feedback

The reactions to this years Awards were spontaneous and varied. A selection of these reactions is printed below, preceded by a short overview of the Awards through the years.

Memories run short when it comes to the Canadian Film Awards. The fact that 700 came to the dinner-presentation Sunday evening, Nov. 20, and that so many reacted so strongly is evidence that the CFA has come a long way over the last years. Or, rather, that even if the CFA has not come as far as some might wish, the Canadian film industry is travelling the distance and is not prepared to remain uninvolved in the annual awards ceremony. Up until now, the Awards have been run on mostly volunteer energy in the face of generalized industry indifference.

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The Canadian Film Awards have had a long and checkered career. By this time, they are 28 years old — a ripe age, considering that many still maintain the Canadian film industry is in its infancy.

What people forget is that, in the beginning, the industry wasn't centered around the feature films; years and years

went by before there was even a 'feature' category.

For a while, showing the films to the public became important. Free screenings — or screenings for a nominal fee— were the order of the day. Still, halls remained empty for the most part as the jury sat through the hundred-odd films in search of the winners.

When Gerald Pratley founded the international jury, that was a step forward. Finally, Canadian filmmakers were ready to ask others for their opinion, to test Canadian

films against an international measure.

Then came the crucial year: 1973. The Awards were moved to Montreal from Toronto because continued financial aid from the Festivals Bureau was conditional upon the move. (In subsequent years, the CFA was to alternate between the cities or even move elsewhere if possible.)

For the first time, a television show was lined up; Lise Payette, now a provincial minister, was to do the first bilingual show that CBC/Radio-Canada had ever done, live.

The cast was proverbially 'all-star'.

The problem was some of the stars, the québécois film-makers, decided to boycott the awards. The reasons given were varied and ranged from poor pre-selection to ideological opposition to the notions of competition in the arts and of the existence of 'pan-culturalism' in Canada. But the results were disastrous. The show was cancelled; the awards weren't distributed, and the organization fell apart.

One analysis had it that although the québécois didn't mind going 'abroad' (read Toronto) to pick up awards, they

just couldn't permit themselves to be seen coast to coast, picking up cultural awards in harmony with their English-Canadian colleagues. That was a year in which separatism was growing among the artists in Quebec, and the Awards were held smack in the middle of a provincial election.

The following year, there was no ceremony. A meeting was called by Jean Lefebvre, director of the Bureau of Festivals, regrouping representatives of organizations interested in filming and members of the CFA committee. The spoils were divided; Toronto got the right to use the name 'Canadian Film Awards' and could request a grant every other year from the Bureau. The québécois could request the grant in the off year, and were to restructure an awards ceremony — or a festival or whatnot — which would fit the requirements of the filmmakers.

And that was that. The Quebec group never got to work seriously, no one being much interested and, certainly, no one volunteering to try to heal the many wounds caused within the québécois film community as a result of the

directors' unanimous boycott.

In Toronto, Sandra Gathercole organized the remote Niagara-on-the-Lake awards and added a series of conferences, round tables and retrospectives. The participants liked the innovations but geographically, it hardly made sense.

N.A. Taylor was the only person who volunteered in '76 and'77 to head the Awards. He whipped the organization into good financial shape, twisting arms here, soliciting there, investing half of the grant money to be able to get along in the off year without government support. He all but did away with the public screenings, pushing theatre trailers for the televised awards presentation instead. In 1976, CTV did the honors. In 1977, CBC picked it up. Still a bit gun-shy about the fiasco of 1973, CBC thought pre-taping was a good idea.

Finally, in 1977, the CFA Committee did away with the jury. The pre-selection committee cast a final ballot; the winners were chosen in September.

The following comments come from several sources. Pat Thompson, Peter Pearson, Pen Densham, Kirwan Cox and Sandra Gathercole gave their impressions to Cinema Canada on tape, the evening of the Awards. Other comments were solicited by the magazine, or came spontaneously to us, some in the form of letters to others, to be reprinted.

Connie Tadros

the hottest ticket in town...

The Awards became the hottest ticket in town about a week before the event, and that's when things began to get terrible. There were just 2 of us in the office, and 3 phone lines, so we had terrible trouble some days.

It became a hot ticket because of the industry people. We had a bigger judging group this year and I think they spread the word. And I also think that it was because we got the nominees out earlier. There were four actual people sitting there as "nominees", and that is a great help. It also helps the organization because you know exactly what you're dealing with... like 135 nominees instead of 260...

Patricia Thompson
Executive Director/
Canadian Film Awards

the jury...

Having been chairman of the international jury since the Canadian Film Awards were reorganised in 1968, I was naturally disappointed to see the judging changed this year to a secret vote by a panel made up of representatives of the many groups which comprise the CFA committee. This is not because I doubted the competence of those who freely volunteered their time and tested their powers of endurance to sit through the 170-odd films entered this year. Far from it. They carried out their responsibilities loyally and well, never complaining, and sitting for as many as twelve hours a day for seven days with an unfailing sense of humor and an alertness to the values they sought to reward which was worthy of the highest praise.

No, as I told the committee, I believe that secret votes are for politicians, not for judging various art forms. This is best achieved through frank and thorough discussions by a jury. While there was some discussion by the panel this year, it was limited; naturally, as the vote was secret, there was reluctance on the part of panel members to let others know what they were voting for. This cut-and-dried method takes the humanity and intellectual considerations out of the process of award giving.

I think I have said before that if the filmmakers who have entered their work in past CFA competitions knew how deeply and at what length the international juries debated their (the filmmakers') work, frequently with great admiration for and enjoyment of what they had seen, I think they would be pleased and gratified. Removing this method of evaluation, estimation and final agreement took much of the color, excitement and immediacy out of the CFA this year.

We also lost the excitement of the Festival aspect of the CFA, during which the public could see the films with the jury. This year, they were seen by the judging panel in private. The irony of the situation is that the committee changed the system to appease CTV (which wanted a carbon copy of the Academy Awards) and then backed out of its commitment to telecast the awards claiming financial difficulties. This led to the loss of secrecy ("and the winner is") when CBC stepped into the breech, but had to tape the "secret" winners before the actual presentations were made! What did Polonius say about to thine own self be true?

In spite of all this, few people, it seems, think the main awards were not justified and fair; and this is what matters long after dissatisfaction with meals and slide shows is forgotten. A voting system is bound to result in some injustices. We can thank the judging panel for using common sense resulting in there being very few of them.

Gerald Pratley
Director
Ontario Film Institute

the judging...

The judging is better, but it's not quite right yet. In my mind, it's alright for the feature films, and the two ballot system is great. It works.

The people who watched the feature films sat for 2 and a half days. They can do that. But some people sat for 84 hours of films, and then they had to do all the crafts in the 2 to 6 categories and there's something wrong there. I think we must do something about this big block of crafts which belongs to those categories.

Patricia Thompson

the fallacy of the secret ballot...

This Film Awards is an example of the fallacy of the secret ballot. In the old days, it used to be difficult because once someone won a big prize, you knew the other film would get the little prize; everything would balance out so that no one would be upset. This time, because the ballots were secret, I think everyone's second choice tended to be the winner. And, although all the films were very good, J.A. Martin wasn't that much better than Why Shoot the Teacher or Outrageous. Those 2 films just got completely wiped out. And so I think it's a shame.

Kirwan Cox Producer and researcher

about outrageous...

I think that it was unfortunate that **Outrageous** didn't get more awards. I felt that it was a signpost film in terms of the enthusiasm it generated. I had picked **J.A. Martin** to get the major award, and I figured that was a very worthy award, but I would have liked to see **Outrageous** get a little bit of energy behind it because I think that's the kind of film that starts the mental activity going.

People like John Roberts like to have something they can hook into when they're pushing for film policy in the Cabinet. I understand he is having a hard time pushing film in the Cabinet. When you have a film you can point to that's doing it in New York and doing it in L.A. and says, 'We can make films and they can be small films and yet do big things," that's what we need.

Pen Densham Filmmaker

the taping session

I was really upset about the secret filming of the winners on Sunday morning. I was upset that the winners had to sneak around all day long. I think that's tacky. When we allow the television networks to control what is essentially a film event, we start to get into trouble. In point of fact, all the winners felt guilty all day long, holding secrets. That's not fair; it's certainly not fair for the losers, and it's certainly not fair for everyone who paid \$25 a ticket to come and see who had won and who had lost.

I've won 17 of these awards, and every time, I've felt honored. I think that it cheapens it by forcing those who win into the ignominious position of having to hold that secret.

If the television cameras want to come in, they can do what they like. They can record it, they can edit it, they can experience it. But for them to dictate that all of us have to skulk down to some studio at nine o'clock in the morning in order to be recorded looking like idiots is unacceptable.

> Peter Pearson Filmmaker

a trip which vindicated...

I loved the Awards. I thought it was an 'up', a trip and I thought it vindicated a lot of years and a lot of work and frustration. The films and what happened tonight were truly a celebration.

Things have changed enormously over the last five years, and I speak from experience. The Film Awards have not always been something to be proud about and I thought that tonight perhaps was the way it should have been for the last 25 years. I think that there was a spirit and a feeling which I've never seen at the Awards before.

Existentially, there was a lot of self-realization tonight. There were a lot of people sitting there saying, 'My God, we actually can put on the Film Awards! We can even put on a show, we can even make movies.' All those unrealized potentials, which is sort of the definition of the Canadian film industry, are being realized.

Sandra Gathercole

Past-Chairperson, Council of Canadian Filmmakers

about the québécois...

My own sense is that it's up to the québécois to determine their destiny. It's very interesting that there was a bunch of ardent separatists at the Awards who really appreciated winning.

Two years ago, Claude Jutra stomped into Niagara-on-the-Lake and denounced the Awards left, right and center. This year there were tears in his eyes, and he was very proud that once again he had been recognized. I think that Jutra has probably won more Etrogs than anybody... and it's important to him.

It's important for us to say, 'You want to come in? Fine. If you don't, that's fine too," because at a certain point, to try and coerce people into some narrow, restricted definition of the future of our country is still a denial of what we hope our country will be.

Peter Pearson

inners

Best Films

Feature Film: J.A. Martin photographe (Jean Beaudin)

Documentary Film (60 mins. and over): The Inquiry Film

(Jesse Nishihata)

Documentary Film (under 60 mins.): Greenpeace: Voyages to Save the Whales (Michael Chechik)

Animated Film: Spinolio (John Weldon)

Theatrical Short (35mm): Spartree (Phillip Borsos)

TV Drama (including drama documentaries): Dreamspeaker (Claude Jutra)

Craft Awards (Feature Film)

Direction: Jean Beaudin (J.A. Martin photographe)

Editing: Jean Beaudin/Helen Girard (J.A.Martin photographe), John Kramer (One Man)

Cinematography: Pierre Mignot (J.A. Martin photographe)

Screenplay - original: Robin Spry/Peter Pearson/Peter Madden (One Man)

Screenplay - adaptation: James DeFelice (Why Shoot the Teacher)

Sound Recording: Claude Hazanavicius (One Man)

Sound Editing: Les Halman/Ken Page (One Man)

Sound Re-recording: Jean-Pierre Joutel (J.A. Martin photographe)

Original Music Score: Paul Hoffert (Outrageous)

Art Direction: Vianney Gauthier (J.A. Martin photographe)

Performance by an Actor: Len Cariou (One Man)

Performance by an Actress: Monique Mercure (J.A. Martin

Supporting Actor: Jean Lapointe (One Man) Supporting Actress: Carol Lazare (One Man)

Craft Awards (Non-Feature films)

Direction: Claude Jutra (Dreamspeaker)

Editing: Marty Gross (Potters at Work)

Cinematography: Tim Sale/Dave Geddes/Ron Orieux/Jeff Mart (Spartree)

Screenplay - original or adaptation: Cam Hubert (Dreamspeak-

Non-dramatic script: Donald Brittain (Henry Ford's America)

Sound Recording: Fred Easton/Chris Aikenhead/Michael Chechik (Greenpeace: Voyages to Save the Whales)

Sound Editing: Raymond Hall (Spartree)

Sound Re-recording: Barry Jones (Spartree)

Original Music Score: Jean Cousineau (Dreamspeaker)

Art Direction: Evelyn Roth (Woven in Time)

Performance by an Actor: George Clutesi (Dreamspeaker)

Performance by an Actress: Marina Dimakopoulos (Happiness Is Loving Your Teacher)

Supporting Actor or Actress: Jacques Hubert (Dreamspeaker)

Special Awards

The Wendy Michener Award: - To Zale R. Dalen for his feature film, Skip Tracer.

Special Award of the Judging Group: - To Ralph Thomas, who has increased the stature of film drama on television in Can-

The Grierson Award: - To Fernand Dansereau of Ste. Foy, Que.

a big non-event...

As members of Canada's film community, we would like to protest the biggest non-event of this or any other year, namely the 1977 Canadian Film Awards.

Our feelings ran the gamut from embarrassment to anger at the ineptitude and dullness of what should have been a glittering celebration.

The food belonged in a roadside diner (what was it?) and was served by the clumsiest waiters this side of the Mack Sennett studios.

As the awards presentation began, we tried to follow the categories as printed in the program. There was no corresponding order between that program and the proceedings before us. Hence confusion.

Rumors were rampant that the award winners had already been informed, and in fact taped in a CBC studio the previous day. The rumors proved true. Sitting at our and adjacent tables, were nominees who, at their own expense, curtailed schedules in order to fly back from New York and Los Angeles, only to be confronted with day old news that they were not winners. Surely a courtesy call would have been in order to give these nominees the option of not incurring expenses for an evening which was not to be theirs. Had the awards been conducted in a proper manner, where no one knew until the envelope was opened who the winners were to be, then the air of excitement and anticipation would have justified everyone's participation in the evening.

The ultimate insult was that the television audience at home found out who all the winners were before those at the actual presentation.

Instead of glamor, sophistication, wit and production values, we were treated to stultifying speeches and an interminable dissertation with slides on Canadian film history, which set a new record in boring an audience to drink. (The tragedy being the bar closed at 7 p.m.).

When will the gremlins who organized the Canadian Film Awards wake up to the fact that the procedure used by the Americans and the British for their Academy Awards works and adopt the same system?

It is a sad state of affairs, that twenty-two people, many of whom have had little or no direct involvement in feature-film production in this country, are chosen (how and by whom are they chosen?) to sit in judgement and determine the fate of Canadian films.

As far as we are concerned, the Canadian Film Awards are important and worthwhile if treated with the honor, respect, excitement and celebration that they so richly deserve. We look forward to such an occasion next year and plan to forget the unmitigated shambles of 1977.

Paul Grose, GKO Associates Ltd.
Lynn Kinney, GKO Associates Ltd.
Michael Oscars, GKO Associates Ltd.
Pamela B. Friendly, GKO Associates Ltd.
Jill de Wolfe James, Astral Bellevue Pathe.
Richard Conkie, Richard Conkie Casting.
Larry Dane, Canart Films.
Clare Walker and Stuart Aikens,
Canadian Casting Associates.
Linda Shapiro, Publicist.
Michael Kirby, Actor.
Nuala Fitzgerald, Actress.
And many others.

not representative...

The letter below was sent to Millard Roth, executive director of the Canadian Motion Picture Distributors' Association in response to his memo requesting opinions on the CFA from some of the association's members.

I have your memorandum of November 24 and appreciate your asking for comments. I did attend the film awards on "that fateful night". I must, however, admit to the fact that I did leave early. Possibly my early departure reflects my overall opinion of what was transpiring.

Millard, I realize it is very easy to complain about what goes on in our industry and that is certainly not my intention at this time; however, I feel very strongly that the Canadian Film Awards for 1977 have, in effect, set the industry back fifteen years.

Without knowing all the intricate details, it is impossible for me to lay the blame on someone's doorstep even if that was my desire, which it is not.

The results of the 1977 Canadian Film Awards would indicate that the Jury would correspond to the New York Film Critics and the awards they give each year, or the critics best ten list in America. This statement is not made with any intention of demeaning these worthy groups; however, they seek and stress other qualities in feature motion pictures than does the American Academy of Arts and Sciences at Oscar time.

In past years, possibly the choice has been extremely limited and a result such as 1977 would have been inevitable; however, it is unfortunate that such a choice was made in 1977 when there were a number of much more suitable (in my opinion) motion pictures available, and I refer to such films as Why Shoot the Teacher and Who Has Seen the Wind.

If the Canadian Film Awards are to serve a useful purpose, then I feel that their major function is to reward and encourage motion picture production that stresses artistic and technical excellence together with basic entertainment.

Our industry is not an exact science, Millard. Both you and I know this, and a great many aspects that I am discussing here overlap, but what went on during the 1977 Awards was not, in my opinion, beneficial to the industry. I left a great many people totally bewildered as to what it was all about.

I do indeed feel that this program should be in different hands.

Mickey Stevenson
Distributor
Astral Films

a sham...

The following letter was written to David Perlmutter, President of the Canadian Association of Motion Picture Producers.

As everyone present at this year's Canadian Film Awards knows, the event was an embarrassing exercise akin to a high-school prom. As a producer with a film in nomination my instinctive reaction was outrage. On the spur of the moment I promised myself never to allow another one of my films to be a part of such an amateurish sham. I am sure that all of you feel equally affronted.

On further thought, however, to abort the Canadian Film Awards by withholding films is, although well deserved, not in the best interests of the film industry. I propose instead, that the structure of the Awards be radically revamped, or, if the Awards' current management opposes drastic changes, that a real Canadian Film Awards be organized by the parties most involved, starting with producers and directors.

Our industry sorely needs its own heroes, folklore and mythology, in short, a kind of glamor that only constant exposure to the limelight and the public can create. Only when we can feed audiences with glittering fantasies the way Hollywood does so well, can we develop our own stars, household names and personalities, who in turn would make our films that much more bankable, and bring a bazzaz to our industry that is still sadly lacking.

An annual film award presentation is an ideal vehicule for accomplishing this, and as producers I think it is incumbent on us to insure that such a ceremony exist, and that it be properly orchestrated. The following are some suggestions for the obvious changes that this would require:

1. The jury system as it exists is utterly impractical and unrepresentative. An Academy structure must be set up, so that nominations and awards are decided upon by a broad base of qualified individuals that would accurately represent a full cross-section of the industry.

- 2. The categories in which awads are given should be re-examined. Best Picture Awards for example, should obviously be presented to the film's producer. The multitude of craft awards for shorts and documentaries has to be abolished or at any rate separated from the Awards ceremony. So long as we are giving awards for best soundediting and best art-direction for a short in the same breath as best actor or best director for a feature, we are eliminating any possibility of wide public appeal and relegating major feature films to the same pathetic public apathy that is the inevitable fate of government funded documentaries. The Film Awards should be reserved for theatrical features only, with just one award for best documentary and one for best animation instead of the plethora of categories that make the current format inherently dull and unmaneagable.
- 3. The idea of feeding more than 600 people seated around tables is ill-conceived. As evidenced this year, the concoction that results is hopelessly inedible and automatically sinks the proceedings to an irredeemable level of tackiness. Instead, there should be an open bar with hors d'oeuvres and free-flowing drinks available without the insult of having to line up for tickets. The presentations should follow on a lavishly dressed stage in a large theatre.
- 4. The proceedings should obviously be televised live. Pretaping the results in order to accommodate the CBC is a moronic notion that is best forgotten. It simply annihilates the suspense and emotions necessary to make an interesting show.
- 5. The \$25.00 charge per person must not apply to those nominated for an award. It is embarrassing to have to pay in order to be celebrated. By eliminating the awards for shorts, the number of nominees will be drastically reduced. The resulting loss of revenue can be more than compensated for by the larger attendance that the elimination of the banquet format can accommodate.
- 6. The presentation should include the performance of the best songs to add entertainment value.
- 7. Truly prominent members of the industry and V.I.P.'s from other arenas should be asked to present awards. It is unforgiveable that not a single celebrated Canadian actor, director, or writer was invited to the show to present an award. The awards should be presented by the most active and best known members of the industry, and they should be organized with enough professionalism to ensure that celebrities attend.
- 8. The show should be properly rehearsed in order to cut down on primitive errors and set up an exciting pace. There

is no excuse for out of focus projection, sound problems, and incessant gaffes by the M.C.'s.

- 9. To work well, the event has to be properly financed. The Festivals Bureau and other sources should be enlisted.
- 10. The Canadian Film Awards is no place for one-man ego trips and incestuous nostalgia. If the current management insists on sabotaging the Awards with boring and extraneous material, they should be retired forthwith.
- 11. It baffles me that none of the co-productions was nominated for an award. Co-productions obviously qualify as Canadian films except in those categories in which non-Canadians were employed. (The same applies to Certified Canadian Features.) A co-production should also qualify for best picture if it is majority Canadian.

Next year promises to be the most important one yet in the history of Canadian films. With nearly a dozen major films of international scope in the can this year, and many more to come before the end of 1978, we have graduated from the junior leagues. The Canadian Film Awards hasn't, and it is up to us to see that it does. The Film Awards is the only forum we have to honour those who excel in Canadian films. To demean that honor in conferring it is intolerable.

I think now is the time for CAMPP to begin dialogue about next year's Awards, and with that in mind, I hereby request that the subject be placed on the agenda of the next meeting.

Sincerely yours,

Robert Lantos

i quit (almost)...

I was both a jurist and a distributor of many films entered this year. (I raised that question too, but the organizers wanted me to be on it anyway...) From the point of view of being a part of the jury, I am really distressed that the Awards came out the way they did... but the organizing committee should have realized that the bastard child of the academy system and the jury system had to be either a jury without a voice (and hence no real control), or a wildly unrepresentative democratic blunder.

From the point of view of the distributor, I really question the value of entering a film and working with filmmakers and producers (both NFB and independents this year), only to have their national exposure and personal time wasted on such an event. The suspense of a secret ballot was only in evidence when we voted; the NFB knew at least a week before the television taping what was up... or so one of their people told me. (A leak by the organizers?) The television taping was ladled on us as a necessity. By whom, and why was the industry not better informed about the situation?

Finally, a personal point. I know that the emotions of a winner-loser situation are delicate at the least, but it seems to me that the organizers were walking through the tulips in Greb steel-toed boots. None of the people I work with, and none I talked to, were happy with the way they were treated. The jury, for example, spent an ungodly week screening in very bad conditions and received a \$15 per diem. We were then sent a thank you letter and were told that no free tickets were given away.

My strongest reaction to the whole fiasco was to swear never to participate again. Since it is over, my swearing an oath has dulled a bit, so I revise that statement to admit that with a new attitude, new organizers and new rules, the Canadian Film Awards may be good in the future.

Linda Beath
Distributor, New Cinema



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