Away with xenophobic nationalism! Without the fresh blood of foreign influence Canadian film will stagnate, says producer Harry Gulkin. As if to illustrate his point Renee Perlmutter has put together an international mix of nine women to make the feature "Love".

Born from the agony of repeated frustration and a heightened sense of cultural inferiority, the reaction to the current Canadian film scene is twofold: 1. There is a resentment towards the kind of formula films that we have been making; 2. There is the circumstance that lead to their creation. The latter is a conviction that if a film isn't 99.49% pure Canadian, it can't be any good; or at least, it's not what we want. The latter reaction is not a new one. Intense cultural nationalism, almost to the point of xenophobia, has characterized much of our industry for a long time. This is sad because it is counter-productive and prompts us to turn inward, away from the richness of world film culture. It leads inevitably to insularity and a cultural chauvinism that insists that what we say, and how we say it, are superior to any in creation. We can then turn comfortably away from the rich accounting of life's experience by artists elsewhere and, not so incidentally, escape comparison.

If it is any comfort, we are not alone. The Hungarian, Bela Bartok — generally considered to be one of the 20th century's greatest composers — devoted much of his life to an exploration of Hungarian folk themes that he used as a basis for much of his work. However, when his ballet, The Miraculous Mandarin, was being performed in 1941, he was attacked for allegedly succumbing to degenerate foreign influences. Sadly, Bartok never wrote a sequel to the ballet, but he certainly tried to counter this smear campaign, "The avoidance of foreign influences results in stagnation."

We have not been found wanting in defining our own paths to cultural stag- nation. In the late seventies ACTRA denied British performers Maggie Smith, Brian Bedford and Margaret Tyzack their right to take part in the making of The Tempest — a play in which they were then appearing at Stratford. Earlier, the union had denied Maggie Smith and American actor Melvyn Douglas and Nehemiah Persoff work permits for CBC-TV drama work. In an introduction to a late-seventies column, Harry Gulkin, a former Canadian film critic, wrote: "It is a fact that we are constantly comparing our own products with the British and American models. We might be surprised to find...that there is nothing on our screens to be despised." This is an invitation to narcissism, to insinuate national gazing, to mediocrity and sterility. It is, above all, a call to intense cultural nationalism, forever. This is the celebrated Canadian inferiority complex. How else can one describe an unwillingness to compare works of art from our own country with those of other countries?

The late, esteemed theatre critic Nathan Cohen was an avid crusader for the arts. In a letter to the editor he demanded theatre equal to that available in New York. "He learned from Alcott's economy and his life to an exploration of Hungarian folklore that he used as a basis for..."

Harry Gulkin has produced Lies My Father Told Me, Two Solitudes and Jacob Two Two Meets the Hooded Fang, all based on the works of Canadian authors.

One man's opinion
by Harry Gulkin

Joshua, the hero of Mordecai Richler's recent novel Joshua Then and Now, young man of pride and pleasure for Canadian audiences. Over the years there has been a trickle of such films; thankfully, this year's Genie Awards acknowledged Le bon debarbes. It is the spirit of such films as these that must be kept alive and nourished within our industry so that they may multiply into a significant body of work. But how much of our excellence is sustained, we will find not only national, but international audiences. Parallel to this there must be a turning outward to the state of the art as practiced and developed elsewhere in the world. Artists of stature from abroad should be welcomed if they want to work with us. Not so that we may slavishly imitate them, just so that we can stretch a little.

Regional Theatre has perhaps been our greatest success in the performing arts in Canada in recent years. The Centaur Theatre by Anne Chislett played the Centaur Theatre in Montreal last fall. A good play. A young Toronto woman moves to a hamlet in southwestern Ontario. Her sister from the Big City visits her. No sooner does Big Sis arrive when Little Sis breathlessly asks, "Can we eat at the CN Tower?" "The Courtyard Cafe?" Really?" Neither the CN Tower nor the culinary/social/cultural wonders of the Courtyard Cafe are likely to become a universal, or for that matter, Canadian, sense of wonder and longing.

We are a very young country, still wrestling with matters of self-definition. We are searching out and engulfing the national consciousness our own heroes and myths, while trying to find the forms that are most appropriate to us. In this, we should be ensuring all the positive help that we can get through an acute awareness of international developments in our field, and by working with artists of stature regardless of where they come from.

A recent example of the international character of art can be seen by the recent film The World, directed by Renee Perlmutter. The novel became the basis for an American film set in Vietnam, based on contemporary American experience Coppola's dedication to the international, artistic values help to open a wide window on the world. If some of our current, narrow attitudes prevail we will have condemned ourselves to a provincialism through which we impoverish ourselves when we resist the opportunity to work with foreign artists of great stature. We owe it to ourselves to parochial standards. It is imperative that we resist the appeal of foreign films with films being done elsewhere in the world.
Ten women’s experience

by Larry Moore

How would you feel if I told you that I made Love? I made Love with four people, all of them women. And of the four, only Mai Zetterling had had previous experience as a feature director.

Few women have the opportunity to direct their first feature film and usually when there has been a few have broken the barrier (Claudia Weill, Anne Bancroft, and in France there is a small renaissance of female directors). In English Canada only three women have directed features of note including: Sylvia Spring (Madeleine Is., 1970), Joyce Wieland (The Far Shore, 1976), and Janine Manatis (Maureen, 1978), as reported by Barbara Martineau in Cinema Canada No. 71. In light of such statistics Love’s success could easily be described as unexpected.

There has been a recent trend in Hollywood to give new or first-time directors a break. In the last few years, for example, Taylor Hackford, Joel Schumacher and Jeremy Irons have shown that the opportunity to direct The Idesmaker, The Incredible Shrinking Woman, and Every Which Way But Loose respectively.

In the case of Love, Mai Zetterling and Liv Ullmann were both accomplished actresses before becoming directors. Their many years of film experience enabled them to communicate very succinctly what elements were essential in the construction of their vision. Zetterling once said; “I simply knew exactly where the piece would cut. No action was required and only the hardest motivation was necessary to the scene. After the take was completed she simply said; “Magnificent,” and moved into the next shot.

Both Nan Dowd and Annette Cohen came to directing via writing. Dowd had previously experience as a feature director. She had worked out a complete shot plan for her short piece (three shooting days) and there was little doubt about exactly what the piece would cut. Because her segment was so spare, it was difficult to tell if any of Ingmar Bergman’s mastery had rubbed off on her during her association with him. Ullmann had an actress sit absolutely still for a take. No action was required and only the harshest motivation was necessary to the scene. After the take was completed she simply said; “Magnificent,” and moved into the next shot.

The only way that we will be able to develop talent in this country is if people are given the opportunity to direct. In Cohen’s case both her strengths and her weaknesses were very evident. One of the benefits of being an apprentice director in a situation like this is that you get an insight into the problems that beset a director. Some of the most important factors on Love, when it was realized that some of the earlier scenes would be difficult to cut. As the picture progressed it was apparent that Cohen’s rapport with her actors was her forte. Numerous members of her respective casts were brilliant in their appreciation of her attention and sensitivity. The actresses in particular seemed excited by the opportunity of responding to a woman in the director/actor relationship. The film itself will eventually reflect the personal and professional experience of the director.

For many years Love was an interesting project from an apprentice’s point of view. Perhaps the most important element of any film is the script. The Love scripts, crafted by some of the best writers of our day, represented a departure from orthodox screenwriting. The authors were free to write about whatever pleased or interested them on the subject of Love. The combination of elements from Love, the scripts, the cast, and the director’s rapport with her actors, enabled the film to explore new directions in Canadian cinema. The film was released, The Golden Lion at the Venice Film Festival. Love’s success could have been predicted due to the combination of elements, guarantees of financial success.