

Laughing Matters: taking comedy seriously

Gary Cohen

"I've been at Cannes and other films festivals over the past few years and the prevalent themes have been death and suicide. I thought it might be time for a change, time for a comedy series." And obviously the people who run this year's Festival of Festivals are in total agreement with Laughing Matters programmer Ted Riley, because with over 50 films to its credit the Festival's comedy series is three times larger than any of the other categories.

Riley, who is presently the acting Toronto representative of the Canadian Film Institute, was taking time between screenings to reminisce on how he got the idea for Laughing Matters, a project which has had him and co-programmer and friend, Cine-Mag editor Stephen Cole, steeped in work for the past six months. The concept that Riley dreamed up while running this year's Canadian Images festival in Peterborough was good, but still a crude product that needed refining.

"It was like a first year student who thinks he has started working on the best essay idea ever, only to realize sixty pages later that he is still defining his terms. We needed themes and we wanted ones that would highlight the social and political concerns of comedy...we wanted people taking comedy seriously."

Riley and Cole based their series around five themes (Comedy Between the Sexes, Comedy as Madness, The Clowns, Comedy as Political Satire and Comedy as Social Commentary) while at the same time trying to create a balance between American and foreign, as well as commercially successful and "festival calibre" films.

"The Festival has a two-fold mandate," says Riley. "It should provide entertainment for people, but it should also provide festival calibre films...good quality, interesting or little-known films that it can introduce to the public."

"We were concerned that the audience would not be familiar with some of the foreign films but we wanted a good balance. We wanted *Annie Hall* and *Shampoo*, yes, but we also



Jerry Lewis, shown above in his role as The Nutty Professor, is just one of the funny people who will be gracing the screen at the Bloor Cinema over the next few weeks. His film is just one of the highlights of the Laughing Matters retrospective, part of this year's Festival of Festivals.

wanted to show films like *Fireman's Ball*, an excellent Milos Foreman film which is not often seen here."

Riley and Cole have applied their concept and concerns to shape a well-balanced, provocative retrospective which is full of funny films. Among some of the other foreign entries are *Happiness*, a 1935 silent comedy, which Riley laughingly suggests is "the Soviet version of Charlie Chaplin"; *Macunaima*, an experimental product of the Brazilian cinema novo movement, which "shows politics mirrored through humour" scatologically developed through scenes of cannibalism and

incest; *Il Minestrone*, a film depicting the poor side of Italian society, and making its North American debut at the Festival directed by former Passolini collaborator Sergio Citti; a splendid British film, *Whiskey Galore*; Yugoslavia's *W.R. Mysteries Of The Organism* and Holland's *Fanfare*.

Spilling over into all five themes and anchoring the retrospective will be two of Chaplin's best, *The Gold Rush* and *Modern Times*. (Riley and Cole wanted to include *The Great Dictator*, but they "were conscious of not including too many American films.") Joining the American classics are Leo McCarey's *The Awful Truth*, a

1937 film starring Cary Grant and Irene Dunn, and *Duck Soup* featuring the inimitable Marx Brothers, *Pat and Mike*, a Tracey-Hepburn vehicle, Kubrick's *Lolita* and *Dr. Strangelove. The Nutty Professor*, Jerry Lewis' best film, and Billy Wilder's *The Apartment* with Jack Lemmon, Shirley MacLaine and Fred MacMurray. Also of note is *Mickey One*, the first collaboration between Warren Beatty and director Arthur Penn before *Bonnie and Clyde*, a film which Riley says is included in the retrospective because it touches on the theme concept of "the comedian as a tragic figure." Special events include the

Toronto premiere of the new John "Pink Flamingos" Waters' movie, *Polyester*, starring Divine, screendom's most bizarre hero/heroine. The film will be presented in odorama — scratch and sniff cards will be handed out at the theatre — and will be followed by a party at *Heaven* with Divine in attendance.

A tribute to Laurel and Hardy, co-ordinated with the Sons of the Desert, a local group of Laurel and Hardy fanatics, will be on for the first Saturday of the festival. Movies will be accompanied by a pianist. And later that day the festivities will continue with a screening of Olsen and Johnson's *Hallazoppin'* which will kick-off the Comedy as Madness section of the retrospective. Also on the bill will be some vintage Three Stooges and a Ritz Brothers film. During the screenings people planted in the audience will keep those in attendance on their toes with some live madness to coincide with the zaniness on the screen.

Also featured as a tie-in to the Laughing Matters series will be a special 11 o'clock after-screenings show which will be held at Yuk-Yuk's Comedy Cabaret. Those present at the day's screenings are invited and details concerning the date and performers will be forthcoming.

Among those who will show up at the Festival for guest appearances will be Buck Henry and Milos Foreman who will be present for the showing of their film *Taking Off* (Henry wrote the screenplay for Foreman's first American film). Also appearing will be Ivan Passer, whose *Cutter's Way* will be making its gala premiere at the Festival this year. Coincidentally Passer wrote the screenplay for Foreman's *Fireman's Ball* which is also on the programme.

Festival passes for the Laughing Matters series cost \$30.00. For further information concerning tickets or scheduling you can check the daily papers or call the Festival office at the Park Plaza Hotel.

Film through a different lens

Gary Cohen

Third Dementia, this year's Festival of Festivals 3-D film retrospective, is one of the most esoteric series being featured and Frank Taylor, the Festival's Planning and Development Director, and the man responsible for the 3-D programme, is happy to keep it that way.

Beginning with its slightly eccentric time slot (all showings begin at 11 p.m. at the Bloor Cinema) Taylor admits that he wanted his programme "to appeal to a slightly more marginal audience".

"The time slot was my choice. I wanted to do a fun program in a time slot that wasn't competing with a whole lot else," he explains.

But as an ex-Director of the National Film Board, president of his own film distribution company and present director of the Festival, Frank Taylor takes his movies to heart. There is a serious side to his 3-D retrospective. Besides wanting to explore some of the potential of the 3-D film process as it

relates to a variety of movies, Taylor wanted to present "a broad spectrum of films as far as the technical end of 3-D is concerned."

Several examples of 3-D cinematography are included in the series (a new space vision system, side by side) along with the latest example of 3-D technology, an experimental, computer-animated 3-D film produced for Panasonic by Robert Abel and Associates. "Animation," hypothesizes Taylor, "may be the area where 3-D is most strongest felt in the future." But he adds that the potential doesn't stop there.

"3-D has obvious benefits for science-fiction and horror films and people like John Carpenter, George Lucas and George Romero are expressing a strong interest in working in 3-D." Keen, received interest in the process, coupled with relatively lower costs as a result of new techniques, augers well for the future of 3-D in Taylor's opinion.

"Hitchcock understood the aesthetic potential of 3-D best," admires Taylor. He goes on to

recall the first time he saw *Dial M For Murder* (the film which opens the series) in 3-D. In the two-dimensional version of the film the murder sequence in the living room of Grace Kelly's flat is a powerful scene, but in the 3-D version Taylor says, "the audience almost feels implicated in the murder."

The work of cinematographer Lucianne Ballard in *Inferno* another Festival film, also draws high praise from Taylor. Known for his association with von Stroheim *The Devil is a Woman* and Peckinpah *The Wild Bunch* Ballard "reflects what a good cinematographer can do with the process."

Taylor is also high on Gun Fury, a Raoul Walsh film which he calls his series' "greatest coup".

As Taylor rushes off to another news conference and more meetings, the dominant feeling one has after speaking with him is that, like Columbus, Frank Taylor wants to prove that the movie world doesn't necessarily have to be flat.

ELGIN CINEMA

189 Yonge St.
(Yonge at Queen)

FESTIVAL CINEMA

651 Yonge St.
(Yonge at Charles)

TOWNE CINEMA

57 Bloor St. E.
(Bloor at Yonge)

BACKSTAGE II

35 Balmuto
(Bloor at Balmuto)

BLOOR CINEMA

506 Bloor St. W.
(Bloor at Bathurst)

REVUE CINEMA

400 Roncesvalles Ave.

FOX CINEMA

2236 Queen St. E.
(Queen at Willow)

CARLTON CINEPLEX

20 Carlton St.
(Carlton at Yonge)

Gala Presentations (GA)

Buried Treasures (BT)
Special Presentations (SP)
Yilmaz Guney (GU)
Critic's Choice (CC)
Culture Under Pressure (CUP)

Special Presentations (SP)
Real to Reel (RR)
Less is More (LM)
World of Animation (AN)

Laughing Matters (COM)
Third Dementia (3D)

Repeat Screenings

Repeat Screenings

Repeat Screenings

TICKET INFORMATION

The Festival's main ticket office is located at the Park Plaza Hotel, 4 Avenue Rd. Toronto. Telephone: 923-1367.

Passes:(\$75) admits to all Festival screenings except

Opening Night.

Single Admissions: \$3.50

Individual tickets, on a space-available basis, are available at all cinemas, and you can order ahead for most screenings through BASS (698-2277).