

RE-ENTHRONING THE FILM

—F.C. Moultrie

Now that the entertainment aspect of Television has passed its zenith, and has nothing to offer but second-rate programs, continual repetition and barrages of inane overstatements termed “advertising”; the time has seemingly arrived for concerted effort to re-instate the motion-picture to its former status as the ‘poor man’s theatre’, or the ‘workingman’s family theatre’.

Let’s think back a little to the ‘pre-television’ era, when the making and exhibiting of entertainment films was in its heyday. First, the fact that the movies were the only form of inexpensive entertainment available resulted in a continual demand for film production, so that there was adequate employment for actors and technicians. The lower wage scales then current were offset by the steadiness of employment.

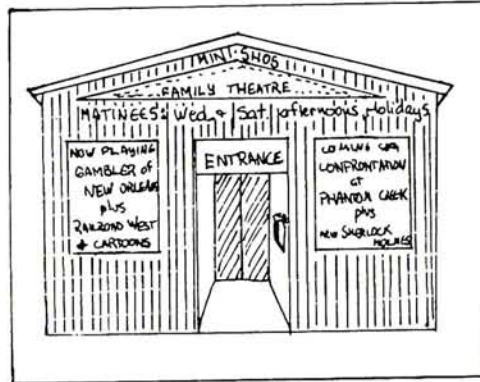
Because of the high attendance figures, partially from frequent program changes, it was possible to charge LOW admission prices to the theatres so that many persons — even entire families — were able to attend the movies regularly.

When television made such inroads into movie attendance, it had three things in its favour: novelty, absence of admission fees, and a stock of old movies to draw upon. In consideration of all this FREE entertainment and novelty, most persons were willing to put up with the frequent interruptions from advertising and the ‘postage stamp’ size of the picture.

When the television operators finally began to feel ashamed of repeating old films “ad extremum”, films especially made for T.V. began to appear. With only one or two exceptions here and there, these have never compared with the best films made for the theatre. Indeed, many ‘class B’ pictures made for the theatre were superior. Such films, and many of better calibre, covered every conceivable subject: Westerns, Mysteries, Musicals, and tales based upon much of the world’s best literature, to say nothing of Biographies, (even though the latter were often amended to create better entertainment). With all this, the average man could take his family to the movies, or send his kids alone to a show, without fear of subjecting any of them to the language of the gutter.

This writer believes that the time is upon us when preparations may begin for the “great Restoration” of the Motion Picture to its originally conceived function, i.e. family entertainment at LOW admission prices, offered in chains of small, neighbourhood ‘mini-theatres’ giving at least bi-weekly changes of program. Such programs might even include the occasional ‘silent’, for there are not

a few persons who feel the cinematic art would often be improved by ‘cutting the gab’, and that, conversely, the art suffered when sound was added. For many types of story this may well have been true.



If this suggestion were acted upon, viz; to make concerted effort toward re-instatement of the Motion Picture to its place in the theatre exclusively, one of a number of decisions to be made would be that of film-gauge: 16 mm, 35 mm, or both? Theatre admission prices should be kept LOW; not over \$1.00 per person; lower if possible. There are still scores of good novels from the 1800’s and early 1900’s which have never yet been used as bases for film scripts, and countless biographies, musical compositions etc. New crops of writers, too, would be attracted to such a revived medium. Television, with its day-by-day demands, is running dry of ideas, partially from attempting the impossible. It is surprising that T.V. writers have done so well, in view of the tremendous pressures to which they must be subjected.

Because television is kept on the air, NOT primarily to entertain, but in order that the advertising sponsors may push their messages at the suffering viewers, one wonders how long this state of affairs can flounder on. Most people are already completely disillusioned with it and would gladly flee from its repetitious, dull and monotonous programs and the constant reminders as to which detergent is “whiter than white”, if there were a LOW-priced regular and oft-changing movie program available, in which to take refuge. The current high admission prices to the theatre, plus the excessively long runs of feature films, makes the movie theatre a more or less impractical consideration for countless thousands of people, except as a ‘once-per-several-years’ proposition. It would be necessary to ensure any independently-owned, or franchised, mini-theatre operator of a ready availability of film supplies at reasonable rental rates. Also, it would be necessary to get together with the various unions involved, in an endeavour to obtain permanent co-operation in effecting a com-

mon objective and to maintain it on an equitable basis for all interested parties. If stars, technicians and others demanded the kind of salaries and pay cheques they have recently enjoyed, the project would be killed before it got off the ground. Perhaps a kind of ‘mini-branch’ could be inaugurated by the unions, for the purpose of accommodating this special undertaking.

The original popularity of the movie as entertainment came about largely when it was recognized that it would be far less expensive to record a story on film and send prints to specially equipped theatres than physically to transport actors, technicians and others, plus scenery, all around a country to present live stage-plays. Various factors have militated against the film so heavily, however, that its economy has been severely strained. In spite of this, the potential for re-building the movie as THE public entertainment medium is still there, only waiting to be drawn forth and re-established. It may yet offer the best means of giving frequent changes and variety of entertainment at prices low enough for regular family attendance.

In consideration of this objective, no films of old vintage should be exhibited, except upon rare and special occasions. The general run of programs should be made up from newly-produced films created especially for the REVIVED MOVIE THEATRE. Modest but comfortable theatre accommodation should be provided in the suggested mini-theatres to assist in the overall plan of drastic down-grading of entrance fees, and exhibiting only films which can be graded as suitable for FAMILY viewing. With respect to the exterior design of such mini-theatres, a cue could be taken from the many snack-bars and special-food chains, in buildings such theatres to conform with a master plan which incorporated easily recognizable features, such as ‘Swiss Chalet’ designs, ‘Fairy Castle’, ‘Western Saloon’, etc.

This writer is convinced that the re-appearance of the FAMILY movie in a re-furbished dressing, and at low, low entrance fees, would be overwhelmingly greeted — and patronized — by the Public. NOW IS THE TIME TO START. To the existing studios it might be good advice to say “Don’t dispose of any more of those props or old locomotives, river-boats, or specially built old streets, Western Towns, YET; you may sorely regret it!”

—F.C. Moultrie has been working in film for 30 years, doing everything from special camera assignments to making educational films in 16mm for school.

cinema canada

Dear Readers,

First of all, we'd like to thank all of you for your support, which is responsible for Cinema Canada being in its third year of publishing! We look like we might even be out of serious debt by the end of this year and will be here to stay. We are also rather surprised to find that we have become 'establishment' in such a short time (we've even had a fledgling local magazine attack us in their very first editorial)! Again, we thank all of you.

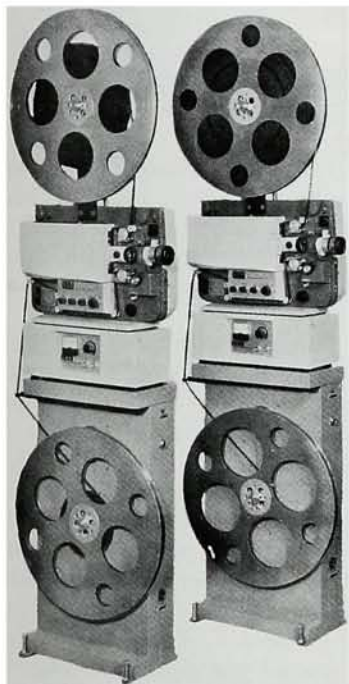
Many subscribers write asking about back issues of Cinema Canada. All are available except for Issue No.3 (Wedding in White, Jean-Pierre Lefebvre, IATSE disputes, Cannes 1972) but we should warn you that Issues 1 through 4 are of lower quality as far as printing and layout are concerned. (We'd hate to disappoint anyone. . .)

The following is by no means a precise index, but it does list some of the highlights of each issue. Not listed, of course, are regular features such as Film News, Technical News, reports from all over Canada, and all the other goodies you've come to know and love. . .

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| 1 | Norman C. Allin CSC, Harry Makin CSC, Richard Leiterman | 9 | L'Infonie Inachevée, IMAX creator Graeme Ferguson, Norman McLaren, Cannes 1973, Women & Film Festival, Montreal Report. |
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| 2 | The Rowdyman, La Vraie Nature de Bernadette, CBC/NABET dispute, major Federal Brief on Film Policy, Anomie. | 10/11 | (Special Double Issue)
The Pyx, Paperback Hero, U-Turn, Slipstream, Between Friends, Micheline Lanctôt, Sarah's War, Canadian Film Awards. |
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| 4 | Vidéographe, Mirror Mirror, Journey, La Région Centrale, Rodin, Filmexpo. | 12 | Filmexpo, Art Form of 90's, Stratford Film Festival, CCFM Film Policy, Shakespeare Murders. |
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| 5 | Canadian Film Awards, Stratford and Student Film Festivals, La Vie Revée, Carnivals, N.Y. Women's Film Festival, On Location: Southeast Asia. | 13 | Film Schools, Insight Productions, Moving Art, Montreal Main, Wolf Pen Principle, Gilles Carle, Réjeanne Padovani, Winnipeg Symposium, Jodorowsky. |
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| 6 | August & July, True North, P.E.I. Films, Industry Panels, Film Policy Briefs, Montreal production Co-op. | | |
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| 7 | La mort d'un Bûcheron, IXE 13, Le Temps d'Une Chasse, Kamouraska, Vancouver Independents, visiting Hungarian director Gaál. | | |
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| 8 | Don Owen, Rainbow Boys, AMPPLC Conference, CCFM, Richard Hellman. | | |

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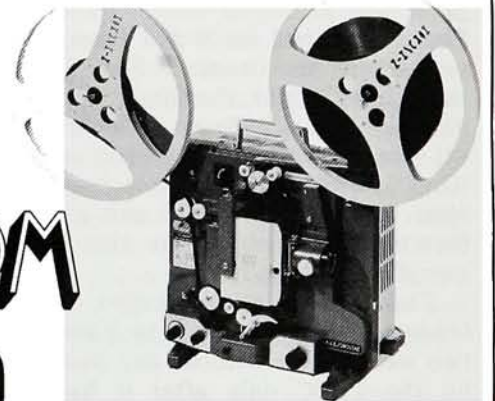
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