

Images of Cannes

by Marc Gervais

It still is a circus. It certainly is a marketplace. For brief, fleeting moments it even recaptures the elegance of its early years, or perhaps more accurately, the glamour bordering on sleaziness. But first and foremost, it remains the unrivaled showcase for world cinema. Is anything significant happening in world cinema? The old masters? The newcomers? How is, say, neophyte New Zealand doing? Is Britain still (cinematographically) dead? And what is Canada up to? And so on and so forth... Go to Cannes.

Because Cannes is just about every film person's first choice, the odds are that something memorable will transpire. This year was no different: it had its moments, many of them. Two American documentaries for example. One (*From Mao to Mozart*) a lovely, humorous tribute to Isaac Stern, which followed the matchless violinist on his tour of post-Maoist China, was nothing less than a joyous humanistic statement that managed at the same time to deliver some hefty ideological digs against Mao's cultural revolution. At the opposite end of the scale a huge midnight audience was treated to a sort of K-Tel "tribute" to Elvis Presley (*This is Elvis*) put together by David Wolper. It was a sad enterprise tracing, via visual snippets and simpering "commentary" -

Elvis telling his story from *heaven* (?) - the gradual disintegration of a country boy who could not cope with it all, saved only by the musical excerpts.

Cannes, indeed, is a mosaic of contrasts. There was Clay Borris - with his family and his film team, all of them new to this - scoring a surprise success for Canada (in the Directors' Fortnight) with *Alligator Shoes*, and enjoying it immensely. Will this prove to be one of those show biz break-through stories? And New Zealand - a tiny country (less than three million), doing surprising business with surprisingly good films - fairly bouncing with enthusiasm. If Australia and Canada can do it, why not the Kiwis?

Meanwhile, another era was coming

to an end. One of the festival's most distinguished figures, Nagamasa Kawakita, a giant in the Japanese film industry, had died at home in Tokyo. A suite had been set aside in the Martinez Hotel to accommodate hundreds of film people from all over the world, come to pay their final tribute - while outside, mobs of pathetic, vulgar photographers continued chasing the... uhh... starlets on the beach, the panderers to the contemporary voyeuristic trade.

There was, however, one event this year that was inescapable, and only a person politically/culturally/humanly dead could have failed to notice it. I refer of course, to the Cannes '81 grand prize winner, Andrzej Wajda's *Man of Iron*.

Here is a magical film that explodes in sheer human significance, well beyond the limits of film. *Man of Iron* is an amazing phenomenon; and everything surrounding it took Cannes by storm. Suddenly the festival, which had started pleasantly - good weather, good films - but rather slowly, had found its heart. There was excitement in the air, repeated standing ovations at film showings and press conferences. Many felt they were witnessing a turning point in world history, let alone filmmaking.

Last year, in these very pages, I remember writing that a number of

European critics felt the Polish cinema was the most important in the world, because - given its power, brilliance, commitment, and status - it was actually leading in the re-shaping of its own country. Well, Gdansk and the ensuing strikes and Lech Walesa and Solidarity stunned the world in the months that followed. Even now, we wait and watch, hope and fear.

Man of Iron? Here is Wajda, at fifty-five, the major film director east of Ingmar Bergman, with over twenty-five features to his credit - and still, to all intents and purposes, unknown in North America. There are reasons for all of this; one being the difficult political situation in Poland, another (an even more overwhelming one) the appalling cultural chauvinism and narrow-mindedness of North Americans. Mention Wajda and knowledgeable film people (in America), say, "Oh yes, *Ashes and Diamonds*" - which dates back to 1958, Wajda's third feature, seen here in film clubs or universities. Be that as it may, Wajda's work is relatively unknown outside of Europe.

A man of the theatre, president of Poland's filmmakers' union, director of one of the major state film production companies, Wajda is a towering figure in Polish cultural life. He is indeed one of the reasons why cinema is one of the



● Director Bernardo Bertolucci strolls down La Croisette flanked by Anouk Aimée and Ugo Tognazzi (Best Actor); an enthusiastic Dusan Makavejev, and a shot from *Angels of Iron*.

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most powerful unofficial voices in that country.

With *Man of Iron* the wrapping is off: Polish cinema's semi-veiled criticism of the regime is a thing of the past. Never has a Communist government been so severely criticized by its own cinema, and so immediately. While the very strikes at Gdansk were going on, Wajda created his most recent film. No glowingly beautiful aesthetic masterpiece, this. It is dynamic reportorial recreation, or actual news footage, analysis and actual happening — and all of it, magically interwoven in a fictional story, a love story that takes up where Wajda's 1976 masterpiece, *Man of Marble* left off. (*Man of Marble* by the way, finally found its way onto Polish TV screens the day Wajda left for Cannes. A French subtitled print has been shown in Montreal).

So, *Man of Iron* follows *Man of Marble*; but now, Wajda's new film fairly sings with a sense of hope and joy, qualities that have been singularly absent from this great director's previous work. The man himself seems transformed — and Cannes reacted to his presence. The jury's attributing of the Palme d'Or was an act of solidarity of sorts, on a wider, international scale.

One thing for sure: *les jeux sont faits*. There is no turning back for Polish cinema, for Wajda and for so many

other Polish film figures. It is no accident that Lech Walesa actually participated in the film, as an actor in the story! Everyone is aware that a return to the old totalitarian ways in Poland will signify a death for the Polish cinema far more cruel than even the death of Czechoslovak cinema in 1968.

I have rhapsodized excessively over, and given a disproportionate amount of space to *Man of Iron*, not only because of the political importance of the film, but also because it is an example of what the Cannes film festival keeps on furnishing the film world: marvelous examples of films that go all the way, beyond the limits of one's own film viewing pattern, pushing cinema yet further in some direction or other. *Man of Iron* is a staggering achievement. The Soviets of the twenties, only long after

the success of their revolution, made their political films. And history has furnished us with examples of more or less underground films — generally more like video-pamphlets — representing the propagandistic work of not terribly skilled film teams. *Man of Iron* on the other hand, issues from Poland's greatest director. It is a work of enormous risk for all involved, made before the issues are finally settled. It fairly sings out in its love for human freedom and dignity. As such it is already ensured its unique place in film history.

And it was made precisely for Cannes — literally completed a few days before the festival began, its eventual fate decided on only the eve of the festival opening.

Three years ago, Olmi stunned Cannes with his statement to the human spirit, *The Tree of the Wooden Clogs*. Two years ago, Cannes gave us the gigantic *Apocalypse Now*, Coppola's grand, operatic, agonized exploration of the American psyche that produced U.S. involvement in Vietnam — a sort of contemporary Dante's *Inferno*. Last year, it was the grand return of Kurosawa with *Kagemusha*, a monument to the great Japanese cinema of the past, and Alain Resnais' *Mon oncle d'Amérique*, a brilliant essay in modernity.

These are the moments, these are the

films, that make it all worthwhile. And it is to Cannes' glory that this particular festival seems fated to be their showcase, their public consecration, proving each year that cinema can indeed be more than just a cynical exploitative money-maker. It can reach the heights of universal art, it can indeed continue to be the major cultural statement of our era.

Of course, Cannes was much more than one movie — closer, as a matter of fact, to five-hundred. And, of course, there were many things worth noting. Britain made a dazzling return to cinematographic grace with Ken Loach's *Looks and Smiles*, with John Boorman's *Excalibur* (officially an Irish entry), and above all with the finest film of the festival (outside of Wajda's movie), the glorious, moving, immensely entertaining *Chariots of Fire* by feature newcomer Hugh Hudson. The money may be American or Arabic, but the talent, spirit and sensibility are quintessentially British, making one hope that at long last the English cinema will once again become a world factor.

Hungary excelled with Istvan Szabo's *Mephisto* and Istvan Gaal's *In the Forties*. Sweden backed an obsessed Dusan Makaveyev's *Montenegro*, while Italy's Bernardo Bertolucci continued to be talented, pretentious, confused, and



● Trevor Howard in *Light Years Away*; *Man of Iron*'s Andrzej Wajda and Jerzy Radziwilowicz and a shot from *Chariots of Fire*

CANNES

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and otherwise, chose the low profile, in contrast to the hard sell of previous years. There were Canadian films in evidence, to be sure. *Les Plouffe* caused much favorable comment: everyone felt it should have been an official entry, and it sold well. *Alligator Shoes* was received very sympathetically for what it was, a low-budget first film filled with personal insight, depth of feeling, and great promise—a culturally admirable product. *Love*, a Canadian compilation film by women, shown to a few people in a private screening, revealed a beautiful segment in Liv Ullman's debut as writer/director. Don Shebib's *Heartaches* proved a warm and funny film of quality. And the Leduc brothers' *Zea* won honorable mention in the festival

short features category.

There were other Canadian films at Cannes as well, some sadly disappointing (eg. Claude Jutra's *By Design*), others already sold to American distributors, some of whom preferred, in silly fashion, not to let the official Canadian coordinating body (the Film Festival Bureau a.k.a. Cinema Canada) know they were on display. Presumably, the acceptable retrospective buyers alone had the privilege of attending these showings.

Thus, the Canadian presence at Cannes, in this year of many good Canadian films, proved enigmatic, to say the least. As one watches the evolution over the years, one gets the feeling of a growing maturity, with various distributors using Cannes each in their own way. Dusty Cohl and George Anthony, for example, quietly prepare for the launching of their production company (Reel Canadian). They know the game. Many check out remaining territories for films already sold to the U.S. and a few other major territories. Many come for the first time to learn the game.

One such was Ralph Thomas, director of *Ticket to Heaven*—which turned out to be one of the most favorably received films at Cannes, given many more-or-less private showings in the market. *Ticket* presented a sample of Canadian filmmaking at its best. Thomas, of

course, is no neophyte. He was executive producer of CBC's *For the Record* series, sometimes scripting what were probably the best films being made in Canada. Courage, commitment, intelligence, heart—these are the Ralph Thomas hallmarks. *Ticket to Heaven*—which shall be given a thorough aesthetic/plus review at the proper time—reveals a new talent in commercial feature filmmaking. He may well prove a leader in the positive evolution of our feature film industry. Perhaps this is a sign that Canada can start taking its feature filmmaking seriously.

Meanwhile, the festival goes on. This year's smaller crowds proved a welcome relief, not a threat for the future. The Cannes marketplace, seriously challenged, it was claimed, by Los Angeles' similar effort, probably remains as solid as ever.

A huge new festival centre will open its doors, if not for next year's film festival, then for the 1983 edition. The buyers and sellers will return. Hopefully, Canadian films will continue their growth in quality, witnessed by this huge international gathering. And, of course, one always hopes that Cannes will go on revealing new, splendid creations—worthy successors to the achievements of artists like Coppola, Olmi, Kurosawa, Resnais, and Andrzej Wajda.

boring with *The Tragedy of a Ridiculous Man*. Liliana Cavani, another Italian, continued to use history and politics to communicate the horrors of her own dark imagination, with *The Skin*; and another terribly cruel, ugly nightmare (*Possession*) by the Polish expatriate Andrzej Zulawski, was sponsored by West Germany.

Cruelty, harshness, torture—Cannes' screens had plenty to show us this year. But even more strikingly, the antithesis to all of this appeared with greater insistence than ever: a kind of searching for common roots: certain basic human decencies recapturing the spiritual meaning of life. And this not only in Wajda's film, but even in Francesco Rosi's *Three Brothers*, a radical departure for this strong, committed Italian director, shifting away from his simplified, contestatory aggressivity into a more meditative study of life, and an acceptance of democratic institutions, however tainted, with a denunciation of terrorism. And one could find this spirit in so many other films: *Chariots of Fire*, *Looks and Smiles*, Lee Grant's *Tell Me A Riddle* (U.S.A.), Canada's *Les Plouffe* (Gilles Carle), *Heartaches* (Don Shebib), and *Ticket to Heaven* (Ralph Thomas).

Interestingly enough, both the Australians and Canadians, who have so much in common cinematographically



● Brothers André and Jean-Jacques Leduc collect their prize for *Zea*. Clockwise: *Excalibur*, *The Tragedy of a Ridiculous Man*, *The Skin*, *Possession*, *The Three Brothers* and *Tell Me A Riddle*.



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NFB NEWS CLIPS

NFB Films Gala Performance at National Arts Centre

On Saturday, May 30th, NFB cameras filmed the gala performance of the Canadian Dance Spectacular, originally scheduled for live telecast on CBC and cancelled due to the strike. The film crews had less than seventy-two hours to prepare for the shoot. With the cooperation of Secretary of State Francis Fox, Pierre Jumeau of the Department of Communications, the Canada Council, the dance companies and the technicians unions, a record of this unique celebration of dance has been kept. Directed by Mike McKennirey, Cynthia Scott and John N. Smith, the footage will be edited into a one-hour documentary.

New Appointments

John Kramer, director and writer of the *Inheritance* (1980) and presently series producer of the NFB's six-part series on war, will take up his new post as producer in the Ontario Production office in August. André Lafond, formerly head of the NFB's Paris office, has been appointed director of the Film Board's Quebec Regional Office in Montreal. In Ottawa, Martha Langford is the new head of the Still Photography Division.



"Zea" Wins at Cannes

The NFB's innovative five-minute film *Zea* has won the Special Jury Prize at the 1981 Cannes Film Festival. Directed by André Leduc and Jean-Jacques Leduc, *Zea* required the skills of scientists, lab technicians and the inspired camera work of Eric Chamberlain. The result is a film that transforms the commonplace into magic. *Zea* was produced by the NFB's French Animation Studio, Robert Forget, producer, Werner Nold, editor.

New Animators Sought

The NFB's French animation studio has opened its annual competition for francophone filmmakers. Artists who have completed an animated film are eligible to submit their work

to the Board in Montreal. Full details can be obtained from the French Animation Studio, Box 6100, Montreal H3C 3H5.

NFB International Sales

National Film Board representatives sold 184 titles to television networks in 24 countries during the last quarter of the 1980-81 fiscal year. The new figures announced by Lyle Cruickshank, Director of NFB's International Marketing Division, included two major sales: Qatar purchased rights to broadcast 52 titles, and the United States 37. Six NFB films, all produced by the NFB's Vancouver Studio, were purchased for broadcast over the American Public Broadcast System. Cable and pay-cable rights were also acquired by a USA distributor for six films.

Every Film Has a Silver Lining

With a daily average output from the NFB labs of 420,000 feet per week, the NFB is now recovering the silver stripped from film stock during the developing process. Silver is a main ingredient of motion picture film. A large proportion of it is removed and remains in the fixing solution until recovered by electrolysis and sold by the ounce. The proceeds have amounted to over \$200,000 since April 1, 1980 to March 31, 1981.



Canadian actors Lorne Greene and Lloyd Bohner join NFB Chairman Jim Domville in a toast at the reception opening the Retrospective of the National Film Board at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. They were joined by 300 other celebrants at the party held following a special screening of NFB shorts. The Los Angeles Retrospective scheduled animated films during May, and documentary films for the month of June.

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