

BROCK'S BANTER: Fade to Black

By Brock Weir

The stars have come and gone.

The Oscar race has been clarified.

Some sure bets have been taken down a peg while dark horses have suddenly broken away from the straggling pack and are heading up the fence.

Another Toronto International Film Festival is in the books and us movie fans left behind are now able to fully resume our regularly scheduled program ? including this guy.

TIFF is one of my favourite times of the year, but it always causes a bit of stress and anxiety.

For the uninitiated, the nearly complete schedule of Festival films is released weeks in advance of tickets going on sale, allowing for ample time to pick your picks, as it were, and hope for the best once the free-for-all begins on single ticket day.

Sometimes you luck out and get all your picks and other times you get a complete strike out, settling for a raft of second draft pics while you read reviews from your first choices from afar, usually getting an ever-greener tinge on your skin. Jealousy and all that. I was on a hot streak this year, scoring many of my first choices, including the Italian-American film *Call Me By Your Name*, the Winston Churchill biopic *Darkest Hour*, Judi Dench's latest turn as the Mother of Confederation in *Victoria & Abdul*, Angelina Jolie's passion project on the Khmer Rouge entitled *First They Killed My Father*, and a number of others that will be sure-fire hits this fall and winter. And, truth be told, a couple of duds.

Some moved me to a point where it took a few minutes to collect myself before being able to get out of my seat ? *Call Me By Your Name*, *First They Killed My Father*, *Film Stars Don't Die in Liverpool*, *The Wife* ? while others, like *Darkest Hour*, left so little an impression on me the fact I sat through two hours of it seemed but a vaguely distant memory just a few days later.

All in all, it was a very busy schedule, but all worth it.

The atmosphere is invariably electric. Stars and directors being in attendance for various screenings, of course, only enhances the electricity but when you get down to the root of the festival, the real charge is being in a hoard of thousands all swarming in the same direction and for the same purpose: a love of film.

There is the anticipation of seeing established actors, sometimes actors who are unheralded, land and nail the roles of a lifetime, viewing the work of an up-and-coming director whose thrilling product leaves you wanting more, sure in the knowledge you're watching a future classic unspool for the very first time, and seeing homegrown talent exposed to an international market, complete with bigwigs who can take them into the stratosphere.

Programs not only cater to the Spielbergs, Scorseses and Aronofskys of the world, but new Canadian filmmakers, students just getting their feet wet in the digital ? and traditional celluloid ? media, and emerging on-screen talent.

Not every creative has the wherewithal to get to Toronto to gain exposure, however, be it from a lack of financial backing or simply an avenue closer to hand that can be used as a springboard to greater things.

By the time I saw my last film of the festival this weekend a film which, truth be told, I did not care for whatsoever, I began to think about our own lost opportunities.

Actually, I hesitate to use the phrase ?lost opportunities? because there are new opportunities on the horizon every day. Platforms ranging from YouTube, to Instagram, to Snapchat, to even the humble Facebook, provide outlets every day for budding filmmakers to unleash their creativity onto the world.

Some of our local filmmakers who have been featured in these pages have become experts at harnessing the power of social media to create viral content that is noticed around the world which has led to increasingly impressive opportunities across the country.

For every Chris Hau, however, are dozens of aspiring filmmakers peering into their screens, editing their videos, and stumped on what their next move should be.

Once upon a time, there was just such an opportunity that came around once a year designed to give these artists who wouldn't otherwise have a chance to reach or build an audience a chance to shine before a bona fide audience of interested parties.

For over five years, Family Services of York Region spearheaded a wonderful initiative branded the Multimedia Festival of York Region. The festival encouraged creative talent, talent ranging from York Region born-and-bred filmmakers who already had a feature or two under their belts to elementary school students, sometimes even whole elementary school classes, to polish up their works and submit them for consideration in the festival.

Each year, until its apparent demise in 2015 a year after it was rebranded as the PlaYR Video festival, it produced a staggering array

of films which were taken on the road to different venues across nearly all of York Region's nine municipalities, culminating in a very gratifying awards ceremony which provided not only trophies that looked good on a mantle, but an additional line on a resumé that carried increasing weight with each passing Festival.

Entries hit all the touchpoints of comedy, drama, romance, suspense and mystery but participating filmmakers, whatever their age, never once shied away from turning their full attention to the issues close to their hearts or the bold statements they felt needed to be made.

Racism and discrimination within our community, and even within the schools, were perennial topics to which young filmmakers devoted their passion. So too were environmental concerns, budding or evolving sexuality, the marginalization of seniors, the treatment and experiences of veterans young and old, and personal mentors gone too soon.

In short, the York Region Multimedia Film Festival was a powerful outlet for these powerful individuals who, camera in hand, created very powerful images. Some went on to great things ? take, for instance, the face of Participation's 150 Playlist. This Aurora-bred comedienne made a splash in the festival ? while some are still fighting to be heard. The point is festivals such as these allowed them to make a ripple in a much bigger pond, but this outlet is no longer there.

As someone who grew up able to hit a baseball out of the park with little inclination or ability to run bases, someone who could drive a golf ball reasonably well but couldn't care less where it ended up, I am thankful that organizations ? and indeed parents ? today are recognizing the value of creative outlets for their kids.

Look no further than the proliferation of maker spaces within our community.

But, what good is a video, an app, or game without an audience?

In my view, investing in ways to provide these talented up-and-comers with encouragement, exposure, and the potential for accolades is money well spent and a perfect way for cultural and service groups within our community and in greater York Region to build the foundation of a lasting and fruitful legacy.