**FESTIVALS**

**ATLANTIC CINEMA:**
Portrait of a region

by Frank McGinn

Atlantic Canada needs an annual film festival because there is an industry here that would not otherwise be recognized. It would continue to exist, as it has for some years now, but it would not be seen to exist. This is an unpleasant state of affairs, as any Atlantic filmmaker (or feasible Man) will tell you. It means that people tread on your toes and don't say they're sorry. This can lead to resentment. It also means that you can't check your appearance in the mirror before a big date. You have no way of determining whether you look great or have something hanging from your nose. This can lead to self-doubt. The purpose of the Atlantic Film Festival is to exorcise these regional demons. By displaying the best films of the region's best filmmakers, it hopes to win Atlantic Canada the honour of being taken seriously. And by bringing together these filmmakers, it aims to promote a local sense of shared identity.

This year was the festival's second try. Last year it was held in St. John's, Nfld., and did not create a stir. Halifax was a better choice: it has more media to focus attention on and a larger, more voracious film audience. There are only two alternative cinemas here: Dalhousie University's Film Theatre and The Womwood Dog and Monkey Film Society. Just sufficient to create an appetite for alternate cinema without being substantial enough to satisfy it. The festival was well-publicized and comparatively well-attended. More film-goers than ever now know that, even though a film was produced in Atlantic Canada, it isn't necessary a documentary about fish. All that if it remains an annual event and the local film fan came to the festival equipped only with the desire to learn.

And what he found were films that could hold their own at any festival. Some of these he liked a lot and some he liked less. The festival opener was one of the latter. Threshold, starring Donald Sutherland, was entirely out of order. The story of the world's first artificial heart implant, it was a poor choice for the festival's most prestigious slot for two reasons. First, it was a thumb, lethargic movie. It had all the trappings of a documentary with none of the attendant real-life excitement. Second, it had nothing to do with the region beyond the fact that Sutherland went to high school in Bridgewater, N.S. A far more appropriate opening number would have been Sutherland Productions' Siege. This is a grade-A grade-B movie filmed in Halifax by the Donovan brothers. Their planted intention was to make the kind of violent thriller for which there seems to be no end of a market, and they succeeded. Screened on the second evening by invitation only, Siege proved to be a tense, gripping adventure with genuine, Atlantic content. The tale is set unashamedly in Halifax and milks that historic city for all the murky atmosphere it possesses. Although everyone who saw it agreed that Siege would have been a far more appropriate kick-off than Threshold, it could only be shown privately because distribution rights were still being negotiated. But for the film fan, it was a real eye-opener: you can make real movies down here.

The festival continued to impress with the quality and variety of the entries. The feature film industry is not yet extremely active, although Siege gives one hope that it soon will be. But experimental cinema is alive and well, as are documentary, educational and industrial films. The makers of all these were also in attendance, although with a different set of responses. First and foremost, the Atlantic filmmaker appreciates the rare chance to show his film or films before such a wide audience. This is not an opportunity which comes often, although the festival will change all that if it remains an annual event. Also, viewing the latest works of other Atlantic filmmakers reveals what standards the competition is setting. And, last but not least, the festival provided an opportunity for discussions with distributors and other filmmakers on the state of the business in Atlantic Canada.

The first of the discussion panels was called "Marketing Private Sector Films." Featured guests were three filmmakers and two distributors. The audience was comprised mainly of other filmmakers and the discussion was for their professional benefit. Conflicting advice was given them on how to best market one's film. Roman Melnyk, Independent Productions, CBC Toronto, agreed with Lawrence Carotta, Carotta Films Ltd., P.E.I. that you should research your market before you make your film. Know your market and talk to it; they recommend. Ramona MacDonald, Doomsday Studios Ltd., responded that she didn't believe in streamlining films. She maintained that originality should be the sole criterion of the independent filmmaker. If it's good, she said, it'll find its market. This led to an animated discussion on the merits of idealism versus the benefits of working within the system. One school of thought believed that since Atlantic Canada is out of the mainstream anyway, you might as well go all the way out. If you're a renegade, act like a renegade, was its rallying call. The opposing view held that it's precisely because the region is so isolated that it can't afford to play the maverick. Bankers don't care about ideas; just financial details, was how they expressed it. As the arguments wore on, of course, each side came to accommodate more and more of the other's position. No idealistic filmmaker was so naive as to hold that financial matters are unimportant and no practical filmmaker was so cynical as to hold that originality was unnecessary. Discussion ended with both sides agreeing that Atlantic Canada had already laid the foundation of a fine film industry and it was up to them to make the world realize it. Ramona MacDonald summarized the general feeling when she said that in this region, the quality of the film is way ahead of the reputation of the films.

The other major panel, held on the closing day of the festival, was supposed to be the wrap-up and definitive word. Titled "The Film and TV Industry in Atlantic Canada," it featured nine heavyweights from the National Film Board, the CBC and the national and regional pay-TV networks. They were there to
Second Atlantic Film & Video Festival

CONGRATULATIONS to the winners of the second Atlantic Film and Video Festival!

Thanks to all participants, volunteers and suppliers.

FÉLICITATIONS aux gagnants du deuxième Festival de film et de vidéo de l'Atlantique

Merci à tous les participants, les volontaires et les fournisseurs.

AWARDS

BEST FILM: Miller Brittain (Kent Martin, Charloftown)
BEST DIRECTION: Kent Martin for Miller Brittain
BEST OVERALL ENTRY: Miller Brittain
BEST SOUND: Transitions (Barbara Sternberg, Sackville, N.B.)
BEST EDITING (VIDEO): In the Name of Jesus (CBC-Newfoundland)
BEST EDITING (FILM): Sarah Jackson (Ramona Macdonald, Halifax)
BEST SCRIPT (VIDEO): Star Reporter (Corin Dolce, Halifax)
BEST SCRIPT (FILM): Transitions (Barbara Sternberg)
BEST CINEMATOGRAPHY IN FILM OR VIDEO: River of Light (Walter Delorey, Cape Breton)
BEST CHILDREN'S ANIMATION: The Magic Carpet (Toquille Colbo, St. John's)
MOST PROMISING FILM OR VIDEO MAKER: Prize shared by Peter Wood, James Casey, Brian Saunders, Chris White and Cathi Beattie, for The Grave Quakes, produced for Cable 5, Moncton
BEST INDEPENDENT VIDEO PRODUCTION - Star Reporter (Corin Dolce, Wynne, Halifax)
BEST VIDEO PRODUCTION: Christopher Pratt - His Art and His Poetry (Charlotte O'Dea, Avalon, St. John's)

CERTIFICATES

BEST DOCUMENTARY FILM: Miller Brittain (Kent Martin)
BEST EDUCATIONAL FILM: Patterning (Marie Woodson, CBC-Newfoundland)
BEST EXPERIMENTAL FILM: Transitions (Barbara Sternberg)
BEST DOCUMENTARY NEWS JOURNALISM (VIDEO): In the Name of Jesus (CBC - Newfoundland)
BEST EXPERIMENTAL VIDEO: The Grave Quakes (Brian Saunders, Peter Wood, James Casey, Chris White, Cathi Beattie, produced for Cable 5, Moncton)
BEST VARIETY ENTERTAINMENT: Dicky Goes to School (Wayne Oxwell, CBC - Newfoundland)

HONORABLE MENTIONS

FOR SOUND EDITING: River of Light (Walter Delorey, Cape Breton)
FOR MOST PROMISING FILMMAKERS: Charles Maclean and Eric Bagnell, for Peter Paul
FOR USE OF MUSIC: Miller Brittain (Kent Martin)
FOR VIDEO: O c'est que je m'en va avant (Betty Arsenault, Nicole Legueur, Michelle Paulin for Femmes en focus, Bathurst)
FOR VIDEO: Disconnexion (Michael Coyte, produced by Video Theatre, Halifax)

SPECIAL JURY AWARD FOR WIT: Rock and Roll (Arthur Maksin, Fredericton)

COMMERCIALS

BEST COMMERCIAL: Trayton Adalt Productions
HONORABLE MENTIONS: Caledon Advertising, Bruce Law and Associates, Halifax

tell a packed house of Atlantic filmmakers what the future held for them from the perspective of these various organizations, but as the best laid plans will, this one went astray. Right from the moderator's opening remarks the panel was sabotaged by Tom Burger, who was sitting as representative from the Film or Cut Bank Collective. He had specific grievances against the CBC and NFB who had apparently refused to support his collective in its efforts to produce films about the working man. Whenever one of their agents spoke, he denounced them for "the fascination (sic!) of art. And he had general grievances against the other filmmakers, whom he accused of being "security cleared." His intent seemed to be to swing the discussion without the future of the film industry in Atlantic Canada. He was partly successful. Few officials were able to withstand his heckling and the topic withered on the vine. By the time the vigilantes in the audience had convinced Burger that it was in his best interests to shut up for a while, it was too late to proceed with a nice, orderly chat. Their blood was aroused by the fray, the audience began to attack the panel for the various perceived failings of its various institutions. Half of the independents wanted to know where was the CBC (or NFB) or pay-TV if you were no longer getting enough official support. The other half of the independents were disdainful of official support. They said they wouldn't take a grant if you paid them. It was all very eloquent but left the guests with little to say in response, so they didn't respond. The only concrete, helpful suggestions that emerged were from the pay-TV people, who promised boom times were a coming for the Canadian independent filmmaker. They quoted CRTC regulations which state that 45 per cent of gross subscribers' revenues must be spent on Canadian production. It's a crapshoot, they said. It all takes off then so will the independents. Findlay MacDonald, head of the regional Star Channel, went so far as to say that the future of pay-TV was dependent on the future of the independent producer: "We have more money now than has ever been spent," he promised. The forum, all too quickly, was brought to an end shortly thereafter. Together they had established the identity of the Atlantic film industry.

It is a fighter. And it's hungry.

Coming together

The evening the awards were presented, a hundred or more people sat down for dinner together and realized that they constituted an Atlantic film industry. Never before had the filmmakers from the four Atlantic provinces come together to celebrate their filmmaking, and to measure their growth and strength.

The progress since the 1976 Atlantic Film Week - the last occasion I had of screening a number of Atlantic films - was remarkable. Then, it looked as if the National Film Board Regional office in Halifax would come to dominate filmmaking in the region. The film cooperatives were willing but their films were weak, and only three independent production companies were at work. In Newfoundland, Memorial University hadcornered the market on educational films and videos dealing with social intervention.

Judging from the recent output, it is clear that the National Film Board's regionalization strategy has worked well in Atlantic Canada. Although the best over all entry and best film, Miller Brittain, was an NFBC production, the number of fine independent productions was important. The Atlantic Filmmakers Co-op and the New Brunswick Filmmakers Co-operative both entered accomplished films. (Transitions and River of Light) and both production companies seemed to flourish, making sponsored films, documentaries and commercial work, and working in conjunction with the CBC/Radio-Canada and the NFB. Even the independent filmmakers like Walter Delorey and Neil Livingstone found it possible to live at the end of the world on Cape Breton Island and produce personal films of high technical caliber. But more on the films a bit later.

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Some of the best films - including Kent Martin's Miller Brittain which won five awards - were films about artists. Martin had already shown considerable consideration for documentary form, particularly in his People's Adventure in 1976, and his mastery has grown. Working from a script written by NFB regional media specialist Robert Cowling, the film reconstructs the life of the Saint John, N.B. painter whose art was intense, difficult and often tortured. The artful script, the use of Brittain's paintings and the strong marriage of the camerawork and editing made the film an easy winner in the film category. A more pedestrian work, Christopher Pratt - His Art and His Poetry, was made by Charlotte O'Dea and produced by Avalon Cable in St. John's, winning best video production.

From Halifax, Doomsday Studies produced Sarah Jackson by Ramona MacDonald. In the film, artist Jackson explains her interest in working with new