

Ottawa 1996

By Gerald Pratley

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IN OTTAWA, ONE WEEK LATER, came the Summer Institute of Screen Writing, now in its sixteenth year, and where, on its opening night we heard that its enthusiastic and determined founder, Tom Shoebridge, has decided to move upstairs to the position of Chairman bringing in Tim O'Brien to be the programmer. This event is not so much a festival as a work place forum where the paying participants are introduced to the "intensive, focused, career-boosting" workshops and where, in just five days "you will realize your highest potential" in screen writing and direction. As introductions to crafts and careers however, with descriptions of methods to follow and moves to make, they are revealing and valuable. Few leave without feeling that they have trodden at last the paths to discovery.

Among those leading the way were Sandy Wilson, Gerald Wexler, Anna Sandor, Nancy Trites Bodkin, Bill Gough, Tantoo Cardinal, Murray Battle, Leon Marr and Stephen Williams, who all gave generously of their experiences and working procedures. There were times when it seemed that these groups of eager Canadians were actually learning more about how to make American films, but no one seemed to be bothered about this. And why should they be? We are so Americanised in our daily cinema and tv watching that to make American films would be the obvious thing to do. And so we do! Of the evening films screened the one premiere was that of *Swann*, an Anglo-Canadian co-production based on the novel by Carol Shields. It made a good debating subject for the remainder of the week on how to adapt a difficult book to film -- from which much was learned, mainly, how not to!

We also discovered in Ottawa that we no longer have a National Film Archive. After years of fighting to get the Archive established, we now find that it has disappeared into the oblivion of the National Archives of Canada -- just another department with another manager. What it takes in, what it keeps, what is Canadian, what it has, all seem to be a secret as dark as the vaults themselves. But a privately managed committee has been formed to find sponsors to help it save videos. This is so preposterous as to be unattainable. This may well be the case, but no one knows and no one will talk.

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.