

REVIEW

Review of Ricardo Trogi's fourth autobiographical comedy *1995*

2024, Sphère Média/Go Films/Immina Films, 119 min

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Look who's back... The unveiling, in early February 2024, of the movie poster advertising Ricardo Trogi's latest autobiographical, dated "yearbook" feature *1995* was greeted in Quebec with significant fanfare. Recognizing the posture of Trogi's cinematic ego Jean-Carl Boucher atop a sand dune with a camera, audiences eagerly anticipated the promised visit of an old friend. While Denis Villeneuve is certainly upheld as a native son and his international blockbuster career is celebrated in Quebec, Trogi is recognized as a Québécois filmmaker who (despite recent Netflix distribution) makes films for and about Quebec.

From his initial feature-length film *Québec-Montréal* (2002), which follows nine travelers in four vehicles along Quebec's fabled Highway 20 on the Rive Droite of the St. Lawrence River, through each of his autobiographical films – *1981* (2009), *1987* (2014) and *1991* (2018), Trogi situates his action primarily in his native Sainte-Foye/Quebec City and provides ample reference points and landmarks to orient and offer a comforting sense of familiarity to his viewer. The same is true of his characters, who, since *1981*, establish a certain *commedia alla Québécoise*, in which the central protagonist remains, of course, Ricardo (Boucher), our earnest but bumbling narrator who, despite acting in good faith, tends to dig himself deeper and deeper into sticky situations with his own over-abundant words. Alongside Ricardo, we have the crowd favorite, his lively, overly stressed, high strung and humorously vulgar mother Claudette (Sandrine Brisson) and his meek, supportive but aloof and henpecked Italian immigrant father Benito (Claudio Colangelo). And, once again, there is always a male best friend, a partner in crime who is often absent when Ricardo needs him most, especially when dealing with inept bureaucracy. Finally, through the first three films, Ricardo has an idealized love interest, whom he presumes to be the love of his life. The ensemble drips with *couleur locale*, from uniquely Quebec *sacres* (profanity) to predicaments that could only befall a Québécois like Ricardo.

With *1995*, Trogi certainly does not disappoint, even if he makes some notable departures from the first tryptic of films. For one, Ricardo's moody sister Nadia (Rose Adam) plays a far more reduced role in this film; however, perhaps more unexpectedly, there is no idealized love interest for the now graduated Ricardo. In fact, his current flame of two months, Chantal, appears only in Ricardo's mind as a five-second intrusive thought during an important interview and only because she has enigmatically defined their relationship as "trop *chum-blonde*," as well as when he sends her postcards from his world travels (more on that soon). All the same, even if *1995* has no Anne Tremblay, no Marie-Josée and no Marie-Ève Bernard (let alone a Giorgia/"Yorda"), the film maintains its familiarity through Ricardo's typical hijinks. Following a high-speed chase with a security guard through the Jean-Charles Bonenfant Library at the Université de Laval, where he

was selling books without authorization, an under-employed Ricardo unexpectedly discovers he has been selected for the Canadian Television reality show for aspiring filmmakers *La Course* (based on Trogi's personal experience with *La Course destination monde* with Télévision de Radio-Canada), which will send him on an international adventure.

While our more mature Ricardo is somewhat less lovestruck, he is also more cosmopolitan. While 1987 saw him employed in the real-life Italian institution Restaurant Le Parmesan in Old Quebec and 1991 saw college-aged Ricardo on study abroad in Perugia, *La Course* takes him, despite occasionally missing planes, to Amsterdam (which those even passingly acquainted with Quebec City will instantly recognize as the historic cobbles of the Rue Saint-Paul), Cypress, Turkey and, eventually, Egypt, where the overwhelming majority of 1995 takes place. Seeking inspiration for his short film entry into the contest, Ricardo follows various would-be helpers across Cairo into hilarious situations and bizarre predicaments that could only befall our hero. Most notable is the multi-stop back-and-forth across the city's bureaucracy and the Canadian embassy to claim a movie camera that was mailed to him from Montreal, and which hyperbolically occupies nearly a quarter of the film's two-hour run time. After a few false starts, Ricardo finds his subject and, in spite all odds, frantically rushes to complete his entry. Interspersed with fever dreams beneath the insect tent inside his Cairo honeymoon suite, personal revenge fantasies and popular culture references to Aerosmith and *Back to the Future*, Trogi's 1995 is a gamboling romp across Egypt that reacquaints us with a character and a filmmaker who remains intimately familiar.

After the last decade saw Trogi branch out professionally and twice collaborate with decorated actor/screenwriter Louis Morissette (and old friend Patrice Robitaille) on the dramatic films *Le Mirage* (2015) and *Le Guide de la famille parfaite* (2021), the later of which includes a comical cameo by Boucher, it was a very welcome surprise to see Boucher and/as Trogi in 1995 – and to realize they had not missed a comedic beat. Is another trilogy in the works? All of Quebec can only hope so.