

IN AND OUT OF THE MOVIES

gerald pratley

Canada's English-speaking film endeavors seem awash with "co-productions" these days; that hybrid form which only the French and Italians seem to pull off without a one-sided use of technicians and actors, and an undue sacrifice of native qualities.

Businessmen in films see only dollar signs, and without knowing what they are talking about declare that co-production is the only way to "create a viable industry," whatever that means, in "smaller countries" such as Canada.

In Canada, when producers speak of co-productions they mean movies made to look like second-rate American films, complete with second-rate American players, preferably written and directed by second-rate Americans, and in which everything Canadian (**Black Christmas**, for example) is disguised to look American.

Making films this way is supposed to open those magic doors to the American marketplace, where they will be gratefully received as "international pictures" by eager distributors and audiences, and thus make fortunes for their producers. The fact that this seldom happens (partly because the films are awful and the US has enough second-rate productions of its own) deters Canadian businessmen and politicians not at all. Any mediocre person arriving from the States with a 'proposition' will get a favorable welcome and an interview in the *Toronto Star*. And sad to say, the CFDC (the Canadian Film Development Corporation) is now involved in this dubious practice.

It is with some interest then that we watch a departure in kind as the first Anglo-Canadian co-production, **Ragtime Summer**, completes its five-week shooting schedule in Lakefield, Ontario, on the Severn River about 100 miles from Toronto.

Although the screenplay is by the Toronto writer and actor, Ratch Wallace (previously he made an interesting short subject, **The Match**), and everyone connected with the picture is going to great pains to call it a "Canadian-Anglo" film (very awkward phrasing!) this is really a British film of a Canadian story shot on location where it is supposed to take place. In this respect it is at least honest to its characters and background.

David Warner plays an English teacher who comes to a small Ontario town in the early

1920s and becomes involved in politics (he was a conscientious objector during the war) and women, the latter being a wealthy widow with a British background (Honor Blackman) and the headmaster's daughter, played by the young Canadian actress Trudy Young. (She was the fated girl in George McGowan's **Face-Off**.)

Other Canadian actors playing supporting roles are Tim Henry (seen with Michael Sarrazin in **Eye of the Cat**), Cec Linder (several UK films to his credit) and Lois Maxwell, James Bond's Miss Moneybags.

The lighting cameraman, Brian West, is from London, although he was here to photograph **Duddy Kravitz** and **Russian Roulette**. The sound recordist, David Bowen, editor Kirk Jones, producer George Willoughby and director Alan Bridges are here from London. Three horses in the scene being shot are local!

The money (\$175,000) is coming from the CFDC, the Rank Organization and Odeon Theatres of Canada - one of Canada's two "foreign-owned" circuits.

Everyone is working quietly and efficiently (in spite of almost constant rain) and the fact that the small budget precludes all the help behind the camera a director might want. Alan Bridges, whose remarkable picture **The Hireling** was shown, and destroyed, on commercial TV the night before, took cheese and biscuits for lunch under dripping trees, and remarked that he hadn't thought much about the film as a co-production.

"I was shown the screenplay, I liked it, but it needed work. I was asked to direct it. We've come here to do it as well as we can. But I can see that, successful or not, it doesn't do very much to further Canadian production. You've simply got to make your own films with your own people. There's enough talent in Canada to do this. But that's not my concern, is it? I want to make a film which I hope audiences will like and reflect credit on all those who made it."

Politics aside, the rain reminded him of the weather during the filming of the car rides in **The Hireling**, a film he is pleased to have made. **Out of Season** is a film he'd rather forget. "I'll never get involved in an arrangement like that again. I didn't really care for the script, but I wanted to work with Vanessa. The two writers took over the film, took it to Los Angeles and re-edited it. The result is not my original film."

He thinks that the continuation of film production in England depends on low-budget pictures. "To pour millions into one or two big pictures is wasteful. Several smaller films made for the same amount of money would give everybody more work, and if some of them fail, the loss is much less than an expensive film that fails." □

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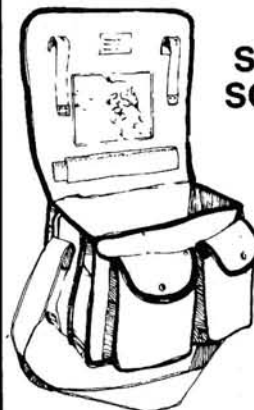
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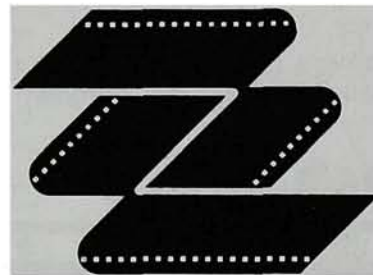
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