Ivan Reitman's 
Meatballs

Dan Goldberg, Len Blum, Janis Allen ph. Don 
Wilder sd. Richard Lightstone p. designer 
Judy Gellman Lp. Bill Murray, Kate Lynch, 
Russ Banham, Margot Pinvidic, Todd Hof- 
man, Norma Dell'Agnesse, Jack Blum, Sarah 
Torgov, Keith Knight, Kristine Debelle, Matt 
Craven, Cindy Girling exec. p. John Dunning, 
André Link p. Dan Goldberg p. manager Bob 
Baylles p.c. Haliburton Films Production, 
1978 col. 35 mm Can. dist. Cinepix

All the ingredients are there: the pom­ 
pous camp director, the over-sexed head 
counsellor, the not-too-good looking 
female staff, dozens of screaming kids, 
and of course, the ritzy rival encampment 
across the lake. Meatballs depicts the 
typical summer camp. From ingenious 
pranks to romantic flings, the spirit of 
many a summer month in the Haliburton 
wilderness is recaptured for those lucky 
enough to have attended one of these 
camps. For those who lack the experience, 
the film offers ninety minutes of good fun, 
laughter and release.

Canadian successor to Ivan Reitman's 
Animal House (a film about a fraternity 
of rejects situated somewhere in the mid-
U.S.), Meatballs employs the same basic 
style of slapstick humour.

Bill Murray, as head Meatball at Camp 
North Star, is much like the Belushi 
character in Animal House. In fact, both 
Belushi and Murray owe their exposure 
to Saturday Night Live. Murray also 
toured with the original troupe of Second 
City, so he comes to the Canadian setting 
well-seasoned for his role as Tripper, the 
quick-witted camp clown. At times he 
tends to be as obnoxious as Belushi and 
yet holds a kind of fascination for the 
viewer. Tripper is the counsellor who 
might be voted Most Likely To Succeed 
— be it through consoling a homesick 
camper or 'making it' with one of his 
female associates when the campfire is 
over.

From the word 'go' we see the side of 
camp life that is most remembered — not 
the petty arguments or too much of the 
homesickness, but mostly the fun and 
comradeship that evolves after two weeks 
at a summer retreat.

The opening scene introduces the film's 
two rival camps. Larry Solway, as part of 
the news crew covering the beginning of 
the summer camp season, interviews 
Murray to find out about camp life. Mur­ 
ray, however, pretending to be the direc­ 	or of the rival camp, Mohawk, across the 
lake, advertises its loose lifestyle and 
degenerate game-playing. All this is said 
with a dead pan expression belying Mur­ 
ray's dry wit.

The annual Olympiad provides the 
focus for the good-spirited rivalry between 
the two camps. Predictably, the good 
guys seem to lose at everything. Mohawk 
has the better players, better uniforms, 
and even the better looks. How could 
they lose? Then there's North Star — 
they've got Tripper, and... well, you don't 
even wonder why they lose, 'cause after
all they're a bunch of meatballs. But they do have spirit and they do know how to play dirty! With Tripper's cheer of "It just doesn't matter," the Meatballs go nuts. They turn Globetrotters with their antics on the basketball court and win, buns down, in the hotdog-eating contest.

This year North Star is determined to win. After much contestation about who is to replace the injured Cindy in the big finale, the cross-country race, the task is entrusted to Rudy, the camp runt. In a magnificent sequence following Rudy and his Mohawk opponent through the surrounding woods, Rudy's runt-turned-star performance earns North Star the gold medal for the first time in the history of the two camps.

No camp life would be complete without at least a hint of illicit sex. Meatballs abounds in inoffensive innuendoes — and the occasional offensive one as well! The CITs (counsellors-in-training), provide the entertainment as they conduct their own sex education course. The initiation of Nerd, one of the junior staff, takes the male half of the crew on a mission to the girls' cabin, where a typical hen session, complete with 'true romance' magazine readings, is underway. Safely tucked under the cabin, the guys settle in for some cheap thrills — a perfect setting for the slapstick humour to follow. The girls, discovering their peeping toms, succeed in partially disrobing them and scattering them helter-skelter back to their own cabin — the battle lost, but the war just begun!

Although the critics haven't been overly kind, Meatballs has proved to be a great Canadian box office success. With its more-or-less universal theme, the film appeals to all ages and all persuasions. The difficulties encountered in shooting the film with so many amateurs — including the actual campers of a session at White Pines — seem to have been worth it in the end. Ivan Reitman, I sympathize.

Michele Maheux

André Blanchard's L'Hiver Bleu


Now that Canada and Quebec have entered an era of big-budget productions — for better, for worse, and for however long — some old questions have been raised. Is marketability incompatible with artistic vision? Do investment returns rate higher than didacticism and the altering of our sensibilities? What about national cinema? Are big production values inseparable from political bias (most often capitalist)?

Answers to these questions may be offered by considering two recent, would-be, anti-establishment, Hollywood films: Apocalypse Now and China Syndrome. Both are less successful in shaking the status quo than in glorifying the big-buck technology and power-hungry mentality they decry. Both are slick products which inspire awe and stupefy. (Apocalypse is a great recruiting film, China Syndrome a star vehicle for U.S. back-up systems that work.) Considering this, and the Canadian social and political problems which won't disappear in a cloud of Clark's consensus, L'Hiver Bleu (Blue Winter) can be neither sunk because it's out of synch, nor obliterated for its blizzard of graininess.

Moreover, this one-hour and 20-minute film, written and directed by unknown André Blanchard, appears to have been hand-crafted with his friends, and compleated with the help of most of Rouyn Noranda's population, businesses and community organizations — which also star.

As a decidedly low-budget Quebecois film, L'Hiver Bleu is interesting for several reasons. First, it may be an anachronistic postscript to the wave of films made independently by Quebecois for Quebecois. This 'movement' peaked in the early 70's and faded with the P.Q.'s election — for which it may in part be thanked or blamed, depending on one's political persuasion and belief in the extent to which films actually sensitize populations, culturally and politically. Certainly these films provided training for many now working on the big-budget—mostly English—films.

Second, L'Hiver Bleu could be the first ripple in a new wave, by a new generation of independent filmmakers. Like its predecessors it touches on problems of labour, the disaffected students and their instructors, the young unemployed, the family, and language. Unlike its predecessors, this film dwells little on sexual awakening — which seems a fait accompli, considering jokes about 52 orgasms! The young appear afflicted with late '70s ennui, in contrast to the fervent political and social commitment of the '60s.

Third, the problems explored are not necessarily the consequences of Quebec's relationship with Canada. Rather, they seem to arise from regional disparities and difficulties in communicating with Quebec City. The climax — if there is one — comes when, after a struggle, the leader of the Association des Accidentés (The Rouyn Noranda Injured Workers