

everybody came

Big and brash and slightly out of control. That was the Toronto festival this year, awash in its huge popular success. George Csaba Koller gives us a glimpse of his diary as he 'did' the festival.

by George Csaba Koller



Robert Morley thinks the proof is in the pudding. Jacqueline Bisset and George Segal wait to see in *The Great Chefs*

On the afternoon of Opening Night, I enter the press room at the Plaza II. David Novek, with telephone welded to his ear, greets me warmly. He is repping *In Praise of Older Women*, having left his National Film Board publicity job some time back. Paul Almond comes in with his newly tanned, California wife and Marc Gervais, who seems to vaguely remember me from Cinema Canada's formative years. It takes a while to get my pass, since I'm not on the official list, but the phone

call from Cinema Canada does the trick. Then George Kaczender makes a brief appearance and I ask him in Hungarian for a pass to Opening Night for a young lady I have in mind, but he looks puzzled, throws up his hands, and says that they are way oversold.

Get a lift in a yellow Ford truck to Yonge and Queen and high tail it to the theatre where a huge crowd is gathered on the sidewalk. They hold me up at the door along with the

rest of the crowd. Even my press pass cannot get me through. George Anthony of the *Toronto Sun* sails through with a whole entourage while I wait around (but then the *Sun* is the official festival paper, an indication of Bill Marshall's shrewdness in reaching the masses). Assertion does the trick. After a long fruitless search, I find a seat way up in the balcony, cordoned off for the privileged gold passes and the press. Scores of people are left holding tickets with no seats. Some do not hesitate to express their anger. Wayne Clarkson, this year's festival director, appears to assure everyone without seats that the film will be re-screened at the Festival Cinema later in the evening. Then Secretary of State John Roberts is introduced to win the hearts and minds of this gala audience.

Roberts gets a cool reception (largely on account of anti-government sentiment, but perhaps because of his dilly dallying on the film policy) but makes a very strong statement against censorship, endearing him to all, judging from the applause. And finally the lights are dimmed, and through the magic of celluloid and big bucks, we are propelled back in time to Budapest, Hungary perspiring profusely under the burden of Papa Stalin in the fifties (and what's this?) "elderly" ladies initiating a young boy into sweet n' sweaty sex? Leave it to us Magyars to put the paprika back into puberty, but with finesse, noblesse oblige.

Actually, it is to the credit of director Kaczender, producer Robert Lantos, and director of photography Miklos Lente, that they managed in **In Praise of Older Women** to recreate the atmosphere of Budapest in the fifties without ever leaving Montreal. Down to the last minute detail, such as the ashtrays in the dance hall, the flashing neon signs, pictures of the political leaders on the wall, and the lead character young Andras humming the popular tunes of the day, as well as the impressionistic portrayal of the 1956 revolution, the spirit of our homeland is there. The explicit treatment of heterosexual encounters might raise a few eyebrows, but is healthy and refreshing in this age of sexual ambivalence. The audience for the most part disliked the film, even though it has a strong Canadian element, being that young Andras winds up escaping to this country after the abortive revolt, to continue his sexual conquests unabated. A male fantasy to be sure, but what red blooded man would turn down invitations from Karen Black, Marilyn Lightstone, Helen Shaver, Alexandra Stewart, and Susan Strasberg?

Over to City Hall in the rain where I find long line-ups for drinks and blaring disco music, wide plastic streamers, and huge balloons. The whole affair is a bit chintzy, despite the assembled notables. Karen Black makes an entrance with hubby Kit Carson. Donald Pilon and Chuck Shamata exchange macho acting talk. Don Owen is complaining about almost being kept out of the opening. Kaczender makes a brief appearance, but one has the impression that the real party is elsewhere.

Wake up Friday at noon and catch Murray Markowitz on a Hamilton talk show rapping about **Hugs and Kisses**. He says that Demeter was done in by jealous people who envied his success and great wealth, and the Hungarian connection

George Csaba Koller, former editor/publisher of Cinema Canada, is presently at work on a research project on Canadian experimental films. He hopes to write a book on the subject next year.

is there again. The whole town is buzzing with film talk and film people. Over to Canadian Film Institute luncheon at Plaza II, meet Frederik Manter in the lobby, an old friend from the days when he used to be Cinema Canada's advertising manager. Kelly O'Brien and others are there, and the circle is complete, because Wayne Clarkson hails from the CFI as well. They hand out press kits, including new books on Don Shebib and Richard Leiterman, put out by Piers Handling and the publications section. John Foster of *Movie Works* rushes about with a huge cross around his neck, having taken on the task of publishing a daily paper for the duration of the festival.

Head down to the Marketplace, a collection of commercial booths featuring product from various publications and film companies. Back to the lobby to sit awhile and chat with Dennis Zahoruk of **Brethren** fame about his new script **Evil Eye**, based on an outline by Peter Bryant.

Nelson Smith C.A. appears and invites us up for a drink at the hospitality lounge on the fifth floor, which turns out to be *the* place to hang out and pick up gossip and be attuned to the festival's central nervous system.

In the following week, this very comfortable hotel suite is to be deluged with stars and sparkling, beautiful people, all eager to be close to the hub of this fast revolving wheel of fortune set in motion by Bill Marshall and company.

Go to see **Marie-Anne**, a film from Alberta with a feminine point of view, starring Andrée Pelletier as a beautiful, strong willed woman who turns out to be the first white lady west of Saskatchewan among the fur traders and Indians. She has a quasi-mystical confrontation with a fierce Indian woman, her husband's ex-lover, and ends up saving the day by an act of courage. It's a bit square what with its CBC like dramatics, nevertheless producer Fil Fraser did a fine job. There is a need for honest films about Canadian history, if our identity is to survive alongside the American, Australian, German and Italian bits of consciousness exhibited at festivals like this and in marketplaces throughout the world.

Back to the hospitality suite, where Helen Shaver comes in with a white poodle in a white outfit and she asks me for a light. She seems happy, high and not so holy, not knowing that next week she'll win the Etrog as Canada's best actress for her role in **Older Women**. Graham Coughtry is there and gives me an icy look, maybe because I don't have time to talk to him. Have to rush off to see a film. Sydney Newman makes one of his frequent appearances, and we both have club sandwiches (paid by us) along with drinks (courtesy of the Festival). The celebrities sink into their comfortable sofas and arm chairs, preparing to watch the Ali/Spinks fight on the large color TV. I rush off to see another film with an actress named Sandy.

Bloodbrothers turns out to be a nitty-gritty, working class drama about machoness in Italian American hardhats, but it does have its softer moments. The technical quality is excellent and the acting is quite natural, but this kind of film gets on my nerves after a while. In addition to the, by now arbitrary, tits 'n ass scenes and locker room language, bloody fights between men, wife beating, and sweaty camaraderie, one of the brothers has a sensitive side. He wants to quit construction and become a schoolteacher.

The next morning I make it to Yonge and Bloor in time to catch a bit of **Don's Party**, an Aussie film again about macho men who indulge in such sports as grabbing a well-

endowed lady, undressing and throwing her into the pool. Then they all undress and jump in after her and everyone runs around naked for the next half hour, with the more squeamish women offering the towels. Oh yes, there is a labor party election in there somewhere, but not in the sequence I saw, although they did have heavy handed discussions about socialism. Nice technical quality and some good acting.

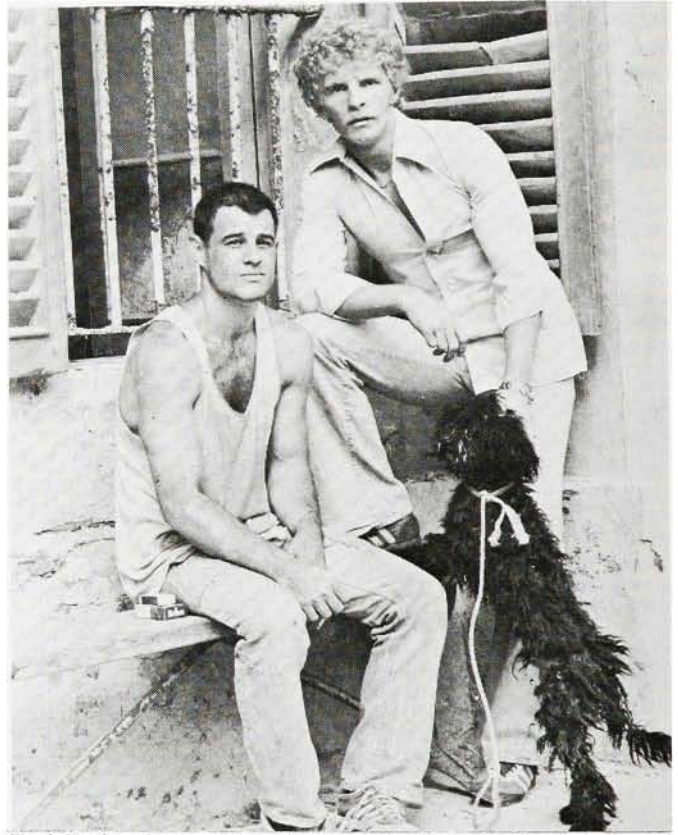
After a quick trip to the hospitality suite, I run across the street to see **Violette Nozière**, Claude Chabrol's Canada/France co-production, which is a beautifully photographed (Jean Rabier) and costumed period piece (thirties) about this sexy young girl who has problems at home and decides to murder her parents in order to solve them. Her father could or could not have been having intercourse with her since she was 13 and her mother is a neurotically hysteric lady. Violette finds out that she has syphilis which can be hereditary, so she decides to blame it on her family. The film is a long and monotonous series of vignettes illuminating the internal world of this young lady. Cockeyed editing makes the plot hard to follow, but David Novek confirmed that 17 minutes were cut. But the film has an added impact, when it is revealed that Violette was a real life murderess saved from the guillotine by Marshall Petain, and then pardoned by Charles de Gaulle. "We do have some curious people in Paris," commented cinematographer Marc Champion after the screening.

Next is the world première of Ted Kotcheff's **Who is Killing the Great Chefs of Europe?** Kotcheff and Micheline Lanctôt get seats in the last row of the balcony and I find myself sitting next to Oscar winner Beverly Shaffer. **Chefs** is a very well made film, Kotcheff knows his craft, but it is about over abundance and high cuisine, which at a time of economic crunch is perhaps a sardonic comment on western appetites and could be considered in bad taste. The film concerns Robert Morley as the epitomic epicure who runs a gastronomic magazine and knows all the great chefs of Europe personally. Anyway, the great chefs get knocked off one by one in the manner of their specialty: baked in an oven, boiled alive as a lobster, mashed as a rabbit, whatever. Jacqueline Bisset and George Segal play a likable couple who have divorced but get back together as the film progresses. She is one of the great chefs and he is a high rolling businessman specializing in fast foods. Well photographed, well acted and humorously scripted, it is not a screamer throughout, but one scene where Segal walks into a subdued vegetarian restaurant and loudly and graphically describes how he's going to open up a place next door where he'll butcher the steer right at your table sending the gentle patrons scurrying for the door, is hilarious. If you are scrimping on your weekly food budget, go see **Great Chefs**. Maybe you'll get vicarious heartburn.

Saturday go to see **Girl Friends**, director Claudia Weill's 16mm feature blown up to 35mm. Off beat beginning about two girl friends, one blonde and WASP, the other curly black haired and Jewish, the real heroine of the film. Blonde gets married and Susan Weinblatt, played by Melanie Mayron, is left alone to cope with the problems of getting started as a photographer. She has a touching love thing going with a middle-aged rabbi (Eli Wallach) and he at one point kisses her passionately on the lips. Later, she picks up a young hitchhiking lady who helps Susan come out of her shell. Not unlike the proverbial butterfly from the cocoon, the awkward, sometimes snotty Jewish kid with glasses is transformed by the

end of the film into a desirable woman. She goes back to see the blonde periodically, and her girl friend's relationship with husband and baby provides good male/female contrast in this liberated age. Well acted, shot and scripted, this film received a standing ovation when it was shown at Cannes. The reception at Toronto's Towne Cinema is more subdued.

There is not enough space to continue in this detailed fashion. I just wanted to give an idea of what it was like covering this major event. The facts have been recorded elsewhere. Total attendance at the festival topped 75,000, making it one of the biggest film festivals in the world. The organizers kept assuring everyone that they did not sell more passes than seats but the contrary was obvious. For this reason, they extended the festival, repeating some of the major attractions for those who could not get in the first time. Cinema Canada asked for interviews with both Bill Marshall and Wayne Clarkson but the request was denied by the press room.



Brad Davis takes a rest as the real Billy Hayes looks on during the shoot of **Midnight Express** in Malta

The festival had too many films for any one journalist to attend, so I decided early on to be very selective. Of the new Australian cinema series, **The Chant of Jimmy Blacksmith** was the most outstanding. Directed by Fred Schepisi, this film is gripping in its subject matter and exhibits a very high standard of technical excellence. About a young aborigine, who is sometimes mistreated but more or less accepted by the white settlers down under, **Jimmy Blacksmith** nevertheless explodes with gruesomely explicit racial violence. The film has imperfections, but it keeps the viewer on the edge of his seat throughout its 122 minutes.

The most cathartic moment at the Festival occurred after the screening of **Midnight Express** when Billy Hayes made



The coup d'état explodes into action as the military storms the airport in *Power Play*

an appearance. The film we saw depicted his somewhat dramatized, but mostly true story of going through hell for five years in a Turkish prison. Having been picked up at Istanbul airport with a large quantity of hashish taped to his body, Billy Hayes was caught up in the nightmare world of the Turkish system of "justice," which decided to use him as an example to other young westerners who might entertain similar get rich quick ideas. Sentenced to three years, Billy is told on the day of his release that another twenty years has been imposed on him. Brad Davis, as Hayes, goes understandably berserk at this point. One of the most powerful scenes in any movie of recent memory takes place when his girl friend finally saves up enough money to visit Billy after four years. By this time he is almost a zombie. As soon as they are left alone in the visiting room, with a glass partition dividing them, he's overtaken by her low-cut blouse and asks to see her breasts. Taken out of context this sounds crass, but it is one of the most touching love scenes ever filmed. He finally kills the head prison guard and makes a dramatic escape. It is not surprising that audiences everywhere have been giving Billy Hayes standing ovations after the film. Toronto was no exception. A further note on the power of cinema in general: 47 days after the film was shown in Washington D.C., the U.S. government signed an extradition treaty with Turkey for the exchange of such prisoners.

And finally, an equally gripping movie, this one a Canadian/Anglo co-production, directed by Martyn Burke, produced by Chris Dalton, and starring Peter O'Toole, David Hemmings, Donald Pleasence, and Barry Morse. *Power Play* takes place in a mythical European country, but just as *State of Siege*, it could happen anywhere. When terrorism causes brutal government repression, or vice versa, a number of high echelon military leaders, instigated by a well meaning cabinet minister, decide to stage a coup. Hemmings plays the noble

Colonel, a family man, about to retire but moved by his conscience to act. O'Toole plays a flamboyant tank commander, who is slow to convince but does join the coup, for entirely different reasons. Morse plays the cabinet minister and Pleasence is superbly evil as the symbol of the repressive government. Chuck Shamata makes a brilliant entrance as the coup's security chief, in a scene that will probably go down in Canadian movie history. As the plotters sit around a conference table discussing the tactics of the coup, Shamata puts a bit of terror in their hearts as he replays, on a hidden tape recorder, everything they've just said and jumps in front of them with a submachine gun placing them under mock arrest. "Gentlemen, you should be more careful next time," he says conchantly. "This could have been the real thing." And so could the rest of the movie, which has a very twisted, if not totally unexpected, ending. The pace is brisk, the acting is of an evenly high quality with O'Toole's brilliance shining through and the rest of the production values do just credit to the highly talented, largely Canadian production team responsible for *Power Play*.

Epilogue: the sidewalk outside 21 McGill Street, an exclusive Toronto's women's club, looked just like a scene from *Power Play*. At least a dozen heavy looking dudes with walkie talkies who claimed to be "parking attendants for the limousines," were looking out for the security of the notables assembled inside. The downstairs gymnasium featured the music and the dancing, while the upstairs reception room had a cocktail party atmosphere. Both were packed tightly with celebrities, and the champagne flowed freely. Earlier in the evening, the Canadian Film Awards ceremonies took place at the Ryerson theatre, of which a CBC television special was taped by Bill Marshall and his team. "Stars galore," is how one participant described the largest bash ever thrown by the film industry in Toronto, and probably in Canada. □

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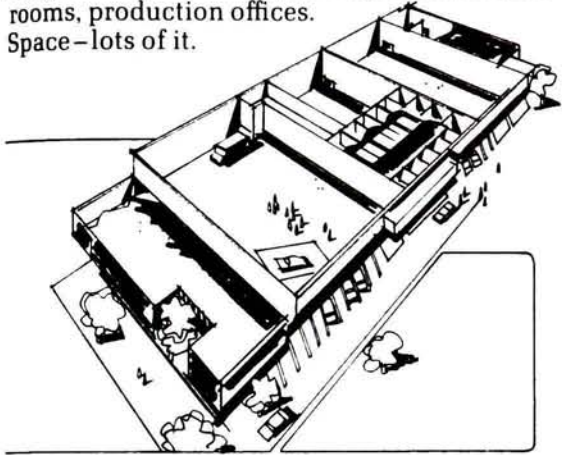
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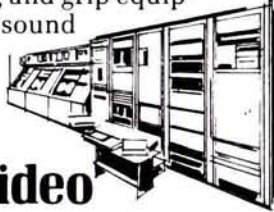
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