

SPECIAL EVENTS

CANADIAN FEDERATION OF FILM SOCIETIES SCREENING-PREVIEW WEEKEND

Delegates and observers representing up to 40 film societies and institutions who regularly use and program film are expected to converge on the Cornwall, Ontario, campus of St. Lawrence College of Applied Arts and Technology this Victoria Day weekend.

At least six rooms and the college cinema will be turned over to 16 mm projection from 9 a.m. to 11 p.m. daily and a midnight room will open up in the residence until 4 a.m. Ten minutes' walk away a friendly local independent will screen the 35 mm features from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. Sandwiched in-between are three panel discussion groups which will be audio-taped, the annual general meeting of the federation and ritualistic numbers such as a wine and cheese party and banquet. All this for \$25, students half price and a discount for members. The college cinema management program students are working on a tie-in with a local drugstore for eye-drops. Feeding and sleeping arrangements will be on-campus and will include a coed hostel in the gym. Mattresses if you're lucky and your own sleeping bag for free. Or defect for the relative comfort of an hotel.

The image of the film society movement varies according to one's age and experience. It may seem to be a bunch of socialites and "film buffs" (odious words and often odious types) name-dropping directors while ogling subtitled prints of anything not in their mother tongue. It may be someone with a cultural-messianic complex hustling celluloid in a church basement in the Northwest Territories; it may be a group of rural isolates who abhor television yet hunger for images. It may be the patron of the plush federally, provincially or university-sponsored film theatre, institute, cinemathèque, conservatory or whatever.

All that these people have in common is a love of cinema and most of them hunger for alternatives to regular commercial fare, and for the

isolates, Bergman's *Magic Flute* is an alternative to *How to Stuff a Wild Bikini*.

The film society movement has been up and down in the last 20 years and at one time about to go the way of the dinosaur. The hangup was the federation's concept that a true society was one with a rigid system of membership and subscriptions for admissions, in part brought about by the contract terms of the major distributors. However, the federation and distributors seem to be moving with the times. In the heyday of the society, it was the sole purveyor of quality films. The past decade has seen the growth of the independent repertory theatres, powerful campus screening bodies, all manner of people getting "into film".

Statistics indicate that over a third of film rental income in the country comes from 16 mm and there are numerous independent and specialist distributors catering to the alternative exhibitor. All types of distributor have made top product available to cater to the different screening situations in the country and, besides the latest foreign-language import looking for a screen (Japan, Switzerland, Peru, Italy, Germany, France, Jamaica, South Africa, Australia, Brazil are among the sources), there will be screenings of new prints of old goldies, restored versions, new discoveries, re-discoveries for bookers of all ages. *Les enfants du paradis*, *The Front Page*, *Duel in the Sun* and so on. Can one list 80 titles?

Canadian content has not been overlooked. The National Film Board has feature-length product of interest and there is a move to turn *A Star is Lost* into a midnight cult movie. And there is room for independently made shorts, socially conscious features.

The *modus operandi* is to register, digest the program notes and schedule and, with one or two brother/sister delegates spread around the rooms, eavesdrop on conversations, check the computerized audience rat-

ings and cover as much as possible with as little sleep as possible. Having a CFFS index, a listing of over 8,000 titles which can be rented in the country, also helps - but distributors supply copious catalogues and fliers, and societies exchange program notes.

The panel groups promise to be interesting. One is an interface between film society officers, independent repertory theatre managers and heads of institutes to see where each helps and hinders the other. Another is for newcomers just starting societies or screening situations and while one end of the spectrum may be exclusive and preoccupied with constitutions, there are thrusts towards societies which are socially oriented, doing things like weaning audiences away from conventional pabulum, seeking out the worthwhile domestic and experimental product and finding or making audiences for it. And not forgetting kids. Children's shows are not just conveniences for parents but participatory experiences under the aegis of some societies - Disney doesn't have it all his way anymore. There are alternative sources for kids and these films will have screen time too.

The opening program is being arranged by the National Film Theatre, a branch of the Canadian Film Institute emanating from Ottawa. NFT is not big brother and not a cuckoo in the film society nest and it is probably the best source of quality 35 mm film from anywhere as long as commercial exhibitors do little to encourage distribution of non-North American film on the continent. Apart from a top-ten list of Bergman, Bunuel, Wertmuller (lately) and others, there is so much which remains unseen in Canada - although an urban Canadian is certainly better off in the area of film fare than most British people living outside London. The thing is to get the NFT programs circulating around the country.

Cornwall is 75 miles west of Montreal, on the Saint Lawrence River, and 65 miles southeast of Ottawa. With a little perseverance and research, getting there shouldn't be too difficult and if you write or phone the conference convenor Chris Wilson at St. Lawrence College, Windmill Point, Cornwall, Ont., (613) 933-6080, you should be able to find out anything else you need to know about the weekend.

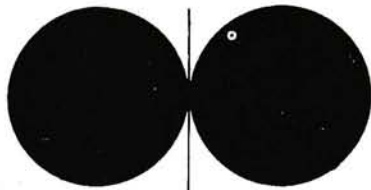
Chris Wilson

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