

# some opening remarks

Impressions of the Montreal and Toronto festivals follow, in articles written by Ron Blumer and George Csaba Koller. But first, Connie Tadros tries to create a context for those impressions. How were they alike? How were they different? And what does it all mean for the future?

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by Connie Tadros

As far as Montreal and Toronto are concerned, the competition is over. Montreal's World Film Festival and Toronto's Festival of Festivals were so different this year that it is now a question of choosing between two different festival formulas or deciding that Canada needs both. They were competitive with each other on only slight grounds: the selection of a few films. On the other major points – the kind of film selected, the sort of guests invited, the handling of the press and the press conferences, the appeal to the public and the handling of the screenings, the market and its potential – the festivals were as different as night and day.

It is tempting to push the analysis further and to suggest that the differences between the Montreal and Toronto festivals reflect the differences between French and English Canada. Certainly, the Montreal festival could not happen in Toronto, and the Toronto festival would not succeed in Montreal. So, in festivals, like in so much else, Canada has two valid options, two different approaches to a same problem: how to throw a film festival of international stature in Canada.

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The Toronto festival was aimed at the Toronto public. When its organizer Bill Marshall commented, as was reported

in the press, that he hoped it would become a tourist attraction like the zoo, he expressed things well. If the Festival of Festivals can draw the public like flies, as it did this year, create local publicity like we have seldom seen, and present movies which please, the accomplishment is already enormous.

One result is that such a festival can become self-supporting. Another is that an important number of people will be exposed to films which they would not see otherwise. Never mind that some of the films may have been available through film societies or in specialized houses, the Festival drew the public. And the films were seen.

The Festival of Festivals knew how to sell its product. And the Ontario Censor Board gave it just the send-off every festival organizer dreams of by cutting the first film. The overflow audience for **In Praise of Older Women**, and the news which resulted from the near-riot scene, made participating in the festival a social must for many.

The films themselves were selected as the 'best' from other festivals, hence the name Festival of Festivals. Few risks were taken in the programming; the films had already had public exposure, and the organizers knew that they would go over well. There was no doubt about the public reaction to films like **Midnight Express** or **Girlfriends**. Their reputation preceded them.

In Montreal, the thrust of the festival was quite different. Director Serge Losique aimed big: the international film community. This meant moving directors, producers, stars and buyers across the Atlantic. He paid little attention to the local populace.

The ways to get people to move are several. Cannes does it by presenting films which have not been seen outside of the country in which they were produced. Losique adopted the formula.

Inviting some thirty films to compete for prizes, none of which had been exposed to international audiences, is a gamble. Nothing insures that the Montreal public will appreciate the latest production of Italian television, or a recent film from Argentina. But buyers — and the international film press — welcome seeing 'new product.'

One can also get people to move by simply inviting them: offering to pick up part of the tab. Milan (MIFED) had functioned for over fifteen years, and no one came. The time came to close down the film market or to make it work, and the Italians gambled on inviting everyone and paying for everything. Predictably, 'everybody' came. Three years later, when MIFED was established and the buyers and sellers could not do without it, MIFED cut down on its financial largesse and the market continued to thrive.

A market can only work if buyers and sellers come. Although this year Montreal enticed the sellers who, in turn, brought their films, the buyers were in shorter supply; but more on this later.

So, on the one hand, Toronto addressed itself to the public with many sure-fire films and impressive local press coverage, while Montreal catered to hundreds of foreigners — merchants, stars and directors, and the foreign press.

The local coverage in Montreal was good, and the existence of a 16 page, daily paper enhanced the festival. But it was curious to hear the anchor lady of a local program ask, during the final days of the festival, "Can the public go?" To her, the festival meant having Alain Delon talk to Dino Risi while stars from Spain, Germany, France and Italy stood by.

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Socially, the festivals reflected their chosen styles.

In Toronto, the discothèque at the Plaza II, and the hospitality suite for those in the know, were home base. The reception given, for instance, by John Turner's C.F.I. Investments was minimal, and the shin-dig for opening night at the city hall (where one waited for 30 minutes to buy a ticket and another 30 minutes to receive the beer the ticket bought) was, in the words of one Ottawa civil servant, "tacky."

In Montreal, the receptions were sumptuous. Iran, which didn't have a film in the festival, but which had many domestic problems, threw a feast at its Expo pavillion, and the French out-did themselves at a sit-down lunch high in the Chateau Champlain. In context, the Italians, whose reception would rate high above CFI Investments cocktail in absolute terms, didn't come off so well in Montreal.

The standards were different.

The press, who personally had many complaints at both festivals, were better served in Montreal. Press conferences — two, three and four per day — were held, sometimes in front of television cameras and always with proper microphones.

Journalists met the directors, stars and producers after press screenings, and a steady flow of information other than gossip was generated. It had to be so because the foreign press was invited, and there were many in Montreal who filed stories abroad. In Montreal, it was easy to operate in many languages, and the Europeans appreciated it. For the World Film Festival, one article in the Paris *Figaro* was worth two in the *Toronto Star*.

Neither festival has given a detailed accounting of the success of the film markets, but a first distinction is evident. Toronto's physical surroundings were unacceptable, and few foreign merchants could have been expected to do business there.

In Montreal, the physical set-up was fine, as was the administration. What was missing were the American buyers. People had come from most of the European countries to sell to the Americans. For them, Montreal represents a French speaking back door, open to the States. They don't understand that it can be as hard for Canadians to move Americans north as it is for Europeans to move them east.

The Americans who did come to Montreal, came to promote their films, not sell them: just as the Americans who came to Toronto came to promote their films. Steve McQueen's **Enemy of the People** and Ted Kotcheff's **Great Chefs** were not being presented in Montreal and Toronto respectively to sell them; they were being shown so that the Canadian audiences would consequently go to see them.

If Canada's festivals are to be used by Americans to promote their own films rather than to buy new product, then the chances are that Toronto will fare better. It got the people to the theatres.

If, on the other hand, a festival is going to serve as a market place to sell Canadian films and to offer others the chance to buy and sell, then Montreal probably has the upper hand.

At the end, money makes the difference. Establishing an international film market is an enormous bluff for the first few years, and someone has to spend an enormous amount of money inviting guests to make it work. An atmosphere has to be created. Whether the public goes to a market is neither here nor there. MIFED refuses to allow the press in, let alone the public. And business in Cannes is not conducted around the official competition or even in the public places. Private discussions, receptions, and 'who you know' predominate.

So the principal questions are not the ones which are asked in the press as to whether Marshall or Losique is the villain of the festival drama Canadians play out in late summer.

The question is whether Canada can support two very different kinds of festivals — one aimed at the local population, the other at the international community — or not. If not, can either festival incorporate the virtues of the other? And, if not which will the governmental money-men back?

For the answer, same time, same station, next year... □

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P.S. In all honesty, it must be said that the festivals share two more characteristics. Neither can manage to throw a decent opening night ceremony. And neither, at this writing, have settled all their debts.