

OPINION



Shooting "Ivory Founts" — winner of the Norman McLaren prize



First Prize winner, Murray Battle's "Reunion"

The Canadian Student Film Festival

In a world surfeited with film festivals of every size and purpose I think there were four this year of significance to people interested in Canadian films. The most important for Canadian features was Cannes (which is in France and tough for most of us to get to). If you missed that, then there is the Canadian Film Awards where these films, commercial shorts, and a few late arrivals can be seen. This is the best Canadian film festival in this country though its pre-selection system remains notorious and next year there may be no Québec films.

Filmexpo in Ottawa became very important this year because of its retrospective of 20 years of CBC production. Perhaps the CBC will broadcast this retrospective for those of us who didn't see it in Ottawa. The fourth event is the Canadian Student Film Festival held for the fifth year at Sir George Williams University in Montreal during the last week of September. This festival fills a huge void in the center of all these Canadian festivals, but is not actually a

student festival. Anybody who ever attended a Canadian high school or university can enter. A few of the entrants were in their forties.

Though it may be a misnomer, the Canadian Student Film Festival is indispensable. The Famous Players prize money figures strongly in the dreams of many young filmmakers across the country. This amounts to \$10,000 this year ranging from \$1,000 for top prize down to \$250 (a reduction from last year when the top prize was \$1,500).

Aside from giving talented people money, the Sir George event increasingly offers its small audience some of the best work in Canadian cinema shown anywhere. The overall quality of films exhibited at this event has increased immensely since it began. Most of the winners of the first two years would not win in the competition of the last two years. This strength is not limited to student films. The fact *Slipstream* won so heavily at the Canadian Film Awards indicates that the bottom films are no longer obviously at the bottom.

This qualitative development was also underscored by organiser Serge

Losique and jury president Frank Capra. Capra has seen a lot of student competitions, he said, and put this competition at the top in terms of overall quality.

Aside from the questionable student-ness of the festival, I thought the lack of an experimental category placed some films in unfair competition with others — especially in the scenario and documentary categories. Another problem was the positioning of the films in the festival program since that alone often changes the reaction to a film. This was done haphazardly.

Thirty-six films in 16mm made the final competition. The jury was headed by Hollywood great Frank Capra who seems to be making a revival in personal appearances. He was at Cannes at a special screening of one of his early films and showed some of his work at Sir George. He is an impressive stocky man who was a master at his trade over forty years ago — before some of the parents of many of the filmmakers he was judging were born. His main criticism was that too many films overly depended on canned music.

The rest of the jury included docu-

mentarist Jean Rouch, head censor André Guerin, critic Gerald Pratley, NFB producer Guy Glover, Radio-Canada film buyer Guy Joussemet, and critic Robert Scully.

There were twenty 8mm films I decided I didn't want to see. Also, I didn't get to the festival for the opening night. I will try to give an impression of what I did see. **Reunion** by York University student Murray Battle was an extremely competent film that dealt with the return of a long-lost war prisoner father who comes back to his daughter. Meanwhile his wife has died and the daughter tries to make contact by assuming her mother's role down to the late forties styles. If the old man wasn't crazy before the incestuous daughter begins to put him over. He has to leave and the reunion is over — he can't accept responsibility for what is going on. This film was a little too slow for my taste, but won first prize.

Le Terroriste by Danyele Patenaude won second prize. I thought it should have gotten first. It is a brilliant Buster Keaton film and one of the best comedies made in this country by anyone. An inept terrorist tries to assassinate a company president. Roger Cantin was involved in this film and his use of pixillation was one of the strong points of the work. The third prize in scenario was won by Toronto students Mark Sobel and Robin Lee. This was about a student trying to get around Kodak by processing his own film which he messes up and which his teacher thinks shows the influence of Hegelian dialectic method. Also a comedy, but I didn't think it was funny. Perhaps because the same subject was treated in **Ivory Founts** and **Wild Sync** by Rick Hancox.

I thought the documentary category was the most poorly judged of the festival. The winner **Sans Faire d'Histoire** by Jeannine Gagné was a very sensitive work about a working class girl. **Giovanni** was a well constructed piece on an amazing man who had been a barker for freak shows at travelling fairs. Fraser Steele drew out the ambiguity in the character. The best parts of the film were the winks and side glances Giovanni kept throwing to the audience while pontificating on comic books or the three-legged man. Also could have been shorter.

The last prize went to a very long and tedious documentary by Jonathan Oldroyd from Vancouver called **Sandon of the Silvery Slocan**. Sandon is a B.C.

ghost town sitting on top of a stream. It began interestingly enough, but then trailed off into interminable shots.

I like two films which were put in the documentary category and didn't win. The first is Lorne Marin's **Rhapsody on a Theme from a House Movie**. I got very drunk that night with Marin and told him he came very close to a great film — but hadn't gone somewhere at the very end. The structure of the film had ended dictating to the filmmaker. The film is a series of travelling fades down a block through which time disappears as the people and other transients come and go. Only the houses are intransient. One of the best films at the festival.

The other was Norman Zlotkin's **Surreal**. This film was made with an Ontario Arts Council grant. It is a series of shots of water and a beach ricocheting off polished metal reflectors. The filmmaker creates many time/space illusions and plays a game with the reality on the screen. I think he wins — but the jury didn't think so.

The animation category was obvious and the three most competent animation films won. Michèle Danvoye and Nicole Robert won top prize with **Québec-Love**. This was a political cut-out animation piece set to Robert Charlebois. This animation told the story of the song — which generally was about how Québec was getting ripped off. The film is done with a sardonic sense of

humor and got the strongest audience reaction.

Third prize was won by Jean-Michel Labrosse's **Au Pays des Microbes**. This film was sponsored by Opportunities for Youth and along with **Québec-Love** was also one of the high points of the festival. It shows a live person confronting animated spots and the whole thing is synchronized in the best McLaren tradition. Extremely well done.

Second prize went to **Boarding House** by Ken Stammick and Neil McInnes of Winnipeg. The animation was very detailed and beautiful. The work required to do this film beggars the imagination. However, it was a bad film. The surreal story was generally confused and confusing. I don't think they succeeded at what they wanted to do, but the jury couldn't overlook their talent.

The Norman McLaren prize for best film of the festival went to Christopher Aikenhead's **Ivory Founts**. Aikenhead is an alumnus of the Ontario Arts Council's film apprentice program who is now studying at Simon Fraser. **Ivory Founts** was a funnier and more sophisticated filmmaker-making-a-film film than any other I have seen. This type of approach seems mandatory at student film festivals. I was uncomfortable that he won the top prize, but his film worked. He put into it just about every clichéd image of the filmmaker imaginable. It was a fun film.

AWARDS

SCENARIO

Louise Pierre MONGEAU
& Bernard DAOUST
Dept. of Communication Arts
Loyola College
Montreal

Richard MARTIN
West Vancouver

DOCUMENTARY

Robert AWAD
Montreal

John H. BUCKLEY
U. of British Columbia
Vancouver

ANIMATION

Richard MALO
Montreal

Margit BORONKEY
Dept. of Communication Arts
Loyola College
Montreal

1st Prize

"LES PAS EGARES"

2nd Prize

"THE OBSESSION"

1st Prize

"UNTIL WHEN"

2nd Prize

"DIDN'T YOU HAVE A
GREAT TIME AT THE EX?"

1st Prize

"SONIC DANCE"

2nd Prize

"TRANSFORMATIONS"