

SCREEN INTERNATIONAL

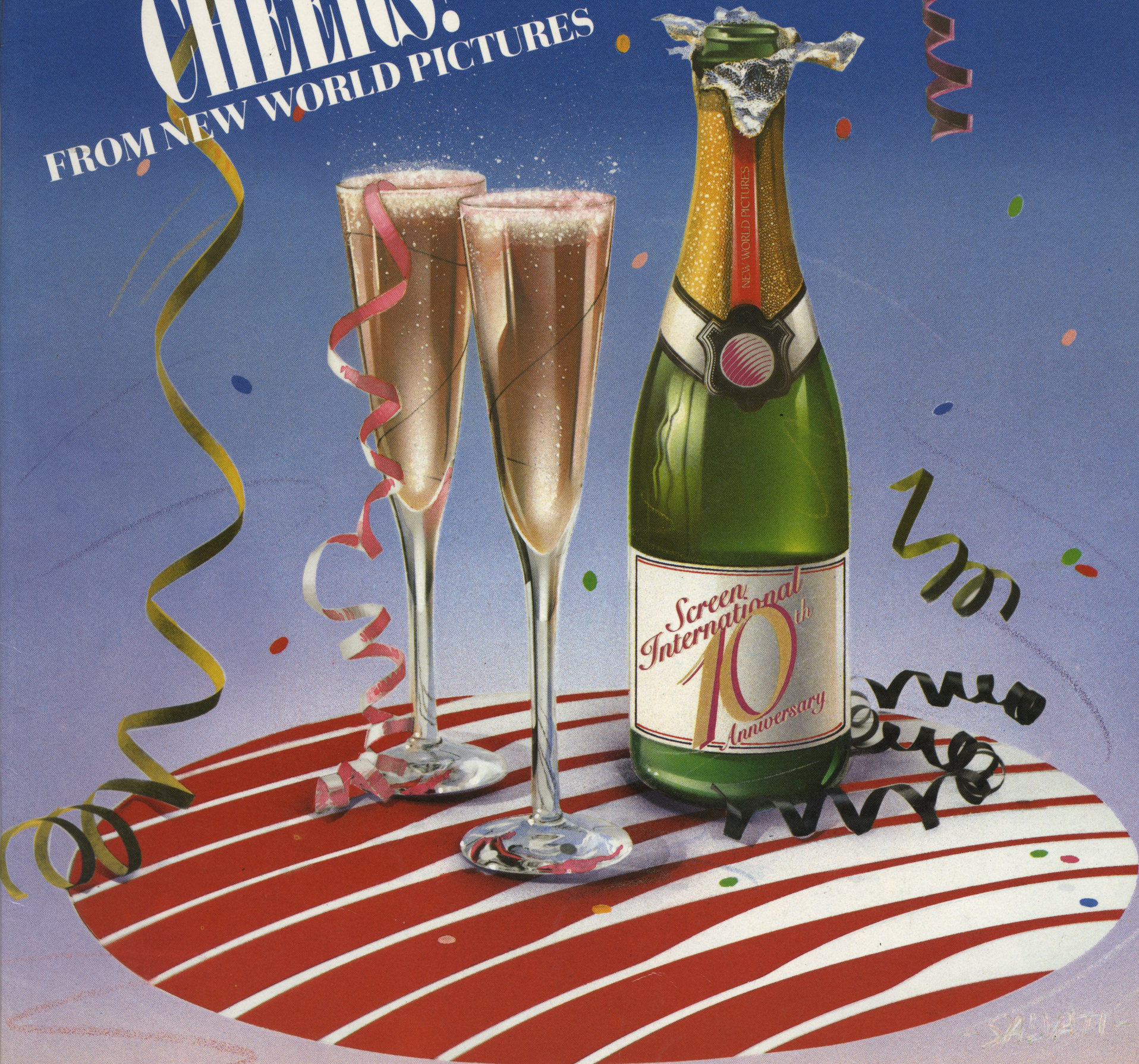
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CHIMERS!
FROM NEW WORLD PICTURES



NEW WORLD PICTURES

1984

● From page 54

"Paris, Texas". **Sergio Leone's** "Once Upon A Time in America" premieres at the festival. The Cannon Group has a busy month — in the UK it acquires Gala Film Distributors; in Sweden it sells its catalogue for satellite distribution; in Japan it sells four films; it completes deals for the distribution of its pictures in Italy, France and Belgium; it announces a number of co-production deals for films to be made in Europe. Goldcrest raises £22 million share capital as part of a major restructuring of the company in which it ceases to be a subsidiary of S Pearson. **Saul Steinberg** increases his holding in WDP from 9.3% to 11.1%. "I don't know what Mr Steinberg is attempting to do, but we are going to come out of this all right," said Disney's chief executive, **Ron Miller**. 20th Fox and Virgin combine to co-distribute Virgin-produced and acquired films while TESE signs a distribution deal with **David Begelman's** Gladden Entertainment Corp. "The Jewel In The Crown" and "An Englishman Abroad" share the major programme awards presented by the Royal Television Society. In the

continuing upheavals at TV-am, editor-in-chief **Greg Dyke** resigns, blaming changes in management policy as his reason for leaving. Actress **Diana Dors** dies.

JUNE

STEVEN SPIELBERG's "Indiana Jones And The Temple Of Doom" sets an all-time box office record for a first week's opening in the US by taking \$42,267,345 in six days. The Steinberg/Disney affair reaches its climax with Disney paying \$297.4 million to buy back Steinberg's stake in the company and an additional \$28 million for "out of pocket expenses". This gives Steinberg a \$59.8 million profit on his original investment and provokes stockholders to file eight lawsuits against Disney directors charging them with wasting corporate assets. The Steinberg case is quoted as an example of "greenmail" — the practice of buying stock in a corporation and frightening its executives into buying it back at a premium out of fear of a takeover. **Mamoun Hassan**, managing director of the National Film Finance Corp for five years, announces he will relinquish his post and return to

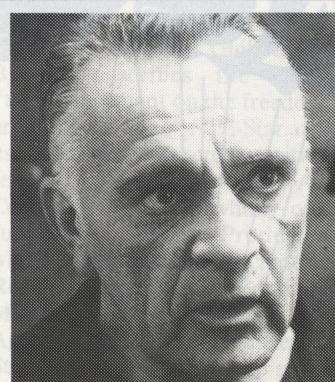
independent production. Fire destroys the massive 007 stage at Pinewood Studios, being used for **Ridley Scott's** multi-million pound film "Legend" and soon to be taken over by the 14th Bond film, "A View To A Kill". Bond producer **Cubby Broccoli** says rebuilding work will start after the insurance investigation. **David Lean** receives a knighthood and Elstree Studios' **Andrew Mitchell** an MBE in the Queen's Birthday Honours. Legal battles over "Cotton Club" wind on in LA with **Robert Evans** being reinstated as producer and being awarded the right to oversee distribution and marketing of the film. "1984" wraps on time, but the budget is believed to have soared to twice the original estimate of £2.5 million. Director **Joseph Losey** dies, having just completed his film version of the hit play "Steaming". Comedian **Eric Morecambe** and producer **Carl Foreman** also die.

JULY

FILMS MINISTER **Kenneth Baker** publishes the long-awaited White Paper on films policy. Main proposals are the scrapping of Eady



● Mahmud Sipra bought Ireland's Ardmore Studios for \$1 million in August.



● Richard Burton died in August 1984, days after finishing work on "1984".

levy (with the suggested extension of the levy principle to TV and tapes being rejected) and the privatisation of the National Film Finance Corporation. The Paper gets a distinctly chilly response from the industry — while there is wide agreement that Eady has to go, there is disappointment that no practical incentives for the future growth of the industry are put forward. The AIP mounts an all-industry campaign to lobby MPs during the course of the White Paper's course through Parliament. The Video Recordings Bill completes its passage through Parliament to now become law — it provides for fines up to £20,000 for people dealing in unclassified videos. Goldcrest's **Guy East** is elected to the AFMA board. A threatened strike by the Directors Guild of America is averted by a vote of 157 to 2,500 in favour of a new contract offered by producers and TV networks. The US film ratings board is changed for the first time in 16 years with the introduction of a new PG 13 classification. MGM/UA Entertainment Co closes its London office. Fire damages a storage building and equipment at Bray Studios. Thames TV decides to set up its own satellite TV station aimed at the 10 million English-speaking homes in Europe. The BBC is left with a monopoly on coverage of the Olympic Games in LA after ITV companies pull out in a row over the number of technicians to be used. TV-am's editor **Clive Jones** resigns over his station's decision not to cover the games... Jones had been editor for just five weeks. The Director of Public Prosecutions levels obscenity charges against Palace Video for distributing the hit "The Evil Dead", the number one video rental title in 1983. Actress **Dame Flora Robson** and producer/screenwriter **Ernest Tidyman** die.

AUGUST

TWO STUDIOS change ownership — Lee Electric Lighting pays £3,675,000 to take over the 23-acre Shepperton Studios and shipping magnate and film producer **Mahmud Sipra** buys Ireland's Ardmore studios for \$1 million. In a further expansion in Holland, the Cannon Group agrees to buy the City chain of cinemas comprising 18 screens in key Dutch cities. Cannon already controls 27 Tuschinski screens acquired from Rank. In Australia, Rank's 50% stake in the Greater Union Film Group is the subject of acquisition moves by Amalgamated Holdings. Greater Union controls 200 cinemas and drive-ins Down Under. Trouble stirs again at Disney. WDP's plans to buy a greetings card company for over \$300 million are opposed by Minneapolis investor **Irwin L Jacobs** who says the price is too high and a waste of corporate assets. Faced with Jacobs' move to call a special stockholders' meeting, WDP drops the take-over. Disney chairman **Raymond L Watson** says the "siege society" and "contentious atmosphere" they were surrounded by was interfering with the running of the company. UK film leasing company Albion Films launches a \$22 million investment plan for the co-financing of features with Hollywood studios, starting with four from 20th Fox and Warner Bros. Thames TV announces record pre-tax profits of £13.2 million. **Richard Burton** dies, days after finishing work on "1984" and one day before he was due to start filming "Wild Geese II". **James Mason**, writer **J B Priestley** and film and theatrical agent **Aida Foster** also die.

SEPTEMBER

MUSICAL CHAIRS at the Hollywood majors. In the course of seven days executive ranks at three studios are in turmoil with the resignation of **Ron Miller** from Disney, **Alan Hirshfield** from Fox and **Barry Diller** and **Michael Eisner** from Paramount. Diller goes to Fox



● "The Evil Dead" — distributor Palace Video named in obscenity charges in July.

to succeed Hirschfield while Eisner moves to the troubled Walt Disney Productions to replace Ray Watson and pledge an increase in production. Warner Bros' **Frank Wells** also moves to Disney, to take over from **Ronald Miller**, while back at Paramount **Frank G Mancuso**

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THE BRITISH FILM INSTITUTE

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FOCUS ON BRITAIN

PALACE PICTURES advocates taking an organic approach to every aspect of films and the cinema in the UK. This means, for example, that we are involved in films at every stage, from developing the idea, through production and distribution all the way through to the opening. The energy that's there at the start of the film follows through to the release and has an impact at each stage along the way.

We have found that nobody brings as much energy and enthusiasm to a film as the producers. It's that kind of input that proves invaluable when it comes to marketing, to selling the movie to the media and the public.

As an example, I would say that the films that we have been involved with as producers have been the ones that we have handled most successfully in the market.

It is this all-round, organic approach that is probably our trade mark and is the one invaluable benefit of working in a small, young company that cares about film.

In more general terms, I would say that on the whole the situation in Britain is good. We are very optimistic and I personally got very fed up with the constant chorus of doom that you hear up and down Wardour Street.

Of course, we have problems. Britain has an archaic, dinosaur-like industrial infrastructure that is no longer efficient in the business of showing movies. Everything that we have done successfully has been done in spite of that infrastructure and usually against the advice of most of the people in it.

But the way that the video market has rooted itself in the national culture — becoming an intrinsic part of the way people behave — shows that there is a real, live,

Palace Pictures advocating an organic approach to cinema

Paul Webster, managing director of Palace Pictures, ponders on the problems of marketing films in the UK

vibrant market for movies. Our job is to reach it, not expect it to reach us.

Also, despite the doom-laden prophecies, the fact is that the UK market has a far greater significance in the world than the figures would suggest. It is in some way representative of the possible performance of films outside the US and people look very closely at what we're doing here. One bad effect of this is that we are expected to pay very high prices for films that we want to release. We know that a film might take some money in the West End, perhaps in Dublin and on video, but we're negotiating in telephone numbers. We pay the same prices as France, which is a much bigger market.

Tribute

It is a tribute, if an expensive one, to the way we are perceived in the world.

Now that kind of attention is being intensified because we are experiencing a very welcome burst of enthusiasm for the cinema in the industry here. Admissions are up, and everyone has plans for new buildings or refurbishment.

All of this is welcome, of course. With decent facilities, programme choice and sensible seat prices, combined with lively and imaginative marketing the only missing ingredient is the film. Unfortunately all the rest is worthless if the film is no good.

MARKETING

Our general approach, then, is to look at the particular characteristics of the UK market and to try and play to its strengths. That means making every picture an event. It's not good enough that the film is wonderful. It has to be presented as an event that you, the public, can't afford to miss — something that will enrich all areas of your life. And that means seeing it in the cinema. There is a glamour and a mystique about the cinema that no other medium has. If you're marketing a film as an event then you have to be marketing it for the cinema. Showcasing is not enough. You have to do the whole job and do it well. It's hard work, of course, but the pay off comes not only in box office, but in video release and in television as well. "Diva" is to be shown on television this Christmas, for example, and it will undoubtedly get a much bigger audience than they ever expected on account of the campaign for the theatrical release that we did. Unfortunately, we don't stand to make a penny out of it if it does well on TV, but the point is there.

Our new film, "Letter To Brezhnev", is a good example of film as an event. We've had to spend very little money on it. The subject matter, the Liverpool location, the background to the production, all go to make it a natural with the media. It's easy to identify with and easy to digest. Also, the people who made the movie have put a tremendous amount of energy into the marketing and promotion. Oddly enough they never doubted for a moment that the film was going to be a hit. And they have been proved right. Although it's only a small film, everyone seems to know about it, and the circuits, who dismissed it



● Paul Webster.

the first time round, are now sitting up and paying attention to the figures: it's doing record business.

The trouble is in industry terms that if you want to get good bookings you've got to have a television release. TV is the magic word. It's also incredibly expensive. With "Letter" we've had 52 minutes of television time already, for which we haven't had to pay a penny. If a film has a "buzz" it's something you can't buy. Everyone wants to be part of it. Once you build up excitement, which in the first place comes from the film-makers, then it feeds off itself.

Of course, at Palace we're lucky in that we have a track record and people know us. We haven't hyped ourselves up, we've just worked hard and tried to do things imaginatively.

We're lucky also in being an unstructured company in the traditional sense. We're much more amenable and approachable than most people in Wardour Street and there is what you could call a strong element of youth in our make-up. None of our people are entrenched in traditional forms of behaviour or work practices.

Enthusiasm

We have to employ the same procedures as everyone else, of course, but that is augmented by energy and enthusiasm.

We also have some understanding of an area that is becoming increasingly important in movies: music. In my opinion it's probably too important, but every film has music blaring out at you now. At MIFED the American films aimed at the youth market were not much more than illustrated soundtracks. It's the legacy of the pop promo and it has changed the way people see films. One consequence is that our trailers for "Letter To Brezhnev" and "Absolute Beginners" are more or less pop promos themselves.

Music doesn't open doors automatically but it is something that you have to take into account. I think, for example, that David Bowie's title song from "Absolute Beginners" is going to be a huge hit and will have an enormous impact on the public's awareness of the film.

Despite all these upbeat ideas, however, we still have our

problems. This year has been a real rollercoaster for us, with a number of films not performing well. We know only too well that we have to have mainstream movies pumping money through the system as well as the more interesting, but perhaps more estoric and risky pictures. In future, I think you will find that we have a more aggressive, high profile mix of quality and commercial films, with some, like "Spider Woman", covering both.

Also, we released too many films this year. I think distributors as a whole have to be more selective in what they choose to put before the public. Palace should do six to eight titles a year, as opposed to the 13 we've done this year.

Independents in particular tend to pick up too many films for the UK. They don't do a proper job on them and anyway the public doesn't really want to go and see them.

So Palace is learning from its own mistakes and we won't be sitting back and resting on our laurels or relying on our reputation. We'll be more aggressive and we'll go out there and be right up front, taking lots of initiative and continuing to take lots of risks. It's inevitable that we should change and I'm very optimistic about it.

Hope

In the industry as a whole there are reasons for hope and grounds for anxiety. Everyone wants AMC to succeed in Milton Keynes, but they'll have their work cut out just persuading all those people to regain the cinema-going habit. No-one yet knows what is going to happen at TESE, though I imagine that most will join me in hoping that Gary Dartnall succeeds in his management buy-out. And there is the age-old problem that there are far too many favours done on Wardour Street. It's got to stop. The industry has got to be a lot more hard-nosed and pull itself together.

The entrenched attitudes in this business, against change and innovation, are a major headache. For a company like ourselves it can be a real uphill struggle to get our ideas across and be taken seriously. The ABC circuit, for example, turned down "Letter To Brezhnev", pigeon-holing it as a "small television film". Well the figures, even at the not-so-good houses that we were able to book, have proved them wrong.

Likewise the circuits got the surprise of their lives at the success of "Care Bears". I think "Care Bears" is the most important release of the year for the industry as a whole. I hated the movie, but thought that Miracle handled it brilliantly and have shown that new audiences can be reached if you're prepared to break rules and take the initiative.

We are a small team at Palace. We talk to each other. We are close to production and we are young enough and energetic enough to keep one step ahead. We take pride in what we do and the films with which we are associated. Everybody here is proud of "Company Of Wolves", "Absolute Beginners", "Mona Lisa" and "Letter To Brezhnev". And we're looking forward to taking pride in our releases for 1987 — that's how far we have to look ahead.



● "Letter To Brezhnev" — a media natural.

HAPPY 10TH ANNIVERSARY

and Congratulations
SCREEN INTERNATIONAL
FROM Patricia Lovell
PAVILION FILMS
SYDNEY AUSTRALIA