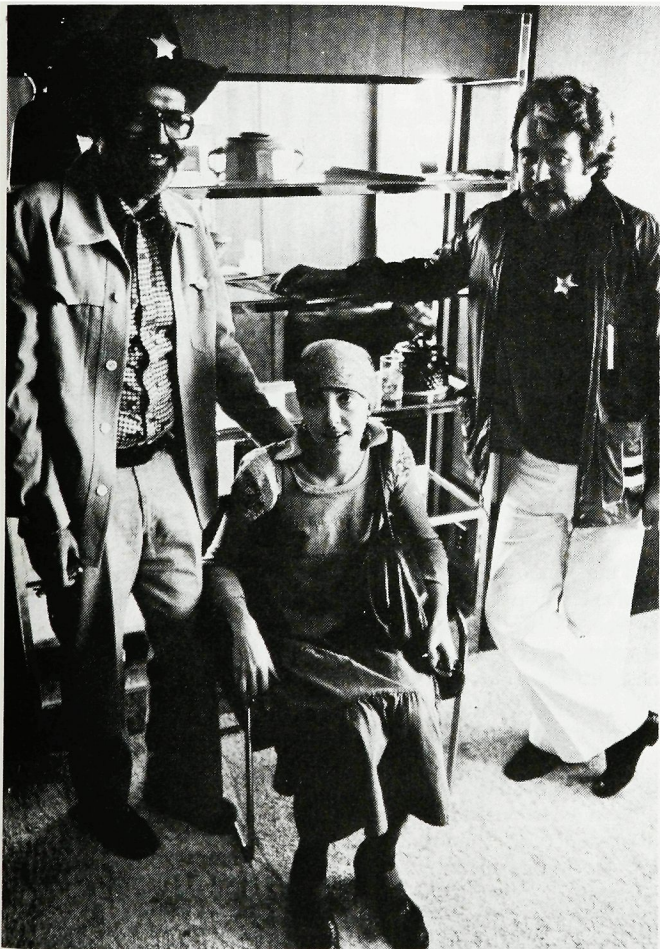


toronto: year two

Toronto's enthusiasm for its own festival seemed boundless. Stephen Chesley's article below is a good example of that. Clive Denton, an experienced programmer, shares some of his thoughts.

by Stephen Chesley

photo Chris Holland



The organizers – weary but happy – Dusty Cohl, Linda Beath and Bill Marshall

The second annual Festival of Festivals burst on the September scene with just as much ballyhoo as last year, fewer unfilled promises, a stupid 'contest' with Losique's Montreal opus, and a strong base of solid planning and programming. The result was a film-packed, audience-satiated ten days that began slowly and developed momentum to lead to a smiling, contented finale.

Festival heads Henk Van der Kolk and Bill Marshall were determined to improve upon last year's successful but slightly chaotic event. And without apology, says Van der Kolk. "We knew we needed three years to get the kinks out, both in planning and financially. By next year we'll reach our goal. Meanwhile, we will make mistakes; but in such a huge project, perfection just isn't possible."

Nor is perfection required or expected. In fact, this year's event was almost snag-free. A few projection problems were quickly rectified; co-op screenings were disrupted by last minute planning (and patrons were refunded money); the Greek program was obliterated by shipping foul-ups (a print was sent subtitled as requested, but in French. Halfway across the Atlantic the mistake was discovered and a substitute was sent – too late); and even the censor board was quiet. (*Je tu il elle* was pulled after a 1000 foot deletion request was refused by Marshall. Another film had ten feet cut. Otherwise, said Marshall, the censor board co-operated greatly).

There was a lack of discretion in press treatment at first. Some films in the showings lacked subtitles. But the audience accepted the problems and enjoyed themselves immensely. And that's what counts in the end.

Numbers count too, and in fact attendance was up this year, aided no doubt by clearer scheduling, by blocks, better and physically closer facilities, and less insistence on

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Henry Winkler played the hero instead of the Fonz.

glamor for the rich few and more emphasis on seeing as many films as possible that one wouldn't normally get to see – the prime purpose of any festival.

After just a few days there was a tangible sense of community, even though no central gathering-place existed. Perhaps none was needed; there were so many good films shown, many running simultaneously, that idle chatter was virtually impossible to fit into one's schedule.

Programmers David Overby, Agnes Varda, Martin Knelman, Jean-Pierre Bastien, Peter Harcourt and Wayne Clarkson were given free rein to develop their contributions, and each was warmly received by a loyal and interested audience. Bastien felt that his Quebec Retrospective offered Toronto the first accurate picture of French-Canadian filmmaking and thought the films were very well received. Peter Harcourt's Ophuls Retrospective culminated in an unscheduled discussion period. David Overby's Update jumped from one undistributed gem to another. Martin Knelman's Buried Treasures saw actress and star Luce Guilbeault translate in person a film that came untitled from the National Film Board in Montreal (commented Knelman, "They're subtitled only for showing outside of the country.").

In all, there were ninety-seven features and thirty shorts, including efforts from the Toronto Filmmakers' Co-op and the Atlantic Co-op. With a student half-price week ticket of \$35 subsidized by Coca Cola, that's a very low cost per film, even if you saw only half. And much of the audience was student-aged; during work days little adult attendance is possible. That hurt only the conferences (more on that

later). One surprise was the relatively small attendance at the galas. This was due partly to the fact that these evening events had strong competition from the other programs, and that the galas were repeated the next afternoon. And the word was not spread well that individual tickets could be bought for any screening.

But the programming was also surprising in another way: Canadian success. It's appropriate that a festival run by Bill Marshall would illustrate the current confidence in the feature film industry. Marshall is not afraid to hype his activities and has a talent for drawing press coverage that is at best unsympathetic. Yet he does speak confidently, and so did the three hits of the festival, all Canadian (and one of which he produced). Dick Benner's **Outrageous** brought standing ovations and cheering and shouting from a capacity crowd – a sight that dazzled investors and was the talk of every panel discussion, especially by American participants. The National Film Board's **J.A. Martin photographe** moved almost immediately into a commercial run, with strength from Festival raves. Robin Spry's NFB feature **One Man** was the subject of hot rumors about U.S. and Canadian distribution deals, although all momentum was lost when no deals were signed.

photo Chris Holland



The panel on screenwriting

There's no doubt that Toronto again confirmed its position as a top filmgoing city of the world. Marshall's desire to see a film market adjacent to the festival could occur starting next year, but he's leaving it up to the professional associations to set that one up. He'll concentrate on solidifying this year's gains.

One gain was in credibility, arising largely from the glamor or contingent. This year it arrived in numbers, without unfulfilled promises and name-dropping.

Last year, virtually none of the projected film industry royalty attended, and this year, Marshall kept his mouth shut and let the bodies speak for him. Which they did. And co-operated greatly, too. From Donald Sutherland, Peter O'Toole, Frank Capra, Henry Winkler (who wowed a special tandem youth program) and Sydney Pollock to Francine Racette, Gillo Pontecorvo, Agnes Varda, Denys Arcand, Robert Kaufman, Len Cariou, Robin Spry, John Simon, Kathleen Carroll,

William Wolf, Jean Beaudin, David Helperin, Joan Tewkesbury, Jayne Eastwood, Jean-Claude Labrecque, and countless contributors from the business side of filmmaking. The input was large and co-operative, and unaffected.

Aside from press conferences that were private, and the opening and closing parties which were restricted to Silver Pass holders, the showbiz guests mingled with audiences, saw films, and, above all, participated in conferences.

Three groups of conferences were organized. A slate of experienced luminaries in various aspects of financing and marketing gave sessions to an audience that responded well, but which was notably lacking in Canadian Producers. And it was the Canadian producers' association who sponsored the talks set up by CAMPP President David Perlmutter. Commented Marshall, "Maybe they don't need any advice."

They would have received it. Even this audience, made up mostly of inexperienced students, went a long way towards understanding the crazy film business.

A session on financing, with government types such as Dinah Hoyle from secretary of State Department and Joseph Beaubien from the CFDC, outlined potential ways of funding films, but of greatest interest was the discussion surrounding the involvement of stock brokers in film financing, a procedure now impossible in Ontario, but used elsewhere. There was also the feeling that the CFDC is becoming a minor player at best in the feature financing game. Producer Robert Cooper related his battle to get **Coup d'Etat** off the ground, stressing the importance of legal and accounting expertise. Not many insights over-all, but a solid summary of possibilities.

Festival Reflections

Toronto's Festival of Festivals was held in September (somewhat earlier than last year). It acted like a two-year-old, I hasten to say, rather than like a one-year-old. While Montreal's World Film Festival made mistakes with bad projection, widely separated theatres, expensive but under-exploited guests, etc., Toronto corrected most of those same mistakes which it too had in '76. Projection was better (not really good but undeniably better), the main theatres involved were conveniently close together (in fact, walking briskly up and down those few blocks on Bay Street was the only exercise most of us got) and some of the guests were grabbed while they were in town anyway.

There was some doubt as to whether Canada should have two officially supported festivals in one summer but, inevitably, in our nervously divided country (could Separation be any worse than the present schizophrenia?), the English cannot have a toy that the French can't match, and vice versa. Proliferation is likely, quite beyond this, as festivals crowd out Europe and threaten to do the same in North America. There was a time when film enthusiasts were actually supposed to *travel* to the main events - Cannes, Berlin and Venice, chiefly. Now, only a few writers, producers and freeloaders do this; all festivals rely almost entirely on support from people within their areas. This year's New York Festival, referring to a horrendous metropolitan nightmare drama, announced in its brochure, "If you live in New York City, you must see this". And, of course, 90% of its audience did live there. So, the more the merrier, really. It's a debasement of the original 1930s festival idea, but also seems a fact of life.

In terms of newspaper coverage, Bill Marshall's greatest coup was producing Henry Winkler, "The Fonz" in person. His film, **Heroes**, wasn't quite ready but clips were shown and, to many people's amazement, Mr. Winkler was shown not to be necessarily, inescapably, "Fonzie" for all time. (Who said there was no God?) Following last year's howl of complaint about Canada being a part of the American studios' domestic market (it is, in practical terms, but never mind), there were two Hollywood productions previewed. At least, one was actually English, **Joseph Andrews**, but it had the magic name

Paramount attached, which qualified. The other was Columbia's **Bobby Deerfield**. Nobody seemed to like either very much but they were unarguably *there* so honor was satisfied.

It was noticeable that, with few exceptions, the new festival entries at Montreal and Toronto were entirely different. This raises a possible problem if, as one suspects, the organizers were determined they *should* be different. Was Toronto denied such fine films as the Italian **Padre, Padrone** or the Japanese **The Corporation** because they had already been in Montreal? Was Montreal deprived of another lovely Italian effort **We All Loved Each Other Very Much** or the exquisite French dramatic comedy **The Right Way to Walk** because Toronto had secured them? Slightly worrying, that point; perhaps it's a case for centralization. Conversely, it must be admitted - it's rather a pleasure to admit - that the poor old cinema of 1977, often derided by myself and others as "worked out" on the basis of what we usually see in commercial theatres - came up with enough good and stimulating new films to feed two hungry Canadian outlets. Mind you, there were some stinkers too, but still...

Toronto relied on retrospectives, partly legitimately, but partly, one must suspect, to round out an imposing lineup, on paper. Retrospectives have always been considered a nice bonus at festivals, boys and girls, not a mainstream activity! Still, Peter Harcourt deserves commendation for his excellent Max Ophuls series (though I wish he'd stop making jokes about being "the token academic"; he's either proud of it, or could forget about it, and so could we). The Ophuls prints, like all festival prints were of variable quality, but at best could make you weep for the now-vanished beauty of their compositions and actual physical perfection. Martin Knelman trundled out some (not very deeply) "Buried Treasures". For no particular reason, the festival actually opened (before the official First Night) with a print of Edward Dmytryk's **Give Us This Day**, insistently titled **Christ in Concrete** in publicity, after the short story on which the very downbeat 1949 Anglo-American film was based. I'm not sure what this had to do with anything else, but I've always wanted to see this unpopular and therefore rare picture. So, thanks a lot.

Clive Denton

Clive Denton is a film professor and broadcaster. For many years, he was the Program Director for the Ontario Film Theatre.

A session on foreign sales brought home a theme that ran throughout all the conferences: Canadian modesty and insecurity. Foreign sales rep Irving Shapiro asked why Canadians don't use their box office clout. Home Box Office's Arnie Huberman expressed surprise; after attending last year's event, he expected to get 250 Canadian scripts. He got four. Similarly, the marketing seminar returned again and again to current Canadian successes as examples, usually of what not to do. Billy Baxter emphasized that all who come in contact with selling a pic must be fully informed about it; this would include sending a theatre manager the press kit. And he used **Outrageous** as an example of how to use advertising and openings to best advantage. Arthur Manson pointed out that films are usually more successful in Canada than they are in the U.S.: "Canadians do a better job." Baxter said this was not always so. He saw **One Man at Cannes** and tried to buy it – "It's timely in theme, a good movie, is being talked about, and has a potential film star in Len Cariou" – but he couldn't even get the NFB on the phone. Columbia Canada's new General Manager Irving Ivers wondered why, after the initial success of **Why Shoot the Teacher**, only five trailers were in circulation and the film wasn't playing all around the Southern Ontario region, but instead, losing momentum. Canadians, said Manson, have made good films, but haven't followed through.

Then there were the Craft Conferences. The acting session revealed little about details of technique, but with a talent-filled panel, the audience really saw the range of attitudes and philosophy toward the craft. Sutherland, O'Toole, Susannah York, Jayne Eastwood, Len Cariou, Carole Lazare, Francine Racette and moderator William Wolf provided wit, if not large amounts of wisdom. They showed themselves to be professionals committed to their professions. The sour notes were few.

photo Chris Holland

Two members from the cast at the gala for **Outrageous!**

The screenwriting conference offered domination attempts – although unconscious – by various schools. There was the Dick Benner I-Keep-Control-and-Always-Integrity philosophy. And the Robert Kaufman Hollywood glitter, name-dropping, sarcastic attitude. All up there in the flesh, especially Kaufman, who was funny, domineering, almost obnoxious, but in the end very valuable simply for his intensity in describing the perseverance and fortitude needed to make it, no matter what kind of film you write. Only Joan Tewkesbury offered too little, but she saved her considerable expertise for the weekend session on Remaining Independent. One



Elliot Gould and Wilt Chamberlain at the closing party at the Toronto City Hall

wanted to hear much more about working with Robert Altman, but only glimpses were available (his scripts are not improvised but very tight, allowing the actors little room to wing it. Altman accepts suggestions from all involved, including crew. He markets carefully and shrewdly; for example, moving his film into a multiple theatre playing beside **Stars Wars**, and thus getting the spill-over).

Not all the comments were brilliant, but many were insightful. Writer Tom Hedley: "We've become the B movie capital of the world, giving work to declining stars or ones who should have made it but didn't." Joan Tewkesbury: "In starting, lifestyle is important. You can't be bound to it. Environmental screenwriting uses very specific behavior in a very specific place, adds most of the dialogue, then asks the actor to add to it." Maureen O'Donnell of the CBC suggested an apprenticeship publicists' program to fill a real void in the industry. John Trent rightly bemoaned the fact that all TV time in Canada is sold out far in advance, and that Canadian films are always given shifting release dates. A major strike is against them in that area alone: competent advertising campaigns.

Even the weekend series, Remaining Independent, was valuable for the insights. Most were given as anecdotes by chairman David Helperin Junior (**Hollywood on Trial**) and panelists Howard Smith (**Marjoe**) and Arnie Riesman and Tewkesbury, who together, are developing a property for Tewkesbury to direct. The panel knew little about the Canadian experience and market, but still gave a detailed, step-by-step outline of how to put a project together.

The conferences offered unique moments too, such as when legend Frank Capra strolled down the aisle to join the session and received, first, a standing ovation, and then the greatest respect, admiration and affection from audience and panel alike.

Finally, even the press was kind. And while no-one knows if that calmed Bill Marshall's pounding veins entirely (about two weeks later another Slam Marshall article appeared, so he probably felt more at home), he can point to many improvements: hiring professional organizers, having a good bloc-booking system, a better date (although next year it'll be at the end of September), a combination of mass and particular audiences, an increase in attendance of 4000, and a price structure that is better, but which still needs fixing. And more links with other festivals; this year the Quebec critics and Ottawa 77 contributed.

And the smile at seeing his own production the hit of the festival. □