

# FILMEXPO 1975: WRAPUP

## The Background

This year's Filmexpo was held in the National Arts Centre in Ottawa and drew an audience of 9514 during its eight-day run. The attendance figure (compared to the 2347 people who came in 1974) speaks eloquently for the organisational and promotional finesse of Wayne Clarkson and his team from the Canadian Film Institute, who were responsible for the festival. One of Canada's two international film festivals, Filmexpo is on its way up.

In 1972, Filmexpo was organised by D. John Turner and took place in late July and early August. The Institute rented the Mall Theatre for two weeks and programmed one week of Canadian Films, one week of international films, and a Warner Bros. retrospective. The Secretary of State helped out with a \$10,000 grant for equal time for the Canadian product. Attendance was 8159 and the deficit was about \$5000.

In 1973 Filmexpo, now run by Alex Grant, moved into the National Arts Theatre from 15-27 Oct. It was big and expensive, and included one week of Canadian films, one week of international films, a Paramount retrospective and the 'best of the CBC' retrospective covering 20 years of television production. Attendance fell a bit, and the CFI decided not to repeat the experience on the same scale.

All of which led to a dismal Filmexpo in 1974 at the Towne Cinema on the outskirts of Ottawa. For one week in November, 19 films were shown to 2347 people. Only three Canadian films were shown: **Monkeys in the Attic**, **Wolfpen Principle** and **125 Rooms of Comfort**. One wondered what would become of Filmexpo after that.

Fortunately, the new administration at the Institute, increased grants, and renewed enthusiasm turned Filmexpo into a successful festival this year. Attendance was the highest of any year though only 15 films were shown,

---

*Filmexpo took place during the change in administration at Cinema Canada and unfortunately we were not able to cover it as adequately as we would have wished. The above is a short history of the festival by Connie Tadros and a review of some of the films shown during the first week-end by Natalie Edwards.*

and with a \$20,000 box-office and \$20,000 in grants, it broke even.

Three aspects of this year's festival are worth mentioning:

First, the Canadian Filmmaker's Distribution Centre organised an afternoon of Canadian shorts at the Towne theatre. Although attendance was sparse, the choice of films was excellent and gave the Ottawa audience a chance to see some 'hard to see' films.

Second, the Canadian feature participation was down to four films. Surely there must be room for more Canadian films next year; if they are not shown in government subsidized festivals, when will the public get to see them?

Third, the Canadian Film Development Corp. gave a grant to the CFI to promote the Canadian films in the festival, and this money was used to invite the press. For the first time, underpaid critics were transported and housed in return for their coverage of the festival. Why is it that a similar grant is not available to the Canadian Film Awards or to smaller Canadian manifestations which are equally important to Canadian critics? Our thanks to Filmexpo for leading the way.

## Some Films

This year the opening movie was **Bar Salon** by André Forcier, a 1973 film that has yet to be seen by many Canadians. (See article and review pp. 28-31, no. 19 and capsule, no. 21) I found it a good sound movie in the Swedish tradition of grainy reality, though perhaps less praiseworthy than the exuberant articles had led me to believe. The strangely distorted wit which denied empathies while purporting to disclose truths of the lives of some humble and unhappy people gave the film an uneasy shifting balance and a particularly unique quality. Performances were indeed excellent, and the film is undoubtedly an original and inspires one to offer that familiar - "a talent to watch with interest."

The first weekend offered other goodies. Jack Hazan's **A Bigger Splash**, a brilliant film of the artist David Hockney, utilizing an intellectual approximation of the technique Hockney uses to impale his subjects in his art, was truly a remarkable

experience for me. It followed a screening of a new film from Roger Corman's money-factory, New World Films. **Cockfighter**, directed by Oates, is not a film made for people like me. It emphasizes masculinity in all its least attractive faces, and offers a message of moderation or morality as a palliative on an almost insulting plane.

**Italy - Year One**, a recent Rossellini work, turned out to be a large, well-constructed, deliberate, educational TV programme in which the young and the forgetful could learn about or rediscover the various series of governmental changes which took place in Italy just following the Second World War. No doubt it was educationally valuable, but it wasn't much of a joy at a festival of films, even though made by an Old Massa.

Saturday's pleasures were however enhanced by a wild afternoon of Canadian Shorts, arranged with the help of Harris Kirshenbaum. I was particularly grateful to see Ondaatje's **The Clinton Special**, an exploration of the means and the ends achieved when Theatre Passe Muraille moved into the countryside to construct a theatrical production out of people and their stories. The film keeps an honest perception of itself, as well as of the countryside, the actors, the real people, and the people as performed, all clear and in intelligent contrast, so that for once the film of a theatrical event manages to be far more than either the event or a mere documentation of it. Ondaatje is without doubt one of our most intuitive and inspired filmmakers, and perhaps the reason is that he is not a filmmaker but a poet, a writer, a man who simply is an artist.

Well, no matter, the real thrill of Sunday at Filmexpo was a chance to see a very fine and beautiful film by Joan Micklin Silver called **Hester Street**. It's overwhelming to realize that this inexpensive first feature, financed by husband Raphael's ingenuity, could be so wonderfully good. No wonder it was talked about at Cannes. I was delighted to see it, and to see Carol Kane performing so capably, and to be drawn into a story that has the wise charm of an Isaak Dineson tale, and the beauty of the best of the period scenes from **Godfather Part II** and above all, I will admit, was directed by a woman. □