution to the rise of this ethnic individuality was that it favored the alignment of the language used in French-Canada on the Parisian norm, variably referred to as "*le beau parler de France*" or "*le français de France*." Among those harping on this point in their speeches to congress participants were prime minister Taschereau and Robert Hurel, founder of La Compagnie cinématographique canadienne. This endorsement of the French norm was implicitly doubled by a disavowal of the local vernacular, evidently perceived as debased and vulgar.<sup>99</sup> In his speech, Taschereau further opined that French cinema would help bring refinement to the tastes of French-Canadians. This opinion was shared by Montpetit, who

went as far as to proclaim that the importation of French films would greatly contribute to the development of the decorative arts in the Province.<sup>100</sup>

The outward clash between the various patriotic discourses coopted by France-Film and the chain's actual programming policies sits well with the analysis of French-Canadian identity and class relations developed by the historian and sociologist Gérard Bouchard.<sup>101</sup> The latter posits that, between the two centuries that elapsed between the English Conquest of Canada in the second half of the eighteenth century and the mid-twentieth century upheaval that led to the Quiet Revolution in Quebec, French-Canada's elites attempted to compensate for their lack of political and economical power by resorting to the construction of a sort of fictional homeland ("*patrie imaginaire*"). This construct stressed French-Canada's connection to "France" (itself an imaginary construction, as French-Canada's elites did not approve of many thinkers associated with the Enlightenment and the Republican ideal), which is to say that it emphasized its difference from the other groups also claiming North America as their home.<sup>102</sup> The French language and Catholic religion were set at the heart of French-Canadian identity, while a glorious rural tradition with only the most tenuous connection with French-Canada's reality was created by would-be novelists and ethnologists largely recruited among the liberal professions and the clergy. In the words of the priest and literary critic Henri-Raymond Casgrain (1831-1904), the elites' nationalistic enterprise aimed to "depict French Canada's population not as it was, but as it should be."<sup>103</sup>

Late twentieth century intellectuals were not the first to pick on the striking dissonance between the French-Canada imagined by its elites and the actual country inhabited by its population. In the 1940 edition of *Fridolinons*, Gratien Gélinas had for instance included a playlet narrating Fridolin's attempt to jump on the *terroir* bandwagon and write his own "play

of the homeland,” *Le Val-qui-rit* (“*The Laughing Valley*”). The playlet opens as Fridolin, realizing that the set he has just built is short on flowers, gets ahold of a stagehand:

FRIDOLIN: Good job mister stagehand. The only thing is that I’d need flowers: around the house, around the barn... everywhere!

STAGEHAND: I don’t think I’ve ever seen flowers in the country.

FRIDOLIN: Haven’t you read some homeland poetry [*“les poésies du terroir”*]?

STAGEHAND: (*Who hasn’t got a clue about what Fridolin is talking about.*) I don’t think so... All I know is that country folks [*“les habitants”*] are not big on flowers.

FRIDOLIN: Listen, this isn’t about being truthful or not, it’s about producing a homeland play [*“une oeuvre du terroir”*]. Go get me some flowers!<sup>104</sup>

Later, when his characters start to argue about property lines, Fridolin once again feels compelled to intervene:

FRIDOLIN: What’s this! No, no and no! What do you think you’re making me write, you? A squabble in the countryside? I’ve never heard of such a thing in a *roman du terroir*! Especially not neighbors quarrelling about property lines! That’s one hell of a blunder we were about to commit! Start over, you two, and let’s show them that we too have read *l’abbé Groulx*.<sup>105</sup>

When one of the characters succumbs to the lure of Montreal (that is, of the city presumably inhabited by most of *Fridolinons’* audience) in the playlet’s second act, an underworld full of white slavers, ancient prostitutes, drunkards, consumptive workers, corrupt politicians, and moving picture theatres is revealed.<sup>106</sup> Clearly, the joke is on the writers and intellectuals who so blatantly distorted the everyday realities of the inhabitants of the Province of Quebec for the sake of a backward-looking ideology.

The various agents involved in the distribution and exhibition of French cinema in Quebec were undoubtedly aware of the fact that most members of their prospective audience lived outside of the *terroir* dreamed by the Province’s elite. They could not ignore the fact that French Canada had largely been shaped by its location on the North American continent, and that an increasingly large proportion of its population lived and worked in

urban areas. Indeed, statistics reveal that city dwellers first outnumbered countrymen in the second decade of the twentieth century in Quebec.<sup>107</sup> Yet, the Compagnie cinématographique canadienne and France-Film also seem to have understood that, in order to maximize their success in the Quebec market, they would have to simultaneously gain the support of the urban popular classes and the assent of the elites. The managers and directors of these organizations dedicated to French cinema had had plenty of occasions to observe the difficulties created by the French-Canadian elites allied with the provincial and municipal administrations for the local film industry, as well as for the practitioners of that other form of popular entertainment associated with americanism: burlesque. Juliette Petrie for instance describes in her memoirs how one Quebec City priest once refused to grant her absolution unless she gave up her life of sin on the stage. The same priest also allegedly caused the Petries' audiences to shrink in the aftermath of the earthquake that hit the city on February 28, 1925, which he declared to be a divine retribution for the presence of a burlesque company in his parish.<sup>108</sup>

It is therefore no surprise to see La Compagnie cinématographique canadienne and France-Film attempting to coopt the Province's elites, most notably by making several personalities associated with the cultural, political and business communities their guests of honors at the annual French film congresses they held in the early to mid-1930s. Ostensibly organized to promote French cinema and organize the efforts of the nascent network dedicated to its distribution and exhibition in Quebec, these congresses featured over the years Édouard Montpetit (secretary, Université de Montréal), Athanase David (provincial secretary), Pamphile Réal Du Tremblay (politician and president of *La Presse* between 1932 and 1955), Roger Champoux (journalist), Camillien Houde (mayor of Montreal), Henri Letondal (comedian, playwright and critic), Adrien Arcand (journalist and future leader of

the fascistic Parti de l'Unité nationale), Jules Hamel (manager of La Banque canadienne nationale), Ernest Tétreau (president of the Alliance française), Olivar Asselin (journalist, editor of *Le Canada*), and many others.<sup>109</sup> [Figure 7.9] As we have seen, even prime minister Taschereau, who had not missed an opportunity to defend the most narrow views on cinema and alienate its industry in the 1920s, was invited to contribute to many editions of the congress, where he expressed effusive words of praise for French cinema and its influence.<sup>110</sup>

This alliance with French-Canadian elites can seem surprising, coming as it was from a company involved in the production of stage shows aimed at the urban popular classes, as well as in the distribution and exhibition of popular French entertainment products whose moral and cultural value was, as a whole, hardly above that of contemporary US cinema. (The latter fact was most notably demonstrated by the Quebec Board of Censors notoriously low approval rate of French imports.) In spite of all of France-Film's grandiloquent statements on "*le beau parler de France*," its leading star, Rose Ouellette, attracted audiences not in spite of, but, indeed, largely through her use of a thick local vernacular. Allegedly nicknamed "*La Poune aux oeufs d'or*" (a pun on "the hen [*la poule*] with the golden eggs") by the company's management, Ouellette eventually succeeded in filling the Théâtre National to capacity week after week for seventeen years with shows regarded as disreputable plebeian amusements by the local elites. She would eventually retain the direction of the theatre until 1953, when television caused both film and burlesque audiences to dwindle.<sup>111</sup>

France-Film's ability to get away with this kind of blatant double discourse might seem somewhat surprising from a contemporary point of view. Bouchard's analysis of class relations in French Canada can however help us understand how the company's seemingly irreconcilable discourses and activities managed to escape criticism. The historical evidence gathered by Bouchard more particularly suggests that this kind of schizophrenic behavior

was so deeply entrenched in French-Canadian society by the early twentieth century that it came to be perceived, not as cynical manipulations, but as an inescapable fact of French-Canadian life. The long list of quixotic campaigns waged the elites but largely ignored by the Province's population compiled by Bouchard includes prohibitions on drinking, dancing and immoral literature, denunciations of americanism and conspicuous consumption, crusades for the defense of the Vatican (no more than a few hundred French-Canadians had volunteered to serve in the zouaves in the 1860s), for the promotion of Catholicism in North America, for *le bon parler français*...<sup>112</sup>

Bouchard generally believes that Catholicism's grasp on the French-Canadian population might not have been as tight as often believed. His research suggests that, while the clergy may have managed institutions and attempted to dictate conducts, religion failed to affect in an essential way French-Canada's values, spirit and ideals. This situation may have been evidenced by fact that Catholicism's influence on Quebec life almost entirely collapsed in record time during the Quiet Revolution.<sup>113</sup> This observation sits well with the fact that, as we have seen in chapter 4, the Catholic clergy's vehement opposition to both cinema and Sunday shows did not prevent the many Montreal moving picture theatres operating in neighborhoods with sizable French-Canadian populations from doing good business on Sundays. And just as many parishioners went to the mass every Sunday morning, politely nodded during the priest's sermon, and then went home and made up their own mind about what constituted proper conduct, quite a few Montrealers glanced at the latest advertisement praising France-Film's crusade for French language in *La Presse*, and then headed to the National to see – and hear – *La Poutine*.

## Gratien G  linas and the Mid-Century Renewal of the French-Canadian Public Sphere

French Canada managed to survive for nearly two centuries in spite of the multiple contradictions that simultaneously resulted from and perpetuated its lack of political representation. Significant changes nevertheless started to occur in the mid-twentieth century, when elements of the popular classes and national elite finally started to bridge the gap that had long divided them. In time, this process would lead to a renewal of French-Canadian/Qu  b  cois identity and strengthen the community's quest for political representation and autonomy.

One of the main manifestations of this deep transformation of Quebec society was the rise of a new popular culture rooted in the actual living conditions of the French-Canadian community on the North American continent. This nascent popular culture was probably best exemplified by the nine annual *Fridolinons* revues produced between 1938 and 1946 by Gratien G  linas. On that regard, it is essential to note that, while G  linas'   uvre certainly stood outside of both the fabricated folklore of the elites and the plebeian culture of burlesque (which it both occasionally mocked, as we have seen), *Fridolinons* remained largely indebted to the various forms of popular amusement booked in the Province's vast network of theatres during the first decades of the twentieth century. It is further essential to keep in mind that the creation of this network of theatres had in turn largely been enabled by the advent of film, which had provided an ample supply of reasonably cheap attractions. When recent film productions became hard to get as a result of the runs systems implemented at the turn of the 1920s and vertical integration, many theatre operators had emphasized the presentation of alternative attractions, thus causing a surge in the production of French-Canadian burlesque shows, revues, melodrama, and musical entertainments.

The *Fridolinons* revues extensively relied on local talent developed within the network of Quebec theatres initially dedicated to film entertainments. Maurice Meerte, the revue's musical director, and one of Gélina's closest collaborators, had for instance been the orchestra leader of the prestigious Montreal Capitol in the silent era.<sup>114</sup> Juliette Béliveau, lead female player of *Fridolinons*, had as we have seen long worked alongside Guimond and Petrie's burlesque companies at the King Edward, Starland, Chanteclerc and Théâtre National. **[Figure 7.10]** Another veteran of the French-Canadian stage, Fred Barry, also filled numerous parts in *Fridolinons*, in addition to acting as adviser to Gélina on staging issues.<sup>115</sup> Between the 1910s and the late 1930s, the various theatrical companies co-directed by Barry, his wife Bella Ouellette, and fellow actor Albert Duquesne had honed their craft during a long string of residencies at the St. Henri Family (later United Amusement's Corona), at the east end Chanteclerc (later the Stella) and Arcade theatres, as well as at Cardinal's Théâtre St. Denis.<sup>116</sup> Tellingly, all four of these theatres had been built between 1912 and 1916, and first operated as moving pictures theatres or combination (film and vaudeville) houses.

Gélina also appropriated some of the defining features of the burlesque tradition for his stage revues. The most ostentatious of these was *Fridolinons*' renowned chorus line. Directed by Elvira Gomez, the twelve female dancers hired each year by Gélina variously added sex-appeal to *Fridolinons*, helped with transitions between numbers and acted as extras.<sup>117</sup> By making the character of Fridolin the center of his revues (as their title reveals), Gélina further reprised a narrative strategy that had well served many burlesquers, including Ouellette and Guimond. Building their shows around characters associated with subordinate groups (La Poune was a boisterous but otherwise unassuming middle-aged woman, Ti-Zoune a variation on the working class drunk, and Fridolin a working class teenager),

permitted Ouellette, Guimond and Gélinas to elicit immediate sympathy for their creations. Gélinas later stated that this decision also aimed to soften the blow of the satire and social commentary contained by his shows, as “one tends to forgive cheekiness more readily in a youngster than in a full-grown adult.”<sup>118</sup>

This recourse to unthreatening familiar types further helped create a climate of complicity between audiences and performers in both burlesque and Gélinas’ *Fridolinons* revues. Juliette Petrie for instance describes how Ouellette’s numerous female fans would bring her food and treats, and how the comedian would often interrupt a performance to thank a female patron she had just spotted in the audience for the *sucré-à-la-crème* she had received the week before.<sup>119</sup> In *Fridolinons*, Gélinas used the shows’ opening monologues to establish a personal rapport with audience members: Fridolin would come and sit on a kitchen chair on the edge of the stage, congratulate them on their appearance, inquire about their health, commiserate about rationing and other wartime hardships, and volunteer updates on his own fictional family.<sup>120</sup> By delving into the trivial and the personal, Gélinas created the bond between performers and audiences on which the political and nationalist components of his shows hinged. As remarked by Bouchard, the “national” was at the time largely conceived as a phenomenon grounded in homogeneity: nations were thought to be communities sharing the same institutions, rules, language, customs, religion and memory.<sup>121</sup> By inquiring about how his public had been affected by the latest flu epidemic, Fridolin reinforced the idea that he and the audience shared the same referents, and thus constituted a single community – one big family, one might say – sharing the same interests, the same fights. He made his spectators’ hardships his, and they supported him by coming back the next year.

This identification process was largely enabled by the fact that, just like the performers active in the local burlesque companies, Gélinas' revues fully recognized the North-American and urban dimensions of French-Canadian life. Which is not to say that Gélinas refused to acknowledge that many members of his predominantly urban audience were not very far removed from their rural roots. His previously quoted parody of the *roman du terroir* genre was effective precisely because the revue's audience was very well aware of the fact that things were not so rosy in the countryside. Indeed, Montreal's francophone population was at the time largely composed of recent expatriates from the Province's rural areas, brought to the city by the lack of prospects and generally difficult conditions offered by country life.

The clash between the facts of French-Canadian life and the outlook of the community's elite makes for an interesting case study of the incorporation process through which, according to Raymond Williams, hegemonies are created and sustained. As we have seen, Bouchard's work suggests that French-Canada's elites saw themselves as the appointed keepers of a population which they tried to control, not through the incorporation of the new culture emerging on the new continent, but by its substitution by an idealized version of the great French "tradition" (itself a most selective concept, in Williams's opinion).<sup>122</sup> This national elite consequently never managed to go beyond ideology and establish a true hegemony – a situation that, once again, could help explain why French-Canadian culture and society seemed to change so quickly during the Quiet revolution, as ideology remains much easier to dismantle than hegemony. As a result, French-Canadian life in the mid-twentieth century seems to have been structured less by the relationship between the dominant culture (i.e., the culture promoted by the elites) and the oppositional culture given a voice by *Fridolinons*, than by the productive tension between residual French rural and

emergent North American urban cultures. Gélinas thus largely helped pave the way for the quest for “*québécoisité*” (“quebecness”) generally associated with the Quiet revolution, which would abundantly mine the Province’s past, this time not to assert French-Canada’s apostolic mission, but to reclaim and reactivate a resilient working-class culture.

At the crux of this tension between French Canada’s residual and emergent cultures was language. On that regard, the *Fridolinons* revues produced between 1938 and 1946, as well as Gélinas’ first *bona fide* play, *Tit-Coq* (1948), constitute an important link between the work of silent-era film lecturers, the burlesque tradition that emerged at the turn of the 1920s, and the theatre of Michel Tremblay in the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>123</sup> Three decades before Tremblay, Gélinas pioneered the use of a popular language rooted in the vernacular of Montreal’s working class. The language of *Fridolinons* was distinct from both the Parisian French emulated by many French-Canadian authors and the backward looking picturesque vernacular created by writers such as Claude-Henri Grignon (author of *Un homme et son péché*, a story set among late-19<sup>th</sup> century settlers). *Fridolinons* mined the expressive possibilities of the local vernacular that had previously been exploited by Guimond, Ouellette and their peers, but distanced itself from the burlesque tradition by consciously downplaying the “vulgar” elements of this language. This decision was most likely justified by more than Gélinas’ own personal stand on issues of decorum and public morals, as he no doubt understood that the slightest hint of profanity or off-color language would have aroused vehement responses, and thus prevented the audience from engaging with the more important points made by his revues.

The single most important influence on Gélinas’ dramatic art, and more specifically on the language employed therein, might actually not have been the work of local burlesque performers, but the Marcel Pagnol films distributed in Quebec in the 1930s by La

Compagnie cinématographique canadienne and France-Film. In interviews, Gélinas has acknowledged the deep impression that Pagnol's comedy-dramas had made on him.<sup>124</sup> This reaction to the Provençal's author productions was not atypical. Pagnol's films, and more particularly the trilogy made up of *Marius* (Alexander Korda, 1931), *Fanny* (Marc Allégret, 1932), and *César* (Marcel Pagnol, 1936), had met with tremendous success in Quebec in the 1930s – a situation most eloquently demonstrated by the fact that *Fanny*'s record eight week stay at the first-run Cinéma de Paris in the winter of 1934 was only broken by *César*'s fourteen weeks run at the same theatre in the spring of 1937.<sup>125</sup> **[Figure 7.11]** Pagnol's films and plays thus indisputably demonstrated that regional accents and vernaculars were not incompatible with respectable entertainment. Their success furthermore showed that by being made to connote “authenticity,” regionalisms could actually enhance both drama and comedy, and even increase the export potential of cultural productions.

Pagnol's influence on Gélinas' creative and commercial and activities (including an attempt in the early 1940s to create an independent film studio reprising the commercial model of Les Films Marcel Pagnol) would deserve a study of its own. Suffice it to say that, by taking cues from Pagnol's particular brand of regionally inflected comedy-drama, Gélinas managed to create works whose deep sympathy for the characters and milieus they evoked did not prevent the formation of a strong critical undercurrent. There are no more bad guys in *Marius*, *Fanny* and *César* than there are in *Tit-Coq* (first a play based on a playlet – “The Conscript's Return” – from *Fridolinons 46*, later a feature film co-directed by Gélinas and René Delacroix in 1952). Yet all of these plays-cum-films<sup>126</sup> offer hard-hitting denunciations of inhumane social mores enforced by communities of well-meaning characters, be it the prohibition of divorce in *Tit-Coq* or the opprobrium to which single mothers and “bastard” children were subjected in both Gélinas' play and Pagnol's trilogy.

The criticism contained by *Fridolinons* and *Tit-Coq* was largely enabled by the fact that, contrarily to the generally improvised burlesque shows, Gélinas' radio shows, revues and plays had all been carefully scripted by the author and a handful of collaborators.<sup>127</sup> A Montreal journalist thus observed in a contemporary review that Gélinas managed to get away with a few unpleasant truths and spicy double entendre in *Fridolinons 39* by burying them in genuinely funny, humane, and well-crafted sketches.<sup>128</sup> Careful scripting work indeed permitted Gélinas to broach on many sensitive issues and topics, and still manage to escape accusations of vulgarity, impertinence, or even treason during war years. These included sexual matters now mistakenly believed to have been entirely avoided in the French-Canadian cultural production of the era. In one sketch from *Fridolinons 40*, the wife of an enrolled man for instance candidly admits to her neighbour that she certainly could have used her missing husband to “unclog her sink” the previous morning.<sup>129</sup> In *La dame aux camélias, la vraie*, screened during performances of *Fridolinons 43*, Gélinas took advantage of the fact that 16mm films were not yet required to be approved by the provincial board of censors, most notably by illustrating the film's final “and they lived happily ever after” with a shot showing various undergarments being enthusiastically thrown on a bedroom chair.<sup>130</sup>

These implicit denunciations of the prudishness imposed by local elites were abundantly completed in *Fridolinons* by more explicit attacks aimed at a wide variety of targets. Interestingly, most of these targets could be found within the French-Canadian community. In a sketch entitled “On the Matter of *la Race's* Future” (“*Essai sur l'avenir de la race*” – a parody of Lionel Groulx's nationalist essays) a group of idle young men drink Pepsi, chase girls, and discuss Yvon Robert's latest wrestling match at a snack bar. When an old acquaintance stops by, the assembled loafers ridicule him for taking night classes, a choice they deem utterly “pretentious.”<sup>131</sup> In “The Exemplary Life of Jean-Baptiste Laframboise”

(“*La vie édifiante de Jean-Baptiste Laframboise*”), a playlet included in *Fridolinons 45* and Gélinas’ most ambitious piece of work before *Tit-Coq*, French-Canadians are similarly depicted as being deeply distrustful of individuals toiling in non-manual labor, and utterly incapable of recognizing talent in one of theirs. The playlet closes on a monologue by protagonist Laframboise, a notary born with a great passion and talent for literature who, as he is entering the afterlife, is called up to face God and explain why he has wasted his gift:

I realize this is no moment for me to brag, but the fact is that, without ever realizing it, I was rather gifted, you know. I never would have believed that this could happen to a *Canadien*. My late father too must have been in for quite a surprise when he realized it. Because. . . dad never believed in me, and neither did the inhabitants of my village. Actually, nobody ever had any kind of trust in me. [...]

You see, dear God, the folks back home, this is their main problem. It would never dawn upon them that a guy born in St. Agapit might be just as bright as another born in, say, Paris. [...]

So, with this kind of idea – please forgive the language, dear God – they imagine that the only thing they’re good for is to sit on their behind and watch the others get moving. And when a poor fellow with talent appears in their midst, they wait for him to go away be called a great man abroad before they admire him.<sup>132</sup>

While we can safely assume that Gélinas did not feel that he had personally been ignored at home – by the age of 30, he had his own successful radio show and annual revue – one does not have to dig very deep to find traces of the lack of confidence in local talent to which he so strongly reacted. In October of 1938, *Variety* had for instance reported that the national public radio broadcaster, CBC, was planning to record “a series of [French] classical plays” in Paris because there was “a deficiency of capable or even promising native-language actors” in Canada. (Tellingly, the article further explains that these broadcasts were intended to “cater to the French-language highbrows.”)<sup>133</sup> This statement was in line with Julien Duvivier’s decision to shoot his 1934 adaptation of Louis Hémon’s *Marie-Chapdelaine* with an almost completely French cast (Fred Barry being the sole French-Canadian actor involved in the project). A French industry representative had defended Duvivier’s decision

by stating that while “French-Canadians had a particular accent,” any concerns for linguistic authenticity had to be subordinated to the quest for good acting, and that, sadly, with the lack of development of the French-Canadian film industry came a dearth of able actors.<sup>134</sup> This view was unfortunately not entirely unfounded.

The superstitious and coercive sides of religion, as well as the authoritarian nature of the Catholic clergy were also frequently (though in most instances indirectly) mocked by Gélinas.<sup>135</sup> In the 1942 sketch “The Bingo Fiends” (“*Les bingomanes*”), a bingo-addicted housewife reacts to news of a ban on church basement bingos by exclaiming: “Again a trick by those freemasons... I tell you, soon we won’t be able to practice our religion anymore, in the Province of Quebec.”<sup>136</sup> In the 1946 playlet “The Conscript’s Return,” as in *Tit-Coq*, which expanded upon the same story, a well-meaning avuncular priest helps the protagonist on many occasions, but ultimately defends the Catholic prohibition on divorce that will crush both Tit-Coq and the woman he loves by the play’s conclusion.<sup>137</sup>

Other representatives of the national elite were more openly lampooned. Politicians, for instance, were systematically depicted as egotistical and supremely corrupt. Patronage, bribes, telegraphing and ballot-stuffing were presented as the basic facts of provincial politics in several sketches.<sup>138</sup> Some politicians, such as Jean-Charles Harvey, were further depicted as opportunistic traitors, eager to bad-mouth French-Canada in order to make allies in the rest of Canada.<sup>139</sup> As for federal politicians such as Prime Minister Mackenzie King, they were generally derided for their lack of command of the French language and their perceived condescension towards French-Canada.<sup>140</sup> A notable exception can however be found in “If I Were King,” a parody of the 1943 Quebec Conference, in which the Canadian prime

minister is the one being hastily squeezed out of the picture by his British and Yankee counterparts.<sup>141</sup>

In his wartime revues, Gélinas did not skirt round the divisive question of conscription which galvanized public opinion across Canada. It should be reminded that during the campaign leading to the March 26, 1940 federal election, Mackenzie King had promised not to enforce conscription should he be re-elected. The promise obviously aimed to appease Quebec, where provincial prime minister Adélard Godbout and Union Nationale leader Maurice Duplessis, together with a large proportion of the Province's French-speaking population, opposed the measure.<sup>142</sup> The fall of France in June had nevertheless led Mackenzie King's Liberal government to institute a national registry of Canadian men and women aged between 16 and 60 and to make military service mandatory for Canadian men. The fact that enlisted men still could not be sent abroad without their consent did not prevent a majority of Quebec federal MPs from expressing their marked opposition to the measures.<sup>143</sup>

Quebec's continued opposition to conscription clashed with public opinion in the rest of Canada, where public opinion was calling for new measures fully enforcing conscription.<sup>144</sup> In January of 1942, after the opening of a new front in the Pacific, and with victory in Europe still a distant dream, Mackenzie King announced that Canadians would be asked to permit the federal government to forsake its no conscription promise through a plebiscite. Godbout advised Quebecers to grant Mackenzie King his wish (a turnabout often cited as one of the causes of Duplessis' victory in the 1944 provincial election), but failed to convince.<sup>145</sup> On April 27, 1942, 64% of Canadian electors (including Quebecers) voted for Mackenzie King's proposition, while no less than 71% of Quebec electors rejected it. The anger caused by this broken promise was exacerbated in French-Canada by the impression

that Mackenzie King had used the approval of the rest of the country to get out of a promise made specifically to French-Canadians.<sup>146</sup> These lingering tensions likely led Mackenzie King to delay the full enforcement of conscription until November 1944.<sup>147</sup>

*Fridolinons* expressed the anger and the helplessness felt by many French-Canadians in connection with conscription on several occasions. Interestingly, Gélinas' most vehement sketch touching on the issue was actually staged in *Fridolinons 39*, before the outbreak of the Second World War (and the coming of heightened censorship...). Entitled "Baptiste Goes to War," the sketch featured an exchange between "Lady England" and "Baptiste Dominion," in which characters representing Chamberlain, Mackenzie King and ex-Canadian prime minister R.B. Bennett also intervened. The sketch opens as Lady England, being unable to appease the Germans by offering them the French colonies, Belgian Congo and Greenland, calls Baptiste Dominion to her rescue. Baptiste first acts most ungrateful towards this "mother in law" who has granted him "independence... in principle," permits him to buy her products, and graciously sends him her bureaucrats and unemployed sons. "The kids at home might not see the point in catching a bullet in order to save somebody else," explains Baptiste. The latter however ends up joining the fight, moved by the oratorical skills of Lady England, who reacts by asking her son John, an arrogant British officer, "to condescend to command Baptiste." The sketch closes as Baptiste comes back from the battlefield in a stretcher, while John parades and takes all the credit for the victory.<sup>148</sup>

Gélinas' *Fridolinons* revues were peppered up until the end of the war with similar barbs aimed at both the conscription and the Canadian army's alleged contempt for French-Canadians. The 1945 edition of *Fridolinons* featured a famous (a long excerpt was filmed by the National Film Board) sketch centered on a naive working class conscript, played by Gélinas himself, getting drunk and starting to utter inconvenient truths about industrialists,

propaganda, and the poor treatment of rank-and-file soldiers. The sketch opens as the conscript enters a lunch counter on his way to the station to catch the Halifax train after a fifteen days furlough spent in Montreal drinking, gambling, playing “hide and seek” with his girlfriend, and going to the National to see La Poutine. The conscript then proceeds to empty his last bottle of gin while sarcastically bragging to the sympathetic waitress about being ready to have his mug photographed for propaganda – “another conscript leaves with a smile on his face!” – and being offered a free boat trip to Europe by the government. The exchange ultimately reveals that, while the conscript is willing to do his part – kind of – for the country or whatever, he does not entirely understand why he’s being sent abroad to be screamed and shot at for one dollar thirty cent a day. Especially when his unfit for service pal can make upwards of ten bucks a day while working at the ammunition factory and trying to steal his girlfriend.<sup>149</sup>

Surprisingly, Gélinas seems to have been pretty much left alone by the authorities in spite of the strong critical overtones of his shows and of his vocal advocacy of free speech during wartime. In his opening monologue for the 1944 edition of the revue bearing his name, Fridolin for instance warned audience members that:

I need to tell you that you’re about to hear in my revue a few things that won’t seem like they’ve been scripted by the government’s official propaganda. These things, we – my buddies and I – promise to say them clearly and loudly. Not only because it is our belief that they’re still worth saying, but also to show that we’re still living in a democracy. Yep, because, as things stand, we might not be able to work where we want... to eat what we want... to dress like we want... So freedom of speech might be about the last thing standing between what we’re fighting not to be and what we actually are.<sup>150</sup>

In later interviews, Gélinas confirmed that he had never really been bothered for the content of his wartime shows. An anonymous censor sent to a performance of *Fridolinons 44* by the federal government is known to have reported that the new revue was considerably less biting (“*rossé*”) than the previous editions, against which no measures had been taken. It was

ultimately determined by the censor that nothing contained in *Fridolinons* could be said to be truly deleterious to the war effort, to the relations between the various groups populating Canada, or to the country's international relations. The unidentified censor consequently granted his approval to the show, and declared himself happy to indulge the French-Canadians' well-developed taste for laughter.<sup>151</sup> Of course, one possible subtext for this decision might have been that the censor simply felt that French Canada's bark was worse than its bite, and that no real risks were taken in letting Gélinas proceed with his show.

The sole criticism of note reported by Gélinas actually came from an influential member of the provincial Liberal party, Téléphore-Damien Bouchard. Bouchard had summoned Gélinas to express his disapproval of a few CWAC jokes included in the 1943 show (reportedly because his own daughter was a member of the Women's Army Corps.), and to advise him not to compromise his fellow citizens serious attitude towards the war. Gélinas later claimed to have retorted that forcing him to alter or prematurely interrupt his performances of *Fridolinons* would simply not look too good for whoever had decreed the ban.<sup>152</sup>

Gélinas later attributed this relative lack of retribution to his good judgment in regard to what was and was not possible during wartime.<sup>153</sup> But while his wisdom on these matters is not to be doubted, the exchange with Bouchard suggests that the tremendous popularity of his shows might also have helped shield him from the censure of the authorities. It should incidentally be noted that, in those days where public funding of the performing arts had yet to develop in Canada, popularity constituted a definite *sine qua non* condition for a show's continued existence. On that regard, Gélinas later testified that he could not have turned a profit on *Fridolinons* without selling at least ninety percent of the Monument-National's 1,400 seats for each performance.<sup>154</sup> By way of example, this means that the 1942 edition of

*Fridolinons*, which was presented forty-two times in Montreal, was seen by upwards of 53,000 people.<sup>155</sup>

In addition to being large, the revue's audiences were also varied if one is to believe the abundant praise heaped on *Fridolinons* by publications located on the left (Jean-Charles Harvey's *Le Jour*), on the right (*Le Devoir*, *L'Action catholique*), as well as on the center of the political spectrum (*La Presse*, *La Patrie*).<sup>156</sup> Even English newspapers joined the choir. One Montreal *Gazette* reviewer for instance wrote that: "[Fridolin] is an extraordinarily gifted clown, one of the descendants of Charlie Chaplin and gifted with the kind of humor that is so native to this Province that it would be unthinkable transplanted."<sup>157</sup> Another notable fan of Gélinas was none other than the Scottish-born animator Norman McLaren, who, according to Gélinas, had convinced his superiors at the National Film Board of Canada to produce *Fridolinons* (Roger Blais dir.), a thirty-four-minute compilation of filmed excerpts from the 1945 edition of the revue.<sup>158</sup>

This previously unseen level of popularity for a Quebec personality ensured that there would most likely have been trouble a brewing for whoever would have dared censure Fridolin. On that regard, Gélinas' case more particularly gains to be contrasted with that of Camillien Houde, Montreal's francophone mayor. On August 2, 1940, Houde publicly expressed his strong opposition to the newly enacted national registry, which he saw as both an illegal measure and a simple prelude to total conscription, and advised his fellow citizens not to comply. Official censorship prevented journalists from reporting Houde's stand, but not the Montreal *Gazette* from asking for Houde's arrest. On August 5, Houde was accosted by agents from the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and the *police provinciale* as he was exiting City Hall, and taken to a concentration camp located in Petawawa, Ontario. He would eventually remain interned until 1944 as a result of his refusal to renege his position on the

national registry and conscription.<sup>159</sup> The salient fact in regard to the current argument is that, though Houde was a populist politician with a strong base in Montreal's francophone districts (he would be reelected mayor of Montreal in December of 1944, a mere few months after his release, and remain in office until 1954), his arrest and internment did not lead to any major protest. A possible explanation for this situation might be that, having long lost faith in a political system subjugating them to anglo domination, the French-Canadian masses did not vest too much in their elected representatives. As a result, the task of representing and defending French-Canada might have ultimately fell, not on the elites perceived as being both impotent and detached from the reality of the masses, but on popular figures such as Gélinas.

Now, there is obviously no way to tell what would have happened had Gélinas been arrested for his anti-conscription remarks during the war – partly because, of course, Gélinas never uttered statements nearly as brash and provocative as Houde's. What we do know, however, is that not too long after the end of the war, in 1955, a riot now regarded as one of the defining moments in the history of Quebec nationalism was sparked by the alleged contempt and unfair treatment shown by anglophones, not against an elected representative of the French-Canadian community, but against a popular hockey player, Maurice Richard. The latter had since 1942 been the shining star of the team representing French-Canada in the National Hockey League, the Montreal *Canadiens*.<sup>160</sup> The fact that the mere suspension of a hockey player could provoke such a violent reaction can largely be explained by the strong symbolic bond between the *Canadiens* hockey team and the French-Canadian community, which was most notably demonstrated by the fact that the team's jersey constituted an essential part of Gélinas' Fridolin costume in the 1930s and 1940s (see figure 7.1). In the 1960s and 1970s, the highly popular singer-songwriter Robert Charlebois would similarly

integrate to his stage costume the *Canadiens* jersey, still strongly associated with Quebec nationalism and urban working class culture.

While the contribution of the timid Richard to the renewal of French-Canadian identity was arguably largely symbolic, other popular figures such as Gélinas and Charlebois undoubtedly played leading roles in the renewal of the French-Canadian public sphere in the mid-twentieth century. True, there was no real exchange or deliberation within the public assembled at their performances. Still, the mere fact that thousands of people would return, performance after performance, year after year, suggests that many French-Canadians identified with these performers' creations, and thus felt somewhat represented by these non-elected figures. It could consequently be argued that, in the 1930s and 1940s, the series of annual *Fridolinons* revues put on by Gélinas actually functioned just like the subaltern counterpublics described by Nancy Fraser, as they unquestionably invented and circulated discourses countering those of both the French-Canadian elites and the Canadian State, and helped formulate new interpretations of the community's identity and interests.<sup>161</sup> In time, the workings of this counterpublic would permit the organization of political action, and lead to effective political representation, most notably through the creation and quick ascendancy of the nationalist Parti Québécois in the decades following the Quiet Revolution. On that regard, it is worth noting that Parti Québécois founder René Lévesque had once, during his career as a journalist and film reviewer, praised the 1952 film adaptation of Gélinas's *Tit-Cocq* by stating that it signaled "year one of the history of *Canadien* [meaning: French-Canadian] cinema."<sup>162</sup>

The facts pertaining to the numerous burlesque shows and revues created in Quebec between the turn of the 1920s and the arrival of television in the 1950s challenge Scott MacKenzie's analysis of the counterhegemonic potential of cinema in Quebec. MacKenzie's

central claim on the issue is that while this potential existed, it was very rarely actualized, and could therefore mainly be observed through its negative determination:

I would hesitate to state that the cinema *allowed* individuals to come together and debate the concerns of the day in a rational manner and on equal ground; I would, however, contend that, at times the cinema held the promise of this possibility, and that this promise often motivated social intervention in the real world, be it in relation to Church, State, poverty or national identity.<sup>163</sup>

I will readily concede that film theatres only exceptionally, if ever, became havens of exchanges and rational debates. Still, it could be argued that a slight shift in emphasis from Quebec cinema to Quebec film programmes might have significantly altered MacKenzie's assessment of the medium's contribution to the Province's social and democratic life. Had he investigated the performances of the *bonimenteurs*, comedians and revuists commonly employed by many Montreal moving picture theatres, he would no doubt have found more to report on the counterhegemonic potential of cinema spaces.

MacKenzie is correct in asserting that the film adaptation of *Tit-Coq* distributed by France-Film constitutes the first significant Quebec feature film to somehow reflect the changing identity and living conditions of French-Canadians, and to not “unproblematically [reaffirm] the supremacy of the Catholic Church.”<sup>164</sup> His analysis of the film would have however gained to be informed by a better acquaintance with the theatrical tradition that had preceded it. Had MacKenzie been able – as contemporary viewers most assuredly were – to situate the film version of *Tit-Coq* in the continuity of Gélinas' wartime revues<sup>165</sup>, there is no doubt that he would have felt compelled to describe it as more than “ethically confused” – that is, as being almost unwittingly critical.<sup>166</sup> The 1952 film presented by Lévesque and MacKenzie as year one of Quebec cinema would have also been shown to be just a link – albeit an important one – in a wider and older dramatic tradition.

The facts exposed in this chapter arguably complete the observations made by Germain Lacasse and Jean-Marc Larrue on the interconnectedness of film and the stage in the Province of Quebec over the first half of the twentieth century.<sup>167</sup> Gratien Gélinas' *Fridolinons* revues were not films, and neither were they presented in moving picture theatres. But they still relied to a large extent on talent developed on the stages of the Province's moving picture theatres, often to fill the vacuum left by vertical integration and the runs system. *Fridolinons*, in turn, also proved that there was an audience for stories rooted in the daily lives of French-Canadians, and even furnished material to be adapted on the screen.

There is no debate that the aforementioned formation of a French-Canadian counterpublic anchored in the Province's amusement places constituted an unplanned and unexpected consequence of the popularity of film, as well as of the subsequent vertical integration of its industry. Simply put, exhibitors suddenly found themselves with slots to fill in their programmes, and local talent tried its best to step up to the occasion. Gélinas for instance explained that he had had to take whatever was available and create his own formula, just like burlesque comedians had done before him.<sup>168</sup> The creative process of Quebec's most popular performers of the early and mid-twentieth century was thus characterized by invention, borrowings, adaptations and *bricolage*, that is, by the very same phenomena that Gérard Bouchard associates with the experience of the French-Canadian community on the new continent.<sup>169</sup>

## Endnotes

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- <sup>1</sup> "Radio Reception," *The Gazette* (15 September 1938): 2.
- <sup>2</sup> "St. Denis Theatre, Montreal, Re-opens with RCA High Fidelity," *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* (4 November 1933): 9.
- <sup>3</sup> "French Comic Big Stuff in Montreal Theatre," *Variety* (23 March 1938): 35.
- <sup>4</sup> "No Dent in Montreal for 'Snow White,' 18G," *Variety* (2 March 1938): 7.
- <sup>5</sup> "Canadian Comic Earns \$300 Weekly, A New Local High," *Variety* (10 August 1938): 40.
- <sup>6</sup> "Sets in Canada," *Variety* (10 August 1938): 40.
- <sup>7</sup> Interestingly, the Gayety would be acquired and turned into La Comédie canadienne by none other than Gratien Gélinas in 1957.
- <sup>8</sup> The "burlesque canayen" label was notably used by the comedian and theatre historian Henry Deyglun. See: "Les inédits d'Henry Deyglun: les années folles 1920-1926," *L'Annuaire théâtral: revue québécoise d'études théâtrales* no. 1 (1985): 34.
- <sup>9</sup> Gérard Bouchard, *Genèse des nations et cultures du Nouveau Monde: essai d'histoire comparée* (Montreal: Boréal, 2000); Chantal Hébert, *Le burlesque au Québec: un divertissement populaire* (Montreal: Hurtubise HMH, 1981).
- <sup>10</sup> Paul-Émile Borduas, "Refus global," in *Écrits/Writings 1942-1958*, François-Marc Gagnon and Dennis Young, trans. and eds. (Halifax: The Press of Nova Scotia College of Art, 1978), 45-54. Original French version: "Petit peuple qui malgré tout se multiplie dans la générosité de la chair sinon dans celle de l'esprit, au nord de l'immense Amérique au corps semillant de la jeunesse au coeur d'or, mais à la morale simiesque, envoûtée par le prestige annihilant du souvenir des chefs-d'oeuvre d'Europe, dédaigneuse des authentiques créations de ses classes opprimées."
- <sup>11</sup> Scott MacKenzie, "A Screen of One's Own: Early Cinema in Quebec and the Public Sphere 1906-28," *Screen* 41:2 (Summer 2000): 183-202; *Screening Québec: Québécois Cinema, National Identity and the Public Sphere* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004).
- <sup>12</sup> MacKenzie, "A Screen of One's Own," 188, 200, quoting Miriam Hansen, *Babel and Babylon: Spectatorship in American Silent Film* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), 232.
- <sup>13</sup> Lionel Groulx, 1918 speech quoted in *L'Action française* (July 1924): 3; in turn quoted in MacKenzie, "A Screen of One's Own," 197; Léo Pelland, *Comment lutter contre le mauvais cinéma* (Montreal: L'Oeuvre des tracts, 1926), 14.
- <sup>14</sup> Hébert, *Le burlesque au Québec*, 18; André-G. Bourassa and Jean-Marc Larrue, *Les nuits de la "Main": cent ans de spectacles sur le boulevard Saint-Laurent (1891-1991)* (Montreal: VLB éditeur, 1993), 80.
- <sup>15</sup> Bourassa and Larrue, *Les nuits de la "Main,"* 71-81; Juliette Petrie, *Quand on revoit tout ça! Le burlesque au Québec, 1914-1960* (Montreal: Productions vieux rêves, 1977), 31-43; Hébert, *Le burlesque au Québec*, 18-44.
- <sup>16</sup> Bourassa and Larrue, *Les nuits de la "Main,"* 76-77.
- <sup>17</sup> Jay Aitch, "Burlesque Gets Into Its Stride," *The Axe News* (18 August 1922): 5; Dane Lanken, *Montreal Movie Palaces: Great Theatres of the Golden Era 1884-1938* (Waterloo: Penumbra Press, 1993), 41.
- <sup>18</sup> Bourassa and Larrue, *Les nuits de la "Main,"* 38.
- <sup>19</sup> Lanken, *Montreal Movie Palaces*, 38.
- <sup>20</sup> "Columbia Burlesque Must Play Montreal and Returns to Gayety for 1923-24 Season," *The Axe News* (31 August 1923): 2; Hébert, *Le burlesque au Québec*, 18-19.
- <sup>21</sup> Bourassa and Larrue, *Les nuits de la "Main,"* 77; Hébert, *Le burlesque au Québec*, 5-11.
- <sup>22</sup> *The Axe News* (16 November 1923): 7; "King Edward," *The Axe News* (16 November 1923): 8.
- <sup>23</sup> John H. Roberts, "Why I Like Burlesque," *The Axe News* (8 February 1924): 6.
- <sup>24</sup> Petrie, *Quand on revoit tout ça!*, 34-35.
- <sup>25</sup> Germain Lacasse, "Joseph Dumais and the Language of French-Canadian Silent Cinema," in *Early Cinema and the National*, Richard Abel, Giorgio Bertellini and Rob King, eds. (London: John Libbey, 2008), 211-212.

- <sup>26</sup> See Juliette Petrie's testimony in Petrie, *Quand on revoit tout ça!*, 34.
- <sup>27</sup> Juliette Petrie claims that Olivier Guimond Sr. mainly spoke English backstage. Petrie, *Quand on revoit tout ça!*, 35, 97.
- <sup>28</sup> Petrie, *Quand on revoit tout ça!*, 34-35; Hébert, *Le burlesque au Québec*, 28-35. Advertisements for Petrie's show at the Starland in the Spring of 1924 do promise: "A Musical Comedy in French and English." See: *The Axe News* (16 May 1924): 6.
- <sup>29</sup> "Tizoune Still Gives Hysterics," *The Axe News* (16 November 1923): 7.
- <sup>30</sup> It should be noted that this statement somewhat contradicts French-Canadian burlesque's firmly established reputation as a plebeian form of entertainment despised by the elite. It may be that this reputation only developed later or, more likely, that the writer of this advert trying to pass as reporting "enhanced" reality so as to promote the Starland's show. "Montreal Boasts Theatre Unique on Entire Continent," *The Axe News* (21 December 1923): 6.
- <sup>31</sup> Deyglun, "Les inédits d'Henry Deyglun," 35. Author's translation.
- <sup>32</sup> Bourassa, Larrue, *Les nuits de la "Main,"* 14-17.
- <sup>33</sup> The King Edward is first listed in the 1909-1910 edition of the *Lovell's*.
- <sup>34</sup> *Lovell's*, multiple editions, 1906-1935; "L'encombrement dans les scopes," *La Patrie* (24 September 1910): 12.
- <sup>35</sup> *Lovell's* (1906-1907); Bourassa, Larrue, *Les nuits de la "Main,"* 79.
- <sup>36</sup> See for instance: Insurance Plan of City of Montreal, Quebec, Canada, Volume I, Map 18 (Montreal and Toronto: Chas E. Good, 1909), Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec.
- <sup>37</sup> *Répertoire d'architecture traditionnelle sur le territoire de la Communauté urbaine de Montréal, architecture commerciale III: les magasins, les cinémas* (Montreal: Communauté urbaine de Montréal, Service de la planification du territoire), xix-xx.
- <sup>38</sup> Bourassa and Larrue, *Les nuits de la "Main,"* 79.
- <sup>39</sup> Petrie, *Quand on revoit tout ça!*, 41.
- <sup>40</sup> See for instance: John H. Roberts, "Why I Like Burlesque," *The Axe News* (8 February 1924): 6. *The Axe News* was published between 1922 and 1924.
- <sup>41</sup> *The Axe News* (26 October 1923): 8; *The Axe News* (16 November 1923): 7.
- <sup>42</sup> "Starland," *The Axe News* (18 January 1924): 8.
- <sup>43</sup> *The Axe News* (16 November 1923): 7.
- <sup>44</sup> "Nouveau programme spécial au Théâtre National," *La Patrie* (26 January 1924): 35; *The Axe News* (9 May 1924): 7.
- <sup>45</sup> *The Axe News* (16 May 1924): 6; *The Axe News* (23 July 1924): 7; *The Axe News* (19 August 1924): 7.
- <sup>46</sup> *The Axe News* (9 September 1924): 6.
- <sup>47</sup> "Tizoune-Fassio Team Scores in Starland Show," *The Axe News* (9 November 1923): 7.
- <sup>48</sup> Gratien Gélinas, *Les Fridolinades 1938, 1939, 1940* (Montreal: Leméac, 1988), 160. Author's translation. The "Théâtre du Tricentenaire" sketch offered four different takes on an inconsequential plot, done in the styles of some of the leading French-Canadian theatrical traditions: the old-timey "troupe du Terroir," the "collège classique" boys company, burlesque, and community theatre.
- <sup>49</sup> Rose Ouellette, *La Poune* (Montreal: Éditions Québecor, 1983), 67-68.
- <sup>50</sup> "King Edward," *The Axe News* (9 November 1923): 8.
- <sup>51</sup> Distribution sheets available in the Cinéma Impérial collection at Cinémathèque québécoise (see figure. 6.2) reveal that, within the United Amusement circuit, smaller lower-run theatres typically paid between one fifth and one tenth of what larger United theatres had paid for the same films a few weeks before. Burlesque theatres likely paid even less than the smaller United theatres for the films they exhibited.
- <sup>52</sup> *The Axe News* (9 November 1923): 7; "Tizoune Still Gives Hysterics," *The Axe News* (16 November 1923): 7.
- <sup>53</sup> *La Presse* (5 October 1935): 42.
- <sup>54</sup> Arsin had first been employed as a cameraman by Fox News in Winnipeg. He would remain involved with Montreal film producers Cinecraft and Les documentaires Jean Arsin at least until the

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late 1940s. See: Germain Lacasse, *Histoire de scopes: le cinéma muet au Québec* (Montreal: Cinémathèque québécoise, 1988), 63, 69-71; *Film Daily Yearbook* (1947): 754.

<sup>55</sup> “Montreal Comedian to Be Starred in New Arsin Feature,” *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* (10 November 1923): 16; “Tizoune Out to Rival Charlie,” *The Axe News* (30 November 1923): 8; “Local Comedian to Star in Flm,” *The Axe News* (7 December 1923): 3; “Movies Introduced in Christmas Show,” *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* (8 December 1923): 16.

<sup>56</sup> *La dame aux camélias, la vraie* was to be the first of a series of theatrical films produced by Les Studios Gratien Gélinas. Lukewarm reactions to the film’s screenings integrated to *Fridolinons 43* however caused Gélinas to abort his various film production projects. Anne-Marie Sicotte, *Gratien Gélinas: la ferveur et le doute* (Montreal: Typo, 2009), 181-83, 187.

<sup>57</sup> Ouellette, *La Poune*, 20, 23, 31, 50.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

<sup>60</sup> *The Standard* (25 May 1929): 57; Lanken, *Montreal Movie Palaces*, 133.

<sup>61</sup> Chantal Hébert for instance claims that Ouellette directed the Cartier between 1928 [*sic*] and 1935. Hébert, *Le burlesque au Québec*, 50; Ouellette, *La Poune*, 55-57.

<sup>62</sup> The *Lovell’s* lists P. Lanthier and Roméo Rochon as managers, respectively in 1929 and 1930-31, but gives no names for the 1932-1935 period.

<sup>63</sup> *La Patrie* (6 août 1913): 12; *La Presse* (14 September 1929): 75-76; Petrie, *Quand on revoit tout ça!*, 106.

<sup>64</sup> *La Presse* (4 January 1930): 60; *La Presse* (25 January 1930): 65; *La Presse* (30 August 1930): 67; *La Presse* (5 August 1933): 37; *La Presse* (23 November 1936): 8. See also: Hébert, *Le burlesque au Québec*, 277-81.

<sup>65</sup> *La Presse* (5 October 1935): 45.

<sup>66</sup> Petrie, *Quand on revoit tout ça!*, 111. Author’s translation. See also: Ouellette, *La Poune*, 56.

<sup>67</sup> Gerben Bakker, *Entertainment Industrialised: The Emergence of the International Film Industry, 1890-1940* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), xix.

<sup>68</sup> See for instance: Charles J. Maland, *Chaplin and American Culture: The Evolution of a Star Image* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 3-51.

<sup>69</sup> Quoted in Hébert, *Le burlesque au Québec*, 3. Author’s translation. On the negative attitude of intellectuals towards burlesque, see also Petrie, *Quand on revoit tout ça!*, 102; Ouellette, *La Poune*, 66.

<sup>70</sup> *La Presse* (5 October 1935): 45.

<sup>71</sup> Michel Tremblay, *Les vues animées* (Montreal: Léméac, 1990), 23-25. Quebec children were occasionally permitted to attend screenings of animated features in commercial theatres.

<sup>72</sup> Tremblay, *Les vues animées*, 67-68.

<sup>73</sup> Ouellette, *La Poune*, 56; Petrie, *Quand on revoit tout ça!*, 115.

<sup>74</sup> Ouellette, *La Poune*, 65.

<sup>75</sup> *La Presse* (20 June 1936): 26; Petrie, *Quand on revoit tout ça!*, 113; Ouellette, *La Poune*, 66-67.

<sup>76</sup> Hébert, *Le burlesque au Québec*, 50. The Musée catholique canadien was located on the corner of Côte-des-Neiges and Queen Mary Road, in front of the Oratoire St. Joseph. In 1935, it offered exhibits on the holy family, on Rome’s circus and catacombs (featuring “religious and historical scenes on 500 feet”), as well as on Canadian history. *La Presse* (1 June 1935): 72; *La Presse* (8 June 1935): 41.

<sup>77</sup> Jean-Pierre Sirois-Trahan, in collaboration with André Gaudreault, “Quand le Nationscope dama le pion au Ouimetoscope”, in *Au pays des ennemis du cinéma: pour une nouvelle histoire des débuts du cinéma au Québec*, André Gaudreault, Germain Lacasse and Jean-Pierre Sirois-Trahan, eds. (Quebec City: Nuit blanche éditeur, 1996), 167-68; *Lovell’s*, various editions 1920-1936.

<sup>78</sup> Germain Lacasse, Johanne Massé and Bethsabée Poirier, *Le diable en ville: Alexandre Silvio et l’émergence de la modernité populaire au Québec* (Montreal: Presses de l’Université de Montréal, 2012), 262.

<sup>79</sup> Cardinal most notably ran the St. Denis, Canadien and Casino theatres at the time. “Montreal Commission Enlarging Picture Scope of Its Investigation,” *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* (18 June 1927): 13; *Lovell’s*, multiple years.

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- <sup>80</sup> Authorities forced the National's owner to carry out "substantial changes" to the theatre, but deemed it less problematic than the King Edward, Globe, Ideal, Casino, Ouimetoscope, Alhambra, Arcade, Boulevardscope and Canadien-Français (most of which, it should be noted, ultimately managed to stay open). "Eight Theatres May Lose License to Operate," *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* (14 May 1927): 17; "Nine Theatres Montreal Are Permanently Closed – Seven Must Make Considerable Alterations," *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* (6 August 1927): 14; Petrie, *Quand on revoit tout ça!*, 89.
- <sup>81</sup> "Spectacle très varié au théâtre National," *La Presse* (7 September 1929): 75.
- <sup>82</sup> *La Presse* (30 August 1930): 64; Petrie, *Quand on revoit tout ça!*, 91.
- <sup>83</sup> *Lovell's*, multiple editions; *La Presse* (23 January 1932): 45.
- <sup>84</sup> *La Presse* (12 May 1934): 41; *La Presse* (5 October 1935): 46; *La Presse* (7 March 1936): 48; *La Presse* (20 June 1936): 26; Yves Lever, *J.A. DeSève: diffuseur d'images* (Montreal: Michel Brûlé, 2008), 85-86, quoting *La Presse* (8 September 1934).
- <sup>85</sup> *La Presse* (6 September 1930): 73; Memorandum of agreement between United Amusement Corp. Ltd., Confederation Amusements Ltd., and Compagnie France-Film, 13 June 1938, Cinémathèque québécoise, Cinéma Impérial collection, B15 F924.
- <sup>86</sup> Michel Tremblay, *La duchesse et le roturier* (Montreal: Léméac, 1982), 35. *La duchesse et le roturier* of course remains a work of fiction published thirty-five years after the situations it claims to describe, which are set in 1947. Tremblay's fictional writing was however granted some level of legitimacy as a realistic account of the Théâtre National's heyday by none other than Rose Ouellette, who states in her memoirs that the novelist's account constitute a remarkably truthful portrait of her years at the National, and wonders who Tremblay's informer might have been. Ouellette, *La Poune*, 165.
- <sup>87</sup> Pierre Véronneau, "Le succès est au film parlant français (Histoire du cinéma au Québec I)," *Les dossiers de la Cinémathèque* no. 3 (Montreal: Cinémathèque québécoise, 1979), 29.
- <sup>88</sup> The Arcade's history remains quite hazy. Lever (*J.A. DeSève*, 116) claims that it was acquired by DeSève in 1941. Newspaper advertisements however reveal that the Arcade was already part of France-Film's chain in the fall of 1936. See for instance: *La Presse* (23 November 1936): 8.
- <sup>89</sup> *La Presse* (10 September 1938); *La Presse* (31 January 1939): 8; Memorandum of agreement between United Amusement Corp., Ltd., Confederation Amusements Ltd., and Compagnie France-Film, 13 June 1938, CIC, B15 F924.
- <sup>90</sup> *La Presse* (7 March 1942): 45; *La Presse* (6 March 1943): 35; Jean-François Lépine, *Janine Sutto* (Montreal: Libre expression, 2010), 49-53. Michel Tremblay celebrates both the Arcade and the Giroux sisters in *La duchesse et le roturier*, 236-53.
- <sup>91</sup> *La Presse* (31 May 1941): 40.
- <sup>92</sup> Tremblay, *La duchesse et le roturier*, 243-44.
- <sup>93</sup> "Les films français dans notre province," *La Presse* (5 September 1931): 61; *La Presse* (1 June 1935): 65.
- <sup>94</sup> Quoted in: Léon Franque [Roger Champoux], "Un jugement autorisé," *La Presse* (8 June 1935): 41. Author's translation.
- <sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>96</sup> Quoted in: "Premier congrès des exploitants du film français," *La Presse* (30 July 1931): 8. Author's translation.
- <sup>97</sup> Léon Franque [Roger Champoux], "Le congrès France-Film," *La Presse* (1 June 1935): 63.
- <sup>98</sup> Taschereau sent a delegate to the film Congress, which he did not personally attend. Quoted in: "Le beau succès du congrès du film français," *La Presse* (24 mai 1934): 5.
- <sup>99</sup> "Premier congrès des exploitants du film français," *La Presse* (30 July 1931): 8; "Le beau succès du congrès du film français," *La Presse* (24 mai 1934): 5.
- <sup>100</sup> "Le beau succès du congrès du film français," *La Presse* (24 mai 1934): 5.
- <sup>101</sup> See more particularly: Gérard Bouchard, "Une ambiguïté québécoise: les bonnes élites et le méchant peuple," *Présentation* (1985-1986): 29-45; "L'imaginaire de la Grande noirceur et de la

- Révolution tranquille: fictions identitaires et jeux de mémoire au Québec,” *Recherches sociographiques* 46:3 (2005): 411-436.
- <sup>102</sup> Bouchard, “Une ambiguïté québécoise,” 35.
- <sup>103</sup> Quoted in Bouchard, “Une ambiguïté québécoise,” 32.
- <sup>104</sup> Gratien Gélinas, “Le Val-qui-rit,” in *Fridolinons 1938, 1939, 1940*, 311-312. Author’s translation.
- <sup>105</sup> One of French-Canada’s leading intellectuals, Lionel Groulx (1878-1967) was a priest, renowned nationalist historian and novelist. Gratien Gélinas, “Le Val-qui-rit,” in *Fridolinons 1938, 1939, 1940*, 314. Author’s translation.
- <sup>106</sup> Gélinas, “Le Val-qui-rit,” in *Fridolinons 1938, 1939, 1940*, 326-331.
- <sup>107</sup> Bouchard, “L’imaginaire de la Grande noirceur et de la Révolution tranquille,” 418.
- <sup>108</sup> Petrie, *Quand on revoit tout ça!*, 58-59, 63-64, 81.
- <sup>109</sup> “Premier congrès des exploitants du film français,” *La Presse* (30 July 1931): 8; “Le beau succès du congrès du film français,” *La Presse* (24 mai 1934): 5.
- <sup>110</sup> “Le beau succès du congrès du film français,” *La Presse* (24 mai 1934): 5; “Les progrès magnifiques du film français depuis cinq ans dans le Québec,” *La Presse* (4 June 1935): 8.
- <sup>111</sup> Ouellette, *La Poune*, 67, 71.
- <sup>112</sup> Bouchard, “Une ambiguïté québécoise,” 33.
- <sup>113</sup> Bouchard, “L’imaginaire de la Grande noirceur,” 430-31.
- <sup>114</sup> “L’Orchestre symphonique du Capitot,” *La Presse* (9 April 1927): 27; Lancken, *Montreal Movie Palaces*, 18.
- <sup>115</sup> Barry actually receives the sole “mise-en-scène” credit in the printed programmes for most annual *Fridolinons* revues. The mise-en-scène credit is only shared with Gélinas for the last edition, in 1946. Programmes, *Fridolinons* 1941, 1944, 1945 and 1946, Médiathèque Guy-L.-Coté, Cinémathèque québécoise. On Barry and Gélinas’ work relationship, see also: Gratien Gélinas and Victor-Lévy Beaulieu, *Gratien, Tit-Coq, Fridolin, Bousille et les autres: entretien* (Montreal: SRC radio FM/Stanké), 93.
- <sup>116</sup> *La Presse* (11 October 1919): 20; *La Patrie* (4 September 1920); *La Patrie* (23 February 1924): 32; *La Presse* (2 March 1929); *La Presse* (14 September 1929): 76; *La Presse* (5 September 1931): 64; *La Patrie* (27 February 1937): 39; Philippe Laframboise, *Fred Barry et la petite histoire du théâtre au Québec* (Montreal: Les éditions Logiques, 1996), 77, 95-96, 99-103.
- <sup>117</sup> Gélinas and Beaulieu, *Gratien, Tit-Coq, Fridolin, Bousille et les autres*, 60-61.
- <sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, 45. Author’s translation.
- <sup>119</sup> Petrie, *Quand on revoit tout ça!*, 124-125.
- <sup>120</sup> Gratien Gélinas, *Les Fridolinades 1941 et 1942* (Montreal: Quinze, 1981), 225-226; *Les Fridolinades 1943 et 1944* (Montreal: Quinze, 1981), 187-190.
- <sup>121</sup> Bouchard, *Genèse des nations et cultures du Nouveau Monde*, 30.
- <sup>122</sup> Raymond Williams, “Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory,” *Culture and Materialism* (London: Verso, 1980), 39.
- <sup>123</sup> In an interview included in the documentary *Gratien Gélinas un géant aux pieds d’argile* (Pascal Gélinas, 2009), Michel Tremblay lauds Gélinas’s decision to make use of the vernacular developed by Montreal’s French-speaking population in *Fridolinons* and *Tit-Coq*.
- <sup>124</sup> Gélinas and Beaulieu, *Gratien, Tit-Coq, Fridolin, Bousille et les autres*, 44.
- <sup>125</sup> *La Patrie* (10 March 1934): 55; *La Patrie* (21 August 1937): 39.
- <sup>126</sup> The sole exception being *César*, written directly for the screen by Pagnol.
- <sup>127</sup> These included over the years Claude Robillard and Louis Pelland. Laurent Mailhot, “Présentation,” in Gélinas, *Les Fridolinades 1938, 1939, 1940*, 8; Sicotte, *Gratien Gélinas*, 112, 117, 161.
- <sup>128</sup> E.-Ch. H., “Fridolinons 39,” *Le Jour* (February 1939), quoted in Laurent Mailhot, “Présentation,” in Gélinas, *Les Fridolinades 1938, 1939, 1940*, 12.
- <sup>129</sup> Gratien Gélinas, “Les joyeuses commères de la rue Panet,” in *Fridolinons 1938, 1939, 1940*, 279. Gélinas later explained that double-entendres were easier to get away with, since prudish citizens first had to admit that they had understood them before they could denounce them. André Fortier and

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Gratien Gélinas, "Gratien Gélinas en entrevue: le théâtre et la censure," *Cultures du Canada français* no. 8 (1991): 42.

<sup>130</sup> It is only in 1947 that the provincial bureaucracy reacted to the introduction of the by then not so novel film gauge and required 16mm prints to be submitted to the Quebec board of censors for approval. The decisions had most likely been prompted by prime minister Maurice Duplessis' opposition to the National Film Board of Canada's distribution activities in Quebec. Duplessis was convinced that the NFB was a hotbed of communist activity. See: Yves Lever, *Anastasia ou la censure du cinéma au Québec* (Montreal: Septentrion, 2008), 140-43.

<sup>131</sup> Gratien Gélinas, "Essai sur l'avenir de la race," in *Les Fridolinades 1938, 1939, 1940*, 133-144.

<sup>132</sup> Gratien Gélinas, "La vie édifiante de Jean-Baptiste Laframboise," in *Les Fridolinades 1945, 1946* (Monreal: Quinze, 1980), 155-6. Author's translation. Part of this monologue was reprised in the film *Fridolinons* (Roger Blais, National Film Board of Canada, 1945).

<sup>133</sup> "French Classics for Quebec May Be Recorded in Paris; No 'Name' Actors in Canada," *Variety* (19 October 1938): 34.

<sup>134</sup> Benard B. Musnik, of *Mon Ciné* magazine, quoted in: "L'affaire Maria Chapdelaine' vivement discutée à New York," *La Presse* (14 April 1934): 45.

<sup>135</sup> Fortier and Gélinas, "Gratien Gélinas en entrevue," 42.

<sup>136</sup> "Les bingomanes," in Gélinas, *Les Fridolinades 1941, 1942*, 304. The same year, Adélard Godbout's liberal government voted a new law ensuring that education would be rendered mandatory for children of less than fifteen year of age and provided for free to those who could not afford private schools. The fact that this law was adopted in Quebec more than two decades after similar measures in most other Canadian Provinces and US states can be largely attributed to the Catholic Church's opposition. The Quebec clergy had frequently denounced free mandatory education as a freemason plot aiming to promote atheism.

<sup>137</sup> Gélinas, "Le retour du conscrit," in *Les Fridolinades 1945, 1946*, 237-265; *Tit-Coq, pièce en trois actes* (Montreal: Beauchemin, 1950).

<sup>138</sup> See for instance: "Le Flop Populaire," in Gélinas, *Les Fridolinades 1945, 1946*, 21-48; "Le candidat du peuple," in Gélinas, *Les Fridolinades 1945, 1946*, 183-218.

<sup>139</sup> "L'an de grâce 1940," in Gélinas, *Les Fridolinades 1941, 1942*, 97.

<sup>140</sup> See for instance: "Le troisième front du rire," in Gélinas, *Les Fridolinades 1943, 1944*, 17.

<sup>141</sup> "Si j'étais King," in *Les Fridolinades 1943, 1944*, 157-90.

<sup>142</sup> Jacques Lacoursière, *Histoire populaire du Québec* volume 4, 1896 à 1960 (Montreal: Septentrion, 1997), 253.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, 267-68.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*, 269.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*, 288.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*, 289-90.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*, 321.

<sup>148</sup> "Baptiste s'en va-t-en guerre," in Gélinas, *Les Fridolinades 1937, 1938, 1939*, 172-86.

<sup>149</sup> "Le départ du conscrit," in Gélinas, *Les Fridolinades 1945, 1946*, 49-62.

<sup>150</sup> "Si j'étais King," in Gélinas, *Les Fridolinades 1943, 1944*, 189-90. Author's translation.

<sup>151</sup> Sicotte, *Gratien Gélinas*, 199.

<sup>152</sup> Fortier and Gélinas, "Gratien Gélinas en entrevue," 43; Beaulieu and Gélinas, *Gratien, Tit-Coq, Fridolin, Bousille et les autres*, 82-83.

<sup>153</sup> Beaulieu and Gélinas, *Gratien, Tit-Coq, Fridolin, Bousille et les autres*, 61, 83.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.

<sup>155</sup> Sicotte, *Gratien Gélinas*, 167.

<sup>156</sup> For a sample of reviews published in these papers, see: Gratien Gélinas, *Les Fridolinades 1943 et 1944*, 346-7.

<sup>157</sup> "Radio Reception," *The Gazette* (15 September 1938): 2.

<sup>158</sup> Beaulieu and Gélinas, *Gratien, Tit-Coq, Fridolin, Bousille et les autres*, 72.

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<sup>159</sup> Lacoursière, *Histoire populaire du Québec* volume 4, 272.

<sup>160</sup> Maurice Richard had been suspended for punching a referee. His supporters however believed that Richard had unfairly been prevented from protecting himself by the referee, who had allegedly held him while he was being attacked. Many members of the French-Canadian community were moreover under the impression that Richard had been treated with contempt and undue severity by commissioner Clarence Campbell, and that the suspension, which prevented him from playing the remaining games of the regular season as well as from taking part to the playoffs, actually aimed to keep their team away from the Stanley Cup.

<sup>161</sup> Nancy Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy," in *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, Craig Calhoun ed. (Cambridge, Mass./London: The MIT Press, 1992), 123.

<sup>162</sup> Statement originally published in *L'Autorité* and quoted in: Pierre Véronneau, "Cinéma de l'époque duplessiste (Histoire du cinéma au Québec II)," *Les dossiers de la Cinémathèque* no. 7 (Montreal : Cinémathèque québécoise, 1979): 121.

<sup>163</sup> MacKenzie, "A Screen of One's Own," 202. The "negative determination" concept is borrowed by MacKenzie from Miriam Hansen, who in turn gleaned it from Alexander Kluge and Oskar Negt.

<sup>164</sup> MacKenzie, *Screening Québec*, 109.

<sup>165</sup> MacKenzie does assert that the Tit-Coq character was partly based on the popular stage character Fridolin, which seems incorrect to me. Fridolin was a facetious teenager largely defined by his inclusion and strong bonds to two overlapping groups: his large French-Canadian family and his neighborhood. Tit-Coq was a frequently sullen character defined by his "bastard" condition, that is, by the fact that he had been rejected by his parents, raised in an orphanage, left to fend alone on the street at sixteen, and then shipped to the army.

<sup>166</sup> MacKenzie, *Screening Québec*, 108-109.

<sup>167</sup> See for instance: Germain Lacasse, *Le bonimenteur de vues animées: Le cinéma muet entre tradition et modernité* (Quebec City: Éditions Nota bene, 2000); Lacasse, Massé and Poirier, *Le diable en ville*; Bourassa and Larrue, *Les nuits de la "Main."*

<sup>168</sup> Beaulieu and Gélinas, *Gratien, Tit-Coq, Fridolin, Bousille et les autres*, 62.

<sup>169</sup> Bouchard, *Genèse des nations et cultures du Nouveau Monde*, 103-104.

## Conclusion

Canadian film exhibitors unquestionably had a banner year in 1952. That year, the combined receipts of the nation's film theatres jumped for the first time over the one hundred million dollars mark, while Quebec receipts verged on twenty-five million dollars.<sup>1</sup> In Montreal, the receipts collected by the city's film theatres peaked at \$12,335,000, up from \$4,226,000 in 1934 and \$7,609,000 in 1945. But this was not to last. After a slight drop in 1953, the annual receipts of Montreal film theatres fell to \$10,156,000 in 1954, and then proceeded to steadily decrease over the second half of the 1950s to reach \$8,176,000 by 1960. What's worse, an increase in average ticket prices (from 44¢ in 1952 to 79¢ in 1960) actually masked an even steeper drop in film theatre attendance over the same years. Montreal film theatres, which had sold 27,953,000 tickets in 1952, only sold 10,285,000 tickets in 1960.<sup>2</sup> Available documents further show that the net profits reaped by one of the city's leading theatre operators, United Amusement, fell from \$827,512 in 1952 to \$266,089 in 1959.<sup>3</sup>

While such a severe decrease most likely was not attributable to a single cause, circumstantial evidence suggests that television might have been one of the main culprits for this sudden drop in theatre attendance. Indeed, Montreal's first television station, CBFT, started to broadcast in French and English on September 6, 1952, in the late summer of cinema's record year. By this point, television stations had already been on the air for several years in the United States. The beginning of regular television broadcasts had been somewhat delayed in Canada by a squabble between the national public radio broadcaster, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC), and film producing agency, the National Film Board of Canada, over control of the new medium. CBC had eventually been granted

the leading role in the organization of the Canada's national public television following a Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters and Sciences directed by Vincent Massey.<sup>4</sup> These delays however did not prevent television from quickly integrating daily life once CBFT was on the air. Official statistics thus show the percentage of Quebec homes owning at least one receiving set went up from 9.7% in 1953 to 38.6% in 1955 and 88.8% in 1960.<sup>5</sup>

Film historian Douglas Gomery has nevertheless argued that, in the United States, the baby boom and mass exodus to the suburbs actually constituted the two leading causes of the marked drop in postwar film theatre attendance, which had begun in 1946 in the U.S.<sup>6</sup> The fact that Montreal theatre attendance actually peaked at 30,817,000 in 1949, more than three years before CBFT went on the air, tends to show that these two developments, which certainly also affected the Province of Quebec, further impacted theatre attendance in and around Montreal.<sup>7</sup> Interestingly, statistics show that theatre attendance only peaked in 1952 Canada-wide. A possible explanation for this phenomenon could be that the rise of the suburbs in the postwar years first brought Canadians to simply shift the site of their moviegoing activities before a combination of causes including growing families, increased car ownership<sup>8</sup>, and television eventually started to impact their choices and leisure activities on a deeper level.<sup>9</sup>

Whatever the causes of the sudden drop in theatre attendance observed in the early 1950s, exhibitors did not stand listlessly as their market was undergoing deep transformations. Most extant theatres were for instance altered to permit the presentation of the new widescreen stereophonic sound epics and extravaganzas introduced by Hollywood studios in the hope of winning back audiences mesmerized by television.<sup>10</sup> Exhibitors also added a new major revenue stream to their operations when the vast majority of film

theatres were fitted with concession stands selling popcorn, candies, chewing gum, and soft drinks. **[Figure 8.1]** This trend appears to have been started south of the border some time around 1946, at the time of the first drop in US theatre attendance, with Canadian theatres promptly following suit in the late 1940s.<sup>11</sup> As could be expected, some industry commentators soon protested the perceived decrease of showmanship associated with the sale of snacks in film theatres. The *Canadian Film Weekly* for instance quoted an irate piece complaining about “the nitwit impoliteness of those who mistake a theatre for an eating house,” and demanding the construction of “soundproof galleries or hutches in which the munchers might be segregated.”<sup>12</sup> Exhibitors were further accused of caring more about snacks than about films, and more specifically of sabotaging film presentations by adding intermissions and leaving the houselights on during shorts in order to facilitate trips to the concession stand. But these concerns were ultimately overridden by the fact that theatre operators were permitted to retain a much larger share of concession stand sales than of box office receipts. Snacks, as we know, were there to stay.<sup>13</sup>

Widescreens and concession stands were nevertheless not sufficient to save many of the Montreal film theatres built since the 1910s. For many neighborhood theatres, the difficulties caused by the drop in attendances were compounded by the fact that increased reliance on automobiles for transportation turned the lack of parking spaces into a major issue. As a result, the number of film theatres operating in the city fell down from 72 in 1952 to 57 in 1960.<sup>14</sup> As for the new theatres built in the late 1950s and 1960s, they tended to be integrated to shopping centers and located in the suburbs, where ample parking lots could be offered. An additional advantage of the new generation of theatres is that they were commonly fitted with multiple screens, which obviously permitted exhibitors to provide their clientele with more options. Many of the older theatres still in operation in the 1960s,

1970s, and 1980s, including many prestigious downtown venues such as the Loew's, Palace, and Princess (which became Le Parisien in 1963), were consequently divided into multiple auditoriums to follow the trend. The rise of multi-screen theatres was however accompanied by a general trend toward the simplification and standardization of programmes. Shorts, including cartoons and newsreels, gradually dropped out of sight between the 1950s and 1970s, while live acts disappeared from most of the theatres where they were still being featured in the late 1940s. Rose Ouellette for instance ended her eighteen-year stay at the Théâtre National in 1953, as we have seen in chapter 7. New film theatres were almost all devoid of stages.

This growing standardization of programmes might have been somewhat related to the disappearance of the pioneer showmen who had determined the policies of most of Montreal's film theatres over the four decades covered by this research. George Ganetakos, who arguably was the most important Montreal exhibitor of the era, for instance died in a car crash on June 9, 1955. He was 77 at the time, and still managing director of United Amusement.<sup>15</sup> Ganetakos was replaced at the head of the chain by a trio made up of his son John G. Ganetakos (president), who had been general manager of the affiliated Confederation Amusements since the mid-1940s, of his son-in-law William Harold Giles (vice-president), and of United veteran William G. Lester (vice-president and general manager).<sup>16</sup> John G. Ganetakos's sudden death in March of 1959 however destabilized the company and caused the remainders of the Montreal group to quarrel with Famous Players' management.<sup>17</sup> This turn of event finally permitted Famous Players to seize full control of United Amusement and its affiliates, including Confederation Amusements, through an agreement signed on July 1<sup>st</sup>, 1959 – nearly half a century after the opening of the chain's first theatre, the St. Catherine Street East Moulin Rouge, and thirty-five years after the first

deal concluded by Ganetakos and Nathan L. Nathanson.<sup>18</sup> A few months later, Ernest Cousins, who had served as the Montreal chain's president for more than four decades, finally retired from United Amusement at the age of 94.<sup>19</sup>

Famous Players soon proceeded to merge United Amusement with the organization operating its theatres located in downtown Montreal, Consolidated Theatres. The enterprise became known as United Theatre/Les Cinémas unis in 1970, and then simply as Famous Players' Quebec branch in 1987.<sup>20</sup> Then, in an ironic turn of event, Famous Players was acquired on June 13, 2005, by Cineplex Galaxy, an offshoot of the second national theatre chain originally conceived by Nathan L. Nathanson, Odeon Theatres of Canada.<sup>21</sup> The resulting chain was renamed Cineplex Entertainment a few months later.<sup>22</sup> These successive mergers did however not totally negate the agency and influence of the showmen involved in the operation of theatres in the city of Montreal. By way of example, the presidency of Famous Players was occupied between 1968 and 1986 by a man who had risen through the ranks at United Amusement after having been initially hired as an usher by one of the chain's theatre, George Destounis.<sup>23</sup> As Famous Players' first Canadian-born president, Destounis was eventually responsible for getting the chain involved in the production and exhibition of Canadian feature films.<sup>24</sup>

The gradual decline of the influence of local showmen since the 1950s and the consubstantial standardization of film shows have nevertheless been accompanied by two major trends related to film exhibition and audiovisual production in the Province of Quebec. The first is the rise of alternative exhibition practices and venues since the late 1930s. In Catholic Quebec, this trend had first been encouraged by the 1936 publication of the Encyclical letter *Vigilanti cura* by pope Pius XI, which had significantly altered the Church's position on cinema. Moving pictures suddenly ceased to be a phenomenon to be

categorically condemned and opposed, and became a tool which could legitimately be appropriated by Catholics. Soon, the Province's multiple Catholic organizations were putting on screenings in schools, church's basements and community centers. Many of these were intended for children, which tremendously irritated the commercial exhibitors who had lost this particular segment of the market in 1928 largely as a result of the pressures exerted by the Catholic clergy on the Provincial government. The commercial exhibitors' displeasure with this perceived unfair competition was further aggravated by the fact that, up until 1947, the 16mm prints of commercial releases that constituted the bulk of the titles shown to children in these non-theatrical shows were not required to be submitted to the provincial board of censors, contrarily to the 35mm prints of the same titles exhibited theatrically to mature audiences.<sup>25</sup> Non-theatrical film shows were moreover not required to collect the heavy taxes imposed on commercial shows, or submitted to the same strict safety laws.

In postwar years, the growing availability of 16mm sound projectors and film prints, most notably thanks to the efforts of the National Film Board, facilitated the creation of multiple film societies and *ciné-clubs* across the Province.<sup>26</sup> This phenomenon fostered a new breed of cinephilia and vastly contributed to the education of the *cinéastes* later associated with the renewal of Quebec cinema in the years of the Quiet Revolution. These developments eventually paved the way for the opening of several art houses in the 1960s, when Montreal theatres such as the Verdi and, later, the Outremont followed in the footsteps of Lumière's Roxy and Odeon's Kent, and exploited a niche market dedicated to foreign (i.e., non-US) films, art cinema, and Quebec films.

Television, it should be noted, also greatly contributed to the development of cinephilia in Montreal and the Province of Quebec, as the abundance of older films and foreign productions available for next to nothing incited broadcasters, including CBC and

Radio-Canada, to extensively use cinema to fill out their schedules. What's more, being federal organizations, CBC and Radio-Canada took no heed of the decisions of the provincial board of censors, and thus frequently aired banned films or uncut versions of films that had been heavily censored at the time of their theatrical release in Quebec. Radio-Canada for instance broadcast *Les enfants du paradis* (Marcel Carné, Société Nouvelle Pathé Cinéma, 1945), which had been the subject of an infamous ban in 1947 in spite of being widely recognized as French cinema's crowning achievement.<sup>27</sup>

The second major trend contemporaneous to the decline of local showmanship pertained to the increased access of Canadians and Quebecers to the means of audiovisual productions, and obviously also involved television. Prior to the involvement of CBC/Radio-Canada in television, Canada's audiovisual production had essentially been restricted to the film produced by governmental agencies such as the Canadian Government Motion Picture Bureau, the National Film Board of Canada, and the Service de ciné-photographie de la province de Québec, as well as to the industrial, educational and sponsored films produced by private companies such as Montreal's Associated Screen News. Only a handful of theatrical features had been produced in the country between the 1910s and 1950s. The creation of two new private television stations in 1961, CTV and Télé-Métropole, further contributed to this trend. Télé-Métropole was the brainchild of none other than France-Film's J.A. DeSève, who chose to build the station's studios in the east end Théâtre Arcade, an old film theatre that once been one of the leading venues for French-language plays, revues, and burlesque shows in Montreal.

As could be expected, Radio-Canada and Télé-Métropole's productions mostly appropriated different French-Canadian cultural series. Radio-Canada granted a good deal of air time to dramatic series continuing the tradition of the *radioromans* and feature films

produced in Quebec over the two decades preceding the start of its regular television broadcasts. It for instance produced between 1956 and 1970 *Les belles histoires des pays d'en haut*, a series inspired by Claude-Henri Grignon's 1933 novel *Un homme et son péché*, which had previously been adapted in a long-running *radiroman*, a comic strip, and two feature films distributed by France-Film in 1949-1950. As for Télé-Métropole, it was mostly known for its variety shows, which featured many veterans of the burlesque shows regularly booked by Montreal film theatres between the 1910s and the early 1950s.

The production of Canadian audiovisual content was further boosted in the late 1960s by the creation of the Canadian Film Development Corporation (CFDC), later renamed Telefilm Canada. The CFDC was presided between 1969 and 1977 by another familiar figure, Gratien Gélinas. **[Figure 8.2]** While the success of Canadian and Québécois feature films has unquestionably varied over the following decades, the fact remains that by the second decade of the twenty-first century, Canadians have access to a substantial offer of both local and national audiovisual productions. Montrealers can for instance chose between several Quebec films exhibited theatrically in the city on any given week.

Things were evidently quite different during the forty years covered by this research, when, as we have seen, audiovisual production was at much lower levels in Canada and Quebec. I have nevertheless attempted to demonstrate that the story of film in Montreal between 1912 and 1952 was much more than that of the transnational organizations involved in film production, distribution, and the operation of local film theatres. The situations investigated over the preceding chapters indeed demonstrate that, as far as cinema's contribution to Quebec culture and society is concerned, this period gains to be approached as more than a long barren stretch between the days of early cinema, when local agents such as exhibitors and *bonimenteurs* developed a variety of appropriation tactics aiming

to integrate a foreign invention to local culture, and the renewal of Quebec cinema in the years of the Quiet Revolution, which saw the sudden emergence of direct cinema and several Quebec film auteurs, as well as the second birth of the Province's feature film industry.

The facts exposed by this research nevertheless show that different classes of film exhibiting venues developed different relationships to local culture, and thus demonstrate the persistence in the context of the Montreal film market of the scissors effect described by Miriam Hansen, which posits that "the more ambitious and costly the show, the larger and less specific its intended audience."<sup>28</sup> We have for instance seen how the city's vertically integrated film exhibitors mostly emphasized the presentation of recent US feature films in their programmes, while the theatres marginalized by their limited access to the current US film production had to turn to alternative attractions tailored to the needs of their audiences, such as live shows relying on local talent, French films and French dubs. Leading exhibitors such as George Ganetakos's United Amusement did manage to leverage their in-depth knowledge of local conditions to preserve a significant degree of control over their operations, but it is largely in the marginalized small neighborhood theatres that residual local cultures met with urban vernacular modernity and eventually contributed to the renewal of French-Canadian identity.

Granted, this contribution largely emerged, not from the films exhibited, but from the theatrical tradition that developed in and around film theatres. I have thus emphasized the contribution to the renewal of the French-Canadian public sphere of the annual revues presented at the Monument-National by Gratien Gélinas between 1938 and 1946, which clearly lay outside the scope of the film industry. I nevertheless hope to have demonstrated that the creation of Gélinas' revues cannot be dissociated from the rise of cinema as a mass entertainment in the early decades of the twentieth century, as both form of entertainment

were actually part of the same continuum. This research consequently exemplifies the need for the type of systemic approach frequently put forward by the proponents of new film history. Only by going beyond the study of film texts and auteurs can we hope to develop a better understanding of the complex processes through which cinema is shaped by its inescapable industrial nature, as well as by its circulation in multiple societies and cultures, which it can influence in return.

One thing I have sought to avoid doing throughout this thesis is to present the various film exhibitors active in Montreal between 1912 and 1952 as individuals actively seeking to reform society or otherwise transform the world they lived in. Characters like George Ganetakos, J.A. DeSève, and the members of the Lawand and Tabah families appear to have been mostly driven by their desire to make money and not being bossed around. Still, this does not prevent the fact that it is partly thanks to their ceaseless work that the popular culture of Canadians, Quebecers, and Montrealers is now permitted to exist and thrive elsewhere than in the margins and interstices of foreign texts. This contribution of film exhibitors to the development of a local culture and national identity may have been both unplanned, unintentional, and essentially opportunistic, it nevertheless remains very real. It must not be forgotten.

## Endnotes

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- <sup>1</sup> The actual figures were \$100,554,173 for Canadian film theatres and \$24,932,000 for Quebec film theatres. Dominion Bureau of Statistics, quoted in “Still Going Up!,” *Canadian Film Weekly* (28 October 1953): 5; Statistics Canada, Catalog #63-207 (1934-1976), quoted in, Pierre-François Hébert and Yvan Lamonde, *Le cinéma au Québec: essai de statistique historique, 1896 à nos jours* (Quebec City: Institut québécois de recherche sur la culture, 1981), 46-47.
- <sup>2</sup> Statistics Canada, Catalog #63-207 (1934-1976), quoted in Hébert and Lamonde, *Le cinéma au Québec*, 50-51.
- <sup>3</sup> United Amusement Corporation, Ltd., annual reports, Cinéma Impérial collection, B9 F307-F310, Cinémathèque québécoise.
- <sup>4</sup> See for instance: “Little Interest in Massey Report – Suggestion that CBC Hog TV Not Supported in Trade,” *Canadian Film Weekly* (13 June 1951): 1, 7.
- <sup>5</sup> *Annuaire du Québec* (1964-1965): 593, quoted in Hébert and Lamonde, *Le cinéma au Québec*, 65.
- <sup>6</sup> Douglas Gomery, *Shared Pleasures: A History of Movie Presentation in the United States* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992), 83-88.
- <sup>7</sup> Declining attendance was more than compensated by rising average ticket prices (from 36¢ to 44¢) between 1949 and 1952, which explains why 1952 actually was the peak year for receipts. Statistics Canada, Catalog #63-207 (1934-1976), quoted in Hébert and Lamonde, *Le cinéma au Québec*, 50-51.
- <sup>8</sup> *Annuaire du Québec* (1952-1970), quoted in Hébert and Lamonde, *Le cinéma au Québec*, 81.
- <sup>9</sup> Statistics Canada, Catalog #63-207 (1933-1976), quoted in Hébert and Lamonde, *Le cinéma au Québec*, 46-48, 56.
- <sup>10</sup> Minutes of the meetings of the board of directors of United Amusement Corp., Ltd., 17 November 1953, 26 March 1954, CIC, B8 F237.
- <sup>11</sup> Minutes of the meetings of the board of directors of United Amusement Corp., Ltd., 15 November 1950, CIC, B8 F237.
- <sup>12</sup> “Those Theatre Munchers” [from the *Brantford Expositor*] *Canadian Film Weekly* (20 February 1946): 10.
- <sup>13</sup> According to a *Film Daily* survey, by 1951 95 per cent of US theatres sold popcorn, 97 per cent candy, 79 per cent soft drinks, 53 per cent chewing gum and 49 per cent ice cream. Quoted in: “Popcornucopia,” *Canadian Films Weekly* (14 February 1951): 7. See also: “Theatremen – Make More Money!” [Viking Popcorn Machine advertisement], *Canadian Film Weekly* (30 January 1946): 16; “Hollywood Complains About Candy,” *Canadian Film Weekly* (3 November 1948): 10; “Producers Frown But ‘Candy Is Dandy’ Say Exhibitors,” *Canadian Film Weekly* (Christmas number 1948): 27.
- <sup>14</sup> Statistics Canada, Catalog #63-207 (1934-1976), quoted in Hébert and Lamonde, *Le cinéma au Québec*, 50-51.
- <sup>15</sup> “Leader of City’s Greeks To Be Buried on Monday,” *Montreal Star* (10 June 1955): 31.
- <sup>16</sup> United Amusement Corporation, Ltd., annual reports, CIC, B9 F310.
- <sup>17</sup> “John G. Ganetakos Passes In Florida,” *Canadian Film Weekly*, (18 March 18 1959): 1, 3.
- <sup>18</sup> Memorandum of agreement between United Amusement Corporation, Ltd., the Montreal interest, the voting trustees, Famous Players Canadian Corp., 1 July 1959, CIC, B12 F455.
- <sup>19</sup> Minutes of the meetings of the board of directors of United Amusement Corporation, Ltd., 18 November 1959, CIC, B8 F238.
- <sup>20</sup> *Gazette officielle du Québec*, 102:44 (31 October 1970): 6215; “Cinémas Unis redevient Famous Players,” *Qui fait quoi* (15 November 1987).
- <sup>21</sup> *Daily Variety* (14 June 2005): 32.
- <sup>22</sup> “Introducing Cineplex Entertainment A New Name for Cineplex Galaxy LP” [Cineplex press release], 3 October 2005.

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- <sup>23</sup> Dane Lanken, *Montreal Movie Palaces: Great Theatres of the Golden Era 1884-1938* (Waterloo: Penumbra Press, 1993), 170.
- <sup>24</sup> Gerald Pratley, *Torn Sprockets: the Uncertain Projection of the Canadian Film* (Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Presses, 1987), 22.
- <sup>25</sup> Yves Lever, *Anastasia ou la censure du cinéma au Québec* (Montreal: Septentrion, 2008), 140-43.
- <sup>26</sup> Statistics show that film distributors saw the proportion of their revenues generated by 16mm prints jump from about 5% in 1950 to 40% in the early 1960s. Statistics Canada, Catalog #63-207 (1944-1976), quoted in Hébert and Lamonde, *Le cinéma au Québec*, 116.
- <sup>27</sup> Films could however be cut to be made to fit television's rigid schedules. Yves Lever, "Les enfants du paradis," and "Télévision," in *Dictionnaire de la censure au Québec: littérature et cinéma*, Pierre Hébert, Yves Lever and Kenneth Landry, eds. (Montreal: Fides, 2006), 239-243, 639-641.
- <sup>28</sup> Miriam Hansen, *Babel and Babylon: Spectatorship in American Silent Film* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), 101.

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Régie du cinéma collection (E188)

Maisonneuve Theatre collection (P647)

Album de rues E.-Z. Massicotte, <http://bibnum2.banq.qc.ca/bna/massic/accueil.htm>

### Cinémathèque québécoise

Cinéma Impérial collection, 2001.0010.FD

*Abbreviated as CIC in endnotes. References to documents part of this collection contain both the number of the box (B) and the number of the file (F) where it is located. By way of example, CIC, B13 F369 indicates that the document can be found in box 13, file 369 of the Cinéma Impérial collection.*

Famous Players annual reports, Médiathèque Guy-L.-Coté

Famous Players file, Médiathèque Guy-L.-Coté

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Léon-H. Bélanger collection

Roméo Gariépy collection

### Montreal Municipal Archives

Aegedius-Fauteux collection

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*The Axe News* (Montreal)

*Montreal Daily Star*

*Montreal Herald*

*La Patrie* (Montreal)

*Le Petit Journal* (Montreal)

*La Presse* (Montreal)

*The Standard* (Montreal)

## Trade Journals

*Canadian Film Weekly* (Toronto)

*Canadian Moving Picture Digest* (Montreal and Toronto)

*Hollywood Reporter*

*Moving Picture World*

*Variety*

*Wid's Daily, Film Daily*

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*Film Weekly Year Book of the Canadian Film Industry*

*Lovell's Montreal Directory*

*Wid's, Film Daily Yearbooks*

### **Online Filmographies**

American Film Institute, *AFI Catalog of Feature Films*

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Fondation Jérôme Seydoux-Pathé, *La filmographie Pathé*

<http://www.fondation-jeromeseydoux-pathe.com/site/>

Groupe de recherche sur l'avènement et la formation des institutions cinématographique et scénique (GRAFICS), *Filmographie des "vues" tournées au Québec au temps du muet*

<http://cri.histart.umontreal.ca/grafics/fr/filmo/default.asp>

**HOW DO SHOWMEN SENSE A HIT ?**



**By Peeping Through Keyholes ?**



**By The Grapevine ?  
Telegraph System ?**



**By Seances With ?  
Mystic Strangers ?**

**or by plain COMMON SENSE ?**

Figure 0.1: First National advertisement, *Variety* (11 March 1931): 23

<p>Instrumentalists.</p> <p><b>MADAME EDVINA'S SUCCESS.</b></p> <p>Madame Edvina's appearance and success in "La Tosca" at the opera last night was made all the more emphatic by the presence of Mr. Henry Higgins, managing director of the Covent Garden Opera House, who took the opportunity of going behind the scenes at the conclusion of the big death scene to personally congratulate Mme. Edvina on her wonderful work.</p>	<p><b>DO IT NOW</b></p> <p>Place your name on our season subscription list and be assured of your choice of seat for every performance for the entire season up to 1.30 for the afternoon and 7.30 for the evening of the day for which tickets have been ordered.</p>	<p><b>BOX OF THE BIGGEST ACTS IN PRODUCE.</b> 10c Covers Entire Bill. Park Military Road.</p>
<p><b>WILLIE ECKSTEIN.</b></p>  <p>Pianist at the Strand Moving Picture Theatre, which opened its doors to-night.</p> <p>It was only fitting that the director of the greatest Opera House in the world</p>	<p><b>LYRIC HALL</b></p> <p>Twice Daily, 2.30 and 8 p.m. 10c, 15c, 25c.</p> <p>Latest and best in moving pictures, including the great Irish story in 3 parts.</p> <p><b>KERRY-GOW</b> taken in Ireland with all the natural scenery and a full programme of fine subjects; also the musical novelty act of</p> <p><b>ALICE LAMONT</b> the Musical Trancing Girl; and</p> <p><b>KATHERINE RAYNER</b> Prima Donna, Soprano. Monday night, fancy China <b>SOUVENIRS FOR EACH LADY.</b></p>	<p><b>STRAND</b></p> <p><b>MONTREAL'S PHOTOPLAY THEATRE DE LUXE</b> Corner St. Catherine and Mansfield Streets.</p> <p><b>OPEN TO-DAY</b></p> <p>WITH <b>MME SARAH BERNHARDT</b></p> <p>—IN— <b>LA TOSCA</b></p> <p><b>NOTE</b>—An important feature of the "Strand" is the engagement of <b>Willie Eckstein and Harry Thomas, the well-known pianists</b></p> <p>—PRICES— Afternoon, Ten cents. Evenings, 10c, 20c, and Boxes, 25c.</p>
<p><b>ROYAL COMMENCING MONDAY MAT. DEC 10th</b></p> <p><b>HAZEL GRANT</b> AND HER OWN COMPANY</p> <p><b>THE CHAMPAGNE GIRLS</b> 20—PRETTY GIRLS—20</p>		

Figure 2.1: *The Standard* (7 December 1912): 30, BAAnQ



Figure 2.2: George Ganetakos (left), Ernest Cousins (centre), and Isidore Crépeau (right) personify United Amusement at the opening of the Seville theatre. *La Presse* (23 March 1929): 69, BAnQ

**GRAND OPENING TO-MORROW**  
**SATURDAY, AT NOON**  
of the Most Beautiful Picture Palace in the World

# THE IMPERIAL

New Home of the Nickel Bleury and St. Catherine Streets  
A Metropolitan Theatre Which New York Would Be Proud to Possess.

**Entirely Fireproof Throughout**  
Magnificently Built in Every Particular—No Posts—No Sight Obstructions. Beautifully Decorated and Furnished in the Latest Up-To-Date Style

Every Comfort for Men and Women in the way of Retiring and Toilet Rooms, Promenades and

## 2000 COMFORTABLE SEATS

An Amusement Palace That Will Be Heralded as

**MONTREAL'S MOST BEAUTIFUL PLAYHOUSE**  
Devoted to MOTION PICTURES and PHOTO PLAYS of the highest Order  
A TWENTY THOUSAND DOLLAR MUSICAL FEATURE

# The Hope-Jones Unit Orchestra

Comprising Sixty Different Instruments  
... This is the First Theatre in the United States or Canada to be Supplied With One of These Marvellous Orchestras.

Admission to all Parts of the Theatre **10c**  
A Few Box and Loge Seats 25c Each.  
A View of the Theatre Alone is Worth the Price of Admission; the Show Three Times as Much  
**Come and See for Yourself**  
DOORS OPEN AT 12 O'CLOCK NOON,  
**SATURDAY, APRIL 26th**  
and a Continuous Performance Daily Thereafter  
From Noon Until 11 P. M.

Figure 2.3: *Montreal Daily Star* (25 April 1913): 14, BAnQ

# UNTO HERSELF ALONE WHO PAYS





"THE WEATHER" ETC.



"THE REVOLT"

Fifth Drama in a Series of Twelve  
on Vital Questions of Life

### WHERE TO SEE "WHO PAYS?" NEXT WEEK

<b>5th Drama "UNTO HERSELF ALONE"</b>		<b>3rd Drama "WHEN JUSTICE SLEEPS"</b>	
<p><b>THE IMPERIAL</b></p> <p><b>CINEMA PASSE-TEMPS</b> ST. CATHERINE ST. WED.</p> <p><b>OUIMETOSCOPE</b> 424 ST. CATHERINE ST. FRI.</p> <p><b>ARCADE</b> ST. CATHERINE ST. EAST SAT.</p>	<p>MON. TUES. THURS. FRI. SAT. SUN.</p>	<p>MT. ROYAL AVE. EAST. (Near Papineau.) MON. TUES. WED. THURS. FRI. SAT. SUN.</p> <p><b>THE DOMINO</b></p> <p><b>THE GAYETY</b></p> <p><b>LAURIER PALACE</b> 1445 ST. CATHERINE ST. EAST. FRI. SAT. SUN.</p> <p><b>CASINO</b> 49 ST. CATHERINE ST. WEST</p>	<p>MON. TUES. WED. THURS. FRI. SAT. SUN.</p>
<b>4th Drama "THE LOVE LIAR"</b>		<b>2nd Drama "THE PURSUIT OF PLEASURE"</b>	
<p><b>CRYSTAL PALACE</b> COR. ST. CATHERINE and MAIN STREETS MON. TUES. WED. THURS. FRI. SAT. SUN.</p> <p><b>THE CANADA</b> 2121 ST. LAWRENCE BLVD. FRI. SAT. SUN.</p> <p><b>THE ALEXANDRA</b> ST. DENIS ST. SAT. SUN.</p>	<p>MON. TUES. WED. THURS. FRI. SAT. SUN.</p>	<p>1374 NOTRE DAME ST. WEST. MON. TUES. WED. THURS. FRI. SAT. SUN.</p> <p><b>THE FAMILY</b></p> <p><b>THE LUNE ROUSSE</b> ONTARIO ST. EAST (Near Fleeta.) THURS. FRI. SAT. SUN.</p> <p><b>FAIRYLAND</b> 475 NOTRE DAME ST. WEST. SAT. SUN.</p>	<p>MON. TUES. WED. THURS. FRI. SAT. SUN.</p>
<b>1st Drama "THE PRICE OF FAME"</b>		<b>THE GLOBE 1169 St. Lawrence Blvd.</b>	
		MON. TUES. WED.	

Figure 2.4: *The Standard* (26 June 1915): 11, BAnQ

**GRANDE SÉRIE DE 4 ÉTOILES DE PATHÉ**



**La  
Main  
Mystérieuse**

Une production qui fera sensation dans l'histoire du Cinéma.

Toute personne de coeur, qui aime les beaux traits d'héroïsme, le mystérieux, les histoires d'amour et les romans, devra suivre cette série, la plus captivante de toutes.

**CARACTERISANT**

Doris Kenyon  
Sheldon Lewis  
Arline Pretty  
et  
Mahlon Hamilton

DEUXIEME EPISODE AU

**THEATRE STRAND**

**Lundi, Mardi et Mercredi, 17, 18. et 19 Décembre et bientôt aux Théâtres suivants :**

Théâtre Crystal Palace, Montréal.	Théâtre Maisonneuve, Maisonneuve
Théâtre King Edward, Montréal.	THEATRES HORS VILLE
Théâtre Oulmetoscope, Montréal.	Royal Alexandra, Lachine.
Théâtre Alexandra, Montréal.	Théâtre Empire, Ottawa.
Théâtre Domino, Montréal.	Théâtre National, Ottawa.
National Biograph, Montréal.	Théâtre Casino, Ottawa.
Lord Nelson, Montréal.	Théâtre Princess, Sherbrooke.
Perron Hall, Montréal.	

**Specialty Film Import, Limited.**

Figure 2.5: *La Patrie* (15 December 1917): 20, BANQ

LA PLUS VASTE ENTREPRISE THEATRALE  
DU MONDE ENTIER

## LE THEATRE ALLEN

Peu de Canadiens savent que les plus grands exhibiteurs de Vues du monde entier sont deux de leurs jeunes compatriotes qui ont leurs quartiers généraux à Toronto d'où ils font rayonner leur activité d'un bout à l'autre du Dominion et passent même la frontière.



B. Allen

Ces deux canadiens sont Jule et Jay J. Allen, leur succès tient du roman et leur carrière est une des merveilles du royaume du film.

Il y a douze ans environ, B. Allen et ses deux fils ouvrirent un théâtre de Vues Animées à Brantford. A cette époque, Toronto et Montréal étaient les deux seules villes au Canada où l'on exhibait régulièrement des films; partout ailleurs, il n'y avait que des représentations occasionnelles données par des voyageurs. On ne considérait alors les Vues Animées que comme une curiosité, une simple distraction sans conséquences au point de vue des affaires.

Pourtant, Allen eut l'intuition de l'avenir. Avec ses fils il décida de travailler pour cet avenir et, aussitôt, ils ouvrirent leur premier théâtre en prenant ces deux devises: "n'exhiber que les meilleurs films et plaire à la clientèle à tout prix".

Peu après, ils ouvrirent un deuxième théâtre à Brantford puis, présentant l'opportunité offerte par l'Ouest, ils vendirent leur établissements d'Ontario et s'installèrent à Calgary. Là ils commencèrent leur premier échange pour le louage et la distribution des films aux autres théâtres et ce service s'étendit bien vite à tout le Canada.

Ceci ne les détourna pas de leur premier but et ils continuèrent à opérer le groupement de théâtres mais il revinrent alors à Toronto où ils sont toujours et là ils organisèrent divers services, principalement ceux des *Famous Players* et de la *Monarch Film Co.*

Ils avaient alors un magnifique théâtre à Toronto, ils en acquièrent ou construisirent d'autres, un à un puis récemment en ajoutèrent onze d'un seul coup à leur liste. Parmi ces derniers, il y en a trois à Winnipeg, trois à Vancouver et deux à Victoria. Ce seul fait démontre que les Allen conduisent leurs opérations d'une façon sans exemple dans l'histoire des affaires.



Jule Allen

Les lecteurs du *Panorama* s'en rendent compte par la liste, ci-après, des théâtres actuels appartenant à cette vaste entreprise: l'Allen, l'Allen's Beaver, l'Allen's Bloor Street, l'Allens Royal et l'Allen's Danforth à Toronto; le New Grand et l'Allen à Montréal; l'Auditorium et l'Allen à Québec; le Régent à Ottawa; l'Allen à Cobourg; l'Allen à Peterboro; le Majestic à London; le Temple à Hamilton; le Windsor à Windsor; l'Allen et Aoma à Kitchener; le Province, le Dominion, le Gaiety, le Bijou et le Rex à Winnipeg; l'Allen à Brandon; le Rex et le Regina à Regina; l'Allen à Moose Jaw; l'Allen et le Monarch à Edmonton; l'Allen à Calgary; le Victoris et le Dominion à Victoria; le Rex, le Dominion, le Globe et le Broadway à Vancouver.

D'autres théâtres seront encore joints à

cette liste dans un avenir rapproché et qui doivent coûter au-delà d'un demi-million chacun; il s'en construira à Winnipeg, à Vancouver, à London, à Halifax et à Montréal. Cela représente des dollars par millions. Depuis plusieurs mois, d'ailleurs, peu de semaines se sont passées sans l'achat ou la construction d'un nouveau théâtre. A Cleveland et à Detroit des travaux ont été entrepris pour un montant supérieur à quatre millions.

On remarque sans doute que nombre de ces théâtres ou de ceux qui sont en construction portent le nom d'Allen. Il n'y a pas là une question de vanité mais une signification; depuis leur début, en effet, les Allen ont voulu que leur nom soit synonyme de "qualité" ce qui a été fidèlement suivi.

Un fait digne de considération, c'est que les Allen ont toujours estimé que l'exhibition de films était un genre d'affaires véritable; ils n'ont jamais sacrifié l'avenir à une fausse économie dans le présent, chose qui a fait faillir des entrepreneurs trop ambitieux; ils ont toujours eu à l'esprit les développements possibles de ce qu'ils commençaient et ont maintenu leurs efforts en conséquence.

Les Allen choisirent avec soin les films qu'ils exhibent. Ils n'acceptent pas indifféremment tout, bon ou mauvais, ce que font certains directeurs de théâtres qui se trouvent ainsi à payer trop cher certains films insignifiants qu'ils montrent quand même au public pour rattraper leur argent. Eux, au contraire, n'ont pas de contrat entravant leur liberté de choix et c'est ainsi qu'ils ont su acquérir une réputation excellente bien méritée.

Jule et Jay J. Allen, les deux fils de B. Allen sont d'infatigables travailleurs; leur père leur laisse une grande initiative qu'ils emploient au mieux des intérêts du public. Il leur faut, d'ailleurs, une énergie et une activité remarquables pour s'occuper de l'ensemble comme des plus légers détails de leur immense entreprise.

(Voir suite page 40)

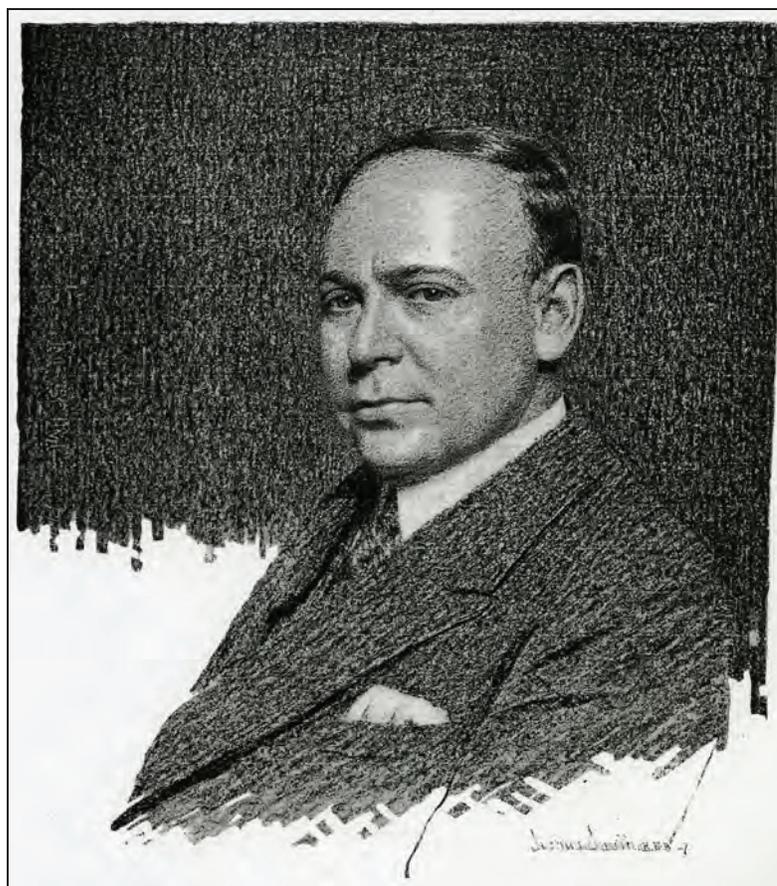


Jay J. Allen

Figure 3.1: "La plus vaste entreprise théâtrale du monde entier: le théâtre Allen," *Le Panorama* 1:1 (October 1919): 58, BANQ



**Figure 3.2:** Allen Westmount theatre, postcard, BAnQ



**Figure 3.3:** Nathan L. Nathanson by Joshua Smith, *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* (9 July 1927): 45



**J. RAOUL GARIÉPY**



Architect of Rialto Theatre, which opens tonight.

production of "The Square Peg," and has arrived in New York for a vacation. Norma Shearer, another Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer celebrity, has returned to Culver City after a shopping trip to New York.

Helen's new production was adapted by Agnes Christine Johnston from the Lewis Beach play and has Claire Windsor, William Haines, Emily Fitzroy, Lucille Hickson, Robert Agnew and others in leading roles.

Three handsome leading men in one production!

Bianche Sweet, in "The Sporting Venus," is to be envied!

Imagine such screen Adonises as Ronald Colman, Lew Cody and Paul Hill, the newest handsome film discovery, all making love to one heroine!

Miss Sweet, by the way, is showing her bobbed tresses in pictures for the first time since she returned to the screen, her previous roles demanding long hair.

Eleanor Boardman is joining Claire Windsor a class second on the fatening diet," both are now on.

The question on the Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer lot these days is not "How much did you lose?" but "How much did you gain?"

Claire, you remember, was told by her physician just before she started on "Dixie," her forthcoming vehicle, to watch her calories in order to get fat; whereupon Eleanor Boardman immediately discovered that she, too, needs a few more pounds (fitness to be exact) for perfect weight.

Result: Eleanor is now on an exclusive milk diet for a whole month, wherein she will eat nothing at all but four quarts of milk a day!

Lillian Gish in Henry King's Inspiration production of "Romola," with Dorothy Gish, a Metro-Goldwyn picture, opened December 1, at the George M. Cohan Theatre in New York. Both Gish sisters were present. "Romola" scored the greatest success of any photoplay in recent years.

The Christie Comedy girls have stepped out and organized a football team and have challenged the girls of the other studies for a match to be played on a Hollywood field. The Christie team consists of Natalie Joyce, Cecelia Joyce, Sue Hicks, Josephine Hicks, Lois Wilson, Martha Beck, Mary McLain, Nellie Reedson, Dorothy McMillan, Lucille King, Betty Murray, and Anita Garvin. All but one of the team wear bobbed hair,

if concerns the original story. Universal will undoubtedly make a big special of "The Goose Woman."

"Wanted.—A prepossessing young lady to play with thirteen lions, one elephant, one monkey and twenty-nine assorted wild animals. Ten weeks work at right salary for right girl. Must have acting experience and speaking acquaintance with lions."

By the above want ad. Universal is endeavoring to find a heroine for "Lovers of the Lions," the big adventure spectacle which Edward Sedgwick is getting ready to produce. No answers have been received to date.

Ben Alexander, 19, who plays the youthful George Minafer in Vitagraph's "Pampered Youth," David Smith's picturization of Booth Tarkington's "The Magnificent Ambersons," is 100 per cent boy. William Tilden I, the tennis champion, has adopted him as his mascot and the two are great pals.

Wolf, the famous police dog that is to play the title role in "Bares, Son of Kazan," James Oliver Curwood's novel, has come under management with Vitagraph by signing a

variety of sandwich than have been found to date.

"Very satisfying tit-bits for tea," she says, "are graham-bread sandwiches of marmalade mixed with pistachio nut-mats."

Not often does a producing company receive such a letter as this, which Rafael Sabatini, the novelist wrote to Vitagraph: "I congratulate you very warmly upon your film adaptation of my novel, 'Captain Blood,' and I congratulate myself still more warmly upon having been afforded so splendid a translation to the screen. The scenarist has done his work with courage and skill, while the producer has supplied real talent, intuition and enormous labor to give the vital movement of the story a life and actuality which render the film a very faithful mirror of the period in which my tale is set. The work of Mr. Kerrigan and Miss Paige needs no praise from me, but I may record my personal delight in it."

To be "different" is commonly held desirable — but it's a tremendous task in the motion picture business where individuals profit most when

**EMMANUEL BRIFFA**



The famous European artist, who directed the decorating of the Palace, Papineau, Belmont, Plaza, Corona, Bourget and the Rialto.

they are remembered longest. Who believes this, even though the author of the statement says it's a fact: "Clara Bow, who has had a number of important roles in Warner Bros. pictures recently — and most of them 'flapper' roles — says she has never tasted ice cream!"

"The Mirage," the picturization of Florence Reed's famous stage play of that name, is now being cut and titled at the Regal Studios at Culver City.

"The Mirage" is the story of a showgirl and of her experiences in New York. Miss Florence Vidor plays the lead, and finds in this role one entirely different from the parts she usually essays.

Clive Brook, the popular English actor who has recently come to this country is seen in the leading male role, and a well balanced company, including Viola Vale, Alan Roscoe and Myrtle Vane and seen in support of the stars.

C. Gardner Sullivan wrote the screen version and George Archibald directed.

Albert E. Smith, president of Vitagraph, who returned to New York recently from London, where he attended the English premiere of "Captain Blood," left almost immediately for the Pacific Coast. He was accompanied by Mrs. Smith, known on the screen as Jean Puleo, and expects to be away until after January 1st.

At Hollywood Mr. Smith will confer with Vitagraph directors regarding production plans for future pictures on Vitagraph's 1924-25 schedule. Among the earliest of these are Basil King's "In the Garden of Charity," to be produced by J. Stuart Blackton, and James Oliver Curwood's "Bare, Son of Kazan," which is to be a David Smith production.

Work on "The Redeeming Sin," starring Mrs. Alla Nazimova, and directed by Mr. Blackton, and "Pampered Youth," from Booth Tarkington's "The Magnificent Ambersons," which David Smith is making, already is well under way.

In spite of her summery name, little Mildred June looks charming in her new winter costume designed from Molyneux. It consists of a coat of fawnkin in cranberry red with tufted facings of leopard cat and a harmon-

**UNITED AMUSEMENT**

**THEATRE**

**MANAGERS**



*Wish Their Many Patrons and Friends*

*A Very Happy and Prosperous New Year*

Figure 3.5: Raoul Gariépy, architect of the Rialto theatre, Emmanuel Briffa, theatre decorator, and United Amusement theatre managers. *The Standard* (27 December 27 1924): 34, BANQ



Luncheon tendered to delegates by J. Le Breque at Le Club Canadien. Montreal.

TERRITORIAL GET TOGETHER, EASTERN CANADA, MONTREAL, QUEBEC, DECEMBER 13.

Top row, left to right—S. Brint, Montreal; I. Goldwater, Lachine, Quebec; N. Lazanis, Montreal; I. Singerman, Sherbrooke, Que. Second row—Frank Wanicker, Montreal; J. Spurdakos, Montreal; J. La Breque, Montreal; Fred Guest, Hamilton, Ont.; A. J. B. Robert, Three Rivers, Que.; W. W. O. Fenety, Fredericton, N.B. Bottom row—D. Wolff, Montreal; Geo. Nicholas, Montreal; Harry Brouse, Ottawa, Ont.; J. Kraker, St. John, N.B.; Mrs. E. H. Davidson; W. J. Drummond, Gen. Mgr. Eastern Canada, Toronto.

**Figure 3.6:** “Territorial Get Together,” *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* (15 December 1921): 10, Cinémathèque québécoise

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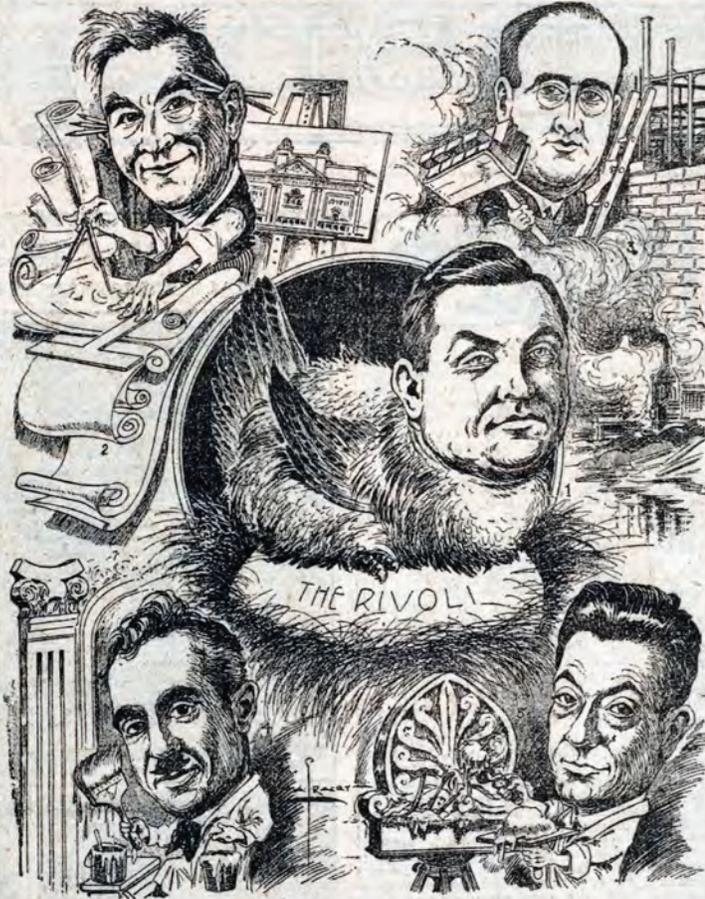
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LES GRANDS ARTISANS DU RIVOLI



Un caricaturiste a esquissé dans leurs attitudes symboliques les principaux artisans de la construction du beau théâtre dont l'United Amusement Corporation vient de doter la partie nord de Montréal. Ce sont: 1. M. GEORGE NICHOLAS, directeur-gérant de la corporation, qui a conçu l'idée et le plan général du nouveau théâtre; 2. M. D.-J. CRIGHTON, architecte, qui a préparé les plans et a surveillé leur exécution; 3. M. DOUGLAS BREMNER, qui a eu charge de la construction; 4. M. EMMANUEL BRIFFA, qui a exécuté les peintures murales et scéniques et les décorations; 5. M. ANTHONI DeGIORGIO, qui a fait les moulures qui recouvrent les murs et le plafond.

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FLECTRA PRINCESS

Figure 3.7: Arthur Racey, "Les grands artisans du Rivoli," *La Presse* (18 December 1926): 46, BANQ

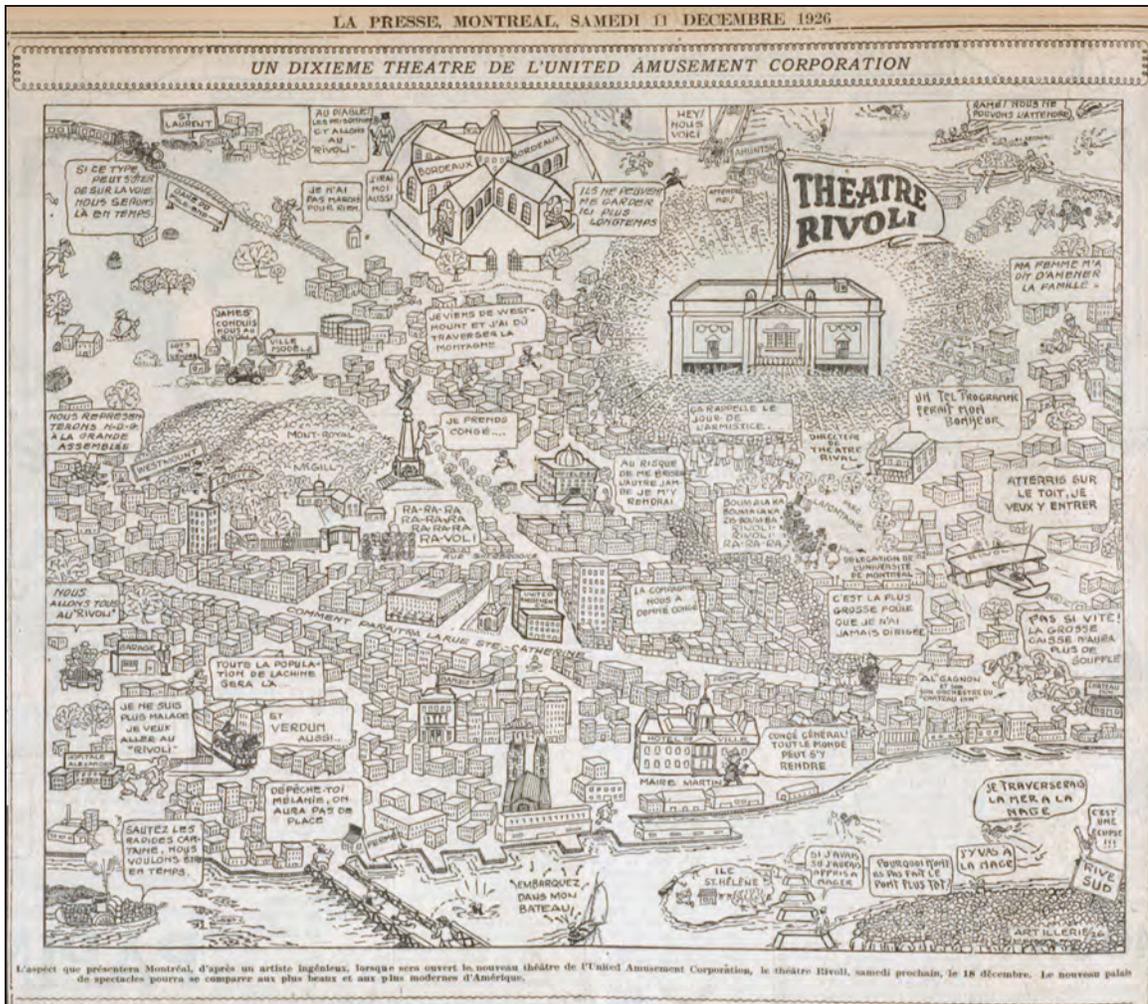


Figure 3.8: “Un dixième théâtre de l’United Amusement Corporation,” *La Presse* (11 December 1926): 50, BAnQ

### Réouverture du théâtre Starland

Les nombreux habitués du populaire théâtre Starland apprendront avec plaisir que M. Jos. Cardinal en a fait l'acquisition, et le théâtre a été remis à neuf et ouvrira ses portes le 3 mars prochain.

M. Paul Cardinal, nommé gérant du Starland, offrira chaque semaine un programme double de vos françaises et anglaises; en outre une troupe présentera un programme de numéros de Music-Hall, avec des artistes de New-York. Vous serez toujours assurés de passer une soirée très agréable au Starland, et les prix toujours modiques permettront à tout le monde de s'y rendre.



**Jos. Cardinal**

A l'Arcade: "La Rose effeuillée", sur demande spéciale. — Harry Baur.

L'Arcade présente cette semaine une innovation à sa nombreuse clientèle; à demande générale, la direction montrera: "La Rose Effeuillée", ou "Un miracle de Ste-Thérèse". "La Rose Effeuillée" est approuvée par le clergé. A l'oc-



Figure 3.9: “Réouverture du théâtre Starland,” *La Patrie* (24 February 1934): 49



deuxième d'opérette, voici l'excellent et amusant résultat de gauche à droite: M. HONORE VAILLANCOURT, directeur général de la Société; Mme JEANNE MAUBOURG, directrice artistique; M. JEAN GOULET, directeur artistique; Mlle IRENE TRUDEAU, au centre, Mlle LUCY TURNER, M. ALBERT ROSEVART, directeur artistique, Mlle ROLANDE LABELLE, au bas, M. GASTON SAINT-JACQUES, M. EMILE CARTIER, M. ROMEO MOUSSEAU et Mme ALICE DEMERS.

## LA UNITED AMUSEMENT OUVRAIT HIER LE PLUS VASTE DE SES CINEMAS

La United Amusement Corporation Limited, a le droit d'être fière du nouveau cinéma, le Granada, dont elle faisait l'inauguration hier soir. C'est, en effet, la plus somptueuse et la plus spacieuse salle qu'elle possède à l'heure actuelle dans la métropole. Cette active compagnie canadienne a voulu doter la partie Est de la ville—le Granada s'élève à l'intersection de la rue Sainte-Catherine Est et du boulevard Morgan—d'une construction imposante, digne du développement commercial intense de cette populeuse section de la ville.

Le Granada est le summum dans ce genre de construction; à l'élegance de ses lignes, à la décoration artistique de sa façade il joint la richesse de son architecture intérieure; toute une série de nouveautés techniques ajoutent encore au confort et à la sécurité du public. Construit tout spécialement pour le film parlant, sa construction a donné lieu à une étude particulière de la part d'experts en acoustique qui, grâce aux généreux moyens mis à leur disposition, n'ont rien négligé pour en faire la salle la plus parfaite à ce point de vue.

### Deux mille sièges

Aussi les 2000 sièges qu'il contient ont été placés sur le même plancher, afin d'éviter les balcons et les niches, qui sont reconnus comme les pires ennemis de la bonne diffusion des sons. Ces sièges, par ailleurs d'un confort parfait, sont disposés entre de très larges allées et à l'inclinaison voulue pour permettre une visibilité parfaite de quelque endroit de l'immense salle. Ayant l'espace à leur disposition, les

architectes l'ont utilisé de façon à donner au public le maximum d'un bien-être; ainsi le foyer est assez spacieux pour contenir de nombreux fauteuils invitant au repos, et les allées de sortie sont d'une largeur réconfortante pour les spectateurs qui n'aiment pas être bousculés.

L'architecture s'inspire des styles que la renaissance espagnole a mis en faveur, et bien que quelque peu fantaisiste elle conserve une élégance et un goût qu'on souhaiterait voir présider à la décoration de bien d'autres salles.

### Décorations intérieures

Le plafond cintré a pris sous l'habile pinceau des décorateurs l'aspect d'un beau ciel par une claire nuit d'été. Dans un bleu sombre percent des milliers de points d'argent, les étoiles. Cette façon de décorer le plafond donne à la salle une belle perspective. Les murs ne sont pas écrasés sous le poids d'un plafond chargé de guirlandes et d'autres motifs décoratifs.

### Harmonie de tons

Sur les murs de côté court une large corniche où l'or et l'argent s'allient admirablement, repoussés par le noir et le vert du marbre; des colonnes à l'architecture décorées d'oves et de godrons la supportent sans effort. A l'avant de la salle, de chaque côté de la scène, les décorateurs ont élevé des balcons rondes qui soutiennent des colonnes à modillons. D'élégantes palmettes d'argent leur donnent un aspect très riche, et des draperies de velours rouge viennent adoucir de leurs plis soyeux leur fastueuse apparence.

A SUIVRE SUR LA PAGE 69

## Documentaires de conception bien nouvelle

La firme Pathé vient d'entreprendre la réalisation d'un genre de film qui obtiendra certainement un vif succès, ne serait-ce que pour satisfaire l'insaisissable curiosité du public. Ce n'est pas d'her que l'on désire connaître la vie, les premiers pas des grands personnages de la terre ou des vedettes de cinéma. Or, la compagnie Pathé entend réunir toutes les premières bandes réalisées par ces grandes vedettes. Ainsi, le premier film tourné dans ces conditions compte des images fort amusantes. Voici ce qu'il contient.

Tout d'abord, un bout de film tourné par Bill Roberson, alors que ce monsieur s'appelait tout bonnement l'empereur Guillaume II d'Allemagne. Cette bande datée de 1913. Puis c'est un homme sur le front duquel le soleil ne se couche jamais; on a deviné le prince de Galles, assistant en 1914 à une de ses premières fonctions officielles. Puis le bon ami Maurice Chevalier amusant Paris avec son premier film: un drame, pensez donc! intitulé "A Paris".

Le général Pershing lui succède. On le voit faisant la guerre au fameux bandit mexicain Villa, dans les prairies de New-Mexico. Quelques secondes plus tard, nous nous trouvons en compagnie de William-Howard Taft, au cours d'une campagne politique en 1913. Quelques scènes d'Irene Castle, alors que cette actrice était modèle pour un grand couturier de Paris. Voici maintenant un Harold Lloyd sans lunettes jouant un petit rôle dans "Just Nuts", et, pour terminer, des scènes de la campagne politique de Calvin Coolidge au cours de la grève à Boston, en 1919, où, comme gouverneur de l'Etat du Massachusetts, il remporta une victoire qui devait plus tard le conduire à la présidence de son pays.

Ces petits documentaires d'un caractère tout nouveau seront bientôt présentés à Montréal.

## Quarante chansons de Conrad Gauthier

Par ses Soirées du bon Vieux Temps, M. Conrad Gauthier a déjà fréquemment manifesté son désir que survivent chez nous et se propagent en dehors les gais refrains qui firent la joie de nos ancêtres et que nous réentendons toujours avec plaisir. Son talent de chanteur et de diseur est depuis longtemps au service de ce répertoire, qu'il a l'art de préserver intact et de rendre cher à ceux qui l'ignorent.

C'est sans doute afin d'assurer à ces chansons une plus grande diffusion que Conrad Gauthier vient d'en grouper quarante en un recueil de grand format dont le distributeur général est la maison Edmond Archambault, et dont le texte et l'annotation sortent des presses de Thérien Frères.

"Ils sont légion, dit avec raison le préfacier de l'album, M. Gustave Comte, ceux des nôtres qui brûlent d'apprendre et l'air et les paroles de "Mauron, lurette", "Anatole et Manda", "Un P'tit soulier, Madame", "Autrefois", "Le Père La Neige", "Zozo", "La Destinée", "Quand Pollon va voir Mina", "On est Canayen", "Les souliers de ma mignonne", etc.

Et cela devrait suffire à assurer le succès de cet album, si la réputation de Conrad Gauthier de n'enlever jamais n'était pas déjà une garantie suffisante.

Harry Beaumont, le réalisateur de "Broadway Melody" rappelle qu'il y a quinze ans il faisait déjà des expériences de film parlant aux studios Biograph.

Warner Baxter et Catherine Dale Owen sont les vedettes du premier film dialogué adapté d'un roman d'Ellinor Glynn, "Such Men Are Dangerous".

et (A. Vaino), Mississipi (J. Schildkraut); PALACE: The Vagabond King); PRINCESS: Be Yourself (Brice); ROXY: A Woman in Pawn (Stuart).

AU VAUDEVILLE  
IMPERIAL: Love Comes Alo (Daniels); Lew Pollack, Dunn, etc.  
LOEWS: Seven Days Leav (Cooper); Jane et Katherine etc.

AU CONCERT  
L'ASCENSION: Chorale Br (demain soir); MONT-ROYAL: Orchestre P (monique de Montréal, Luna re Gregory, mezzo, mardi 3); RITZ-CARLTON: M. et Mme (ter, Mme Lieber, lundi).

## Un anniversaire pour la capital du cinématographe

Il y aura exactement 10 ans, cette année, que le premier film était tourné à Hollywood. Le sateur de ce film, qui devait la ville dans la voie du succès, n'a pas été le célèbre réalisateur, mais, avait nom Tom Ricketts, fit encore du cinéma par compte de la compagnie Co. Il avait reçu son éducation qu'à Londres, où il s'était sé d'une façon particulière crets de la pantomime. Ces 10 années devaient le servir admet au cours de sa carrière graphique. Ricketts cumula ses fonctions lorsqu'il entra réalisation de son premier fut à la fois directeur et C'est avec la firme Nestor, re du cinéma à Hollywood, ketts fit ses débuts.

Après une tournée de dix semaines au vaudeville, le George-K. Arthur vient de à Hollywood.

**Ramona**  
dans une  
COMEDIE  
Musicale  
avec  
MARION  
HARRIS  
DOROTHY  
JORDAN

Programme  
double  
jusqu'à  
mardi

**TH**  
Un dra

**DENIS**  
9244

AUJOURD'HUI  
INCLUS.

Écran, deux vues  
de CHADWICK dans  
"ASSURE OF THE  
RICH"  
ET  
Julienne Logan dans  
"OF THE STORM"  
des français et anglais

Soirée 60c, 40c, 25c.

musical

**SIDE**

et Gaynor,  
ted

**RIVOLI**  
-Denis, près Bélanger)

Jusqu'à mardi.

## AU CINEMA GRANADA



M. N. LAZANIS, gérant-général de la Lord Nelson Amusement Company, sous la direction personnelle de qui s'est faite la construction du cinéma Granada, que la United Amusement Corporation, Limited, inaugura hier soir.

Figure 3.11: "Au cinéma Granada," *La Presse* (29 March 1930): 65, BANQ

LES PRINCIPAUX THEATRES DE MONTREAL

MONTREAL LEADING THEATRE  
**HIS MAJESTY'S**  
 TELEPHONES, UPTOWN 9640-9644

Aujourd'hui 2:15 et 8:15 William Faversham dans "Her Friend the King"

TOUTE LA SEMAINE PROCHAINE — MATS MERC. et SAM.  
 Seconde Saison Annuelle

**AMERICAN OPERA CO.**

Repertoire

OPERA en ANGLAIS sous la direction de W. ROSING  
 100 Artistes Canadiens et Américains  
 ORCHESTRE SYMPHONIQUE

LUNDI SOIR  
 'CARMEN'  
 TUESDAY EVENING  
 'FAUST'  
 WEDNESDAY MATINEE  
 'MARTHA'  
 WEDNESDAY EVENING  
 'MADAME BUTTERFLY'  
 THURSDAY EVENING  
 'YOLANDA OF CYPRUS'  
 FRIDAY EVENING  
 'MARRIAGE OF FIGARO'  
 SATURDAY MATINEE  
 'FAUST'  
 SATURDAY EVENING  
 'CARMEN'

EVER 7:15 to 8:30 - WED. and SAT. MATS. 7:15 to 2:50 (Plus fees)

Continu  
 11 A.M. & 11 P.M.

**PRINCESS**  
 TELEPHONES - LANCASTER 5232 - 5233

Commentant Aujourd'hui

LA VUE QUE TOUT MONTREAL ATTENDAIT

Les deux plus grandes personnalités dans le monde des spectacles

MARY PICKFORD  
 and DOUGLAS FAIRBANKS

dans l'adaptation de l'immortel oeuvre de SHAKESPEARE

**"THE TAMING OF THE SHREW"**

Toute parlée — Toute désopilante —

Attractions  
 PAT ROONEY & FAMILY in "The Royal Game"  
 VAN & SCIENCE in "Everything"  
 A HOLLYWOOD STAGE & SHOW SERVICE in "The Comedy"  
 NEWS REEL

ENSEMBLE

PRINX  
 Toute la semaine, 11 a.m. à 1 p.m. . . . . 25c - 25c  
 Matinée 45c - 25c  
 Soirées et fêtes 55c - 30c

Matinée Quotidienne Spéciale 25c

**GAYETY**  
 2 fois par jour 2:15 et 8:15 P.M.

Commentant demain soir, 8 dée.

Un Pageant of Gracieuses Beautés

FASCINATION REMUANTE ET EXOTIQUE  
 La fascinante beauté du Burlesque

**ANN CORIO**

et ses **GIRLS IN BLUE**

avec le concours de HAP FREYER et CHUCK CALLAHAN  
 et un chœur de SEDUISANTES, PIMPANTES BELLES



Continu 12 P.M. & 11 P.M.

**ORPHEUM**  
 AT POPULAR PRICES

A L'Affiche

"Combattez pour elle ET LE MEILLEUR HOMME L'OBTIENDRA"

UNE ETRANGE IDYLLE AU MILIEU DE BIZARRES DECORS

**The ISLE OF LOST SHIPS**

Basée sur le roman de Crittenden Harriott avec

NOAH BEERY-VIRGINIA VALLI  
 JASON ROBARDS

TOUTE PARLEE

Tous les sièges

Semaine  
 Matin. 50c  
 Soirées 40c  
 FETES  
 Matin. 50c  
 Soirées

Attractions spéciales parées et jouées



Contrôlés par **CONSOLIDATED THEATRES LIMITED**

Figure 3.12: La Patrie (7 December 1929): 36, BANQ

**PALACE**

GEORGE ROTSKY  
Managing Director

WEEK BEGINNING NOVEMBER 3rd, 1928

- 1.—Overture  
"Introducing "Jeannine, I Dream of Lilac Time"  
JERRY SHEA, conducting
- 2.—Fox Movie-Tone News
- 3.—Shubert's "Serenade"
- 4.—Winnie Lightner: singing  
Nagaska Butterfly
- 5.—Will Mahoney,  
the International Star, says  
"Why Be Serious"
- 6.—Palace Comedy Creation
- 7.—Winnie Lightner: singing  
"Everybody Loves My Girl"
- 8.—Feature Presentation

JOHN McCORMACK presents  
COLLEEN MOORE  
in  
"LILAC TIME"

CAST

Jeannine Berthelot	....	....	....	....	....	....	....	....	COLLEEN MOORE
Captain Philip Blythe	....	....	....	....	....	....	....	....	Gary Cooper
General Blythe	....	....	....	....	....	....	....	....	Burr McIntosh
Mechanic's Helper	....	....	....	....	....	....	....	....	George Cooper
Captain Russell	....	....	....	....	....	....	....	....	Cleve Moore
Lady Iris Rankin	....	....	....	....	....	....	....	....	Kathryn McGuire
Madame Berthelot	....	....	....	....	....	....	....	....	Eugenie Besserer
Burgomaster of Berle Les Bois	....	....	....	....	....	....	....	....	Emile Chautard
The Infant	....	....	....	....	....	....	....	....	Jack Stone
Mike, Mechanic	....	....	....	....	....	....	....	....	Edward Dillon
Aviators	....	....	....	....	....	....	....	....	Dick Grace, Stuart Knox, Harlan Hilton, Richard Jarvis, Jack Ponder, Dan Dowling.

- COMING -  
"THE MAN WHO LAUGHS"

Figure 3.13: Palace theatre programme, from *Palace Topics* (3 November 1928): 6, author's collection

# DIRECTEMENT AUX CINEMAS A DOUBLE PROGRAMME!

<b>STRAND</b> La même production "THE GIRL ON THE TRAMP" "THE GAWLETT" Mette Lindberg, S.S. Warner Adapté de "The Girl on the Tramp" Linda, S.S. Warner			
<b>WESTMOUNT</b> "THE HOLLYWOOD REVUE" "THE HOLLYWOOD REVUE" "THE HOLLYWOOD REVUE" "THE HOLLYWOOD REVUE"	<b>PIALTO</b> "THE GIRL ON THE TRAMP" "THE GIRL ON THE TRAMP" "THE GIRL ON THE TRAMP" "THE GIRL ON THE TRAMP"	<b>REGENT</b> "THE GIRL ON THE TRAMP" "THE GIRL ON THE TRAMP" "THE GIRL ON THE TRAMP" "THE GIRL ON THE TRAMP"	<b>RIVOLI</b> "THE GIRL ON THE TRAMP" "THE GIRL ON THE TRAMP" "THE GIRL ON THE TRAMP" "THE GIRL ON THE TRAMP"
<b>BELMONT</b> "THE COCKEYED WORLD" "THE COCKEYED WORLD" "THE COCKEYED WORLD" "THE COCKEYED WORLD"	<b>ROSEMONT</b> "THE GIRL ON THE TRAMP" "THE GIRL ON THE TRAMP" "THE GIRL ON THE TRAMP" "THE GIRL ON THE TRAMP"	<b>SEVILLE</b> "THE GIRL ON THE TRAMP" "THE GIRL ON THE TRAMP" "THE GIRL ON THE TRAMP" "THE GIRL ON THE TRAMP"	<b>GRANADA</b> "THE GIRL ON THE TRAMP" "THE GIRL ON THE TRAMP" "THE GIRL ON THE TRAMP" "THE GIRL ON THE TRAMP"
<b>PLAZA</b> "THE GIRL ON THE TRAMP" "THE GIRL ON THE TRAMP" "THE GIRL ON THE TRAMP" "THE GIRL ON THE TRAMP"	<b>CORONA</b> "THE GIRL ON THE TRAMP" "THE GIRL ON THE TRAMP" "THE GIRL ON THE TRAMP" "THE GIRL ON THE TRAMP"	<b>AMHERST</b> "THE GIRL ON THE TRAMP" "THE GIRL ON THE TRAMP" "THE GIRL ON THE TRAMP" "THE GIRL ON THE TRAMP"	<b>MT-ROYAL</b> "THE GIRL ON THE TRAMP" "THE GIRL ON THE TRAMP" "THE GIRL ON THE TRAMP" "THE GIRL ON THE TRAMP"
<b>PAPINEAU</b> "THE GIRL ON THE TRAMP" "THE GIRL ON THE TRAMP" "THE GIRL ON THE TRAMP" "THE GIRL ON THE TRAMP"		<b>LORNE NELSON NAPOLEON</b> "THE GIRL ON THE TRAMP" "THE GIRL ON THE TRAMP" "THE GIRL ON THE TRAMP" "THE GIRL ON THE TRAMP"	

**Gloria Swanson** dans le drame sensationnel "The Trespasser", au Rivoli et au Plaza jusqu'à mardi; au Westmount à partir de mercredi.

**Harold Lloyd** dans sa grande comédie "Welcome Danger", au Pialto, du 19 au 23 février, et aux autres théâtres United immédiatement après.

DES studios Warner Brothers, United Artists, Paramount, Fox, First National Vitaphone, Metro-Goldwyn Mayer et Columbia nous viennent les meilleures productions du Nouveau Monde du Cinéma, parfaitement projetées et synchronisées aux "United Theatres" en programmes doubles.

**The United Amusement Theatres** programme Double

Figure 4.1: La Presse (1 February 1930): 66, BANQ

## WARNING

Accept no verbal statements of salesmen regarding  
Silverware Gift Night.

### **Investigate**

It has been brought to our attention that parties not connected with us have represented themselves as being the originators of and the only company selling Silverware Gift Night to exhibitors.

### **Theatre Promotions Reg'd**

were the first company to introduce silverware in this field and are exclusive distributors to theatres for the

**Wm. Rogers Manufacturing Co. of Canada**  
**International Silver Co. of Canada**

Niagara Falls, Hamilton and Toronto

*Every piece made in Canada by Canadian Workmen*

#### A Few of Our Satisfied Accounts

United Amusement Corp.  
Ltd., Montreal  
Premier Operating Co.  
Park Theatres Ltd.,  
Toronto  
Carlton Amusements Ltd.,  
Toronto  
Belsize Theatre, Toronto  
Bedford Theatre, Toronto  
Danforth Theatre, Toronto



#### A Few of Our Satisfied Accounts

The Remy Theatre, Ottawa  
Columbia Theatre, Ottawa  
Nolan Theatrical  
Enterprises, Ottawa  
Rialto Theatre  
Three Rivers  
Gayety Theatre Co.  
Collingwood  
Model Theatre, Midland  
Princess, Woodstock

### **Theatre Promotions Reg'd**

69 York Street - Toronto

ELgin 1921

Figure 4.2: *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* (8 August 1931): 12, Cinémathèque québécoise



**Figure 4.3:** Sam Katz, *Publix Opinion* 3:64 (26 December 1930): 1, Cinémathèque québécoise

**Avis Spécial**

*Le Palace fut le premier théâtre de Montréal à présenter les films parlés — Maintenant le Palace enregistre une autre victoire en étant le premier théâtre en Amérique à s'assurer la version française d'un film parlé tourné en Amérique. Je suis fier de recommander personnellement cette version française d'un film parlé Super Paramount au public français de notre grande cité*

*Geo. Kotsky*



**The LOVE PARADE**

*Fascinante idylle musicale gaie et charmante, filmée Paramount, mettant en vedette le personnage le plus captivant de l'écran.*

**MAURICE CHEVALIER**

*sous la direction inspirée de*

**ERNST LUBITSCH**

*avec une troupe comprenant*

**JEANETTE MacDONALD  
LUPINO LANE LILLIAN ROTH**

Commençant aujourd'hui

**PALACE**

Le foyer du film parlé parfait

MATINEE POPULAIRE QUOTIDIENNE  
dimanche excepté **25¢**  
From 10.30 A.M. to 12.30 P.M.



*à Paramount Picture*

Figure 5.1: *La Patrie* (18 January 1930): 52, BAnQ

**Attention!**  
**Canadiens-Français**

**VOICI LE PLUS GRAND EVENEMENT  
 DE LA SAISON THEATRALE**

**UN FILM ENTIEREMENT PARLÉ EN FRANÇAIS**  
*intitulé*  
**'UN TROU  
 DANS  
 LE MUR'**

*Mettant en Vedette*  
**DOLLY - JEAN  
 DAVIS - MURAT**

**MARGUERITE MORENO - PIERRE BRASSEUR  
 SUZANNE DEHELLY - LEON BELIERES**



**7 AUTRES  
 ATTRACTIONS**  
 Comédies parlantes et  
 Nouveautés produites  
 en France

**A NOTRE CLIENTÈLE  
 CANADIENNE-FRANÇAISE**

Grâce à nos instances souvent répétées auprès des grandes compagnies  
 de film pour obtenir des Vues Parlantes Françaises, nous venons d'obtenir -  
 comme faveur extraordinaire - de présenter au public canadien français  
 la PREMIÈRE VUE PARLANTE FRANÇAISE du genre en Amérique. Cette  
 première française "UN TROU DANS LE MUR" étant un essai de la Compagnie  
 Paramount - le public Montrealais devra, s'il désire la permanence des  
 vues françaises en notre ville, nous aider à le leur prouver par son  
 encouragement immédiat!

Votre dévoué M. HARRY S. DAHN - Gerant.

**A  
 L'AFFICHE  
 Les Spectacles  
 CAPITOL**

Figure 5.2: *La Patrie* (9 August 1930): 20, BAnQ

PREMIÈRE PRÉSENTATION AU CANADA

Commençant aujourd'hui — pour une semaine seulement

# ST - DENIS

Le film PARLANT et CHANTANT—entièrement en FRANÇAIS

## "LA ROUTE EST BELLE"

avec ANDRÉ BAUGÉ de l'Opéra Comique de Paris



*L'hon. A. David*

—AUSSI—  
L'hon. A. DAVID  
*sur l'écran*  
Souhaitant la  
bienvenue au  
Canada du  
film français

L'Ancaster  
9243-9244

**PRIX :**

**25<sup>c</sup>** EN MATINÉE  
Tous les sièges

**25<sup>c</sup> et 40<sup>c</sup>** En Soirée

*Attractions supplémentaires*  
LA VIE DE CHOPIN  
LE SEXE FORT  
*Comédie 100% parlant français*

Scénario de  
**Pierre Wolff**

Réalisateur  
**Robert Florey**

Musique de  
**SZULC  
PARES  
VAN PARYS  
PLANCHARD  
A. BERNARD**



Représentations continues tous les jours de MIDI TRENTE à ONZE heures p.m.

**"La route est belle" passe à 1½, 3½, 5½, 7½, 9½ hrs**

— "LA ROUTE EST BELLE" — SEUL DE S'ÊTRE JAMAIS FAIT PLUS BELLE — ET LE MONDE TOUT.

Figure 5.3: *La Presse* (6 September 1930): 69, BAnQ

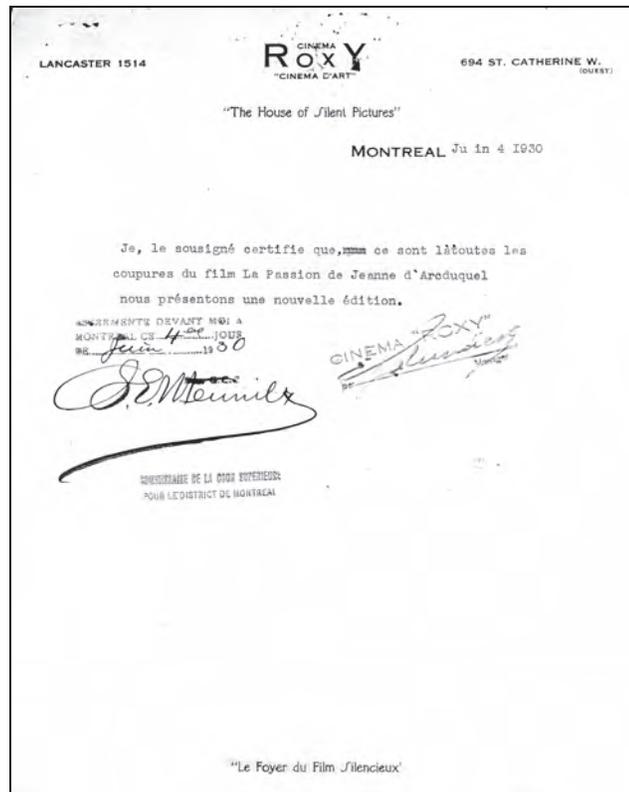


Figure 5.4: Roxy letterhead, Régie du cinéma collection, BANQ



Figure 5.5: J.A. DeSève (center), some France-Film employees, and a Théâtre St. Denis-shaped cake, 1950. Roméo Gariépy collection, Cinémathèque québécoise

**Aux salles de la UNITED AMUSEMENT**

**Grande semaine de Gala**      **Inauguration de la politique française**

**AU PUBLIC**

Le 1er octobre marquera une DATE CAPITALE dans l'histoire du cinéma à Montréal. Chaque semaine désormais, dans sept salles United, le film français DISTRIBUE EXCLUSIVEMENT PAR FRANCE-FILM, aura la place d'honneur.

Cette page permet de juger, en un clin d'œil, le formidable effort que l'United Amusement et la France-Film viennent de fournir pour présenter dans TOUTS LES QUARTIERS de la métropole les grands films français.

Depuis longtemps le public attendait cette innovation. Le jour est venu et la France-Film et l'United Amusement n'attendent plus que la réponse du public à leur effort. L'accord de ces deux firmes était logique. Il est basé sur la confiance mutuelle et le désir de diffuser sur une vaste échelle le film de langue française.

Les salles United sont reconnues pour leur luxe, la qualité de l'acoustique et la courtoisie du personnel.

Les films distribués par France-Film sont les plus magnifiques, les plus somptueux et les mieux adaptés à la mentalité du public canadien parce qu'ils sont choisis en France par le personnel compétent d'une firme DIRIGÉE PAR DES CANADIENS-FRANÇAIS DE MONTREAL.

Voilà des dates et les films ici annoncés. L'United Amusement et France-Film ont fait leur part. La parole est au public!

**CORONA**  
2490 RUE NOTRE DAME OUEST  
2-3 OCTOBRE mer. JEU.

*opérette comique*  
**LE BARON TZIGANE**  
avec JOHANN STRAUSS

*avec JACQUELINE FRANCEL*  
**Son Excellence ANTONIN**  
avec ANGE GRILEY - JOSETTE DAY - RAYMOND CORDY  
2 heures de rire!!

**RIVOLI**  
6906 RUE ST-DENIS  
3-4 OCTOBRE JEU. VEN.

*UNE RÉALISATION MAGISTRALE*  
*L'œuvre de Louis Hémon*  
**Maria Chapdelaine**  
PROGRAMME DOUBLE avec

**2 grandes vedettes**  
ALBERT PRÉJEAN  
PAULETTE DUBOST

**L'AUBERGE du PETIT DRAGON**

**PAPINEAU**      *Le roi des comiques*      *Le si populaire*

4819 RUE PAPINEAU  
1-2 OCTOBRE mer. JEU.

**FERNANDEL**      **Jean MURAT**

**Les Bleus de la Marine**      **La Sonnette d'Alarme**

Un film à mourir de rire!      2 grands films français      un fameux vaudeville

**PLAZA**  
6505 RUE ST-HUBERT  
1-2 OCTOBRE mer. JEU.

UN FILM COMME ON N'EN VERRA PLUS

**Son Autre Amour**  
avec CONSTANT REMY  
JEANNE BOITEL

EN PROGRAMME DOUBLE AVEC

**TOI QUE J'ADORE**  
avec JEAN MURAT  
EDWIGE FEUILLERE

**BELMONT**  
14 RUE MONT ROYAL OUEST  
2-3 OCTOBRE mer. JEU.

**Victor FRANCOIS**

**L'aventurier**  
avec HENRI BOLLAN  
BLANCHE MONTAN

EN PROGRAMME DOUBLE

**LE ROI DES CHAMPS ÉLYSÉES**  
avec HOMAY SUR UN  
scénario de JACQUES  
BUSTER KEATON  
classé aux Diamants  
France-Film

**ROSEMONT**  
3238 RUE MASSON  
1-2 OCTOBRE mer. JEU.

*Un saisissant portrait de la Russie au temps du Tsar*

**Voilà les Flammes**  
avec le fameux  
• INKHINOFF  
• ALBERT PRÉJEAN  
• DANIELE GARRIEUX

EN PROGRAMME DOUBLE AVEC

**PIERRE BRASSEUR**  
IRENE DE ZILALHY  
classé aux Diamants  
France-Film

**QUADRILLE D'AMOUR**

**GRANADA**  
4333 RUE STE-CATHERINE EST  
2-3 OCTOBRE JEU. VEN.

LE JEUNE ACTEUR PRODIGE,  
**Robert LYNEN**  
ET LE CÉLÈBRE TENOR  
**Vanni MARCOUX**  
Gars

**SANS FAMILLE**  
En programme double avec

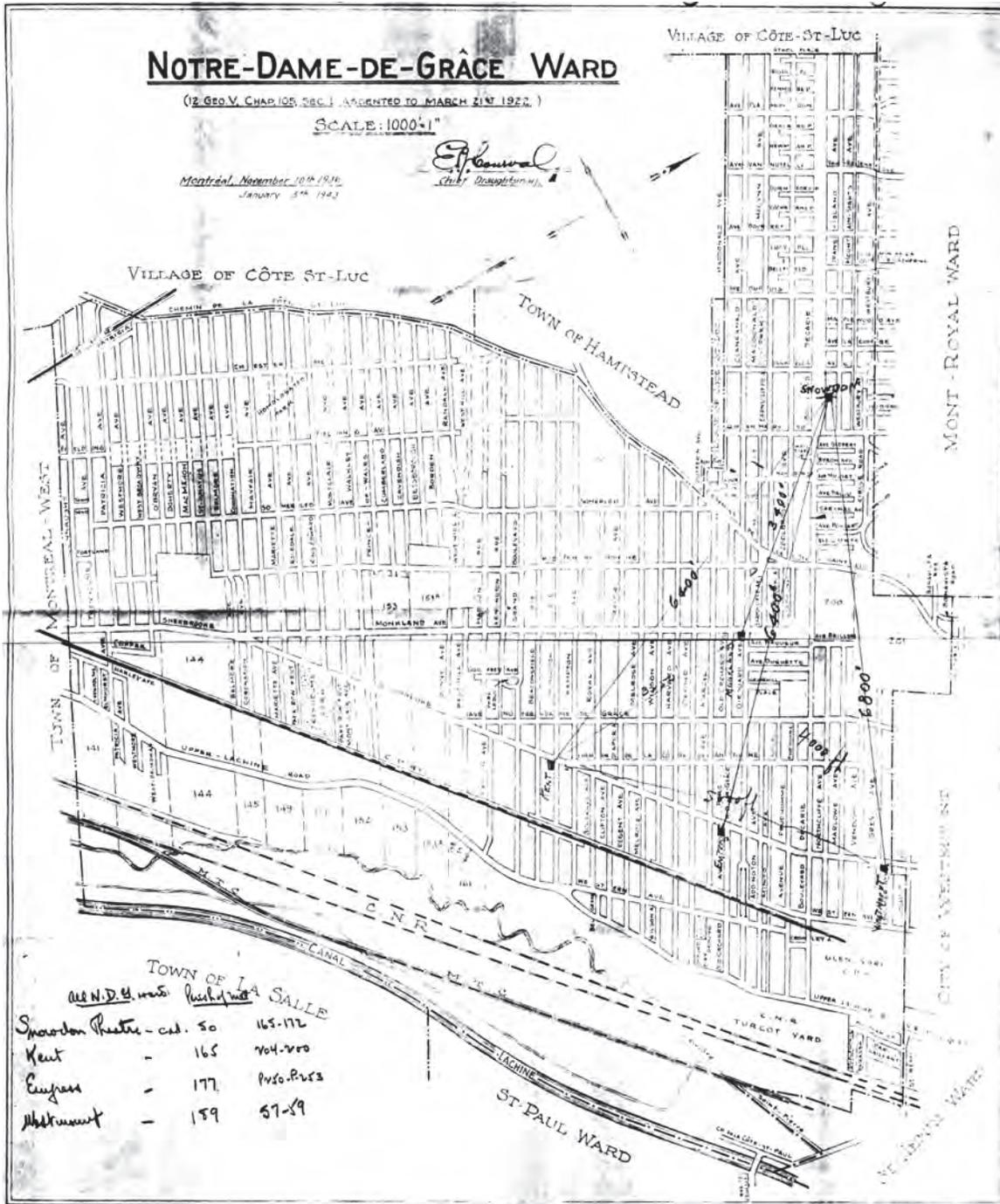
**BOUCOT et RENEEST CYR**  
classé aux Diamants  
France-Film

**Incoquillo!**

Figure 5.6: United Amusement - France-Film advertisement, *La Presse* (28 September 1935), BANQ

	<u>RUN</u>	<u>EXPIRATION</u>
Cinéma de Paris	1st	
St. Denis	2nd	
Château	3rd	1st Sept. 1942
Dominion	4th	1st Sept. 1942
Cartier	5th	1st Sept. 1942
Maisonneuve	6th	1st Sept. 1942
Beaubien	7th	
Electra	8th	31st Aug. 1942
Rex	9th	30th Sept. 1943
Arcade	10th	
Stella	11th	30th Sept. 1943
National	12th	
Lord Nelson	13th	Spot Booking
Perron Hall	14th	11th June 1938
Passé Temps	15th	30th Sept. 1938
Majestic	16th	Spot Booking
Plaza	17th	Spot Booking
Caméo	18th	Spot Booking

**Figure 5.7:** France-Film runs, annex to the June 13, 1938, memorandum of agreement between France-Film, Regal Films, Confederation Amusements, and United Amusement, Cinéma Impérial collection, B15 F924, Cinémathèque québécoise



**Figure 6.1:** Map of the Notre-Dame-de-Grâce ward showing the respective locations of the Westmount, Empress, Monkland, Snowdon, and Kent theatres, Cinéma Impérial collection, B3 F83, Cinémathèque québécoise





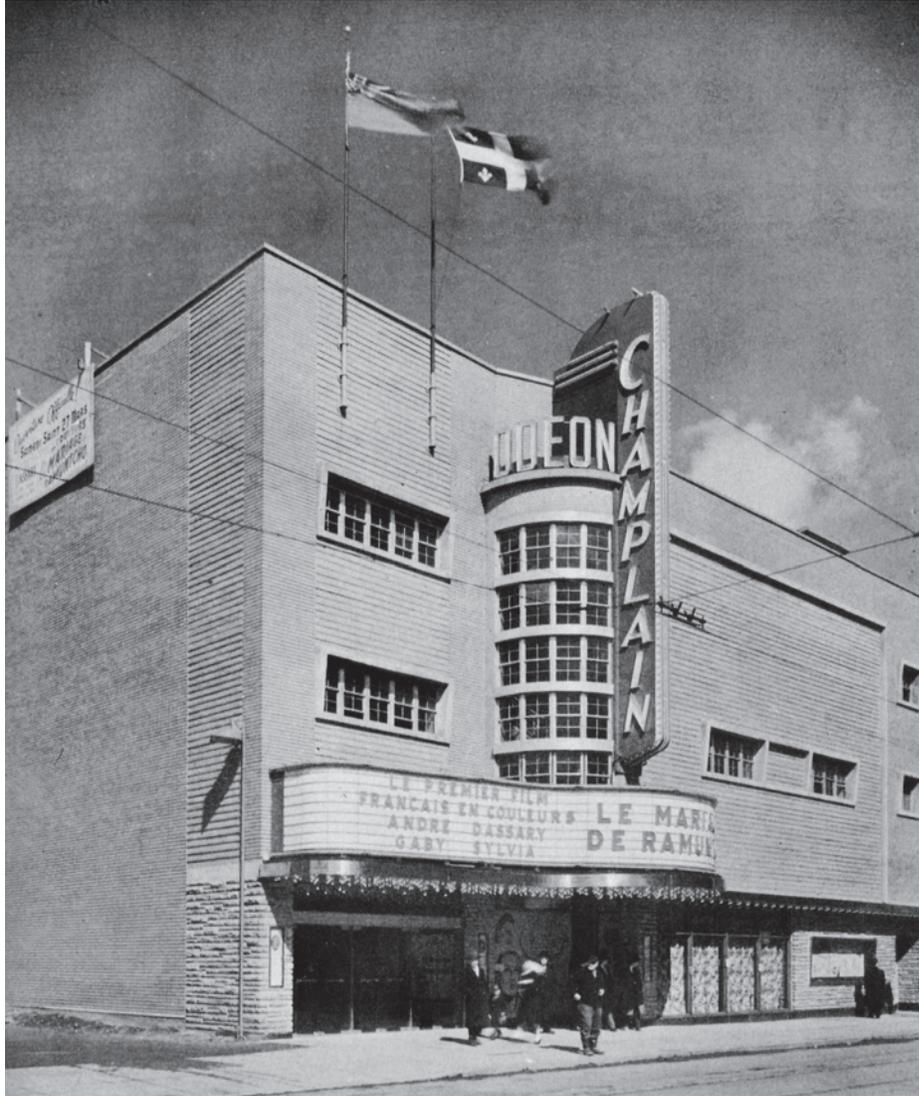
Figure 6.4: *La Patrie* (1 April 1944): 38, BAnQ



Figure 6.5: *Canadian Film Weekly* (30 June 1948): 9, Cinémathèque québécoise



**Figure 6.6:** Jacques Martin, *Canadian Film Weekly* (14 October 1953): 4, Cinémathèque québécoise



**Figure 6.7:** The Champlain days before its March 28, 1948, opening. *Theatre Catalog* (1948-1949): 122



**Figure 7.1:** Gratien Gélinas as Fridolin, Library and Archives Canada, courtesy of Anne-Marie Sicotte



**Figure 7.2:** *Le train de plaisir* on the 'Théâtre St. Denis' stage, Library and Archives Canada, courtesy of Anne-Marie Sicotte

**CE SOIR—CKAC—9 HRS**  
*La BIÈRE BLACK HORSE*

*présente*

**“LE TRAIN  
 DE  
 PLAISIR”**

*mettant en vedette*

**“Fridolin”**  
 (GRATIEN GELINAS)

**ET SA TROUPE, LIONEL DAUNAIS  
 AINSI QUE MAURIGE MEERTE  
 ET SON ORCHESTRE**

*Ne manquez pas d'écouter ce soir*

**BIÈRE BLACK HORSE**

Figure 7.3: *La Presse* (14 September 1938): 24, BAnQ

**ST DENIS**  
*Aujourd'hui*

*présente*  
**RICHARD WILLM**

*comédie*  
**FEUILLÈRE**

*avec*  
**LA DAME DE  
 MALACCA**

*avec*  
**Lucien BAROUX**

*dans*  
**M. BRELOQUE  
 A DISPARU**

**CE SOIR seulement**  
 SUR LA SCÈNE  
**FRIDOLIN**  
 dans  
**“Le Train de Plaisir”**  
 Admission 40 cent., taxes incluses  
 à compter de 5 heures

Figure 7.4: *La Presse* (14 September 1938): 5, BAnQ



**THÉÂTRE NATIONAL**  
**SÉMAINE PROCHAINE**

**"FRIVOLITIES"**  
**"FRIVOLITIES"**

Revue sensationnelle avec  
**TIZOUNE**  
**EFFIE MACK**  
**BELIVEAU**  
**PIC-PIC**





**H. PELLERIN**  
 Mme PETHIE  
 GILDA GUERCY  
 FRED CHAPUT  
 RITA—COX  
 GRACE CHAPMAN  
 4—ROSEBUDS—4

**ART. PETRIE**  
 MERRILL SISTERS  
 CABBELL TWINS  
 LULU — MABEL  
 HENRIETTE  
 WILMA—THELMA  
 TEDDY  
 Mlle MIMI  
 LULU WHITE

Voyez 30 artistes, 20 tableaux — Sur l'écran: SHADOW OF THE MOSQUE. 7 rouleaux. Titres en français.

Figure 7.6: *La Presse* (6 September 1930): 73, BAnQ

**NATIONAL** *DEMAIN A LA SCENE*  
*L'inimitable comédienne*

**La POUNE**  
 poursuit son tour du monde  
**"AU PAYS D'HAWAÏ"**  
 Ouverture: "Sous les palmiers".  
 Drame: "Pour lui" avec Simone de Varennes.  
 Sketch: "Théâtre en Hawaï"  
 Grande Comédie  
**"La Pouné chez Madame Wakiki"**  
 — A L'ÉCRAN —



*Samedi à mardi*  
**VICTOR FRANÇEN**  
**BLANCHE MONTEL**  
 "L'aventurier"  
 "Mystérieuse Lady"  
 avec **GINA MANES**

*Mercredi à vendredi*  
**RAYMOND ROULEAU**  
**RENEE SAINT-CYR**  
 "Donogoo"  
**Jean Murat—Annabella**  
**Pierre Richard Wilm**  
 "Anne-Marie"

Figure 7.7: *La Presse* (31 October 1941): 45, BAnQ

LE SUCCÈS EST AU FILM PARLANT FRANÇAIS



L'OEUVRE DE FRANCE-FILM DANS  
LA PROVINCE DE QUÉBEC  
A L'AMPLEUR D'UNE  
HÉROÏQUE CROISADE

**I**NSTITUTION canadienne - française, FRANCE - FILM revendique pour la population française du Québec le droit de protéger la langue maternelle en mettant à son service le plus formidable médium d'expression qui soit au monde: le film.

FRANCE-FILM a lutté; sa victoire est décisive!

FRANCE-FILM a été le champion du français; son appel a été entendu.

FRANCE-FILM, dès la première heure, lança la phrase désormais célèbre: "Le Succès est au Film Parlant Français". Cinq années d'efforts constants, de travail opiniâtre lui ont permis d'offrir à la population ce qu'elle désirait: du cinéma présenté dans la langue de France.

Trente millions de spectateurs, depuis cinq ans, ont récompensé par leur encouragement infatigable la bataille engagée par FRANCE - FILM pour la défense de l'art et de l'esprit français.

Désormais, la province de Québec ne saurait se passer du film français. Il est devenu la distraction de milliers de foyers et sa popularité actuelle n'est que le prélude d'une puissante évolution.

Mardi, s'ouvrira à l'Hôtel Windsor, à Montréal, sous le haut patronage de Son Excellence le Ministre de France à Ottawa, M. Raymond Brugère, et de l'honorable L.-A. Taschereau, premier ministre de la province et sous la présidence de M. René Turck consul général de France à Montréal, le Cinquième Congrès du Film Français tenu sous les auspices de FRANCE-FILM.

En cette mémorable occasion, FRANCE-FILM prendra les dispositions pour assurer l'avenir du film d'expression française en cette province. Un nombre imposant de super-productions seront annoncées; de vastes projets d'expansion seront élaborés; de nouvelles méthodes de diffusion du film seront mises à l'essai; bref, FRANCE-FILM fournira le plus gigantesque effort de sa carrière.

FRANCE-FILM N'A QU'UN MOT D'ORDRE:  
"GRANDIR AVEC LE QUÉBEC FRANÇAIS"

CINQUIÈME CONGRÈS ANNUEL

**FRANCE-FILM**



Figure 7.8: *La Presse* (1 June 1935): 65, BAnQ



Figure 7.9: Attendees of the first Congrès du film français, *La Presse* (30 July 1931): 8, BAnQ



Figure 7.10: Juliette Béliveau, Chanteclerc theatre postcard, Library and Archives Canada



Figure 7.11: *La Patrie* (20 January 1934): 65, BAnQ



Figure 8.1: Candy bar of the Champlain theatre, Roméo Gariépy collection, Cinémathèque québécoise



**Figure 8.2:** Gratien Gélinas' Canadian Film Development Corporation and George Destounis's Famous Players get involved with Canadian feature film production: Quebec premiere of *Red* (Gilles Carle, Canadian Film Development Corporation/Famous Players/Onyx Films, 1970) at the Montreal Capitol, 1970. Cinémathèque québécoise