Pinball Summer

p. Fred J. Fox d. George Mihalka sc.
Rodney Hibbons ed. Ian Webster l.p.
Michael Zelniker, Carl Marotte, Karen
Stephen, Helen Udy, Thomas Kovacs
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Criterion Film Productions.

It is rather unusual for business
people in the feature film industry to
have a chance on young filmmakers,
but it is very commendable.
The producers of Pinball Summer,
John F. Murphy, president of Crite-
ria Film, a 16mm distribution com-
pany, and Bob Presner, line producer,
have taken such a chance. In August,
1978, Murphy approached Presner with
the idea, marketing concept and strat-
ey for a low budget picture. Their
$750,000 feature about high school
students on the loose during summer
break, is scheduled to appear in April.
It was shot in 29 days with a crew pri-
marily composed of filmmakers only
a few years out of university. In fact,
37 of the 45 crew members had not
worked in key positions on feature
films previously. Pinball Summer
gave them their chance to prove them-
selves.

Presner explains, “I’ve been in the
business 11 years, and I remember how
difficult it was for me at that time
when there was no feature film in-
dustry. I graduated from Loyola in
1969 in Communications Arts with a
major in film. The doors didn’t open
for me. It was a closed shop. My film
background didn’t help. I was coming
up against people who had started in
the industry. That’s why I try to listen
to anyone who comes to me for a job.
Presner, not unlike Roger Corman,
goes to student film festivals. It was
at such a festival at Sir George (now
Concordia University) in Montreal that
he first saw Pizza to Go in 1977. The
24 minute color film, quite slick for
a student production included an
impressive 30 locations, locations that
were well chosen and well lit, with a
variety of mood and appearance.

The creators of this student film
were George Mihalka and Rodney
Gibbons, two aspiring filmmakers.

These same two filmmakers were
approached by Presner as director
(Mihalka) and cameraman (Gibbons).
Gibbons had only shot about 800’

sound recordist Ingrid Cusiel has had
her share of problems. But right now,
Benner is more concerned with being
able to match the noise in post-produc-
tion that went with a noise-free track,
so they roll sound.

Alan Rosenberg does his part basic-
ally the same for every take, but Sarah
Holcomb plays around with her timing
and delivery, Richard Benner watches,
makes suggestions and encourages the
experimentation. They all three seem
involved and unhurried – lots of mutual
trust and respect here. An hour later,
with the scene in the can, Benner will
see John Quill aside and scream at him
in the low earnest voice of a man on the
verge of murder about some third party
on the set who is consistently harrassing
him about time.

Despite these hassles, and more be-
sides, the crew is showing a lot of en-
thusiasm for the film. The rushes are
well-attended and more than one hard-
ened techie has praised Benner’s hand-
ling of the actors and confided that
there are at least four scenes in the pic-
ture that will leave not a dry eye in the
house.

And that makes it all worth while.

Andrew Dowler
The filmmakers also proved adept at finding locations. One old broken-down house on St. Joseph Blvd. in Montreal was transformed into "O.J.s," an Orange Julep restaurant. The place was so convincing that people kept driving off the road to order food, thinking it was real and open for business.

The spirit of the production seemed to be an incentive for everyone to pitch in and help. The people at one old age home liked the crew so much that they kept feeding them, and cops would come off duty to work on Pinball.

Casting: It's not easy doing a picture which involves actors who play bikers when the actors don't know how to ride motorcycles. (The bikes for the shoot were choppers weighing-in at about 800 lbs.) But the people were right for the parts, so the Pinball team decided to ignore this slight problem and to teach them to ride and move like bikers. Tow rigs were built for close-up shots, and stunt doubles were found for the long shots.

Another unique insert is that 7 of the main talent hadn't acted in film before. And one actress, Joy Boushell, was found by casting director Arden Ryspan late one night at the disco 1234.

It's not easy to cast roles in the 17-19 age bracket in English in Montreal. Contacts were established with high schools, CEGEPS, universities, amateur theatre groups - 160 people auditioned for 8 leads. It would have cost three times as much if the production had gone to Toronto to fill these roles.

"In Montreal, for prestige, they way 'Hey man, we've got all the heavy-duty folks from Toronto.' In Toronto say 'Hey man, we've got all the heavy-duty folks from New York.' We were discovering heavy-duty folks in Montreal," stresses Mihalka.

These young filmmakers are perhaps a new breed. As Gibbons insists, "Film-making is a process, not just a job where you pick up your check and run home."

When he decided to make Pinball, Presner was personally told not to have anything to do with it. People thought he was crazy.

"Uncle Bob believed in all of us," the crew says.

Perhaps he will prove something to the industry.

Lois Seigel