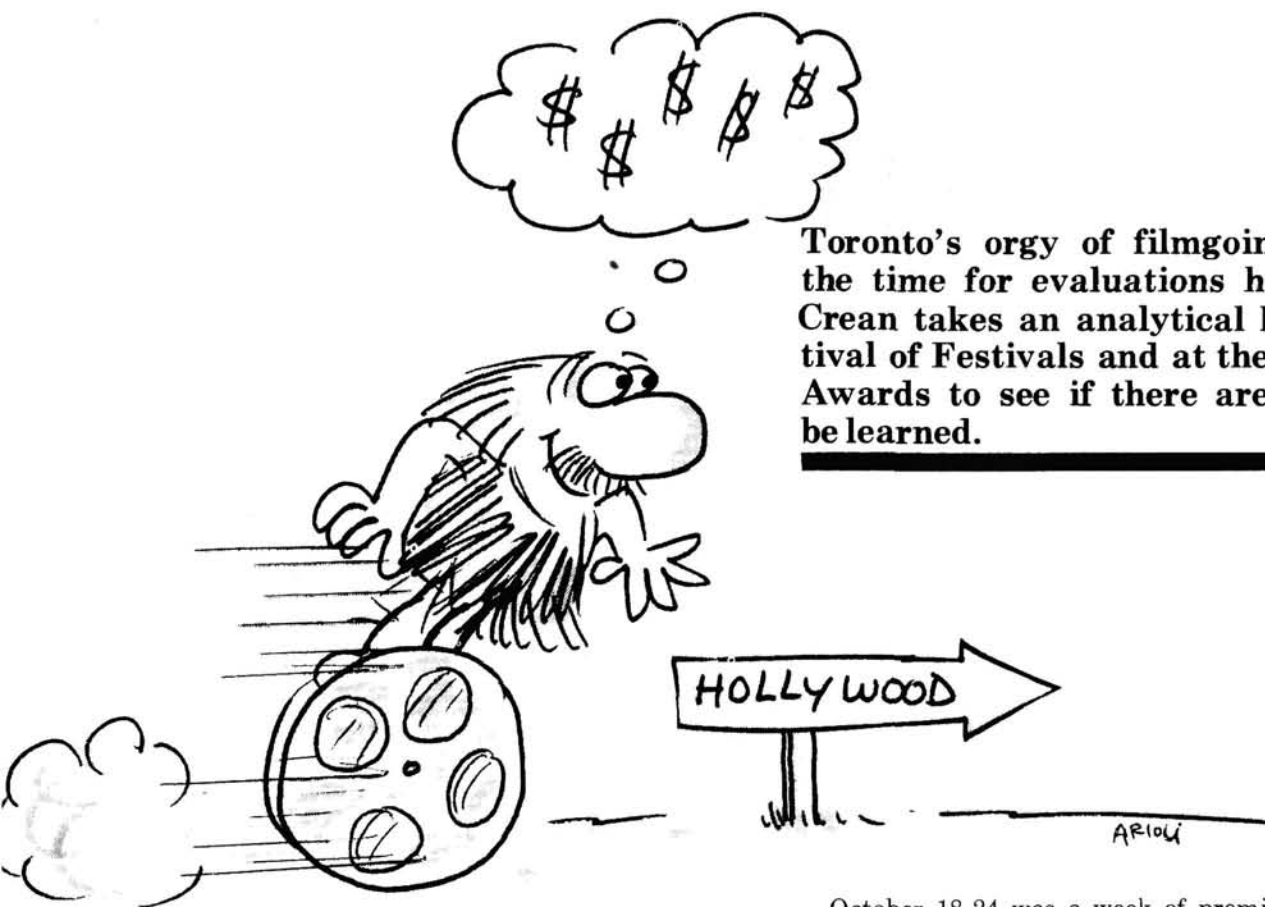


an analysis

toronto's festivals

by S. M. Crean



Toronto's orgy of filmgoing is over, and the time for evaluations has begun. S.M. Crean takes an analytical look at the Festival of Festivals and at the Canadian Film Awards to see if there are any lessons to be learned.

October 18-24 was a week of premieres for the Canadian film industry. The First Annual Toronto World Film Festival (aka Bill Marshall's Festival of Festivals) made its debut with an impressive seven-day lineup of 165 films from five continents, most being shown in Toronto for the first time. Concurrently, the 27th Canadian Film Awards was running its mini-festival of recent Canadian films (the 41 selected for competition) leading up to the awards presentation, broadcast for the first time on national television. From the Toronto filmgoer's point of view it was an excess of riches – more foreign films *and* more Canadian films than one might otherwise expect in a lifetime.

As it turned out the Festival lived up to its 'world' billing by bringing in films representing the national cinemas of some 20 countries – the USA's contribution coming from independent producers, not from the "majors". The result

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was a genuinely cosmopolitan festival which was a striking contrast to the so-called 'world class' menu being served up as usual in Odeons and Famous Players elsewhere in town. For Canada it was like hosting another Olympics – a chance for the home team to be seen in international company before a home audience.

CFA: The Media Carried the Message

The scheduling of the two events in the same week was accidental – October 24 happened to be the only date Nat Taylor, this year's awards chairman, was able to arrange with CTV. As it was Taylor's mission to transform the awards ceremony into a national media event, October 24 it had to be. In fact there was some reason to suppose that the two events might help publicize each other. For the CFA the key word this year was promotion – promotion of public awareness about the existence of Canadian film and a Canadian film industry. Taylor managed to corral the support of the theatre owners he represents on the CFA Committee; trailers announcing the telecast ran in 400 theatres across the country, and 250,000 programs were handed out. Thus in approaching CTV, he was in a position to offer a ready-made audience, anticipated at 1½ million. But by the same token the CFA's shift in emphasis this year – channelling most publicity efforts into the TV presentation – may have contributed more to the uninspiring turnout at the screenings (700 paid admissions over four days) than the inconvenient timing.

Last year, you will recall, the awards were held at the Shaw Festival in Niagara-on-the-Lake. The screenings there were the focus of a whole festival of events – an NFB retrospective, a film series by expatriate directors and the meet-the-director forums – especially planned for commuters. This year the Festival of Festivals organized the industry forum with its craft conference, and a producers' conference – actually sponsored by the Canadian Association of Motion Picture Producers (CAMPP).

Apparently the Festival and the Film Awards co-existed but had little to do with each other (though Bill Marshall as CAMPP president was on the Awards Committee). Still there is potential for co-operation in the future, and in many ways the two did complement one another: the Festival's

galas, held each evening at Ontario Place's Cinesphere, celebrated other world festivals (Cannes, Berlin, Moscow, Edinburgh, Los Angeles, Taormina, Karlovy-Vary and Thames). It seemed fitting that the last evening, in the CTV studios, there was a grateful celebration of our own Film Awards. Despite their age difference, both the CFA and the Festival of Festivals are in flux – neither has yet found a permanent format. For both, next year will probably be a watershed.

For the Film Awards the ramifications of the funding arrangement with the Secretary of State's Department (subsidization to alternate annually between Quebec and English Canada) will not be evident until next year when, for the first time, the grant goes to Quebec. According to the Festivals Bureau, this money is no longer earmarked for the CFA or any other particular organization, but for an event showing the year's film production from across the country. The pious hope is, of course, that the CFA and whatever corresponding event is held in Quebec will each include both English-Canadian and Quebecois productions in order to qualify for the federal subsidy. As Quebec is unlikely to set up a competitive festival, the artificiality of prize-giving being a major reason for Quebec filmmakers leaving the CFA in the first place, there will probably be two very different events. The question is: will they both become bi-annual, as the agreement implies, or will they make financial arrangements (as the CFA is doing) to survive without the grant every year? And would a successful Quebec festival obviate the participation of Quebec filmmakers in the CFA, eventually forcing the Festivals Bureau to cancel its funding or find another criterion?

Enter the Americans (CMPDA)

Considering its financial setup for 1976 the CFA appears to be moving in the direction of more private support. Its public funding came from three sources – the Festivals Office (\$30,000), the NFB (administration costs for the Grierson Award) and the Ontario Arts Council (\$12,000) – the City of Toronto grant having been denied. On the private side there were contributions from the Canadian Motion Picture Distributors' Association (\$3,000), Kodak (cost of the programs), Cinepix Inc., and six other cinema groups. The CFA made greater use of member organizations, parti-



Some 727,000 viewers saw the Canadian Film Awards on television. The program got a 7.4% rating in an area which included 6,295,000 homes and ranks 36th in all CTV programming for the period.

cularly the distributors and exhibitors, than ever before. In the case of the CMPDA, a newcomer along with the American Federation of Musicians on the Awards Committee, the unprecedented decision to allow it to present its own prize with the CFA's was a good idea carried too far.

The Golden Reel Award for the highest-grossing picture of the year (dubbed the crass materialism award) is, if nothing else, unique. However, in the context of the present political situation, the CMPDA, whose members are the representatives of Hollywood in Canada, can hardly claim neutrality in its bid to become "involved in the Canadian industry". When it suddenly reappeared on the scene last year it was to lobby with Canadian governments for a co-production industry and against regulations which would impede the free flow of American know-how and American stars into Canada and Canadian dollars back to the US. As the CMPDA's position has been to oppose the development of an independent national cinema in Canada (just as the Motion Picture Export Association has consistently opposed similar developments in other markets), so its activities on the CFA Committee could be expected to include the promotion of their type of "Canadian image". While Hollywood was being such a help to the CFA (it even hosted a pre-awards reception), over at the Festival of Festivals it was being accused of carrying on a boycott.

For the moment it looks doubtful that the Golden Reel, although conceived as an annual award, will remain a part of the CFA ceremony. Nevertheless, it has already raised other difficulties. The idea of using a jury to judge commercial success is fairly preposterous to begin with – a jury of accountants, perhaps, in which case bring on the balance sheets and skip the screenings. The task of the CMPDA's special panel was to select the Canadian feature which "achieved the highest level of commercial acceptance in Canadian and foreign markets" based on four criteria: Canadian box office gross, US gross, the existence of "meaningful" distribution agreements for foreign distribution and of an "innovative" marketing and promotion campaign – leaving some room for selectivity. Yet the list of finalists was a hodge-podge of films in various stages of distribution with *Lies My Father Told Me* the obvious front-runner. Indeed it won the Golden Reel, suggesting that the judgment involved wasn't beyond the capacity of a pocket calculator. So what motivation would most Canadian distributors have for entering such a contest, where the only real competitors would be the CMPDA's own members who have the money and the elaborate promotional backup with which to obtain the largest distribution? In business marketing, strategies are normally considered confidential matters; firms like Danton or New Cinema wouldn't be well disposed to submit such details to the CMPDA.

Where Were the Canadians (IMPDA)?

All this leads to the inevitable question of the composition of the CFA Committee. If the distribution segment of the industry needed representing, why was the CMPDA invited and not the Independent Motion Picture Distributors Association? (The IMPDA includes the two Canadian members of the CMPDA, Astral Films and Ambassador Film Distributors.) Nat Taylor claims he was unaware that most Canadian distributors are not in the CMPDA. But his glib-sounding response to inquiries about regional representation on the CFA Committee (*Cinema Canada* No. 32: "Who's going to pay the travel expenses?") underlines the fact that the CFA is essentially a volunteer organization. It rises from the dead once a year, raises money and hires a masochist to work around the clock for a couple of months. Everyone on the



Workers for the CFA: (back row) Stan Fox, Vic Beattie, Morris Klayman, Christopher Dew, Bob Brooks; (front row) Natalie Edwards, Pat Thompson – executive director, Gerald Pratley – chairman of the Jury, and Nat Taylor – president.

Committee and the pre-selection committee is a volunteer, representing the various industry organizations which make up the CFA.

Looking back over the history of the Awards it's amazing they haven't folded long ago, given the many opportunities to do so. When they were suspended in 1974, some thought the momentum would never be recovered. The second coming of the Film Awards seems to confirm that there is a strongly felt need for this kind of thing, and that some people are prepared to put out their time to make it happen.

Perhaps now is the time for the CFA to consider turning pro – to keep an office open and to extend its activities year-round. Considering that we've lived without a feature industry of our own for half a century, it is touchingly naive to expect an hour-long annual telecast to successfully promote the industry as a whole – as well as individual Canadian films – to Canadian audiences, used to a steady diet of Hollywood films.

The difficult business of developing a revolutionary new sensibility which can respond to Canadian films is too important and complex to leave entirely to individual distributors and their publicity campaigns. However well intentioned, Nat Taylor's Awards Night message to the nation "Go and see a Canadian movie this week; it'll be good for you" sounds more like a prescription for a dose of salts than good advice, coming as it does once a year. A broadly based, well-coordinated PR job is in order and the CFA, which is already a functioning co-operative of the major components of the English-Canadian industry, might be the group to undertake it.

A Blockbuster

As with the Awards, there is something phenomenal in the fact that the Toronto World Film Festival ever took place. With a budget of \$500,000 (\$275,000 in cash and \$225,000 in services) the Festival promised a blockbuster ("only Cannes' festival of all the festivals has more films; only Teheran spends more money bringing in personalities; only Los Angeles has bigger audiences") and it delivered a blockbuster which from all accounts is assured a return engagement.

To pull it off Bill Marshall and his partner Henk Van der Kolk performed what must be a record of some kind in the annals of cultural fundraising. Government grants came from the Festivals Bureau (\$19,600), the Ontario Department of Industry and Tourism (\$10,000), Wintario (\$20,000), the City and Metro Toronto (\$5,000 each); the NFB lent David Novek to run the press room for a week; and the CFDC provided



65 features on video cassette in a sales office at the Harbour Castle Hotel. There were personal endorsements in the program from Secretary of State John Roberts, Ontario Minister of Industry and Tourism Claude Bennett, Mayor Crombie and Metro Chairman Paul Godfrey. Certainly Marshall's experience as David Crombie's executive assistant stood him in good stead, and not just with governments. Coca Cola, Macdonald's, Cadillac Fairview Corp., the Campeau Corp. and Air Canada led the list of corporate donors (their combined help worth about \$135,000). And 60 individuals were found who gave \$1,000 apiece.

Getting the money and the films, Marshall allows, is the easy part. The acid test – and what ultimately determines the success of such a venture – is the kind of international attention it attracts.

So far, so good. The Festival did lure an interesting if motley aggregation of foreign filmmakers and got respectable notice from the international trade publications, 10 of whom were accredited at the Festival. As the Festival was closing came the announcements that *Screen International* was planning a Festival of Festivals supplement next year and that three other festivals – Berlin, Edinburgh and Teheran – would have special screenings of Canadian features.

Of course, the most obvious omen of continuing acceptability is success in drawing an audience. Though life was not easy for the filmgoer (advance information was scrappy and the schedule, when it finally appeared, looked like it had been ghost-written by Revenue Canada's computer), attendance averaged 7,000 a day, equalling about 70% capacity and surpassing the organizers' expectations. With little prodding or preparation the Festival uncovered a local, hitherto unexploited audience with an appetite for a huge variety of foreign films and non-commercial cinema. To the distributors of these films this indicates the dimensions of a market that exists in Canada as it does in other countries around the world, and conversely points to a potential for exporting Canadian films abroad, outside the Hollywood pipeline.

Boycott Is a Blessing

Unquestionably, during the Festival the big story was the "Hollywood Boycott". The subplot being the "Radicalization of Bill Marshall". Back in September Marshall and CAMPP were planning the producers' conference as a platform for their Seven Percent Solution, and as a forum for Canadian producers to get together with their "natural partners", the "experts (from) down south". The Solution called for Famous Players and Odeon to double their voluntary investment in Canadian film (to approximately 2% of their revenues) and for US distributors in Canada to similarly dedicate 5% of their considerable take. Pitched to the American sense of "fair play" and political realism, the compromise was wholly in the spirit of the Mintz Plan (the US border TV stations' plan to buy Canada off Bill C-58 with a \$5 million television production fund), of which CAMPP was the predominant supporter. In the Festival program Marshall writes that while Canada has attained two kinds of films (the "first features" and the "Canadian basket" – NFB and CBC films) we have yet to break into the big-budget ("movies made in Canada for the rest of the world"). Their hope was that by importing the Hollywood studio chiefs they would forge a breakthrough. Marshall now admits he was naive, and is firmly committed to legislation as the only way to keep some of the money in the industry. More than willing initially to co-operate with US interests, he soon discerned how organizing a festival to focus attention on Canada as a film-producing nation and as a market in its own right exposed Hollywood's true sentiments. No face-saving diplomacy here! Before long he found he couldn't even get the studio chiefs to answer the phone; and then there were the 22 films that became unobtainable because the New York distributors ruled their policy of not entering festivals held in the United States applied in Toronto since it was part of the domestic US market.

The boycott turned out to be a blessing in disguise because it gave the Festival a chance to establish itself in-

dependent of Mother Hollywood. By the same token the non-appearance of the big stars – Jack Nicholson, Julie Christie and Claudia Cardinale – caused little disappointment. The Festival still has its options and it will be intriguing to see how it handles Hollywood if and when Hollywood decides it wants in.

It may be that the Festival of Festivals is entering a crowded field just at a time when critics are reassessing the value and purpose of festivals in general. Out there, there are some 400 international film festivals of basically two types: the conspicuous big-money affairs catering to the international press and starlet set – serving, as Gideon Bachmann wrote in *Film Quarterly* this summer, “as primers for the chain reaction of the cinema circuits” – and then there are the modest city festivals, some consumer-oriented, some aimed at the specialists, addressing the local, paying audience, keeping guests, glamor and galas to a minimum. To Bachmann, only the second one has any future (the first benefits the blockbusters which don’t need it) and he speculates it may even supersede the art filmhouses as a main outlet for “engaged” or serious film.

Lack of Form and Direction

The Festival’s smorgasbord, something-for-everyone approach avoided having to choose one or the other. Moreover, by starting out with a bang, it achieved the status in one year that a small, unflashy festival would have taken years to build up. Right now the Festival is in an excellent position and can take whatever direction it wants. But I don’t believe that it will develop into the more modest type of festival, – and this, for two reasons. The first is that the errors in organization mostly affected the public. The technical setup was not thoroughly researched and planned; up-to-date information was hard to get and not available at the theatres where it counted; and the scheduling did not reflect sensitivity to local audiences (eg: no daycare was arranged, and craft sessions were held at a bad time for working filmmakers). Part of the problem was that the two consultants responsible for the bulk of the programming – Tony Watts, director of the Thames Film Festival and Jan Dawson, director of the Perth Festival – were unfamiliar with Toronto audiences. They weren’t in town long enough to fully exploit the various communities. (Only the students were present in full force.) But these consultants were also the only ones with festival experience. Together with Barbara Martineau they put the show on the road.

The second reason is money. Incredible as it may seem, the Festival with its huge budget still depended on some volunteer labor. The three program consultants made less than \$12,000 between them for almost five months’ work. Like so many cultural operations, poverty strikes when it comes to paying the artistic personnel. Stars and secretaries get the going rate (William Wolfe of *Cue* magazine was paid \$1,000 for chairing six craft sessions) because they won’t work without it – and don’t have to. But everyone else in the cultural scene is counted on to be “committed” enough to work for the minimum rate. In the case of *Womanscene* (the only real film “scene” at the Festival and the best-organized program) it is fair to say that it wouldn’t have happened at all without Barbara Martineau and that it did happen in spite of disinterest bordering on opposition from headquarters. An example of the attitude was Marshall’s unwillingness to accept the guests of *Womanscene* as guests of the Festival, so that at least half of the women filmmakers were there on their own. Yet *Womanscene* was a particularly innovative element in the Festival. Only one other festival (the Edinburgh Festival whose director is Linda Myles) has integrated women’s film into its

overall program. There have been many separate festivals organized by women including our own Women and Film, but precious few of them, despite great success, have become perennial. What a coup it would be for Canada if Toronto’s Festival became the first male-directed international festival to recognize the women in its audience and to support without prejudice women’s film.

Obviously the shape of next year’s festival depends on who is hired to program it. The Festival has not yet attempted to define itself, but it is not yet clear whether this was merely a tactic to get things off the ground. If Bill Marshall has a concept reflecting an artistic/political philosophy about the kind of film the Festival should showcase and the way it should fit into the Canadian scene, he is keeping it a secret. His role as director is enigmatic, the more so because from the outside the Festival looked so much like a one-man operation. (In this respect it resembled nothing so much as a political campaign where all the workers in back rooms are simply backup for the candidate.) While his skill in orchestrating money and people class him as an ace entrepreneur, there is no discernable vision behind the immediate purpose of staging the festival.

Where Were the Media?

Finally, the uneasy relationship between the Festival and the Canadian media needs some careful rethinking. Before the Festival opened there were complaints about apathy in the press. The release sent to 400 media people elicited a response from one Canadian newspaper (*The Winnipeg Tribune*). While the Toronto press eventually ‘climbed aboard the bandwagon’, the response everywhere else was poor. As Sid Adilman (*Toronto Star* and *Variety* reporter) remarked to me, the *L.A. Times* has given more coverage to the Festival than all but four Canadian newspapers. While the foreign press was treating it as an international event, Canadian papers regarded it merely as a Toronto event. Yet steps were not taken to counteract this predictable reaction. The Festival’s publicity scarcely penetrated the city limits (its ad in *Saturday Night* was in the Ontario edition only). However, as far as Marshall is concerned the people who really let their end down were the trade magazines (**Cinema Canada**, *Take One* and *Motion*) who did not pick up the story after Cannes (as he expected) and who provided little advance coverage. Unfortunately this opinion glosses over the fact that the publicity office was not ready to handle advance stories – the material was not there. (Even the *Toronto Sun*, which was the official Festival paper, had difficulty obtaining art for its stories.) And Marshall’s evaluation does not take into account that **Cinema Canada** is not *Maclean’s*, that at 2 cents a word its writers barely cover expenses. If Cannes is a media event, it is because the organizers send official invitations to magazines like **Cinema Canada** and share in some of the expenses. The point is, the Festival did not invite the Canadian film magazines to be there, and only grudgingly did it furnish press passes. Given that the Festival didn’t use any of its publicity budget to help make it possible for these magazines to cover the event adequately, I’d say Marshall was taking a lot of people for granted.

A final positive note: Because negative criticism is easy to come by these days, and because we tend to be harder on ourselves and our friends than those who oppose us, I think this file should end with a word of praise for the organizers of both the Film Awards and the Festival of Festivals, for their great enthusiasm and herculean labors. Marshall’s sentiment “I’d like to do something really big for the Canadian film scene”, like Nat Taylor’s desire to make Canadian filmgoing a national pastime, has to be appreciated by everyone. □