

cannes

To hear some tell it, Cannes was a dog show and Canada, the ill-behaved mutt which was fighting its way upward. For one such jaundiced view, read on...

the year of the bourge

by Ronald H. Blumer



La Dentellière, a Swiss film – one of the best – which you probably won't see in your neighborhood theatre

It is a curious chemistry of political and social ingredients which dictates what sort of films show up as official selections at Cannes. The subject and style of a film is 'in' one year and is as dated as the hula-hoop the next. Last year, 'third world' films were fashionable; next year maybe it will be art films. This year is the year of the bourgeois film – the decor films with pretty sets, neurotic people and fashionable ideas. So this year, the official films matched the fairyland atmosphere of the Riviera with its \$3.00 ham sandwiches and \$4.00 cocktails.

The Riviera, of which Cannes is one tiny particularly vulgar outcropping, lives off three things: flowers, perfumes and tourists. There are no other industries although I read in a local newspaper that there are big plans afoot for the opening of a new research center on the mating habits of the butterfly. Cannes, like any other ocean vacation town has its crowded beaches, then the main drag – "La Croisette", – a row of huge hotels including the \$100 a night Carleton and a train station.

During the winter and spring it takes on the air of a floating old age home with pensioners from all over France strolling out to sit on the deck chairs (one franc) and to watch the bathers and the Mediterranean. There is really nothing all year to disturb this peaceful ebb and flow of people and money except for this crazy wild aberration of a film festival which bursts upon this sleepy vacation land once a year, forty thousand strong.

"It's not a film festival, it's a dog show!" someone commented and indeed what was going on up and down the Croi-

sette rivaled whatever was happening inside the screening rooms. Part of this dog show were the buyers and sellers of films – which is what Cannes is really about. Along with the clowns, the stuffed animals, the would-be, are, and have-been movie stars, the topless, bottomless and middle-less men, women and etceteras “dragéing” up and down the promenade were the real live Rizzolis, Reichenbachs and Nat Cohens and their real live cigars, slicing the world into hardtops and drive-ins and trading South American rights for West Germany with an option on next year’s production package sight unseen. Grierson used to call them “the thugs” but he was careful to make friends with them and frequently hung out in their haunts in New York.

It is these buyers who are the ultimate target of the millions and millions of dollars of publicity lavished on these two weeks - in proportions as epic as any film they could possibly be pushing. There are four daily magazines of 20 to 30 pages each covering the events and giving schedules but mainly providing a fat and glossy vehicle for the advertisers. As an official member of the press, one receives a staggering 60 pounds of flyers, brochures, photographs and, for major films, forty-page press books, some in full color. Outside, along the Croisette, lit and rotating billboards proclaim this year’s **Return of the Exorcist**, **Return of the Earthquake**, in short, return of whatever made money last year; James Bond has even returned from the dead. The biggest publicity splash this year was being lavished on a film which hasn’t even been finished. Will the world be ready for **Superman** starring Marlon Brando as Superman’s father and Canada’s own Margot Kidder as Lois Lane? The cost of the publicity spent on this not yet completed film with airplanes flying overhead, billboards everywhere and ten page ads in many of the publications should easily surpass Canada’s film production budget for the year.

And how did Canada stack up against the King Kongs? Extremely well – we may be small but we are awfully pushy. The fact that there were two Canadian films officially competing in the festival and another 15 films at the Marché was not lost on the organizers of Cinema Canada (no relation) whose three-room suite in the Carleton a couple of doors down from Warner Brothers boasted a Cannes first: a video projection system with cassettes of all the Canadian films at Cannes. With this set-up, it was possible for buyers and journalists to see films on demand. With screening schedules looking like something from the Turkish railroad system, this service proved to be very useful. But Canadian pushiness didn’t stop at the official level.

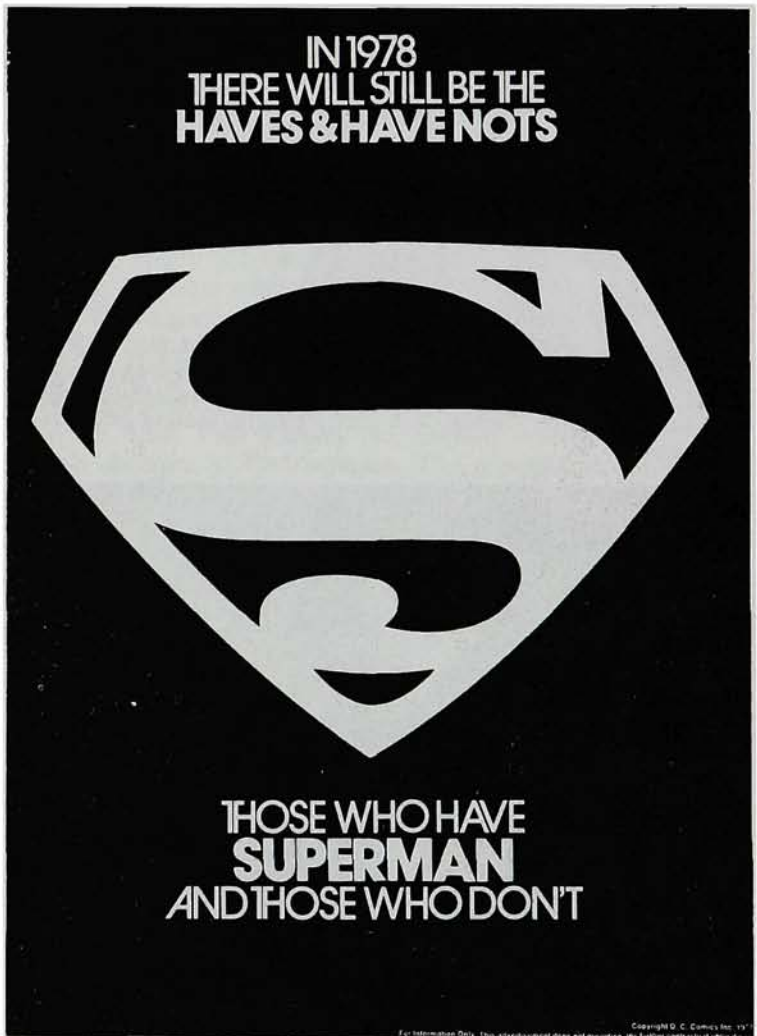
With every other country relatively well behaved - sticking to the officially approved methods of publicity (billboards, airplanes, groups of large stuffed animals carrying signs walking down the Croisette, painted cars, fire-eaters, etc.), nasty little stickers began defacing sidewalks and public monuments. **Rabid** kept sticking to your shoes as you crossed the street and **Cathy’s Curse** glared at you with her electric eyes from every second lamp post. It was a wonderful testament to the Duddy Kravitz spirit of our country that even in the midst of the most elegant cocktail party we couldn’t behave ourselves. Perhaps the David and Goliath award should go the producers of **The Rubber Gun**, a Canadian film at the Marché. Armed with nothing more than a stencil and a can of spray paint, bands of renegades would steal out in the middle of the night, and while the Nat Cohens and Rossis were obviously sleeping off their wine and quail diners, sidewalks, walls and streets would be-

Ronald H. Blumer, Montreal filmmaker and professor, has just returned from a 6-month stint in Tunisia where he worked with a video group under the auspices of SUCO.

come living billboards for **The Rubber Gun**. For one member of the spray team the big fear was not whether he was going to be caught by the police, but whether he was going to have the humiliating experience of being seen by some starlet on his hands and knees painting the curb. On the second night the worst happened; as he was defacing a fashionable crosswalk he looked up to find himself at the feet of the original Ilsa of porno film fame - boots and all - looking down at him with a mixture of amazement and contempt.

The second worst behaved country was our Commonwealth cousin - Australia, and particularly a man pushing a film with the delightful title **Pure Shit**. Notices for it kept appearing on the bums of all the haughty statues in the parks.

One wonders whether all the waste and decadence and hoopla, so amazingly concentrated during this two week stock market, is the cause or the effect of the emptiness of films in recent years. Among all the fashion and tinsel, tucked away at some obscure screening time, there is the occasional wonderful film from Tunisia, or Poland, from small independents from the United States – oh yes, and from Canada. Without publicity and the requisite number of stars, it has no chance of reaching our local hardtops. Part of the system seems to be that many wonderful films made throughout the world are lost in the crevices of the huge multi-film, multi-national distribution deals. The original idea of the Cannes Film Festival was to promote merit over money but this year, even if a relatively sensitive and unpretentious film did win the Palme d’or, the official events were totally dwarfed by the multi-million dollar horse trades. So, like it or not, Cannes or not, next year we’ll all be seeing **Superman** as the dinosaur film industry stomps its way to extinction. □



It's a bird, it's a plane...

Cannes 1977: formal ...

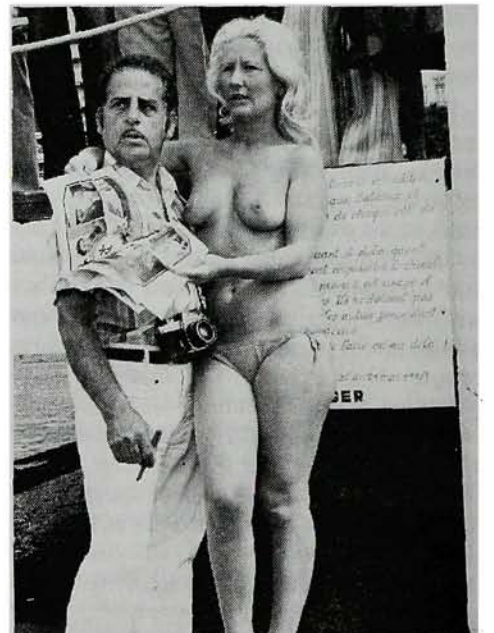
or informal



Anouk Ferjac, Marcel Sabourin, Myriam Boyer, Jean-Pierre Lefebvre and Marguerite Duparc-Lefebvre going to the Grand Palais



Sabourin, Monique Mercure and Jean Beaudin, radiant after the screening of J.A. Martin **photographe**



Starlets all..?

photos by Federico



Federal-province small talk: Jean Lefebvre from Festivals Bureau with Michel Brulé and Michel Chabot from the DGCA-Quebec.