

“coming out”

by Natalie Edwards

“Well, where the hell is the Super 8 Revolution!” jeered the professional cinematographer who, ten years ago, had been worried he’d lose work to the advancing technology of the pistol or pocket camera and its ever-ready advocates. “There isn’t one, and there never will be!” he cried.

One place to look for signs of a Super 8 revolution is at a Super 8 film festival. There are only a few of them in the world, notably in South America, Spain (where they can be potent revolutionary tools) and England. But one is here in Canada, in Toronto, a thriving three-year affair that this April filled the rooms and halls at Harbourfront, and, according to participants, organizers and the general public, was a runaway success. Again.

The evolution of these first three years of the Super 8 Festival, as the coordinators search for its most effective direction, to some extent parallels the directional shifts in Super 8 itself.

Organized by an active group of teachers and friends at the Ontario College of Art, including John Coull, Richard and Sheila Hill, Scott Didlake and Shalheveth Hillel, it initially set out to find who was out there, what they were up to, and what they wanted to know.

In their introductory article in *Cinema Canada* (No. 25) they stated their original aim:

“We hope that this festival can be a ‘coming out’ celebration for all S8 filmmakers – a chance to meet other people like themselves, gain production knowledge which will enable everyone to make better films in the future, and to finally see their work portrayed on the *big silver screen* after years of being played off the basement wall.”

That first festival held at the Ontario College of Art, with additional screenings at a downtown theater, was a wild success “with people storming the projection booth trying to get their films screened,” as John Coull described it to *The Globe & Mail*.

Natalie Edwards, Toronto film critic, is president of the Canadian Filmmakers Distribution Centre and serves on the Board of the Council of Canadian Filmmakers.

The organizers found there was indeed an abundance of material and almost fanatical interest in Super 8. Their stated desire “to receive any and all work in S8 format from any and all filmmakers...” released a veritable tidal flood of film. For the next festival it became clear that expanded quarters, a bigger budget and both selectivity in films screened and direction of emphasis would be needed.

Located at Harbourfront, with special Sunday screenings at the New Yorker Theater, the second festival had a healthy budget, good press coverage, and received abundant praise for the non-competitive screenings, the workshop and lectures and the fascinating exhibition of technical advancements. Yet the problem of over-abundance remained.



Julio Neri



Jacques Loiquin

"It's a grass roots thing," explained organizer Richard Hill to a *Toronto Star* reporter. "Super 8 is very much a folk art. These things are happening regardless of the film market. There is a lot of raw or semi-raw material you might not otherwise see."

Or want to see. For the difficulty now was how to keep all the channels open and yet not be swamped by inferior, unimaginative, and imitative efforts. In other Super 8 festivals organizers have found only 25 percent — or, in some cases, as low as 5 percent — of the material offered, acceptable. For Super 8 is in many ways a folk art, and like folk music, as Pete Seeger once explained, it "sounds that way because it was made up by the folks."

Ian Birnie, well-known in Toronto for his knowledgeable programming of Art Gallery of Ontario screenings, was in charge of the jury handling submissions. Only about half of the 175 films submitted were programmed over the weekend festival April 14 to 16 this year. Divided into categories "Fact and Documentary", "Home Movie and Diary", "Fiction and Narrative", "Stop Motion and Animation" (only a few here), and "Art and Experimental", they varied in accomplishment. "I was disappointed in the quality of the films submitted," admits Ian, "but the workshops were exciting and suggested all sorts of possibilities the submitted films didn't. Certainly the potential of Super 8 is much larger than the present reality."

Considering the marvelous *sketching* qualities of Super 8, so often lost in an attempt to be sophisticated, Ian commented, "It surprised me how little of the film was really personal. I expected something closer to the psyche, about what goes on in their own room, but found even most of the experimental films influenced by previous 16mm work, and a lot was high-schoolish."

Praising the workshops and the work with the blind and the elderly particularly, Birnie concluded that the Super 8 Festival "mustn't become too elitist but it does need standards", and wondered how the blend of public interest, academic sessions, panels, conferences, workshops and entertaining screenings would work out next year.

That is a chief concern of organizer John Coull as well. The overwhelming response to the festival has allayed fears of failure and replaced them with some hard decisions con-

cerning content and direction. Coull fears the strength of the festival's appeal on an international level, with guests and workshops concerning Super 8 work around the world, may eventually cause some neglect of its original purpose and Canadian aspect. Furthermore, the trade show, a huge success on one level, could expand unduly and turn the festival into "a hobbyist's haven". He'd prefer to see people bring in their own systems, examples of their own inventions, for study and comparison.

And like Birnie, Coull was "not too happy with the quality of the films."

Yet the festival was a marked success; the film screenings after all were only one part of a packed weekend. Available also were the guests and their workshops: Jim Blue with his community documentaries for PBS; Lenny Lipton with his ever-popular 3-D experimentation; Julio Neri, director of the Venezuelan S-8 Festival, with a workshop on features; Jacques Locquin from the Antenne 2 Network in Paris, opening up mind-boggling possibilities with his talk of the over 70 programs he scheduled last year, transferred from Super 8 to video; Suzanne Swibold and her exemplary nature work; Mary Beams talking about rotoscope and animation; Helene Winer from Artists Space Gallery in New York showing the work of three outstanding artists, and many others, as well as two projects of far-reaching possibilities: Bert Stollard's York Communascope, a senior citizens project, and Doug Eliuk's NFB project on Super 8 for the Blind.

On top of all this there was the well-organized and flourishing mini trade exhibit, with Sankyo and Kodak, Atelier S8 and Beaulieu, Filmsonic, Chinon, Magnet One, PS Production Services, Halmar, Toronto Camera and Henry's among those striving for the attention and education of the Super 8 fan in a kind of huckster's heaven of screens and mikes and machinery.

The 1978 Super 8 Festival exposed the best and worst of current Super 8 trends. Over the weekend the large crowd which drifted between screenings, lectures, workshops, and in and out of the trade fair, represented a 100 percent growth over last year's registration, according to director Sheila Hill. Next year's dates in April and the location (Harbourfront has donated its facilities again) are set, but the balance of content and emphasis is not. This may be the year the dedicated hobbyists and amateurs take their films off to the Canadian International Amateur Film Festival competition, and the Super 8 concentrates on advanced techniques, original material, and the inventive uses of this most adaptable medium of expression.

Obviously if the festival is not to be swamped by its success, the acceptance of 'any and all' films must be replaced by strict selectivity and tough decisions made about the overall purpose and direction of the event. Next year can further the exploration not of the Super 8 'revolution', but of the evolution of Super 8.

Amateur enthusiasts should also note the CIAFF, the Canadian International Amateur Film Festival (director, Mrs. Betty Peterson, 4653 Dundas Street West, Islington, Ontario M9A 1A4) and local film clubs like The Toronto Movie Club (P.O. Box 1224, Postal Station A, Toronto) which encourage work on all levels.

For more information on the Super 8 Festival, contact Sheila Hill, Room 16, 43 Victoria Street, Toronto, or call 367-0590. □