

Montreal Main

Canada : 1974 : dir. Frank Vitale : President : 88 min
 prod: Frank Vitale & Allan Bozo Moyle : scr: Frank Vitale : dir.ph.: Eric Bloch
[Johnny Sutherland](#)
 Frank Vitale; Allan Bozo Moyle; Tony Booth; Nye Maciukas; Esther Ormianer; Suzy Lake;
 G.E. Rogers; Janet Walczewski; George MacKenzie; Leonard Coleman; Stephen Lack;
 Jackie Holden; Dave Sutherland; Ann Sutherland; Peter Brawley

Ref:	Pages	Sources	Stills	Words	Ω	8	€	M	☺	Copy on VHS	Last Viewed
2948b	4.5	5	3	1,900	-	-	-	3	3	No	<i>Unseen</i>



An alternative culture Ganymede – Johnny Sutherland

Source: The Moving Picture Boy



*The love that **really** dare not speak its name, glimpsed – however imperfectly – in this Canadian art-house movie. Frank Vitale left, with the ambiguous Tadzio Sutherland. Remember the days when male persons actually had **hair**? Source: 18th London Film Festival programme*

18th London Film Festival – 1974 – programme review:

“Put simply, "MONTREAL MAIN" is a raw and perceptive film about an inevitably fated relationship between a man and a thirteen-year old boy. More ambitiously it traces a sub-culture in the Canadian city, specifically in the Main Street, within a free wheeling group of homosexually-oriented (but not exclusively so) drop-outs. The film was made on a co-operative basis (though the guiding force is obviously Vitale) and, as such, is partly a joint-autobiography, with the structure of the relationship - and its results - imposed upon it for dramatic purposes¹.

The boy is gently and enigmatically played so that one is never quite aware of how much he understands of the relationship. Initially he is indifferent to the attentions of the man, Frank, although gradually the dependence becomes two-sided. The final conflict is not simply between the pseudo-liberal parents and the couple, but between the group who resent the loss of their "leader". The film, it should be said, is a small budget, occasionally naïve, personal work that has rough edges and a slightly soft centre. Its actors vary from the brilliant (the character Bozo) to the indifferent;

¹ *Why should you suppose so?*

it is grainy and often difficult to follow in its unexplained shifts of mood and relationships.

Yet despite these partial reservations and shortcomings, the film is redeemed by a persuasive urgency and truth that made it one of the most attractive films at both Locarno and Edinburgh. And the central theme is one rarely treated on the screen, less so in this unfurtive, sympathetic manner. For this alone it deserves attention, but it is as a humorous, accurate study of a group outside conventional society that the film finally succeeds.”

- Brian Baxter

The Time Out Film Guide review:

“Vitale’s first feature was the most honest film about male sexuality made to date... which is to say that it’s both troubled and troubling, in the most positive sense. It centres on a character called Frank Vitale, an unemployed artist-photographer, and his circle of (predominantly gay) friends. Frank’s closest friend is Bozo; they have a disastrously furtive attempt at sex together at one point, although neither considers himself gay. But their friendship, and Frank’s life in general, threatens to fall apart when Frank meets the 12-year old Johnny and in some sense falls in love with him. It’s impossible to be more explicit about it, since the film itself isn’t. In

fact, hardly anything happens in the way of reportable incident: it plays as a stream of modest encounters and conversations, which

seem like improvisations. Brilliant casting, photography, and especially editing, however,



You won't be seeing this one on the BBC any time soon. There's no room for it between all the melodramas of abuse, incest and child murder that constantly fill our screens.

Source: CVMC website

give the whole movie an acute psychological focus.”

The Moving Picture Boy entry on Sutherland:

“ **"MONTREAL MAIN"** was a brave, sympathetic but ultimately slightly wet story of love between a man and a boy. (The relationship is left shadowy, and the man caves in too easily under social attack.) Johnny Sutherland makes a hauntingly sad figure of the boy, a child of the flower-power era who proves stronger in both emotion and character than the man who loved him.”

Nambla Bulletin media column note:

“Nostalgia: In the September 1974 *Better Life Monthly*, "Tickle Bone" reviewed a number of trashy books, and the then-recent movie **"MONTREAL MAIN"**. Frank Vitale, an American, wrote it, produced it, directed it, and played the main character. In an almost improvised style, it reveals the offbeat areas of Canada's largest city and the "mob we were all warned to stay away from when we were young". The story is of a 13-year old (played by Jackie Holden) [*wrong*] befriended by a 30-year old artist/photographer. Their relationship is many-faceted and, though built around a love theme, is never expressed physically. The conflict occurs in the responses by the lad's aware and apprehensive parents...”

CVMC video retail/rental website review:

“A photographer living in Montreal during the early 1970s develops an intense interest in a twelve year old boy. The two hit it off and grow close, but then the man's friends and the boy's parents become suspicious about the nature of the relationship and attempt to bring it to a halt. A very honest character study that attempts to make no heroes or present easy answers; one of the best celluloid portraits about a passionate relationship between members of different generations. Highly recommended!

Rated NR: adult themes [*sic*]; brief nudity; sexual themes; violence; profanity
Language: English (also some French)

Categories: Boy Films, Little to Preteen, Adolescent, Coming-of-Age, Drama, Gay & Lesbian ”

[no listing in "Halliwell's Film Guide", "Leonard Maltin's Movie and Video Guide 2001", "Speelfilm Encyclopedie", "The Critics' Film Guide", "The Good Film and Video Guide", "Movies on TV and Videocassette 1988-89", "Radio Times Guide to Films", "Rating the Movies (1990)", "The Sunday Times Guide to Movies on Television", "TV Times Film & Video Guide 1995", "Variety Movie Guide 1993", "Video Movie Guide 1993" or "The Virgin Film Guide"]

No further information currently available. The film's absence from all thirteen above film guides has as much to do with its subject matter, no doubt, as with its independent origins and negligible distribution. Even the *Time Out* critic feels obliged to employ the awkward qualifier "*in some sense*" to the man's love for the boy. One can hardly imagine any other context where the term "love" would require such an uncomfortable disclaimer. The *NFT Bulletin*, bizarrely, cites nine "leading players" without mentioning either the man (Vitale), the boy (Sutherland), Frank's closest friend (Moyle) or the boys' parents (Dave and Ann Sutherland). This is some avant-garde definition of "leading players" which is new to me.

The *NFT* and *Time Out* reviews were plainly written over twenty years ago, when it was still possible to be cautiously objective on the issue of what in America is called man/boy love. No *Time Out* critic today would dare adopt the same neutrality, and it's doubtful such a film as "**MONTREAL MAIN**" would even gain a screening at the London Film Festival. The central issue has become so overwrought in the intervening years that the Western mind is incapable of rational thought upon it, successive waves of legislation targeting pædophiles having swept away such conventional notions as rudimentary civil liberties or the boundaries of jurisdiction.

Seen in that light, "**MONTREAL MAIN**" – which I've no doubt is as wet and befuddled as Holmstrom judges it – almost attains the status of a courageous, pioneering voice. You know you're in deep trouble when a film as ambivalent as this, or Visconti's "**DEATH IN VENICE**", made three years before, could come to be viewed as "controversial" or "disturbing". The recent remake of "**LOLITA**" – which story is scarcely a celebration of the virtues of pædophile relationships – has generated a storm of protest and interminable hand-wringing by its distributors. Humbert Humbert is insufficiently violent and monstrous a character to suit prevailing appetites. If *Lolita* had attempted suicide, the film would have enjoyed more success. Such is the depravity of intolerance on the subject.

A recent Dutch film, as yet unseen in the UK except on video (and then with discreet "pruning"), was "**VOOR EEN VERLATEN SOLDAAT**" ("For a Lost Soldier", 93) which recounts from a 12-year old boy's perspective his brief affair with a Canadian soldier while evacuated to Friesland from Amsterdam in World War II. The film is less ambivalent than either "**MONTREAL MAIN**" or "**DEATH IN VENICE**", in that we see the relationship develop until the man and boy are having sex together in bed, yet even that (for modern times) astonishingly audacious film withdrew from the frankness of the autobiography on which it was based, allowing the audience to shrug the incident off as a vagary of war, and a child displaced from his family merely seeking human comfort. It is, for all it's refreshing matter-of-factness and non-judgmental stance, a very minor film, neither compelling nor entirely convincing as drama.

Yet compared to that, "**MONTREAL MAIN**" will seem rather small beer, I expect, and no more prepared to stand its ground to the final reel than was Mel Gibson's "**MAN WITHOUT A**

FACE", in which sexual activity is imputed to an intimate teacher/pupil relationship without any substance in fact. At least, in Gibson's *interpretation* there was no sexual component to the friendship, but again the book is less evasive. By dealing with love, and not *sexual* love, Vitali sought perhaps to dodge the heat of the kitchen, but any attempt to broadcast his film today would still be met with outrage as an apologia for "abuse". I submit that those who would stamp the word "abuse" on such a friendship reveal less about the relationship than about themselves and their attitudes – to sexuality, to power over children, to the "right" of parents to veto what they choose not to understand. "**MONTREAL MAIN**" may be a very timid testing of the boundaries society places on human love, but it is a voice from a time rather saner than the one we live in, and for that, if nothing else, it should be valued.

What lends the situation (it hardly seems to amount to a story) added piquancy is that all concerned – director Vitale, the boy himself and his parents – are portraying *themselves*, in which context it is quite futile for the NFT critic to comment "one is never quite aware of how much he understands of the relationship". How did Frank and Johnny actually fare together? Would the parents have agreed to sit down and make a movie about a relationship they disapproved of so much? Or consent to their son re-enacting it? If making the film were intended as some sort of group therapy exercise, then that experiment alone – cinema as role-playing catharsis – is probably unique. Nothing else is known of Johnny Sutherland, but since Donald Sutherland and son Kiefer are both Canadian of origin, it's not impossible there was some family connection. At least, Holmstrom does not explicitly rule it out.

What *none* of the above titles are about, let's be clear on one point, is anything to do with gay culture, which has exhibited such cowardice on this matter, and any attempt by gay critics to incorporate these films into their own social paradigm, hostile as it is to intergenerationality, must only be seen as the height of hypocrisy.

See subject index under [AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL TITLES](#), [SEX & SEXUALITY](#) and [SPECIAL FRIENDSHIPS](#).