Cronenberg takes a disturbing premise, the relationship between photography and death, but does little to dramatize it. *Prelude* by Snow, is a typically arbitrary film in which the sound for a narrative piece is presented backwards to the visuals we are seeing on the screen. A nice experiment, but...

...and then there's Maddin. As he has ironically noted, "I thought I'd just lie low in the bushes and ambush some of those other feature filmmakers." He most certainly did, creating a cinematic masterpiece that recalls elements of Lang's *Metropolis*, Eisenstein's *Potemkin* and Murnau's *The Last Laugh*. Shot in a warehouse in Winnipeg, Maddin evokes the magical art direction of the 1920s, combines it with a melodrama worthy of Dickens while gripping audiences with his propulsive editing style. It's a deranged silent classic resurrected like a Frankenstein beast that isn't afraid to strut itself in front of a stage lit with a single word, Kino.

Kino or cinema is what the festival is all about. Maddin has provided Handling with the sweetest of tributes, a work that reminds us all why we give a damn about the movies.

MARC GLASSMAN

NEW WATERFORD GIRL


Fifteen-year-old Mooney Pottie is lying on her back watching the clouds go by, daydreaming about exotic places. With voice-over, she tells the story of her life in a small Nova Scotia town during the 1970s. Mooney is the town misfit, always reading a book, doing her best to ignore what's going on around her. Presently, new neighbours move in next door: the 16-year-old, Lou, and her mother, Midge, a Latin-dance instructor. Lou and Mooney become friends. While putting up flyers around town to attract people to her mother's dance lessons, Lou gets harassed by three local toughs. Meanwhile, Mooney watches a pregnant girl get on a train to go to her aunt in California and envies her for getting out of town. Lou picks Mooney up and they go cruising. She tells Mooney that her father is in jail because he killed someone in the boxing ring. She takes her to a bootlegger and then to a party where they meet another friend who has to go to Antigonish to have her child. A boy at the party who is pestering her becomes Lou's first knockout. The three tough girls seek Lou out, and ask her to find and take care of a two-timing boyfriend; Which she does, decking him with the expression, "if they fall, they're guilty."

Mooney devises a plan to pretend to have sex and get a reputation of being the town "slut," while Lou becomes the instrument of every girl's revenge. Mooney let's her parents know that she's pregnant, and her sisters concur that she's a
Waterford Girl. Lou is at first picked on by the town's tough girls, but when it is discovered that she has inherited her father's knockout punch, the town toughs engage her to punch out one of their two-timing boyfriends. Lou asks, "If I do this, will I be a New Waterford girl?" "No," they say with dumbfounded surprise, "you weren't born here." But Lou does deck the guy anyway and her road to acceptance has begun.

The relationship between Mooney and Lou is the core of the film and there is a great deal of chemistry between them. Balaban has been singled out for her fresh performance in a role that seems written for her (think of Sheila McCarthy's star turn in Patricia Rozema's I've Heard the Mermaids Singing and you get the idea), but it's Spencer-Nairn who carries the film and virtually steals every scene she's in from her co-star. Whereas Balaban plays Mooney as a one-note wonder (her head cocked endearingly to one side, as if expecting the worst, with a winning smile from an elfin face the camera loves), Spencer-Nairn gives the necessary life and energy to the proceedings. Lou's is the more original character and the film's climactic scene is the fight between her and the boxer from Sidney. After a slow start, Lou flattens the guy with a wicked right hook. She finally becomes a New Waterford girl. Mooney's scheme to fool her parents (nicely played with out-of-touch charm by veterans Nicholas Campbell and Mary Walsh) into thinking she is pregnant succeeds with the help of her high school teacher. She gets to leave for New York while Lou happily gets to stay.

Allan Moyle brings over 30 years of experience to what, for him, is essentially a movie for hire. It's Fish's film, there is no doubt about that, but Moyle's deft handling of the material holds it together and he doesn't stoop to the current low ebb in teen comedies. This is no American Pie or Road Trip. The most gross-out thing is morning sickness. Moyle recognizes the subtleties needed to make New Waterford Girl work and he draws out the best from his two inexperienced leads. His choice and use of music is particularly effective, from the opening "Dragging the Line" by Tommy James, to the Canadian-heavy soundtrack, which includes 1970s hits from A Foot in Cold Water, April Wine and The Stampeders.

New Waterford Girl is a rarity in Canadian cinema, artistically and commercially successful at the same time. It's an audience pleaser in the way that so many Canadian features aren't. The only comparison in recent years is that other hit from down east, Mort Ransen's Margaret's Museum. It would seem that despite the film's obvious Canadian trappings, a good story, well-told and well-acted will always draw a crowd, and New Waterford Girl is no exception to that rule.

PAUL TOWNEND

ABBREVIATIONS:
prod—production company; exp—executive producer;
p—producer; ap—associate producer; d—director;
sc—screenplay; ph—cinematographer; ed—editor;
pd—production designer; ad—art director; c—costumes;
sound; sr—sound recording; ed—sound editing;
sfx—special effects; m—music.