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COVER STORY

TORONTO FILM FESTIVAL

A jaded critic's guide to Festival of Festivals

Each year we try to make the world a better and easier place by telling you everything you'll ever need to know about the annual Toronto film festival.

Why wait in line? Why get tied at celebrity-packed bashes? And — what? — another night of endless martinis up in Jack Nicholson's suite?

Stay at home, we've said. Watch on tube. Get a cool one out of the fridge and see what Ziggy is wearing on CITY-TV.

But oh, no. Folks never listen. Year after year they insist on going, stuffing themselves with stiff pastries, and wondering if Hollywood is really like this. Go figure.

It has something to do with seeing a lot of movies, I'm told. Well, it's not going to stop us. Anyway. If you insist on looking for cheap thrills at a screening of *Orphanhocker* or *Yum, Yum, Yum*, or *A Taste of Cajun & Creole Cooking*, we'll let you know — in space — what the rest of the

Movies

Peter
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festival will be doing during the next week or so.

□ Today: Clint Eastwood day, with the gala for *White Hunter, Black Heart*, which makes it John Huston day, too — he's Clint's subject — and Patricia Rozema's day as well, because her *White Room* begins the Perspective Canada series.

But the real history will be made at about midnight when, for exactly the 10,000th time, someone connected with the Festival of Festivals will use this year's phrase, "more glamorous than ever," and someone will ask him/her what the heck they're talking about.

Good question. All around him/her will be exactly the same people who were at last year's presumably less glamorous party.

□ Tomorrow: It starts badly when a horde of awful-looking guys in greasy raincoats slink unhappily out of the Cumberland 1 screening of *The Cannibals*. Can you blame them? You think someone would have let them know that this Manoel de Oliveira film is a neo-classic modern opera and certainly not something with lots of slippery and loose body parts. The day will end better when those who can will have

seen Krystyna Janda's performance in Richard Bugajski's *Interrogation*.

□ Sunday: Dennis Hopper — in town to sell *Hot Spot* which he directed — for the zillionth time in recent years tells some reporter why he feels so much better not abusing all the booze and drugs he abused for so long. He smiles a thin little smile.

Fatigue will start setting in for the first time but Gerard Depardieu's bravura performance in *Cyrano de Bergerac* will snap everyone out of the doldrums. A winner at the last Cannes festival,

this is one of the great physical movie performances ever.

□ Monday: After the first screening of *Bethune: The Making Of A Hero*, a good number of disgruntled movie buffs rush angrily out of the 7 p.m. Eglinton Theatre showing. After years of squabbling in and out of the press, they'd come expecting a disaster. Instead, they get an over-blown flick which at its best strives to be thought of as *Lawrence Of Mount Royal*. They are not amused.

By now editors will be getting restless, though.

"Is this supposed to be the most

glamorous festival ever?" they'll ask. "Yeah, well..."

"So who are all these guys you keep writing about?" they'll snap. "These unknowns..."

"They are directors," they'll be told — to no avail.

Where's Richard Gere when we really need him?

□ Tuesday: Saved. Whoopi Goldberg and Cissy Spacek show up, dropping quotes left and right as they hustle this night's gala, *The Long Walk Home*, Richard Pearce's drama about two women in Montgomery, Ala., in 1955, or

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Jaded critic's guide

CONTINUED FROM D3

a white middle-class housewife, the other, her maid.

But by now word has spread about Michael Verhoeven — yet another director! — and *The Nasty Girl*, Monday's gala and Verhoeven's wickedly funny German film about the Nazis, small-town smugness and writing essays.

"It's terrific," people are saying while nibbling their zillionth shrimp at their zillionth cocktail party.

"Why didn't we have more on this?" editors everywhere will be asking.

"And why doesn't this Goldberg woman spell 'Whoopi' with an 'e' at the end? That's how you spell 'whoople'."

☐ Wednesday: Reality sets in. Festival visitors realize that they're in Toronto and start hanging out in alleys looking for a bit of decent trash.

And for the first time real questions are being asked — like what is the festival all about, anyway? It's fun and all that but

The conversation ends as everyone rushes off to catch the two hip flicks of the week — *Wonderful World Of Dogs*, at the Varsity 2 at 4 p.m. and *Frankenhooker*, midnight at the Bloor. Another small gem is also discovered — *That Burning Question*, at the Cumberland 3 at 9.45 p.m.

☐ Thursday: Unable to get into the big gala of the night, *Listen Up: The Lives Of Quincy Jones*, several festival patrons looking for another mainstream flick — does anyone define mainstream better than Quincy these days? — end up at 9.30 p.m. at the Cumberland for *Paris Is Burning*.

Oh-oh. This is not some mad marquee mix-up for *Is Paris Burning?*, the World War II drama, but rather a peep into the Harlem drag balls, where "Vogueing" was a big deal long before Madonna and every teen discovered it.

The dress-up competition falls into various classes, but the hottest is the one called "Executive Realness" — where Bay and Wall streets become a drag queen stunt.

☐ Sept. 14: The big gala news is Stephen Frears' latest, *The Grifters*.

Festival insiders, however, are whispering knowingly about Aki Kaurismäki's *I Hired A Contract Killer* — how clever — as being the movie to see.

Meanwhile, the real hot shots are heading to James Bond III's *Def By Temptation*, about single bars, Christian redemption and lots of High Kitsch.

☐ Sept. 15: The few survivors left in what little remains left in

Weren't there a lot of Portuguese films we didn't see? they'll wonder. And where was Richard Gere when we really needed him?

Meanwhile, discussion rages over which Canadian film should get the big bucks — some \$25,000 of them — as the Toronto-CITY Award winner for "excellence in Canadian films."

The competition is stiff and no one will be exactly certain, when it's all over, that they've really picked the right one.

Later, when everyone is alone, they'll start thinking about *H*, the riveting drama about kicking drugs, and wonder just who is its director, Darrell Wasyk, anyhow?

☐ Sept. 16: The diehard will find some real trash, finally.

periodicals. He pays particular attention to films that are shown at other North American and European festivals, gambling that many of them will show up on the Toronto schedule.

This year, his research has been augmented by Woolacott and civil servant Barbara Shearer, who spent hours in the Metro Reference Library pouring over reviews.

"Barb and I went to the library when *Metropolis* published an advance schedule," says Woolacott.

"Then, when the festival program book came out last week, we met with Bill and gave each movie a rating from one to four stars.

"Our ratings are subjective opinions based on other people's subjective opinions, but at least it's information that can help in decision-making.

"The research lets us make preliminary choices. You still allow room for a great movie you

Manker, is given a two star, making it a contender.

Potential mega-hits, such as Italy's *Everyone's Fine*, are dismissed out of hand because they soon will have Toronto commercial run.

Only one movie of the fest's 289 movies rates four stars, a select few get three. The w is under oath not to reveal the names (although she plans to put these potential winners into own festival schedule).

"We don't want to reveal treasures," says Woolacott, "because we don't want people to flood the theatres.

"This information is precious.

"Instead, we encourage fans to do their own research.