

the nitty gritty

If you can't sell it, it's no good. According to some.

by Connie Tadros

There may be a lot of noise and nonsense at Cannes, but there is also a lot of hard work being done by those who love the movies and/or make a living from them. The concentration of distributors and world sales agents (the buyers and the sellers) make Cannes unique. As the American Irving Shapiro commented, after stating that he does in 2 weeks at Cannes what it would take him 6 months to do without it, "The echoes of Cannes go all year round." Well, let's hope so. This year Shapiro handled three Canadian films.

Like last year, Cinepix came up the biggest winner, grossing over \$500,000 in advances for David Cronenberg's **Rabid** before the festival had ended. André Link, well seconded by Werner Wolfe from Cinepix's Paris office and Rita Rita Leone, was in constant motion, suggesting that one call him around 8 a.m. if there was anything important. For Link, Cannes means keeping about half the scheduled appointments, appearing at his screenings and knowing who has showed up. The sheer energy pays off.

How else could he have also got a reported \$200,000 in advances for a frightful little Franco-Canadian co-production called **Cathy's Curse**? Or pre-sell the third of the Ilsa films, **The Tigress**, now being edited? According to Link, "If you have a good film, your grandmother can sell it. You may not get the right prices, you may not get the right deal, you might deal with a crook, but you will sell it. Lack of sales at Cannes does not mean that the person was inexperienced, but that the product is unmarketable." Sounds easy, doesn't it?

Irving Shapiro has a solid reputation as one of the best agents in New York, and producer Larry Hertzog chose him to sell **Why Shoot the Teacher** because Shapiro was the man to break into the American market. As well, he handled **Full Circle** for Julien Melzack and **The Rubber Gun** for Allan Moyle. A mixed bag indeed!

Just before the festival ended, the sales were reported to be as follows: \$300,000 for **Why Shoot** with another \$150,000 in negotiation; \$150,000 for **Full Circle** with about \$75,000 pending; and a surprising \$50,000 already in for **The Rubber Gun**.

Checking back with Shapiro in early July, it seems that the figures have all shot up, but just what they are now remains a well guarded secret. As for that deal with the States for **Teacher**, Shapiro says, "It's a matter of our accepting it. We think we've done remarkably well and I don't think there's any reason to rush the film."

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Meanwhile, Hertzog – who was counting on the American release to provide the coattails for the Canadian opening – finally decided to go it alone and opened the film in Ottawa in late June. He also 'premiered' it in Edmonton on July 1, a nice trick if you can pull it off – his birthday present to the nation.

Full Circle, an Anglo-Canadian co-production and the first of the Classic Film ventures starring Mia Farrow was a disappointment at Cannes: a weak and drifting story which tried hard to be suspenseful. The sales reflected this. But Cannes gives producers a second chance, and now a new sequence is being shot; a response, no doubt, to the public's first exposure. Shapiro insists that "important deals are being closed around the world... **Full Circle** is running out very fast, and will be an important film." Sales are confirmed in the United Kingdom, Italy, Spain and Latin America. It opens at Christmastime in Australia.

The Rubber Gun, Moyle's first film and the spiritual sequel to **Montreal Main**, has been sold in the US to a new distribution company. Shapiro commented that he expects the film to have a long, slow career.

And after all the ballyho, what of Bill Marshall's crew and **Outrageous**? Well, they were, all of them. There was style if not substance, and even *Maclean's*' Bill Miller was taken in by it. The film attracted a lot of attention, and got invitations to many a festival. By the end, no sales were made, though "interest was shown", as they say.

By the beginning of July, the US sale had been made; Steinman Baxter of New York will handle it, opening in August. According to Marshall, "We got a nice advance and a favorable distribution percentage." The reader may supply the figures. Like **Full Circle**, the Cannes screening has led to some changes in **Outrageous**. The commercial version will be 6 minutes less outrageous than the film screened at the festival.)

Talking about outrageous changes, just a note in passing to say that Gille Carle's film **L'ange et la femme**, which met with a hostile reception in Montreal and closed quickly, was cut by the director *before* going to Cannes. The most pornographic sequence was eliminated because Carle felt that the audience lost sympathy with the heroine (Carole Laure) at that point. It made little difference. Robert Lantos, the disappointed producer, reported a small sale to France and a nibble from Sweden, but nothing to write home about.

Harold Greenberg was there, selling a picture of his own for the first time. **Rituals** was well received, and was sold in 11 countries by Mark Damon from California, and Astral's Maurice Attias. Greenberg, who left Cannes after the first week, felt that Astral had learned a lot from this first selling expedition and will return, better prepared – "a potent force" – next year. Meanwhile, the distribution company bought about 15 films there.

This was the year of the National Film Board, but whether the NFB was able to shrug off its bureaucratic lethargy to get out there and scramble remains to be seen. At Cannes, it worked like this:

The Board hired a French public relations firm to deal with the receptions and press conferences, and its image had never been stronger. To boot, it had a film in competition **J.A. Martin photographe** by Jean Beaudin, and 2 films in side events **One Man** by Robin Spry, and **Ethnocide** by Paul Leduc. So far, so good. All three directors were present, as were the stars of **J.A. Martin**. On top of it all, Monique Mercure walked away with the prize for the best actress, an event which made the Montreal box-office for **J.A.** jump from \$5,000 to \$15,300 within a week, and this, after 16 weeks of viewing.

As if the warm critical response to **J.A.** didn't suffice, **One Man** was also getting an enthusiastic welcome. Distributors were knocking at the NFB's doors, trying to get this 'made-for-television' film for their theatres. Add the Olympic film, and you have winners all around.

Or do you? The official representative of the NFB at Cannes is the Paris rep, Yves Blanchard: it's in his territory. David Nobek and André Lamy were also on hand to handle the p.r. duties, and the general manager of the London office was about.

Blanchard takes down names of interested distributors, feeds them back to the local NFB reps in the offices in New York, London, South America, Australia, etc. They, in turn, get back in touch with the distributor, and work out the deals.

Is it fair to say that the NFB will do in 6 months what it takes the other sales agents 2 weeks at Cannes to do?

In mid-June, the NFB still didn't have a Canadian distributor for **One Man**, though the pressure was so great that screenings were to be organized. As for **J.A. Martin photographe**, André Lamy stated recently that there are no immediate plans to make an English version or to distribute the film in English Canada. Mind you, the English subtitles already exist; we saw them in Cannes! *Plus ça change...*

Cannes did mark a serious set-back for the commercial Quebecois film. Neither Claude Fournier's **Je suis loin de toi mignonne** nor André Brassard's **Le soleil se lève en retard** made any sales despite their strong box-office in Quebec.

Pierre David from Mutuel lamented that the future of filming in Quebec rested upon making films in English. The as yet unfinished **Panique** by Jean-Claude Lord was pre-sold to 3 countries for \$75,000 and many other deals are pending the final version of the film. Had **Panique** been available in English, David thinks he could have tripled his sales.

A few other films which weren't ready nevertheless had encouraging sales on the basis of the promotional material at Cannes. Ed Hunt's **Alien Encounter** was reported to have been sold throughout the Far East with the exception of Hong Kong. No spokesman was on hand to provide a complete round-up. Producer Garth Drabinsky's co-production **The Disappearance**, handled by Arnold Lopelson, was also doing well; Drabinsky predicts that the film will recoup its costs before release. For the time being, it has sold in over 20 countries though the buyers in the big markets – the UK, the US, France and Germany – are waiting to see the finished film before committing themselves.

For seven years, the Secretary of State Department has fielded support staff to second the efforts of the Canadians who go to Cannes to buy and sell. Jean Lefebvre, director of the Film Festivals Bureau, has headed up this effort for the

last four years and feels that it is well worth the time and energies of his department. Whether or not he will be able to continue lending this support without a renewed commitment from the SOS is in question.

Organizing for Cannes (preparing pamphlets, holding jury screenings, sub-titling, the costs of the operation) eats up half of the yearly budget (\$400,000) of the Festivals Bureau: Of the \$200,000 spent, Lefebvre estimates that about \$100,000 goes for activities whose benefits are felt throughout the year, and \$100,000 is uniquely spent for Cannes. Over the years, he has had no budget increase, and each year, he has cut down the size of the staff sent to Cannes. (Just a note; to the great confusion of all concerned, the Festivals Bureau is called 'Cinema Canada' when it works abroad. Only our magazine has the right to use the name on Canadian soil)

This year, with its diminished staff, the Bureau seemed to function more efficiently than in previous years. The Canadian Film Development Corp. set up a marketing section within the Cinema Canada offices, and the Province of Quebec set up shop as well. Even Peter Skinner from the Province of Ontario was officially on hand, though without office space within the delegation.

It seemed to offend no one that the Direction générale du cinéma (Québec) had the provincial flag flying freely on its desk top as its three representatives studied the 'Cannes situation' in earnest. In Cannes, harmony reigns in a common effort to breakout internationally. Nevertheless, the odds have it that Quebec will send a separate representation next year, and focus on a booth either in the Hotel Carlton lobby or in the Palais des Festivals.

The government support is a great help to the weaker, uninitiated producers and distributors who must master the 'folly of Cannes' quickly if they are to function well. The old hands can get along on their own, though it's always nice to have Cinema Canada around.

This year, a distinction was made between the films on the Marché and those of 'cultural' importance. The latter were the five films chosen to participate in the competition, and in the complementary events. The Cinema Canada staff – and principally Jacqueline Brody – was decisive in getting press coverage and recognition for these films. Should it not be present in future years, the cultural impact of Canadian films would be significantly diminished at Cannes. Culturally, the 'echos of Cannes' include a great many invitations to other festivals, and the creation of a general awareness of Canadian films.

Bill Marshall called Cannes a tribal village: "You show your film at 2 o'clock and by 5 pm you've got feedback from a dozen people. You know what they think." Irving Shapiro said the same thing when he talked about the concentrated audience reaction. It can *make* a film which might otherwise fall flat in a lonely screening room.

At Cannes, you get down to the nitty gritty. A film is shown, in front of an audience, to the critics and distributors who ultimately will determine who will see the film. As Shapiro says, "I think that it's important to finally display your wares to the ultimate audience, and while it's not the best cross section, it's the only cross section in the world which is available to critics, and buyers, and I think it works."

This year, it worked well for Canada. The films themselves were better than in previous years, and they sold better too. And until someone has a better idea, sales at Cannes will continue to be a dominant element in the future of Canada's film industry. □