

# Istanbul 1996

By Gerald Pratley

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## **KNOWN AS 'THE MEETING POINT BETWEEN TWO CONTINENTS',**

the International Istanbul Film Festival, now in its 15th year, lives up to its official designation and becomes more pertinent with each passing festival. With limited state support, this determined, medium-sized event, under the direction of the glamorous Hülya Ucansu, has improved the cinema programs of Turkish moviegoers with films from around the world, the emphasis being placed on new works from both European and Asian filmmakers. There is little of Hollywood here (it's all in the cinemas week in week out); only a few of the best of the American independents.

The concept of film as art is now more widely recognized by a public which once thought of movies only in terms of popular entertainment from Hollywood's distributing agents. The pattern of the domestic market in releasing and exhibiting films has changed visibly. Ms. Ucansu said that in the festival's early years she "would not have dared to dream that one day I will see a film like *Ulysses' Gaze* open to a commercial showing in Turkey."

Now it is not uncommon for local distributors to obtain many of the films programmed by the festival before they are shown, mostly "by new companies that obviously think it is worth their while to give them wider showings." A few of the latest are *Land and Freedom*, *Cyclo La Cérémonie*, *Nothing Personal* and *The Brothers McMullen*.

The 1996 Festival ran for 15 days with the first week being a national festival and the second becoming a fully international event with a competitive program, an international jury and guests from around the world. There is very little overlap of selections but the days are busy with morning press conferences and afternoon and evening screenings, with most films being repeated. In the best Oriental fashion, the relaxed atmosphere banished the customary stresses and strains of other festivals.

The Jury was led by veteran Robert Wise. His members included Margarethe von Trotta, Alain Tanner, Simon Perry of British Screen and renowned Greek cinematographer, Yiorgos Arvanitis. With 150 films from some 50-odd countries, the festival has attracted audiences in excess of 150,000 -- with many more joining in each year. The program is divided into sections (sixteen this year) somewhat different from the usual, and may be changed from year to year. This time around sections were devoted to *Arts in the Movies*, *Cinema Looks at the Cinema*, *From Literature to the Silver Screen*, *Best of the Festivals* (including Vancouver and Montréal), a memorial to Jean Renoir, and Tributes to Robert Wise, Claude Chabrol, Stanley Kwan and Jim Jarmusch, accompanied by almost complete Retrospectives of their films.

Marking the 100th Year of the Cinema was the showing of the BFI's popular cycle *Centenary of Cinema*, and much anticipated and discussed was Robert Lepage's *The Confessional*. Put up against its contenders in the competitive section it towered easily over them all. We expected it to win the Golden Tulip; it went instead to The Netherlands' entry. *Little Sister*, the latest in the school of the demented and depraved. Lepage's film was however, recognized by the FIPRESCI Jury.

With Turkish films literally driven from domestic screens by the Hollywood tide, the National Competition has become increasingly important as a showcase for Turkish filmmakers whose work might not otherwise be seen. Entries this year were nine films produced in 1995 and 1996: *Istanbul Beneath My Wings* (Mustafa Altıoklar), *Insect* (Ümit Elçi), *Longing for Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow* (Tülay Eratalay), *Be Love Colder Than Death* (Canan Gerede), *80th Step* (Tomris Giritlioglu), *The Eighth Hour* (Cemal Gözütok), *Man on the Street* (Biket İlhan), *Anatomy of a Woman* (Yavez Özkan) and *Cold Nights* (Kadir Sözen).

Other non-competition Turkish films were Tülay Eratalay's *Dream, Truth and Cinema Reality*, and *Everything Untold on Love* and *Loves with Gravity* consisting of short films by ten directors. These films were made possible by the determined directors who, tired of being rejected by TV stations, the cinemas, and the state, banded together and equipped with little other than solidarity and their determination to make films,

created The Cinema Fund. Often criticized for making movies audiences didn't want to see and tired of hearing about "The Golden Age" of Turkish Cinema, which consisted of old-fashioned melodramas the public loved, they found an unlikely sponsor in Efes Pilsen, the maker of the most popular beer in Turkey. Their first two films are *Everything Untold About Love* and *Loves and Gravity*. Any profits from this venture will go back into the Fund. The Cinema Honor Award given to artists who have made a major contribution to the development of Turkish cinema, has previously been awarded to Lütü Ö, Akad, Bedi Muvahhid, Nijad Özön, Hürrem Erman, Atif Yılmaz, G. Turan and Memduh Ün. This year the award went to Türkan So-ray, veteran film actress, and was presented at the closing ceremony. Once a flourishing film making nation, Turkish cinema has dropped from several hundred titles a year to no more than 14-16 features. Canadian filmmakers think times are difficult here, but their worries pale beside those of their Turkish contemporaries. The best films of 1995, *Mr. E*, *Anatomy of a Woman*, *Immortal Carnations* and *My Father in the Army*, attracted between them an audience of slightly more than 250,000.

Possibly the most remarkable aspect of the Istanbul festival is the fact that with very little money from state funding groups the festival exists largely on commercial sponsorship, and our readers will be surprised to hear that a major partner for the past few years has been the Istanbul Stock Exchange, whose contributions pay almost one-fourth of the \$750,000 budget. (The Exchange also held a splendid reception in its elegant new building.) Tuncay Artun, the Chairman of the Exchange, has publicly said that "At a time when non-cultural developments have a negative impact in shaping our society we feel we were obligated to lead the way and compensate by helping artistic events." How many other institutions of this kind throughout the world think in these terms?

The highlight of the festival for those who think that Michelangelo Antonioni is one of the world's great filmmakers came with the press conference held after the showing of his new film *Beyond the Clouds*. Described by all those who spoke of him as "The Master," Antonioni, who cannot speak as a result of a severe stroke eleven years ago and is partially paralysed, was accompanied by his wife, Enrica, who spoke for him most eloquently, in English, describing him as "the master filmmaker who goes beyond his mind to reach the state where truth and spontaneity and instinct reign supreme. His technique is not instinctive; he is constantly in a state of imagination and his newest film is fanciful -- a work of pure fancy." The admirers present were enchanted and gave the master a standing ovation.

## Author Information

Gerald PRATLEY, OC, LLD, started his career as film critic with the CBC. In 1969, he founded the Ontario Film Institute which he directed until 1990. He has written several books and numerous articles on film, including *Torn Sprockets*, a history of Canadian cinema. He taught Film History in universities in Toronto and Waterloo, Canada and holds three honorary degrees from Canadian and US universities.

**Gerald A. Pratley** (1923-2011) was born and educated in London, England, and came to Canada in 1946. He started working in Toronto for the CBC as a scriptwriter. He was drawn toward working in motion pictures, and became, in 1948, the CBC's first film critic and commentator.

Gerald Pratley broadcast three programmes a week, *Pratley at the Movies*, *The Movie Scene*, *Music From the Films*, and others, until 1975. During this time he also became the first post-war chairman of the Toronto Film Society, chairman of the Toronto and District Film Council and co-founder of the A-G-E Film Society and correspondent for international magazines such as *Films and Filming*, *Film In Review*, *Variety*, *Hollywood Quarterly* and *International Film Guide*. During the 1950s he wrote for *Canadian Film Weekly* and *Canadian Film Digest*.

He became known as a speaker on all aspects of motion picture art and industry, and was invited to teach film history at the University of Toronto, York University, University of Waterloo, Seneca College and Ryerson Polytechnical University, with individual lectures being given at many other Canadian and US universities and colleges. He has served as a member of various judging panels of competitions and festivals, being one of the members of the first Canadian Film Awards in 1949.

From 1970 to 1975 he was the director of the Stratford (Ontario) International Film Festival, and from 1969 to

1976 he was Chairman of the International Jury of the Canadian Film Awards. He has attended all the world's leading festivals of film, and in particular, for 30 years, the Cannes Festival as CBC correspondent. He has written six books, *The Films of Frankenheimer: Forty Years in Film*; *The Cinema of John Frankenheimer*; *The Cinema of Otto Preminger*; *The Cinema of David Lean*; *The Cinema of John Huston*, and *Torn Sprockets*, a history of the Canadian cinema.

Gerald Pratley has served on the Advisory Boards of the film departments of Ryerson Polytechnical University and Humber College, and as a member of the programme committee of TV Ontario. In 1968 he became the founder-director of the Ontario Film Institute of the Province of Ontario, an organization which has distinguished itself in archival holdings and public service and is known since 1990 as the Cinematheque of Ontario. He taught Film History courses at the Department of Film and Photography, Ryerson Polytechnic University, Toronto and the University of Waterloo.

In 1984, Gerald Pratley was made a Member of the Order of Canada and in 2003 **Officer of the Order of Canada** for his service to Canada through film appreciation. He holds Honorary Degrees in Letters and Fine Arts from York and Waterloo Universities (Ont., Canada) and Bowling Green State University (Ohio, USA).

In 2002, Gerald Pratley received a **Special Genie Award** from the Academy of Canadian Cinema & Television in recognition of his lifelong dedication to the promotion and his exceptional support of Canadian cinema.

He died on 14 March 2011 in Ontario, Canada.