

photos: Lois Segel



● Louis Malle



● Gordon Willis



# Surviving Hollywood

A report on the '83  
"Conversations with filmmakers"

by **Barbara Samuels**

The deadly dullness of a Montreal winter was dispelled briefly this year when the National Film Board and a public relations firm called Primo Piano combined to toss some sparkle into February and March. The "Conversations with Filmmakers" series had its inaugural runs in 1980 and '81 when similar joint efforts brought Bernardo Bertolucci and Wim Wenders to town; the '83 version came officially titled and prestigiously wrapped, with very much the texture of an annual event. The series was primarily designed as an occasion for local filmmakers to encounter the invited guests and one another within the context of an informal seminar, but it also offered the public a shot at the "stars"; open question-and-answer sessions with director Louis Malle and cinematographer Gordon Willis followed the screenings of their films at several Montreal cinemas.

Initially the brainchild of Primo Piano's Eva Zebrowski, the series became a co-operative venture between the Montreal-based, non-profit corporation and the NFB. Also participating this year were l'Institut Québécois du Cinéma, la Cinematheque Québécoise and the Cinéma Outremont. While the seminars themselves were offered free of charge,

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criteria for admission were fairly strict, based on a clean 50-50 split between NFB and private-sector attendance. The Board selected 15 directors to participate in Malle's five-hour conference, turning the remaining 15 available seats over to l'Association des Réalisateur de Films du Québec. The same formula was applied to Willis' two-day meeting, with attendance divided between NFB cameramen on the one side and DPs from Quebec's APCQ and SNC on the other. Screenings for participants were held at the Board, as were the seminars themselves.

The series was the newest feather in the cap for Primo Piano, a cultural PR organization founded to promote film and filmmakers both here and abroad; in addition to the earlier seminars, Zebrowski also organized the Canadian Film Week in Rome in 1980. Both she and the Board's Cathy Weller were enthused by the response of seminar participants. Weller termed the sessions "terrific for morale," and felt they filled a need for "filmmakers here to meet other filmmakers of international calibre, and for the public and private sectors to meet each other." The only disappointment was the last-minute cancellation of the third scheduled seminar: director Ivan Passer bowed out due to illness.

Although no definitive plans are set for a similar series next year, there are plenty of ideas, with both Primo Piano and the NFB ready to "feel the situation out."

