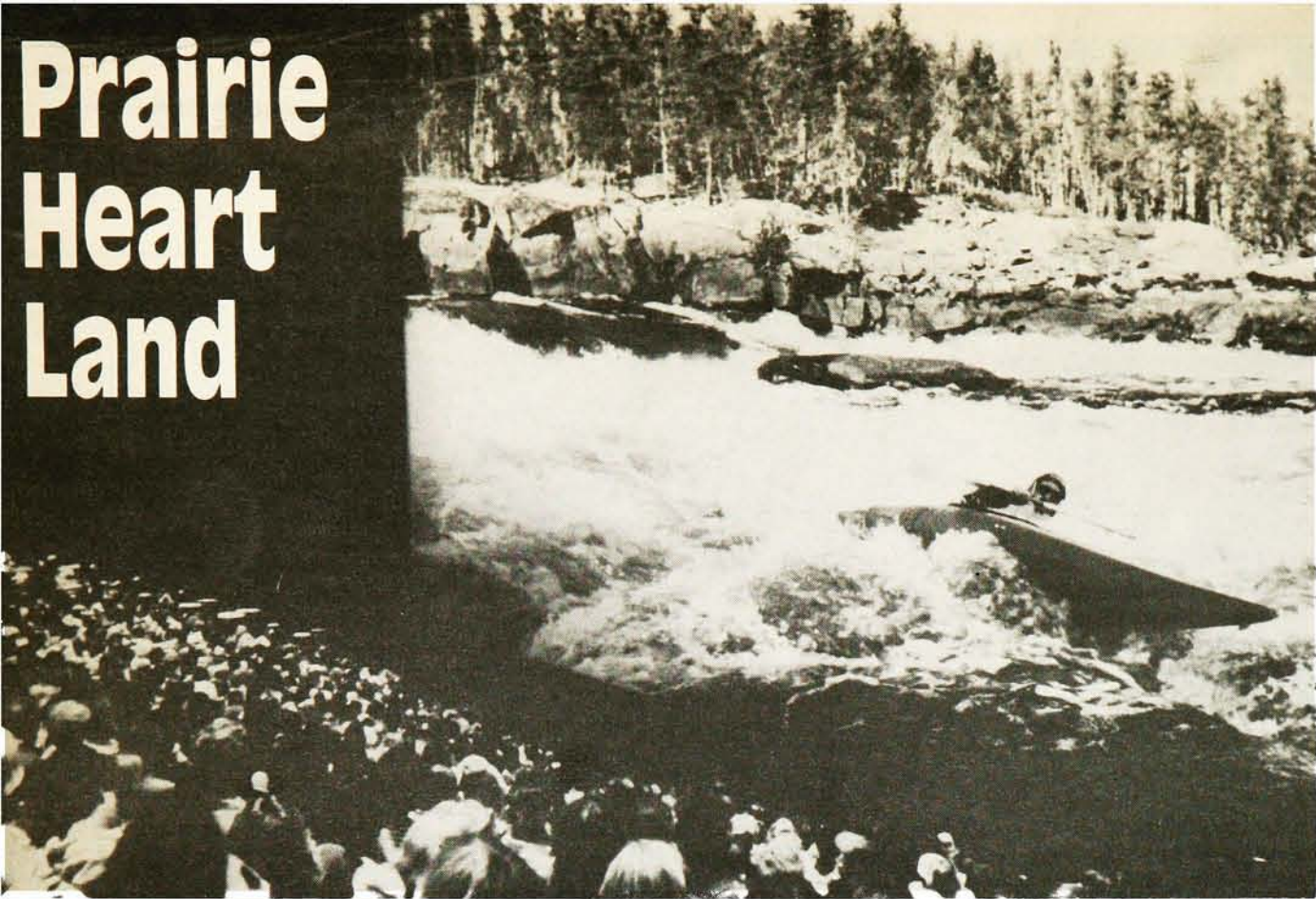


# Prairie Heart Land



• Audience swallowed by *Heart Land*

## by Don Macdonald

A crowd peers through the high glass windows into the lobby of the IMAX theatre at about 300 dignified people dressed in black ties and evening gowns. The theatre is located on the third floor of Winnipeg's new Portage Place mall which stretches three city blocks down the city's main east-west drag.

The crowd is waiting to get into three cinemas on the other side of the shopping centre and are idly curious about the spectacle on the other side of the glass.

"Look, there's Mayor Bill Norrie and Arthur Wood, the publisher of the *Winnipeg Free Press*. And that must be Arnold Spohr, artistic director of the Royal Winnipeg Ballet with the exquisitely emaciated prima ballerina Evelyn Hart on his arm."

For those invited to the theatre's opening this cool late September even-

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ing, the gawkers add to the ambience. There's a certain pleasure in being watched while eating canapes and sipping dry wine. It's like being filmed – the act of recording makes even the most banal activity more significant.

"If Portage Place is the cake of downtown Winnipeg, then the IMAX Theatre is surely the icing," booms Gary Doer over the heads of the guests. As Manitoba's urban affairs minister, Doer is the fair-haired boy of the province's New Democratic Party government and is whispered to be an attractive candidate to succeed the man he represents tonight, Premier Howard Pawley.

Doer throws gibes at the mayor and Jack Murta, Member of Parliament for the affluent rural riding of Lisgar. The governments these men represent have chipped in \$23 million to help Cadillac Fairview Corp. build the \$93 million, 153-store mall, which is the centrepiece of redevelopment of downtown Winnipeg.

The guffaws continue as they cut a strand of IMAX film. The Winnipeg theatre, with its slate grey carpet and ushers in execrable blue satin spacesuits, is To-

ronto-based IMAX's 53rd permanent theatre.

The company, now 20 years old, has built its success on the allure of giant screens, wrap-around sound and theatres specially designed to give viewers the sensation of being part of what is unfolding before them.

The three governments spent \$7.5 million to get an IMAX into Portage Place and hire seven Manitoba filmmakers to shoot *Heart Land*, the 37-minute film that is the evening's main event. The filmmakers are easy enough to spot in the crowd; they are the ones in the denim and corduroy elbowing the reporters to get at the wine and hors-d'oeuvres.

*Heart Land* is a collage of typical Manitoba scenes – polar bears, pristine lakes, white-water kayaking and Winnipeg's northend on a bitter January night, along with a pas-de-deux that punctuates the scenes and a bit of home-grown animation for comic relief. It was put together by producer Roman Kroiter.

Incredibly, the speeches in the foyer aren't enough to appease the politicians

and, when everyone is settled in the 271-seat theatre, they begin again.

Finally the hype is over and the film begins with a fantastic leader welcoming the audience to the theatre. The digital sound surrounds the audience as a passenger train chugging across the Prairie opens *Heart Land*.

But the effect of the film is disappointing. The film doesn't live up to the billing or all the *bon mots* the audience has had to endure.

The audience wants to be surrounded by the screen, to be swallowed by it. They want to look around and see their neighbors go green at the experience of being behind the wheel of a racing car or gasp at the sheer terror of being in the cockpit of a fighter plane in a power-dive.

But *Heart Land* doesn't capitalize on the technology. Only the flight of a crop-duster over a sunflower field gives you the famous IMAX you-are-there sensation. And the screen, although 5 1/2 storey high and 22 metres wide, doesn't extend past the peripheral vision of the viewers and therefore doesn't engulf them.

What is astonishing, however, is the rare experience of viewing our own people, culture and terrain on celluloid. A gathering storm on Lake Winnipeg, a hockey game on the local radio station, a Hutterite colony – this is our world and it's a revelation to see it reproduced.

But these tiny films within a film deserve more time. They offer the promise of filmmaking talent in the province that has gone unnoticed to a mass audience.

Perhaps part of the disappointment of this evening is that the governments chose to pay \$7.5 million to produce a tourist attraction. The money would have been better spent if each of these seven filmmakers had been given \$1 million to produce movies with stories as well as images of Manitoba. It wouldn't have brought the tourists running, but it would have stimulated filmmaking and produced a body of work that shows the beauty and torment of life on the Prairies.

In *Truffaut by Truffaut*, texts, documents and photographs speaking in the voice of one of the most influential contemporary directors, reveal the essential nature of François Truffaut's personality. Assembled by Dominique Rabourdin, this rich collection illuminates Truffaut's method of dealing with story, performers and production, as well as his overall approach to cinema. (Abrams, NYC, \$42.50; \$50 after 1/1/88).

The creative and managerial problems inherent in the planning of television shows are knowledgeably discussed by Richard A. Blum and Richard D. Lindheim in *Primetime: Network Television programming*. This comprehensive study examines in detail the input of creative and management personnel as well as of the viewing public. The scheduling strategies based on extensive testing are precisely defined, as is the

## BOOKSHELF

by George L. George

process of developing series, mini-series and TV specials. Excerpts from scripts, sample budgets, shooting schedules and other production data are included. (Focal Press, Stoneham, MA, \$19.95).

How to write and sell screenplays is considered in two current books. Professor Alan A. Armer, a film/TV professional turned academic, examines the principles and techniques of the craft in *Writing the Screenplay: Film and TV*, an informative and highly readable text. In *The Screenwriter's Guide*, Joseph Gillis offers useful tips on the successful presentation, protection and sale of film/TV scripts, together with a master list of agents and producers. (Wadsworth, Belmont, CA, \$19; NY Zoetrope, NYC,

\$9.95).

In *Film Magic*, David Hutchison expertly outlines the basic principles of the art and techniques of special effects. He includes miniatures, frame-by-frame model animation, traveling mattes and matte paintings, and computerized imaging, as used in such films as *Star Wars*, *E.T.*, *2010*, and *King Kong*. A useful glossary and a descriptive guide to 80 special effects movies are appended. (Prentice-Hall, NYC, \$12.95).

A film genre as old as the medium itself is surveyed in a comprehensive reference volume, *The Encyclopedia of Horror Movies*. Expertly edited by Phil Hardy and a large staff, it describes 1300 films whose diverse plots and story ang-

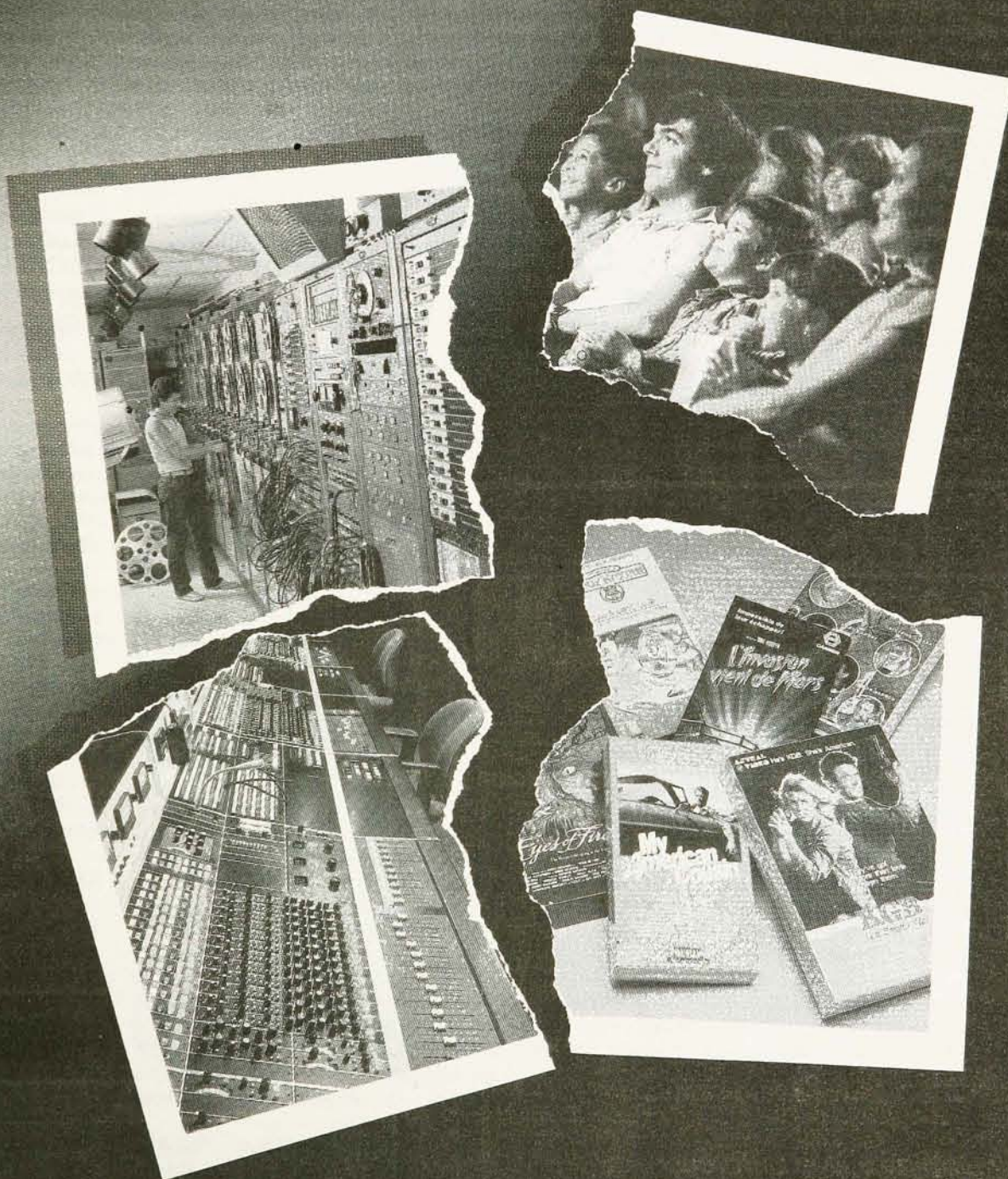
les have been scaring audiences ever since Georges Méliès' 1896 *The Haunted Castle*. Abundant illustrations provide a suitable framework to the entries' detailed synopses. (Harper & Row, NYC, \$34.50).

The encyclopedic 12-volume Motion Picture Guide extends its coverage of released films, in *The Motion Picture Guide 1987 Annual*. It lists the previous year's feature films in extensive entries, with full cast-&-credits, production data, genre, ratings, and cassette availability. Lengthy plot summaries include critical evaluations and related anecdotal material. Awards, obits, upcoming personalities and an index round out this basic research source edited by Jay Robert Nash and Stanley Ralph Ross. (CineBooks, Evanston, IL; Bouker, distr., NYC, \$99.95).

George L. George •

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