

Top echelon types at weekend conference

Hypothetical movie illuminates film industry

By BARRY CLAVIR

Over 600 participants from both industry and academic circles filled Burton Auditorium last Friday and Saturday for the Business of Film Conference.

The gathering, initiated by the Canadian Distribution Centre (a Toronto-based film organization which distributes independent filmmakers' films), and co-sponsored by York and Ryerson, was designed to increase the awareness of students and professionals alike in the pragmatic day-to-day problems incurred in film production.

Representatives from television, independent producers, lawyers, and theatrical and non-theatrical distributors were placed on three separate panels to discuss, in seminar form, the mysteries of film production.

A hypothetical film project was created, consisting of a prime

dramatic feature film based on the life of Norman Bethune for international theatrical distribution. With this, a complete film package was added, including a television version, shorts, and a travelogue dealing with the main subject.

For the first hypothetical situation, concerned with the financing of the feature, Chalmers Adams, producer of Don Shebib's *Between Friends*, was delegated the role of executive producer; George Desmond represented the CBC as an advisor for a possible network sale, and lawyer Miles O'Reilly represented the interests of possible private investors in the project.

David Perlmutter, producer of *Black Christmas* and an unexpected participant, assumed the role of producer for this initial session.

The second session, chaired by Louis Applebaum of the Ontario Arts Council, dealt with possible legal

problems. Joseph Beaubien, legal council of the Canadian Film Development Corporation, served on the panel as the spokesman for the CFDC. Using *The Norman Bethune Story* as an example, he expressed the corporation's concern that profits be disbursed properly and that rights to the Bethune book be secured.

The final session dealt with the possible marketing opportunities open to the producers; the ensuing discussion clearly illustrated the different stances of exhibitors and distributors. George Destounis of Famous Players, and Bill Soady of Universal, produced a fine display of half-serious banter which beautifully summed up the one-upmanship and what-have-you-done-for-me-lately attitude inherent in the wheeling and dealing process of selling feature films.

Marie Waisberg, who coordinated the conference, had originally expected 250 people to attend. But demand was so great that the site was changed from Osgoode's Moot Court to the larger Burton Auditorium.

Waisberg estimated that over 70

per cent of the 600 in attendance were professionals working in the field, with the remainder represented from the academic community. The two day seminar attracted people from as far away as Ann Arbor, Rochester, Phoenix and Vancouver.

Film department chairman John Katz, who organized the proceedings with fine arts dean Joseph Green, termed the conference "fantastic".

"The audience was made aware of the issues, and different groups of people were brought together for informal discussion and interchange," he said.

The conference seemed to develop a much more professional and business-like bent than was originally intended, in light of the number of professionals who attended. But this shift in audience make-up gave the student faction a better opportunity to learn the nuts and bolts of the business, as well as to meet informally with a greater cross section of the industry.

The conference centred mainly on the production of the feature film. Panelist John Boundy, film officer

for the NFB, was concerned that the ancillary aspects of the total film package, including short subjects and a travelogue of the Bethune theme, were relegated to the secondary position of a "spin-off".

A feature film does not have the immediate relevance to a student film-maker which a shorter length of film has; while distribution channels, audience considerations, and costs are different in nature and scope from those of feature films, they are, as Louis Applebaum suggested, problems of common concern to the makers of both feature films and shorter subjects.

Pablo Frasconi, a York film student, would have liked to have seen an additional conference dealing with aesthetic considerations; in his view the weekend conference portrayed film as a consumer good to be marketed just like any other commodity. While he agreed that this is a reality of film, he felt other realities, such as aesthetics, should not be forgotten.

Hopefully other conferences will be held which can be equally successful in serving as a catalyst for exchanging information and ideas.

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