

# From Sea to Sea



Stephen Reynolds's *The Divine Ryans*

## Montreal

With Quebec's three most important film festivals (the veteran World Film Festival, the funky upstart Festival of New Cinema and New Media, and the always surprising Festival du Cinéma en Abitibi-Témiscamingue) come and gone, and a rather low-key presence of Quebec productions in all of these events, one has to wonder what happened to all the Québécois films shot over the past year. Truth is a lot of Quebec's stellar filmmakers and top indie directors are either still in the editing room—including Claude Demers, Charles Binamé, Arto Paragamian, Guylaine Dionne, Robert Lepage, Mario Chabot and Denys Arcand—or in production—including Denis Villeneuve and Philippe Falardeau—leaving us hungry and hopeful for the new millennium lineup.... It was a first-timer who managed to steal the attention of the media and direct one of the most talked about films of the fall, even winning the Best Director prize at the WFF. Louis Bélanger's *Post Mortem* impressed audiences and critics alike with its confident directing and subtle yet quirky treatment of a very unusual love story, that of a mortician who resuscitates a strangled young woman brought into his morgue by making love to her supposed corpse. A morbid subject (already handled with grace by Lynne Stopkewich in *Kissed*), it is given a twist in Bélanger's film, as the two characters, lost, alone and pressured into their own closed-off universes, slowly learn to open up to the world and to love again. *Post Mortem* features a strong performance by Sylvie Moreau in her first starring role for the big screen, alongside the always powerful Gabriel Arcand, one of Quebec's most respected film and stage actors. With its tremendous success in Quebec, one would hope *Post Mortem* gets released in the rest of Canada in 2000. The other film that seemed to gather much attention was a short, *Décharge*, directed by Montrealer Patrick Demers, made such an impression that it snapped up the best short film prize at the Toronto fest last September and has enjoyed an unusually fruitful theatrical career for a short. Produced on a shoestring budget by young Montreal-based production company Quatre par Quatre, *Décharge* actually is a stunning reflection of the combined efforts and particular style of Quatre par Quatre's unique "freestyle crew," which attempts to construct a film as it goes along and transform it at each step, from its rather kamikaze shooting method to its very creative and reconstructive editing sessions.

**Claire Valade**

## East Coast

The 19th annual Atlantic Film Festival unleashed a record number of Atlantic features, including the long-awaited Halifax premiere of hometown boy Thom Fitzgerald's *Beefcake*, along with New Brunswick director Rodrigue Jean's impassioned *Full Blast*, Stephen Reynolds's *The Divine Ryans* and Mike Clattenburg's *Trailer Park Boys*. Clement Virgo's *One Heart Broken Into Song*, produced by Bill MacGillivray from poet George Elliott Clarke's original script, also made its big-screen debut to widely mixed reviews. While *Beefcake* picked up awards for art direction, music score and supporting actor (CBC-TV kid show host Jonathan Torrens), the big winners were *Full Blast* (Rodrigue Jean for Best Director and co-winner for best writing) and Alan Moyle's sparkling *New Waterford Girl*, which won Best Canadian Feature and picked up Best Sound Design for good measure. *The Divine Ryans*, the region's flagship picture for 1999, managed to cop a shared win for best writing (Wayne Johnston's script from his own novel) and the coveted Best Actor in a lead role for young St. John's-based Jordan Harvey. Mike Clattenburg's wild, low-budget comedy, *Trailer Park Boys*, was shown out of competition, as he served on the festival jury. The film, a 75-minute faux documentary about a couple of white trash pest-removal experts, was made—amazingly enough—for less than \$10,000 on digital video in black-and-white. Relentlessly paced and howlingly funny, it represents an exciting, film-agency-free direction for the Atlantic industry.... Nova Scotia's warm, lingering fall and gentle early winter is seeing the most intense period of film activity in its entire history. Five features are underway, all from away except for *Black Harbour* co-creator Wayne Grigsby's *Codename: Caviar*, a drug-bust *policier* that sees Halifax tarting itself up to look like Montreal. Caroline Bell's *Deeply*, starring the redoubtable Lynn Redgrave, is shooting at Mill Coe and Ironbound Island in St. Margaret's Bay, while the CBS MOW *Songs in Ordinary Time*, starring Beau Bridges and Sissy Spacek, is shooting in Windsor at the head of the Annapolis Valley. Finally, Farrah Fawcett is in town shooting another MOW entitled *Baby*, executive produced by Glenn Close. Most Halifax-based producers are ambivalent about this rush of outside work as it gobbles up crews and studio facilities, driving up wages and prices. Local production houses, busy with series television and one-off documentaries, await the new funds for indigenous features promised by the federal government. Perhaps this time next year all the features being shot here will be written, directed and produced by Atlantic Canadians.

**Ron Foley Macdonald**