



Celebration and Sensitivity

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by Melinda Camber Porter reports from the New York Film Festival

The twenty-third New York Film Festival opened with Kurosawa's *Ran* (Chaos). It provided the perfect setting for his masterpiece for it is a non-competitive festival that aims at celebrating the art of film rather than offering a location for the making of deals. Hollywood directors shun the festival, and even the New York-based director Martin Scorsese refused to show his latest film, *After Hours*, because he feared Kurosawa's work would steal the limelight. Kurosawa's film and his presence have dominated the festival and have lent a dignified and quietly celebratory note to the events.

Quite unexpected, Kurosawa was available for public appearances, parties and interviews, and seemed in excellent spirits. For he had waited over ten years to make *Ran* (his version of Lear), and had eventually been approached by Serge Silberman, Bunuel's producer, who found him the \$10M to make the film, as David Robinson has already described on this page.

Immediately following *Ran* was a British entry, Joseph Losey's last film, *Steaming*, based on the play by Nell Dunn. The film does not have distribution in the States, and will move on to the San Francisco Film Festival in the hope of receiving more attention. The response from the critics here was unfavorable. *Steaming* works against itself, and its avowed feminist intentions, by making the three leading women (Vanessa Redgrave, Patti Love and Sarah Miles) appear self-immolating in their self-pity, and rather unreasonable for constantly putting the blame on men; yet it would be unfortunate if this film were not shown in the States, for, at times, it does blossom into a strange poetry.

Also from Britain is Michael Apted's documentary *74 UP/28 UP*, already seen on television in the UK. This is Apted's first film to be presented at the festival. Michael Powell's *Black Narcissus* was shown as a tribute to British cinema, and as a reminder of the huge retrospective of British films that came from the BFI last year and were shown at the Museum of Modern Art.

American cinema has never been well represented at the festival, and this year was no exception. So far we have seen some dismal avant-garde shorts, like *Travelling Light* (Jane Aaron) and *Shapes, Forms and Robots* (Cathy Karol), and an equally superficial documentary about Huey Long, the Louisiana governor



and senator who might have been another Mussolini if he had not been assassinated in 1935. This documentary, by the prize-winning director Ken Burns, is structured like a popularity poll. Some witnesses in it, like Mrs. Hodding Carter, detested Long's methods of obtaining power; others, like the locals of Louisiana, worshipped him. The film never goes much deeper than that.

Also from the American camp will be a documentary by Christian Blackwood, often makes films about making films. His last visit to a film set was during *Under the Volcano*. This time he will be documenting Arthur Miller's and Dustin Hoffman's attempt to bring the Broadway production of *Death of a Salesman* to television. Both of these directors were first presented at the New Directors/New Films series that the Lincoln Centre sponsors with the Museum of Modern Art. Another protégé of this series, Mark Rappaport, will be presenting his feature *Chain Letters*.

If the festival were to be judged on its American films, it would be a dull event. But the real function and purpose is to show art films from outside America. Many excellent films might never be given the possibility of distribution, and some would never be seen in the States, without a helping hand from the festival. This year many of the prize-winning films at Cannes, like Emir Kusturica's *When Father Was Away on Business*, were presented to a receptive audience. So were the remarkably static *Oriane*, directed by Fina Torres, which won the Camera d'Or at Cannes for the best first film, and Manuel De Oliveira's *The Satin Slipper*, which was also a Cannes entry.

The festival committee, led by Richard Roud, is not obliged to offer a representative number of films from each country. They can please themselves, express their own tastes freely and choose anything that they consider to be art. The committee have taken up the cause of Rivette over the years and came up with a stroke of genius this year by placing Rivette's interview with Jean Renoir, *Renoir, the Boss* (1966), next to an imaginative portrait of Jean Cocteau by the Argentine director Edgardo Cozarinsky,

Rivette sits Renoir in front of *La Règle du jeu* and asks him very precise questions about the film. Renoir, in a delightfully direct and open manner, tries to tell Rivette how little and how much he was aware of his own intentions. The conversation is illustrated by clips from the film and at one point the actor Dario is seen chatting with Renoir about his memories of making *La Règle du jeu*. Renoir reassures Dario, cajoles him when he criticizes his own performance and smooths over the actor's extreme nervousness; in this short clip we see Renoir's extraordinary sensitivity towards actors.



Jean Renoir turns up again in Cozarinsky's *Jean Cocteau - Self Portrait of a Man Unknown* (1933). He is congratulating Cocteau on his frescoes, as they stand in a chapel that was decorated by this writer, filmmaker, painter and actor. Yet again, Renoir allays the fears and assuages the self-doubt of his friend Cocteau, demonstrating his unfailing cheerfulness. Cozarinsky's film manages to convey both the gregarious and flamboyant public persona of Cocteau, and the deeply tender and withdrawn poet.

Also in the French selection are Alain Tanner's *No Man's Land* (1985) and Leos Carax's first feature, *Boy Meets Girl* (1984), which received a great deal of attention at the 1984 Cannes Film Festival. Zanussi's *A Year of the Quiet Sun*, the winner of the Golden Lion at the 1984 Venice Film Festival, and Istvan Szabo's *Colonel Redl*, another Cannes prize-winner in 1985, are both being shown. Both Szabo and Zanussi are favorites of the festival committee, and one can credit the festival for helping to establish Szabo's career in the States: they presented his *The Father* in 1967 and *Confidence* in 1980, long before he gained a following in 1981 with *Mephisto*.

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