

Immovable fests

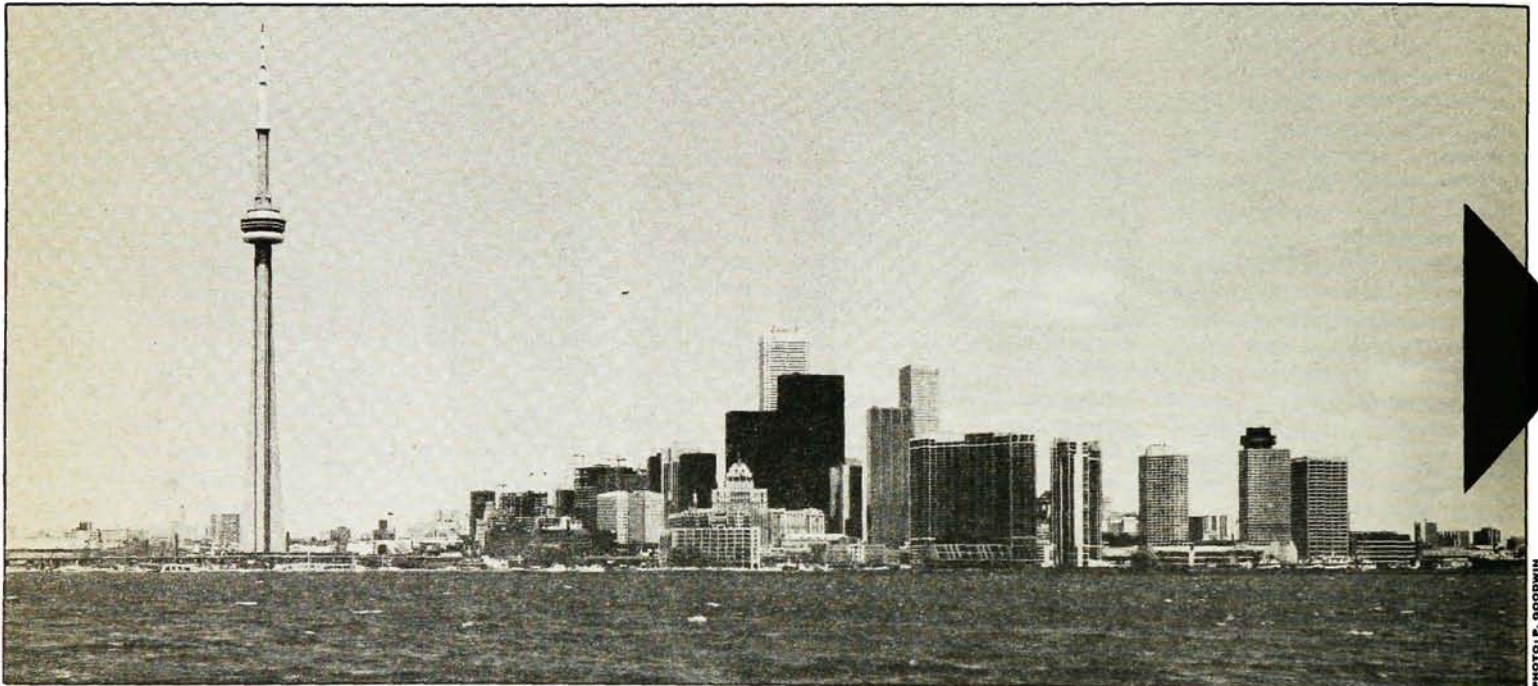


Photo courtesy of the Toronto Film Liaison Office

PHOTO: P. GOODWIN

BY GLEG KLYMKIW

Every year the battle rages between the Montreal World Film Festival and Toronto's Festival of Festivals. This year was no exception. "I'm bigger and better," reasoned Montreal chief Serge Losique. "No," proclaimed Toronto head-honcho Helga Stephenson, "I am." "No, I am," countered Losique. "Stuff it, windbag," asserted Stephenson. "I know you are," said Losique, "but what am I?"

Since both fests claimed overall attendance to be in and around 270,000 each, it would be safe to assume that both festivals are equal in stature. Or are they?

Well, in order to clear this important matter up, I've devised a foolproof system which should, once and for all, put an end to this endless nattering between Toronto and Montreal. I attended both festivals this year in a number of capacities: as viewer, film buff, buyer, seller, hypemeister, and writer. This enabled me to sample both the inner and outer

workings of each festival in a number of different areas.

First of all, I've selected a number of these areas for examination. Secondly, I've devised a points system by which to rate the individual festivals in these areas. And thirdly, I plan to inundate you with my scientific findings.

The ratings are as follows:

- 3 points equal unparalleled excellence.

- 2 points equal a solid effort.

- 1 point equals some room for improvement.

- 0 points. Well, that sort of speaks for itself, doesn't it?

These ratings reflect my personal experience and taste, but hopefully they'll provide — as accurately as possible — an answer to a question which plagues us all. A question, I suspect, which transcends such mundane queries as "Is there a God?" or "Is there life after death?" or "What truly is the difference between good and evil?"

And of course, that question is: "Which festival is the King of festivals?" Toronto? Or Montreal?

Hold onto your hats, folks. We're about to find out.

Accessibility of theatres for guaranteed orgy of movie-viewing

Sorry Toronto. The clear winner in this category is Montreal. In Toronto, the Festival headquar-

ters, the Festival box-office and the theatres are spread way too far apart for my liking. For maximum viewing potential, a leisurely walk was simply out of the question. You either had to drive, run or utilise Toronto's fine public transit system. Unless, of course, you were equipped with a helicopter to fly you from theatre to theatre.

Montreal gets top points in this category. With everything centred around the Meridien Hotel, access to Festival headquarters, Market and screenings was as easy as an occasional elevator ride or, at worst, a two-block walk.

Montreal: 3

Toronto: 1

Largest selection and most accessible English-language product

Depending on how you look at it, top-points in this category might not actually be considered a compliment. However, if you're not particularly interested in New Yugoslavian Cinema and just want to see some good old-fashioned celluloid apple pie, Toronto takes top honors here.

Toronto: 3

Montreal: 2

Most varied selection of foreign product

In spite of its superb Kino Eye series (a marvelous retrospective of Soviet Cinema), Toronto takes a back seat to Montreal on this

one. In terms of international product, Montreal truly is a World Festival.

Montreal: 3

Toronto: 2

Most flamboyant festival director

Sorry Helga. Can there really be any doubt here? Serge Losique, the king of class and hype, takes top prize here. Helga's no slouch, though.

Montreal: 3

Toronto: 2

Best-dressed festival director

Serge Losique definitely exuded a certain dapper charm, but Helga Stephenson wins hands-down with a wide variety of eye-popping fashions.

Toronto: 3

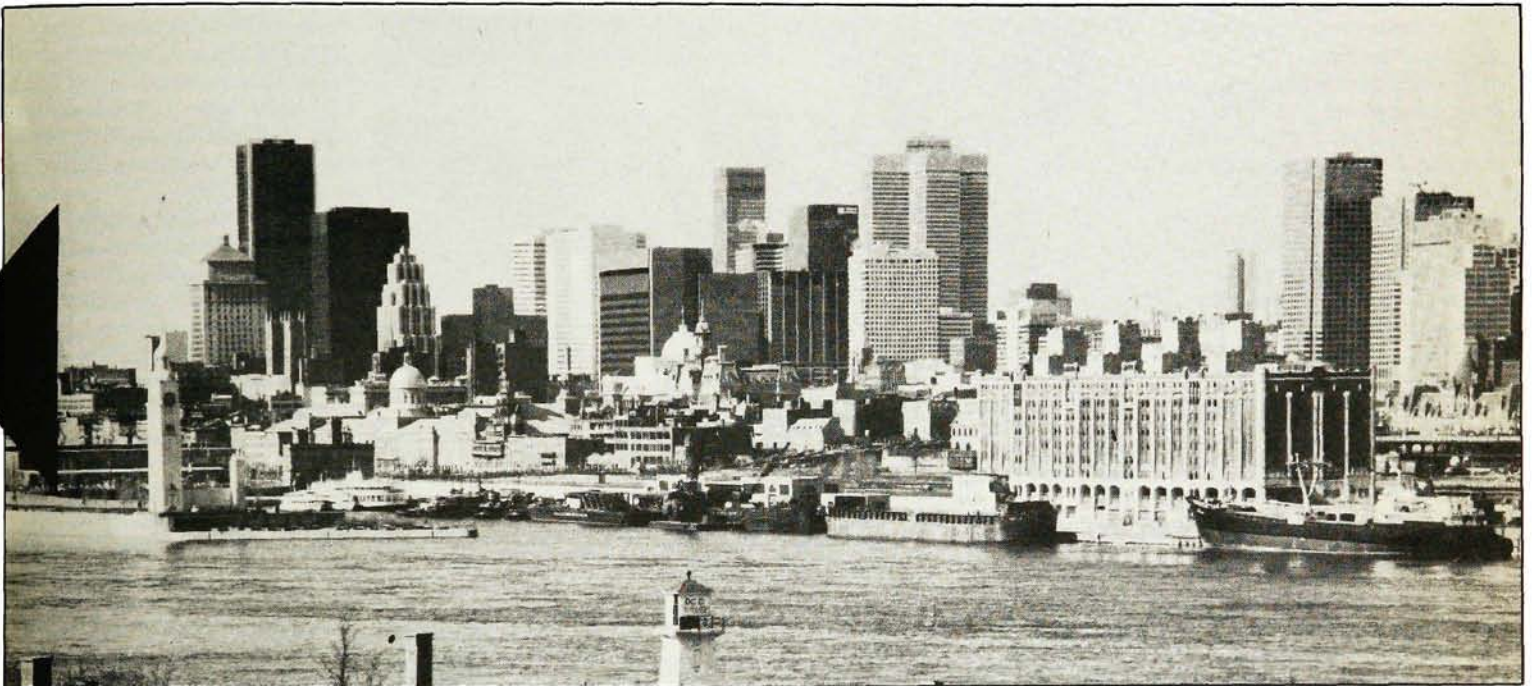
Montreal: 2

Classiest treatment of Canadian films

Montreal's Panorama Canada is trying hard, but it still can't beat Toronto's Perspective Canada. Homegrown product in Hogtown is treated with class by the festival (and in turn by both public and media). In Montreal, however, unless a Canadian film made it into Official Competition or Selection, it was almost impossible to dredge up the necessary media hype. Audiences for both, however, were equally (and surprisingly) receptive to Canadian products. Montreal, you've gotta get your act together on this one.

Greg Klymkiv, *Cinema Canada's* Prairie Pulse columnist, works with the Winnipeg Film Group and moonlights as a gravedigger in Gimli, Manitoba.

The race for world class excellence between Montreal's World Film Festival and Toronto's Festival of Festivals



You can't be making excuses that this year was a dry year for Canadian film; Toronto proved you wrong. However, I must say that this increasing competition for homegrown product between both festivals is just plain stupid (on both sides). Canadian films have a hard enough time getting seen. Let's knock off this "If you play their festival, you can't play ours" nonsense.

Toronto: 3

Montreal: 1

Best celebrity spotting

The facts speak for themselves. In Montreal I spotted Robert Stack, Roger Ebert, Miou-Miou and Flora MacDonald (that is, if she even counts). In Toronto I spotted Roger Ebert (boy, he gets around), Brian DePalma (on several occasions), David Cronenberg, Geneviève Bujold, Martha Plimpton, Saul Rubinek, Bonnie Bedelia and many others. I even shared an elevator with Rae Dawn Chong. (Will I ever really share an elevator with anyone else ever again?)

Toronto: 3

Montreal: 1

[Obviously, celebrity spotting is a tricky activity. Both De Palma and Bujold were, along with many others, at Montreal's festival. Ed]

Best use of Flora MacDonald

Once again, Hogtown takes top honors. Getting

Flora to address the gala presentation of a film about psychotic twin gynaecologists was the most delightfully perverse act of both festivals. Her appearance at a Telefilm cocktail party in Montreal was quaint, but Toronto treated her like royalty.

Toronto: 3

Montreal: 1

Best parties

In general, Montreal was the clear winner. Toronto's parties were too Yuppie for my liking. The accent was on dreadful rock bands in noisy clubs with blinding light shows. Ho-hum. However, a special nod must go to Cinephile for their *Growing Up In America* bash in their Queen Street offices. It was well attended, laid-back and lots of fun. At one point, some drunk off the street was jokingly mistaken by some partygoers as Norman Jewison. The drunk played along beautifully. Brian DePalma was there also. He ignored almost everybody. Who he actually was talking to could not be readily discerned through the haze of smoke which hung about the room like so much dirty laundry on the clothesline.

Montreal was another story. The opening night gala was class from beginning to end; a chamber orchestra played in the background, allowing for mellow talk and good times. Closing night was even better; a forties-style big-band raged the night away. In between,

most affairs were quaint and cultured. In some cases, comfortably unpretentious. Some of the better parties included the warm gatherings following the evening screenings for Bachar Chbib's *Clair Obscur* and Tom Berry's *Something About Love*.

A special nod to Telefilm, however. Cocktail soirées in both cities were extremely delightful.

Montreal: 3

Toronto: 1

Best opportunity for industry shmoozing

Due to the generally laid-back atmosphere of most soirées and a superbly laid-out and attended Market, Montreal takes top honors here. In Toronto, the newly-formed Sales Office was just that - newly-formed. The Trade Forum was basically a big snooze; however, the panel on independent Canadian producers was quite engaging. The Trade Forum coffee room wasn't a horrible place to shmooze, but it was certainly lacking in privacy.

Montreal: 3

Toronto: 1

Best projection of 16mm shorts and features

The projection of 16mm product in Montreal was exquisite. In Toronto, it was another story. While definitely a few notches above using a Bell and Howell Autoload in a High School Gymnasium, most of the Hogtown 16mm

screenings were pedestrian to say the most.

Montreal: 3

Toronto: 1

Best midnight movies

Since Montreal didn't have any, I guess Toronto wins, but certainly not by default. The late-night programming was superb; most notably *The Metal Years*, *Hellraiser II* and (especially) *Brain Damage*. This was midnight programming at its most imaginative and successful.

Toronto: 3

Montreal: 1

And now folks, the final tally:

Montreal: 26

Toronto: 26

What's this? A tie? Can it be so? I'm afraid it is.

And so, you might be asking, just what did this exercise prove? Well, it proves that both festivals have equal strengths and weaknesses. But most of all, it proves that our country's film community should be mighty proud. The sports world's Ben Johnson may have brought disgrace to Canada at the Olympics, but our film world brings nothing but honour to our country.

Just think. Canada hosts two world-class film festivals. What more could we want?

So, what the heck, folks. Let's just stop the bickering, eh? ●