

TERMINAL VENUS

2003 19m *prod* Canadian Film Centre, *p* Hilipppe Frappier, *d* Alexandre Franchi, *sc* Joelle Bourjolly, Alexandre Franchi, *ph* Brian Harper, Mark Laiberté Else, *ed* Stephen Phipson; *with* Zoie Palmer. Kristin Hinton, Liliane Clune.

In this intelligently constructed tale that shifts back and forth in time and adopts a variety of visual signatures—from Bergmanesque austerity to excess à la Jean-Claude Lauzon—we witness one woman's lonely exploration of herself after learning she has cancer; aggressive cancer. She speaks to other women in the hospital, learns about the sexually deadening impact of chemotherapy and holds close her bewildered son, Sebastian, who fears in silence. Initially seeking sanctuary in notions of beauty (she intones: "as long as I am beautiful, I am not sick"), her world soon fragments into deeper introspection, gestures of denial and even more troubling strategies to cope with her condition. As the woman (played brilliantly by Zoie Palmer) courageously fights the invisible assaults of radiation treatment, there are no narrative palliatives or grand heroics offered in the film to assuage the fear and the pain; neither for her nor for us. Indeed, both are registered in the finely rendered, touching and devastating denouement in which she asks her helpless young son, simply and sadly, "Will you still love me when I am ugly?"

SQUEEZEBOX

2003 16m30s *prod* Canadian Film Centre, *p* Anthony Leo, Andrew Rosen, *d* Andrew Hull, *sc* Loren Rattew, Andrew Hull, *ph* Brian Harper, *ed* Rob Brownridg.; *with* Jonathan Paul, Mary Margaret O'Hara, Jessica Sugar.

Is it Canada's fate to keep polka alive in North America? Recalling that perennial Grammy winner in the polka category is Walter Ostanek, a Canadian; now meet the

Bachs family. While teen accordion prodigy Bradley Bachs (Jonathan Paul) is in his room industriously squeezing another organ, his father, despondent over the decline in polka's popularity in Canada, ends his life in the bathroom. Guilt-ridden and fearing being sent away to Utah to live with relatives, Bradley organizes a Bachs family reunion concert with his sister Lolly and their mother. But will his mother perform the family's signature tune, "Squeezebox"? Will Bradley's performance work with his friends, who are engaged in reshaping other, hipper musical traditions? In its minor and major keys, and somewhere between a messy suicide, a talking dog and sticky onanistic pleasures, Andrew Hull's clever and spirited *Squeezebox*, shall we say, verily pulses with energy and humour. More than a quirky family comedy, Hull's film is also about a Canada in transition; Bradley's friends are busy creatively incorporating polka's peculiar cadences into their urban black musical mosaics; new mixes with old traditions. If all this sounds a bit precious, it is, but not overly so. *Squeezebox* has a winning sense of humour about itself that prevents it from becoming cloying and sentimental. And really, who can resist a film celebrating the arrival of something as irresistible and 21st-century Canadian as "ghetto polka"?

BRU HA! HA!

2002 2m, *p/d/an* Steven Woloshen, *mus* Eric Satie.

Montreal-based experimental animator Steven Woloshen is, like his West Coast contemporary Richard Reeves, keeping alive the artistically vital and often cinematically thrilling non-representational animation style established in Canada by Norman McLaren. *Bru Ha Ha!*, Woloshen's latest offering (he has created a body of remarkable work that now numbers 12 films in two decades), is a lively dance of shapes and scratches on film. Shot in 35-mm wide-screen, no less, the film is a taut, accelerated assemblage of bursts of scratch-on-film images that include both abstract shapes and brief sketches of a camera, fish, insects, plants, humans, numbers, letters and blocks of colour. As with most non-figurative animation, it is concerned more with rhythms of perception and the possibilities of vision than with narrative order and flow. *Bru Ha Ha!*'s propulsive power comes from Woloshen's spirited combinations of light and darkness, recognizable forms and the suggestion of others, and strategic blasts of colour in an otherwise starkly black-and-white palette. Set to a jaunty, startling music score by Eric Satie performed by the Vienna Art Orchestra, *Bru Ha Ha!* is a kinetic marvel of abstract animation.

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