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Jeff Lumby's view from the country

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Show me the Money

"Hey, wanna go see a movie?"
"Sure!"
"Great, you get the listings, and I'll call the bank."

The other night, we did something we haven't done in a long time. No not that, no. We went to the movies. You remember, that once quaint outing where you'd grab a bite then stroll over to the theatre and have a few laughs. The entire night might have cost you \$50.00. That won't even get you past the concession these days.

Hollywood is in trouble. They've just endured one of the most costly slumps in the history of talkies. In the 18 weekends since February, North American box offices have dropped nearly 13%. The Canadian plunge has been even worse falling over 17% in sales. The downturn, which officially ended the weekend of June 17th, has Hollywood mucky-mucks scratching their heads. Really? Well don't scratch too hard or you'll be pulling slivers out of your fingers.

In my opinion, determining the moviegoer's loss of interest in the product is about as simple as cracking the whole 'how they get the caramilk in the caramilk bar' puzzle. To use an industry term, I call it the Perfect Storm of events. For me the whole turn-off began with the advent of the multi-plex goliath.

Going to the movies used to be about more than the movie itself. The whole evening was an experience. That included sauntering into a movie house that took you back in time, or at least removed you from the reality of the day. The old Capitol Theatre in Saskatoon was beautiful. Similar to Massey Hall, it had two balconies, side loges and an entrance and lobby that instantly put you into the movie world. I remember watching the entire *Planet of the Apes* series one night when I was a kid. Sure we walked out of there with our knuckles dragging on the ground but it only cost \$2.75. There's nothing charming about a theatre complex called Colossus.

Then there's the cost. The other night

when I saw the numbers \$13.95 pop up as I was buying the tickets, I subconsciously pulled out a twenty before realizing that that was only for one. 28 bucks just so two people can have the privilege of lining up to buy popcorn? Nicole Kidman better be escorting me to my seat for that. As we got closer to ordering our treats, I began dreading the anticipated "upsizing" routine. All I wanted was a small popcorn and a small drink. Sure enough after ordering just that, the girl held up this tiny bag and asked if I'd like to upsize to a regular for only 25 cents more. Since it appeared that the bag on display couldn't hold a handful of unpopped corn, I went for the bigger popcorn. She then proceeded to try and up sell me the "We are the World" size diet coke. You know, the one that comes with its own catheter. No thanks. I didn't go to the movies just so I could have the Black Sea gurgling around in my stomach. So after a modest meal, tickets and snacks, they're into me for way over 100 bucks. That's nuts.

In his book, *Which lie did I tell*, the Oscar winning screenwriter William Goldman called the 90's the worst decade of film on record. And it doesn't look like this decade is far behind. Goldman cites a huge lack of originality as the culprit. He said that a movie like *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*, which he won Best Screenplay for in 1969, would be laughed out of the boardroom these days. Instead we're subjected to "safe" remakes of good, old movies or adaptations of good, old TV shows. Even this week alone, 6 of the top ten box office pictures are either remakes, sequels or adaptations. Pathetic. I don't want to see a movie version of *Bewitched*... ever. I already saw the first *The Longest Yard*, how much longer could it get? I went to the original *Star Wars* movie in the late 70's and now they're asking me to go to the prequel of a prequel in 2005. My brain doesn't have the capacity to store that much useless information. The force is not with me.

A lot of critics will tell you the main reason for box office declines can be blamed on illegal downloading. No way! I mean really, who wants to waste time downloading a re-tread piece of crap?

It's unlikely they'll bulldoze all of the multi-plexes out there and there's probably a better chance of the GST disappearing than seeing ticket prices abate. So Hollywood needs to step up the quality of its product and start taking some creative chances again. Please!!!!

PAUL NEWMAN ROBERT REDFORD KATHARINE ROSS

BUTCH CASSIDY AND THE SUNDANCE KID



Where have all the good movies gone?

A Bird's Eye View

WITH RAM NAMBIAR

The Baltimore Oriole (*Icterus galbula*)

It was Linnaeus, the great Swedish naturalist and classifier, in 1776, who named this brilliant orange and black beauty -the 'Baltimore Oriole'. He did so in honour of Cecil Calvert, a famed British Colonial officer, who settled in Maryland U.S.A, in 1634. The settlement was called Baltimore and Calvert when called back to England was honoured by Queen as Lord Baltimore. His Lordship's coat of arms carried the orange and black colour, same as that of the gorgeous male oriole he took with him from North America. Small wonder, they chose Baltimore Oriole as the State bird of Maryland.

First week of May, trees not leafed out yet, but orioles are back again from south, in the Halton region's woodlands, to nest. A bird of shade trees, the Baltimore oriole can now be seen probing into the petals of crab apple blossoms for insects.

The spring male sings often. It can be a whistle or flute-like, depending on the individual male, but can often be heard from afar. It intensifies when female arrives in few a few days. No match to the flaming flares of the lord, but a simple olive on the back and yellowish-orange on the breast, that is what the lady Baltimore wears.

Enticed by his persistent 'territorial' and 'greeting' songs, she enters his real estate. He may prove it to her how flamboyant he is, and may soon allow her to feed on the same tree or branch, all signs of a pair formation. Rival males and their trespassing are vehemently opposed and are chased out in flight. Two feathered fireballs tumbling, zigzagging at high speed, both somewhat violent in nature, could nevertheless be a pleasing spectacle to a behaviourist. After a short courtship the male mounts her.

Nest building is the next item on the agenda. The female doesn't seem to require any help in this task. The writer once watched most, if not all, of the construction by a female oriole on the branches and leaves of a riverside weeping willow. Carried in her bill was thread of fibres, whitish-grey hair, long yarns, few even

clinging to her claws. The foundation was done by looping and weaving the yarn against the stem by her crafty needle -the beak.

Six days passed. Now, there hanged among the thick foliage and twigs of the willow, the finest work of art, a completed nest of a Baltimore oriole!

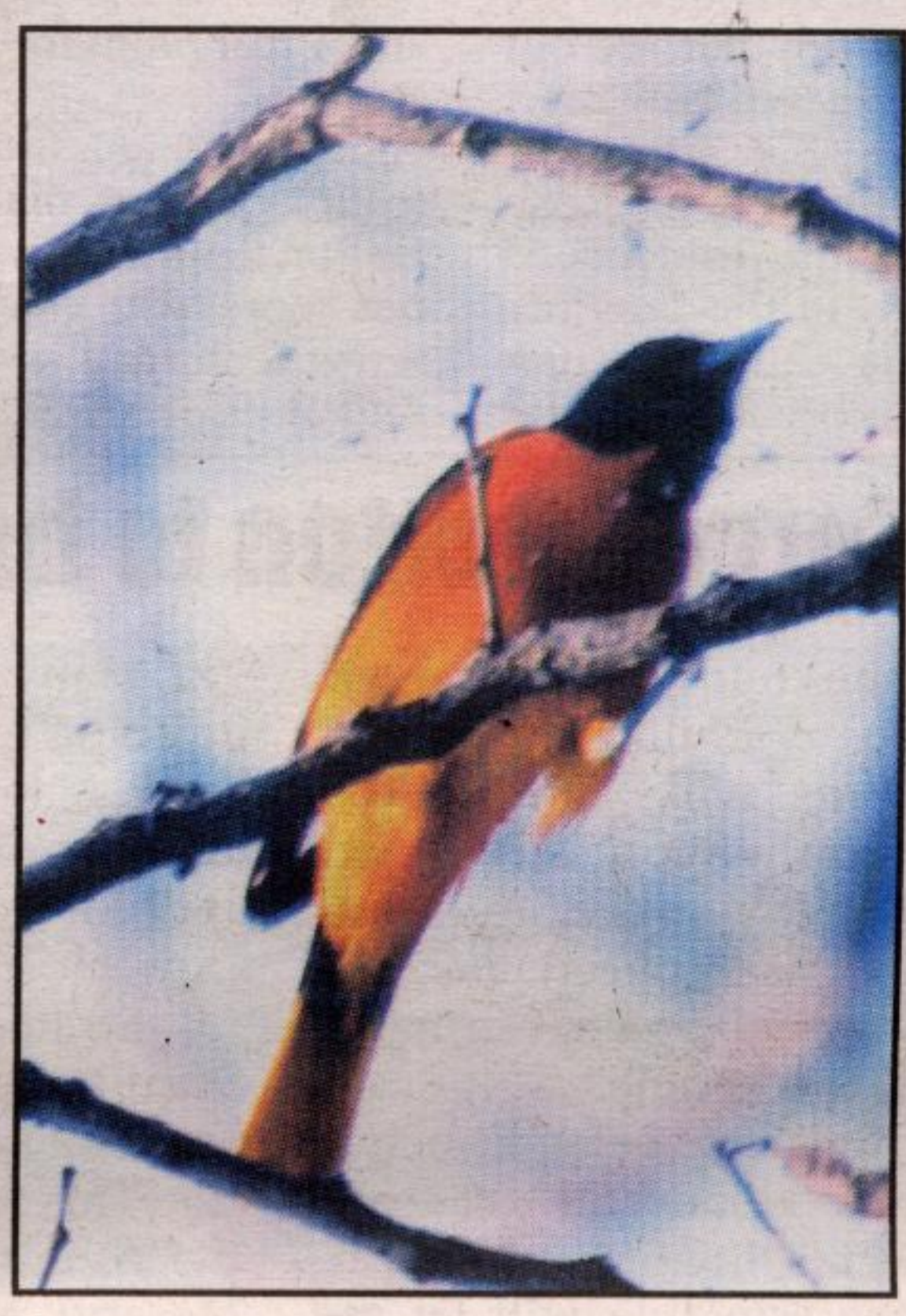
It resembled an old-fashioned granny handbag, slung up there to hide her treasures from her inquisitive grand children!

She does the incubation also. Farther from the nest site is the male perched on top of a spruce tree singing loud, as though giving moral support to her.

By the second week of June, it appeared that the eggs have hatched. Parental care awakens in orioles now, more so in male. He takes aggressive stand in terms of defence and protection of their young. When a gull hovered low near the active nest, the vigilant male was seen leaving the woods as a small orange missile speeding at 45 degree angle and striking the target with an astonishing precision and driving it out of the area.

Feeding the four (mostly) young was done mainly by male. He brings in flies, caterpillars more often. Even after the young leave the nest, he responds to the food begging calls of them and continues the job tirelessly.

In October, the surviving orioles will wing their way south to their winter quarters of either Mexico, Costa Rica or South America's Columbia about 4000 kilometres away. Next spring, they will be back in their birthplace in Halton woods. Unfortunately, the first year spring male will not be as attractive as the true adult Baltimore. The breast will be lighter orange and the colour of the hood rather dull black. The returning male in the spring after, however, will be in full nuptial plumage. We sure hope so. The springtime in Halton region woods will not be the same without their bright colours flashing above and their alluring whistles that break the silence of our woodland wilderness



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