

Festival notes you won't find in Now

by Ira Nayman

The Festival of Festivals is over, but, before it passes into memory, I'd like to offer some personal observations on lineups, losers and unusual film-related injuries.

Critics should be read but not seen:

A child in the hospitality suite was whining; "Sounds like a critic who hasn't had all his expenses covered," one person at the scene remarked.

The ontology of the whoopie cushion:

With his old-fashioned grey suit, purple tie and long, thin face, director Peter Greenaway (*Prospero's Books*) looked like a character out of a Damon Runyan story. But, when he started to speak, nobody in the Sutton Place conference room doubted they were in the presence of one of the most intelligent auteurs in film.

Greenaway, whose background is painting, spoke at length about the relationship between the painted and filmic image, how images relate to the frame in which they are set (an important consideration in his latest film), irony as the primary intellectual attitude of the twentieth century and other weighty matters. His press conference would have been perfect if the reporters there had actually asked him about any of these things.

Unfortunately, typical questions were along the lines of, "Was it tough to find so many dancers willing to perform naked?" You expect inane, formulaic questions from many reporters (of the "How was it working with...?" or "What is your favourite of your works?" genre), but when a person doesn't resort to inane and formulaic answers, but turns the most ridiculous questions into opportunities to explore interesting ideas, the critical press comes off looking really foolish.

The nadir of the conference came when one woman, concerned about Greenaway's often revolting images and controversial stories, asked, "What does your mother think of your

festival of festivals

A film festival offers more than just movies, if you know where to look. This wrap-up of the Festival of Festivals gives you the lowdown you won't find anywhere else.

films?" With dignity, Greenaway replied, "My mother died 20 years ago and never got to see any of my works."

Remember this the next time you read a review to see if a movie is worth attending.

Do I win a prize?

Carlsberg, sponsor of one of the Festivals awards, produced a short shown before most of the films. With its clips of previous Festival films, it reminded me of a MuchMusic "name the videos" contest.

I recognized *The Big Chill*, *The Decline of the American Empire* and *Cyrano de Bergerac*. Then there was Sally Field in one of those "women in the country" films that were so popular a few years ago...and something Shakespearean...and...well...

I was never very good at those MuchMusic things, either.

Attend a film festival, see a world class city:

There is an alley off Bloor Street between two very tall buildings; looking up was like trying to find the sky at the bottom of a deep well. I lined up in it to see Ken Loach's *Cathy, Come Home*; the atmosphere was stifling. "It's unusual," I said to myself, "for an outdoor area to need air conditioning."

The Festival developed an elaborate system over the years, where passholders were given tokens an hour before the show; if any seats were left, they went on sale to the general public fifteen minutes before the film. (Once you had your tokens, you could leave the line and still be guaranteed a seat, but few people actually did.)

This was intended to ensure people didn't wait in line not knowing whether they would get into a film or not; now, people know well in advance. This had the unintended effect, however, of forcing passholders to show up an hour and a half before



Peter Greenaway directs Sir John Gielgud on the set of *Prospero's Books*. He doesn't look like the sort of person you'd ask about naked dancers, does he?

popular movies to make sure they got in.

The line through the ManuLife Centre, with the 700 seat Varsity Cinema, led past the office of the Parkinson's Association, Boatwright Investments and onto Balmutto Street. With attractions like this, it's a wonder the city isn't flooded with tourists.

Attend a film festival, catch up on reading:

There's not much to do in a lineup on Balmutto Street, so, for one of my courses, I read Nadezhda Mandelstam's *Hope Against Hope*. Reading about the persecution of poets during Stalin's reign of terror in Russia, it's hard to feel too bad about not getting in to see Bruce McDonald's *Highway 61*.

Unusual cinematic injuries:

Burnout is common at film festivals, but it sometimes takes unusual forms.

At a screening of *Picture This: The Times of Peter Bogdanovich in Archer, Texas*, a guy with a bloody gash on his shin sat a couple of seats down from me. "You must really want to see this film," I remarked.

"Actually," he replied, "it's my neighbour's dog. When I leave home on my bike, he chases after me. This morning, he caught me. It's hard to get away on five hours of sleep."

Reviewing is the best revenge:

Mid-way through the Festival, I ran out of superlatives. Having seen three films I adored (*Barton Fink*, *Hearts of Darkness: A Filmmaker's Apocalypse* and *The Search for Signs of Intelligent Life in the Universe*) and at least a dozen I enjoyed, I was finding it difficult to come up with original praise. How many times can a reviewer use the term "exhilarating" without losing credibility?

What I needed was a really cheesy Hollywood movie, with cardboard-thin characters and a stale, formulaic plot; something that would take the

sweet taste out of my mouth. At that moment, John Frankenheimer's *Year of the Gun* hove into view.

My suspicions about the film were confirmed even before it started; little vials of the product of a major men's fashion designer turned perfumier were being distributed in the theatre by men with cheekbones so angular they must have met in the backs of their heads like boomerangs. As I passed one, he took in my typically rumpled exterior and smirked.

His smirk said it all; "You want to have a sample of our perfume? Our perfume? Really? What makes you think we want to give it to you? You're not man enough to wear our perfume. In fact, who let you into this movie?"

As it happened, I didn't need any incentive to dislike the film; for one thing, it starred Andrew McCarthy, who was wooden and unconvincing as himself when he was introduced at the Gala. For another — ah, but, I should save that for the review, shouldn't I?

Finally...

It's funny how your attitude changes over the course of a film festival. At the beginning, you say to yourself, "I want to see everything!" By the end, you're saying, "This film better entertain me in the first five minutes, or I'll go to the Terry Gilliam press conference early!"

Over the course of the Festival, I saw about 30 films. To my surprise, they were mostly entertaining to brilliant; there was only one major disappointment, and two or three films that just didn't work for me.

The 1991 Festival of Festivals had a good lineup with an extraordinary level of quality. Hopefully, filmgoers will have something special to look forward to next year.

12

IT'S GREEK TO ME CORPORATION

PRESENTS

6 LBS OF POWER

THE

TOPLINK 1020 SX
NOTEBOOK

THE TOPLINK 1020 SX IS THE PERFECT TOOL FOR TODAY'S STUDENT. IMAGINE A 386SX-20 MHz COMPUTER, 2 MB RAM, 40MB HARD DRIVE, VGA BACKLIT LCD DISPLAY PLUS 2 SERIAL AND 1 PARALLELL PORTS THAT FITS IN YOUR BRIEFCASE WEIGHING ONLY 6 LBS!

NOW IMAGINE ALL THIS FOR ONLY \$2,775.00
(WITH STUDENT ID - REG. PRICE \$2995)

CALL TO PLACE YOUR ORDER TODAY
886-7704

WE ACCEPT VISA AND MASTERCARD. GST & PST NOT INCLUDED
PRICES SUBJECT TO CHANGE WITHOUT NOTICE

1992 BELL CANADA ENGINEERING & COMPUTER SCIENCE

A W A R D S

Bell Canada offers up to 30 scholarships to engineering or computer science undergraduates.

THE AWARD

Winners receive full tuition for the following academic year plus an offer of summer or work-term employment at Bell.

ELIGIBILITY

The awards program is open to engineering or computer science students in their next-to-last undergraduate year who rank in the top half of their class and have made a significant contribution to university or community life.

DEADLINE FOR APPLICATIONS - OCTOBER 18, 1991

FOR APPLICATION FORMS AND MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT THE ENGINEERING OR COMPUTER SCIENCE OFFICE.

Bell