

the oldest, continuing north american fest

The Yorkton Festival is a celebration of down-home hospitality as well as oldest the short film festival in North America. Nik Burton gives us the flavor.

by Nik Burton

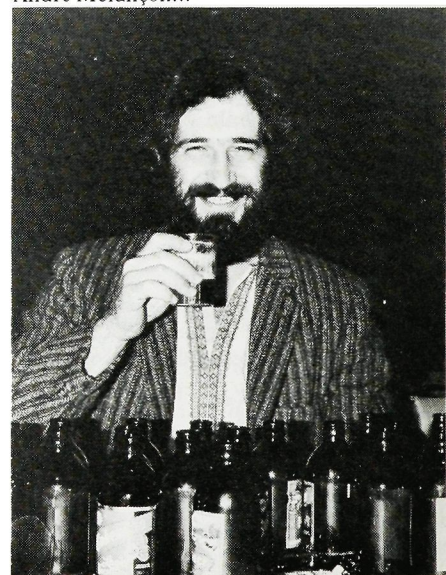
Jury members George Anthony...



Don Owen...



André Melançon...



Anyone who had the faintest objection to eating Hungarian goulash and watching the Shepherd's Dance until 1:30 a.m. had no business being at the Yorkton International Film Festival this year. The festival was determinedly multi-cultural and relaxedly unpunctual.

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Any event involving a number of people, especially a cultural event, and especially one that brings in professional people from down East, has a great potential for friction, alienation and its defense mechanism — apathy. But Don Humphries, Festival Executive Secretary and chief organizer, hasn't spent most of his working life involved with community people and community politics for nothing. The casual, relaxed manner of the proceedings made sure no one

felt herded; it wasn't too "slick". The multi-cultural events, such as the Yorkton Regional High School band, ethnic dances and multi-cultural march-on on opening night, and the Hungarian night that wrapped everything up, were made an integral part of the festival. The familiarity of these events to local people, and the open astonishment and delight of the conference guests at this unaccustomed treat, served to draw people together, made the giving and the showing go both ways, and made the visitors less threatening.

Inevitably, though, the character and tone of a cultural event such as a film festival is determined by the professional people that are brought in. The guests, delegates, and especially the adjudicators, who were most in the public eye, made this festival the artistic success it was; a more splendid trio of judges could not have been found. The adjudicating team – and a team they were – consisted of Toronto Sun Entertainment Editor and Film Critic, George Anthony, well-known Toronto-based film director Don Owen, and award-winning Quebec filmmaker, scriptwriter and actor, André Melançon.

In an occupation littered with inflated ego-trips and personality conflicts, these three worked together perfectly, beautifully, complementing and reinforcing one another. Humphries explained their approach to the film adjudication: "George was the organizer and the critic, André was the perception, and Don was the conscience." Far from doing a merely routine job on the staggering task of viewing over 150 films in 4 days and making 17 awards, they brought imagination and intelligence to the job, shifting films to another category for an award they felt it deserved and creating several new categories where they were needed. Their selection for the over-all Golden Sheaf award was made with such insight and feeling for this country and its culture that no one need doubt or fear for the future of Canadian film in the hands of such as these.

In public, their actions were outrageous enough to make them credible as true film personalities, while at the same time being positively civilized about it, not taking their *gaucherie* too seriously.

The dedication to filmmaking in Canada, commitment to the success of the Yorkton International Film Festival, and respect for the people of Yorkton displayed by all the adjudicators and guests was typified by André Melançon. In the situation of a twofold potential for aloofness and alienation, as a successful personality in the film industry and a native Québécois, Melançon never for a minute gave up his sincere efforts to interact with the people around him. Everyone received the warmest possible greeting, questions asked of him in French were often answered in English if there were any unilingual people present, and his visible effort to always express himself in a not-perfectly familiar language made completely unnecessary his one mumbled apology for the way he talked. André earned the respect of all who met him, not to mention the lasting impression all the adjudicators made concerning the importance and viability of Canadian filmmaking and Canadian culture in general.

The Yorkton International Film Festival is a good festival, with the potential to be great. It was generally agreed that the hiring of a full-time executive secretary, done for the first time this year, contributed most significantly to its success. Important people across Canada and in other parts of the world know it's here, and are committed to its continued success. The people of Yorkton, and the festival directors have, virtually on their own, kept the festival going, on a biennial basis, longer than any other in North America. They received enough adulation for that fact this year to last them at least a decade. It is time to come to the realiz-

ation that many of the problems Humphries and the board had to battle so valiantly to overcome at this festival are largely of their own making. The festival is run as a one-shot cultural event that pops up every second year, and then vanishes lock, stock, budget and Board for the next 18 months. Hence the organizational nightmares. As such, the festival reached its maximum potential this year, and only an experienced and work-crazy executive secretary made that possible. The Yorkton Festival has convinced film people that it has merit and potential, and that it is going to stick around for a good while longer. It's time the organizers convinced themselves of that fact, and started treating it accordingly, with ongoing organizing, planning, and fundraising. Even the possibility of an annual film festival is worth considering; the increase in work on events would be balanced by the elimination of going through the start-up motions every second year.

The Yorkton Film Festival works well artistically and publicly in its international format. Suggestions that it be made a strictly national festival at this point are out of line and suspect. The festival has the distinction of being the documentary film festival in Canada; there is no reason to make it *the* Canadian film festival. There was certainly no evidence of any Canadian films being crowded out by the international representation. All the awards went to Canadian efforts. No one can deny that the festival's major impact and major encouragement is to Canadian films and filmmakers. Why turn it into an introverted nationalistic affair, pointlessly cutting out the opportunity for some international standard of comparison, for the public as well as for the film people? □

THE WINNERS

Best Cinematography

Cooperate, Mercury Pictures, Vancouver

Best Experimental Film

Growing Up At Paradise, Canadian Filmmakers Distribution Centre, Toronto

Best Nature & Wildlife Film

Return Of The Winged Giants, Dan Gibson Productions Ltd, Toronto

Best Children's Film

Illusion, Societe Radio-Canada, Montreal

Best Promotion Film

In **The Spirit Of Our Forefathers**, Saskatchewan Indian Cultural College, Saskatoon

Best Information Film

V.D. The Disease You Love To Get, Tinsel & Sham Productions Ltd, Edmonton

Best Animation

Le Paysagiste / Mindscape – NFB, Montreal

Best TV Drama

Honor Thy Father, CBC-TV, Toronto

Best Arts Film

Blackwood, NFB Montreal. This film has also won the *Best Sound Editing* award.

Best Sports & Recreation Film

I'll Go Again, NFB, Montreal. This film also wins *Best Films Editing*.

Best Documentary

Los Canadienses, NFB, Montreal.

Best Actress

Jackie Burroughs, **If Wishes Were Horses**, Insight Productions Inc., Toronto.

Best Actor

Gordon Pinsent, **Horse Latitudes**, Roxebud Productions, Toronto. This film has also won the festival awards for *Best Adventure Film* and *Best Director* Peter Rowe.

Golden Sheaf Award

High Grass Circus, NFB, Montreal.