



University of California
San Diego
News

American and Russian children, parents and filmmakers talked to each other during a live, simultaneous satellite videocast between the University of California, San Diego and the 13th International Film Festival in Moscow on the morning of Wednesday, July 20.

UCSD's Department of Communication engineered the event, a first in international information transmission. Films for children were the focus of the hour-long telecast. Approximately 150 participants, led by UCSD professor Michael Cole, were gathered in UCSD's Mandeville Recital Hall. The hundred children in the American audience, aged 5 through 15, were invited by the Department of Communication to be participants. They were chosen from a summer computer camp on campus, an alternative school called the Learning Tree and school children from the San Diego minority community. The group was linked by a large screen television transmission to a studio in Moscow, where a similar group, moderated by Russian journalist Vladimir Posner, was assembled. The two groups viewed film segments from each country followed by questions from the children.

Three American and three Soviet filmmakers were seated in the studios ready to show segments from their works. At UCSD Shanta Herzog, director of the American Center of Films for Children, made a brief introduction; director Robert Radnitz introduced a clip from his film, "Sounder;" actress Shelley Duvall, executive producer of Faerie Tale Theater, showed "Sleeping Beauty," and director John Matthews screened "Curious George Goes to the Hospital."

The Soviet film segments which were transmitted from Moscow included two of Vladimir Grammatikov's comedies, one about adolescent rebellion, the other on computers in the classroom; a fairy tale on the temptations of gold by Alexander Metta, and an animated "Winnie the Pooh" by Fyodor Khitruk.

The dialogue between the children and filmmakers centered around the common concerns of love of parents and of animals, the outsmarting of teachers by students, scary movies and the place of mischief in society.

This event occurred through the efforts of individuals in each country who believe in the power of modern technology to increase international understanding. While in Moscow attending a seminar, Cole was approached by representatives of the Soviet media. Excited by the simultaneous telecast between participants at the US Festival in San Bernardino and a Moscow studio filled with musicians and students last May, the Soviets wanted to try to create a similar experience, using the occasion of the 13th International Moscow Film Festival.

When Cole returned home, he presented the idea to his colleagues in the Department of Communication at UCSD and to Sherman George, acting campus media manager.

George immediately began to investigate the technical feasibility of the enterprise and within the week had most problems worked out.

"We viewed this as an experiment to determine if a public university can develop this new form of communication," explained Helene Keyssar, producer of the event and the chairperson of the department. "Our intention was to reveal the universal principles of understanding that enable films to communicate across national boundaries and to demonstrate that serious discussions are possible if we keep to topics that involve science, popular culture and basic human values.

"Response from around the country," continued Keyssar, "suggests that we succeeded beyond our expectations in setting a model of exchange of information among citizens for whom knowledge of the rest of the world is often difficult to obtain. The Soviets have deemed the program such a success that they will rebroadcast it on prime time TV.

(more)

VIDEOCAST USSR/USA
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"In addition, they have reported to us that they will quickly create a new state committee to support and encourage more simultaneous satellite broadcasts. We at UCSD are exploring possibilities here, too, for further broadcasts."

Support for the American involvement in the satellite transmission was provided by private foundations, the volunteer labor of many of the participants and the staff of the Department of Communication at UCSD.

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