

# Stratford Film Festival



*by Natalie Edwards*

## Point of View

In 1972 about 20 people took memberships for the full week of events at the Stratford Film Festival. Last year, almost 10 times that many did. Popularity of the Festival is on the rise again, and with justification, for it is a unique and charming festival and a pleasure to visit.

It offers no brass, no hype, no high-powered shenanigans such as surfeit other bigger noisier efforts, just a quiet week (10 days in 1974!) of interesting films culled from world festivals, shown in a comfortable theatre in a conservative, mannerly little Ontario town.

The Festival actually began in 1956, and, run by the Stratford Festival Office, lasted six seasons, to 1961. Revitalized, it began again in 1971 with a "7th" season, under the energetic direction of Gerald Pratley and Clive Denton of the Ontario Film Theatre, abetted by Pat Thompson as P.R. and in cooperation with the Stratford Festival Office. It seems now to be settling in for permanence, and eventually, stature.

These first years of what I expect will become a terribly well established and possibly renowned festival, are the interesting and exciting ones. Now Pratley and Denton court producers and distributors of the films they select, no doubt murmuring of the great North American market to the European and Third World filmmakers, reminding Americans of the large audience in nearby Toronto, the safest big city in the east (so far) and hinting of prestige and the popular press coverage that will come in time.

True too, Jamaica's *The Harder They Come* was shown at the Festival in 1972 and well received. It took a long time coming to Toronto, but predictably drew enthusiastic audiences of West Indians and indigenous Torontonians just as the critics said it would. The reaction to films at the Stratford Film Festival in many ways has proven a good indicator of their eventual commercial reception in this part of North America.

One result of this is that I feel it necessary to be very conscientious in writing my personal opinions of these films as a festival reviewer. Remember though, seeing films at a Festival is after all much like meeting someone at a party. Just as your impressions are influenced by the party itself, the guests, the gaiety or deadliness, your view of the film is affected by the other films in the festival surrounding it, the general ambiance and the audience reactions. And just as that handsome athletic type who stood out so in a crowded room full of boozy pseudo-intellectuals turned out to be as interesting as an empty pea-pod over lunch a week later, you can misjudge a film somewhat by the company it keeps.

Finally, it's pretty redundant to point out that a reviewer's viewpoint is just the opinion of one person. As Herbert Whittaker, *Globe and Mail* theatre critic, recently remarked, "Would anyone really prefer the opinion of a committee?"

## Eastern Europe Shows Off

Eastern European films selected for the 1973 festival, with one exception, had a great deal in common. They were big budget, lavish, and overwhelming works, heavy on artistry, the skills of set design, costuming and imaginative decoration, and superbly photographed. And they were very old fashioned in film terms, using little that was innovative in either technique or theme.

The one I liked the least was *Michael the Brave* from Romania. Whole armies were enlisted for this historical opus, also called *The Last Crusade*. "200 actors, 50 leading parts, 7 battles (30,000 extras in one), 150 period cannons, 200 stuntmen on horseback . . . 38,000 spears," boasts their press folder. This simplistic rendering of the unifying of Wallachia, Transylvania and Moldavia into modern Romania, in style more DeMille than Griffiths, may be a necessary force in that country to develop or encourage national consciousness, but it was, like so many epics, too much a pageant and too little a

worthwhile examination of the powers and currents that in actuality form nations and create "heroes." A child's history, romantic and ridiculous — a boy child's. Loads of blood and guts, slaughtering and connivery and cruelty, plus a beheading so awkward and desperate for effect that it caused comic relief, were the chief features of this mud-and-blood spattered war-adoring show. Any treatment that could show the wealthy and powerful sister in the largest banking house of the time as an adorable, beautiful, faithful innocent who looks like she just won the Miss Teen Pageant, certainly isn't taking full advantage of the opportunity to investigate the power of Michael's personality in creating converts to his point of view.

Sergiu Nicolaescu's reputation was originally based on flower/art shorts, for which he's won a number of prizes. I finally saw one, the *Dream of Roses*, and found his time-lapse photography of flowers opening and petals falling to a lush musical score as exquisite as paintings on velvet, and similarly in that same gasp-of-admiration class that still wins festival prizes. Considering the determination and organization and skill necessary to make a film like *Michael the Brave*, it is some consolation to me that a powerful romanticist like Nicolaescu is just directing pretend armies.

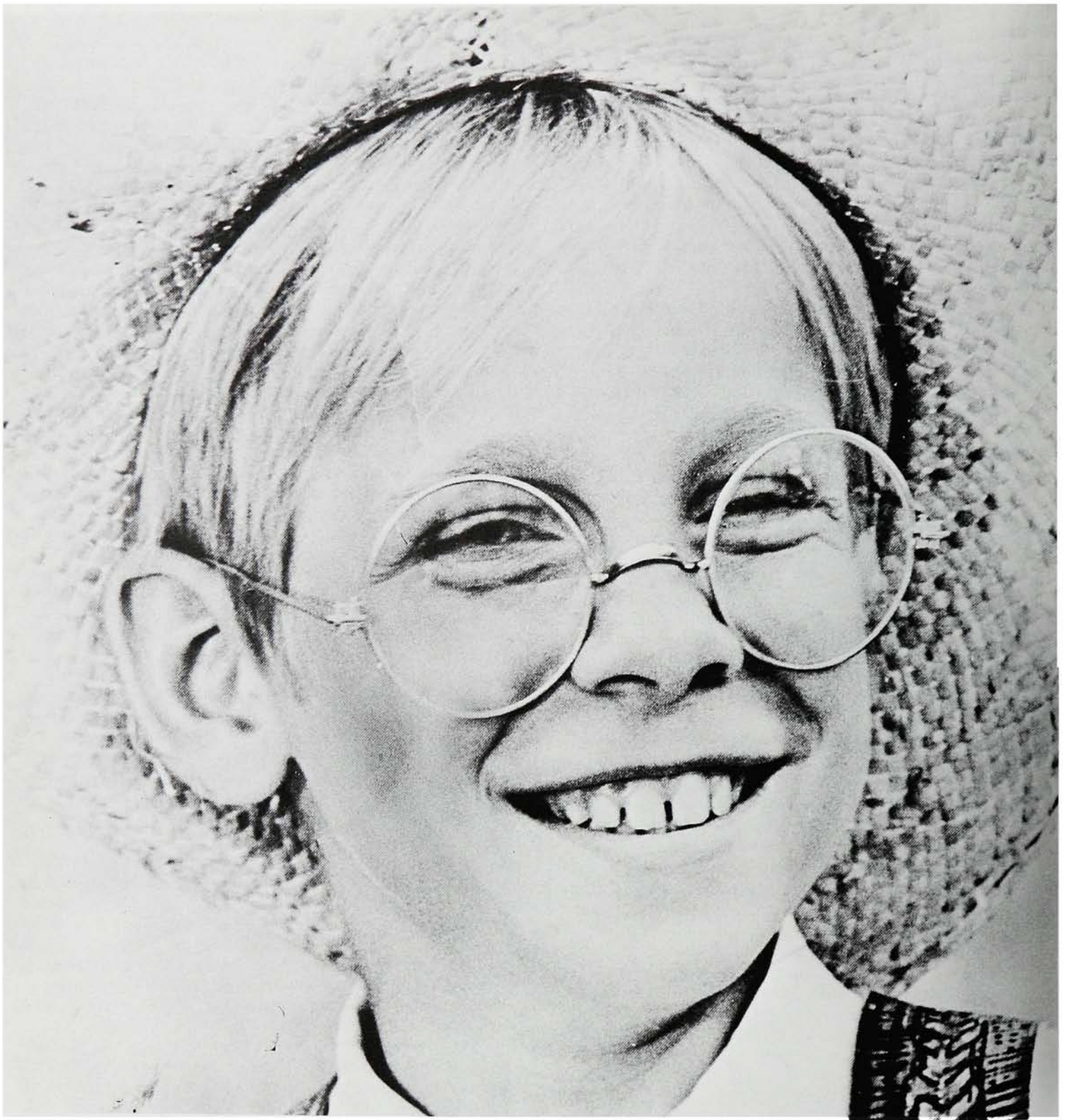
Male battlefields apparently aren't confined to history and territorial warfare; men also think of themselves as conquering heroes among the less noticeably bloody hearts and thighs of women, subduing foreign territory with a short sword and much skill. Thus the Hungarian entry, *Szindbád*, presented a handsome devil in the Mastroianni mold as he, silver sideburns and distinguished face, leafs back through the pages of his personal history, fondling the memories of his many loves and occasionally retreating to a red and womb-like brothel and his large, comfortable, rather ugly mistress, wife and mother surrogate.

The male, played by Zoltán Latinovits, is seen with a tinge of regret; he is really no hero, and director Huszárík in fact studies him with a tender sympathetic sigh. If I interpret the film correctly it tells me that women are beautiful and marvellous and that men need them and that without love-making life is not worthwhile, but if you devote your life to no greater pursuit than sensual satisfaction, you will in the end have, and be, nothing.

Sándor Sára's photography was magnificent. Truly. A cascade of beauty. The romantic theme was embellished with visuals of the finest linens and lace, glass and silver, women and girls. Costumes, coiffures and localities all vied to cause exclamations of delight. Each scene seemed to surpass the last as Szindbád journeyed through his sensual life. Yet through all this orgy of beauty I became withdrawn, reluctant, resentful at seeing women as just one more form of sensual pleasure and nothing else. And during the exquisite gourmet meal which nearly kills Szindbád and which makes a sensitive woman shudder as the connection between women as objects and finally women as delicious food is made all too clear, I found myself thinking of Atwood's *Edible Woman*.

The Czechoslovakian entry was *Valerie and Her Week of Wonders*, 1970, directed by Jaromil Jires and photographed by Jan Curik. Again, like *Szindbád*, it was notable for virtuoso camera work and suffering splendor. Such closeups, such framing, such *light*, such *colors* . . . one runs out of superlatives (like such?). And actress Jaroslava Musil as Valerie is as beautiful and delicate as a fairytale princess.

Shades of *Juliet of the Spirits* here we have again a male visualization of the daydreams and nightdreams of a female, only this time of a thirteen year old who has just dropped two beautiful ruby globules of first menstrual blood on a daisy as she passes, and who now enters a magical mystical surreal pubic dream-world. The fantastical and melodramatic fancies of the maiden's dreams meld in and out of her equally fantastic mind as strange sequences combining martyrdom and incredible rescues, love of brother, grandmother, strange incestuous feelings for male parent or grandparent, vampire imagery linked to the blood, innumerable beautiful virgins,



*Frederik Becklen in Kjell Grede's Hugo and Josefin*

girls' love, and everything imaginable except normality, overwhelm the film. Surreality and dream sequences don't have to make sense, and there isn't much here to suggest the inner fancies of a pubescent girl, or what it's really like to be a young female in Czechoslovakia. For that you need to see Vera Chytilova's *Daisies*, where she makes the definitive comment on women as edible goodies by having *her* young females tramp all over a gorgeous banquet, quite spoiling all the beautiful food. Needless to say, Valerie is beautiful, and surrounded by fruit and lace, she does look good enough to eat. With the kind of imagination she's endowed with in the film, imagine the nightmares she'll have when she realizes that.

Two more eastern European works of splendor and big budget magnificence were by Tarkovsky, the much acclaimed young Russian director of *My Name is Ivan*, 1963.

Andrei Rubliev, 1966, only superficially falls into the

pattern of films of violence, cruelty, battles, mutilations and tortures and a strictly male point of view. It is far more than that, though it contains it all.

Handled in a classically constructed style, divided into formal parts like the screens upon which icons are sometimes painted, it reveals a vast panorama of 15th century Russia, a seething cauldron of a nation bubbling into being, a muddy miserable universe of people barely above the animal stages. The remoteness of art, as typified by the icons of the great monk Theophanes and Rubliev's early work, and the violence, lusts and needs of the people of Russia, are inexorably brought together so that by the end of the film Rubliev's art has been humanized. The black and white film concludes with a color montage of details from the real Andrei Rubliev's work.

Much cutting, dwindling the original lengthy film by at least 40 minutes, has doubtless weakened the structure of the



*Delphine Seyrig and Jane Fonda in Losey's version of A Doll's House*

film. Still, a fascinating combination of remote esoteric sequences and realistic involving episodes works reasonably well to draw the two worlds of art and life together, though the editing may have interfered with their balance. Unfortunately for me, scenes in which eyes are gouged out realistically, or hot lead poured into a bound man's mouth tend to unnerve me so that I don't get sufficient calming from the balancing lyrical scenes of reeds flowing in water or gently falling rain, but just sit and shudder, numb.

The eighth sequence of the casting of a giant bell is not only important as a statement of the need for faith and a reaffirmation to icon painter Rubliev of faith's power, but is a masterly little film all on its own, and could be separated and enjoyed quite alone.

Vincent Canby in the *New York Times* said: "This much is known: the film, which was being shown privately in Moscow

in 1967, was presented out of competition at the 1969 Cannes Film Festival by the owner of the French distribution rights but against the official wishes of the Russians, who reportedly felt that one of its themes — the artist trying to make sense within a brutalizing world — had embarrassing contemporary parallels."

The showing at the 1971 Belgrade Festival was cancelled by USSR authorities who said, "... it does not correspond to historical truth."

Certainly one significance of this immense work is the statement that art must develop regardless of political repression and that after the deaths (of which we see plenty) of leaders and laymen, art will survive to speak for the people. Rubliev learned to humanize his icons, he introduced real faces rather than symbolic and idealized versions of saints. Yet



Howard da Silva capers as Ben Franklin in Peter Hunt's musical, 1776



Annie Girardot and Alain Delon in Jessua's *Shock Treatment*

blandly I occasionally couldn't remember which of the bearded monks he was. The film in more than this harked back to the old styles of Russian film-making, and in this it was both an interesting achievement and a disappointment.

Another Tarkovsky film at the Festival was the unscheduled *Solaris*, which as a Sci-Fi fancier I was longing to see. The beginning was awkward, prolonged and certainly disorienting as a lot of black and white Japanese speeding road-shots were intercut with Russian astronauts meeting at a country home, and film of official meetings introducing characters who seemed in the present to be doing things like burning old photographs and regretting life. The effect was so confusing I couldn't decide whether we were viewing flashback, flash-forward, current time or simultaneous time in some other time warp. I hope it was intentional. Finally, however, all this led to the space ship and our scientist's investigations off *Solaris*, a very distant planet indeed.

There were some splendid visual effects here and a good set, but though the concept of a planet whose shifting sea-foam-like surface can attract and direct your thoughts into concrete visualizations seemed pretty interesting on several levels, the actual products of the various scientists' imaginings were quite a let-down. The terrifying monsters hidden away on the ship and conjured by the other scientists never materialized, except for a fleeting glance at what seemed an ordinary dwarfed person while "our" scientists' brain simply offered him the same girl, a lost love, over and over again.

It was an interesting exploration of love as a figment of our mind that we can't destroy, but both the theory, and the adventures on the space ship were too diffuse and unformed, so I suppose, like the shifting froth of the surface of *Solaris*, they were meant to be used by our own minds to be drawn into meanings. I certainly hope so. After 2 1/2 ponderous hours my opinion of Tarkovsky dropped a notch.

There was one exception to the east European super-spectacles, and that was a modest 60 minute black and white feature by the Hungarian Zanussi (*Family Life*) originally aired on TV and called *Behind Walls* or *Behind the Wall*. This was a perceptive and sensitive exploration of the moments when two lives cross and the imperceptible, subtle and touching reactions caused by possibilities missed, or perhaps met, as people maintain their lives behind their separate walls.

The actors Zbigniew Zapasiewicz and Maja Jomorowska play a scientist and a young woman who live in the same M2 apartment block. She hopes to receive a position in the institute at which he works and shyly but determinedly meets him and tries to enlist his aid. Whether she is bold under her tentative exterior, or shy and desperate, to make such a move, we must decide. A natural wariness of involvement tends to

make the audience, like the physicist, draw back from the intrusion.

Everything is seen only on the surface. We know no more of either of them than they, and their appearance, reveal to each other. Therefore we are drawn into the film, forced to make the same value judgments the young physicist attempts to make while trying to decide whether to remain uninvolved or take an interest in the girl. We can't even tell if she's honest and if her remarks about her doctorate and uncredited paper are true. She looks like trouble and she's not particularly appealing so an uncommitted attitude seems safest. Even her undramatic suicide attempt doesn't draw us or the physicist, into close sympathy. Yet at the end, like him, we see her in the distance on her balcony fumbling with her plants, we feel that something has been lost, missed. The Beethoven piano concerto in the background doesn't sentimentalize the scene but augments precisely the position of gently regained life and Maja's (Zanussi's wife) superb acting controls the scene perfectly. The girl puts a little water on her not very attractive plants, and the film ends. Good.

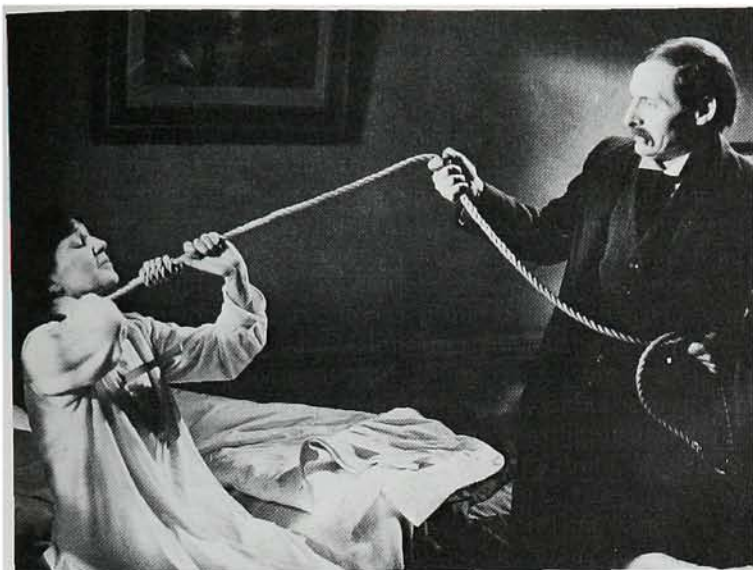
### A Bad Mark for West Germany

No matter what one felt about the weight of eastern European opuses, there was no comparison to be made with the one West German film included in the festival. This was *The Scarlet Letter*, a reworking of Nathaniel Hawthorne's New England novel directed by Wim Wenders. It was a disappointment on every level, particularly that of seeing Lou Castel, whom I liked so much in *Fists in the Pocket*, in a very uninspired and pedestrian acting job and badly dubbed to boot. As for Senta Berger, looking like a cover of Redbook, and that "Atlantic" coastline of sloping beaches and gently slapping wavelets, well, the less said the better. At least Hans Christian Blech had an interesting face, but it's cheating to use *Blech* as the last word on this film.

### Francky French

French entries at the festival were commercially entertaining movies, well made and with, as usual, a little more to them than meets the eye.

Alain Jessua's *Shock Treatment*, for instance, was not only a carefully constructed thriller concerning a middle-aged lady visiting an unusual health spa where fresh sheep cells were used to revitalize wealthy ageing patrons, but it also carried a pretty clear and effective statement about the selfishness of the rich, the necessary evils of a capitalist society where greed and gain are encouraged, and the ignored exploitation of the foreign laborers in France, who in the film are quite literally bled for all they are worth. Alain Delon as the icy-hearted doctor, and



A dream sequence from *Under Milk Wood*

carefully contrived cold lighting helped create a nightmare environment for Annie Girardot to explore and try to escape. Jessua said before the show that he hoped it would give us nightmares. Thanks a lot.

In the morning coffee seminar the next day Jessua explained how he managed to create the cool light and the coldly clinical atmosphere, and how he manoeuvred Girardot into her part of the unforgettable murder scene. "We did our best to frighten her, things like took out lamb's brains in front of her. So we shot this scene only once, and after the scene she had almost a breakdown."

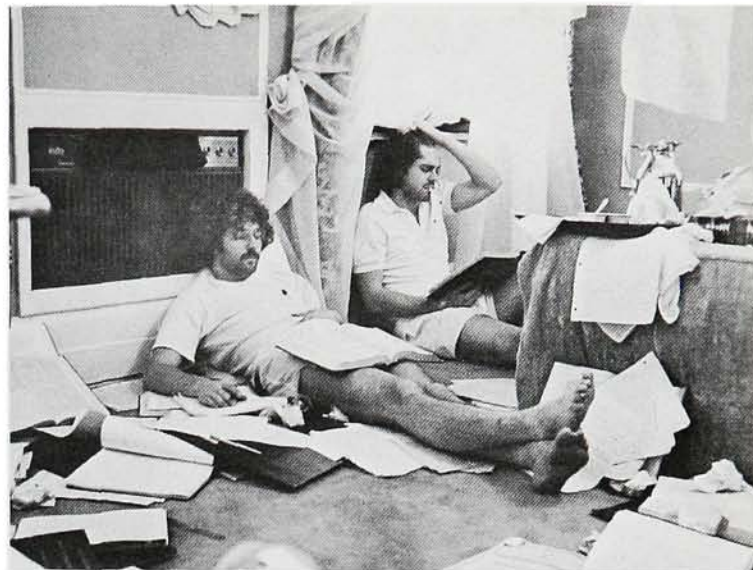
This is Jessua's third feature. Of the first two he commented: "The first one (*La Vie à l'Envers*) was an international critical success and an international failure from a financial point of view. The second one (*The Killing Game*) was a little bit less praised by the critics and the public came in France; it was rather successful. And the last one, I think because of Delon and Girardot, was a very big success in France. People came to see it and were discussing it, and what I liked about the reception of the film – was people happy with the film, people loving the film . . ."

And his next project? Jessua said, "It will be a film about a man of 40 living like an old kid, and suddenly something happens in his life and he realizes that time is passing, and he's obliged to continue to live, making the same jokes, the same stupidities. That's all."

Another French master of horror is certainly Claude Chabrol, but I didn't stay for his 1970 untitled *La Rupture*, because my French isn't good enough to comprehend subtleties. I understand the film is melodramatic and even unimpressive on one level, while on a deeper level it is a fascinating work. All I saw was the opener where the ever ladylike and well-groomed Stephane Audran creams her druggy husband with the frying pan after he chucks their child across the room. Some opener.

The third French feature was Barbet Schroeder's (*More*) *The Valley*, 1972, starring Bulle Ogier (*La Salamandre*) as a diplomat's wife stationed in New Guinea filling time by pursuing exotic feathers for a Paris boutique. Her search for the unusual lures her into joining a far-out threesome seeking a Nirvana-like existence in a secret hidden valley high in the mountains. This fragile plot, supported by some of the most magnificent scenery in the world, develops quite reasonably until about three-quarters of the way into the film when the seekers (and film crew) come across a primitive band who welcome them and include them in their festivities.

If the scenery was enough to overpower the slight story and modest characterizations before, you can imagine the effect of the real natives in their natural habitat. They overwhelm the



Scene from *The Paper Chase*

film with another kind of reality, powerful and awe-inspiring, particularly when the prophetic voice of the tribal chief welcomes the white visitors and intones in his tongue that now his voice will go very far and many places. Eventually the little group leaves and continues their ascent to a place from which return is impossible. The plot of the search for a 'perfect world' or of returning to primitivism as an answer has been so muted by the vigour and presence of the real primitive people, that it never recovers from this etching of truth, and just slowly unravels and trails away.

The remaining French entry was Marcel Ophuls' *Sense of Loss*, dealing in documentary detail with the political situation in Ireland. While *The Sorrow and the Pity* seemed a conclusive and necessary statement on the unacknowledged times and the people of France during the Second World War, his Irish documentary had only the troublesome subject of a current conflict that no one really understands, from far too close in time, to elucidate. A hard job, and although the presentation of points of view appeared reasonably balanced, I sensed a prejudice that invalidated the film for me in many ways. It is simply too early to try to make a value judgement on rights and wrongs – deciding which extremists are murdering in the most righteous cause – if one can ever be made.

The filming was slightly exploitative, with too many concentrated takes on the saddened faces of bereaved parents or empty beds amplifying the theme of sorrow and pity, and though I dutifully stayed for the 135 minutes, many of the audience obviously felt life was too short to tolerate this lengthy examination of pain in little, sorrowing Ireland.

## Literary England

Both British films at the Festival were literary and academic works: Losey's version of Ibsen's *A Doll's House* and Andrew Sinclair's colorful illustration of Dylan Thomas' radio play *Under Milk Wood*.

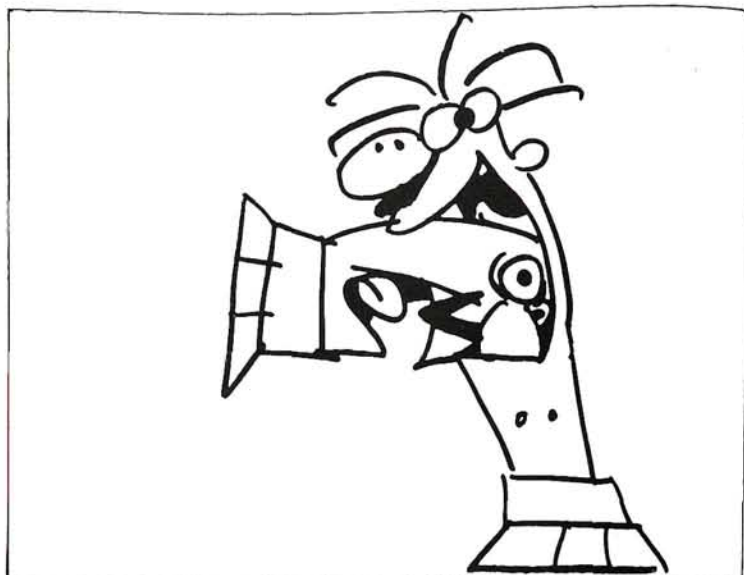
I usually like Losey a lot, and I've been admiring Jane Fonda's work for some time. Yet *A Doll's House* is not a big success. Losey opens up the play, adding an attractive skating rink scene and some leading dialogue before Ibsen's opening, and intersperses sleigh rides, children sliding, the men's office at the bank, the Doctor's digs and some mad dashing around town, without losing the feeling of restriction and spatial limitation. This allows the viewer to realize that the town is as restricting as the home, adding an ironic overtone to Nora's eventual bid for "freedom".

However, nothing Losey does frees Ibsen's play from its creaky nature and pedantic every-word-must-count style.

Fonda doesn't quite fulfil the role of Nora either. As a bird-like gay little wife, flitting about, she seems indeed to be



*Diana Dors applying a little pressure to David Lodge in The Amazing Mr. Blunden*



*Scene from Lecture on Man by Richard Williams*

'acting', and her whirling twirling actions are suitable and effective, the bird imagery appropriate. But as a woman, noble and self-sacrificing and intelligent, she's harder to accept, oddly enough. And as one who clearly understands the price of freedom and the enormity of the crime against her she seems instead to deliver her harangue with vehement petulance and to leave in a cold-blooded snit.

Like the overpowering 'moment of truth' in *The Valley* when the movie enters the world of the real primitives, there is an unsettling and moving 'moment of truth' in Nora's leaving from her sleeping children, when one child sits up suddenly in its sleep, turns abruptly away from its mother with a jerk, and settles down again. Losey probably left this in as it corroborates the point made by Ibsen that children can survive without their mothers, but again the peculiar intensity of an unacted moment throws a bright clear light illuminating the play-acting qualities of the rest of the scene. A tiny moment, yet an effective, but jarring, one for me.

Losey subdues the effects of Nora's tarantella, and I don't really understand why, for without its whirling desperate passion it seems to me the play loses its emotional climax and is fatally weakened. Theatrically, the gaily dressed, uncorseted and flamboyant figure dancing her abandoned and frenetic peasant dance before the astonished eyes of the guests, all properly attired, and though tiddly, never completely unrestrained, is crucial to the structure of the play. Losey's no fool so obviously he played the dance down on purpose. Yet with its power diminished, the exceptional in Nora seems also to disappear, her sexuality and appeal to Torvald are spoken of but not *felt*, and her ensuing speeches lack the depth of delivery of a life-starved woman and become didactic, plat-formy and uninspired.

I felt Losey's overriding ironic sense subtly, and perhaps subconsciously, ridiculed Nora's great decision, and that Fonda wasn't a powerful enough actress to rescue it.

Andrew Sinclair's *Under Milk Wood* has been playing successfully in Toronto this winter, following its enthusiastic reception at Stratford. It's a colorful flow of images illustrating the visions of Thomas' radio play almost phrase by phrase. Sinclair doesn't do any injustice to Thomas, whom he admires immensely, but his slavish devotion to Mickey-Mouse technique, (at the mention of something, you see it) causes an interesting redundancy partially deadening the effect of some very lively writing.

Furthermore Sinclair's own erudition and literary nature (he's a well-known author of a dozen scholarly works, including *Magog*) cause a spot of confusion. Though it is mythologically correct to envision the souls of dear departed Celts as seals, the audience never understood what the pair at the opening of the film, and the little frolicking group at the

end were intended to convey. Seals are just seals unless the film can suggest otherwise clearly. Sinclair contrived the characters played by Richard Burton and his friend Ryan Davies to embody the First Voice and Second Voice of Thomas' poetic trip through the all-Welsh-for-all-time town of Llareggub (read it backwards for an idea of Thomas' humor) but giving these voices bodies weakened the mystical spiritual nature of their visit, made them solid and heavy, flattened some of their irony and free-floating ridicule, and caused some real physical confusion when they met the girl in the pants suit and took her off to the shed for some three-way loving. That Sinclair intended this scene to convey the importance of love by threes to Thomas, or that the undercurrent of the children's patter songs and the Tom Dick and Harry scenes all were meant to further this sub-theme, never was as clear as it should have been and the modern look of the pants-suited girl simply appeared as an unfortunate and disturbing mistake. "My error," said Andrew Sinclair frankly, when I asked him about this.

Andrew Sinclair meant the film to extend the work to a mass audience, make it accessible, and he was pleased that it had played nine weeks in Madrid, for instance, subtitled, and particularly flattered when Caitlin Thomas told him she felt that "it is just as Dylan would have wished it."

Certainly *Under Milk Wood* satisfies his intentions. The fine voices of Burton and Davies and the colorful performances by O'Toole, Vivien Merchant, Glynis Johns and the many native Welsh actors plus the visual delights of the Welsh scenery all make this production commendable. It's excellent for TV I think, educational or otherwise, and a fine introduction to Dylan Thomas.

His next feature, *Blue Blood* (formerly *The Carry-Cot*, a Gothic tale he describes as being a cross between *Rosemary's Baby* and *The Servant*) stars Oliver Reed and Anna Gael and is being produced by John Trent for Quadrant in England.

Sinclair is a forthright and intelligent Scots-Irish gentleman whose comments, following a discussion between the Ontario Government's Minister of Tourism Claude Bennett and some filmmakers, came on like whiskey in weak tea. (Quoted by permission.)

"I don't think he knew anything about film distribution. He kept on saying, 'free competition, not socialism' There IS no free competition in film distribution. It's a racket. It's run as a racket. It may not be in this province, but it is everywhere else . . . I pointed out that if you wanted fair competition you'd better put a commission on to film distribution in the province as everywhere else. If he looks at the books he'd find out very rapidly why filmmakers get no returns and why no Canadian films were showing and a few other things. It's no good to talk about free competition when you have a monop-

oly. It simply is not free competition. It's not even capitalism. It's a form of total control by non-Canadians. It's not a question of expropriation or anything else. They should run it correctly. They should show Canadian films. They should finance Canadian films to have the right to run cinemas."

## Child's Fare

A number of films at the Festival would have had particular appeal to children. Over the years my good old man has given me some babies, all of whom are now various sizes and ages of children, so I am accustomed to judging children's films while accompanied by a receptive, sometimes giggly, sometimes trembling, always fascinated companion or two. Therefore it seemed a great loss to me to see movies they'd have enjoyed without being able to vicariously share their pleasure.

For instance, I'm sure they'd have liked the British *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* directed by William Sterling, better than I did. I've never seen them not like an Alice, and these colorful costumes and familiar words and situations would surely have pleased them, though as far as I was concerned it was the dullest Alice I think I've ever witnessed, despite the talents of Flora Robson, Peter Sellers, Ralph Richardson, Spike Milligan, and even my favorite man, Michael Hordern.

And they'd certainly have adored all the Fairbanks films in the afternoon retrospective series — at least the boys. Oh, I did too, as much as these adolescent male fantasies of pirates and princes, outlaws and soldiers could interest a grown-up woman. Fairbanks was a beauty to watch move, and it was interesting also to see the early use of Technicolor in *The Black Pirate* and to observe Raoul Walsh's direction in *The Thief of Bagdad*, enjoy the familiar melodic ways of Horace Lapp at the piano, and note how Fairbanks' use of Chaplin-esque humor in some scenes parallels Chaplin's use of Fairbanks' style of romantic acting in his films.

The children most certainly would have liked the American film *1776*, a musical fifth grade history lesson on the writing and signing of the Declaration of Independence given the Sesame Street Treatment of gay songs, costumes and dances, better than I did too. However, I must admit some prejudice: I'd be partial to such an ebullient attempt to teach Canadian kids some Canadian history this way, if anyone would like to give it a try!

And I'd love to see the Swedish *Hugo and Josefin*, again, in the company of children. Kjell Grede's film depicts a world where children are visibly *loved*, and the warmth of this emotion saturates the film like the smell of rising bread. This child's-eye-level story of a lonely little girl who meets the remarkable Hugo, a unique and independent little schoolmate who apparently lives on his own in the woods, concerns her acceptance at school and some rather exciting adventures, as well as some marvellous footage of Hugo riding an old-fashioned bicycle, wheeling down the road to the applause of the countryside, and with background music like a Hallelujah chorus. (But that *is* what it feels like isn't it.)

The acting was naturalistic, the incidents reasonably realistic, at least to a child, so the turn to fantasy at the end seemed unsatisfying. I don't think the children would have accepted it either, for although they can accept fantasy easily, they always feel a little gypped when they want a happy ending and are just offered fantasy instead. They know fact from froth.

Made in 1967, this film is available for release through Warner Brothers. I hope it appears soon.

*The Amazing Mr. Blunden*, directed by Lionel Jeffries, was another suitable show for those ten and over, but not too far over. Without the delightful reconstructed trains of his earlier *The Railroad Children*, accompanying adults must get their pleasures out of the locale at an ancient palatial home, and the sight of once voluptuous Diana Dors as an evil old woman housekeeper as cruel and ruthless as if she was born in a Dickens' sub-plot.

The plot concerns some children living in poverty in

London with one of those wonderful, reasonable, kindly, brave, beautiful English mothers (all literally descended from Barrie's Mrs. Darling?) who move to the country as caretakers of an ancient haunted country house. Their experiences with the ghosts from the previous century are scary and involving, but because of the possibility of escaping to the present, not too painfully terrifying. Unfortunately the leads lack the charm of the irresistible *Railroad Children*, and the ending is a little too tacked-on-happy to suit an experienced child.

## The Animated Pussy Cat

Finally, the children would have adored everything animator Richard Williams showed. I was disappointed with the much acclaimed *The Little Island* with which he first made his name and received many awards, though the originality of the approach in 1958, and the display of technical virtuosity were absolutely remarkable in a young man (21 when he started) dealing with such a demanding medium. The repetitive visual sequences now become boring to the point of irritation long before their accompanying music and the simplistic ideas seem woefully drawn-out. Williams, in discussing it with me, heartily agreed. He learned a lot with it, he says, but finds it almost embarrassing to see now.

But such a modest fellow is he that he also says he blushes at his cartoon short *Love Me, Love Me, Love Me*, which I still found fresh and charming in its early simplified line style. And winces at the ending of his witty cartoon *A Lecture on Man* because of its brutal final slam at white South Africans.

Also shown were his titles for the Bond movies, *What's New Pussycat* and *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*, as well as the now famous sequence he created of period cartooning to fit into *The Charge of the Light Brigade*. And his commercials were just great, and included the Schweppes Cresta bear, the Volkswagen Beetle Killer and a number of other old favorites, and certainly seemed to validate the argument that some of the best work around is found in commercials today. Williams explained that he and his group of about 30 in their Soho studio use each commercial as an individual exercise in technique or experiment in style.

He also made the animated *Christmas Carol* that was shown on TV again this year. The sections developed by different artists show disturbingly distinct styles, and how can you do the Christmas Carol in 28 minutes? "Well," says Williams, "you can't, but it was a good experience and practice."

All of these experiences and earnings keep being fed into the dream of his whole group of animators, the feature in progress, originally called *Nasrudin* and now titled *The Golden City*. This animated tale of a cobbler who falls in love with a princess' feet and has an astonishing and wonderful series of adventures while learning about good and evil, is set against backgrounds full of detail like Persian miniatures. So far he's spent about 200,000 pounds on it (about \$500,000 of the 2 million he thinks it will eventually cost).

And will it be a success? Says Williams, "It won't fail. I would be so surprised. It would mean everything I've learned in twenty years and before was wrong. It's like a circus for good and evil, with romanticism — all the commercial ingredients. Our story is simple and clear and exciting and hilariously funny and romantic. If we're so bad it somehow wouldn't work I'd be surprised, because other things we've done, our commercials, are wildly successful."

"So," said I, "We'll leave it at that: it won't fail."

"I don't see how it can," said Richard Williams.

## The Luck of the Canuck

The one Canadian film at the Festival was the only Canadian film that caused any sort of excitement at Cannes last year, *Rejeanne Padovani*, directed by Denys Arcand. At the 1972 Festival his *La Maudite Galette* a sharp super-B crime tale about personal greed and ill-gotten gains introduced the talents of this bright French-Canadian director to the Stratford audience. This latest film advances the theme of greed and



corruption one step further to business and politics.

As with most French Canadian films, you can help yourself to any one of several layers of meaning in this tale of the dinner party Padovani the contractor gives to thank his influential friends, the mayor etc., for his successful super-highway contract and celebrate its opening.

There are two minor interruptions to the celebration. Padovani's ex-wife arrives from the States and wishes to see their children and return to Quebec now that the Jew with whom she ran away is dying of cancer, and some young journalists foolishly expose a planned demonstration meant to interrupt the opening.

Rejeanne longs to live in Quebec again, see her children, but Padovani won't let her, won't even see her. All negotiations are carried on through one of his henchmen, who twists every statement. "Ah God," sighs Rejeanne, "I don't want to speak English any more; I'm sick of living in the States." But Padovani, according to his cohorts, has a moral question to decide here, and his decision, reluctant but firm, is to dispose of Rejeanne.

Meanwhile the party celebrating the successful business deals these pros have worked out with each other continues in a desultory fashion with various unattractive seductions, and some half-hearted amusements, as, in-another-part-of-town, a couple of the political bodyguards destroy the planned protest by quick foul means.

Everything is ugly: the little miserable men, their manipulations, their pathetic wives, their deals, their bodyguards, and their attitude to life. And they live in ugly surroundings, the suburban milieu, the concrete-block rec-room, the incredible tastelessness of the house, walls, drapes, lamps, fixtures and furniture. And they create an ugly world through means that are none too pretty.

Arcand's eye is true, and he can make a film quickly and cheaply and effectively. According to Luce Guilbeault, who visited the Festival, this one was shot in two and a half days, with just one or two takes per scene, for around \$200,000. A pertinent politically-motivated film like this falls into the category of investigative journalism: sensational, popular, and disposable. Why don't English Canadian filmmakers try it? We've certainly got the material.

### Ugly But Beautiful

By good fortune Kurasawa's *Dodeska Den*, scheduled but unavailable for the 1972 Festival, replaced Sri Lanka's *The Treasure*, scheduled but delayed in transit for the 1973 Festival.

*Dodeska Den* (we say "clickety-clack") uses a simpleton's imagined trolley-car, binding the metaphors of madness and mechanics, to take us on a surreal trip among the misfits and castoffs that live in the junkheap of past and present in today's Japan.

This is not the film of a young man looking for answers, or a fervent anti-establishment harangue. It is the wise and bitter statement of an older experienced man who sees life with its illusions, false humour, hideous cruelties and ridiculous levity, and who is a filmmaker par excellence, able to translate the most ephemeral thought into visuals. Here in a symbolic shanty-town he displays characters familiar and allegorical, stories ancient and new: the father feeding his begging son on dreams, the wives exchanged by their drunken vaudevillian husbands, the poor uncle's lust, the maimed lovers and lost hopes, the classic understanding patient old man of Japanese story and theatre. The imagery is so brilliant and the characters cartooned into such vivid life that they become unforgettable, creating for me the most *foreign* movie I feel I've ever seen.

Like an excellent oriental feast the film offers a constantly changing set of tastes, familiar, new, sweet and rich, sour and sharp, tender, sinewy, and surprising, like bits that seem to be sweet but turn sour when tasted fully. There is little in the western world that so adeptly balances a variety of sensations.

and experiences like this, with subtle skilled perfection.

### An American Send-Off

Again the Festival ended with the premiere of a new film from the United States. *The Paper Chase*, directed by James Bridges and starring Timothy Bottoms and John Houseman, was an appropriate choice, particularly as it had been filmed partially on the University of Toronto campus and with classroom sets built out at the Kleinburg studios. Director Bridges, John Houseman, and producer Thompson gave a public press conference afterwards, which gave the attending audience a nice touch of the old bezazz for parting memories.

The film itself was a pleasant saleable entertainment concentrating neither on violence or sex, but offering instead a rather cynical compliment to the Harvard law students as it displayed the tremendous work and pressure involved in winning those precious pieces of paper which entitle them to a future of wealth and possibilities like defending Watergate combatants. Bottoms, as Hart, throws away the unopened report of his grades at the end in a wryly ineffective symbolic comment on their value. But this is not a rebellious film in any way.

Bottoms is likeable, both cool and committed, the ideal 1973 hero. His hair is long, but neat, his attitude casual in appearance, but basically dedicated and intense, his sexuality unquestioned but unpressured. Lindsay Wagner as his co-star playing the daughter of John Houseman's acerbic Professor Kingsfield, is an unfortunate comment on what appears to be the current impression of a liberated young woman. Distinguished by a sullen expression and indifferent to general rudeness, a lackadaisical attitude of cool-to-careless, an unappealing presence and an alarming absence of kindness, sweetness or unselfishness, she portrays the kind of girl you'd just as soon wouldn't get liberated after all.

For me the greatest pleasure in the film came from Houseman as the sardonic and insufferable Professor Kingsfield, playing with a panache seldom seen since the days of David Niven. At present *The Paper Chase* is enjoying a long healthy run in Toronto.

### The Tenth is Coming

The purpose of the Festival, is not, however, just to provide a launch for movies to go out into the world and make money. As I understand it, it is essentially a Festival to attract movie fans, enticing them with a worthy selection of films that they probably would not see anywhere else and that often do not get the commercial distribution they deserve. Further, the Festival offers fans a delightful retrospective of past movie pleasures, such as the Fairbanks series in 1973, as well as Canadian shorts and some amateur and experimental efforts. Finally, one of the greatest bonuses of all, it offers the audience the priceless chance to meet and discuss the films with guests: directors, writers, musicians, and stars of the films, in the unique morning coffee hour seminars.

Primarily showing films selected from other festivals, the Stratford hopefully should have no duds and a good supply of worthy, original and controversial films, providing the Festival Directors can convince the distributors of the value and honor of participating.

I hope so. I liked the films selected in 1973, though not as much as 1972, and loved the week visiting Stratford, walking down 19th century sidewalks, under orange maples and golden birches, smiling to see the children skipping and tagging, the ladies briefly glimpsed hanging out their wash, and knowing the good will and geniality of a small southwestern Ontario town.

And I want to go again. So would just about anyone who is interested in film, for this fall's Tenth Festival is expected to be bigger and better than ever, and also longer — 10 days in fact — from September 12 to 22. Write the Stratford Festival Office at Stratford, Ontario for details.●

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