

Odd choice from U.S. opens our eighth film festival

By Sydney Johnson

THE Eighth Montreal International Film Festival opened last night at Expo Theatre amid more than the usual éclat, for this year the annual Film Festival is part of Expo 67 and, in honor of this extraordinary exposition of man's achievements and Canada's Centennial, it is lasting two weeks instead of the usual one.

Nothing could be more fitting than the association of Montreal's Film Festival with an international exposition whose theme is "Man and His World," for the cinema is an integral part of man's world today. It is man's greatest medium of communication, a fact demonstrated by the number of pavilions using films, as well as the latest developments in projection, to get their messages across to their visitors. The cinema is more than just a form of mass entertainment, it is often its audience's only regular contact with the arts.

The power of the film as a medium of communication is beyond question, but the standing of the feature film as a form of art is often debatable. The making of feature films is a business, a very expensive and hazardous business, in which large capital sums must be gambled with the return of the investment dependent not solely on the quality of the product but on the whim of a fickle public. As we can see by television, the more commercial the film, the more accidental its intrinsic quality as art.

IT IS TO BRING together those films in which the arts and crafts of cinema predominate that film festivals came into being, though many of the most publicized ones have degenerated into annual trade shows. Montreal's Film Festival is one of over a hundred internationally recognized annual film festivals and it is to its credit that in seven years it has established a world reputation as one of the most artistic. It has achieved this distinction because of its high standards of selection and because it has refused to descend to the blatant publicity, the market-place horse-trading, and the Chamber of Commerce hoop-la that influence the running of the trade-fair type of festival.

The Montreal Film Festival organization, in an official brief, has stated that the aim of a film festival should be "... to introduce the great films of world cinema, not to exploit them commercially" and it goes on to emphasize the cultural importance of the cinema in the world of today and the role a film festival plays in the cultural life of the public by "bringing before it the world's most outstanding films."

IN A SUMMARY of last year's Seventh Film Festival, which was attended by a total of 32,000 persons who saw films from seventeen different countries, the brief gives the results of an interesting sample poll defining the type of

audience the Montreal Film Festival attracts.

The largest age group was in the 20 to 24 bracket, which numbered 28 per cent of the total polled. Sixteen per cent were in the 25 to 29 age group and 16 per cent were 30 to 34 years of age. Sixty per cent were therefore between the ages of 20 and 34. Those 15 to 19 polled only eight per cent and the average age of the over-all total was calculated at 30.7.

A table of "Educational Standing" showed that those with eight to nine years of study (which would mean those who left school before the age of sixteen) represented only one per cent of the total attendance, though this group is generally reckoned to provide a large proportion of the attendance at the commercial cinema. Thirteen per cent had 10-12 years of study, 24 per cent had 13-15, 32 per cent had 16-18, and 21 per cent had 19 or over.

ONE OF THE PROBLEMS of any film festival selection committee is the difficulty of getting representative films from countries where the film industry is commercial and tremendously competitive and it is reported that Britain and the United States are the most difficult to deal with. This is quite understandable. A big company, with millions of dollars invested in a film about to be released, cannot run the risk of having its film condemned as third-rate art, especially when it knows that it has deliberately planned the whole film to suit the taste of the mass public—perhaps that section of the public that

makes up only one per cent of the Montreal Film Festival's audience.

AS A FILMGOER I couldn't care less about the inclusion of British, American or French feature films in the Film Festival, because I know that sooner or later any British, American or French film worth seeing will be shown in Montreal commercially (I don't know about "Ulysses") and I would rather the Film Festival concentrated on those films of artistic merit that I should otherwise have no other opportunity of seeing. I want to know what is being done in other countries, even if I don't like what I see.

Still, the Film Festival must do its best to have every film-making country represented, so it cannot be blamed if the best offer it could get from the United States this year was the world première of "Bonnie and Clyde," the feature picture that opened the Festival last night and which, though an excellent demonstration of technical competence, does not, in my opinion, merit a place in any film festival, whether it is considered on artistic, literary or moral grounds.

"BONNIE AND CLYDE" is, to put it quite bluntly, a sentimental glorification of a couple of small-time murderous thugs who, with their gang, terrorized a section of the Southwest and Midwest United States in the 1930s. The film is conceived along the lines of the money-making string of glamorized outlaw films (like Jesse James) popular a few years ago and, like those films, it sticks only loosely to the facts, preferring to make the motivations of



Faye Dunaway and Warren Beatty in an escape scene from "Bonnie and Clyde," which opened the 8th Montreal International Film Festival.

these real-life characters fit the sympathetic personalities of the popular stars engaged to play them.

This approach to the crime career of Bonnie Parker and Clyde Barrow might perhaps be defensible from an artistic point of view if the film had any social or psychological comment to make, but although the film makes oblique references to the hard times of the Depression and subtly suggests that the "hero" is mentally deficient neither approach is valid since the film is romantic fiction based on fact rather than fact itself and its obvious aim is to gain a sentimental audience's

sympathy for the criminals (or for the stars). The film thus has about as much literary or artistic merit as a drug-store paperback.

The film opens as Bonnie meets Clyde just after he has been released from jail for armed robbery, though the real Bonnie was professionally affiliated with Clyde before he went to jail and, indeed, slipped him a pistol while visiting him there, thus enabling him to escape. He was recaptured and sentenced to two years in the penitentiary and Bonnie was waiting for him when he got out, after which they formed a gang and embarked on a career of robbery and murder that lasted until they were finally ambushed and shot to death by law officers in Louisiana.

The film concentrates on the sentimental image of two nice but weak young people in love who are hounded to death by the law, along with the pleasant young man they have picked up and Clyde's older brother and his wife. Warren Beatty, who is also the producer of the film (which has been competently directed by Arthur Penn of Broadway and cinematic fame) gives a very interesting portrayal of Clyde Barrow, presenting him as a very likeable and friendly young man who wouldn't willingly hurt anyone and who is quite upset when people get in his way while he is robbing banks and he is obliged to kill them in order to make his getaway with the money.

Arthur Penn has provided a convincing background of the Southwest in the 1930s (principally by costuming and vintage automobiles), but in a film that has nothing important to say there is not much room for directional originality. The best that can be said for the film is that it is competently directed, acted and photographed in color, but it is not the kind of film that Montreal Film Festival audiences would go to the commercial cinema to see and it is certainly not the kind of film they expect to see in a festival organized to introduce the great films—or even the unusual films—of world cinema.



Faye Dunaway, Denver Pyle and Warren Beatty in a "capture" scene from "Bonnie and Clyde."