

Hollywood Destinies

by Graham Petrie
Oxford University Press, 257 pages,
photos,
ISBN 0-7102-0161-3, \$49.95 (cloth)

The insularity of the American market when it comes to selling foreign films and television programs (i.e. anything non-American) to the circuit cinemas and the networks is well-known — although not well enough, it would seem, to some Canadian producers who spend fortunes in the vain attempt to do so.

In many respects, the insularity is understandable bearing in mind that Americans are brought up to believe that their films and television programs (along with all things American) are superior. So ingrained is this belief, combined with national pride, that for the U.S. mass audience to watch something non-American (should the unlikely opportunity arise) would amount almost to an act of disloyalty with little attempt being made to understand "foreign stuff."

Graham Petrie's *Hollywood Destinies*, one of the best books on cinema history yet written, provides us

with clear reasons (political, sociological and economic) why this is so and how such a situation came about. Professor Petrie (of McMaster University) did not, however, write the book for the purpose of enlightening Canadian producers; rather his is a fascinating study of the reception of foreign films in the U.S. between 1920 and the coming of sound. Petrie's is a valuable contribution to the study of the silent screen, a comprehensive description and analysis of the American films of German directors F.W. Murnau, Ernst Lubitsch and Paul Leni; Swedes Victor Sjöström and Mauritz Stiller; the Dane Benjamin Christensen, and the Hungarian Paul Fejos.

The author describes how Hollywood's always morbid fear of competition, both at home and abroad, led the studios to invite directors who had achieved recognition in their countries to come to work in Los Angeles (thus eliminating the competition) and expecting them without question to fit into the American way of popular mass entertainment. Some, like Lubitsch, found common ground without losing his individuality, but for the others it was a bitter experience, although not without some triumphs — *Sunrise, The Marriage Circle, The Wind*.

But it was the response of the critics and the public to their work and to European films in general, quoted ex-

tensively by the author (probably for the first time since their original publication), which is so revealing, showing as it does their insensitivity and prejudice, and their belief in fairy-tale films with their nice, happy endings — in what one discerning critic was brave enough to call "the glucose era."

The fact that so many European films were about "real people, ideas and life's difficulties," seems to have inflamed Hollywood and made the studio producers more determined to force the immigrant directors into their scheme of things. It is also true, however, that many American directors with a personal vision also experienced the same conflicts with the heads of production.

Many of today's books on film history are littered with mistakes carried from one to the next, with many writers describing films they have perhaps never seen, or saw so long ago their memories are faulty. Petrie, with his painstaking care in writing and teaching, has researched an astonishing number of original sources, all of them listed or given footnotes; and amazingly, as he properly points out, looked at every film he describes immediately prior to starting this book, necessitating visits to archives in England, the U.S. Sweden, Denmark, Germany, Belgium, and Czechoslovakia.

Coming back to the present-day, it is interesting to note that in recent years

Hollywood producers have again invited European directors of repute to make films in the U.S. (Antonioni, Wertmüller, Wenders, to name a few), this time giving them a free hand and generous budgets. Only to be rewarded by disappointing, if not dreadful, films. The lesson seems to be that artists in film, with very few exceptions, are better off working in their own countries with the societies they know and under conditions they feel at home with.

Exceptionally well-written, a pleasure to read, arguable in places, with a mass of detail which is never overwhelming (the notes themselves are an education in the subject-matter), *Hollywood Destinies* is a most welcome book. Its high price will put it out of reach of many, but all libraries and university film departments should have it.

In his final comments, the author notes that the feeling in Hollywood concerning foreign films at the end of the period he writes about was best expressed in the statement: "The conclusion must be arrived at that it is not for us." Last year, the head of the Arts and Entertainment pay-tv network expressed dissatisfaction with the many excellent British programs that A&E was showing, saying that "We must find more programs that are about us." *Plus ça change...*

Gerald Pratley ●

● B O O K S H E L F ●

The first two volumes of *The Motion Picture Guide*, a 12-volume encyclopedia covering all English-language films since 1927, have been issued. Over 6,000 movies are listed alphabetically in volumes A-B and C-D, with lengthy plot summaries and in-depth discussions of social, historic and technical aspects of each film, a distinctive feature of this collection. Expertly edited by Jay Robert Nash and Stanley Ralph Ross, each entry includes full credit lists, production data, year of release, awards, ratings and cassette availability (*CineBooks, Chicago, \$75/ea., \$750/set*).

Raymond Fielding's authoritative *The Technique of Special Effects Cinematography*, now in a thoroughly revised 4th edition, includes all current visual effects. Detailed and clearly written, with appropriate illustrations, it describes significant advances in standard processes, especially front projection, travelling mattes and the use of computers and motion-control hardware (*Focal Press, Stoneham MA, \$24.95*).

The 1986 edition of Peter Cowie's *International Film Guide*, now in its 23rd year of publication, covers with its customary competence and reliability, production activities in 65 countries. Leading directors, notable films, animation, archives, festivals, publications and schools are also included (*NY Zoetrope, NYC, \$12.95*).

Director Edward Dmytryk collects in *On Filmmaking* the texts of four previous manuals dealing with directing, writing, editing and acting, the latter written with his wife, actress Jean Por-

ter. His extensive experience provides a wealth of practical guidelines for handling film and television production (*Focal Press, Stoneham, MA, \$34.95*).

New volumes in the outstanding "Celebrations" series, *James Cagney* by Richard Schickel and *Frank Sinatra* by Derek Jewell, survey the lives and careers of two highly popular performers. Well-documented and superbly illustrated, these biographical studies offer insightful analyses of the characters Cagney and Sinatra portray in films, and the social impact of their screen personalities (*Little Brown, NYC, \$19.95 ea.*).

A notably serviceable three-volume reference source listing motion picture production personnel, the 1985-86 edition of *Credits* has been compiled by Debbie Brenner and Gary Hill. It covers over 900 English-language films released since 1979. Vol. 1 carries an alphabetized catalogue of these films, cross-indexed in Vol. 2 by production companies, and in Vol. 3 by individual technician (*Maggie Press, Wallington, NJ, \$75/set + \$3.50 handling*).

In Clint Eastwood, a film-by-film survey of his career, François Guérif records the development of Eastwood's screen character into a fully realized personality (*St. Martin's, NYC, \$10.95*).

George L. George ●

Correction. Carmine R. De Sarlo's excellent book, *TV Commercial Film Editing*, recently reviewed in this column, is published at \$29.95 by McFarland & Co., Box 611, Jefferson, NC 28640.

● L E T T E R S ●

Repatriate primetime

(The following was addressed to the Task Force on Broadcasting Policy)

After studying the Canadian broadcasting system for the past 15 years, I have come to the conclusion that there is one key factor essential to its future development: **REPATRIATE PEAKTIME**.

We must drop the Canadian content quotas and encourage the broadcasting industry to concentrate their technical, financial and human/creative resources into making 8 p.m. to 10 p.m. totally Canadian entertainment programming on all TV stations across the nation. Peaktime must be Canadian entertainment programming (not news, current affairs or sports coverage).

The remainder of the time on Canadian TV stations can be any kind of programming (non-American on CBC) — Canadian news, current affairs, sports, reruns, old movies, quiz games, panel shows, and foreign programs. The one exception would be the requirement for a Canadian children's program between 4 and 5 p.m. every weekday.

The public commitment to Canadian entertainment programming in peaktime must become the major require-

ment for licence renewal. No Canadian commitment — no Canadian licence.

Mr. Al Johnson, president of the Canadian Broadcasting League and former CBC President, has proposed EQUAL TIME FOR CANADIAN PROGRAMS IN PRIME TIME. However, given the requirement to schedule two hours of Canadian content between 7 and 11 p.m. each night, most stations will put the Canadian programs into the 7 to 8 and 10 to 11 p.m. slots...leaving the 8 to 10 p.m. peaktime period to American shows. Mr. Johnson's idea is a good one but it doesn't go far enough to accomplish real change. We must be tougher...we must **REPATRIATE PEAKTIME**.

One peaktime is filled with Canadian entertainment programming, the quality and marketing of these programs will make them competitive with the American channels available on cable. The Canadian stations will be forced to do a good job or lose ratings and revenue.

As Canadian viewers switch channels in peaktime, they will see attractive and distinctive Canadian programming on all Canadian channels. Canadian programs will become popular and Canadian entertainers will become stars without having to leave Canada because Canadian TV shows will earn their way around the world.

Therefore, I urge the Task Force to recommend that the government changes The Broadcasting Act to **REPATRIATE PEAKTIME**.

Clive J. Court,
Willowdale, ON