

Behind the **BOHEMIAN EMBASSY**

A documentary profiling
Canada's wordiest
landmark

Featuring:

MARGARET ATWOOD
MARK BRESLIN
JACKIE BURROUGHS
JOHN ROBERT COLOMBO
JOANNE CRABTREE
DON CULLEN
DAVID FRENCH
GREG GATENBY
PAULETTE KIRKEY
DENNIS LEE
GORDON LIGHTFOOT
GWENDOLYN MACEWEN
GEORGE MILLER
BRAM MORRISON
ROBERT PRIEST
CHICK ROBERTS
SYLVIA TYSON
NANCY WHITE

And Introducing:

AMY PITT

Moose Creek Productions & Andraos Media present
"BEHIND THE BOHEMIAN EMBASSY"

Co-Producer, Editor & Cinematographer GABY ANDRAOS
Writer, Producer & Director CHRISTOPHER VALLEY BAN

FEATURING

(in alphabetical order)

Margaret Atwood
Mark Breslin
Jackie Burroughs
John Robert Colombo
Joanne Crabtree
Don Cullen
David French
Greg Gatenby
Paulette Kirkey
Dennis Lee
Gordon Lightfoot
Gwendolyn MacEwen
George Miller
Bram Morrison
Robert Priest
Chick Roberts
Sylvia Tyson
Nancy White

And introducing

Amy Pitt



BEHIND THE BOHEMIAN EMBASSY

THE HELMSMEN

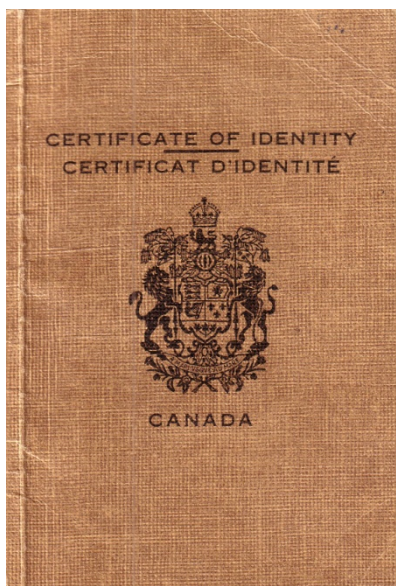
Written, Produced and Directed by
Christopher Valley Ban

Co-produced, Editor and Cinematographer
Gaby Andraos

PRODUCED WITH DEVELOPMENT SUPPORT FROM SUN TV

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A CANADIAN PRODUCTION



ENGLISH, HDCAM, COLOUR AND BLACK & WHITE

RUNNING TIME: 88 MINUTES

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BEHIND THE BOHEMIAN EMBASSY

SYNOPSIS

The Bohemian Embassy was the funniest and most irreverent venue for launching a career as a performer in Canada.

Tracing the phenomenal rise, fall, and lasting influence of this sometimes infamous, now legendary, 1960s avant-garde Toronto coffee house, ***Behind the Bohemian Embassy*** is an original, inspiring and humorous feature length documentary.

For a generation of songwriters, poets, dramatists and comics this was the place to test their mettle. Many legends hung out and performed there, including folk singer **Gordon Lightfoot**, poet **Margaret Atwood**, playwright **David French**, and comic **Lorne Michaels**.

Canada's most promising English speaking talent was nurtured under its roof, first at 7 St. Nicholas Street (1960-66), then at Rochdale College (1970), Harbourfront (1974-76) and Queen Street (1991-92).

"When we started out there were very few opportunities for our talent," said Don Cullen its impresario. "We wanted to create a nurturing environment where they could stay in Canada if they chose to and eventually did. As late as the 1980s Canadians did not accept their homegrown talent, it took time for this idea to evolve and the opportunities to present themselves."

Behind the Bohemian Embassy is a tribute to Canada's wordiest landmark.



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BEHIND THE BOHEMIAN EMBASSY

VOICES

"I started my poetry readings in the Old Bohemian Embassy on St. Nicholas Street. I feel that it was baptism by fire because it was dark and you read on the stage. The washrooms opened right onto the room and every time someone used it a flood of light would fill the room. They also had what I think was the first espresso machine in Toronto which always seemed to be in use during the most dramatic points in the reading."

– *Margaret Atwood*

"The [Bohemian] Embassy, to an extent difficult to imagine today, recorded the pulse of [Canada's] writing life...was from its opening June 1, 1960 to its closing exactly six years later, proving ground or showcase to a whole generation of local poets, playwrights, monologists and song writers, as well as a lot of other talent who happened to be writing."

– *Douglas Fetherling (a.k.a. George Fetherling)*

"Here's a place you can go every night of the week and find something new going on."

– *Nathan Cohen*

"It was also a force that led to the formation of a listening public."

– *John Robert Colombo*



FILM STYLE

Behind the Bohemian Embassy is divided into segments that tell its history as if it was the live subject of an interview. Think of the place as a person being interviewed, as if its walls could speak to us. Through the voices of some of its most influential artists, the Bohemian Embassy shares the secrets it harbors.

In keeping with the spirit of the time and place, we tell the story in a series of sketch-like segments capturing the irreverent humor and sketch comedy made famous there.



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BEHIND THE BOHEMIAN EMBASSY

FILM STYLE – CONTINUED



Don Cullen, the Bohemian Embassy's impresario and self-titled "Ambassador", is at the center of the story as his reflections and observations of those iconic times come to the fore.

Dynamic and engaging interviews are the backbone of this story. Comics, poets, playwrights or songwriters – for all, words were the primary medium of artistic creation nurtured at the Bohemian Embassy. Highlighting this, we focus on the words of each of the featured personalities. The visuals complement the underlying ideas or emotions they express.

Most of the camera work for the interviews was done in a studio with a green screen, so that background of either original or dramatized archival film footage, including samples of poems and music; and photographs and images, could be inserted later.

The music and sound design punctuates the sequences that build the story arc.

CHRISTOPHER VALLEY BAN

Director, Writer and Producer



Christopher's writing and production background includes independent dramas and documentaries. He is also an experienced film editor, actor and narrator. He holds a BA with distinction in history and politics and an MSc in Legal Studies. He now lives in Toronto.

In 1994 Christopher wrote and directed *Hugs and Apples*, a comedy about a young man in therapy after a failed relationship, which won a Silver Award in TV and Video Production at the prestigious Houston International Film Festival. Additional film credits as both writer and director include the half-hour dramas *Face to Face* (1998) and *The Engagement* (2000). He also made a short film of poet Alexandra Leggat reciting her poem *the gun never stops smoking* (2001).

A number of his documentaries aired on Canada's Bravo, include *Pearl: A Passion for the Fiddle* (2001) on the violinist Pearl Palmason, for which the late Don Haig acted as executive producer, and *A Player's Carol: A Canadian Actor Reflects* (2002) on the actor Vernon Chapman. His critically acclaimed documentary *Vertical Desire: Tango* (2005) is a glimpse into the world of Argentine tango, including one woman's search for love under the dance's spell (Marina Palmer's memoir *Kiss and Tango* was published by William Morrow in 2005.).

His screenplays include *The Chasm*. The first draft was selected for a story edit as part of the Screenwriter Mentorship Programme of The Film Reference Library with support from Writers Guild of Canada and The Harold Greenberg Fund.

Behind the Bohemian Embassy is his first feature length documentary.

DIRECTOR'S NOTES

I have always been a passionate promoter of Canadian culture and its stories. Unfortunately our collective national fear of celebrating our best and most talented has frustrated me for many years. Some describe this condition as tall poppy syndrome; I ignore the diagnosis and instead focus on positive ways we can change this underlying condition and bring recognition to those whom it is due. Two of my previous documentaries were profiles on famous Canadians in the arts who finally got some long overdue respect for their important contribution to music and theatre respectively.

Unlike any place before or since, the Bohemian Embassy was a place that was truly unique in our history, blessed with a cross section of so many talented personalities who laid the foundation for the creative explosion that followed.

This fact alone sparked my curiosity to learn more about the talent that passed through its doors, some of whom, such as Margaret Atwood and Gordon Lightfoot, are our most celebrated cultural icons today.

The late author and historian Pierre Berton, a visitor to the Bohemian Embassy, understood the importance of mythologizing the stories of our past and was particularly fond of this one. If he had lived, he would have been a very willing and engaging interviewee.

There is an urgency to get this story told as this generation passes on and recedes from memory. I have spent more than eight years trying to tell it. In the process I have researched this story extensively, reading everything I could find on the subject, including archival materials held at MacMaster University in Hamilton and boxes of materials in basements like Dr. Bill Goodman's, the late famed ear, nose and throat specialist to Gordon Lightfoot and many others, who has now donated his materials to the Mariposa Folk Festival Collection at York University in Toronto.

In addition, I have met repeatedly with many of the personalities who were at the Embassy, in particular Don Cullen, its impresario, who has been an inspiration and guide in this endeavor. I have immersed myself so fully in the many stories, the gossip and differing accounts of the same recollections, I have been able to distill a clear sense of what I believe to be truly essential in context of the times and people involved.

In my view, we need stories like the Bohemian Embassy to enrich our understanding and appreciation of our cultural life so that current and future generations of Canadians never forget the important contribution those before us made for our collective soul.

BEHIND THE BOHEMIAN EMBASSY

GABY ANDRAOS

Editor, Cinematographer and Co-Producer

Gaby's background and training was in music, including studies at the Pontifical Institute of Sacred Music in Rome, Italy; followed by a degree with honors in film and television production from Humber College. Upon completion of his studies he founded and currently own and manages his own production company and post-production facility, Andraos Media.

In 1995 Gaby directed his first documentary *Hopes and Memories* on the Lebanese immigrant experience in Canada. In the past year he has been working on a documentary with the working title, *Guilty Until Proven Innocent*, on the trampled legal rights of some foreign born Canadians or residents. He directed the soon to be released *Kinshasa* on a wayward teenage Congolese-Canadian girl. He was the technical director and editor on Desalegn Eyob's documentary, *Bitter Coffee*, which captures the dark side of the Ethiopian coffee trade and its relationship to Canada. Finally, he was the DOP and editor on Sivia Mangos' documentary *Ladies Section* which celebrates the women in three of Toronto's Macedonian churches.

Among his many additional career highlights:

Editing short dramatic scenes, *Dangerous Relationships*, for the Canadian Red Cross; producing the promotional video for the Carassauga Festival in Mississauga; and co-producing with Salt and Light TV the documentary *Home and Peace* in both French and English, about the Canadian Martyrs' Shrine in Midland, Ontario.



Producing many weekly multicultural television shows: in its eighth year of broadcast with over 200 episodes to date is his critically acclaimed Arabic program *Asda'*, which is aired on Rogers Television; in its third year of production with over 200 shows is *Omniyat* for Omni Television. Other productions include public health awareness segments for Toronto Public Health in the following language groups: Farsi, French (for the Francophone African community) Somali, Portuguese, Punjabi and Ukrainian.

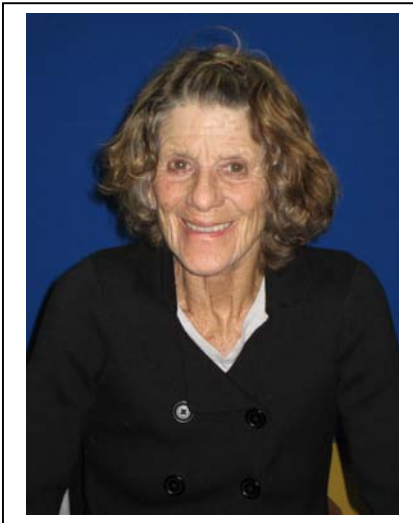
Gaby is fluent in English, Arabic, French and Italian.

BIOGRAPHIES



Margaret Atwood is a Canadian writer. A prolific poet, novelist, literary critic, feminist, and activist, she is winner of Booker Prize and Arthur C. Clarke Award, and has been a finalist for the Governor General's Award seven times.

Mark Breslin is a Canadian entrepreneur, stand-up comedian and actor best known for being the founder of Yuk Yuk's, the largest chain of comedy clubs in Canada.



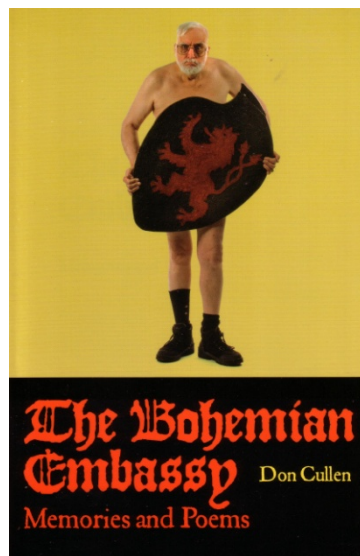
Jackie Burroughs is a Canadian actress. She most memorably played on television Mrs. Amelia Evans in *Anne of Green Gables* (1985) and Hetty King in *Road to Avonlea* (1990)

BIOGRAPHIES – CONTINUED

John Robert Colombo is a Canadian poet, editor, and humorist, best known as a writer of reference works and editor of anthologies pertaining to Canadian culture, history and geography, and the fields of science fiction, fantasy and horror.

Joanne Crabtree is a musician who performed at the original Bohemian Embassy. She continues to perform her own music to this day and as part of the celebrated duo Crabtree & Mills.

Don Cullen was one of the original founders of the Bohemian Embassy, and its impresario. Now a legendary entertainer, he spent 25 years as a writer and performer on *The Wayne & Shuster Comedy Show*. Don has scripted over 200 television and 1000 radio shows. He was in the Broadway replacement cast of *Beyond the Fringe*. He was also lead writer for *Spring Thaw* which helped launch the careers of Robert Goulet, Don Harron and Dave Broadfoot. His memoir *The Bohemian Embassy: Memories and Poems* (2007) is the definitive account of its history.



David French is a Canadian playwright. His partly autobiographical play *Leaving Home* (1972) about the Mercer family is one of the best loved and most popular Canadian plays ever written. *Salt-Water Moon* is another part of the same family saga and was nominated for a Governor General's Award. He also wrote the comedy *Jitters*, a popular and frequently mounted production about putting on a play.

BIOGRAPHIES – CONTINUED

Greg Gatenby was the founder in 1975, and artistic director, of the International Festival of Authors at Harbourfront in Toronto. He is also a writer, and author of *Toronto: A Literary Guide* (1999).

Paulette Kirkey is an important force in the folk music scene in Canada. She is a past president of the Mariposa Folk Foundation. Currently she is the artistic director of the much acclaimed Flying Cloud Folk Club, Toronto's longest running folk club.

Dennis Lee was the first poet laureate of Toronto. He is a much acclaimed Canadian children's writer and poet. In 1967 he was among those who founded House of Anansi Press and was its first editor.



Gordon Lightfoot is a Canadian folk singer, composer, lyricist and poet. He has received 15 Juno Awards and been nominated for 5 Grammy Awards.

BIOGRAPHIES – CONTINUED

Gwendolyn MacEwen (1941-87) is now recognized as a major Canadian poet and writer. She got her start at the Bohemian Embassy.

George Miller is a poet and a favorite among those who know his work. At the original Bohemian Embassy he followed Milton Acorn as the in-house poet-in-residence. Later at Harbourfront he supervised a poetry writing workshop.

Bram Morrison is part of the acclaimed Canadian children's musical trio called *Sharon, Lois & Bram*. During the 1980s the trio starred in *Sharon, Lois and Bram's Elephant Show* on CBC.



Amy Pitt & Don Cullen

Amy Pitt is a Toronto based musician who performed at a recent tribute to the Bohemian Embassy. Keeping true to its tradition of nurturing the next generation of talent, the release this year (2009) of her debut album, *The Melody*, may be the launch of another legend.

BIOGRAPHIES - CONTINUED

Mitch Podolak was one of the two founders of the Winnipeg Folk Festival in 1974. He has been actively involved in spreading folk music across Canada. He began his career booking Joni Mitchell at the Bohemian Embassy.

Robert Priest is a Canadian poet, songwriter and children's author. He is also a highly respected journalist for Toronto's weekly *Now* magazine.



Evan "Chick" Roberts is a musician, and actor. He famously played the bell hop in Charlie Chaplin's *A King in New York* (1957). He was a much recognized and sought after performer at coffee houses in Toronto throughout the sixties. His bands included *The Sinners*, and later, more famously, *The Dirty Shames*.

Sylvia Tyson was part of the legendary folk music duo Ian and Sylvia who performed and recorded from the early 1960s through the early 1970s. The Bohemian Embassy was a launching pad for their success.

Nancy White is a prolific singer-songwriter, recording such CD's as *Stickers on Fruit*, *Gaelic Envy* and *Momnipotent*. She met Don Cullen when he was performing in *Beyond the Fringe* at the Charlottetown Festival. Nancy performed at the Harbourfront version of the Bohemian Embassy.

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