

IN AND OUT OF THE MOVIES

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Enough has been written about Festival of Festivals, much of it foolish in its misplaced admiration for such a ramshackle event; but one important aspect of the behavior of its promoter, William Marshall, remains unmentioned. It is his childish condemnation, joined by the anti-American faction of the film community, of American producers and distributors who refused to give him films.

This has been interpreted by him and by certain reporters as a sign of disdain for Canada on the part of the Americans, and the usual comments were trotted out about "colonization," and of our lucrative market being considered the back door of the USA. Once again, figures in the millions were used regarding the amount of rental money taken out of Canada, in return for which, the complainers argue, the festival received nothing.

Producers and distributors – whether they are American or Mongolian, for that matter – try to do what they think is best for their films when it comes time to release them to cinemas. In our deep interest in films, we may or may not agree with their decisions, but they have the right to make them. It is their investments which are at stake.

There is no rule or special understanding which says that producers of any country must submit to festivals films requested of them by promoters or directors. The producers will send them if they think it is in their interest to do so; if not, there is no other reason why they should. And American producers use this approach for festivals in their own country as well as those abroad.

Why should Mr. Marshall, then, think that he is being discriminated against? What makes him think that producers have a special obligation to him because his event is Canadian? American producers have refused films to festivals all over the world, many of them famous, including those held in the USA, when they felt that a festival showing would not be beneficial to their pictures.

Why should producers give films costing millions of dollars free of charge to a festival which is unknown to them, has not yet proved itself, and is run by people who have yet to establish their credibility? And why would any festival want to show the films Marshall asked for (*Bound for Glory*, among others)? It is not that they are unimportant, but they are not 'festival films,' and are assured of regular exhibition. They were wanted primarily for the greater commercial success of the festival.

Those who joined him in his anti-American comments failed to point out that one of Montreal's most successful festival evenings was the showing of Arthur Penn's *Bonnie and Clyde*, and that over the years the Stratford International Film Festival never had any real difficulties ob-

taining films it wanted from American companies. How, then, can they be criticized as being indifferent to Canada?

The fact is that Marshall did not give anyone much reason to trust his competence to run a major expensive film festival. His grandstanding aroused doubts as to the true nature of the event, which sounded more like a circus than an artistic manifestation.

Many of his claims were absurd, including the leading one in which he said he was working with other festival directors to obtain films which they show. Anyone who professes to know anything about festivals should be aware of the fact that no director has the authority to give to another festival a film submitted to his event. He does not even have the right to send films made by filmmakers in his own country. Only the producer can grant this permission – working, in some cases, on the advice of his distributor.

Another aspect to the event which is discouraging to people working in the cause of film appreciation is that among the many films so enthusiastically described by Natalie Edwards and other commentators, no less than 15 had already been shown by Canada's repertory cinemas, cinema-theques, film theatres and the CFFS, and at the time of their showings, particularly in Toronto, they were ignored by the press which found them so praiseworthy when shown at the festival.

Why is it that some reviewers become ecstatic over showings which are part of a festival of some kind, but remain uninterested when the same films are accessible through regular means of exhibition? Snobbism, perhaps?

There is nothing wrong with the festival showing these films again. Not everyone could see them at their previous showings. But for the festival to make out that these were premieres was hardly being honest.

Furthermore, there are many observers who wonder about ethical considerations when *Saturday Night*, which has not previously shown interest in other Canadian film festivals, accompanies a large advertisement from the festival with a laudatory article before the event takes place; and of the propriety of our NFB in seconding its knowledgeable director of promotion to a festival which was frankly commercial in outlook and associated itself in "promotions" with commercial companies.

The final hypocrisy in all this is the behavior of Marshall as a leader of the Canadian film community. As the president of CAMPP, the Canadian Association of Motion Picture Producers, he speaks up regularly against the exploitation of Canada by American film companies. He sincerely believes in his cause. He even came to the Canadian Film Awards meeting just before the Awards began and said he would resign on principle should the committee allow the CMPDA, the American-dominated distributing organization, to present its award on television.

Believing this, he should not then go to the same companies he is attacking and ask them to assist him with films for his festival. And even worse, when they refuse, turn around and attack them yet again. This is surely inconsistent with any ideals he and his association uphold.

A true "nationalist", it seems, would take pleasure in organizing his festival without asking for the participation of the major American companies, and making it so successful that, in time, they would come to him. After all, if we are so dominated by them, and they send us all their films in the regular course of exhibition, what could he want to show that will not be seen in the cinemas?

It is all childish *in extremis*. No wonder so many Americans look across the border and see only a nursery school.