

ACTING IN CANADA

Acting in Canada is at a crossroads. While the big features are expected to flourish this year, money-wise producers still prefer banking on a star – preferably imported – than betting on a Canadian unknown. ("Canadian" and "star" are still two words which are ill at ease together... unless, that is, the "Canadian" has gone abroad, at which time he or she may become a "star".)

The weekend conference on acting held by the Toronto Film Centre, briefly reviewed on this page, gave Cinema Canada the occasion to take a closer look at acting for film. There is a profile of Stan Colbert who chaired the sessions. Ken Gordon, an acting pro, distinguishes between the career actor and the neophyte. Then, Dr. Blum, who was a visiting professor in Montreal last summer, shares

*his ideas about the special requirements of acting for the camera. Finally, the Spotlight section introduces Françoise Berd, that lady from Quebec who just finished shooting with Robert Altman and who, last year, had a supporting role in Italy with Ettore Scola in **A Special Day**.*

Analyses of the health of the Canadian film industry vary widely these days, but few film people deny that the industry is booming. And with the controversy heating up as to who is and should be reaping the benefits, there has been a flurry of seminars and conferences among professional groups wanting to ensure that their members get a share of the jobs and high status credits.

To the budding film professional, the seminar and conference situation is a chance to observe and question others in the business. For the acknowledged masters in the trade, seminars offer an opportunity to make fresh contacts and, often, to air problems affecting the interrelating sectors of the industry.

One such encounter took place at the recent weekend conference on acting for film sponsored by the Toronto Film Centre, (formerly the Filmmaker's Co-op) and held at the Chelsea Inn, Toronto.

"The Industry's Approach to Acting", the first of several conferences planned by the Centre, was an initial step in the Toronto Film Centre's expanded involvement with Canadian actors. A series of courses for actors will be offered at the Centre in the fall.

CBC executive producer (Film Drama) Stan Colbert chaired the four sessions. Colbert, who has been working closely with Canadian film writers over the past couple of years through the Canadian Film Development Corporation's writer workshops, also has wide experience in working with the actor-related areas of the film industry.

Saturday morning panelists Marc Champion, Patrick Spence-Thomas and Joyce King tackled the subject of technical aspects of filmmaking and their relationship to the actor. Drawing from personal experience in film production, the participants talked about the kinds of problems and responsibilities actors should be sensitive to in the production situation. Joyce King, who works as a Continuity person, outlined her responsibilities on the set and suggested that actors need to be familiar with the basics of continuity. Patrick Spence-Thomas (Sound) while defending his fellow technicians in the industry, attributed the poor sound quality of some Canadian films to low budgets. Marc Champion spoke enthusiastically about having worked on a low budget film where the actors took up various technical positions, in a spirit of cooperation.

The afternoon session dealt more specifically with the relationship between director and actor on the film set. Directors Allan King and George Bloomfield discussed their particular approaches to working under pressure with actors. King expressed a preference for a relaxed, smooth-running atmosphere on the set, while Bloomfield felt that tension on the set was often an integral part of the creative process. Actress Linda Sorenson, in describing how she had often been treated as "Second Class" to American actors on the set of a Canadian production in which she had equal billing, drew a sympathetic response from the audience.

Sunday's seminars were geared to acting as a business, and the panels were made up of the people behind the artists. Guests for the

morning session included Linda Shapiro, publicist; Michael Oscars, talent agent (GKO); Gino Empry, publicist and Bruce Kirkland, from the *Toronto Star*. Both Empry and Shapiro cited communications between actors and publicists as a major problem in the industry. Their requests for information, composites and credits are often met too late, they explained, in a business where success depends on hustle. Actors and agents were urged to make publicity material more readily available. Bruce Kirkland was put in the hot seat when Michael Oscars described his difficulties in getting promotional material published. But Kirkland, in a lively discussion, defended himself and the sincerity of the Canadian press's desire to assist in the promotion and recognition of home-grown talent.

The final seminar of the weekend, "Agents and the Actor", dealt with the problems of the agent in acquiring script and casting information from those responsible for casting, and conversely, the difficulties of the casting agent in trying to respond to the demand of agents and actors phoning in search of engagements. Guests on the panel were agents Michael Oscars and Lawrie Rotenberg, George Bourne (casting agent, Ontario TV) and lawyer/actor Hart Pomerantz. The session wrapped up with all the panelists airing their views of the problems and potential solutions in the relationship between actors and agents.

Each panel session was followed by questions from the audience. Despite the disappointingly low turnout from the acting community, criticism and questioning was lively.