

TORONTO FESTIVAL

Bonanza beats all



by John G. Harkness

At the end of the 1980 Festival of Festivals, director Wayne Clarkson said that he foresaw a reduced program with increased repeats for the 1981 Festival. Only half that prediction came true, with increased repeat screenings from every program filling the Carlton Cineplex and the Fox Theatre in Toronto's East End, as well as the West End's Revue Cinema. The first-run program, however, expanded, making it even more difficult for the dedicated moviegoer to see everything - and the truly dedicated moviegoer wanted to see everything. You could see them clustered in the lobbies of theatres frantically comparing notes; "Asphalt Night, is that bad? Well, if I skip the animation I can make it to that other German picture at the Towne..."

Add to this a round of parties that truly staggered one's tolerance for cold quiche and crackers with interesting cheeses on them and a Trade Forum that ran eight days, and one started to go blurry after about five days - in a Festival that lasted 10.

The numbers game

Clarkson had anticipated approximately \$170,000 from the box office. By the first Tuesday, the Festival had grossed \$160,000, causing Clarkson to revise estimates to a gross of upwards of \$200,000. Every aspect of the Festival was up from expectations: over 150 features, plus eight feature-length animation compilations, plus a huge number of short films; an anticipated revenue of \$3000 from the animation series broken by 25% in four days; the Critic's Choice series (which largely consisted of extremely depressing German and Dutch films) 100% sold out; and Jonathan Rosenbaum's series of Buried Treasures reaching 80% of the 1980 box office in four days.

Dial M for Murder, which kicked off the Third Dementia series, turned away 1,000 paying customers. *Diva*, a runner-up for most popular film, had a couple of hundred people in the street at a repeat screening at the Revue Cinema. The Opening Night Gala, Ralph Thomas's *John Harkness*, former *Cinema Canada* reporter, is a Toronto free-lance writer and film critic.



● top Fest party at Gracie's Restaurant featuring director Clive Smith and Mellany Brown of *Neivana* centre bare behinds to promote *So Fine* at the opening party (Four Seasons Hotel) bottom left: Harold Greenberg, Dusty Kohl, and Saul Rubinek at Astral bash (Sutton Place) right T.O. Mayor Eggleton at ribbon-cutting ceremonies opposite (top) Buck Henry, Caryn Smith at Gracie's (bottom) Jonathan Welsh and friend at opening night party

photos: Ron Levine

Ticket to Heaven, even turned away about 60 silver passholders who had paid \$500 for their Festival admissions.

The pass sales for the Festivals all reached new highs, with 180 gold patrons (at \$1000+), 150 silver patrons (\$500), and an estimated 900 straight passholders (\$85-100).

Clarkson said at a mid-Festival press conference that he was seriously considering either eliminating the passes for the 1982 Festival or restricting their numbers and raising the price. Nothing succeeds like excess.

The trade forum

There was really only one issue at the Trade Forum this year - pay-TV. At a day-long seminar chaired by feature producers Peter Simpson and Bill Marshall, a large number of the regional, specialized and national applicants presented their cases and ripped at each other.

The regional applicants were a fairly unified group, for they had little conflict of interest and a common enemy - the national applicants. Wendell Wilks, representing one of the Alberta applicants, tore into the cable industry,

had the national applicants speak in order of financial promises to the Canadian production sector.

Marshall also voiced a sentiment that must have been on the minds of many. "I have dealt with many of these people as a producer, and despite their promises, I have about as much faith in their commitment to Canadian production as I do in Attila the Hun's commitment to day-care centres."

The Bar Association's two days of seminars were highly technical and, on occasion, impenetrable even to the lawyers in the audience. When Beverly Nix, a lawyer from Warner Brothers in L.A., spoke on contracts and residuals, you could see eyes glazing all over the room.

The Bar Association also threw a luncheon at which the sandwiches were served with the crusts cut off. This reporter felt about seven years old.

The most interesting panel outside the pay-TV seminars was that of accountant Richard M. Wise, who talked at length and with passion on how to read a prospectus from the point of view of an informed investor. It was a breath of fresh air to hear him lace into the

high-budget pictures loaded with "soft costs" - financing, guarantee kickbacks, allowances, overhead fees - that have become so high in this era of 25% interest rates that one can often see a \$5 million-budget film that has only \$2.8 million on the screen.

Yet aside from Wise and the dress rehearsal for the CRTC hearings, one has to wonder about the value of the Trade Forum. Surely there are few businesses as concentrated and inbred as the film industry. (In a way, it reminded me of nothing so much as Rick Salutin's famous observation that in the afterlife, as the souls make their way toward heaven they encounter a fork in the road, with one path labelled "Heaven" and the other, "Panel discussion on Heaven." You can tell the Canadians because they always choose the discussion over the real thing.)

The parties

It is an axiom of film industry parties that they are too crowded, and that no matter how early you get there the food is already cold. If the *Chariots of Fire* party at Gracie's proved it beyond a shadow of a doubt (Overheard in the street: "God, they should give this party an award for worst food." "Yeah, but you end up eating it anyway because it soaks up the booze!"), the *Cutter's Way* party at the Blue Angel was a partial disproof. If there were fewer big names this year, there were more interesting character actors around - Robert Caradine, R.H. Thompson, Saul Rubinek, Jennifer Dale, SCTV's Catherine O'Hara, Buck Henry, John Heard and Winston Reckert, to name but a handful.

The films

If there was a theme this year running through the films in almost every series, it was desperation. It was like having a ringside seat at the decline and fall of Western Civilization. David Overbey's Critic's Choice series was loaded with these pictures, particularly the German films like *Asphalt Night*, *Angels of Iron*, and *Desperado City*. It even seemed to infect the comedy series programmed by Ted Riley and Stephen Cole. The yukfest included such comic moments as *The Apartment* (with the most stunning scene of sexual humiliation in the American cinema), *Mickey One* (the first truly paranoid movie), *Lolita* (murder

and more sexual humiliation), *Shoot the Piano Player* (death and romantic loss), and *Macunaima* (cannibalism).

It is interesting that the audiences at the Festival, in their voting for the Labatt's Most Popular Film award, largely ignored the despair for the nostalgic stuff of *Chariots of Fire*, the eccentricity of *Diva*, and the comedy of *Heartaches*. Strong showings were made by the jazz documentary *Imagine The Sound*, and the films *Cutter's Way* and *Prison for Women* (which was so popular that Pan-Canadian opened it at the International Cinema while the Festival was still in progress).

The Canadian films at the Festival this year were extremely encouraging, with all three of the galas (*Ticket to Heaven*, *Heartaches* and *Threshold*) attracting full, attentive houses and at least respectful reviews. *Heartaches*, despite an antipathetic review in the *Globe & Mail* (which sent a food writer), was especially welcome, as it hailed the return of Don Shebib-at-his-best to the ranks of Canadian filmmakers.

In the other events, Canadian films were well received, with Harry Rasky's *Being Different* drawing sellout crowds, a distribution pickup for *Prison for Women*, and some fine reviews for Gilles Blais' Hare Krishna documentary, *Les Adeptes*. Virtually the only Canadian film to draw universally negative review was Bonnie Klein's *Not a Love Story: A Film About Pornography*, which was cleared for a single Festival screening by the Ontario Censor Board.

This was also the first year in which not a single film was cut by the Board. As a special screening facility, the Festival underwent classification by documentation, and the Board only requested to see 11 pictures - some of them controversial, like *Not a Love Story*, the Brazilian film *Pixote*, and Makaveyev's *WR: The Mysteries of the Organism* (screened uncut for the first time in Ontario), and some which were set for commercial release following the Festival.

It would seem that the Board has finally recognized that the "community standards" which govern their rulings are not necessarily those of Agincourt or Tilsonburg.

By and large, the films this year seemed better. There were no galas as embarrassingly awful as last year's *Loulou* and *Deathwatch* (although *Neige* came close), and if there was no *Les bons débarras* tucked away in a sidebar series, there were such discoveries as Raoul Walsh' 3-D *Gun Fury* in a crystal-clear new print from the Columbia Archives, and the British Film Institute print of Fritz Lang's German-Indian productions, *The Tiger of Eschnapur* and *The Hindu Tomb* in the Buried Treasures series.

The future

To compound the serious moviegoers' problems for the 1982 Festival, Clarkson has promised the most comprehensive series of Canadian films ever - over two hundred pictures to be screened in five theatres across Toronto. "Quick, Gladys, the Murine." The series will be, according to Clarkson, definitive, and will produce eight to 10 major publications.

There are also rumours from informed sources that 1982 will be Clarkson's last year at the helm of the Festival of Festivals. The question is not what will happen to the Festival, but where will Clarkson go after running the largest publicly-attended film festival in the world? ●



saying that "people think that pay-TV is something new. We have had pay-TV for years, only we call it cable. I don't see any reason that the cable industry, which has contributed nothing to the production industry over the years, should get even richer from this new industry."

All the regional applicants disliked the idea of a national monopoly, but sidestepped questions on the possibility (or necessity) of a purchasing consortium to deal with national and foreign purchases of materials.

The national applicants attacked each other with much greater relish. Jack McAndrew of Performance referred to Canadian Premiere as the "cable company application" (the cable companies hold a 27% equity interest in Premiere). Moses Znaimer of Premiere accused TeleCanada, the universal subscription system, of "being wrong, because it assumes that Canadians will not buy Canadian programming unless it is forced upon them."

Chairmen Simpson and Marshall had perhaps the best perspective on what the cable hearings were about. They

