

## ARTS &amp; LIFE



JULIE OLIVER, THE OTTAWA CITIZEN

Bojan Z. Bosiljcic, a film critic and author in his native Sarajevo, calls himself 'the last cinema romantic.'

# Canada's greatest film fan

A Gatineau man has written three books celebrating Canadian film. The only catch is that they are in Serbian.

JAY STONE

The Genie Award nominations will be announced Jan. 17, and few people will be more excited than Bojan Z. Bosiljcic, who may be Canada's greatest film fan.

"It's a huge cultural statement. It's a testimony about Canadian identity," Bosiljcic says of the Genies. "They speak about us, about Canadians. When people ask why do we care about the Genies, it would be like saying the question is: Why do we care about ourselves?"

Bosiljcic — who signs his letters "the last cinema romantic" — is a 54-year-old immigrant from Bosnia who came to Canada in 1995 and, four months later, was attending the Genie Awards in Montreal ("the visually striking *The Confessional* by

Robert Lepage" was that year's winner, he recalls). He was a film critic in Sarajevo, and he now writes for *Kisobran*, a Serbian-language newspaper in Vancouver, although he lives in Gatineau.

He has written three books about Canadian movies, all of them in Serbian: *Hollywood North*, *While Maple Branches Sway*, and now *The Beautiful Dreamers (Ti divni sanjari)*, a history of the Genies that includes interviews with many of the winners. He proudly says it's the only book in the world on the three decades of the awards: An earlier celebration of Canadian film called *And the Genie Goes To ...* by Maria Topalovich, former head of the Academy of Canadian Cinema and Television, came out in 1999.

The academy, which runs the Genies, says it has heard of Bosiljcic's book, but it has not seen a copy. It probably wouldn't do much good, the book being in Serbian and all, although there are several illustrations of Bosiljcic with various luminaries of Canadian cinema, and the occasional word — Dejvid Kronenberg or Atom Egojan — that is intelligible to the non-Serbian speaker.

## The Genie Awards

The nominees for the the 32nd Genie awards will be announced Jan. 17, and the awards will be presented March 8.

**The book:** *Ti divni sanjari* (The Beautiful Dreamers) by Bojan Z. Bosiljcic is available at Serbica Books in Toronto.

**WATCH a video of Bosiljcic talking about his new book by finding this story at**

[OTTAWACITIZEN.COM](http://OTTAWACITIZEN.COM)

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The fact that the only current book on the Genies is in Serbian and had its launch at the Belgrade International Book Fair is somehow a quintessential Canadian story. We are largely a nation of newcomers, and it is frequently the recent arrivals who most appreciate our virtues: the freedom, the safety, the Atom Egojan films.

Bosiljcic — who uses his middle initial because his cousin, Bojan S.

Bosiljcic, is also a writer, in Belgrade — says that, while they are often ignored at home, Canadian films are very popular in Yugoslavia and are regularly shown in theatres and on TV there. "I like Canadian movies, because, to me, they are opposite to the Hollywood mainstream, to this Hollywood brainwashing escapism," he said in an interview.

"Canadian movies are similar to European auteur cinema. They're audacious, they're innovative, they speak about real life. They speak about everyday problems. They speak about the people who are not like the superheroes. In Canadian movies, there is no superhero with supernatural power who always saves the world and gets the girl."

He also likes the fact that Canadian films tackle subjects that some regard as taboo: Jean-Marc Vallée's *C.R.A.Z.Y.*, about the coming of age of a gay youth in Montreal, won the 2005 Genie as best picture, "the same year when Oscars were afraid to give the best movie of the year award to *Brokeback Mountain*," Bosiljcic says.

"I found Canadian movies very exciting. They are provocative. They

actually make you think, not sleep."

Alas, not everyone knows this. Telefilm Canada set a goal of having Canadian films earn five per cent of total box-office receipts, but they managed only 3.3 per cent in 2009-10, according to the latest figures. Telefilm chair Michel Roy said in November that there will be a new index of success, one that will also consider award nominations, acclaim at festivals, DVD and TV revenues and private-sector funding.

Last year, *Barney's Version* and *Incendies*, the top Genie movies, earned \$35 million worldwide and won 52 prizes at festivals. But for most Canadian movies, getting audiences has been a familiar problem, and Bosiljcic puts forth familiar reasons: We're just too close to Hollywood.

"We are not enough exposed to Canadian movies," he says. "They should have more space in theatre and on national TV."

In fact, there was such a televised retrospective of Canadian cinema recently. It was in Belgrade, when he was there for his book launch.

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