

# Echoes from the festivals

by Connie Tadros



*In the beginning, there was the Toronto Festival, called the Festival of Festivals and incorporated by Bill Marshall as the World Film Festival of Toronto Inc. The year was 1976.*

*Not to be out-done, Montreal's festival was founded by Serge Losique the following year, incorporated as the World Film Festival of Montreal/Le Festival des films du monde. The battle was on.*

*As if the latent competition between Toronto and Montreal did not suffice, the two directors and their towering egos fueled the fight. The object? To see which would be the better, most important festival in Canada.*

*The criteria were several. Which would attract the largest public? Which would screen the most North American (if not*

*world) premieres? Which would attract the largest following from the Canadian industry and, more important, the largest delegations from abroad? Which would get the better press? Added up, the criteria would lead to which would have the most paying sponsors and the largest government grants. The stakes were high.*

*In those early years, the fight was for real, much to the delight of the press. The festivals fought hard for films, and refused to screen any which were already booked into the rival event. Guests were disputed and tricks were played, all for the greater glory of the festivals. Early on, Wayne Clarkson replaced Marshall as festival director in Toronto.*

*Each city had its advantages.*

*Montreal had 'le fait français.' It's bilingual nature made it a comfortable place for Europeans, who sorely needed a launching pad into the North American market. Moreover, the principal offices of the Canadian Film Development Corp. and the National Film Board were there. Montreal also had the lead in the production of feature films in Canada.*

*But Toronto was a booming city. Canada's anglophone capital held the head offices of the American Major film distributors, of the national television networks and, recently, of all the national pay-TV companies. Its non-theatrical film industry was stronger, and the presence of all the national advertising agencies in the city guaranteed that it would remain so.*

*Montreal had its official competition, and its Film Market. Toronto had its Galas and assorted programs and programmers. It developed a Trade Forum.*

*Now, six years later, both festivals have found their publics, registering 150,000 entries this year, give or take 5,000. Neither are in any danger of disappearing; nor – despite the wishes of many – is there any indication that they might co-operate, finding some way to alternate years.*

*Cinema Canada talked to many who had attended both festivals this year. Everyone was tired, having gone through one party too many. They offered their thoughts on the two festivals, on their similarities and differences, and on their benefits to the Canadian film industry.*

## JEAN LEFEBVRE

Director, Film Festivals Bureau  
Ottawa

I'm addressing myself to these two festivals in general, as opposed to giving a personal opinion as to how they went this year. From the point of view of the Film Festivals Bureau, there is a difference as to way the two festivals are perceived.

Montreal is a traditional festival of the FIAPF (Fédération internationale des associations de producteurs de films), it's a competitive festival, recognized by FIAPF and forced to obey some very strict and sometimes very difficult rules. That has to be taken into consideration when evaluating Montreal. A FIAPF-recognized festival must accept in competition only films which premiere on the continent where the festival is being held. So that makes it very difficult. In other words, all North American films shown at the Montreal film festival in competition have to be not yet released in North America. It's much easier for Cannes or Berlin to obtain good U.S. films (and whether we like it or not, they are the biggest crowd-drawers for these events). So Montreal has a very limited potential because of this very strict regulation. Whereas an invitational festival, such as Toronto, can afford to obtain some very strong films because, once they have been shown in a major festival - in Europe especially - they are eligible for any secondary festivals or for any non-competitive festivals. It's easier to obtain good films once they've been shown elsewhere.

Another point we take into consideration is the quality of services provided by each festival for the development of the Canadian film industry. Now, whether these services are announced as such, like the market in Montreal or the Trade Forum in Toronto, or are simply spin-offs of the festival, is secondary. What counts are concrete results from these two events. The general feeling seems to be that both festivals contribute a lot to the economic development of the film industry.

For the moment, the two festivals are complementary and should remain so. In other words, one should complement the other. Whether they do this willfully or not is secondary again. The worst situation would be to have two major, similar, festivals that would constantly be fighting over the same titles. Right now, of course, there are overlaps. There are moments when they do fight over certain titles but there aren't that many because of the concepts of the festivals, and that has to remain that way. It's useless to have one festival, repeated in two cities. Nobody would lend good films for that purpose. If Toronto started showing exactly the same films as Montreal, or vice versa, it would be useless to think of having two major festivals.

Festivals, whether we like it or not, are feasts of cinema, are happenings; they are occasions to celebrate cinema, and that's the nature of the beast. The great advantage of film festivals is that the more important people you attract to a festival - I mean people in a position to work and to do business - the more they'll work towards the development of your own industry.

Canada is ill-perceived from afar. Ask any European and he'll mention Indians, snow and things like that. He'll tend to imagine a sort of social and creative structure based on these little preju-

ices. If Europeans do come over, they suddenly realize they are dealing with a North American mentality but one with an original way of thinking... Canadians may be North American, say in attitude and in economic terms, but they are not necessarily American in their cultural trade. Creating this awareness is necessary, and this is the necessity of a film festival. Call it long-term marketing as opposed to short-term marketing, which would be a film market where you go to sell a movie immediately. What you're selling at a festival is an image of the country, and of the country's potential in terms of cinema. What you're selling also is the occasion to come and know this particular place.

In the festival milieu both the Montreal and Toronto festivals are well-known. It's a fairly small milieu, it's a fairly specialized milieu and it has ramifications all around the world. Some favor Toronto, some favor Montreal. I would say it is divided right now 50-50, but both events are regarded as very important North American stepping-stones by Europeans and an important stepping-stone for Europe towards North America by the Americans.

## JOHN HARKNESS

Film critic, Now magazine  
Toronto

There was an interesting sort of reverse image... If you approached Montreal's festival from behind the scenes, it seemed incredibly disorganized. But once you get into the theatre it was very well-organized; all the movies started on time, there were no projection problems, most of the pictures scheduled showed up. In Toronto, everything looked incredibly well-organized behind the scenes, but you got out into the theatres, and it was a mess. Someone suggested they call it 'the festival-to-be-announced' because the schedule changed so rapidly and the pictures tended to start late, especially at the Bloor cinema.

In terms of programming, Montreal seemed a little more serious to me. But I could have just been seeing the wrong pictures in Toronto... By and large I liked the programming a bit better in Montreal but I don't think that Toronto has anything to be ashamed of. Its programming was also very good. It's a fact that Toronto has a variety of programs, which Montreal doesn't. So I think that gives an illusion of size because, obviously, each series has a programmer. I didn't notice any programmers in evidence in Montreal.

The main difference - and one that works to Montreal's advantage - is the fact that screenings in Montreal were in one building. If you got bored and wanted to walk out, it was easier than in Toronto. There, if you walked out, you had to walk six blocks, eight blocks... to get a picture that might not even start on time! Toronto is going to get a five-plex - either the Uptown or the Imperial. That would resolve the many logistical problems. As for the "massive repeat program" in Toronto, it doesn't do you much good if you spend your time in mid-town Toronto because most of the repeats are happening out in the suburban theatres.

From a 'press' point of view, people at Montreal were more accessible but things were less efficient. I was really startled when I arrived in Montreal to discover that if I wanted to do an inter-

photo: Ron Levine



● From leader of the band to Brimstone - Sting

photo: Ron Levine



● The King and the McKenzie brothers - it must be Toronto!

photo: Lois Seigel



● Punk was prominent as Liquid Sky screened in Montreal

photo: Ron Levine



● The pleasant Wim Wenders

view I could track down the person myself and set it up. That meant spending a long time at the press office or wherever, waiting for someone to show up. In Toronto, on the other hand, if you wanted to do an interview, they set it up, gave you the room, etc.

The problem in Toronto was that the two biggest names who showed up - Scorsese - Cassavetes - weren't doing any press or absolutely minimal press so, of course, they were inaccessible, though I should say that Cassavetes was very accessible to the people. But it is irritating when the festival brings in important guests, and then denies the press access. When Wayne Clarkson talks about a "festival for the people," I think there's a danger that Toronto is becoming a festival for the 400 people who get invited to the black-tie parties in Forest Hills.

## LEN KLADY

Winnipeg Free Press  
Winnipeg

Obviously, one thing that is different is that the Montreal is competitive, and I think that in itself is going to carve a difference. The other basic difference is that Montreal is a one-man show. Wayne Clarkson very consciously decided to make Toronto a team of people, and as a result, he has got very distinct styles, like David Overby's stuff. Year after year, there's a certain kind of field that Overby has programmed which is very different from the Buried Treasures, which changes every year as the critic changes. And then the Retrospectives, and the Galas...

I don't know that the differing approach to programming makes one or the other more interesting intrinsically. The films are what makes one or the other festival more interesting. Logistically, it changes things. In Montreal, there are fewer people to go through. In Toronto, particularly this year, I found that there wasn't necessarily one person I could talk to to get certain information. There were internal problems between the press office and the guest office and what have you.

Toronto seems to have a heavier emphasis in terms of the social aspect. That's something that it has its good and bad sides. It extends your day, on the one hand, and on the other hand, it's a chance to make contact with a number of people on an informal basis. The problem is usually the crowd and I think that this year Montreal handled its parties better. They were more casual and more geared towards the film community. But there's not much you can do about that. Toronto had more patrons, and they have to be provided for.

## LINDA BEATH

United Artists Classics  
Toronto

The two festivals are very important. The Montreal festival has a completely different complexion as far as the films go. And the situation with the press, which is of great concern to us, is different. I don't know whether the Montreal press bends more to commercial interests, or is more cognizant of commercial interests, but they tend not to review a film which they know is going to open later. They will give the film a mention, or do an interview, and

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save the review until the majority of the audience can get to see the film, so there's not so much of a sense of danger putting a film in Montreal as there is in Toronto.

Toronto is more of a popular festival, and there seems to be less a sense of industry coterie, but that may just have to do with geographic location of the theatres and the hotels. It also must have something to do with the kind of festival each is aspiring to run...

From a distributor's point of view, the two are about the same - 50-50. It's the kind of film that you can pick up that is different. And that is a function of the style of programming. Montreal takes more chances. There are more films from Third World countries and more a sense of the aesthetic coming through the program than there is in Toronto. Toronto is really catholic. I sent eight films back to New York from each of the festivals for possible acquisition.

This year, there was a big difference between Montreal's Market and Toronto's Trade Forum. The focus of the Forum was on pay-TV and what it would or wouldn't do, so the concentration in Toronto was definitely for that window. In Montreal, they were talking about all markets and although pay-TV was a current issue, it wasn't the central focus. Technically, I don't know if you can call the Market in Montreal a success, but deals did get done. I doubt, for instance, if there were as many deals out of London. The sellers seemed quite happy with both festivals. As for me, there were enough people in both places to keep me hopping, and I think it was the same for others.

If I had to recommend a festival to a foreign seller, it would depend upon the film he had for sale. *Identification of a Woman* would do much better in Montreal, and something like *Moonlighting* would do better in Toronto. I think they are both really wonderful films, but there seems to be a real Quebec flavour and a real pro-film stance in Montreal that really isn't reflected in Toronto.

As for the parties, I don't want to see another party as long as I live! In Toronto, they were all huge and crowded, and there was a sense towards the end of the first week of seeing all of the same people over and over again. In Montreal, the parties were smaller and tended to be less frenetic, but there was still a sense of seeing everybody over and over. I don't think there's a solution to that.

I really wish the two festivals would get together and alternate years. I don't foresee that happening, but it's incredible that Canada has two festival of that size.

The real audiences, the people who live in Montreal and Toronto, get a lot out of them. For the moment, Montreal seems to have more potential for the public. The way the Cinéma Parallele is run, for instance, is more interesting than the way Harbourfront is run. And although The Funnel is doing its job with experimental cinema, I doubt they would show *Lightning Over Water*, which the Parallele will screen.

From a good film festival comes the ability to do good work for the filmmakers. You can get real money and the press to work for them. It creates a climate, and that exists in Montreal. I'm not sure that exists in Toronto at the moment. Some films take off, like *Best Boy*, but they take off so big... A feature-length documentary becomes something that can play at the Uptown. That seems to be what everybody aspires to in

Toronto. In Montreal, there's more of a grey zone.

## LAWRIE ROTENBURG The Talent Group Toronto

From the public perspective, both festivals are very, very similar. I think the audiences in Montreal and Toronto are fairly well served... They get to see a lot of things that don't come their way normally or which, in some cases, will never come their way.

The major difference is the way the industry is served. And I think it's ironic that the Toronto festival is more social than the Montreal festival, because all the time I was growing up, Montreal was a more social city than Toronto. But I think that's a function more of the direction of the festival than of the hosting city... I think Monsieur Losique is more inclined to have a much more esoteric kind of festival. It's more European, and it has that kind of an atmosphere around it. There are a number of very private parties but the general business industry or community is not there.

In Toronto we get really tired of the parties after a while (especially when it's the second festival in a row) but the good thing is that because a lot of people only come in for a couple of days, you are going to see almost everybody if you keep going to the parties. Most people are fairly accessible at those functions and, if nothing else, it's the "Hello, how are you? Can I call you next week?" kind of access. Most of the time you can't hear what is being said, so having a business discussion *per se* at a party is almost impossible, but it's an opportunity for everybody to step up and say hello.

I would think that certainly the Trade Forum in Toronto is of much more use to everybody than the Market in Montreal has been so far. If the market was a successful market, you would say that a significant portion of the industry is being helped. My own observation in the last four or five years is that the market has not worked. Montreal tried a series of seminars last year, and I think it was a good start. I don't know why it wasn't continued - perhaps for financial reasons.

I think the Trade Forum is a significant advantage of the Toronto festival and, certainly, this year's attendance was the best ever. As vice-chairman of the Academy of Canadian Cinema (which ran the Forum), I've seen the returns. The degree of satisfaction with the forum is incredible.

As for future benefits to the industry? If you're talking about buying and selling projects as opposed to the kind of buying and selling that's supposed to go on in the Marche in Montreal, I would think that Montreal does have an interesting advantage. Co-productions are going to become more and more significant in the next couple of years and Montreal certainly brings in a more international group of people. If that advantage can be exploited, I think it would be significant.

## JAMES BYERLEY Home Box Office New York

Our function is to cover every movie that

exists for HBO... to try and see everything that exists on films, so we (the various people from HBO) kept in very close touch.

In terms of unseen product, Montreal and Toronto were about even. Walter Malton and I were both swamped with non-stop screenings... We certainly had plenty to keep us busy at both places and I think there were a lot of things we had to miss because we didn't have four eyes.

This is my third year in Montreal and I just have an affection for it. I like the city and the festival is part of it. I didn't really utilize the marketplace this year very much. The market seemed rather inactive, low-key. It seems like the market situation, the more commercial aspects, are shifting to Toronto... It seems like a lot of the filmmakers are going to Toronto. It seems to be the coming city, the most important city in Canada as far as film goes. Montreal, on the other hand, seems to have more of an artistic bend to it, more of a cultural bias, whereas the business seems to be in Toronto. I don't

the largest film festival in the world, and I think that's indicative of what is happening to the Toronto film festival. I think there's been a confusion between quantity and quality. There are many things one can point to: numerous screenings were cancelled, invariably the Bloor cinema started projections late, projection was frequently very poor, it was often impossible to get between the theatres to see films that were programmed back to back.

I think these problems arise partially because there's been an attention recently to the hoopla and the glitter - to the things that surround the festival. Less attention has been paid to the projection of the films and to the welfare of the regular movie-goers. There is a growing overemphasis in Toronto on the patrons, the corporate sponsors and the parties.

Still, I think that the potential is there. It's not one of the best festivals in North America, but it has the potential for becoming a great festival if more atten-

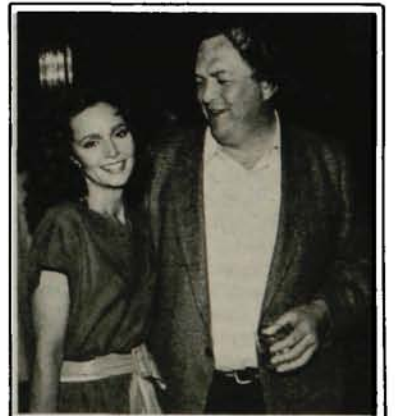
photos: Ron Levine



● There were "Porky's parties" in both cities, but Francis Fox received his mascot from Harold Greenberg in Montreal

know what social ramifications that might have on what's happening *per se* in Canada, but that's what it appears to be from the outside anyway...

There does seem to be a place for a film market in Canada. The time of year may have something to do with it. Los Angeles is pretty early in the year and then Cannes... You have the whole summer before the Canadian festivals come up, so there is a time period there where things can appear. There were plenty of films to screen. I had seen some of the films in Montreal before but there were an awful lot that I hadn't seen. And in Toronto it was the same way. Steve and I would go down all the list of everything we had seen at Filmex, everything we'd seen in Cannes, everything I'd seen in Montreal, and he still had plenty to do in Toronto! I think there are enough films to go around.



● Jennifer Dale and Robin Spry

## JOHN KATZ Film professor at York University Former programmer at the Festival of Festivals Consultant to the World Film Festival

At the gala opening, when festival director Wayne Clarkson said that everybody got in without any hassles so the film festival must be doing something strong, one got an idea of the values of the festival. He also claimed that Toronto was

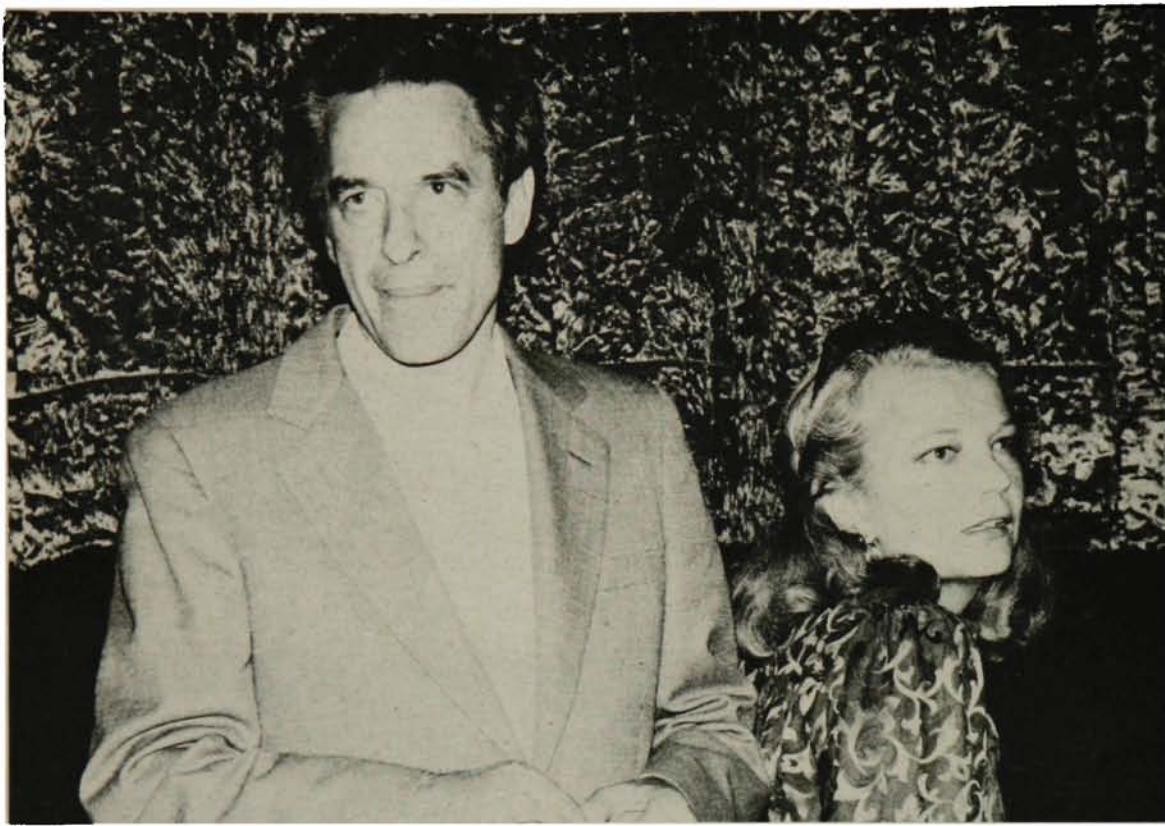
tion is paid to the meal (by which I mean the films) and less to the menu (by which I mean the glitter and the tinsel)

The Montreal film festival is a smaller festival, without the hoopla and glitter, but with an equal number of quality films. It is more serious about films, and takes place in one five-plex cinema. Very few films were cancelled, every screening that I attended and heard of started on time, and projection was perfect for every film I saw.

The marketplace in Montreal was disappointing but perhaps that says something about the state of the film industry in Canada. It tended to lack vitality, and perhaps there, the Montreal Market

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photos: Ron Levine



● The Cassavettes coming...

could learn something from Toronto's Trade Forum, which was lively and active, even though it reflected the sense of desperation about the Canadian film industry.

In terms of the films, there were a few memorable films from both festivals. Notable in Montreal there were some hidden gems that I didn't see in Toronto, films like *Gospel*, *Hit and Run* and *Talk to Me*. There were at least 12 films which were shown at Montreal and then at Toronto including *Come Back to the Five and Dime Jimmy Dean*, *Jimmy Dean*, *Veronika Voss*, *The German Sisters*, *Scarecrow* and *All by Myself*. That leads me to believe that what's happened recently with the collaboration between the Los Angeles and San Francisco film festivals might be viable for Montreal and Toronto. Perhaps, instead of the competition that presently exists between them, there could be more collaboration and they could learn from each other. Montreal's Market could use slightly more hype - which Toronto has plenty of - and Toronto could learn from Montreal's serious attention to the films themselves, and how they are presented to the public.

## RON LEVINE Photographer Montreal

Toronto mainly brings in the stars. It's like a paparazzi's heaven. There are a lot of glittery, glamorous people to photograph and they seem to form an elite at the film festival. While in Montreal you still have the glitter and the glamour but they don't cater to the media as much, as far as photography goes.

For a photographer, Montreal seems a little more accessible - quite a bit more accessible actually. There are always people around, very happy to have photographs taken. People this year in Toronto - the actors, and the directors like Wim Wenders, Scorsese, De Niro -

did not want to have their pictures taken at parties or any of the affairs. They were present but they declined for photographs many times. Robert Duvall nearly punched a photographer's head in. He was really adamant against it. Others were there at parties, but if you took a picture they would just glare at you or say "no photographs." Wim Wenders was very nice but I didn't see him smiling in one photograph.

Toronto, of course, had parties every afternoon and night. In Montreal you had a party every night but a lot of the stars did not show up. In Toronto, everyone was there. Cassavettes and Rowlands were at every party. They were very gracious with photographers, and of course the hangers-on all wanted their photographs taken. It seems that there are many more hangers-on in Toronto than Montreal. These people love to be in there and pretend that they are somebody when they're really just up-and-coming gaffers. In Toronto, there's that whole "star" thing. They think that once they are in films, they are big stars. In Montreal, there's more of the casual attitude towards the festival. Even photographers are casual about it.

## GLENDA ROY Media Connection Toronto

I don't think there's much similarity between the two festivals at all. I think they are two complete events in themselves, and are not in competition with each other. One festival is competitive and the other one is just, basically, a consumer, customer-oriented festival. So it's a big difference. Also there is the fact that the Toronto festival runs the Trade Forum while the Montreal festival tries a marketplace. Again, that puts them in different categories. I really don't see that there is very much simi-

larities other than that they show movies...

I think it does a Canadian picture a great deal of good to be screened at the festivals. It's kind of like "you're judged by the company you keep"... and I think that in those kind of settings, it gives the audience some chance to really see where we stand in the world market. I've always said that the problem with Canadians is that they use the United States as a gigantic test market... What happens within the film festival is that you see smaller pictures, pictures not just from the U.S. I think it really gives the people a chance to get some kind of feeling about where we stand in the world, and I don't think we stand up that badly.

From a publicist's point of view, festival screenings can work for or against you. On the plus side, the press are all alerted. During a film festival, film becomes a priority. So you don't have to make your one little picture a priority with the press; they are already interested. Where you run into a problem is if your film is scheduled against something they are more interested in seeing. But, again, in most festivals, that is looked after because of multiple screenings. So I think it does a picture enormous good. I think it gives it a certain credibility right off the mark.

In terms of reaching the press, it would be important to concentrate more on getting to the international press, or to the Canadian press that is respected worldwide, as opposed to just local coverage, but that's a very expensive process... The only people who could afford to do that sort of thing are the large Major distributors who could use the Toronto festival as an occasion for an actual press junket. But there again, that requires a Major with a picture who wants to do that kind of thing... It's far too expensive for any festival to do it on its own unless there was a festival with a great deal of emphasis on Canadian product. Then it would be up to the government agencies to actually bring in that international presence...

## JAY SCOTT Film critic, Globe and Mail Toronto

I think that overall the Toronto festival is more carefully designed; you can see that just in terms of the fact that there are specific programs, retrospectives and that kind of thing in Toronto. On the other hand, to be fair to Montreal, I presume its organizers see its audience in a somewhat different perspective... I can't second-guess the directors of either festival but Toronto has, in the past, seemed a more serious festival than Montreal. I think this was reversed this year. Whether that's by design or by accident I don't know - I suspect it's by accident. Montreal wound up being, in general, a more serious, more interesting festival than Toronto. In Montreal, a great many movies that very few people knew much about turned out to vary interesting, whereas in Toronto, a great many movies that people knew a lot about showed up. In Montreal, there was an excitement I think was lacking in Toronto.

In terms of organization, Toronto really has to do something about the starting time for the films. I really think it's dreadful. As for Montreal, last year there was a tremendous amount of trouble for people buying tickets; there were long lines in front of the cinema and tickets for that day's performance as well as coming days seemed to be sold at the same place. That didn't seem to happen this year, and, as nearly as I could tell with two or three exceptions, everybody seemed to get into everything they wanted to get into.

Speaking of the atmosphere which surrounds the festivals, both have a kind of - "obsession" is too strong a word - a thing about stars that I really don't understand. And there's not much I can say about that since I don't care for the most part whether stars come or not, on a personal basis. I sort of feel the same way about the parties... There's a certain amount of professional concern that I have to take, given the nature of the job that I do, but on a personal basis it's hard for me to talk about it because for a film critic, interviewing stars is not the function of the festival. They become important to me only to the extent that I have to be more than a film critic in covering the festival, so I do other things, but I don't think that those things are important...

Both Montreal and Toronto are good festivals. I think they both have to stop worrying about each other. There's a tremendous amount of energy wasted on worrying on who had what first. I think in general they are both doing a fairly good job...



● and going...