

OPINION

You Get What You Pay For

by George Anthony

At a recent film seminar a student in one of Toronto's community college film courses complained because, in his words, I spent "all my time" in Hollywood.

"You never write about Canadian movies," he protested. "You spend all your time on Hollywood movie sets. Why don't you ever visit Canadian movie sets?"

Well, sir, to tell you the truth, most of the time I'm not invited. Or if I am, it's a foul-up.

Working movie sets, as a writer, is an exhausting job. I stood for 12 hours a day on the sets of **Lost Horizon** and **Earthquake** to get the stories I came for. I was the first member of the world press on the set of **Funny Lady** - the morning after Barbra Streisand lost the Oscar to Glenda Jackson. (It was not Barbra's most communicative day.) But after seven hours of standing, pacing and absorbing the scene, I got the story - and so did the *Toronto Sun*. It was a prized exclusive (we ran a full-page photo of Barbra as Fanny Brice in action in the *Great Day* production number, a first for both of us), prized by both our readers and Ray Stark, who, as producer of **Funny Lady** immediately realized the value of a giant spread reaching an estimated 500,000 moviegoers six months before his multi-million dollar production opened across America as a Christmas showstopper.

On the other hand, I was recently invited to the set of **Find the Lady** two months after I'd been reading stories about it in other newspapers. I was invited to interview the stars of **Love At First Sight**, too; they were shooting in Niagara Falls, and when I asked what transportation was available from Toronto I was informed that the bus service is excellent. I have not, at this writing, done anything on either film, not because I am offended by not being called first, ahead of my competitors, and not because I am offended by being told, in effect, to get off my ass and take the bus. I find both incidents highly amusing. But the truth is, they're a little sad, too. In the words of TV's popular, Chico, 'ees not my job, man.

It's not my job, you see, to get to your movie set; it's your job, as a movie producer, to get me there. I don't need that story in the paper; I have eight other interviews and reviews rivalling it at all times, challenging it for that precious space in newsprint. I don't need it, but you

do. And getting me there is only half the trick. I went on the set of **The Far Shore** in December 1974 and still haven't written the story because it took so long to get the pictures that went with it (which turned out to be inadequate anyway) that the thing was virtually unusable. Film producers and the publicists who represent them, you see, are supposed to make things easy for me - not harder. I can screw up a story all by myself, thank you - additional outside assistance is simply not required.

What is required (and long overdue, I suspect) is for Canadian producers to examine their own feelings towards publicity. I don't think most of them understand what it is, how it works, how you get it and where its true values lie. If they did they would not continue to hire inexperienced publicists and give them budgets roughly equivalent to what your average secretary spends on your average lunch in your average downtown area. Government film funding is fine, in principle, but anyone preparing a feature film who is planning to spend less than a minimum 10 percent of his budget on publicity should be turned down flat as a bad risk.

The two sets I visited in Canada last year - two that I recall, at least - were Don Shebib's **Second Wind** and Harold Greenberg's **Breaking Point**. Greenberg operates on the Hollywood principle: You Get What You Pay For. He hired a highly competent, professional publicist (Prudence Emery), a highly professional film director (Bob Clarke of **Black Christmas** fame) who worked out the shooting schedule weeks in advance so the publicist would know, weeks in advance, what day which star was working and/or available, and consequently reaped the benefits in the press. Shebib's producer, Les Weinstein, had his own secret weapon; Gino Emery, Canada's top public relations man, also handles press for Weinstein's Irish Rovers, and agreed to handle the film as well. Shebib had a shooting schedule of sorts, but one of his own invention; Emery was unable to tell me more than a week in advance who would be on the set on which days, which hampered us both. But he got me there (and in the morning, too). And that's what the movie business and publicity is really all about.

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