

Arts/Entertainment

Film on anglophones kept off television during vote campaign

By Maxine Ruvinsky

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MONTREAL — It was another clear cut case of Yes or No.

Sort of.

The documentary film *Entre solitudes* (*Between the Solitudes*), about Montreal's anglophone community, was to be broadcast in both languages during the referendum campaign as a contribution to dialogue.

But "the idea of a national simulcast lost its sex appeal" when lawyers for Radio-Quebec, the provincial TV network, began worrying the documentary could be seen as biased, said journalist Josh Freed.

Montreal film-makers Irene Angelico and Abbey Neidik collaborated with Freed to produce the film, which portrays the plight of the city's anglos.

"It was a Radio-Quebec film originally," Freed said in an interview.

"Then the CBC and NFB (National Film Board) came in and offered to pay for an English version."

Negotiations had been under way for an Oct. 20 simultaneous telecast of *Entre solitudes* on Radio-Quebec and *Between the Solitudes* on CBC, when concerns that the films might unfairly influence voters in last Monday's referendum prompted a postponement.

Was the film biased toward the Yes or the No?

Er, both.

Radio-Quebec thought the sympathetic portrait might encourage Quebecers to vote Yes.

The CBC believed the image of a beleaguered English minority here might urge voters in the rest of Canada toward No.

Given the divisive nature of the Oct. 26 vote — with a majority of Quebecers voting No while most Montrealers voted Yes — Freed figures they were both right.

"My general theory on Montreal and Canada is: the less said the better. When we (French and English) don't talk about it, we get along fine," said Freed, who appears in the film chatting up friends in both milieus.

"In fact, the English and the

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—Josh Freed
Montreal journalist

French here get along better than any two language groups in any other city in the world."

The film was a year in the making and "covered half the city," Freed said. Like anglos themselves, "it's ambivalent."

"Like the beluga whales of Quebec, they (Montreal anglos) need some kind of affection."

They love the city and want to stay, but need some "space and encouragement."

The anglophone Montrealer lives a "crazy, beautiful experience — because you're switching worlds so fast."

Freed said he frequents a neighborhood restaurant where "I always order in French and (the waiter) always answers me in English.

"He's a sovereigntist and I'm a federalist and we talk to each other like this, as if it's perfectly normal.

"We're supposed to be enemies, but we're doing everything possible to accommodate each other."

As for the referendum on the Charlottetown accord, Freed's general theory applies:

"The referendum was like a drug. We blew our minds. The only hope now is to somehow stop discussing it."

English and French throughout Canada have grown more tolerant and are "evolving at a tremendous rate. But they're not talking about it. The country works well in practice, even if doesn't on paper."

Radio-Quebec airs *Entre solitudes* tonight; the CBC plans to run it in early December.