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Cimino's 'Hunter' Major Lure At Quality Accented Belgrade Fest

By RONALD HOLLOWAY

Belgrade, Feb. 20.

Once known as the "Brave New World Festival," the Ninth Belgrade International Film Festival now uses "Best Films of the World" as its motto. And this year topper Milutin Colic could well brag of getting the cream of season's film festivals, plus other top commercial pix from around the globe.

Big lure this year was Michael Cimino's "Deer Hunter" in its European preem (it's also slated for Berlin without competition later this month). Pic was an SRO fave, despite lack of ducats, and a critical winner, although there was much discussion as to whether state authorities (rather lenient here during the fest) would give an okay for unspooling in time.

The Soviet delegation promptly protested on grounds that the pic "doesn't respect the struggle of the Vietnamese people for peace." No word was said on Soviets about the games of Russian roulette in pic, nor about the central Yank characters coming from a Russian Orthodox colony in Pennsylvania.

Queried on his opinion, topper Colic looked upon "Deer Hunter" as a "tragic anti-war pic and a very human film." As film critic for Belgrade's leading paper, Politika, Colic felt Cimino was mostly interested in the "phenomenon of war," and "Deer Hunter" often comes across as a kind of "requiem" for Vietnam's dead Americans.

Other Yugo critics, plus helmers, voiced much the same praise for the film's universal qualities, so it appears "Deer Hunter" may be solid b.o. in Europe.

Colic himself was a controversial figure at the beginning of the fest due to a tv talk-show in which he participated with exiled Yugo helmer Dusan Makavejev. Latter made "Mysteries of an Organism" earlier in this decade, which set off a Yugoslav chain-reaction of complaints.

Signs Of Thaw

Since Makavejev was one of the key backers of the Yugo fest in its infancy, this was a welcomed return for him to the days of yore. Another sign of thaw was the presence of Aleksandar Petrovic at the Atelier 212 theatre to direct a legit production of his own creation, a dramatization of Bulgakov's "Heart of a Dog."

Several viewers welcomed Andrzej Wajda's "Man of Marble" on the Main Program of the opening day, pairing with Steven Spielberg's "Close Encounters." This too was a review of Yugoslavia's post-war history during the period of the Personality Cult.

Audiences again were at overflowing peak this year, with attendance reaching 230,000 for the same 90 pix (down from 100 of previous year). Receptions at embassies ran late into the night, and the usual number of invited guests showed throughout the week (although minus Yank big-names as in the past).

Belgrade fest, coming at end of old season and beginning of the new one, is a kind of Western showcase for Socialist countries. This is a pilgrimage point for East European buyers because pix are seen here with live audiences, young and old, who obviously like films and particularly those from the West.

Yank pix are favorites, while American distribs respond generously although nearly everything has been bought in advance. Here's a rundown of 16 U.S. entries:

Besides "Deer Hunter" and "Close Encounters," there were Richard Brooks' "Looking for Mr. Goodbar," Paul Mazursky's "An Unmarried Woman," John Hanson and Rob Nilsson's "Northern Lights," Hal Ashby's "Coming Home" and Robert Young's "Alambrista."

Also, Martin Scorsese's "The Last Waltz," Robert Altman's "The Wedding," Paul Schrader's "Blue Collar," George Schaefer's "The Enemy of the People," Claudia Weill's "Girl Friends," Franklin Schaffner's "The Boys from Brazil," Warren Beatty's "Heaven Can Wait," Robert Enders' "Stevie" and James Toback's "Fingers."

Besides the "Best Films" category, Belgrade fest also features a "Popular Program," "Horizons" (for pix not yet bought) and "Yugoslav Film" Yugo pix featured rising new talent on the scene today for foreign critics.

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