

# STRATFORD

Natalie Edwards

## TAKE II

*Part I covered some dozen films shown in the first three and a half days of the Festival. Here continues the notes written in one mad 13-hour spurt the Monday following the Festival covering the remaining two dozen films.*

Tuesday, September 17. We see *The Eagle*, starring Rudolph Valentino instead of Griffith's *Drums of Love*. It is a very funny film. (Unintentionally)

**HOLLYWOOD'S MUSICAL MOODS**, USA, 1974, Dir. Christian Blackwood, 40 min.

This is an excellent, informative and entertaining documentary on film music, how, and why, and wherefore it is made. Another compulsory item for film schools.

**COMPANY LIMITED**, India, 1972, Dir. Satyajit Ray, 112

Sharmila Tagore has just about the loveliest most sensitive and intelligent face in the world. Here she plays the visiting sister-in-law of an enterprising young executive on his way up in a British-owned company which makes fans. The symbols are discreet and perfectly filmic without being over-obvious. The acting is fine, decor dead on. I find nothing but pleasure in this extremely subtle, simple work. Yet afterwards, Sami Gupta says, "Oh yes, very nice" with such a resigned look. "Very safe, very old fashioned, gentle, inoffensive . . . great craftsmanship." And I see that my reaction might be quite different were I East Indian.

1789, France, 1974, Dir. Ariane Mnouchkine, 150 min.

Just couldn't hang in for the whole of this massive noisy treatment of the events and circumstances leading to the French Revolution, as interpreted by a group of energetic, heavily made up actors, springing from stage to stage in an interesting theatrical production by the Theatre de la Soleil.

French improvisational theatre is fascinating. I'll see more of it in the Rivette film *Out 1: Spectre*. Also the improvisational work of George Luscombe's long lasting Toronto Workshop Productions, with *Hey Rube!* in both rehearsal and performance, intercut with exaggerated close-ups of George as he is interviewed, is part of the POCA films shown Wednesday. It is not well done and I am sorry, because George's work was splendid and alone for many years and this doesn't do it justice. It is also poor to watch. Blush.

Other POCA films weren't much better, and certainly not up to the quality I expect and hope for. *Pedestrians* by Andrew Ruhl worked a simple idea to death, and Peter Starr's *Hill Climb* needed severe cutting and something more to say. Come on Conestoga College, you can do better!

Peter Mellen made *Life Force* about artist Jack Chambers and his work. This is hard to discuss; I am highly critical of

films about artists – so many are really awful. I can see what Mellen is trying, I think. He wishes to adapt the style of the film to the styles of various periods in Chambers' life, and to create continuity through his life-force symbol of Chambers' running. This explains the gory red things that appear in flashes from time to time, and other peculiarities, but I'm afraid for me it doesn't quite work. To those unfamiliar with Chambers' work it is informative and accurate, and it is certainly a genuine and interesting attempt to do the impossible – sum up a man's life and philosophy and work, in one short film.

**LADY OF THE PAVEMENTS**, USA, 1929, Dir. D.W. Griffith, 80 min, b/w, silent.

Delightful film, and Horace Lapp, you old devil, you played so romantically at the end you made me cry!

**THE BITTER TEARS OF PETRA VON KANT**, W. Germany, 1972, R.W. Fassbinder, 114 min.

No festival is complete without some highly styled elegance, and Fassbinder's study of the power plays of love is created entirely in Art Nouveau (Jugendstil), glittering with the luxury of overstatement, loaded with symbolic relationships, and as powerfully attractive as its heroine. Colors are magnificent; movements are as controlled as ballet; tableau illustrating relationships are as precise and fascinating as magic realism (and rather like), so that finally the mundane truths of power and possession, of lack of freedom destroying love as love destroys freedom, and of the surfaces under which all of this is normally hidden are coated and gilded and mirrored and displayed like jewels.

He does this by removing all males, with their automatic assumption of deserved power, and developing his ideas with an entirely female cast. This naturally requires that the love become lesbian, and since the women are verbal and emotional, makes their relationships most revealing.

**THE DAYS OF BETRAYAL**, Czech., 1973, Dir. Otakar Vavra, 190 min., Color.

For the seventh film in one day you might think a nearly three hour documentary almost entirely dealing with negotiations between politicians might stop me. But I had no trouble staying alive and alert through this fascinating interpretation of the events preceding Hitler's annexation of the Sudeteland.

Interesting how everyone is suddenly writing history on film these days, all these years after Lenin realized film's power for creating history.

This Czech construction was periodically weakened by some romantic or sad music, and almost destroyed at the end of Part I by a stupendous crowd of pro-USSR adherents swarming the street to what seemed to be the massive choral

splendor of the whole Red Army Chorus and Orchestra. But generally it was absolutely enthralling with its few small inserts of dramatic individual horror used rather like illustrations to remind us that what the politicians were talking about was war.

I found the interpretations of Chamberlain *et al* remarkably fair, but noted (what else could one expect) that the USSR came out rather better than it might had the film not stopped abruptly and appropriately during 1938.

**THE LOCKED DOOR**, USA, 1929, Dir. George Fitzmaurice, 75 min., Sound, b/w.

Rod La Rocque and William Boyd and Barbara Stanwyck were uniformly deplorable in this absurd early melodrama. ZaSu Pitts was swell.

**LA GUEULE OUVERTE**, France, 1974, Dir. Maurice Pialat, 82 min., Careful color.

Well, here it is. An absolutely exhilarating film. A film so fine I felt purged, sensitized. Walked for hours; flowed with energy.

Title is translated as **Mouth Agape**, but surely **La Gueule Ouverte** is an idiom that must suggest something like jaws of death as well as hunger or lust? Tell me if you know.

Warm interior colors, golds, ochres, fawns, ecru and yellow, give a nervous yet mellow warmth to all the interior scenes, while cold greys and clinical blues open and close the film. The relationships in a family are explored between the time in which the Mother's cancer is discovered, and her eventual disintegration into death.

The style is naturalistic, and so perfectly created are the lives and places of the film, that at one point when the bereaved father, (exquisitely played by Hubert Deschamps), went into the kitchen to fix something to eat, I felt I had somehow entered their home and was secretly watching.

I am not particularly afraid of death, but, like most people, I am afraid of the process of dying. Worse yet is to watch someone you love die, leaving you and their connections with your life, in little ways, bit by bit.

The film did not make me cry or suffer; it worked in a true dramatic sense as a purge, drawing hidden fears and pains out of me, and releasing them. I am very much impressed with Pialat's direction, and would like to see **Naked Childhood** and **We Will Not Grow Old Together** also. He has tackled an extremely difficult subject with care and sensitivity, making something universal out of an individual story, and generating a full feeling of pity and love for us all.

I'm finding Thursday the 19th of September a long and tiring day. At 7 p.m. the amusingly conceived little pixillated cartoon **Pipeline Patrol** goes on too long (8 minutes) despite some bright gags.

**SWALLOWS AND AMAZONS**, Britain, 1974, Dir. Claude Whatham, 92 min., Full color.

Great movie for children whose parents take them to the movies and who like reading books like Ransome's. For those kids who go to the flicks with their friends from 10 to 11 on, the film might generate mocking with-it laughter to cover the huge embarrassment of seeing a 13 year old girl playing pirate. There *ought* to be an audience somewhere; educational TV perhaps?

**THE OTHER SIDE OF THE UNDERNEATH**, Britain, 1972, Dir. Jane Arden, 133 min., Colour, b/w.

**Out 1: Spectre** didn't make it across the Atlantic in time, so we are given an unusual and decidedly uncommercial alternate, just 133 minutes long, instead of the expected 255 minutes for Rivette's film.

This is a woman's film. Did I ask? I got.

Every move is extended in time excruciatingly. Voices screech. Makeup is wild. The movie is madness itself, and it occurs to me that Jane Arden is making it as a kind of therapy to cleanse herself of this massive pain. Could it be deliberately

long to create suffering in those who watch, or because the filmmaker has suffered so much herself that she feels whatever she does cannot possibly be enough to express it all.

You can see that I don't find it successful as a film. But so what. It's good she made it, and I'm glad I saw it. There's enough material for about 14 films and approaches here. But since they'd all be interpretations of the loss of identity for a female, her roles, her agonies, they might as well all be in one massive exploding whole.

**TONIGHT OR NEVER**, USA, 1931, Dir. Mervyn LeRoy, 76 min., Sound, b/w.

The screenplay by Ernest Vajda from a play by Lili Harvany is just a joy. Gregg Toland's photography, Alfred Newman's music, excerpts from Tosca, and Gloria Swanson with Melvyn Douglas – what more could anyone want? Boris Karloff as a butler? That too! Great.

**THE OFFICE PICNIC**, Australia, 1973, Dir. Tom Cowan, 80 min.

Director Cowan, formerly a leading cameraman, opens the film with scenes of a civil service office, where so little happens you must watch for every nuance. This is interrupted by a lecturer who asks you if you have noticed anything, and then the office life resumes. It's as if we'd been introduced to the characters and now they came to life. So little does seem to happen and in such a natural way, that we are ill prepared for the perfectly normal though surprising occurrence that eventually creates a climax. An interesting and impressive first feature.

**THE PISTOL**, Sweden, 1973, Dir. Jiri Tirl, 84 min., Deep rich color.

Another photographer makes a directorial debut. This is a safe and elegant set-piece, a splendid vehicle for the talents of Swedish star Ingo Tidblad, who plays an ageing aristocratic lady who determines to shoot herself with an historical antique family pistol. Inga, the castle and the photography are fine, but the direction, to me, seems only fair.

**ANKUR (The Seedling)**, India, 1974, Dir. Shyam Benegal, 110 min., Good color.

Though this is a tale of the mistreatment of others by a young man wealthier than he is wise, and of how he sows the seeds of hate and sorrow, it is also a strong comment on the appalling treatment of women as less than beings in parts of India.

Benegal offers his story simply and with attention to detail, drawing it out leisurely but maintaining interest with the unusual environment and good visuals.

**THE SECOND COMING OF SUZANNE**, USA, 1974, Dir. Michael Barry, 90 min., color.

Michael Barry and Frank Mazzola really believe in and love this film they made and call **A Surreal American Fantasy Inspired** by Leonard Cohen's song/poem Suzanne. They took it to Atlanta where it won some awards, and then they brought it to Stratford, hoping Roger Corman would see it here and love it too. Now they are trailing off somewhere else with it. I wish them luck.

Christ told us we must love ourselves. But this can go too far. This film, so splendidly photographed by Isidore Mankofsky, is like a gorgeous therapeutic centre-fold display of all the daydreams and diversions of some egocentric persons who were very high up on something which I suspect not to have been coca-cola.

The thing that bothered David Beard the next morning when the perpetrators were defending themselves during Eleveses, was that \$800,000 was spent on it. First they said that everyone got paid, then that all payments were deferred, and no one was paid, then that everyone worked for love, and finally that the actors got half-scale. I felt a little confused but I didn't say anything because I noticed that Barry and Mazzola did not take kindly to criticism. I went to watching Rivette's

Out film, which began around 9 a.m. instead.

**OUT 1: Spectre France, 1972.** Dir., Jacques Rivette, 255 min.

The film started without titles. I watched in wonder as scenes were exposed, sequences interrupted, continuity denied, until finally despite the apparent plot about the Thirteen and the multiple questions raised (Where is Igor? Does Emilie want to get rid of him?) I gradually became less and less concerned about understanding the intricacies of a story line, and more and more involved with the people in their totally natural conversations. (There was no screenplay, everything was improvised.)

At this point, titles appeared. Sunchild Production.

Out 1:

Spectre

Paris and its Double Time

April or May 1970

Meaning:

I was particularly pleased with the word "Meaning" and as the scenes now showed people in previous action, I got interested in the plot again. Bless me if there wasn't Eric Rohmer explaining about Balzac and how the secret Treize turn up in three novels etc. The people in the improvisational theatre doing Prometheus, and the people improvising the story of the Thirteen and the whole improvisational film itself were providing not just the puzzles of plot alone but the question of continuity and comprehension also. I was quite fascinated and could have spent all day (it originally was 12 hours and 40 minutes long) watching it unfold.

Imagine my surprise then, when at the end Peter Harcourt\* spoke out from the audience saying that was not how he saw it in Paris. Titles and credits were at the front then. Some reels must be out of order.

PPFFT. So I must resign myself to its purpose as an exploration of the nature of persons in direct cinema as compared to planned cinema, and the fine lines between acting and life, and forget all about the jolly idea of a complete jumble to test your abilities to be interested in people without any reason or purpose to what you watch.

**25 FIREMAN'S STREET, Hungary, 1973.** Dir. István Szabo, 97 min., Color.

The wrecking ball smashes memories and periods of time with brutal force all over the world, and everywhere there are artists trying desperately to capture something of the places and their histories, before everything is lost.

This film, beautifully photographed (as always) by Sándor Sára and written by director Szabo, attempts to capture the years preceding and during the German and then the Soviet occupation, as they were known to the inhabitants of one old building on Fireman's Street. It also implies hope that the nightmares of the past may die with the old building.

The transitions between reality and dreams are hard to distinguish among the large cast, and the film becomes confusing and formless, though never dull or inept. Film only *seems* a great way to portray dreams; it seldom really works.

**AMARCORD, Italy, 1974, Dir. Federico Fellini, 127 minutes, Lots of color.**

To begin with I really do not enjoy breast-and-buttocks-humor. The audience did and I listened to their happy laughter at boobs and bums, hysterical parental fights, school-boy escapades and grandpa's farts, rather sorry not to join in. I enjoyed instead the smooth familiar techniques: the scenes and sequences gliding past caressed by Nino Rota's score, glowing with Rotunno's expert colors and compositions. The melodies, the actors, like the characters and their stories were all pure vintage Fellini, 1974.

Evoking the past in Rimini (built for the occasion at Cinecittà) Fellini entertains with anecdote and caricature, occasionally centering on a big-boy figure, a rather beefy Teutonic youth who presumably represents something of himself, and unfortunately attracts little love or interest. The

\*Six European Directors just published by Penguin.



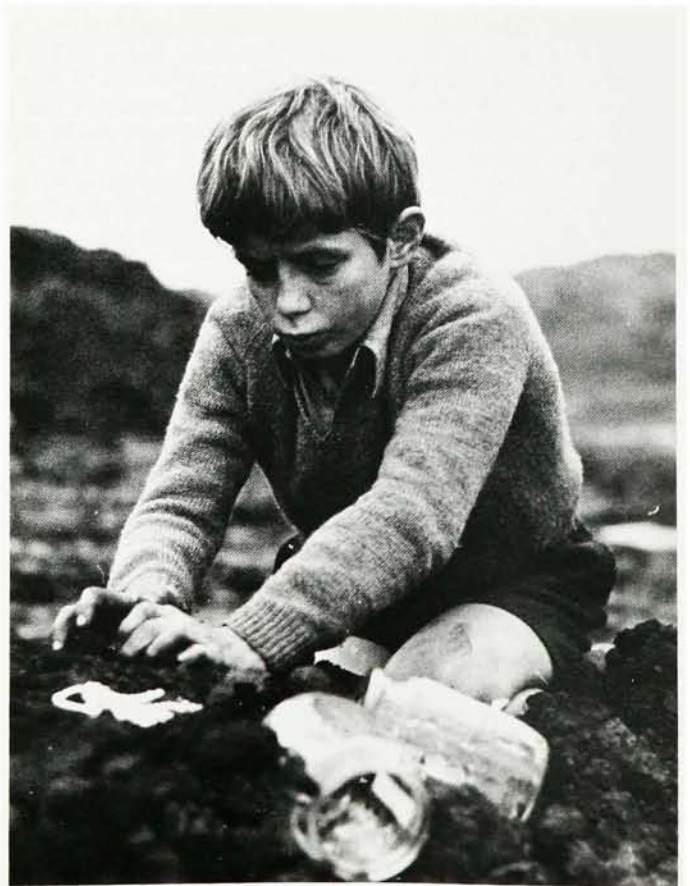
Scene from Fellini's *Amarcord*

film seems short on understanding and compassion.

In fact, it ought to be a big popular success: it's crude, colorful and nostalgic, and very well made. And Roger Corman's New World Films is distributing it here.

I missed the two afternoon films while interviewing Corman, regretting most the 1936 *One Rainy Afternoon* with Francis Lederer and Ida Lupino, which friends said was delightful. The second, *My Ain Folk*, was a continuation of the misery of Bill Douglas, shown last year in *My Childhood*, a Dickensian display of the meanness and cruelty and ugly depression of poverty in Scotland, shown with little alleviating humor, though great sensitivity. According to Milly Hall, this second film in the projected trilogy was just as bleak and

Stephen Archibald in *My Ain Folk*



uncompromising as the first childhood remembrance, and it would indeed have been interesting to have seen it on the same day as *Amarcord*, with its lush, colorful, superficial and festive atmosphere.

Roger Corman talked about his four year old production and distribution company, New World Films and of the various movies he's handled and how they've done. He struck me as a frank, bright, open inventive man, whose description of some of the creative types he's inspired or helped as "unthreatened" applied equally to himself. Talking about Bergman's *Cries and Whispers*, he mentioned that he'd actually shown it in some drive-ins, and it had done well.

**BIG BAD MAMA, USA, 1974?**, Dir. Steve Farber for Roger Corman and New World Film. Cost: approx. \$350,000. Present gross: over one million.

Corman was ready and eager to defend his film at Eleveses the next day, only no one attacked it. Everybody just asked about "the business" of films instead. Maybe not that many people had stayed up for the midnight Saturday show. Starting around 9 a.m. with the Rivette did make it a rather long day.

The film, like comic books, which it resembles, is sociologically interesting and quite probably in years to come some of the most complete statements on the American psyche will be found in masscult entertainment. "Car races and car crashes are a very significant part of the collective consciousness." (Corman)

*Big Bad Mama* also has a zesty opportunistic appeal that is so blatant it is almost winning. Feminine leads, women using men, beautiful old cars, endless races and crack-ups, machine gun rat-tatting enough to satisfy a nine year old, and everything and everyone disposable. How can Corman's company miss?

Sunday, September 22, 1974: the last day of the Festival. I call my family to tell them I'll write all day Monday and hope to return Tuesday, and they all sound like they are having such a good time with me away, that instead of feeling relieved, I feel unaccountably depressed.

Interview Paul Mazursky, who says he has been accused of being sentimental, but looking straight at me states defensively, "I like feelings." It really is a pity to be living at a time when sentimentality is considered worse than brutality. He speaks of himself as a smart Jewish kid from Brooklyn whom some Hollywood types resented. I wonder if it's just this Brooklyn-based "foreign-ness" which permits him to see and satirize Californian life so well.

After the interview I catch part of Mamoulian's 1936 *The Gay Desperado*, which is obviously delightful, followed by *Uncle Vanya*, a replacement for the scheduled Karasik *The Seagull*, from Russia.

Walking back to my digs along Ontario Street the cars pass, honk. Friends wave from the windows. They're pulling out now. It's almost all over. Just *Harry and Tonto* tonight and the 10th Festival is finished.

I feel fairly wiped. Glad Gerald and Clive selected something relatively light for tonight. Watching the Russian *Uncle Vanya* just now I realized I was not giving it my best. Sergei Bondarchuk gave a fine portrayal. The added background information about the crop failures of 1891-2 added a jarring note; I wondered if Konchalovsky had been encouraged to do something to make Chekhov more related to his time, and the final high aerial shot of Russia seemed to corroborate this. Odd business too, switching in and out of sepia to black and white to fullscale but muted color. Spent too long trying to decide if these sequences coincided with material used directly from the play. And after all, have the same complaint: filming a play never really works. Lines, performance and staging should direct the audience's attention, and instead the camera singles out those the director has decided should be watched. Based on empathy, the play inevitably loses its life force when captured on film, and remains best cherished for historical and educational value.

**HARRY AND TONTO, USA, 1974**, Dir. Paul Mazursky, 115 min., Color.

Dilys Powell observed during one of our eleven o'clock coffee hours, that she found the chain of American road-movies one of the most exciting current developments in film. Movies like *Two Lane Blacktop*, *Electra Glide in Blue*, *Easy Rider*, *Dual* and *Steelyard Blues* seemed to her to be humane, touching and unbelligerently anti-authoritarian. I wonder if *Harry and Tonto* could just slip in under the wire as a road-movie at a somewhat slower pace?

At any rate, it excels in Mazursky's Pinteresque ear for reflecting dialogue, his cheerful ironies, his narrow escapes from sentimentality, his colorful road-movie type USA locations, distinctive characters and his daring subject matter. Stories of old men and their cats are not made often any more, if they ever were.

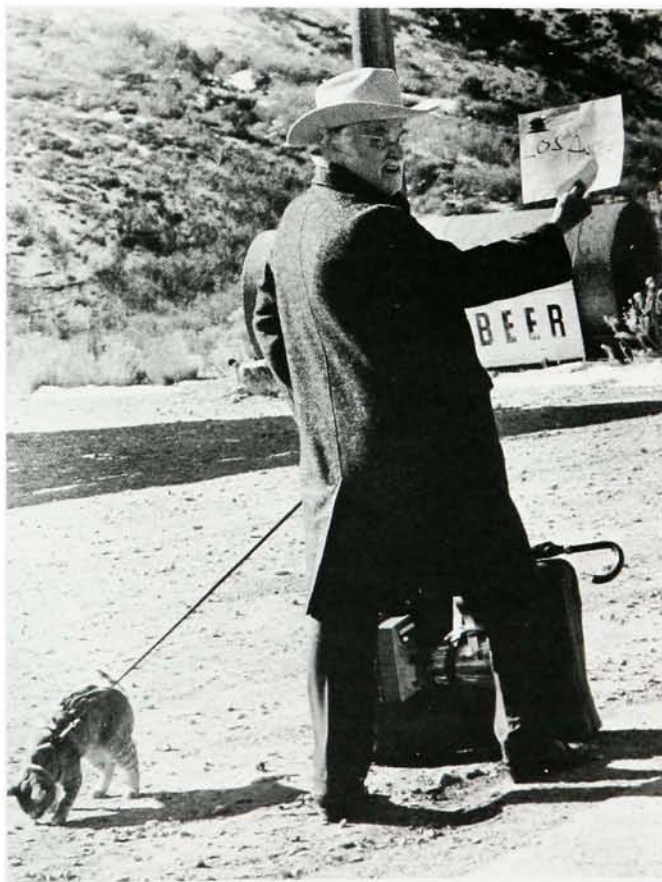
This week I've seen age handled with dignity and finality by the Swedes in *The Pistol*, and with happy resignation in *The Little Theatre of Jean Renoir*. I've seen death met with poetry and drama in the Polish *The Birchwood*, and with touching realism in *La Gueule Ouverte*.

Now Mazursky presents an American approach to age, and though it isn't particularly dignified, or dramatic, or poetic or even especially realistic, it does reflect the way many North Americans would like it to be.

Art Carney's sprightly likeable loner will get along. Neither cats, nor family nor life itself can last forever, but all can be loved and enjoyed while we have them, he seems to say. And through his tolerant self-sufficient gaze we view an America that's pretty freaky, but endurable.

Full of Mazursky's particular talent for displaying the bizarre, far-fetched and highly improbable as realistic, *Harry and Tonto* gently satirizes contemporary fads in its helter-skelter style, while basically providing audiences deep into depression and violence, with an optimistic little movie of survival.

*Art Carney as he appeared in Harry and Tonto*



Finishing this copy, I might leak the conversation a group of us had at dinner one day. Discussing attendance, some were convinced that more than 200 people would purchase week-long memberships if awards were given.

"Well," mumbled Clive (Denton) wickedly, "I was thinking of the Silver Swan. . . ."

Perfect. Fantastic. We all agreed.

"And how about The Cygnet for new talent," I cried, forgetting myself and punning, "You could give a Cygnet Ring."

Or an Ugly Duckling Award, added someone.

And David Beard, everyone agreed, would be delighted surely to give the Great White Albatross to the worst possible offender.

Should these things come to pass, just remember you read it first in *Cinema Canada*!

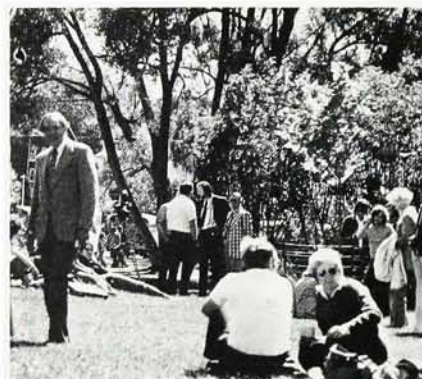
Finally folks, try to make it next year. One of the great things about the Festival is meeting other film people, exchanging news and ideas. And we really lacked Westerners and Maritimers and of course, Québécois. Go for Home Accommodation and a week's membership, get a grant or loan and come on out. You'll like it. □

#### Correction and apologies re: Stratford Part I

Murray Sweigman of International Telefilm was incorrectly identified as Maurice Whitman (say them quickly and you'll see why) and Leo Dratfield has no 'p' in his name. Readers might be interested to know that the entire 10 to 11 thousand word Stratford copy was written the day after the Festival in thirteen hours to meet an already delayed deadline. Need more be said?

#### STRATFORD SCENES:

1. Mary Leslie of Stratford, the lovely lady whose home the writer lived in during the Festival under the "Home Accomodation" plan.
2. Sam Gupta
3. Betty Jane Wylie with Clive Denton
4. The "Canadian Day" picnic on the island



5. Jean-Claude Lord and Robin Spry during Elevenses
6. David Beard
7. Charles Hoffman – magnificent piano accompanist for the "silents"
8. Dylis Powell with Gerald Pratley
9. Enraptured listeners during Elevenses

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