

MEXICAN PIC TRADE: NOWHERE TO GO BUT UP

Getting 'Jedi' Right

Atlantic City, May 31.

Police in nearby Beach Haven Park were summoned when a sell-out crowd staged a "near riot," mistakingly believing that the projectionist of the Beach Theatre had mixed up reels of "Return Of The Jedi."

The incident happened halfway through the premiere of the film. One reel ended with a scene of a space craft in flight and the next reel jumped to a forest scene.

Some patrons, thinking that the projectionist erred chanted "wrong reel, wrong reel."

When the crowd started to get out of hand, the film was stopped and the manager told the patrons that the reels would be checked. It was determined that the right reel was in place and the film was restarted.

This did not satisfy the audience and some patrons allegedly threw bottles at the screen while others attempted to solve the problem by climbing to the projection booth. The police were then called.

After 497 ticket holders were given \$5 refunds or emergency passes, the second show was cancelled. Employees of the Atlantic City-based Frank Theatres chain, played the film to an empty theatre and found that the film had been correctly run the first time.

BUT FOREIGN INPUT IS MIXED BLESSING

By ART DIGGLE

Mexico City, May 31.

"I found the state film industry in very grave condition. There was no way for it to go but up. It couldn't have been any lower."

So said Alberto Isaac, who, as director of the Film Institute of the para-state Radio, TV, & Film Center (R.T.C.), is Mexico's top national cinema honcho.

Isaac took over the film job from Margarita Lopez Portillo, sister of ex-President Jose Lopez Portillo, when named to the post by the new Aztec President Miguel de la Madrid, inaugurated last Dec. 1.

In an interview in the critical political weekly, Proceso, Isaac said:

"I am an optimist about the future of Mexican films. I think that now is when we must do something, or nothing will ever happen."

While Isaac was directing his criticism at the state film program and its financing of unsuccessful co-productions with other nations, much of what the Mexican cine mandamus said, many local critics would agree, applies also to the nation's private film sector, the part that emphasizes sex and soft porn, for instance.

"The state film industry has never stopped being a good business, it's simply been administered badly," Isaac asserted.

He pointed out that currently only two of the state's several film organizations are running in the black — the Peliculas Mexicanas (Pel-Mex) distribber and the Compania Operadora de Teatros (Theatre Operating Company), which manages a string of film houses throughout the nation. Among other state-run film organizations are studios, film companies, publicity and promotion entities, and a school for youthful filmmakers.

While Mexico does have plans for coproductions with other countries during coming years, Isaac did not hesitate to lay down the law on a subject that has become very sensitive to many Aztec film artists, who often resent the importation of a foreign director or actor when so many Mexicans need jobs. There is much nationalism inherent in this, too. Most Mexican film tradesters are of the opinion that Mexicans should make Mexican films in Mexico, which, of course, allows for no coproductions at all.

On the overall subject, Isaac said:

"In the first place, any coproduction should be on a subject which is of interest and relevance to Mexico," he noted. "They should be filmed here. Mexican nationals (actors, directors, cameramen, etc.) should be in the majority. And Mexico should not serve only as a factory for the making of foreign films and a lender of our scenic countryside. I think this is all essential."

While emphasizing all this, however, Isaac admitted that foreign filmmakers, many of whom are currently working here where the shooting is cheap or are making plans to on a variety of film projects, are helping Mexico — "a country in crisis," as he said. They are giving jobs to "an enormous quantity of film people who had none."

One of the problems which face (Continued on page 24)

'Jedi' Print Stolen, Recovered In Carolina; Other Film And Exhibition Bugs Face Lucas

By RAY LOYND

Hollywood, May 31.

Twentieth Century-Fox and Lucasfilm, while celebrating dizzy grosses on "Return of the Jedi," were startled last week to hear that a 35m print of "Jedi" was heisted from a theatre in Columbia, S.C.

The stolen cans of film, according to the Film Security Office of the Motion Picture Assn. of America, were retrieved by sheriffs Wednesday afternoon, (25) literally alongside a rural road near Lexington, South Carolina. The thief or thieves, who stole the print sometime around dawn Tuesday (24) by prying open the lobby door of the Bush River Theatre in Columbia, were still being sought. Whether the film had been transferred to tape or tampered with in any way was not immediately known.

"It's an open question," said MPAA Film Security Office executive director Ewing Layhew. "The print is being shipped to Fox, and will be run through a projector to determine if it has been duplicated." Layhew added that the bands on the cans of film appeared not to have been broken, according to sheriffs in Lexington County. The missing cans of film touched off a prompt investigation by South Carolina sheriffs and the FBI, said Layhew. It was an anonymous telephone tip that informed authorities where the film could be found.

"If a print has been struck from the master it could be all over the world in weeks," said one exec at Fox. The penalty for criminal copyright infringement for duplicating and/or distributing motion pictures without the consent of the copyright owner is up to five years in prison and a \$250,000 fine or both.

Meanwhile, "Jedi" was having its problems elsewhere in exhibition houses. "There have been sound problems," producer Howard Kazanjian said. The nightmare over a near-riot at the Pacific 6 theatre in National City, a San Diego suburb, was traced, Kazanjian said, to an error in shipping. He said if the theatre had only alerted Fox earlier it could have been avoided.

Other Errors

Just as dramatic in its own bizarre fashion as the National City incident was the projection breakdown Wednesday evening at the UA Six-plex at the Valley Plaza in North Hollywood. Midway through the pic, first the sound went and then the screen turned white. Some 600 patrons in the 70m house were herded out and across the Six-plex complex to another UA theatre to see "Spacehunter" in 3-D," then later brought back to see "Jedi" again, only to have the film break down once more. What began as a 4 p.m. screening ultimately let out at 9:30 p.m.

"It was incompetent non-union personnel who fouled that screening up," Projectionists Local 150 business rep Ralph Kemp charged later. Local 150 boothmen have been locked out of UA houses over a contract dispute and the union claims that UA theatres are now tasting the bitter fruit of inexperienced people handling the more (Continued on page 24)

Golden Palm Inflates 'Narayama' Bid As Toei Talks U.S. Rights

By STEPHEN KLAIN

The Toei Company, producer of Shohei Imamura's "The Ballad Of Narayama," is currently discussing domestic pickup of the Cannes Golden Palm prizewinner with four majors' classics divisions and two independents, and expects to have a deal firmed within the next three weeks.

Admitting that "our asking price went up at least tenfold after the film won the prize," Toei N.Y. general manager Hiroshi Yamauchi would not confirm or deny reports that the U.S.-Canadian asking advance was in the region of \$1,500,000.

However, he did venture that the reported figure "doesn't seem unreasonable," noting that Toei would likely pass on the full stream of domestic rights (theatrical, tv, payable, etc.) to the pic's ultimate buyer.

(Putting that asking price in perspective, it should be recalled that Cannes contender "Merry Christmas, Mr. Lawrence" started out asking for \$2,000,000 and wound up with a reported \$750,000 advance from Universal Classics.)

Final buying decision, per Toei producer Goro. Kusakabe, in Gotham for the U.S. "Narayama" talks, won't be made until an English subtitled print reaches New York in the next week or so. Company scouts have made their initial bids, based on the French-titled print screened in Cannes.

For Toei, "Narayama" will mark a relatively rare inroad into the U.S. market, where its only presence has been in occasional pickups of its sci-fi programmers (e.g. UA's pickup of "Message From Space" and New World's "Galaxy Express") and animated fare, primarily for the cable market.

Even in Japan, Kusakabe noted, "Narayama" marked an upscale departure from Toei's bread-and-butter commercial fare and, "though we expected to receive local acclaim, we did not expect an international prize."

That Cannes prize, it turns out, also served to double the pic's first week of business in Tokyo, which was described as "very good" and has give the producers "great confidence" in the film's overall prospect globally, despite some initial qualms about its "adaptability to western viewers."

And while Toei N.Y. manager (Continued on page 24)

Fox Takes 'Osterman'

Twentieth Century-Fox has picked up Sam Peckinpah's film "The Osterman Weekend" for domestic distribution, with its release date yet to be determined. Foreign sales continue to be handled via J&M Film Sales.

The \$10,000,000 Peter S. Davis-William N. Panzer indie production was filmed in Los Angeles last fall, scripted by Alan Sharp from Robert Ludlum's best-selling suspense novel. Picture marks Dutch actor Rutger Hauer's first U.S. starring role, after co-starring appearances in "Night-hawks," "Blade Runner" and "Eureka."

Supporting cast features Burt Lancaster, John Hurt, Meg Foster, Dennis Hopper, Craig T. Nelson, Cassie Yates, Helen Shaver and Chris Sarandon.

Both Sides Okay New Tape Pact

Hollywood, May 31.

Management and the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees have reached a new supplemental tape agreement, calling for 7% wage raises in each of the three years of the pact and another 3% wage boost for an additional four month extension of the contract.

New contract covers all shows taped on signatory lots or shows taped under a signatory's banner.

Production workers in this area will also receive the same pension and welfare, grievance and arbitration, and vacation benefits negotiated into the IA's basic agreement last October.

Negotiations for the new tape agreement began in April. The IA will now send the agreement to its members for ratification.

'Survivors' R Sustained

Hollywood, May 31.

The R rating for the film "The Survivors" has been sustained after a hearing May 25 by the Classification and Rating Appeals Board of the Motion Picture Assn. of America.

Appeal was brought by Columbia, and speaking on behalf of the pic were Columbia associate general counsel Jared Jussim and director Michael Ritchie.

'Muppets' Rolls As First Tri-Star Pic

Tri-Star Pictures, the new studio formed by CBS, Home Box Office and Columbia Pictures, rolled its first feature, "The Muppets In Manhattan," on Friday (27). Produced for Tri-Star by Henson Associates with Jim Henson as executive producer, the film will lens for 15 weeks on New York locations and at the Empire Stages in Lond Island City.

Frank Oz, currently appearing on-screen nationally as the Jedi master Yoda in "Return Of The Jedi" is directing the Muppet film for producer David Lazer from a script he cowrote with Tom Patchett & Jay Tarses, the comedy writing team who also helped pen "The Great Muppet Caper" picture, released by Universal and Associated Film Distribution in the summer of 1981.

Non-Muppet actors for the film have not yet been announced, but Henson will perform as Kermit the Frog and Oz as Miss Piggy among their many Muppet personae.

U CLASSICS TAKES ON 'DEADLY SUMMER'

Hollywood, May 31.

Universal Classics has picked up domestic distrib rights to Jean Becker's "One Deadly Summer" (L'Ete Meurtrier), Isabelle Adjani-starrer which was an official French entry in the Cannes Film Fest.

Confirming the acquisition, U's second out of Cannes after "Merry Christmas, Mr. Lawrence," U Classics topper Jim Katz noted that, aside from the current opera release, "La Traviata," this would be the first contempo foreign lingo pic to be handled by the company. Katz hopes to have it in theatres by August.

Psychological suspenser about a neurotic young woman who slips into madness is based upon the best-selling novel by Sebastian Japrisot, who also penned the screenplay. Other cast members besides Adjani, who received great acclaim for her performance, are Alain Souchon and Suzanne Flon.

U Classics has theatrical and all ancillary rights for the U.S. and English-speaking Canada.