

The programmers and organizers of Montreal's Festival du Nouveau Cinéma (FCMM) were under twice the pressure to perform this year, given the timing of their event. The festival kicked off at almost the same moment that Telefilm and SODEC were attempting to decide who would win the Montreal festival sweepstakes. FCMM was one of four groups which have applied for the money that was previously earmarked for the Montreal World Film Festival (MWFF).

(10/14–24/04)  
By Matthew Hays

## Le Festival du Nouveau Cinéma

However, FCMM delivered on what has become an increasingly tricky high wire act. On the one hand, the festival has tried to present exciting feature films that have gained buzz after the Toronto International Film Festival



Catherine Breillat's *Anatomy of Hell*

(TIFF)—this year, it included Todd Solondz's pleasingly strange *Palindromes*, Niels Mueller's *The Assassination of Richard Nixon*, Jonathan Caouette's *Tarnation*, Catherine Breillat's *Anatomy of Hell*, Mike Leigh's *Vera Drake*, Olivier Assayas's *Clean* and Almodovar's *Bad Education* among others—and at the same time, the festival has had to work hard to avoid the impression that it's merely TIFF redux. FCMM does make an effort to highlight short works by more experimental filmmakers, maintaining a degree of focus on film artists like Montreal-based Nelson Henricks, careful not to leave the impression that these filmmakers are pushed to the back of the bus. Simply put, like the Toronto event, FCMM is expected to be all things to all people.

The strength of this festival is that it manages to be a number of different things while not seeming to suffer from any kind of identity crisis. If there was a crisis for a filmgoer, it would probably be the sense that they were losing one's mind; there were a lot of crazy movies in 2004. I, myself, felt a

certain lapse in sanity, but can be forgiven, seeing that I sat through a series of big-screen meditations on sanity and identity. There was *Palindromes*, in which Solondz creates a sequence of sublime absurdity involving a crew of disabled children singing Christian-themed ditties, 'N Synch style. Then there was *Anatomy of Hell*, which plays like a parody of a Catherine Breillat film, in which an Italian porn star lodges a garden rake up the behind of its leading lady. This was followed by *The Assassination of Richard Nixon*, in which Sean Penn munches on ample scenery as a down-on-his-luck American everyman loser. Taken with *Tarnation*, in which the audience is treated to a hallucinogenic reflection on a seriously troubled childhood and mother/son relationship, and you've got one messed-up movie marathon.

FCMM gains by giving more with less. Unlike the much-maligned MWFF, which favours volume by letting in what seems like anything and everything from everywhere and anywhere, FCMM attendees were treated to such a strong lineup that they could be assured of seeing something worthwhile, and what some films lacked in formal experimentation, they tended to make up for in content. Craig B. Highberger's feature documentary on one of Andy Warhol's drag entourage, *Superstar in a Housedress: The Life and Legend of Jackie Curtis*, offered up titillating anecdotes about a funny and vital figure in Manhattan's cultural underworld.



Roy Dupuis in Francis Leclerc's *Mémoires affectives*

# VANCOUVER International Film Festival

(9/23-10/10/04)

By Dale Drewery

The festival's local card was Francis Leclerc's *Mémoires affectives* (*Looking for Alexander*), another entry in the recent spate of Quebec existential let's-get-obsessed-about-mortality movies (a Denis Villeneuve specialty). This one starred the ubiquitous Roy Dupuis. But the local star of the festival was undoubtedly Ryan Larkin, the infamous NFB animator who, after making a number of exhilarating shorts in the 1960s and early 1970s (including the Oscar-nominated *Walking*), faded into a life of severe substance abuse, homelessness and panhandling on Montreal streets. A tribute was given to Larkin with a screening of his early films, followed by two NFB movies, Chris Landreth's 14-minute documentary/animation hybrid *Ryan* (a short the NFB is pushing for Oscar consideration) and Laurence Green's *Alter Egos*, a fantastic documentary about Larkin and the making of *Ryan*. Green manages to unearth some fascinating Canadian film



Chris Landreth's *Ryan*

history here, including the fact that part of Larkin's trouble was dealing with his own homosexuality. It's a thoroughly engaging documentary, one that is as much about the struggles documentary filmmakers face as it is about Larkin himself. Larkin was present at the affair and occasionally heckled the screen when he saw or heard something he didn't like.

The intimacy of the evening made for an incredible festival experience. After the screenings, the audience was invited to meet with Larkin and the filmmakers in the courtyard of the Ex-Centris cinema complex. There, the filmmakers mingled with the public and a number of noted members of Montreal's film community, from SODEC's Harry Gulkin to Daniel Cross (director of *S.P.I.T.*) to NFB veterans Barbara Doran and animator George Ungar. The sense of community was tremendously powerful, as was the sense that the public was having a unique opportunity to connect with cinema in a way that serves as a reminder of what these festivals really should be about. As FCMM grows (and it will grow considerably if Telefilm and SODEC choose it as the new recipient of government funding), a key challenge will be for organizers to maintain this spirit of intimacy and community, something that has sadly been almost completely lost at larger events like TIFF.

Forget the parties, put down that martini, the West Coast film industry has more serious things on its collective mind. "B.C.'s filmmaking community," says Trade Forum producer Melanie Friesen, "is facing some of the toughest market conditions yet." A more robust Canadian dollar, increased global competition, better tax credits in other provinces and U.S. financial incentives to keep American production at home have all taken their toll. The film industry in this province is down 25 per cent over last year, and those who work in it are searching for new ways of doing business. This is where the 19th Annual Film & Television Trade Forum comes in. For four days in September (22-25), amid the bustle of the Vancouver International Film Festival, 1,000 delegates, guest speakers and the media talk about everything from adapting material for the screen, to international co-productions, to the business of low-budget episodic television.

One of the most interesting discussions centered on the rapidly growing DVD market and the implications for filmmakers everywhere. As of June of 2004, DVD sales in Canada have risen by 100 per cent over last year, and the majority of people with DVD players say they'd rather watch movies at home on DVD than see them in theatres. "The DVD is sexy," says Martin Wragg, Canadian V.P. and managing director of MGM. "It's suddenly become a product that you are proud to own as opposed to something that you have in a box hidden away." Read VHS. Although the format still accounts for 24 per cent of Home Entertainment sales, Wragg is hardly a fan. "If you look at it, a VHS is not a particularly attractive piece of kit," he says with his Scottish lilt. "It's big and it's clunky and it falls to pieces."

"The adaptation rate for DVD is amazing," says Linda Sanderson, V.P. of purchasing at Rogers Video. "We got into it at the very beginning, around 1997, and all of a sudden 2000 hit and it's been a wild ride ever since. DVDs went from 10 per cent of our rental business to over 90 per cent, and they account for almost 100 per cent of the movies that we sell." In fact, the DVD market is moving so quickly it's starting to drive the film business. "Home Entertainment is making its own product," says Wragg. "*Species 1* and *2*, for example, were theatrical releases and very successful for us. So we just made *Species 3*. It had a \$5-million budget, but it was made as a straight-to-DVD release."