

# INTRODUCING...

## **Stephen Miller** *the movie man*

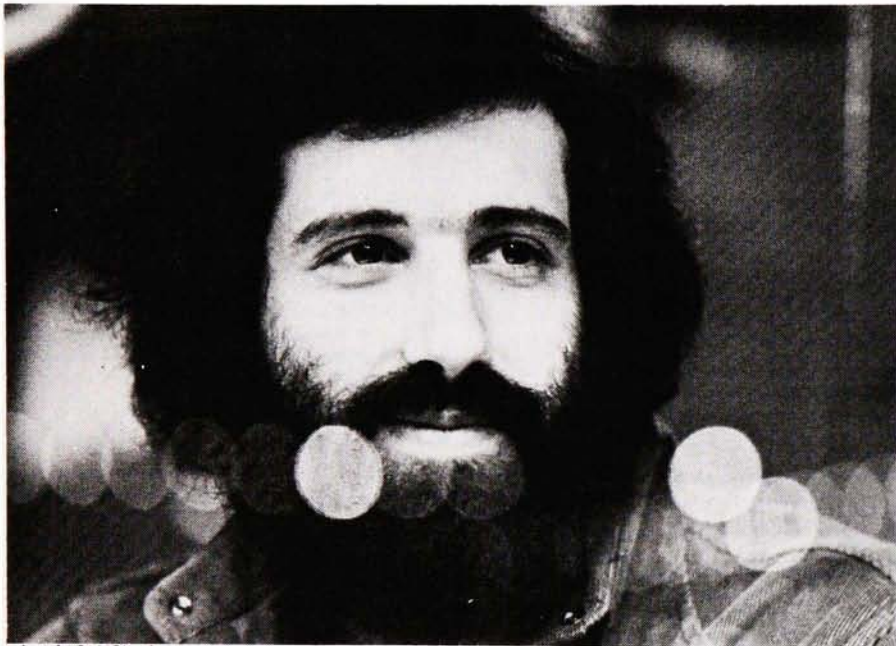


photo by Lois Siegel

At one point in his life, Stephen Miller only saw two films a year. Now he often sees two films a day.

Stephen is the director of the Seville Festival, a relatively new repertory theatre on Ste. Catherine Street West in Montreal, which projects two or three different films every day, including midnight showings on Friday and Saturday.

Films range from 1st run (e.g. Wertmuller's **Love and Anarchy**, Ophuls **Memory and Justice** to 2nd run features (e.g. Woody Allen's **Bananas**, Truffaut's **Jules et Jim**.)

At graduate school in Rochester, N.Y., Stephen found all his courses boring. He began looking for something extra to do. Then a friend asked him to run a film series as part of the school's social events, and that's when Stephen became enthusiastic about film. Along with the film series he also organized an Amateur Film Festival with cash prizes and a dance marathon around **They Shoot Horses Don't They**.

After his school days, Stephen returned to Montreal to become an analyst for an investment firm. That also

was boring, so logically the next step was to look for a theatre.

In April, 1975 Stephen negotiated for Cinema V.

On May 1st he left the investment house.

On May 6th he was in Cannes for the festival.

On August 1st he opened the Cinema V.

Because of business complications with the owner of the Cinema V building, Stephen left that theatre July 31, 1976 and secured the Seville where he would have total creative control.

Besides showing a wide variety of films every week, the Seville is unique with its series of "Encounters", whereby local filmmakers present their films in person to the audience.

Filmmakers who have participated in these sessions include: Ron Hallis, Michael Rubbo, Jean-Claude Labreque, and Tom Burstyn, whose film about the sculptor Mark Prent, "**If Brains Were Dynamite You Wouldn't Have Enough to Blow Your Nose**," won a Gold Medal at the Chicago International Film Festival. Mark Prent even brought his large, encased, rather grotesque sculpture "Dynamite

Brains," to the theatre the night of the showing.

Stephen also likes to recruit 16mm shorts by independent filmmakers to show before the features. "Hopefully, in time, we will be able to pay local filmmakers for these screenings," he asserts. Right now he offers these filmmakers passes to the theatre in exchange.

The Seville Theatre's special events have included a Rocky Horror Halloween Look-Alike Contest; a six-week Dance Series, A Shakespeare Series, and a free screening of Cocteau's **Orphée**.

"The most difficult aspect of repertory is programming, Stephen explains. One needs a balance. The mood of the season affects the audience as well as the locations; for example, in New York there are different types of audiences. There is always someone who will go to see almost anything, but in Montreal a first run, unknown film receives no business. The amount of new films you can introduce to a Montreal audience is limited, and the New York variety of audience just doesn't exist here."

But he hopes that eventually his audience will become more trusting and be willing to investigate the lesser known European, independent and local films. For instance, the Seville recently opened the English version of **Jonah Who Will Be 25 in the Year 2000** by Swiss filmmaker Alain Tanner.

Always one jump ahead, Stephen books films 7-10 weeks in advance. He has to keep in tune with his audience.

Stephen Miller finds repertory theatres necessary. "It bothers me to pay \$3.75 - \$4 to see a movie. The Seville charges only \$1.99 a film, or offers a subscription card of 5 films for \$7.50. Golden Agers and children under 10 enter for \$.99.

"Also, we run a lot of films not showing in the city. If a film does not do well on a first run, it will never be re-run in regular theatres, regardless of whether it's a good film or not. I try to discover these films and old films to show in my theatre."

"I eat celluloid for breakfast," extols Stephen.

Lois Siegel