

# Australia and the World's Film Archives

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*The International Federation of Film Archives is a vigorous body which has achieved considerable success in establishing standards and promoting co-operation between the affiliated archival institutions. It has steadily encouraged the development of film archives in nations which have not yet provided affiliates. In pursuit of FIAF's objectives, Australia is taking a prominent part.*

Representatives of two Australian institutions attended the 39th congress of the International Federation of Film Archives (FIAF) in Stockholm in June. They were officers of the National Film Archive in Canberra, which is a full member of the world association, and of the State Film Archives of Western Australia, which has observer status. A colleague from New Zealand was also a participant, and in the observer category too.

### **The Nations Represented**

Accorded 'B status' by UNESCO, and with a permanent secretariat in Brussels, the Federation now embraces 47 members and 24 observers in a total of 51 countries. The full membership status carries full voting rights at FIAF meetings and entails considerably higher annual fees. The associated archival institutions and cinematheques vary considerably in size, range of activities, and geographical interests. Some scarcely restrict themselves at all by territorial considerations, and some have a specialised field of interest, as for example the Imperial War Museum in London. So, it is not a matter of national or territorial coverage that explains the existence of more than one affiliate within the one country in eleven instances.

The United States, France and West Germany each have four affiliates, Italy has three, and there are two each in Australia, Austria, Brazil, Britain, Canada, Mexico and Uruguay. Disregarding the handful of miniature states, all European countries are represented except Ireland; Iceland and Luxemburg are observers, and all the rest are members. As well as those doubly represented, the Latin-American countries affiliated are Argentina, Bolivia, Columbia, Cuba, Peru and Venezuela. The eight Asian nations associated are Bangladesh, China, India, Indonesia, Israel,

the two Koreas and Vietnam. Africa has just four observers — Algeria, Angola, Congo and Egypt. South Africa has a well established film archive, but can scarcely expect to come under a UNESCO umbrella, and otherwise the most surprising omission is Japan, which, however, has a nascent archival institution. The languages FIAF uses in meetings and publications are French and English; Russian is also officially designated but little used, and Spanish is now working its way towards full acceptance.

With its strong commitment to the preservation of the world's heritage of moving images, FIAF extends a unifying influence around the globe. Specifically, it encourages communication and exchange amongst its membership in regard to films, documentation, and technical information; it sponsors staff training courses and publishes indexes, bibliographies and directories; in promoting standards, it has established codes of professional conduct and procedures for preservation, cataloguing and control. Each year it distributes three sturdy volumes containing the annual reports of all the affiliates, the minutes of the general meetings (congresses), and a summary of its symposium sessions, while a continuing link and channel of intelligence between the congresses is provided in a substantial Information Bulletin generally issued twice yearly.

### **Stockholm 1983**

This year the symposium that always attaches to the congress was of a highly technical nature and was a joint gathering with FIAT (International Federation of Television Archives). The combined operation and the attractive location ensured a much higher attendance than is usual for a FIAF congress, namely some 175 participants from over 50 countries. While the usual strong lead was taken by the advanced industrial nations of both east and west, the under-developed countries were also given much encouragement in the task of preserving their national heritages of film. Generous support from the Swedish authorities and UNESCO enabled sixteen delegates to attend from various countries in Africa, Latin America and South-east Asia, some of which have not yet sought affiliation. These delegates were able to take part in workshop sessions revolving around the basic needs of a newly-created archive in a tropical or sub-tropical climate.

The main body of workshop sessions, seminars, lectures and exhibitions focussed on research and experience with the latest developments in film and video preservation. The items of modern equipment on display included the Fica-box film conditioning apparatus at work and a laser videodisc in use as a cataloguing and research device, in this case in application to stills and lobby cards. Aided by graphs and statistics projected from transparencies, the technical experts dealt with such matters as image stability and colour fading in film, quality control of film copying at laboratories, and the enhancement and longevity of videotape. To illustrate the restoration and copying of a difficult item of nitrate film, a

screening was given of 'The Woman Suffers — While the Man Goes Free', the 1918 production which the Last Film Search recently unearthed in Adelaide. Delegates were offered guided tours of nitrate vaults, film and television laboratories, and the documentation department within the well-equipped building which was the chief venue, the Cinemateket of the Svenska Filminstitutet. Convivial midday meals were taken in its Helan och Halvan restaurant (ie Laurel and Hardy; literally: Whole and Half). In addition to organised tours of city and harbour and an official luncheon at the famed City Hall, another bonus was a reception at the National Art Museum where there was an exhibition of Swedish film posters; spanning 85 years these advertised both Swedish and foreign films, and quite justly Garbo and the Bergmans figured prominently.

At the conference the Austrian delegates outlined some of their ideas for the symposium to complement next year's congress in Vienna, which will relate to non-industrial or unofficial cinema. The emphasis at New York in 1985 will again be on the crucial subject of preserving colour film, and doubtless the proximity of Eastman Kodak at Rochester will be fully exploited.

It was merely a matter of coincidence that Swedish television screens were just at this time treated to such a flood of Australian productions that the irate citizens registered their protests in the national press!

### **Australia's Part**

Australia can take some pride in its increasing involvement with FIAF in recent years. From 1976 to 1979 FIAF had another observer from Australia — the Association for a National Film and Television Archive, which supplied two annual conferences with a delegate, Barrie King of Perth. This association was formed in 1974 to press the need for making adequate provision for preserving the country's film heritage. In its self-described roles of catalyst and watchdog, it claims it had a degree of success on the home front and improved FIAF's understanding of Australia's film archive position.

Though long a member, Australia's National Film Archive has lately come well to the fore in its contribution to FIAF's work and ideals. Its Film Preservation Officer, Dr Henning Schou, took a prominent part in the proceedings at Stockholm, and he is currently president of the Preservation Commission, one of FIAF's several continuing committees.

Australia is also taking a vigorous lead in the realm of regional co-operation. Ray Edmondson, Director of the National Film Library, developed contact with the emerging Japanese film archive when he went to Tokyo in 1980 to launch the 'retrospective' of Australian films which travelled widely under UNESCO's auspices. Mike Lynskey, until lately the Curator of the National Film Archive, last year visited China, India and several South-east Asian nations by way of a cultural exchange arranged

also by UNESCO. China has since returned the visit, and its film archivists have clearly shown that they attach much importance to the membership and framework of FIAF. Three trainees from Indonesia and Malaysia also came to Canberra for a month last year to gain practical experience at the National Film Archive.

In comparison with other developed countries, Australia is labouring under Herculean difficulties to cope with the great quantity of film and videotape it ought to preserve for posterity, and it is therefore all the more praiseworthy that Canberra has accepted the responsibility of being host to the 42nd congress of FIAF in 1986. To offset the high cost of travel to Australia, many of the overseas delegates will be subsidised by funds which the National Film Archive is confident of securing from government and commercial sources. Among other things, it is hoped that a successful conference hosted by Australia will impress upon rather benighted home authorities the importance of this nation's film archives.