

BOOKSHELF

Women and Children First

Viewing the continuing controversy about women performers' claimed exploitation in X-rated films, Australian activist Beatrice Faust discusses in *Women, Sex and Pornography*, the extent to which movies, along with other media, induce erotic stimulation in women, with the author providing perceptive insights into the nature of female sexuality (Macmillan \$11.95).

Laura Lederer's lively compilation of essays on women and pornography, *Take Back the Night*, presents a broad spectrum of articulate views. These essays, written by dedicated feminists, often assume a shrill tone that confuses reporting with advocacy, arbitrarily equates pornography with violence, and invokes censoring powers incompatible with freedom of expression (Morrow \$14.95/7.95).

In Linda Lovelace's lurid transparently self-serving confession, *Ordeal*, the star of the notorious sex film *Deep Throat* recants her past and charges coercion and fear rather than consent as the rationale for her spectacular cinematic activities (Berkley \$2.95).

Using film as evidence of social and cultural change, *Virgins, Vamps and Flappers* by historian Sumiko Higashi portrays the American silent movie heroine (hence the American woman of that era) in various guises of changing femininity during a period of loosening sexual mores (Eden Press, Montreal; \$17.95).

In *Films For, By and About Women*, Kaye Sullivan covers in detail some 2800 films, going back to the beginning of filmmaking, that consider the status of women in society or, more positively, offer solutions to their problems (Scarecrow \$25).

Ruth M. Goldstein and Edith Zornow assemble, in *The Screen Image of Youth*, extensive information of over 350 entertainment and documentary films on the various ways children and adolescents are represented in movies (Scarecrow \$20). Compiled by Judith Trojan, *American Family Life Films* surveys some 2000 shorts, feature-length documentaries and dramatic films, and includes detailed filmographies, distribution sources and other relevant data (Scarecrow \$20).

Talent On Parade

In *Goddard: Images, Sounds, Politics*, Colin McCabe offers an informative evaluation of a director whose aloofness from the French film industry, provocative political views, unorthodox work methods and often brilliant films are skilfully and cogently pieced together (Indiana U. Press \$22.50/9.95).

Cinema as a source of ethnic and urban experience is the theme of an educators' seminar, whose transcribed proceedings, ably edited by Mary Pat Kelly, are the basis for *Martin Scorsese: The First Decade*. The director's filming concepts and methods, stemming from his background, are shown as the active ingredients of his dynamic creativity (Redgrave \$9.90).

In *Woody Allen*, the complex personality of the multi-talented artist - director, writer, actor - is deftly dissected by Myles Palmer in a lively biography that makes telling use of Allen's own, often self-deprecating, remarks, his collaborators' observations, and film critics' reviews (Proteus \$6.95).

The uneven career of the late Luchino Visconti is sensitively analyzed by Nancy D. Warfield in *After The Damned*. Concentrating on that particular movie as the apogee of Visconti's filmmaking career, Warfield finds in it a worthy emotional outlet for his stylistic approach, sense of melodramatic grandeur, writing subtleties and visual pyrotechnics (Cinemabilia, 10 W. 13 St., NYC 10011; \$6.50).

In *Nobody Swings on Sunday*, Harry Rasky, the Toronto-born director of many award-winning documentaries, paints a moving and affectionate picture of his life and work. Beyond his technical skills and innovative cinematic records of celebrated personalities, significant social events and historic perspectives, Rasky emerges as a warm individual with an uncommon depth of feeling and perception of human motivation (Collier Macmillan Canada \$13.95).

Former child actor Jackie Cooper, now a successful producer and director, traces his often traumatic life in *Please Don't Shoot My Dog*, written with Dick Kleiner. It is a truly candid autobiography, unsparing of himself and others, and of the frantic Hollywood scene (Morrow \$12.95).

James Kotsilibas-Davis' extensive research combined with a spellbinding literary style shapes *The Barrymores: The Royal Family in Hollywood* into a glittering chronicle of the quintessential theatrical family's career, spotlighting Lionel, Ethel and John in their memorable contributions to the screen (Crown \$19.95).

Stan Laurel's life story, "chaotic at best, lurid at worst," as Fred Lawrence Guiles puts it in *Stan*, paints the performer as a tragic figure, a gifted actor, writer and director doomed by depression, drinking, and marital problems (Stein & Day \$12.95).

Aspects of Cinema

Close to 1000 personalities - performers, directors and producers - appear in the revised edition of David Thomson's *Biographical Dictionary of Film*. Each entry lists their movies, and carries Thomson's informative, often witty, sometimes gossipy comments (Morrow \$15.95/10.95).

A comprehensive and accurate compilation of birth and death statistics assembled by William T. Stewart, Arthur F. McClure and Ken D. Jones, *International Film Necrology* covers over 12,000 actors, directors, writers, cameramen, producers and various industryites deceased in the last 80 years (Garland \$35).

From A.S. Barnes & Co., two engaging volumes explore cinema's historic record. *Paramount Pictures and the People Who Made Them* by I.G. Edmonds and Reiko Mimura vividly exposes the recurrent power struggles for studio

control and the effect on performers and directors (\$17.50). Buck Rainey's *Saddle Aces of the Cinema* narrates the careers of 15 cowboy stars and the films they made. Gene Autry, Hoot Gibson, Rex Bell, Ken Maynard are among the book's heroes (\$19.95).

A master file of feature films no longer under copyright and thus available to

alert entrepreneurs, *Film Superlist for 1940-49 of Motion Pictures in the U.S. Public Domain*, and its companion volume for the 1894-1939 period, carry a total of some 40,000 films, meticulously compiled by Walter E. Hurst and William Storm Hale (Seven Arts, 6235 Hollywood Blvd., Hollywood, CA 90028; \$150 ea.). **George L. George**

Systems go (cont. from p. 28)

aspect. For example, the *Ticket* project which was ultimately made was not identical to the project which was originally brought to us in terms of its conception, casting, and matters of that nature. We were integrally involved in those kinds of things. There is no question that the major creative input was clearly provided by Ralph. Ralph was one of the two screenwriters, and the idea germinated in his mind. That was the basic jumping off point. But Vivienne has worked in a very close, creative way with Ralph from the time they were involved in the television business. That didn't change in this case.

The major part of Vivienne's activity was certainly in the creative area. However, we have had the necessary involvement in that area as well. One of the essential things for the person who is ultimately responsible, financially, for a motion picture, is decision-making ability, the ability to delegate. You can't do everything. If the strength of our organization is related to our ability to provide all of the necessary on-going activity - to administer the film's distribution, its development in the first place and all of those things in between - if that's one of the major functions, we're doing that on a number of pictures. I'm still making deals on *Coup d'Etat*, so I'm involved in five pictures at any point of time. On that basis, you're continuing in all those areas. But you have to delegate. What we had on *Ticket* was a terrific creative team. We had great, dynamic individuals in Ralph and Vivienne - but there is still the question of shaping the direction of the project.

I think that it's fair to say that Ralph and Vivienne had a ready and comfortable market in which to operate when they were working with the CBC. People, with good reason, had tremendous respect for everything they were able to do. When you get outside that into the commercial world, and the world of distribution theatres and audiences out there, it's a slightly different situation. You can make a great film of several types. You can make a great film which fewer people will want to see, and you can make a great film which more people will want to see. Obviously, we were interested in making a great film that as many people as possible would want to see. And they were absolutely ready to make that jump.

There's no question - and I will not discuss for public consumption

the development of the casting decisions, for example - that in the whole decision-making process we worked very closely together. We spent a lot of time deciding on the major leading role. There's obviously a basic decision about whether or not to go with well-known stars, Canadians or Americans, or lesser-known stars who could perhaps give you a super performance in the role. Our approach was the *Midnight Express* approach: we wanted Brad Davis, not Dustin Hoffman. And we got him.

In a sense, working on *Ticket* was different from the other films I've done. You have a guy, who created a project which is based on fact, which deals with very sensitive realities - a very sensitive guy who did a cracker-jack job. He lived the project, he was involved in a very extreme way. That's not to say that the directors I've worked with in the past have been detached, just that Ralph was probably more involved than the others because of the nature of the particular film. He's obviously a very talented guy; a guy that I'd be delighted to work with again... In fact, both of them. I'd be very pleased to work with either of them individually or together again. That's how I feel about both of their skills, individually and as a team.

Vivienne and I worked very closely together. We spoke two or three times a day, virtually every day for the past year and a half. Sure, there was overlap... I have talked mainly in terms of the creative aspect, but anytime I called on Vivienne to come out and meet investors or dealers, she was always there - and she's good at it. She's a personable and bright lady and she's got a natural talent for that. Involving the current distribution aspects, there's no question that we have taken the lead on all of those issues. We're supposed to. She was supposed to take the lead on the actual line production of the picture and the creative aspects associated with that. We were supposed to take the lead on the other, and we have. We have negotiated the contracts and we have made the deals, but Vivienne has been involved in all of the discussions related to that. She has met with a number of the people involved in that area with us, certainly in terms of our foreign sales agent, and her presence at Cannes, and so on. But it's been a very easy overlapping... and a very pleasant one.

Connie Tadros

BOOK REVIEWS

Culture Statistics: Film Industry, 1978

(Ottawa: Statistics Canada, 1981)
\$6.00, Catalogue No. 87-620

A statistic is like a mercenary employed by one side to stun the other during a battle of wits. Just about any of our favourite prejudices can be reinforced by the use of one dense computation. But of course a statistic is designed to educate, not intimidate.

Statistics Canada has been mobilizing the facts and figures dealing with our cultural industries since 1972. The primary intent of this program has been to provide legislators and cultural associations with some hard data which could be used to anchor their cultural policies and perceptions. Last winter the department published its first study which focuses attention exclusively on the filmmaker, producer and distributor.

The 69-page booklet with the ho-hum title is not just a web of interrelated analyses. Each little box, column and chart of figures is prefaced by a lucid commentary which sets the study in perspective, and then translates the digits into comprehensible prose. As Michael Durand, the statistician who wrote the report, noted: "Most people don't know how to use statistics. So, what we try to do is give them the flavour of a particular industry, and then bring them to a level of knowledge where they can ask themselves additional questions."

The overall analysis was structured under three broad categories: The Theatrical Film Market, The Distribution of Motion Picture Products, and Motion Picture Production. Within each general area, specific issues were examined.

One of the more salient observations made within the report is that the theatrical film market has diminished considerably since the introduction of television, and that this trend has continued. In 1952, Canadians attended 17 films a year; these days, four annual visits is *de rigueur*. In addition, the majority of hard-core viewers is concentrated in the university-educated, young adult category as opposed to being drawn from across the social spectrum. So far, the industry has been able to offset the effect of this shrinking market by charging higher admission prices; as the situation continues though, it does not augur well for the future.

In the area of film distribution, the figures indicate that large-scale productions are favoured by the public. For this reason, most of the earnings go to the few foreign distributors while Canadian firms scratch away at the balance — a mere 29 percent. The situation is similar for the television market, but is reversed in the non-theatrical area where Canadian firms handled 93 percent of the products and received 73 percent of the revenue.

For filmmakers, 81 percent of whom are part-timers, the report clarifies what is already common knowledge. In 1978 most companies were small-scale:

some 50 percent earned \$100,000 or less. Of the 7,816 film and video creations that people turned out that year, 51 percent were commercials for television. This area represents the single most important source of revenue within the profession.

In a rather sobering conclusion, the report suggests that, "pay television looms as a serious threat to the motion picture industry as it is now structured." Not only will it siphon off more of the audience, but it could also deflect advertising revenue away from the television networks.

Two noticeable shortcomings of the report are that it doesn't get beyond general averages, which may distress those who want to see the analysis distilled down to include specific operations, and very little cultural or qualitative data is in evidence.

But, as Durand pointed out: "The need for such information has to be expressed by the various users. It's nice to have all that knowledge floating around in an industry, but it needs to be co-ordinated and structured. We want to provide that service."

Statistics Canada is currently producing another report based on 1979's survey material; in the interim, a five-page bulletin is available for the curious.

Brendan Hawley ●

Fifty Years on Theatre Row,

by Ivan Ackery.
Hancock House, 1980, 253 pages, \$14.95.
(ISBN-0-88839-50-05).

Film exhibition has undergone a considerable metamorphosis over the last eighty years. The transition from carnival sideshow to nickelodeon to movie palace to the multiple theatre facility has occurred within the length of a single lifetime. Ivan Ackery's memoir *Fifty Years on Theatre Row* chronicles that development with a strong emphasis on the years he spent as the manager of one of Canada's great picture palaces.

Ackery worked for half a century in the film business, primarily in Vancouver. For over thirty years, he ran the Orpheum, a showplace for popular, family-oriented films. Although originally built to present both vaudeville and film, the latter medium soon became the main fare. However, the film program was nearly always augmented by 'added attractions' orchestrated by Ivan Ackery.

Actually, the book has more sombre beginnings than its show biz subject matter might indicate. After an often lonely childhood in Bristol, England, Ackery headed off to the Great War as an under-age recruit. Passages describing the horrific conditions of trench warfare place the subsequent reminiscences upon the airy world of entertainment in proper perspective. The 17-year-old kid lugging corpses through the mud of Vimy Ridge later becomes the madcap promoter of such schemes as having an usherette ride an elephant down the streets of Vancouver.

Fifty Years on Theatre Row is written in a flowing, conversational style that is often charming, but occasionally annoying. The very oral tone of the writing makes one feel as if Ackery is sitting down and recalling the past across a kitchen table. Thus the frequent exclamations of "Oh boy!" and "Whew!" seem to punctuate particularly fond memories.

However, the book is not intended to be only a historical documentation and shouldn't be too heavily faulted for its personal tone. There is, in fact, an incredibly rich body of information presented about the ways people have had fun over the last few decades. Anecdotes and factual tidbits are sprayed shotgun style across the page as Ackery shifts from one subject to another in rapid succession. While often confusing, the cumulative effect is to provide a vivid portrait of Vancouver's varied 'cultural' life. Everything from bookies, night-clubs, food and prostitution, to bootlegging, the automobile, radio, big bands, dance fads and roller coasters are touched upon.

Some of the Vancouver night spots of the thirties that Ackery recalls include the Commodore Supper Club and Nigger Jeannie's, the latter presided over by a black blues singer named Jeannie Flynn. The Narrows was a popular gambling casino where entertainers found work after the decline of vaudeville.

Ackery's greatest talent seems to have been expressed in his promotions for the films that played his theatre. Faced with the prospect of filling 2871 seats seven days a week, he resorted to all sorts of gimmicks to bring in the public. This was especially important when the film was a stinker.

Promotions frequently involved ties with stores, window displays and joint advertising campaigns. Ackery would take things a little further by placing free tickets in the store merchandise. On another occasion he offered \$10 to any woman who could sit through a midnight screening of the Canadian horror film *The Mask* in an emptied

theatre. Based on the description of the film itself, it sounds like she deserved the money.

When *King Kong* played, he had an usher dress up as a gorilla and climb all over the marquee while a spotlight dramatically pointed him out. Ethnic Soirées such as Chinese Nights and B.C. Indian Pow-Wows were common, as were magic shows, joke nights and sports competitions (ping pong, weight-lifting). While these devices seem a bit dated now, their attraction in pre-television Vancouver must have been very strong.

The Orpheum had been built in 1927 for a mixed vaudeville and film format. The change to an all-film program was never total as various acts or musical performances occasionally supplemented the film. Louis Armstrong, Duke Ellington and Frank Sinatra (when he was one of the Hoboken Four) were among the many entertainers who played the Orpheum.

Every Tuesday for twelve years after the Second World War, the "Nabob Harmony House" radio show was sent across Canada. Music was also to be heard at various contests ranging from a mid-night amateur show to Elvis look-alike competitions in the late fifties. A rock 'n roll performance might accompany a Saturday matinee of the latest Gidget film.

The Orpheum's long link with music was recently cemented when it became the home of the Vancouver Symphony Orchestra. In the early 1970s it appeared that the theatre was going to fall victim to the modern trend of splitting a facility into smaller units. An enormous public outcry eventually led to the preservation and restoration of the magnificent theatre. There is no doubt that the ferocity of that concern was triggered in part by the strong and happy memories of the Orpheum felt by many Vancouver citizens. There couldn't be a better testimony to the power of Ackery's work as a creator of corny but colourful programs and promotions for over half a century.

Andrew Johnson ●



Sept. 16, Cinema V, 5560 Sherbrooke St. West, Evening.