

cannes~did!

by marc gervais

'Anything goes' could be the motto for the international Cannes Film Festival — because everything does! And everyone! Marc Gervais takes a critical look at this year's Cannes bonanza.



Lorca (Carole Laure) is sitting pretty in Gilles Carle's new musical *Fantastica* — Canada's official entry at this year's Cannes festival

Cannes continues to be the film happening of the year; a huge, two-week conglomeration of various aspects of film life, a multi-faceted phenomenon that serves up so many different kinds of dishes to so many different kinds of film palates. . . Nothing newsworthy in that.

As ever, though, Cannes 1980 did give us a few of those transcendent Moments — those occasions when the tawdry and the false give way to a celebration of humanity, and a recognition of service, talent, and human excellence — an extended tribute to Hitchcock, presided by Her Serene Highness, Grace (Kelly); a star-studded gala honouring Danny Kaye for his years of work for UNICEF; and the return of Akira Kurosawa to a standing ovation by hundreds of critics.

Cannes, of course, continues to be of major interest to readers of **Cinema Canada**. For it serves as an incomparable show case, if nothing else, for the evolving Canadian presence on the world film scene. Is it only a decade ago that Canada scrambled for the crumbs at this film feast, snatching a few showings here, making a few film sales there? Today, 1980 — at Cannes, at least — Canada is one of the *majors*, topped, in sheer quantity, only by the Americans, French, and Italians. We are now Big Business indeed, with plenty of product, plenty of deals, and big money. Or so it seems.

Canadian Stars were very much in evidence, their features immortalized in the special Festival issues of *Variety et al.* . . . And those yachts! — no longer the exclusive preserve of European affluence and Hollywood moguls — were the *in* thing for Canadians, Canadian meetings, Canadian cocktails. . .

All of this has been duly recorded elsewhere, surely — including the enormous amount of Canadian activity, much of it orchestrated, as usual, by the model national film bureau at Cannes, run this year by the Canadian Film Development Corp. — and called Cinema Canada (no relative). Wheeler-dealing, as always, was very much in the air, and not only by Canadians, to be sure. One story that deserves more than passing notice: the first signs of what will revolutionize (and before long) film life, and film and TV viewing patterns were the video disc, video cassette and pay TV empires — or, rather, empires at the scrambling stage, trying to stake their claims in the Cannes gold fields.

But what about the *films themselves* — those aesthetic/commercial/cultural pro-

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ducts representing the world's output in this initial year of the 1980s? What were the trends? What about the quality? . . . Or, more germane to this journal, where do Canadian films, in this Year II of the Great Feature Film Explosion, fit into all of this?

To begin close to home — last year, American films exercised a domination, in world terms, that was all but embarrassing. And this, at the artistic level, as well as every other. This year's best American, entries, **All That Jazz** and **Being There**, served as convincing evidence that Hollywood is still right up there with the best. But the big news is that the Americans were not alone (as it were) at Cannes '80. As a matter of fact, 'the others' stole the show.

For example, the Polish cinema, so little-known in North America, furnished further indications that it is one of the most important in the contemporary world; at least as a moral and cultural force in its own country, raising questions that are helping shape the dynamically-evolving Polish political, social, and religious life. At the very forefront of this film movement is Krzysztof Zanussi, the forty-year-old intellectual who heads the so-called 'third wave' of Polish film life. Zanussi has reached the stage where only one Polish film director 'outranks' him (a word that may not be out of place when describing film life in Communist countries), and that is the older, legendary Wajda — most brilliant figure of the 'second wave,' whose beginnings date back to the early fifties.

Zanussi richly deserved his award as "Best Director" at Cannes this year, with the beautiful, probing, and typically-anguished offering, **Constans**. Zanussi

had another, perhaps even better film in the prestigious "Regards" section — the romantic **Voyage in the Night**. Cannes 1980, then, provided quite a show case for a film artist who is steadily growing in international film stature. One can only hope that this kind of exposure may yet cause Zanussi to be seen in other lands, perhaps even in our own culturally-inhibited movie houses.

Zanussi's case is an interesting one, for it illustrates an aspect of cinema that North Americans tend to write off as irrelevant to feature film. After all, isn't the only purpose of movies to "entertain"? — and, of course, to make money? Culture, conscience, national life, etc., etc. — what a bore, and how arty can we get. . . Indeed, it has all been said before, pro and con. And it is clear which attitude prevails from the Atlantic to the Pacific.

Other films, however, in a vein different from Zanussi's, might also make the Canadian film establishment pause and ponder. One such was **Breaker Morant**, an intelligent, entertaining, and remarkably well-made military tale directed by Bruce Beresford. Beresford, so far, has not received the international recognition that his fellow Aussies, Peter Weir and Fred Schepisi, have enjoyed (modest though it be). Nonetheless, his record in Australia is a remarkable one, and his **Breaker Morant** was generally considered one of the finest films in competition. In relation to the sister Commonwealth nation, it has to be admitted that for sheer craftsmanship and all-round filmmaking excellence **Breaker** leaves any recent Canadian effort far behind. It may also prove to be a very important movie in terms of the debate going on right now in Australia, so similar to our own, about a

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cinema that reflects a genuine national spirit versus one that enjoys great potential for an international audience. Beresford's film does both.

The *big news* at Cannes, this past May, however, and the phenomenon that caused most critics to agree that this was indeed the finest world festival in years, was the triumphant return of the great names that dominated the sixties (and perhaps even earlier decades). Surely the greatest age of world cinema was that period, say, between 1953 and 1968, when so many countries, movements, and magnificent individual artists reshaped the cinema, exploding upon the world scene with works of enormous human beauty and cultural significance.

A number of those great names were back in Cannes this year. Their works raise questions that may well be sobering for those of us filled with a flickering hope, even a cautious enthusiasm, for the present film possibilities in Canada.

Here are a number of observations (without any particular order or *raison d'être*) centred around some of these works:

1. Ingmar Bergman. Even he, the one gigantic figure who goes on making films on a regular basis — but the man who ducked out of being head of the Jury (after accepting) — was there, via a very modest, "home made" little documentary, *Farö File no. 2*. This film is hardly great cinema, but it is personal, warm, concerned, and it puts the lie to those who accuse Bergman of being aloof and not socially involved. For *Farö* is "his" Swedish Island; the one he returns to

periodically from his "exile" in Munich, where he filmed so many of his great works of recent years. As such, this minor work makes interesting viewing for Bergmanophiles.

2. Akira (King) Kurosawa. If Cannes '80 belonged to anyone, it belonged to this seventy-year-old legendary figure, whose *Kagemusha (The Double)* won the Palme d'or. The "Shakespeare of the Japanese Cinema" shows no diminution of power, and *Kagemusha* is an unashamed return to the epic cinema, and all the sweep and grandeur that that implies. With Ford, Hitchcock, Renoir, and Rossellini no longer part of the film scene, Kurosawa stands almost alone now as creator of a certain, magnificent, humanistic cinema.

Can the contemporary sensibility cope with this kind of human grandeur? The Japanese themselves obviously did not think so; and it was only the intervention of the three young American giants — Coppola, Spielberg, and Lucas — (with guaranteed investments and American distribution) that permitted Kurosawa to create yet one more masterpiece.

3. Marco Bellochio. One of the most promising of the young sixties' school in Italy, Bellochio is still essentially a throwback to that era. Socially committed to the Left — and therefore guaranteed sympathetic, not to say downright, overly-indulgent, treatment by a fragmented school of critics in Italy and abroad — Bellochio is nonetheless much more a creator of obsessional visions and experiences, plumbing into psychosis and aberration. His present offering,

Leap Into the Void, is typical; and to many (including this writer) it eventually proved boring and self-indulgent.

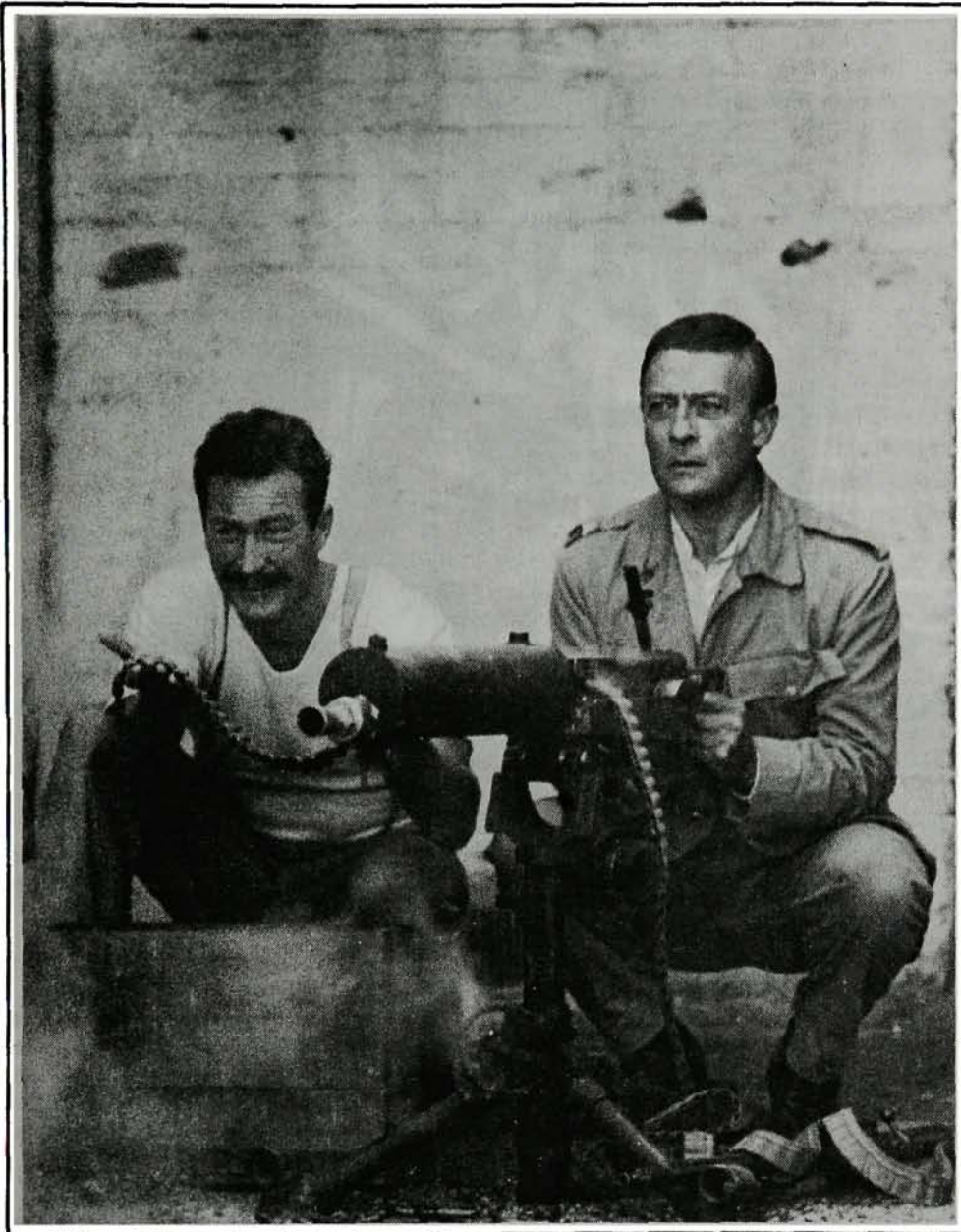
All of which makes one fear that the grand old trio of Rossellini, Visconti, and De Sica may well prove irreplaceable. Certainly, skilled, clever artisans of the ilk of Scola and Risi (unaccountably, it seems to me, present *again* at Cannes) are not in the same class. Pasolini's untimely death added to the enormous sense of loss one feels when contemplating the Italian film scene and those at work today. And yet, such is the Italian richness that one can still turn to the Taviani's, and above all to Ermanno Olmi.

4. And of course with Fellini and Antonioni still standing in the wings, who can long mourn a departed excellence? Federico Fellini's return to Cannes (out of competition) may not have been an unquestioned triumph, but *City of Women* is almost Fellini Grade A, a sort of sequel to *8 1/2*, with Marcello Mastroianni giving his winningest performance since last teaming up with Fellini in that film seventeen years ago. *City of Women* has neither the innovative genius nor the inward depth of the earlier film, but it has more of the Fellini verve, bounce, and ability to caricature-without-falling-into-the-grotesque than anything seen in many a year.

5. Wim Wenders/Nicholas Ray. *Lightning Over Water*, Wenders' "tribute" to Nicholas Ray, hardly fits into the category of "famous names of the sixties." Yet Wenders' cinema, among the best of the



Doing what they do best! The Americans entered a good western, *The Longriders* (above); a war film, *The Big Red One*; and *All That Jazz* — which took the Golden Palm award at Cannes



Coming to the defense of the Australian film industry was *Breaker Morant*: "one of the finest films in competition."

current 'new wave' in Europe, has the feel of that era. And Nicholas Ray, long a pathetic cult figure, already 'enjoyed' that status with many of the young sixties' directors. So, *Lightning Over Water* has a sixties-ish daring, personal, experimental, aggravating, self-gratifying quality. It is a movie to be *experienced*; strange, troubling, a dreadful memorial to the grotesque, cancer-ravaged dying Ray. To be sure, the film left many of us confused — unsure whether to admire Wenders' sincerity or to deplore his bad taste, perhaps even his opportunism. For there seems little doubt that Wenders desperately *wants* to be an *American* film director, to be 'in' — and that is in the film as well. So his own ambivalence, in filming Ray's dying days, may well be the final word in this unique document.

6. Jean-Luc Godard. How can one talk

of the free-wheeling, iconoclastic, effervescent cinema of the sixties without including Godard? And there he was, the same pale, fragmented, alienated, damned poet of the cinema, haunting Cannes' meretricious version of life's feast. The social relevance of *Sauve qui peut — sa vie (Slow Motion)* smacks of *déjà vu*, but the impudent mixture of wit, crudeness, despair, obscenity, pain, pixy-ishness — you name it — is as much in evidence as ever. The once sort-of-Maoist is probably closer than ever to nihilism in this, his "return to commercial cinema"; the disillusionment is still that of a romantic on the edge of despair, and Godard's film, whatever its limitations, still exercises a strange (albeit alienating and off-putting) power — at least for those who, like myself, entertain a certain nostalgia for the adventurous cinema of not so long ago.

7. Alain Resnais. If Kurosawa brought back Shakespearean sweep to the cinema, Alain Resnais, with *Mon oncle d'Amerique (My American Uncle)*, pursues his quest of the *intellectual* cinema with incomparable wit and bravado. So much so, that one may rightfully proclaim that Resnais' last two films (the other was the British-made *Providence*) may well be his finest. Nothing could seem less promising than the most recent enterprise, which could be described as a lecture illustrating the deterministic theories of the French biologist, Henri Laborit, concerning human behaviour. Indeed, after seeing *Mon oncle d'Amerique*, one is tempted to affirm that B.F. Skinner is alive and well in the work of Resnais. The aesthetic miracle is that Resnais pulls it off, combining theory, humour, a certain passive hopelessness, a no-exit deterministic vision, with warmth, emotion, and a dash of cartoon fantasy, in a mosaic that is unique in (at least my) film viewing experience. *Mon oncle d'Amerique* succeeds as well in bringing a new understanding to all of Resnais' previous work, furnishing striking proof that the personal, *auteur* cinema is not wholly a thing of the past.

8. One could no doubt go on in similar fashion, rhapsodizing about Andrei Tar-



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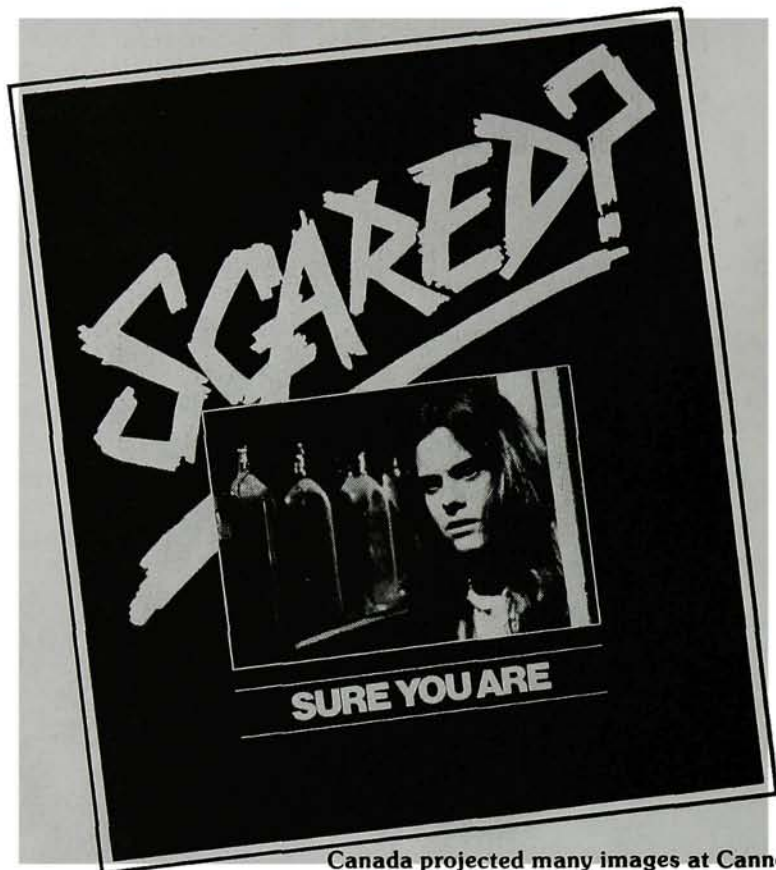
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kovsky's latest effort, presented as a "film surprise." Except that I cannot, having missed the film — and this, from perhaps the Soviet Union's greatest film artist, certainly one who courageously pursues a cinema that has nothing to do with the official line. There was also the best film in twenty years from a cult figure of the *Cahiers du cinema*, *Screen*, etc. coterie, old **Blood 'n Guts** Sam Fuller himself. With **The Big Red One**, Fuller turns the clock back to where he never left, the fifties. Gutsy, exciting action, tough US infantry guys, complete with Lee Marvin like he was back when, and there you have it, in a film unthinkable only a few short years ago during the Vietnam trauma. One was left with the feeling that, at least in the films of Fuller, Kurosawa, and Bruce Beresford, complex though they may be, the patriotic soldier, the buddy ethic, the simplicity of violence, and bravery, and no-questions-asked behaviour, may be coming back to the cinema — and to our world, and the media, building us up for the Big Confrontation. O tempora, O mores!

And so, Cannes 1980. For the present writer, the stunning fact was a living, up-there-on-the-screen reminder of what film can and should be; that there is indeed room for an enormous variety of artistic expressions, social involvement, vision; and that the standardized, "commercially viable" recipe isn't the only way, the only solid film value. In other words, that the great film experience given us by world cinema between 1953 and 1968 is not something hopelessly marginal and "unrealistic."

"Those rich, adventurous days" — the spectacle of aging or aged film directors adventuring out in areas far more hazardous, aesthetically or culturally speaking, than those explored by the later generation of filmmakers — that is the context within which Canada's Cannes presentations are to be evaluated. Or at least one of the contexts. In the present climate, is it simply an unchallenged dictate that in Canada, at least, there is no place for ventures à la Kurosawa, Resnais, Fellini, Bob Fosse? We know, or the producers know — right? — what is allowable; so forget the poets, forget the most exciting artistic efforts, there's no room for such things in the serious Canadian cinema.

Well, yes and no. For as I write this implied criticism, I feel its lack of fairness at least as an overall indictment of our home situation. For surely Gilles Carle's **Fantastica** was... uhh... Felliniesque — crude, arty, disastrous, I feel, but a personal artistic attempt. And that film was the official Canadian entry. And



Canada projected many images at Cannes this year. One of them came from the flyer for *Cries in the Night*

surely Dennis Hopper's **Out of the Blue** (is it, or isn't it 'Canadian'?) is, yes, crude and obscene, but still, an energetic projection of Hopper's personal nightmare/fantasy life — whatever its origin.

Better than that, two Francophone Québécois "small films," by no means made to fit some silly or not-so-silly conception of the "commercial" market, were examples of intelligent, riveting cinema; Micheline Lanctôt's **L'Homme à tout faire**, and Jean-Claude Labrecque's **L'Affaire Coffin** — the latter far less personal, and smacking of TV language, yet blessedly free of the usual Québécois caricaturing and sloganeering, and (thereby?) deeply moving.

The complicated Cannes viewing patterns meant that I saw few Canadian offerings, the ones, I mean, that we tend to tout as of "Hollywood Canada" fabrication. But what I did see left me rather pleasantly surprised. No question here of spectacular masterpieces — this is not the time to engage in mini-critiques — but, at the same time, the films stood out as worthy of a certain respect. A movie such as **Patman**, for example, is far removed from empty, mindless, imitation rip-off. It constitutes, I feel, a serious attempt at making good cinema. Can it be that the Great Contemporary Canadian Feature Film Explosion will result in some

very promising effects?

The effort, in these films, is not to make *Canadian* movies — whatever that may mean. But to make *good* films — and films that, by the way, don't particularly try to hide their made-in-Canada characteristics.

The Canadian scene? A report that began enthusiastically singing the praises of Kurosawa and Co. must end on a cautious, anti-climactic note as regards Canadian output. Further discussion can only be legitimized by in-depth and in-breadth viewings of most of the fifty or sixty features made last year.

Cannes 1980, however, has revealed this much: Canada's film production, at least in a number of its better features, is not the disaster that many expected. Behind the entrepreneurial hustling that seems to be our main claim to fame right now there may very well be, at least in some quarters, a serious attempt at creating quality. The possibilities are now upon us, and now is not the time to wait for some future time when... Those products, those excellent films, which may at last resolve the false battle between "art" and "commercial viability," may soon be a reality, if timidity and self put-down and ignorance — whatever — do not inhibit the creative imagination and the spirit of initiative. ■