

Canada at Cannes 1974:

A Second Look

—Len Klady

Cannes 1974 marked this country's emergence as a presence in world cinema. Canada finally racked up significant enough movie sales to move out of the minor leagues. The sixteen or so films at Cannes, however, did not represent a renaissance for the industry. Last year not only were there more films, but these films were of higher quality and encompassed a wider range of themes. Nonetheless, sales were significantly higher this year.

Apart from perhaps shrewder selling, commerciality may have also been a factor. The buyers obviously thought so. Yet, most people I met were unimpressed by our product. One person stated he had only seen one Canadian film. On closer inspection it turned out that he had seen five or six. Another person was quite confused by our brochures on each film. He found them so homogeneous that he could not decipher any difference between films as radically different as "Bingo," "Exploding Dreams" and "Cry of the Wild."

To be more specific 3 1/4 films represented Canada in various competitions. The 1/4 film was "Sweet Movie" by Dusan Makavejev in the Director's Fortnight. This film had some Canadian financing, several Canadian actors and was largely shot in Montreal. The film is very difficult on a number of levels. The plot involves several unrelated stories. One story involves the decline of Miss World 1984 from a throne of gold to a throne of chocolate. Another story involves the female captain of a barge on the Seine who seduces and murders young boys. In the midst of this are several scenes involving urinating, vomiting and defecating which managed to raise the audiences' eyebrows several inches. At the press conference the question was posed, "Don't you think you've gone too far?" The reply, "I am not yet liberated." The CFDC were asking the question, should we pull our credit?

Also in the Fortnight was Jean-Pierre Lefevre's, "Les Dernière Fiançailles." This film was both modest and impressive. A touching look at the last days of an elderly couple which was unfortunately shown late in the evenings. For those with an attention span greater than three minutes there were few disappointments.

In official competition we had a short entitled "Hunger" a tale of the excesses of affluence. The use of a computer animation process was initially quite startling and the film



Scenes from "Hunger"

won the Special Jury Award for short films. Our feature entry, "Il Était une Fois dans l'Est" did not fair as well. The film is successful largely for its guts and energy. However, it is both stylistically and structurally uneven.

Out of competition the most interesting films I saw were a marvelous documentary entitled, "Images de Chine," a rather good film à la Peckinpah, "Sunday in the Country," and the highly political "Bingo." Not surprisingly, these films scored most of the sales.

The NFB reported most of their sales going to television around the world. They sold some of their features and shorts and scored best on their two feature documentaries. Apart from "Images de Chine," their best sales were for "Cry of the Wild," sold to areas in Asia, as well as, Japan and South Africa.

Cinepix reported sales of \$100,000. This figure excluded sales on a non-Canadian erotic film, "Wet Dreams." What they did sell was last year's product including "Kamouraska" and "Réjeanne Padovani." Also quite successful was an independent film, "Valse à 3 Temps." It was reported sold to England, Australia and some countries in Africa. Unfortunately, there were no similar sales for other low-budget films. This was largely due to the lack of funds for 35mm blow-up. Quite strange, as this program is the CFDC's most ambitious and creative venture.

\$100,000 of sales were racked up for "Bingo." This figure excludes France which will give the film quite a large opening. The figure represents among other countries, England, Holland and Uruguay. One person who was greatly moved by the film was screenwriter Jorge ("Z", "State of Siege") Semprun. Semprun now wants to write a screenplay for producer/director Jean-Claude Lord.

The heaviest sales were reported by American lawyer Arnold Kopelson. Kopelson represented such Canadian films as "Duddy Kravitz," "Sunday in the Country," and "Child Under a Leaf." Interest of a million dollars and sales of over \$600,000 were scored from his

entries. He briefly brought up his disappointment at the Cannes committee's rejection of "Duddy Kravitz" from official competition. He felt he could have done an additional \$500,000 of business had it been present.

No one seems to know why exactly the film "Duddy Kravitz" was passed over in favour of "Il Était une Fois dans l'Est." Certainly "L'Est" has the stamp of a film which could only have been made in Canada. "Duddy Kravitz" with its highly noticeable American cast looks as Canadian as a MacDonald hamburger or a bottle of Canada Dry. This does not prevent it from being a fine film though. What did come to light was the inability of Secretary of State to impose their choice on the committee. In this case, they were afraid to oppose the Cannes committee. I also learned that the Secretary of State's film officers actively opposed the choice of "Slipstream" at Filmex in Los Angeles. Gary Essert of Filmex had requested that film and was taken aback when Secretary of State was uncooperative as they felt the film was unrepresentative of Canada.

The future of the industry? According to Arnold Kopelson we have to do more co-productions. Co-productions mean the opportunity of higher budgets, greater access to international markets and the possibility of using international stars. The producers of "Bingo" agreed. They felt their film would have sold much better with the presence of French and American stars. As well, Kopelson urged the making of more action pictures. "It's the safest way to bring back your investment," he insisted.

These are merely monetary solutions. No one seemed particularly interested in solving the question of how we develop talent. Today, only a handful of productions are set to roll. The co-productions hinted at a few months ago are surprisingly hidden and there are reports of some directors planning exploitation films using assumed names. Here in Canada the gaiety of Cannes is more than an ocean apart.

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