



Vikram Jayanti's *Game Over: Kasparov and the Machine*

In her opening remarks in 2002, Ally Derks, IDFA director, said “many of the films reflect the feeling that the world is on fire.” The cinders were still smoldering in 2003, but the chaos of a blazing fire morphed into a momentous and unambiguous critique of globalization and American hegemony. The plethora of films dealing with post-9/11 discrimination, the war on terror and the fall-out over Iraq made it seem, as Derks said, “that the real weapons of mass destruction were our own governments and the mass media—weapons of mass deception.”

A special program called USA Today was included in the 2003 festival, which examined the many facets of America's superpower status. One of the films in this category was Sarah Goodman's *Army of One*, a fascinating look at three directionless young people who join the U.S. army after 9/11—a failed dancer craving her father's approval, a streetwise Bronx boy who is chuffed about joining “the biggest gang in the world” and a feisty stock broker who

dreams of killing Osama—and are all seduced by what the army has to offer. Like many from their “me” generation, they want instant solutions to their problems. Brought up believing what they inhaled from television, the one thing they have in common is absolutely no sense of who they are. The army offers them an identity, feeding their need for a quick solution, but two years after joining, life is not what they expected.

“One film that I liked very much was *Game Over: Kasparov and the Machine*, which was reminiscent of and structured like that of a Greek tragedy,” said Roodnat. In *Game Over* (a Canada/U.K. co-production), Vikram Jayanti brings Gary Kasparov back to the scene of his 1997, controversial nine-day chess battle against the IBM computer, Deep Blue. The victory by Deep Blue marked a turning point for some scientists who believe they witnessed the birth of the artificial intelligence. “This film did not have a social message, no fighting, no war, nobody got beat up, but it was a battle. A senseless battle,” said Roodnat, adding, “stories aren't often told like that today, and I loved it.”

*Roberta Cowan is an Amsterdam-based journalist covering European affairs for Canadian and European newspapers and magazines.*



Background image, this page and opposite page: Anne Marie Fleming's *The Magical Lillo of Long Tack Sam*

## Toronto Reel Asian International Film Festival

(11/26–30/03)

By Allan Tong

It wasn't easy being an Asian filmmaker in Toronto last year. SARS hysteria crippled the city's filmmaking industry—also hit by the soaring loonie—and unfairly stigmatized the nation's largest Asian community. Amid this backdrop, the seventh Toronto Reel Asian International Film Festival unspooled, exhibiting a strong lineup of films from the Asian diaspora.

The five-day festival (voted Toronto's best small festival by *Now* magazine) opened with Greg Pak's *Robot Stories* (U.S.), a *Twilight Zone*-like collection of four sci-fi films that were funny, poignant, even erotic. The standout segment from this collection was *The Robot Fixer*, featuring a stoic mother (a note-perfect Wai Ching Ho) who sublimates her grief for her comatosed son by completing his childhood collection of toy robots. The lone Canadian

Samuel Chow's  
*Auditions  
to Be the  
Next Canadian*



feature at the festival was the wonderful *The Magical Life of Long Tack Sam*. The latest in Anne Marie Fleming's studies about her family, *Long Tack Sam* skilfully blends animation, still photos and contemporary video to present the colourful life of Fleming's great-grandfather, a Chinese vaudeville magician and acrobat who delighted audiences from Manhattan to Shanghai in the early 1900s. *Long Tack Sam* is part mystery movie, starring Fleming as the sleuth uncovering the long-forgotten Sam across several continents, and part adventure flick where we follow Sam and his inter-racial brood (Austrian wife and two daughters) escaping the intolerant Nazis, then fleeing the Chinese Communists who seized his wealth. Fleming captures the unpredictable and playful persona of her great-grandfather with delightful storytelling wrapped in comic book charm.

All other Canadian entries were either fictional or documentary shorts. Most explored traditional diasporic themes of identity, generational strife and prejudice but a few broke the mould. Newcomer Samuel Chow's *Auditions to Be the Next Canadian* is a clever two-minute medley of snapshots of himself portraying Asian stereotypes by making faces for the camera. In *Chasing Chinese*, student May Chew examines the inner conflict that Canadian-born Chinese suffer in denying yet embracing their ethnicity by taking her camera into places like a Chinese classroom. Though technically amateurish, *Chasing Chinese* is passionate and sincere. Samuel K. Lee explores identity and the generational divide through food. *How to Make Kimchi According to My Kun Umma* captures Lee's aunt preparing

this Korean staple of spicy, fermented cabbage. His charming aunt needles Lee for not speaking Korean and for not being married. Will Kwan's *Don't Toe the Line or Toe Your Own Line (Huron)* is a whimsical record of the performance artist/director spray painting a hopscotch board in a downtown Toronto intersection and filming passersby skipping across or ignoring the child's game.

International films were gutsy, starting with Spencer Nakasako's *Refugee* (U.S.), a vérité documentary that profiles a young Cambodian growing up in San Francisco's tough Tenderloin district. Similarly, Koji Hayasaki's *Leang's Journey* (U.S.) contrasts an upright Cambodian leader in the Bronx, a survivor of the killing fields, who clashes with his rebellious Americanized (pot-smoking, unemployed) daughter. The program *Wherever You Are, You're Home* was exceptional, and included Leonard Lee's *Memoir of a Fortune Cookie Factory* (Canada), a valentine to his family's 30-year-old business; Wook Steven Heo spent a day with a hardworking Korean couple in *Texas Doughnut Shop*; Jane Wong's *Dim Sum (A Little Bit of Heart)* (U.K.), a rare portrait of the Chinese diaspora in England, in this case a grocery-store owner in Liverpool; and Curtis Choy's *Dupont Guy: The Schiz of Grant Avenue* (U.S.) was a shot from the past (an Oscar winner from 1975). In the film, Choy critically looks at how Americans perceive their Asian citizens in an angry, funny rap that gives a nod to the Black Panthers. Although dated, Choy's film is passionate.



May Chew's *Chasing Chinese*

Other films of note included Patrick Epino's *Spunk* (U.S.), a witty look at thick, straight male Asian hair and self-image. Royston Tan's *15* (Singapore) follows three teenage boys who get in and out of trouble in uptight Singapore. The short film thrives on fast cutting and badass attitude, reminiscent of *Trainspotting*.

Vietnamese-American Ham Tram's gorgeously filmed *The Anniversary* (U.S.) tells a poignant parallel story of a family wrenched apart by the Vietnam War. This year's international spotlight shone on Indonesia, a treat considering that few films trickle out of this troubled nation. The searing feature, Garin Nugroho's *Leaf on a Pillow*, was the highlight, taking a painful look at the country's desperately poor homeless children. Memorable for entirely opposite



Spencer Nakasako's Refugee



Will Kwan's Don't Toe the Line or Toe Your Own Line

reasons, Daniel Gordon's *The Game of Their Lives* (U.K.) tells the rousing Cinderella story of North Korea's surprising run at the 1966 World Cup.

While the films themselves were strong, events this year were mysteriously scaled back, which limited networking and camaraderie. Festival sponsorship was down, inexplicable in a city with over half a million Asians, Canada's wealthiest demographic. The workshops offered the obligatory panel of seasoned directors (Fleming, Pak et al.) to impart wisdom to beginners

on how to get a film made. Another workshop brought industry gatekeepers (Telefilm, Showcase, NFB, Canadian Film Centre and Seville Pictures) face to face with filmmakers but failed to address the central question: How does an Asian Canadian get his film shown to the public? The speakers, all of them white, neglected to differentiate between films made in Asia and films made by Asian Canadians. What was the point?

*Allan Tong is a Toronto filmmaker and freelance journalist.*

Background image: Daniel Gordon's *The Game of Their Lives*

Mark Achbar and Jennifer Abbott



## Sundance Film Festival

(1/15-25/04)

By Peter Howell

A funny thing happened at the 2004 Sundance Film Festival. People actually noticed Canada.

This is no small thing at Sundance, which was created 20 years ago by Robert Redford to promote and nurture films from that insecure superpower called the United States of America. Going to Sundance to promote Canadian film is a bit like going to the Super Bowl to promote the CFL. And Sundance 2004 didn't just notice Canada, it also handed out laurels to America's northern neighbour. Canadian films won two top awards at the annual celebration of cinema independence in this ski-town high in Utah's Wasatch Mountains.

*The Corporation*, a critical and scathingly funny look at business history by British Columbia filmmakers Mark Achbar and Jennifer Abbott, took the Audience Award World Cinema:

Documentary. The movie was also a runner-up audience-prize winner at the most recent Toronto International Film Festival. *Seducing Doctor Lewis*, by Quebec's Jean-François Pouliot, won the Audience Award World Cinema: Dramatic. Like *The Corporation*, the film takes a broadside at questionable business practices. *Seducing Doctor Lewis* is about the humorous efforts of a small Quebec town to persuade a big-city doctor to take up residence, to prevent the closing of an essential factory. The film premiered at Cannes last year.

The double wins for Canada represented the best showing for Canadians at Sundance, in a year that also saw a record number of Canadian movies screening in Park City's festival theatres. There were nine Canuck features and 10 shorts at Sundance 2004, a haul that included Guy Maddin's wacky Depression-era satire *The Saddest Music In The World* and Bruce LaBruce's censor-baiting hard-core sex comedy, *The Raspberry Reich*. Our reputation as a country with a perverse sense of humour was well maintained. More important, we were seen as a player in the international film community, and not just a branch-plant extension of Hollywood. If this seems like an overstatement, consider that the official press guide to Sundance 2004 listed the names of the 37 countries represented at the festival. The list included Burkina Faso, Democratic Republic of Congo, Fiji and Luxembourg, not exactly the first names that spring to mind when people think of film. Yet Canada didn't make the list, undoubtedly through some oversight, but a very telling one, nonetheless. So not only is Canada viewed as the 51st state in the eyes of many