On the 10th anniversary of the Toronto International Film Festival, the late Globe and Mail critic Jay Scott noted that the average film festival “has the staying power of a popsicle and the stability of a house of cards.” Now, 26 years later, Toronto has continued to defy the odds to become the world’s biggest public film festival, covered by more than 1,000 media from around the globe, with more than a quarter million people buying tickets to watch more than 300 films from around the world.

How, among the more than 1,000 festivals in the world, did Toronto emerge pre-eminent? No doubt, the city, in 1976, was ready to do big things. The CN Tower opened the same year and the city won the right to its Major League Baseball team. Toronto, which had enjoyed a reputation as the city with the highest-per-capita film audiences in North America since the 1960s started The Festival of Festivals as a kind of greatest hits of other film festivals. At the same time, with the rise of VHS, independent cinemas were folding up and film festivals were becoming more important than ever as distribution networks for low-budget artistic movies. Within a few years, breakout films like Chariots of Fire, Diva and The Big Chill, put the festival on the map as a place where both foreign-language and American films could flourish with famously receptive audiences.

While Cannes and Venice had their vintage prestige, no festival is more influential than Toronto in launching Oscar-campaigns, or mingling the strains of American and world cinema. For many, it’s a chance to catch a first glance at future Academy-Award winners, such as Slumdog Millionaire or The King’s Speech, or to catch Johnny Depp or Scarlett Johansson on a red carpet or at a film party. Along with the stargazing, there has also been trailblazing – the emergence of Hong Kong’s Wong Kar-wai, the first film of documentary firebrand Michael Moore or the breakthrough of a young Ellen Page in Juno. TIFF’s strength has not been so much its size as its appeal to diverse audiences, as a festival that, in many ways, is still many festivals in one, a festival of festivals.

Liam Lacey is a film critic for The Globe and Mail
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Festival of fests: apple pie, French movie

By BRYAN JOHNSON

The Festival of Festivals opened its battle for legitimacy as an international film festival yesterday – and found its first adversary is Canada’s near colonial status.

The major American film studios have torn a gaping hole in the festival by refusing to allow their prestigious new productions to be premiered here. The majors have decided they do not contribute to “domestic” festivals, and to them Toronto is as domestic as Toledo.

That cost organizers at least 22 major films they had been seeking, and nowhere was the gap more obvious than at last night’s gala opening at Ontario Place.

Originally scheduled to be a “sneak preview” of an American film, the first-ever gala suffered the embarrassment of providing an all-American apple pie and hot dog background for a French film.

Jean-Charles Tacchella’s Cousin, Cousine originally slated as part of a double-header gala Thursday was hustled in to pinch hit as the entertainment for the high rollers: a gathering of more than 300 civic dignitaries, film people, financial backers, and just people who paid $150 or more for the privilege.

Fortunately Tacchella’s film was an excellent one. But it was a distinct counter-point to the soul food, pinball machines, jazz band and Schlitz beer which had been laid on to provide an American air to the occasion.

Festival Director Bill Marshall caught the full irony of the occasion in his pre-film remarks. “This is American night.” he said, “Bon soir et bienvenue a cousin, cousine.”

But Marshall went on to bubble enthusiastically about the first day of the festival – a day in which, he claimed, tickets moved briskly and many of the films attracted overflow crowds.

And to be fair, with a film of the quality of Cousin, Cousine, and a buffet provided by the Underground Railroad few seemed disappointed with the gala.

An American carnival atmosphere was attempted, with live jazz, hostesses in Mardi gras style costumes, a bank of pinball machines and other playthings.

It worked fine, providing a casual low-key atmosphere that was in sharp contrast to the stuffiness of festivals like Cannes or Venice.

Also unlike those festivals, however, was the decided lack of international celebrities. Organizers had been tossing off names like Claudia Cardinale, Sergio Leone, Jack Nicholson and Julie Christie in connection with the affair. But so far the biggest non-Canadian name in attendance is Fred (The Hammer) Williamson, an ex-football star
who’s turned actor-director.

Celebrity watches had to be content with the usual Canadian crop: media luminaries like Peter C. Newman and Patrick Watson, politicians like Mayor Crombie, and film names like the Canadian Film Development Corp.’s head Michael Spencer and his counterpart at the National Film Board, Andre Lamy.

This was just the first of what will be a nightly routine until Saturday, with a different film and a different theme every night.

All the films shown can be seen again the next morning by the general public. Today’s replay of Cousin, Cousine – without the soul food – will be at the Ontario Place Cinesphere at 11:30 a.m.
A ‘wild’ film festival reaches puberty in its third year
Monday, September 25, 1978
Jay Scott

By the time Toronto’s Festival of Festivals concluded yesterday afternoon with a screening of The Getting of Wisdom, in excess of 75,000 people - more than Star Wars was drawing in a week - had attended the event. And some of them, as the joke went, even got in to see a movie.

It was, incontrovertibly, a success, a wild success, as director-general William Marshall said. For the people who could not get into screenings, for the people who were rebuffed by frequently insulting ushers at the door - who were only doing their job, after all, but were doing it with vigor - Festival of Festivals was, indeed, wild and Marshall’s comparison to Cannes exacerbated the anger.

To state that a festival which had been advertised as egalitarian, democratic and most of all accessible was superior to Cannes because large policeman did not cart patrons away from screenings for which they had tickets was to display a stunning lack of sensitivity. If there is anything the Festival of Festivals should avoid becoming, it is the Cannes Film Festival, and the hastily arranged three-day extension and extra screenings were a welcome step in the right direction. One cannot blame the festival management for the enormous success of the festival the management is to be congratulated for engineering it - but the sometimes cavalier attitude toward the problems thereby engendered was insupportable.

That said, there is nothing negative left to say. Yesterday, festival organizers were already talking about next year, about using more screens or bigger theatres or both to skirt this year’s inadequacies. S. Wayne Clarkson, the festival’s director, proved to be a programming genius. For the first time, some actual excitement was created in connection with the Canadian Film Awards, mostly because Canadians had an opportunity to see the pictures nominated (except the big winner) and because the feisty producers of Power Play, in taking the awards to court so their pre-selection committee nominations could stand, took them more seriously than they have usually been taken. The stars promised were stars present; and the Ontario Board of Censors, in requiring whatever excisions it required from In Praise of Older Women, comported itself in the manner of a publicist’s dream and a civil libertarian’s nightmare.

Donald Sims, the board’s chairman, is now saying that he never demanded as many cuts as reported, and as claimed by the film’s producers, and he has addition
d he has additionally charged that the producers used the controversy to garner publicity. Of course they did: they would have been fools not to. Meanwhile, Ontario Consumer and Corporate Affairs Minister Larry Grossman, Sims’ boss, stated that the version shown opening night must have been the cut version, apparently not wanting, understandably, to consider the possibility that the censor had been defied.

In the long run, the censorship and attendance contretemps will be forgotten. What will be remembered is that in its third year the Festival of Festivals became one of the biggest and best in the world. I think the festival has reached puberty, a reporter said last week. A publicist differed: I think this was the first affair - heartbreak and ecstasy. It may have hurt, but you know things will never be the same again.
Everyone’s a star—for one week during the Festival of Festivals,
Saturday, September 23, 1978
by Jay Scott

Melanie Mayron, the star of Claudia Weill’s Girl Friends, was sitting next to Brian De Palma on the staircase at the home of the U.S. Consulate General. So whaddya gonna make for me? she asked De Palma, director of Carrie and The Fury. A movie about a Jewish girl living on a kibbutz who goes crazy because her girl friend leaves her so she uses her telekinetic powers to win the war against the Arabs? De Palma glanced at Miss Mayron’s ruby-red cowgirl boots, slid his arm around her waist and said, Sure. The actress hooted, slapped her thigh and grinned, showing off her braces.

Across the room, David Overbey, the Parisian critic who programmed the Daniel Schmid retrospective for Toronto’s Festival of Festivals, was guiding Schmid, Ingrid Caven and Harry Sutherland, the Montreal director of Truxx, a film criticizing the police for busting a gay bar, through the crush, past actresses Susan Anspach and Helen Shaver, past Power Play producer John Eckert, past Brian De Palma. Overbey did not speak to De Palma. Earlier, at a craft conference, Overbey had used Heaven Can Wait as an example of a trashy Hollywood film. De Palma took vocal exception. If I had known it was Brian De Palma speaking, I would have been glad to use any of Mr. De Palma’s films as an example, Overbey said later.

And elsewhere, someone connected with Blood & Guts was telling someone connected with the festival that he would like to get a hold of a Toronto critic and punch his lights out. And elsewhere, someone was worrying about setting up special screenings for a Canadian Film Awards juror who had had an awfully good time but hadn’t seen too many films. And down at the Towne Cinema, people were screaming at the ushers to let them in to see a movie, any movie. And in the festival disco at the Hotel Plaza, instantly intimate pairings were the order of the evening, every evening. And in the lobby of the hotel, In Praise of Older Women director George Kaczender was glumly reading the picture’s glum reviews and was being told to ignore them. And at a press conference at which the Film Award nominees bemoaned their lack of recognition in Canada, an Edmonton critic was bemoaning the bemoaning: God, I’ve heard this boring litany for seven years. This is such a boring country. And over it all, everywhere, all of the time, in the background at the parties, at the disco, and on cassettes in the lobby, the band named Village People was singing, Everybody is a
star in Hollywood.

That, Walter Cronkite, is the way it was last week in Toronto. The Cannes Film Festival, it is said, is the biggest whorehouse in the world. For one week, the Festival of Festivals turned Toronto into the biggest funhouse in North America - as soon as Ali beat Spinks in New Orleans, that is. The festival's director-general, William Marshall, who shares Ali's modesty, talked about a town going wild with festival fever but for at least one night no one cared about movies: the festival's hospitality suite was jammed with people watching the fight. One of them was William Marshall.

Everyone was being interviewed by everyone. American reporters asked Canadian stars who they were. Canadian reporters asked Canadian stars who they were. If I'd spent all the time I've spent talking to Helen Shaver on the phone about when we can get together for an interview in an interview, I could write her biography by now, a reporter from Calgary said. Miss Shaver, exhausted, peered out at the faces at a press conference: Seven months ago I couldn't get arrested by the press on Yonge Street. Now I've talked to you, she croaked. She was not complaining.

Upstairs, Robert Mulligan, the director of To Kill a Mockingbird and Bloodbrothers, was also being interviewed and was talking about the completed film version (with Ellen Burstyn) of Bernard Slade's Same Time, Next Year. I think it's a good film. A good movie. I always think that film is what I put in the camera to photograph a movie and a movie is what I go to see. The word film drives me crazy. My pictures don’t say ‘A film by Robert Mulligan.’ I don’t know what an auteur is. I’m a director; hopefully, I am a good storyteller.

One floor above, Claudia Weill opened the door to her suite and in walked her star Melanie Mayron with a present, a red T-shirt bearing the legend Baby Mogul. Miss Mayron, still a bit stunned by the success of Girl Friends, said, I don't think anyone could have foreseen it. I always wanted to star in a movie but, oh God, I was scared. I called my manager up and I said ‘I'm no good.’ He said, ‘What did you do today?’ ‘Walked, I said. ‘Just walked.’ And he said, ‘You don’t have to walk any special way. You’re the star. They’ll know where you’re coming from and where you’re going. You’ve got the whole movie.’ All I want from being a star is to be able to keep working in things I want to do. I'm going to do projects myself. Instead of whining, I'm going to get up and get out there and tell them what I would like to act.

I just want to make some more good films, Miss Weill concurred.
I'd like to make a film about marriage. I'm not married - laughing - so I'm qualified. It's not particularly important to me who finances them. The people I've met at the studios are people I'd like to work with. I'll make them out of Hollywood, or in Hollywood.

...Where everybody is a star. Except for one... week in September.
Hisses, mob’s cry of fraud open Toronto film festival

Friday, September 15, 1978
Robin Green Jay Scott

There were waves of hissing and booing and angry cries of fraud as about 350 irate ticket-holders were turned back at the world premiere of In Praise of Older Women, the debut film in Toronto’s Festival of Festivals, at the Elgin Theatre on Yonge Street last night.

It seems the festival organizers sent out too many invitations to the event, explained festival director Wayne Clarkson. That, and the fact we may have sold too many season’s passes, is what’s caused this mess. Usually, you figure a certain percentage of those you’ve invited won’t show up. Well, it didn’t work that way: everyone has shown up.

The film was scheduled to start at 8 p.m., but was delayed 45 minutes until the stars, producers and director arrived in five horse-drawn carriages. By the time they arrived, ticket-holders who were being held back at the cinema entrance were in an angry mood. Some were forced to stand in the pouring rain.

A lot of people yelled for their money back and at one point, the crowd broke past the ushers and started running to get into the screening. Stop! yelled a cinema employee, holding his hands up and then disappearing into the rush of bodies.

Mr. Clarkson, who appeared weary, tried to reason with the crowd. There are no more seats, he shouted. We will have a second screening at the Festival Cinema in 45 minutes, please go there.

When Mr. Clarkson’s pleas met with a barrage of catcalls and charges of fraud and shame, he promised to refund ticket-holders their money whether it’s $40 or $50 - whatever. Just leave - please.

Among those caught in the mob were Tony Lobienco, star of Blood Brothers, which has its premiere at the festival tonight, and Stephen Leggett, Ontario deputy Attorney-General, and his wife, Cathy.

I flew up from New York for the premiere of my film, said Mr. Lobienco, but I was asked to come to this as well. I can’t figure it out. I guess I’ll leave. He did.

Mrs. Leggett, a patron of the festival, said she found the whole scene absurd.

As a patron, I’m not amused. This sort of thing shouldn’t happen. It’s not a pretty sight.

The arrival of Karen Black caused a brief diversion as the blonde actress swept into the theatre lobby, broke from her party - which included Secretary of State John Roberts - and headed for the popcorn stand, where she picked out a chocolate bar.
The film got under way at around 8:45 p.m. and the crowd outside dispersed, but all still was not well. The theatre, which seats 1,800, was overcrowded by about 100.

W. R. Watt, chief inspector of theatres for the province of Ontario, was in the house and asked that the overflow crowd be told to leave. They refused, so theatre manager Barry Brown called the police.

A policeman did show up, but after a rapid conference with the festival directors and Mr. Brown, it was decided to leave things be. This could be a possible hazard, said Mr. Watt. We’re overcrowded, but you have an audience here who are so involved with the film you’re going to have a problem if you ask any of them to leave. So we’re taking the lesser of two evils and we’re not going to interfere.

Filmgoers still remained in doubt as to which version was shown last night. The censor had demanded a 30-second trim, but the producer promised an uncut screening. The official word was that the legal version was on tap, but there were unofficial whispers to the contrary. Robert Lantos, the film’s co-producer, said: Let me put it this way. If I answer you one way I am lying. If I answer you another, I might make myself liable for prosecution. Mr. Roberts, in a speech before the film was shown, won the sympathy of the crowd when he said that because of the actions of the Ontario censor it is time for an active affirmation that censors shouldn’t tell people what they should or should not see. The applause was prolonged.

A story yesterday about the ticket mixup during the showing of In Praise of Older Women at the opening of Toronto’s international film festival incorrectly quoted festival director Wayne Clarkson as saying, “It seems the festival organizers sent out too many invitations to the event.” Mr. Clarkson did not make the remark.
Festival extended for three days
Wednesday, September 20, 1978

Toronto’s immensely popular Festival of Festivals will be extended by three days, organizers announced yesterday at a press conference, thereby making it possible for angry patrons who were not admitted to screenings for which they had passes to have a second chance.

William Marshall, the festival’s director-general, issued a release stating, The people of this city are passionate about the festival. This week we have all been part of a situation unique in North America - a city has gone wild with festival fever. That is why we’ve become the first major international film festival to announce a three-day extension at no further cost to our pass holders: more screenings of the films people want to see. The cost to the festival, he added, will be a mere $1,500. At the press conference, Marshall said the festival had 120 per cent attendance and was not oversold, but over-attended, a semantic circumlocution that means no one thought so many people with tickets would show up at once.

Marshall noted that the only similar situation occurs at the Cannes Film Festival, where additional screenings are not scheduled. In Cannes, large policeman take you away.

During the extension (Friday to Sunday), all movies will be screened at 1 and 3 p.m. at the Festival Cinema - the theatre’s commercial run of Pourquoi pas? continues in the evening. Tentatively, the films are: As a Turtle on Its Back, The Getting of Wisdom, The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith, Elective Affinities, Diabolo Menthe and The Chess Players. A final schedule will be announced today. Also, China 9 Liberty 37 will be shown at the Festival Cinema tomorrow at 8:30 p.m. and tonight an extra screening of Midnight Express is set for the Towne Cinema at 11:30 p.m. All screenings tomorrow at the Towne have been cancelled.

Prior to the announcement, many of the performers nominated for Canadian Film Awards - Frank Moore, Celine Lomez, Helen Shaver, John Juliani, Richard Gabourie, Andree Pelletier - appeared to discuss their nominations, which they agreed were an honor but would probably not affect their careers in any appreciable way.
Film fest has real stars - for sale

Wednesday, May 02, 1979
Jay Scott

This year, the organizers of Toronto’s Festival of Festivals promised yesterday, the stars will come out: the film festival has acquired the rights to name the stars in the Andromeda galaxy after persons contributing about $250 (the figure has yet to be confirmed) to the festival, which will run from Sept. 6-15.

In other, more serious business, festival director S. Wayne Clarkson announced that the event will feature a program of contemporary Swedish films and a 40-plus picture retrospective of the American horror film (The American Nightmare) to be programmed by York University’s Robin Wood. The Buried Treasures series, which spotlights commercially unsuccessful movies, will be chosen by the Chicago Sun-Times’ Roger Ebert, and there will be a Trade Forum designed to outline Canadian film accomplishments to the American and European industry personnel attending the festival.

In all, close to 140 movies will be screened, Clarkson said, at theatres in the Bloor-Bay-Yonge area. Passes for the event, exclusive of opening night and the horror series, will be $50 until June 30; after that, the price rises to $60. The horror series will be an additional $25. Tickets for individual screenings will be sold at $3.50. No decision has yet been made on the film to open the festival, Clarkson added. If possible, it will be Canadian; if not, an American film will be given its world premiere.

Last year, the festival sold one pass to all events and wound up having to turn people away from screenings, several of which were re-scheduled. The line-ups and the full houses engendered a great deal of public animosity and several front-page news stories. This year, Clarkson said, the festival will increase its seating capacity by 50 per cent and, because separate tickets will be sold for the horror series, organizers will have a much better idea of who plans to go to which theatre at what time. The festival’s director-general, William Marshall, said he could not announce the theatres: We’re still negotiating delicately with Famous Players. They have more movies backed up than La Guardia has airplanes.

The horror series will include seminars and talks with horror film directors such as Larry Cohen (It’s Alive), John Carpenter (Halloween) and George Romero (Night of the Living Dead).

The star-naming stunt, surely one of the most bizarre gimmicks in the annals of Canadian publicity, was worked out in co-operation with the Smithsonian Institute,
where the stars in the galaxy are currently identified by a number or symbol. Once the stars are named after the patrons, the identification will be recorded through the Smithsonian at the Library of Congress and authenticated by the International Star Registry.

Patrons will receive: a sky map showing Andromeda’s position in the heavens (the galaxy is 4.2-trillion light years away, but visible to the naked eye); a close-up of the galaxy with the patron’s star identified by its telescopic co-ordinates; a certificate of registration; and material on the cosmos prepared by Prof. Harold Leith, professor of natural sciences at York University. Almost incidentally, the purchaser will also receive a pass to all festival events, a gold star pin and the new festival poster.
Toronto film festival casting its net wider
Thursday, July 03, 1980
Jay Scott

The preliminary schedule of Toronto’s Festival of Festivals - which this September includes everything from the world premiere of Bette Midler’s concert documentary Divine Madness (and a personal, non-performing appearance by the star) to a West German film made by an Iranian exile - is less commercial, less American, more international and more eclectic than ever.

By design. “My interest this year is in international participation, and I think it’s the best it’s been in the past five years,” festival director S. Wayne Clarkson said yesterday. “For instance, I’m very pleased that we got the new film by Poland’s Andrzej Wajda. I was just talking to the New York Film Festival not 10 minutes ago and they haven’t been able to get it yet.” In the past, the festival’s schedule included double-feature “galas,” many of which were commercial American productions. This year, the galas have been cut back to a single event each evening while Paris critic David Overbey’s series of mostly European and often esoteric films has been doubled. “That’s where I think we’re doing our job,” Clarkson explained. “Those are the films it is usually impossible to see anywhere else, and the doubling - based on the series’ following - is justified.” Additional programs include a mammoth tribute to Jean-Luc Godard; a festival of French filmmaking; a salute to independent directors; a series of documentaries; and a music-into-film series called New Waves. The Godard retrospective, put together by Peter Harcourt, will be similar in size and scope to last year’s American Nightmare series: there will be more than 50 films, including not only features by Godard, but also films that influenced him or were influenced by him.

Silver passes, which allow the bearer to see all films with the exception of the New Waves series, will be $75 until July 31, when the price climbs to $90. Single films are $3 and galas $4. Clarkson said he is currently in negotiation to screen the best of the movies in neighborhood theatres. “For the two million people in Toronto outside of the Bloor-Yonge area, we may be able to bring the films to them.” Downtown, however, there will be a concerted effort by the festival and the Yonge Bloor Bay Association to give the area a festival atmosphere; for the duration of the Sept. 4-13 event, it will be known as Festival Village.

Other world or North American premieres to be shown as galas - stars and directors in each instance have been invited and many are expected to attend - include: Mr. Patman, from Canada, directed by John Guiller-
man, with James Coburn and Kate Nelligan; La Banquier, France, directed by Francis Girod, with Romy Schneider and Jean-Louis Trintignant; The Conductor, Poland, Wajda, with John Gielgud; La Confidence, Hungary, directed by Istvan Szabo; and the Midler concert, directed by Michael Ritchie (The Candidate and The Island). The five remaining galas have yet to be confirmed.

The Overbey series will begin with Jaguar, the $100,000 Filippino political melodrama shown in official competition at this year’s Cannes Film Festival. Other selections: Opname, from the Netherlands; Afternoon of a War, from Great Britain; Ordnung, the West German film directed by exiled Iranian Sohrab Saless; and Dedicatoria, by Spain’s Jaime Chavarri. The French series spotlights Maurice Pialet’s Loulou - Pialet is widely considered one of France’s greatest directors, although he is virtually unknown in North America - with Gerard Depardieu and Isabelle Huppert. In the independent series, three American movies - Gal Young Un, Return of the Secaucus 7 and Heartland - have been confirmed by John Katz, and in the New Waves series, D.O.A. (the American concert tour of the Sex Pistols), Cha Cha (with Nina Hagen and Lene Lovich) and Reggae Sunsplash have been scheduled by Frank Taylor and Paul Gratton. Four documentaries have been invited by Katz to the series that last year introduced Best Boy to the world: Memories of Duke, about Duke Ellington; Trials of Alger Hiss; As If It Were Yesterday (Belgium); and a French study of a home for the terminally ill, Temps Mort.

While the festival is in progress, a trade forum will also be conducted at the Park Plaza Hotel. Topics to be discussed by professionals include the Capital Cost Allowance, Canadian film performance and case studies in packaging, marketing, distribution and promotion. Organizers are Anna Stratton and Alana Frank; registration for the five-day event (Sept. 5-9) is $275.
Festival of Festivals: unwieldy, but a winner

Monday, September 15, 1980

JAY SCOTT

When the Festival of Festivals came to a close yesterday, it ended its largest and in many ways most successful (and in many ways most unwieldy) year: some 130,000 people tried to squeeze into more than 150 movies. By way of a round-up, a few awards:

The Most Unpopular Popular Film Award: to the Labatt’s Most Popular Film Award, which went to Nicolas Roeg’s Bad Timing (in close competition were two films from Quebec, The Handyman and Les Bons Debarres). Bad Timing was screened for the first time on Friday night; the award was announced Saturday. How did it accrue so many votes so rapidly after only one screening? The award is decided on the basis of cards freely available at the theatres - ballot-box stuffing is a matter of course. That is not to say that Bad Timing won illegally; but next year it might be a good idea to pass ballots out with festival passes - one pass, one vote.

Certain kinds of disappointment would be avoided: “I can’t understand it,” one patron said. “I stuffed those boxes with votes for my favorite movie until they were groaning.” The Bigger May Not Be Better Award: to festival director S. Wayne Clarkson, who said yesterday: “The festival has tripled in size since 1978. Of the three years I have programmed the festival, I am most satisfied with this year, but I think it may have gotten too large by about 10 per cent. Next year we will drop the tribute to a national cinema - it was France, this year - and there will be fewer films, but more screenings of them.”

The Brightest Star Citation: to Bette Midler, whose appearance at the University Theatre for the world premiere of her concert film Divine Madness drew an enormous crowd.

The Brightest Press Conference Citation: to Bette Midler, who sweetly coaxed journalists into the palm of her hand with cracks about the presidential campaign (“I don’t believe it makes any difference who gets that job; they’re all the same guy”), with an admission of her desire to act with Sylvester Stallone (“It’s something about those beefy Italians”), and with a few moments of atypical seriousness (“I really am terribly, terribly proud of Divine Madness”).

The Damned If You Do, Damned If You Don’t Award: to the Ontario Board of Censors, which is called boorish when it snips festival films and discriminatory when it allows the festival to have private screenings of films the board would find otherwise unacceptable.

The It’s Not What You Say, It’s How You Say It Award: to the Ontario Board of Censors. Commented festival director Clarkson
yesterday, reacting to reports elsewhere that the board had intimidated the festival by telling it that if a private screening of Numero Deux, a film by Jean-Luc Godard, were leaked to the press, the screening would be cancelled. “Board chairman Mary Brown never directly intimidated us. We were just very pleased she allowed us to show the film. We did have the feeling that if the private screening were to receive a lot of publicity, the board might review its decision, but she never told us not to talk to the press. That was our decision.” The Who says Toronto Hates Quebec Movies? Medallion: to Micheline Lanctot’s The Handyman, on its way to the New York Film Festival; the picture was accorded a standing ovation in Toronto.

The Best Unknown Canadian Film Extant Award: to Jean-Pierre Lefebvre’s 1977 jewel about Quebec’s relationship with France, The Old Country Where Rimbaud Died, screened as part of the Godard retrospective, and never seen commercially in English Canada. The film is also, without meaning to be, an essay on English Canada’s relationship to the United States; it is just possible that it is the best film about Canadian confusion (and Canadian inferiority complexes) ever made.

The Whistle While You Work Award: to the festival’s programmers, who in a basically uneventful film year found what there was to find.

The With A Quarter It’ll Get You Coffee Award: to festival passholders who showed up for screenings of Divine Madness, Union City, Prostitute, Suzanne and other films, and found that the theatres were full and admission therefore denied to them, despite their valid passes.

The You Can Say That Again Award: to festival director Clarkson - “I think it may have gotten too large by about 10 per cent.”
Toronto film festival changes name
Thursday, February 10, 1994

The Festival of Festivals - the Toronto film festival with the unique but preposterous name - has decided to change its moniker. From now on, the annual star-studded event will be known as the Toronto International Film Festival.

The change was announced yesterday, completing a process that began several years ago when the organization began styling itself the Toronto International Film Festival of Festivals.

“Our festival takes place in Toronto, one of the greatest cities in the world, with one of the best audiences for film anywhere, and is truly an international celebration of film,” said executive director Helga Stephenson in announcing the change. “It’s time we started telling the world how proud we are of our city and giving the festival a name that properly reflects who we are.”

The 19th annual Toronto International Film Festival takes place this year Sept. 8-17.
Film festival celebrates the funny bone

Wednesday, July 06, 1994
GEOFF PEVERE

Sporting a new name, a new boss and the sponsorship of a spanking new beer, the 19th annual Toronto International Film Festival held its kickoff press conference in Toronto yesterday. The 10-day event starts Sept. 8.

Once called the Festival of Festivals, the annual-late summer screen binge has grown in less than two decades into one of the largest of its kind in the world. Each year, despite publicized and persistent ticket-distribution snafus, the festival continues to attract the public, press and industry alike to the international movie banquet that usually includes between 300 and 400 titles. At press time, only a limited number of these were confirmed for this year’s festival, the rest to be teasingly divulged in the remaining weeks between now and the opening-night gala.

Speaking from the podium of the Sutton Place hotel’s swank Queen Victoria Ballroom, new festival executive director Piers Handling - who succeeded Helga Stephenson after acting for several years as deputy director - announced that the festival was “about discovery.” He then called the event, which this year will enjoy the sponsorship of John Labatt Classic Wheat beer, as “wonderful, exciting, challenging and I think a lot of fun.” Earlier, a Labatt’s representative had demonstrated fun by guzzling from a bottle of Classic Wheat at the podium.

Expanding the discovery motif, Handling remarked that the most striking thing about this year’s lineup was that it will provide evidence that international filmmakers have “rediscovered their funny bones.” To prove his point, he cited the inclusion of Italian director Nanni Moretti’s much-ballyhooed Dear Diary, Tomas Guitierrez Alea’s Strawberry and Chocolate (according to Handling, “a film that makes you both laugh and think”), and four films by the renegade Finnish filmmaking siblings Aki and Mika Kaurismaki: Leningrad Cowboys Meet Moses, Take Care of Your Scarf Tatjana, The Total Balalaika Show and Tigrero: A Film That Was Never Made. Australian comedy, a species as endangered these days as Australian rock music, may enjoy a comeback with Muriel’s Wedding, a send-up of upscale down-unders, directed by one P. J. Hogan. “Not,” assured Handling, “to be confused with Paul.”

Less mirthful-sounding titles include Red, the latest instalment of director Krzysztof Kieslowski’s mesmerizing trilogy inspired by the French national credo of liberty, equality and fraternity, starring Irene Jacob. Also announced was a program of contem-
porary Indian cinema titled India Now], which will feature a showcase of the innovative but rarely seen work of Mani Rathnam. This year’s Director’s Spotlight program, which annually brings attention to filmmakers barely known in North America, will showcase the work of Russian director Nikita Mikhalkova.

A few announcements regarding offscreen activity were doled out as well. This year’s symposium, the festival’s annual three-day business conference, will be titled At Warp Speed and will feature a panel of up-and-coming young filmmakers titled The Next Generation.

In the past, the role of Deep Space Nine at the festival has been assumed by the box office, which last year was plagued by a temporary breakdown of its widely-publicized computerized ticket-dispensing system. This year, Handling promises an “improved ticketing system” that will use bar codes for tracking both filmgoers and their choices. In the words of the festival’s press material, the new system will “revolutionize ticket purchases.”

The revolution begins July 11, when tickets go on sale. After that date, further information can be obtained in Toronto by dialing 968-FILM.
How a Little Festival That Could grew

MICHAEL POSNER

Wednesday, September 6, 2000

An unexpurgated, year-by-year chronology of fête and gala, mishap and misadventure, stars and stardust:

May, 1976: At Cannes, Toronto real-estate lawyer Dusty Cohl and impresario Bill Marshall announce plans for the first Festival of Festivals. Both later claim to have originated the idea. The total budget is $500,000. Marshall announces that Jack Nicholson, Warren Beatty, Julie Christie and Martin Scorsese are expected to attend.

October, 1976: Year One. The festival opens at the Ontario Place Cinesphere. Over six days, 127 features are screened, including the opening gala Cousin, cousine, a French comedy. More than 40,000 people attend -- those who don’t include no-shows Nicholson, Beatty, Christie and Scorsese. But Jeanne Moreau is there, with her film, Lumière.

September, 1977: Year Two. Now competing with Serge Losique's Montreal World Film Festival, the Toronto programmers elevate the star wattage, bringing in Peter Ustinov, Donald Sutherland, Liza Minnelli and Peter O'Toole.

1978: Year Three. The festival reaps a public-relations bonanza in a feud with the Ontario Censor Board over producer Robert Lantos’s debut feature, the $1-million In Praise of Older Women. It then stirs up a PR nightmare by issuing 4,000 tickets to a gala screening at the Elgin Theatre, which only seats 1,600 people. Pandemonium breaks out. Fire marshalls are summoned. A second screening is hastily organized at another cinema. Lantos and his entourage arrive, in pouring rain, in a cavalcade of five horse-drawn carriages. Festival parties get rowdier and raunchier, led by rock star Robbie Robertson’s penthouse-suite marathon of booze and sex. The closing gala: Midnight Express.

1979: Year Four. One-hundred-thousand patrons turn up to see 150 films, including Best Boy, an American documentary that later won an Academy Award. The first festival trade forum is held, an industry schmoozathon. Hollywood pretty face Lee Majors arrives in town with his post-Farrah-Fawcett squeeze, prima ballerina Karen Kain. The festival screens its first David Cronenberg films -- two early works, Shivers and The Brood -- and its first Norman Jewison film, And Justice for All, with Al Pacino.

1980: Year Five. A major film auteur, France’s Jean-Luc Godard, graces the festival for a retrospective of his work. He demands and receives $1,000 (U.S.), in cash. Bette Midler turns up, too, for the closing gala, a film version of her concert Divine Madness. Other celebrities include Theresa Russell,
James Coburn and Nicolas Roeg. The festival doubles the size of programmer David Overbey’s Critic’s Choice selections to 18.

1981: Year Six. The festival scores a coup in screening Jean-Jacques Beineix’s Diva, which had bombed in France. But Toronto audiences love it, and Beineix is besieged by distributors seeking rights and groupies seeking sex. The film becomes an art-house classic. The program also features five films by Turkish director Yilmaz Guney, including The Enemy, which is screened over objections of the Turkish government. The Ontario Censor Board continues its snippish habits, restricting Bonnie Sherr Klein’s Not a Love Story: A Film about Pornography to a single screening.

1982: Year Seven. Ignored at Cannes, Hugh Hudson’s Chariots of Fire wins hearts in Toronto and goes on to nab Best Picture at the Oscars. Festival director Wayne Clarkson spends weeks seeking rights to The Wars, a Robin Phillips adaptation of the Timothy Findley novel for the festival’s opening gala. Unsuccessful, he’s forced to substitute a weak Australian film, We of the Never Never. He does score works by Fassbinder, Antonioni, Greenaway, Tavernier and Mazursky. The festival stages first of series of gala tributes — to Martin Scorsese, hosted by American film critics Gene Siskel and Roger Ebert. Major celebs Robert De Niro and Harvey Keitel turn up to help celebrate; they later have to helped to a waiting limo, accompanied by bimbettes. Scorsese spends the night in an after-hours booze can. And aspiring filmmakers Atom Egoyan and Bruce McDonald, whose movies are rejected by festival programmers, hold a public screening on Bloor Street.

1983: Year Eight. The festival snags a landmark Hollywood studio offering, The Big Chill, for the opening gala, spurning the opportunity to have the still unreleased The Wars. Chill represents a kind of American benediction of Toronto as an important film-launch site, marking a turning point in the festival’s evolution. The tribute program, again hosted by Siskel-Ebert, honours actor Robert Duvall. Also featured: a retrospective of David Cronenberg films.

1984: Year Nine. Four hundred films are screened, half of them Canadian (thanks to a major retrospective of homegrown filmmaking called Northern Lights). The festival opens with The Bay Boy, starring 17-year-old Kiefer Sutherland. The tribute program honours actor-producer Warren Beatty, flying him in with Diane Keaton from Los Angeles. The cost of the Beatty program alone is $100,000, twice the entire budget of the first festival, and almost bankrupts the organization. It becomes the last of the tributes. Beatty is the quintessential star; wherever he goes, he is surrounded by security. Arthur Penn, Robert Towne and Jack Nicholson
help sing his praises. The festival showcases works by five directors with big futures: Jim Jarmusch, the Coen brothers, Stephen Frears, Luc Besson and Canada’s own Atom Egoyan. Sally Field turns up to promote Places in the Heart, the film that later won her an Oscar and inspired her classic thank-you line, “You like me, you really like me.”

1985: Year 10. Opening-night gala is Joshua Then and Now (starring James Woods, Alan Arkin and Gabrielle Lazure) from the Mordecai Richler novel; with a budget of $11-million, it is then the most expensive film ever produced in Canada. The post-screening party features smoked meat and cheese blintzes. The film did respectable box office in Canada, but swooned in the key market, the United States, crippled by distinct lack of enthusiasm at Twentieth Century Fox, its distributor. But the festival provides a more successful launch pad for Canadian director Sandy Wilson’s My American Cousin ($1.2-million). The closing gala is Death of a Salesman.

1986: Year 11. Wayne Clarkson resigns to become head of the Ontario Film Development Corp. He’s succeeded, for nine months, by Leonard Schein, who gives way to Helga Stephenson and her chief programmer Piers Handling. Schein’s festival opens with Denys Arcand’s The Decline of the American Empire, an intellectual comedy that had already scored at both Cannes and in Quebec and later won an Oscar nomination. Two other Canadian films also make an impact: Anne Wheeler’s Loyalties and Leon Marr’s Dancing in the Dark. Also featured: a retrospective of Latin American cinema, 96 films from 13 countries. Among attending stars is Julie Christie, who issues a broadside against the evils of Hollywoodism. Disaster is narrowly averted when, during a thunderstorm, part of the ceiling collapses during a screening of the German film Now or Never at the New Yorker Theatre.

1987: Year 12. A big year for Canadian cinema, with Patricia Rozema’s I’ve Heard the Mermaids Singing (the opening gala) and Jean-Claude Lauzon’s Un zoo la nuit (Night Zoo). The closing gala is The Princess Bride with Cary Elwes, Robin Wright and Mandy Patinkin. A special double seat had to be created for co-star Andre the Giant. The festival screens six films by Spain’s Pedro Almodovar.


1989: Year 14. Atom Egoyan watches in
horror as reels of his Speaking Parts are screened in the wrong sequence. Michael Moore persuades festival programmers to accept Roger and Me, his documentary about General Motors and Flint, Mich. Its screening ignites a bidding war for distribution rights; the film goes on to gross more than $12-million worldwide. The festival also helps kickstart the career of American director Steven Soderbergh, with a gala screening of sex, lies and videotape; made for $1.2-million, it goes on to gross $25-million in North America. Opening Gala: Norman Jewison’s In Country.

1990: Year 15. Clint Eastwood brings White Hunter, Black Heart. Other galas include The Grifters, The Nasty Girl, Cyrano de Bergerac and Reversal of Fortune. Several women directors win audience points -- Cynthia Scott for The Company of Strangers, Jane Campion for Angels at My Table, Ann Hui for Song of the Exile and Agnieszka Holland for Europa, Europa. The latter becomes a festival hit, and parlays its popularity into boffo global box office.

1991: Year 16. The most popular film is The Fisher King with Jeff Bridges and Robin Williams. Fifteen women directors make debuts, including Jodie Foster with Little Man Tate. Atom Egoyan meets Bruce Beresford (The Black Robe) at a party and is mistaken for the limo driver. But Egoyan wins the $25,000 prize for best Canadian feature -- and promptly hands the money to John Pozer, who had received an honourable mention for The Grocer’s Wife. The opening gala is The Black Robe (produced by Robert Lantos’s Alliance), at $14-million, to that point the most expensive Canadian film ever made. The closing gala: My Own Private Idaho.

1992: Year 17. Quentin Tarantino arrives with Reservoir Dogs, a film developed at Robert Redford’s Sundance Institute. Redford, too, appears with A River Runs Through It, his homage to Montana. The opening gala is Léolo, by Jean-Claude Lauzon, in which a cat is tortured and a young boy masturbates with liver. It would be his last film. The closing gala is documentarian Ron Mann’s Twist, delivered in traditional Mann style only hours after he finishes editing it. Other major screenings include Mr. Saturday Night (Billy Crystal), Glengarry Glen Ross (Al Pacino), Of Mice and Men (John Malkovich), Bob Roberts (Tim Robbins), Like Water for Chocolate and Neil Jordan’s The Crying Game, later distributed by Miramax, and grossing $80-million.

1993: Year 18. Cronenberg’s M. Butterfly is the opening gala, but other films prove more popular, including Belle Epoque, Jane Campion’s The Piano, François Girard’s Thirty Two Short Films about Glenn Gould and a sentimental Hollywood film, Rudy, which is the closing gala.
1994: Year 19. The Festival of Festivals changes its name to Toronto International Film Festival, accenting its global pursuit of cinematic treasures, old and new. British sales agent Carol Myer arrives back at her hotel after attending the opening of the Barnes Collection exhibition at the Art Gallery of Ontario to find 22 messages from prospective buyers of The Priest, a film about a homosexual Roman Catholic; it won the festival’s People’s Choice award. Helga Stephenson steps down as executive director and is succeeded by Piers Handling. The opening gala is Whale Music, adapted from a Paul Quarrington novel and starring Maury Chaykin.

1995: Year 20. Actor Mira Sorvino (Mighty Aphrodite) and director Quentin Tarantino (Four Rooms) become an item after meeting at Bistro 990. A year of dark films, with To Die For, The Crossing Guard, Leaving Las Vegas, Margaret’s Museum and The Young Poisoner’s Handbook, among others. The opening gala is Robert Lepage’s Le Confessional, the screening rights for which become the subject of an ugly tug-of-war with the Montreal festival. Despite an appreciative audience in Toronto, the film is never released in North America. The year’s most popular film, by far, is Australia’s Shine, starring Geoffrey Rush; it later wins seven Oscars.

1997: Year 22. The triumph of Atom Egoyan, who screens The Sweet Hereafter, which later nabs two Academy Award nominations. But Thom Fitzgerald’s equally bleak The Hanging Garden snare the People’s Choice award -- and an MGM U.S. distribution deal for $500,000. The festivities are graced by the likes of Kim Basinger, Brad Pitt, Kevin Spacey, Anthony Hopkins and Robert Duvall whose The Apostle is bought in a post-screening bidding war by Miramax for $5-million. The festival marks the debut of director Paul Thomas Anderson’s Boogie Nights. The closing gala is Pitt’s Seven Years in Tibet.

1998: Year 23. It’s star power personified, in the form of Jennifer Lopez, Billy Bob Thornton, Tom Cruise, Meryl Streep and many others. François Girard’s The Red Violin is the opening gala, one of several smaller films that will later find a big audience, including Central Station, Hilary and Jackie.
and Little Voice. The whirlwind known as Roberto Benigno brings Life is Beautiful, a Holocaust comedy that goes on to become the highest-grossing foreign film ever in North America. In total, the festival screens 310 films from 53 countries.

1999: Year 24. Hollywood continues to assert itself in Toronto, increasingly using the festival as a major launching pad for features. Without question, the top billing goes to American Beauty, the directorial debut of British stage director Sam Mendes; it wins the most-popular-film award. But there were several Canadian beauties as well -- Patricia Rozema’s Mansfield Park; Jeremy Podeswa’s The Five Senses, Allan Moyle’s New Waterford Girl, producer Robert Lantos’s Sunshine, Atom Egoyan’s Felicia’s Journey and Norman Jewison’s Hurricane, with Denzel Washington. Reuben (Hurricane) Carter himself appears at the special screening of the film
Bright lights, big expectations
He made his name as a film critic, TV host and champion of Third World cinema. Tomorrow, Cameron Bailey steps into the spotlight to host one of the world’s most prestigious film festivals. Michael Posner reports
Michael Posner
Thursday, September 4, 2008

Cameron Bailey isn’t particularly partial to astrology, but the newly minted co-director of the Toronto International Film Festival would be forgiven if he were. His stars have certainly been in alignment.

In the past 18 months, he fell madly in love with a woman he had known casually for 11 years - CBC News: Sunday producer Carolynne Hew. They moved in together, bought a house, then a new car, travelled to exotic places (Berlin, Lisbon) and some less exotic ones (Winnipeg, Sudbury), and finally, last Sept. 30, held a gala of their own, a wedding on the Toronto waterfront at the Palais Royale.

A few weeks later, Bailey, a handsome, 44-year-old Canadian of British and Barbadian extraction, got a call asking him if he was interested in becoming TIFF’s co-director, replacing Noah Cowan. The call came from Cowan himself, who had decided to move on to a no-less-challenging position, as artistic director of TIFF’s new headquarters, the Bell Lightbox, at John and King streets in Toronto, now under development and slated to open in early 2010.

“It all kind of happened at once,” says Bailey, happily ensconced in his office at Carlton and Yonge streets. “It was a year of enormous changes.” With chief executive officer and co-director Piers Handling, Bailey now oversees the most important film festival in North America and, with Cannes, Berlin and Venice, one of the world’s most prestigious.

Starting tomorrow, of course, Bailey will be basking in another kind of illumination, as they roll out the red carpets and the klieg lights for the 33rd annual Toronto International Film Festival. The 10-day fiesta of filmgoing and partying - 312 films in all - begins with perhaps the most expensive and ambitious Canadian film ever made, Paul Gross’s First World War epic, Passchendaele.

Bailey’s snagging the No. 2 job at TIFF was hardly a surprise. He had been a TIFF programmer on and off since 1990, is considered an expert in Asian, African and Middle Eastern films, had been Now Magazine’s respected film critic for more than a decade, had done the same job for CBC Radio One, had hosted TV shows about film and had curated festivals for the National Film Board, the National Arts Centre and the Australian Film Festival. His cinematic credentials were impeccable.
“Cameron’s had a long and fruitful association with the organization,” Cowan says, “and he inspired and invented many of the greatest changes we’ve made, including Perspectives Canada and Planet Africa. Until then, the world tended to see film curation like a game of Risk, where everyone controlled certain territories. Cameron spoke eloquently to Piers and I about how the black experience had transcended borders and needed to be addressed. That changed the face of international curation. It got it out of a rut. His level of understanding and commitment made a big impression on us.”

One of Bailey’s best friends, filmmaker Clément Virgo - each was best man at the other’s wedding - says that “Cameron is very generous of spirit, very conscientious and smart as whip. He’s a gentleman in the full sense of that word - a gentle man.”

More than a decade ago, the two collaborated on the screenplay for The Planet of Junior Brown, a $3-million film that Virgo directed in 1997. It won a Gemini nomination for best writing in a dramatic program or miniseries. “We argued a lot about plot and character,” Virgo recalls, “but the friendship survived the process.”

In a wedding diary prepared for their nuptials, Hew described her husband as “a magician, a maverick, and a man with an uncanny grace. He travels light but looks hard for stellar films to show at the Toronto Film Festival. And although he takes his daily podcast dose standing in the kitchen eating breakfast, he never misses a beat. Elvis Costello should be his friend.”

It was in college that Bailey, who holds an honours degree in English literature from the University of Western Ontario, first developed a serious interest in film. “I took a course in contemporary cinema that began with Godard’s Breathless and went all over the map, everywhere but America - so, Fassfinder, Latin American, Asian, African, stuff I didn’t know even existed. That kind of did it for me. I saw that cinema could do different things. Particularly Godard, who is still an influence. He showed me that movies could be more than entertainment. They could perform some kind of analysis, engage with the world.”

The challenge for film programmers, Cowan says, is to somehow navigate the line between high art and the popular. “Cameron was able to do that, so that the austere and the commercial could exist side by side. He’s beloved the world over for championing the developing world’s cinema, arguing that our obligation to program their films was not just a duty, not just a sidebar, but part of the main event. I’ve learned from him that what happens in Yemen matters in Norway. If we believe differently, we don’t really have command.”
But if change has been the dominant motif of Bailey’s recent personal life, it’s unlikely to be transferred into his new professional realm. “I think the festival’s working really well,” he says, “so I don’t think we have to do much to change it. The big challenge will be incorporating what we do for 10 days in September into a year-round program in the Lightbox - with five cinemas, two galleries and other exhibition space.”

Bailey sees TIFF as “the leading public film festival in the world. Cannes is an industry event, ultimately. We sell 400,000 tickets to the public. Only Berlin is comparable, but we’re in North America and our audience is critical. And being in September, when serious films start to come out, that’s a big advantage.” Bailey and Handling personally choose the festival’s galas, as well as its special presentations, but delegate much of the other decision-making about films to its team of 18 programmers.

Cowan says every TIFF director inevitably brings his own tastes to the festival program, but the fundamental job, which he calls “one of the most stressful in the world,” remains alchemical: to somehow find the right ingredients and mix them to maximum effect.

Bailey’s own cinematic tastes, he says, are catholic. In this year’s lineup, he has high praise for a Kazakh romantic comedy called Tulpan, Steve McQueen’s Hunger and Darren Aronofsky’s The Wrestler, starring Mickey Rourke. Bailey calls it the best work of the actor’s career.

To decompress from the film world, Bailey reads The Economist every week and loves to travel. He and Virgo spent the millennium New Year’s on a beach in Barbados listening to Bob Marley music. “I’ve seen him passionate,” Virgo says, “especially when we talk about the state of the cinema, but I’ve never seen Cameron angry. We debate, but it’s always very controlled. He’s coming back to TIFF at a crucial point, with the Lightbox development in the offing, and has the experience to take it to the next level.”
You’ll laugh, you’ll cry ... well, cry for sure
JOHANNA SCHNELLER
Saturday, September 4, 2010

I’ve been going to advance screenings for the Toronto International Film Festival for two weeks now, as have my local colleagues. (This is our one leg up until TIFF officially starts on Sept. 9, at which point the U.S. media will stampede in and trample us.) And I have to tell you, I’ve been feeling pretty weird. Stirred up. Restless. Sad. My work pals have been experiencing the same thing. Finally, one of them nailed what was happening to us.

“You go to all these movies,” she said, “and they make you feel all these emotions.”

Bingo. The other 354 days a year, with the exception of a few indie and foreign films, we moviegoers see what the folks in Hollywood deem marketable enough for us to see. More and more, those are megabudget, tent-pole films that traffic in sensation rather than emotion. The kind that skate smoothly over your eyeballs, demanding nothing in return.

TIFF, however, is chockablock with the opposite kind of films: the ones that aren’t so easy to market, that need the push that a film festival can still provide - and that TIFF, especially, has become renowned for providing. The films that are tetchy and difficult. The ones that demand a response.

Couple that with the fact that I always seem to find an overriding theme in any given TIFF (or it seems to find me), and that this year it’s “Ah, look at all the lonely people.” No wonder I’m sad. I’ve already seen so many loveless souls aching to connect that I’d be tempted to open a vein had I not also seen a couple of actual, open veins onscreen that gave me pause. Here’s a smattering, in alphabetical order:

Amazon Falls: A soft-core porn actress longing to go straight puts up with a hideous gigolo “boyfriend” and tragically creepy “producers” in pursuit of her dream - which we know from frame one is never gonna happen, and which breaks our hearts because she tries so hard.

Daydream Nation: “I had all this love and no one to give it to,” says our heroine (Kat Dennings), who may be in high school, but who, we just know, will continue to feel these kinds of excruciating feelings her entire life.

Heartbeats: A young woman and her gay best friend (the alarmingly talented writer/director/actor Xavier Dolan) - both the kind of prickly people who are fun to go to lunch, but hard to have a relationship, with - project all the love they yearn for onto an unworthy Adonis. The film also includes testimonials from other terminally lonely
people, who say things like, “If someone
died every time I hit ‘refresh’ hoping for an
e-mail, there’d be no one left alive.”

Jack Goes Boating: Two pathologically
inert single people (Amy Ryan and Philip
Seymour Hoffman, in his feature directorial
debut) imbue a dinner-party date with so
many hopes and dreams that you just know
it’s going to go awry, and you watch with
your fingers over your eyes, more tense than
in any thriller.

Trigger: Two former best friends (Molly
Parker and the late Tracy Wright, who are
both working at the peak of their powers, to
heartbreaking effect) spend 90 minutes try-
ing not to show each other how lonely they
are and how much they miss each other.
“You are the only person who knows me,”
Parker’s character finally admits.

Which reminds me. On a side note, I’m
feeling a positive emotion - delight - about
how good so many Canadian films are this
year. I feel that it’s all coming together:
the decades worth of skills amassed by
our crews; the dearth of mid-range-budget
movies in the U.S., impelling good actors
to come north and sign onto the kinds of
films we’re making here, with juicy parts in
scripts that are about something.

So Canada can give Woody Harrelson a
Defendor (a hit at TIFF last year) or Kat
dennings a Daydream Nation or Dustin
Hoffman a Barney’s Version (based on the
Mordecai Richler novel, it’s arguably the
glossiest Canadian film this year). And in
exchange for their getting a dream role, we
get the sheen (and cash) they bring. Inter-
national co-production is the best thing that
ever happened to homegrown stories, in my
opinion, because it pushes our actors out
of any perceived ghetto, and we no longer
have to force Canadiana down anyone’s
throat, because we are demonstrating that
our stories are ipso facto interesting; we
don’t have to preach it or prove it.

Especially heartening is the faith, which
I’ve noticed in a few TIFF films, that audi-
ences have seen enough Canadian fare
now that movies can reference each other.
So Fubar II can seamlessly pick up where
Fubar (2002) left off. Trigger has even more
emotional resonance, because the cast
and crew’s years of off-screen relationships
inform their onscreen ones. And the hero-
ine of Daydream Nation can crack an Atom
Egoyan joke - and it works.

But back to a few more examples of TIFF
2010: Lonely Planet.

Made in Dagenham, Tamara Drewe and
You Will Meet a Tall Dark Stranger all pres-
ent affecting portraits of desperately lonely
women who are neglected or overlooked
entirely by the people who claim to love
them. Fubar 2 and It’s Kind of a Funny Story
feature heroes who have, respectively, abso-
lutely no idea and too many ideas, about
how to connect with others. And those are the comedies.

Then there’s Biutiful, the latest from director Alejandro Gonzalez Inarritu (Babel, 21 Grams, Amores Perros), who specializes in tormenting his characters - and his audiences, to see how much we can take before we start wailing in the aisles. He outdoes himself with this one, which contains the following: a dangerously bipolar mother; an unheated warehouse crammed with abused, illegal Chinese immigrants; and Javier Bardem in an adult diaper. Try putting that on the poster.

But I encourage you to see Biutiful, and indeed, all the films above, because despite the malaise they caused in me, I’d rather bear witness to those stories, and feel the emotions they churn up, than not.

“Everyone thinks they’re unlovable,” Wright’s character says in Trigger. “What people really want is to feel complete.”

If what you really want is to feel, period - well, moviegoers, start your engines... reality is changing. Deep spending cuts are translating into deep reductions in growth, intensifying the debt crisis. Even Canada has delayed plans to balance its budget.

Silvio is gone and tarnished. But who can say he did a worse job at managing the debt crisis than anyone else in the sorry euro zone?
Lightbox aims to draw filmmakers to its facilities

Though not as public as its main screening rooms, the cinematheque’s educational facilities reach out to the wider community Saturday, September 11, 2010
GUY DIXON

After the marquee actors and auteurs arrive on the red carpet at TIFF Bell Lightbox, the gleaming new headquarters of the Toronto International Film Festival, they’ll head up to the state-of-the-art cinemas on the second floor.

But the true in-crowd will ride one floor higher.

That’s where Lightbox has two additional cinemas, dedicated to showing more experimental works, presenting lectures and teaching young filmmakers. As well, there’s a Learning Studio: high-tech-ready rooms filmmakers can use as work spaces. These spaces promise to make Lightbox more than just an elaborate cinematheque, but also a place for the creation of new works.

The purpose of the building, says TIFF’s director of public programmes Shane Smith, is not only to show the best of world cinema rarely seen outside the festival circuit. The aim is also to draw untapped audiences into Lightbox from schools and universities and to pull working filmmakers into the building to use its resources. Everything from Lightbox’s high-tech facilities, to TIFF’s Film Reference Library, to simply the wealth of insights from visiting filmmakers and scholars are all seen as a magnet for the film community.

“We’re definitely welcoming the film industry into the building. We want them to feel like it’s a building that they can utilize as well,” Smith says. “They don’t just have to come in because their film is screening. They can come because they need a meeting space, they need to do a read-through, they want to have a casting session. Perhaps they want to do a test screening or a cast-and-crew screening. All those opportunities are available at TIFF Bell Lightbox for the film community at large.”

The resources are placed on the higher floors, with the entrance to the building appealing to the larger public.

The first floor has a museum feel, with its soaring atrium and galleries devoted to film and video art projects and exhibits devoted to film. The opening exhibit focuses on Essential Cinema, an array of posters, photos and artifacts from some of the most loved and acclaimed movies in the film canon. Also on the first floor are various commissioned works, from director Guy Maddin’s film fragments Hauntings to artist-designer’s Barry Gilmore’s series of superimposed film titles Essential Titles, exploring the
typography of film titles.

Up one floor are the three main theatres, with the building taking on the feel of a sophisticated multiplex.

But then on the third floor, there’s the intimate 150-seat Cinema 4, which will regularly be devoted to lectures and classes by day, particularly a series on Fridays catering to academics and guest speakers. By night, the theatre will show what Lightbox director Noah Cowan refers to as the more difficult films in the TIFF Cinematheque’s program, as well as installations. From Sunday to October 3, Cinema 4 will show Atom Egoyan’s hypnotic piece 8 1/2 Screens, which projects different snippets from Federico Fellini’s film 8 1/2 simultaneously onto screens of various sizes.

Next door on the third floor is the even-smaller Cinema 5, with a little under 100 seats. The rows can retract into the wall in about 15 minutes, leaving a completely empty cinema space to be used for filmmaking workshops for professionals, students and children. The cinema is wired for numerous technical uses such as working with green screens for superimposing actors onto backdrops, foley workshops and myriad other applications.

“There will be workshops that you sign up for, workshops that will be multiweek, activities like Director’s Trademarks where you’ll be able to examine how Alfred Hitchcock made films,” Smith says. “But there will also be free drop-in activities happening on the weekends: special effects makeup, flipbooks, all kinds of easy-to-do and fun activities that if you’re in the neighbourhood and you’re seeing a screening at TIFF Bell Lightbox, then there’s something for the kids to do as well.”

This hands-on use is an extension of TIFF’s Special Delivery outreach program, in which educators have gone into classes and after-school programs to teach filmmaking and visual literacy. “So we can go to community centres and Boys and Girls Clubs. We can take a filmmaker out. We can teach [students] scriptwriting, teach them to make a film in a day, all kinds of activities that we are able to take out into the community,” Smith says. “Now having TIFF Bell Lightbox as our permanent home means that we can also invite those communities into the building and provide them services here.”

Like most of TIFF’s outreach and education programs, funding has come from numerous sources. For instance, Special Delivery receives funding from both the province and the city, as well as from foundations.

Down a corridor is a large flexible room, the Learning Studios, which can be divided up into smaller spaces for meetings and for technical uses. “There’s no fixed furniture in there. So they are multi purpose. They can also be used as screening rooms. There
are screens in there and video projection facilities. So those can also be used for test screenings or for lectures, for workshops for continuing education. There’s no limit to what’s possible in those spaces,” Smith said.

“The third floor is really the hub for learning activities in the building, [as well as] the Film Reference Library on the fourth floor,” Smith adds. “It’s definitely about audience development and getting them in the building to see what we’ve got to offer.”
VIFF versus TIFF

In one corner: a boldface bonanza. In the other: access, access, access. Marsha Lederman looks into the pros and cons of the festival circuit

Saturday, September 25, 2010

MARSHA LEDERMAN

VANCOUVER -- ‘Vancouver has a film festival?’

This question in the run-up to film festival season came from a worldly recent transplant from Toronto.

Yes, Vancouver has a film festival. But despite its highly regarded programming and huge slate of films (about 375 this year), on the national scene it resides quietly in the shadows of the Toronto International Film Festival.

TIFF is one of the most important in the world, a launching pad to the Oscars, a who’s who of A-list celebrities and Hollywood power brokers. In fancy restaurants and private backrooms, important distribution deals are made. Outside, it’s paparazzi heaven. There’s Ed Norton at the Hyatt hotel; there’s Hilary Swank picking up leather goods at Roots. The international press turns out too, and the event gets worldwide coverage.

The Vancouver International Film Festival, not so much. This is a festival that plays to the cinephile more than the autograph hound, that values auteur cinema more than the Hollywood blockbuster. Many of the high-profile VIFF films have already been at TIFF - and maybe elsewhere by now (Sudbury, Calgary). The chances of glimpsing a Mary Hart type are slim. And as for the red carpet, in Vancouver, you’re lucky if a city councillor shows.

Me? I’m laughing all the way to my plum aisle seat.

As a civilian in Toronto, I gave up on TIFF: I couldn’t handle the line-ups, the frantic fight for tickets or the crazed, screaming fans. In Vancouver, there are line-ups, sure, and some films sell out, but it’s a long festival (16 days!) with many screenings and ample opportunity to score a ticket.

“Toronto very early on embraced an identity as a public festival, but has increasingly gone behind a bit of a velvet rope,” says Diane Burgess, who teaches film studies at the University of British Columbia and wrote her dissertation in 2008 comparing the two festivals.

“TIFF is, like, fanatical. There are people who line up overnight for tickets,” adds Leah Mallen, an independent producer who has shown films at both TIFF and VIFF. “I was just there this past year and had a couple of friends with films and I couldn’t even go because they were sold out already. In Vancouver, there’s easier access.”

Case in point: Just one week before VIFF started, Mallen was able to go online and
buy tickets for Denis Villeneuve’s Incendies. “It was sold out at TIFF,” she said. “Here, I can actually buy a ticket.”

Mallen, who is also an instructor at Vancouver Film School, was at TIFF this year to participate in its Talent Lab - a fantastic experience, she says. But when it came to premiering her film The Score in 2005, she says VIFF was the better venue. “Would it have played in Toronto very well? I don’t think so. It was kind of a quirky subject matter. Could we have competed with all the Hollywood glitz and glamour that shows up at Toronto? Probably not.”

For some, that glitz and glamour, the sold-out screenings, and the fans elbowing each other for a better glimpse of James Franco or Nicole Kidman are part of the sport. “It’s a big, buzzing marketplace,” says Ernest Mathijs, an associate professor of film studies at UBC. “It’s all about the circus of cinema... and the fact that it appears to be unmanageable I would say appears to be part of the excitement.”

It’s a different story at VIFF, says festival director Alan Franey. In Toronto, “Being turned away is part of the hunt,” he says. “I think that’s less true here. If we have a certain percentage of people that are turned away because screenings are sold out, we pay the price, because people say ‘Oh, that wasn’t worth the trouble. I came all the way down here, I found parking and I couldn’t get in.’”

Big Hollywood films, Franey says, aren’t the biggest draws at VIFF. “A lot of the pass-holders and the keeners don’t bother seeing those films because they know they’re coming out anyway.”

More exciting for his core audience are documentaries, Canadian films, and international films that might never get a commercial theatrical release here. VIFF’s Asian program is particularly strong.

The Vancouver festival begins Sept. 30, three weeks after TIFF launches with much hoopla. But Franey has no concerns about film festival fatigue. The opposite, in fact. “The media attention that Toronto gets, I think, just gets people in the festival mood.”

Offers Mathijs: “It cuts both ways. For some people that means the films aren’t as fresh... but the more information people get in advance about the films, the more enriched their experience will be.”

Burgess, a former Canadian Images programmer at VIFF, wrote her dissertation inspired by the fact that in that role she was constantly asked to compare the two festivals - and was generally stumped for an answer.

“I’ve come to the realization [that] it’s kind of like comparing apples and oranges,” she says. “A lot of times when Vancouver gets compared to Toronto, it’s using a particular hierarchy of value that places theatrical
launching of films or visibility of celebrities as the marker of the upper echelon of festivals.”

She says the festivals, both important and respected, are different in ways that can be traced back to their origins. “Toronto began as the effort of a producer looking to grow industry opportunities in Toronto. Vancouver began as the initiative of a theatre owner looking to present an expanded slate of films for the community. And each has kind of retained that core kernel of their identity.”
What, no Oscar-contender underdog?
Saturday, September 17, 2011
LIAM LACEY

So what’s the buzz about the buzz at the Toronto International Film Festival?

The question arises, naturally, from a festival where publicity, particularly of the Hollywood variety, often threatens to eclipse the real question of how much people enjoyed their selections from the 336 short and long, international, avant-garde, Canadian, American, independent and studio pictures that make up this sprawling event.

But let’s focus on one nagging buzz-killer in reports about this year’s festival: There’s no breakout film, no underdog to root for. In this area, Toronto fans have become badly spoiled. In seven of the past 10 years, the best-picture winner has played at TIFF. But not every year yields a Slumdog Millionaire, Juno, Black Swan or King’s Speech, an underdog film that goes from obscurity to Oscar contender in 10 days. Remember, buzz can take months to build: It was almost a year after TIFF before 2009 Oscar winner The Hurt Locker even opened in theatres and then it was to poor box office.

On the flip side, other films should perform exactly according to plan and appear on Oscar’s top-10 list of best-picture contenders. The Descendants, directed by Alexander Payne, is a smoothly made heart-tugging American family drama; The Ides of March, directed by and starring George Clooney, is a competent political drama with good performances; Moneyball is a sharply written sports film with Brad Pitt and Jonah Hill. Even 50/50, the Seth Rogen-Joseph Gordon-Levitt cancer comedy, which surpassed expectations, has a chance. Then there are the outliers, provocative, but more difficult films, including David Cronenberg’s A Dangerous Method, about the birth of psychoanalysis, and English director Steve McQueen’s bold second film, Shame, which earned high praise for Michael Fassbender’s performance as a sexually compulsive man.

Another sophomore film, and one of the true world premieres among major films at the fest, was Sarah Polley’s Take This Waltz, which drew mixed reactions at the festival, but topped Indiewire’s survey of critics.

The consensus is that it was a good year for documentaries. Last Call at the Oasis is poised to be this year’s most important environmental-message movie. And the festival opened for the first time in its history with a documentary, shown apparently for the purpose of bringing its star subjects to town: Davis Guggenheim’s U2 film From the Sky Down, about the Irish band’s production of the 1991 album Achtung Baby. But it seemed an odd choice for a celebration of cinema: It is slated to be a CD extra and
cable movie within the month. Similarly, the festival’s final gala screening, the thriller Page Eight, starring Bill Nighy and Rachel Weisz, is going directly to public television. Both highlight the industry’s drift from theatrical experiences to home-entertainment content.

Nobody could complain about a shortage of star wattage, with Brad, George, Angelina, Madonna all at the party. Especially George. “Welcome to George Clooney’s film festival,” quipped Payne. Both Clooney and Brad Pitt were true movie stars in the old-fashioned sense, charming their way through modest films built around their personal appeal.

So, yes, it was a good year for TIFF - especially when it came to films drawn not only from Hollywood’s fall schedule, but also the best of Cannes (Le Havre, The Kid with a Bike, Once Upon a Time in Anatolia, The Artist), the Berlin Film Festival (A Separation, The Turin Horse, The Forgiveness of Blood) and Sundance (Take Shelter and Martha Marcy May Marlene).

On Thursday morning, I saw my favourite film of the festival, a mesmerizing, tense, metaphorical drama called Invasion, which won’t be on any Oscar lists. This little-known Latin American classic, part of TIFF’s City to City program, was made by first-time director Hugo Santiago, a former assistant of Robert Bresson, in Argentina in 1969 and was co-written by Nobel Prize-winner Jorge Luis Borges. The film was banned by the Argentine dictatorship of the day and disappeared for almost 30 years.

After Toronto, Invasion heads to the New York Film Festival in October.
TIFF boot camp puts first-timers through the drill

Festival gives directors a one-day course on what to do, and what not to do, at their first TIFF

GUY DIXON
Thursday, September 01, 2011

You’re a filmmaker invited to the Toronto International Film Festival for the first time. Elation!

Then the reality: Film execs breeze by you through hotel and cinema lobbies, greeting everyone but you, deal-making by cellphone with everyone but you, champion air-kissing all but your cheek. You need to get into their world to plug your small, independent film.

But how?

Early in August, the festival held a one-day boot camp to dole out wisdom for first-time attendees from across Canada - and some of the advice may seem counterintuitive: According to TIFF organizers, directors should never go to the press and industry screening of their own films, even though that’s probably the one event most filmmakers would want to attend. Often, this is the first time a film is shown before an actual audience, so naturally a director would want to see what his or her peers and the industry think of the work.

But distributors and agents notoriously attend these screenings with a cultivated jadedness. It’s their professional selves talking. Industry people, more often than not, are watching films from the point of view of their company’s market niche. Artistry is one thing, but the film business is another. TIFF’s suggestion? Let the producer go to the screening instead, to talk business and get a sense of interested buyers.

“You’re not wanted there, and you don’t want to be there, because a lot of people will stay 15 minutes, and they’ve seen enough of that film to know whether or not they want to see more,” said Karen Bruce, TIFF’s director of Canadian Initiatives, who organized the boot camp. “If they want to see more, they’re going to reach out for a [DVD] screener. If they don’t want to see more, they are moving on to the next one.” Directors should go to the always-more-encouraging public screenings.

Another counterintuitive bit of advice: Don’t use every opportunity to sell your film. Filmmakers need to attend cocktail receptions, trade business cards, anything to get an “in.” But do it with a bit of knowing panache.

“Sometimes networking is really just networking. You really don’t want to be that person that everyone avoids at the party, because the only thing you talk about is the
film you have there. Sometimes you really just need to be able to meet people and gather business cards,” Bruce said.

In short, filmmakers need to go into the festival with a plan about whom to meet, but not to scare everyone away. Bruce recommends, however, writing on the cards where and how you met those people for future reference.

The boot camp, sponsored by Telefilm Canada, was held on Aug. 10 at TIFF’s Bell Lightbox headquarters, the day after the festival held its press conference announcing the lineup of Canadian films. This was the second year TIFF has held the boot camp, but the first in which it brought a number of Canadian filmmakers in from outside Toronto.

The boot camp “came out of speaking to a lot of filmmakers who attend the festival for the first time and who really aren’t prepared to sell their films, don’t know how to meet the right people or how to network, and don’t really know what they should be doing while they are here,” Bruce said.

TIFF is like a vast toolbox for filmmakers providing, for instance, mailboxes for all industry people attending, thereby making them all easy to find. Although every filmmaker is likely hoping to have their film sold for lucrative sums, often a far more realistic goal for first-timers is simply to secure a sales agent or a publicist.

“Don’t come in and have the goal that you need to meet David Cronenberg and you need to get a U.S. distribution deal by the end of the festival, because those are really high goals to have for anybody,” Bruce said.

Perhaps the luckiest thing for the filmmakers at the boot camp is that they have already made connections with each other before TIFF. “So when they arrive at the festival, they feel they have friends,” Bruce said. “And now these people have a bit of a network.”
HOW TO DO TIFF LIKE A PRO

ANITA LI

Friday, September 2, 2011

Boasting red-carpet movie screenings and celebrity-saturated after-parties, the Toronto International Film Festival offers the hottest tickets in town. But with so many options, spread over 11 jam-packed days, it’s often difficult for newbies to navigate the festival circuit. Anita Li asked those in the know for advice on how to make the most of the experience. Here’s what they had to say

* * * *

Anne Gallagher, TIFF volunteer

TIFF experience: six years. She has been a TIFF volunteer since 2005, and estimates that she spends 300 hours a year helping out before and during the festival. Gallagher, 49, started taking tickets and organizing lineups as a theatre volunteer, but her responsibilities soon expanded to include helping with learning workshops at the TIFF Bell Lightbox (for the past few years, she has also worked at the box office during the festival).

Favourite TIFF moment: Gallagher’s experience as TIFF volunteer kicked off with an auspicious start. On her first day at the Varsity Theatre, the first person she signed in to the screening was movie critic Roger Ebert.

TIFF tip: Gallagher’s advice for new volunteers is to submit their applications early in May, and to volunteer in the action-packed theatres: “The best thing to do your first year of TIFF is to work in the theatres because it is the front line, and you get a sense of what the festival is really about.”

* * * *

Heidi Zarse, TIFF Attendee

TIFF experience: seven years. Zarse, has been attending TIFF - and volunteering - since 2004, after moving to Toronto from Wisconsin. For the past few years, she has watched 10 to 15 films during each festival, screening them on the weekends or evenings after work. As a self-described film buff, Zarse, 34, has been to Hot Docs in Toronto and film festivals in Austin, Tex. As for TIFF, she says she is open to seeing everything from documentaries to foreign films, and tries to catch the Midnight Madness program every year.

Favourite TIFF moment: She managed to score a ticket for George Clooney’s Up in the Air on the day of the film’s premiere at TIFF 2009.

TIFF tip: This September, Zarse says she aims to watch 22 movies, and plans to create a schedule using the calendar on TIFF’s website - something she recommends for festival newbies. Zarse adds that moviegoers should not be discouraged in the face of
long lineups and sold-out tickets: “In general, just [don’t] be intimidated thinking that it’s impossible to get tickets. Even if a film is off-sale, tickets come back after people exchange them or they open up the same day.”

* * * * *

Barbara Hershenhorn, president, Party Barbara Co.

TIFF experience: 20-plus years. As a seasoned event planner - she’s organized 250 TIFF parties - Hershenhorn says her goal for each function is to give guests a “lasting memory.” Among the big-ticket events she’s kicking off this year is TIFF’s opening-night cocktail reception at the Ritz-Carlton.

Favourite TIFF moment: One of her most memorable parties was for David Cronenberg’s M. Butterfly, where pyrotechnics were fired off a barge and choreographed to Malcolm McLaren’s song Madame Butterfly.

TIFF tip: Hershenhorn’s advice for party-hoppers on the prowl for celeb sightings is simple: “Circulate. You’ll never know who’s around the corner until you get up and start moving about.”

* * * * *

Gary Hynd, Bartender, Park Hyatt Toronto

TIFF experience: 10 years. Hynd has prepared drinks for nearly 100 TIFF parties over the years he has worked at the hotel’s two rooftop lounges. Although Hynd, 39, enjoys serving manhattans, he says the festival’s drink of choice is champagne, with at least 30 bottles drained a night.

Favourite TIFF moment: Hynd has had his share of celebrity encounters. Five years ago, he made negroni cocktails for Angelina Jolie and Brad Pitt. On another occasion, he nearly went to a club with James Gandolfini after work. “We were gonna go to a club downtown that was serving until 4 a.m.,” Hynd says. But alas, Project Party with a Soprano never happened because Gandolfini’s friends told him about another place that was open late.

TIFF tip: Hynd’s advice for TIFF scenesters is to attend parties on the first three nights of the festival (Thursday, Friday and Saturday). “It does start to get quiet after the first three,” he says. “That’s when all the glitz and glamour and the buzz is fresh.”
Boom! Cameron Bailey promises a loud start for TIFF

And they’re coming, writes Rick Groen. The stars, the films, the auteurs, the lineups, the red carpets. This year, the film festival is making sure that you will OMG for the duration.

Call it a promise, or maybe a threat, but the declaration is clear: “This is the loudest opening night film we’ve ever had.” The declarer is Cameron Bailey, artistic director of the Toronto International Film Festival which, in typical peekaboo fashion, partly drew back the curtain on its upcoming roster of cinematic goodies. The voluble picture in question is Looper, another genre-bender from director Rian Johnson who, in this outing, combines the time-travel of sci-fi with the big bangs of a gangster flick. “It’s huge fun,” insists Bailey, before quickly adding, “But a smart action film, too.” No doubt.

Indeed, TIFF’s new marketing campaign is cut from precisely the same cloth. Featuring come-ons like, “Where Popcorn meets Paté,” “Where Profane Meets Profound,” “Where OMG Meets WTF,” the slogans seem designed to wipe clean any remaining stain of high-brow exclusivity. Yes, prospective ticket-buyers, the fest may start in early September but, hey, it ain’t like going back to school.

As for the other galas announced, some intriguing pairings suggest themselves. In keeping with the theme of blue-bloods and glitter, consider this coupling: A Royal Affair, a costumed period piece set in the Danish court of the 18th-century; and Hyde Park on Hudson, where Bill Murray plays FDR entertaining the British King and Queen on the eve of the Second World War. Then there are the star actor-director tandems: Ben Affleck appearing both before and behind the camera in Argo, a thriller arising out of the Iranian hostage crisis; and Robert Redford doing the same in The Company You Keep, about a civil rights lawyer running from his radical past.

The gala Canadian content comes courtesy of not one but two female directors: Ruba Nadda’s Inescapable, an obviously timely drama that sees a father searching for his missing daughter in Damascus; and Deepa Mehta’s adaptation of Midnight’s Children, the Salman Rushdie novel (still his best) that unfolds in partition-era India. Finally, how’s this for a strangely matched set of gala documentaries: Free Angela & All Political Prisoners, a look back at the sixties philosophy prof cum Black Panther cum striking beauty Angela Davis; and Love, Marilyn, another product of the Monroe factory, this one apparently based on...
a recently discovered cache of “her private writings and musings.” Marilyn the closet literateur – who knew?

On more classic terrain, Great Expectations travels again from the page to the screen, as does Anna Karenina. We’re in the Special Presentations sector now, where that most supple of contemporary novelists, David Mitchell, gets the adaptive treatment: His Cloud Atlas is so overarching that it took a trio of directors – Tom Tykwer plus the Wachowski siblings, Andy and Lana – to tackle the book. Also noticeable among the announced entries is Terrence Malick who, a mere year after The Tree of Life, returns with To the Wonder – suddenly the guy is prolific.

The partial list goes on, more than 60 in all, but I’m especially attracted to the possibilities in: Dustin Hoffman making his directorial debut with Quartet, starring Maggie Smith; Hannah Arendt, where Margarethe von Trotta dramatizes the philosopher’s life in the wake of her seminal analysis of the Eichmann trial; Capital, from the formidable Costa-Gavras still going strong at 79; and, not least, A Liar’s Autobiography – The Untrue Story of Monty Python’s Graham Chapman, an animated take on the late (and presumably inanimate) physician and co-author of the Parrot Sketch.

I neglected to mention another documentary with some female star power: Venus & Serena, a year in the tennis life of the long-suffering and sometimes insufferable Williams sisters. Expect Serena, in particular, to fit right in with the advertised mood of this year’s festival. She plays loud. But, you know, smart, too.
TORONTO INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL 2012

OPENING-NIGHT GALA 2012
Looper, Rian Johnson (USA), world premiere

GALAS
A Royal Affair, Nikolai Arcel (Denmark/Sweden/Czech Republic/Germany), North American premiere
Argo, Ben Affleck (USA), world premiere
The Company You Keep, Robert Redford (USA), North American premiere
Dangerous Liaisons, Hur Jin-ho (China), North American premiere
English Vinglish, Gauri Shinde (India), world premiere
Free Angela & All Political Prisoners, Shola Lynch (USA/France), world premiere
Great Expectations, Mike Newell (U.K.), world premiere
Hyde Park on Hudson, Roger Michell (U.K.), world premiere
Inescapable, Ruba Nadda (Canada), world premiere
Jayne Mansfield's Car, Billy Bob Thornton (USA/Russia), North American premiere
Love, Marilyn, Liz Garbus (USA), world premiere
Midnight's Children, Deepa Mehta (Canada/U.K.), world premiere
The Reluctant Fundamentalist, Mira Nair (USA), North American premiere
Silver Linings Playbook, David O. Russell (USA), world premiere
Thermae Romae, Hideki Takeuchi (Japan), North American premiere
Twice Born, Sergio Castellitto (Italy/Spain/Croatia), world premiere

SPECIAL PRESENTATIONS
A Few Hours of Spring, Stéphane Brizé (France), North American premiere
Anna Karenina, Joe Wright (U.K.), international premiere
At Any Price, Ramin Bahrani (U.K./USA), North American premiere
The Attack, Ziad Doueiri (France), world premiere
Byzantium, Neil Jordan (U.K.), world premiere
Capital, Costa-Gavras (France), world premiere
Caught in the Web, Chen Kaige (Japan/China), international premiere
Cloud Atlas, Tom Tykwer, Andy Wachowski, Lana Wachowski (USA), world premiere
The Deep (Djúpið), Baltasar Kormákur (Iceland/Norway), world premiere
Dormant Beauty, Marco Bellocchio (Italy/France), international premiere
Dreams for Sale, Nishikawa Miwa (Japan), world premiere
End of Watch, David Ayer (USA), world premiere
Everybody Has a Plan, Ana Piterbarg (Argentina), international premiere
Foxfire, Laurent Cantet (France/Canada), world premiere
Frances Ha, Noah Baumbach (USA), world premiere
Ginger and Rosa, Sally Potter (U.K.), world premiere
TORONTO INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL 2012

Hannah Arendt, Margarethe von Trotta (Germany), world premiere
The Hunt, Thomas Vinterberg (Denmark), North American premiere
The Iceman, Ariel Vromen (USA) North American premiere
Imogene, Robert Pulcini, Shari Springer Berman (USA), world premiere
The Impossible, J.A. Bayona (Spain/USA), world premiere
In the House, François Ozon (France), world premiere
Kon-Tiki, Joachim Roenning and Espen Sandberg (U.K./Norway/Denmark), international premiere
The Last Supper, Lu Chuan (China), world premiere
A Late Quartet, Yaron Zilberman (USA), world premiere
A Liar’s Autobiography – The Untrue Story of Monty Python’s Graham Chapman, Ben Timlett, Bill Jones, Jeff Simpson (U.K.), world premiere
Lore, Cate Shortland (Australia/U.K./Germany), North American premiere
Mr. Pip, Andrew Adamson (New Zealand), world premiere
Much Ado About Nothing, Joss Whedon (USA), world premiere
No, Pablo Larrain (Chile/USA), North American premiere
Outrage Beyond, Takeshi Kitano (Japan), North American premiere
The Perks of Being a Wallflower, Stephen Chbosky (USA), world premiere
The Place Beyond the Pines, Derek Cianfrance (USA), world premiere
Quartet, Dustin Hoffman (U.K.), world premiere
Reality, Matteo Garrone (Italy/France), North American premiere
Rust and Bone, Jacques Audiard (France/Belgium), North American premiere
The Sapphires, Wayne Blair (Australia), North American premiere
The Sessions, Ben Lewin (USA), international premiere
Tai Chi o, Stephen Fung (China), North American premiere
Thanks for Sharing, Stuart Blumberg (USA), world premiere
The Time Being, Nenad Cicin-Sain (USA), world premiere
To the Wonder, Terrence Malick (USA), North American premiere
Venus & Serena, Maiken Baird (USA), world premiere
Writers, Josh Boone (USA), world premiere
Zaytoun, Eran Riklis (U.K./Israel), world premiere

The Toronto International Film Festival runs from Sept. 6 to 16, 2012