

SATURDAY *night*

Canada's Magazine

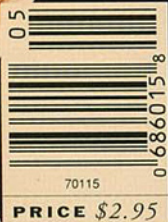
May 1993



THE VALOUR AND THE UPROAR

Brian and Terry McKenna say their film is a tribute to veterans. The veterans say it's an insult. Whose war is it anyway?

LESLIE NIELSEN FOOLS AROUND
REMEMBER WHEN NEW DEMOCRATS
USED TO BE SOCIALISTS?



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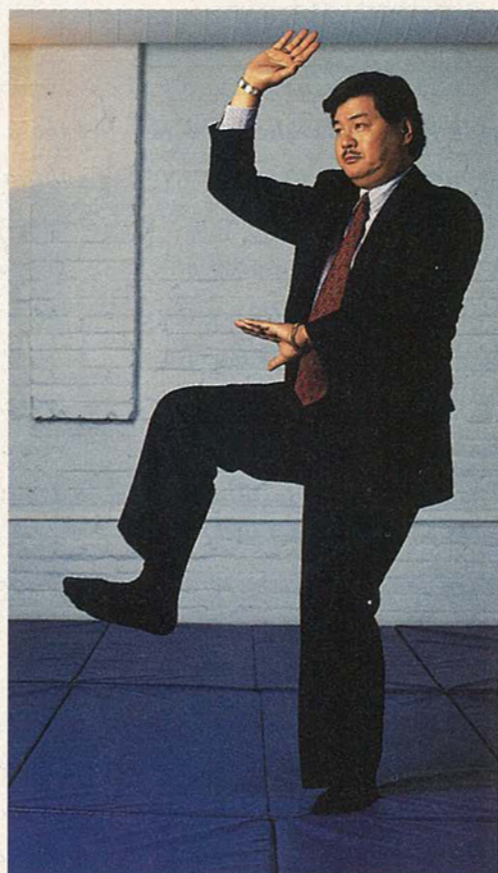
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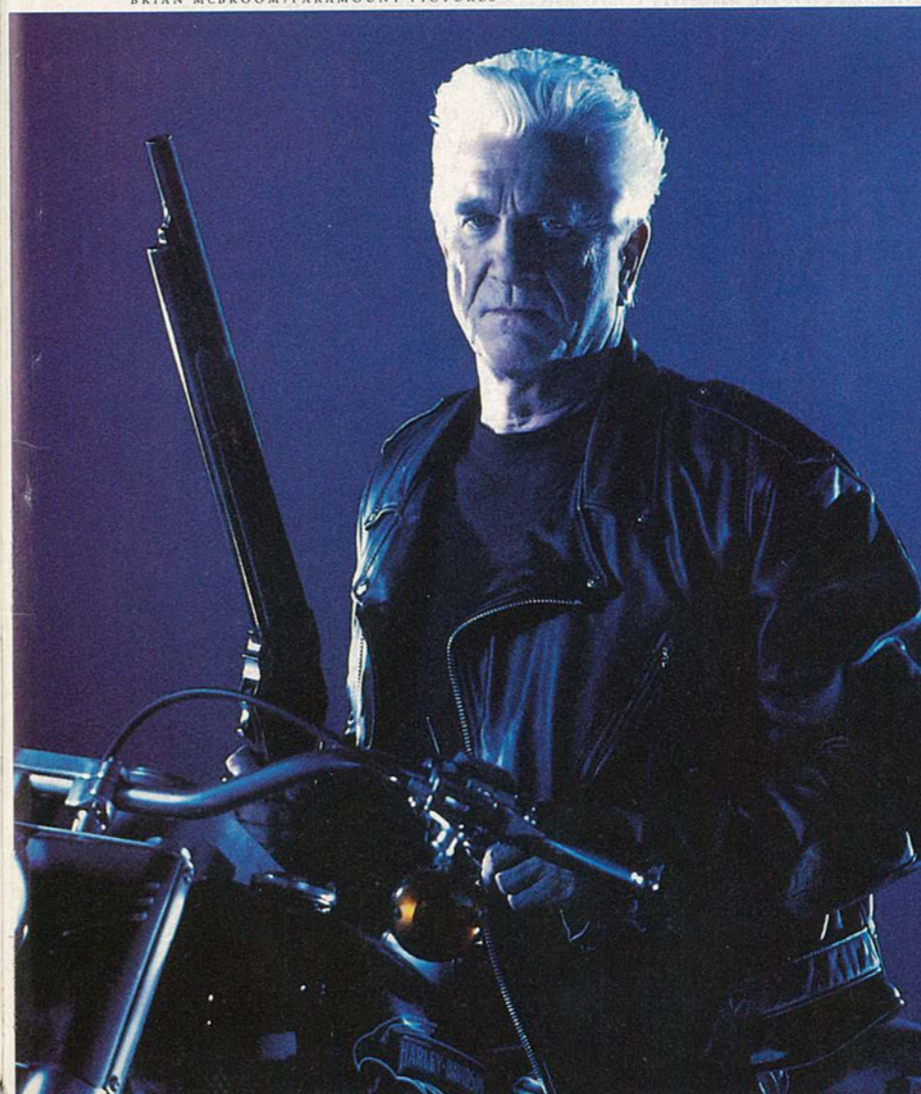
The veterans were not only angry with the way in which the McKenna brothers chose to tell stories about the Second World War. They thought the stories weren't the McKennas' to tell
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BRIAN MCBROOM/PARAMOUNT PICTURES



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Monkey Business

party's upper levels, which manifests itself as noblesse oblige. This party of the common people is almost always led by middle-class professionals – including a number of Rhodes scholars – but never yet by a worker. Deep down, it may not have much respect for those ordinary Canadians it courts.

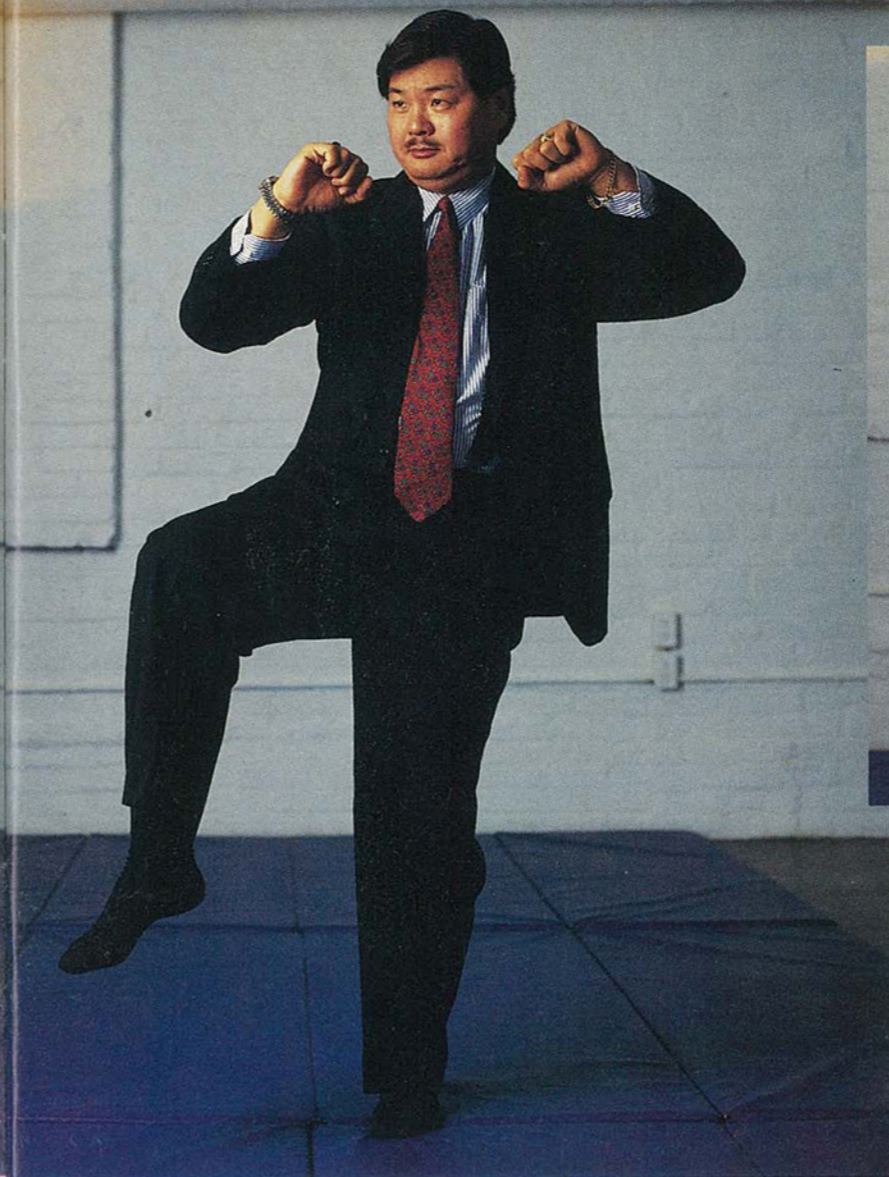
There's a place where the problems of courage and democracy merge. Any future socialism will have to mean more than a labour-supported party that gets itself elected. It must find a place for recent popular movements like ecology, feminism, native rights, anti-racism (often called special-interest groups, as distinct from broad-based forces like the *Fortune* 500). In fact a party like the NDP might be just one component in a large coalition. The NDP wants to speak for these groups – but it also wants them to shut up and do little beyond offering their support at election time. This won't work. In fact unions have been far less fearful about such coalitions than the NDP, with its elitism and electoral fixation.

Does it matter that the socialist element has pretty well dropped out of NDP politics? Well, for one thing, a socialist approach could help illuminate our "post-socialist" world. An unrepentant Marxist I know says, "A Marxist analysis may be more relevant to where we are than it's ever been." He means the way Capitalism Triumphant is dysfunctional for almost everyone in the world today except big capital itself. We're in the worst economic collapse since the thirties, with structural effects that will not go away no matter when "recovery" comes. Even when output grows, it mates comfortably with unemployment, falling incomes, homelessness, and food banks. "Of course," adds the unrepentant Marxist, "such an analysis might leave you totally devastated" – since at the moment it offers no idea at all of how to get to a better, socialist future.

If a socialist approach still has something to offer in our politics, why not give up on the NDP as its vessel, for all the reasons above plus countless others, and start from somewhere else? At least there'd be less grinding of teeth over endless let-downs. I admit this is tempting. But while I don't think it's wise to place great hopes in the NDP, I also think it would be wrong just to let them off the hook.

For one thing, maybe the party will change. MLA Bob Lyons, a "left" member of the Saskatchewan NDP, says, "The Left (*Continued on page 70*) ▶

SPORT



The Tao of Wu

Now the world master of his family's famous tai chi school, Eddie Wu brings a decidedly pragmatic approach to an ancient art

The first time I saw Eddie Wu, I mistook him for the landlord. He drove a Mercedes, wore expensive-looking clothes, and walked with a bit of a swagger into Wu's Style Tai Chi Chuan Academy in a loft on a trendy stretch of Queen Street West in downtown Toronto. I didn't pay much attention, because I was expecting someone else – somebody venerable and ascetic. But the guy with the swagger was Sifu (master, in Chinese) Wu Kwong Yu, one of the more respected martial artists in the world and the great-great-grandson of the man who created Wu style tai chi chuan.

The average martial-arts magazine – full of fantasies cheaply rendered, like a skin mag – has articles about fighting techniques, advertisements for things like Macho Dyna Kick sparring boots and *Secrets of Speed Hitting* ("How to Hit a

Man Eleven Times or More in One Second or Less"), but almost no mention of tai chi chuan. Yet tai chi is one of the oldest martial arts. According to one story, a Chinese monk in the twelfth century had a revelation while watching a fight between a snake and a crane: the secret of self-defence lies in knowing how to yield to an attack. To perfect this skill he developed a series of exercises that evolved into a "form" of 108 movements that flow together in circular patterns like a meditative dance. Tai chi chuan is all about continuity. Each movement has a name, such as "Raise Hand and Step Up," or "Embrace Tiger, Return to Mountain." These moves promote health and longevity, and in esoteric ways embody the imagery of the *I Ching*, or Book of Changes, the classic Taoist manual of philosophy and divination.

Each movement in the form also has a

self-defence application, something that is often overlooked by tranquil tai chi instructors with flowing robes and "vibes," but that is – quite unlike the mystical *I Ching* – close to Eddie Wu's heart. In Chinese, "tai chi" means supreme ultimate, a Taoist reference to harmony between the opposite forces of Yin (dark feminine softness) and Yang (light masculine hardness). "Chuan" is easy; it means fist. Technically, tai chi is a "soft" martial art; kung fu and karate are "hard." Tai chi maintains softness by never meeting attacking forces head-on.

Worldwide, the two most popular styles of tai chi chuan are Yang (a different Yang from Yin/Yang) and Wu. Eddie Wu's great-great-grandfather, a captain in the Manchu royal guard in Beijing, learned tai chi chuan from the founder of Yang style around 1850, and then modified it to create Wu style. Unlike the

Yangs, the Wus have kept their style in the family by passing it down through the eldest son of each generation. Wu emphasizes the hip as a source of power, weight separation between the feet (in Wu, one foot usually takes all the weight), and leaning farther forward from the waist. In other words, you'd have a hard time telling it apart from other styles.

Yet unlike Yin and Yang, alternative styles of tai chi chuan haven't yet achieved harmony. Born from schisms, they still hold grudges. If pressed, practitioners of any one style may yield at first but then start sniping. *Their* style neglects internal strength, they might say. *Ours* improves the liver. Eddie Wu, however, doesn't have time for such talk. "I know what I got," he says, chuckling. "Other people know what I got. Why do I have to compete with someone to show whatever I got? I demonstrate."

Eddie Wu has a trim moustache and looks ten years younger than his forty-seven years. He is a big man, thick around the middle, but his students insist it's not fat: he has a stomach like iron, apparently, protecting an enlarged and powerful diaphragm. To describe how he looks when he does the form, an ancient text called *Key to the Thirteen Kinetic* ▶

by Miles Kronby

The Tao of Wu

Movements comes in handy. He is "firm inside, and outside shows peacefulness. The even pace is like that of a cat walking. The strength exerted is like that of pulling silk from a cocoon." Until you understand his movements, they might seem restrained, even dull. Later you see a beauty that is functional rather than ornamental.

When I ask Wu to show me "neutralization" and "stickiness," two fundamental principles of Wu style, he plants his feet and tells me to push him over. I try, but his chest and shoulders pivot with his hips, easily accepting my shove. It feels like trying to push down a door that – instead of resisting with its lock, as imagined – swings right open. Wu stands still, but I stumble. That's stickiness. Then he tells me to punch for his face, and when I do he softly flicks my fist away. That's neutralization. The demonstration is over. Wu can't seem to understand why I expected more.

Nicholas Langrick is one of Wu's original disciples in Toronto. Langrick stands six and a half feet tall, a head above the Master, and weighs about 230 pounds. He has a beard and a British accent, so when he carries one of the long wooden spears used in tai chi weapons training, he looks like Little John. "Wu," he says, "can push me over like I'm a leaf. Sifu has a very light touch, and when you're sparring with him he uses a minimum effort. He usually just kicks you in the balls."

Eddie Wu is sitting in his office at the Academy, hands on his desk. "People who are fanatical about tai chi chuan think that I'm a superhuman being," he says, playing with the Yin/Yang ring on his finger. "Of course I'm not. I'm very lucky to come from the Wu family, but you'd be just as good if you studied tai chi for so long." He began his training at the age of six. At his grandfather's house in Hong Kong, the family assembled in the courtyard each day at dawn to practise the form. As the eldest son of his generation, Eddie received additional instruction from his grandfather, Master Wu Kung Yu, for several grinding hours a day. Eddie hated it, but did his duty. When he was twelve, his father, Master Wu Tai Kwei, began to teach him how to fight. Seeing that tai chi chuan actually worked – that the principles of the form applied directly to self-defence – Eddie began to appreciate his family's art. He trained intensively with his father until leaving for Scotland to study aeronautical engineering.

In Perth, he had the only street fight of

his life. A few guys closed in on him, calling him "Chink." At this point, naturally, I want to hear the story in *Kung Fu* magazine detail – how Wu focused his energy, his chi, into an explosive attack. "I just knocked them away, that's all," he says. "No big deal." My question is dismissed. That too is neutralization.

In 1973, when he was twenty-seven years old, Eddie Wu received the call he always knew would change his life: his father had just died. The next day, Eddie left his aeronautical engineering job in Singapore and returned to Hong Kong to become the new Master of his family's art. In 1976, urged by the family elders, he moved to Toronto – where a number of his father's students had immigrated – to establish Wu style in North America. These days, Eddie looks after the Academy on Queen Street, serves as president of the Canadian Chinese Martial Arts Federation, and oversees the Wu schools in Europe, Asia, and North America.

Although his engineering licence expired long ago, Wu still applies to tai chi chuan the good sense you might expect from someone who used to keep planes in the air. "In the Western world," he says, "the stuff I know is extraordinary, unusual. That's why Western books make it so flowery. But we all have chi – it's just a matter of how we handle it. Chi is energy, energy is heat, heat travels upwards: it's all basically circulation.

"I don't have a fixed schedule for when I practise. Ideally you'd do it at 6:00 a.m. when the sun's coming up, which is the best energy and all that.... Sure – if you don't have to work. Requiring specific hours for training and that kind of thing is just Oriental bullshit. My family aren't Taoists, although Taoism is part of the philosophy of tai chi. It's good to read about Lao Tzu or Confucius – to beautify your life and stuff like that – but it's too far out. How do you improve your health by reading philosophy? You have to do actual, proper work: the real stuff. Then you can read a bit of philosophy.

"Some people say 'You're a tai chi master, you should be perfect. You should not have a temper, live a long life, never get sick....' But all that's just in the movies. I still get the flu – maybe only once every two years, but I still get it. And I *do* have a temper – I'm a human being. My father's temper was so hot it's not even funny; same with my grandfather. But they could also be like pussycats."

In the old days, most sifus studied other, non-martial Chinese arts: painting, calligraphy, poetry, music. "Sure," Wu says, "those were the skills that a teacher

should have. But now you have to make a living." So Wu has other complementary pursuits: he runs a travel agency, sells cellular phones, does some trading. A number of his students fly to Toronto for private classes and pay considerably more for this privilege than the regular forty-dollar monthly dues, but even so, the tai chi academy doesn't turn much of a profit. It's not supposed to. Wu could open more branches but he fears for the quality of instruction if he spreads himself too thin. "We could expand commercially," he says, "but I don't want to. The tradition of my family puts too much weight on my shoulders."

In Chinese communities, martial-arts teachers are rarely held in high esteem. There is an old Chinese saying – "Good boys don't become soldiers" – and Chinese parents still believe it: children should learn to study rather than fight. Yet Eddie Wu has an excellent reputation in the Chinese community. The legacy of the Wu family helps, as does his own financial success. Henry Liu, editor of the *Overseas Chinese Daily News* in Toronto, has known Wu for a number of years. "In Toronto," Liu says, "when you have a gold Rolex and drive a Benz, you're considered successful. When some people see an old Chinatown sifu wearing traditional clothes and walking around without a car, they think 'What a poor old guy. He's probably not a good sifu.' Wu's style earns respect from businessmen and young people."

Inside the practice studio at the Academy on Queen Street, Eddie Wu presides over a Friday-evening disciples' class. The Toronto skyline dominates the view through the windows and shows up again in mirrors along the walls. The placement of the mirrors has been carefully adjusted, by a Chinese geomancer, to avoid reflecting "bad energy" all over the room. A pot of incense sits on a shelf beneath three portraits of Wu's forefathers. Unlike his disciples, Wu hasn't changed from his office clothes. A gold Rolex and a heavy gold band adorn his wrists beneath a button-down shirt. About fifteen of the twenty-five Toronto disciples, and a few from Detroit, have made it tonight. Most are men in their thirties and forties. Only two are Chinese. To become a "disciple," a student usually must pass through the beginner, intermediate, and senior-level classes (which takes at least five years) and then make a commitment to help run the Academy. As their name suggests, the disciples tend to share a faith in Wu's teaching that runs deep into their lives. They ▶