



# FESTIVAL

## Wraps

### Berlin Film Festival

BERLIN 2/6 -17/02

By Steve Gravestock

Always the first essential international film event of the year, the Berlin Film Festival has also been one of the most divided. Like Cannes, it's organized into separate official sections—a competition, the Panorama and Kinderfest—and unofficial sections—the Forum and New German Cinema. In the last couple years, though, there seemed to be less and less co-operation, or even communication, between the different sections. Consequently, you couldn't help root for new director Dieter Kosslick, who took over the reins from Moritz de Hadlen, who served as festival head for 25 years.

A regular festival-goer could sense the change almost immediately. There was a definite bonhomie to the opening ceremony, which wasn't even destroyed by the elaborate security proceedings that preceded the two-hour-long event. Indeed, it felt like a love-in, with assorted dignitaries wishing Kosslick well, not one but two live bands, and Kosslick (easily the most approachable and funniest human being to ever run a major film festival) cracking jokes and hamming it up.

The ceremony in terms of length almost threatened to overshadow the opening film, Tom Tykwer's (*Run Lola Run*) much anticipated *Heaven*, based on a script written by

Krzysztof Kieslowski and Krzysztof Piesiewicz. A metaphysical allegory, *Heaven* features American actress Cate Blanchett as a widow whose attempt to kill a prominent businessman/drug dealer goes horribly awry, and Giovanna Ribisi as a young cop who falls for her. Split into three parts (hell, purgatory and heaven), the film's a singular and daring mix of realism and abstraction that divided audiences and won fierce supporters.

This year, the festival paid considerably more attention to recent German cinema. There were several entries in competition, and a new prominence was given to the New German Cinema section, which previously seemed marginalized. My favourite German entries were a paranoid, bizarre sci-fi parody shot in black and white called *Planet of the Cannibals* (reminiscent of last year's cult hit *American Astronaut*) directed by Hans-Christoph Blumenberg, and Henner Winckler's *Klassenfahrt* (*Class Trip*), which focuses on alienated teenagers and suggests early Maurice Pialat in its tough-minded sensitivity. It also boasts several fine performances including Steven Sperling as Ronny, an inarticulate lout who's part class clown, part loser and part underground man, and Sophie Kempe as Isa, the classmate with whom Ronny is obsessed. Also interesting was *Burning Wall*, a Panorama documentary about the largely forgotten members of the East German resistance movement, whose actions led to the collapse of the Berlin Wall, yet have been perversely unheralded.

By far the most celebrated film about German history at the festival was the Austrian documentary, *Blind Spot: Hitler's Secretary*, an audience prize winner. The film's subject is Traudl Junge, Hitler's personal secretary. It caused a stir on its own, but it became even more controversial when Junge died shortly after the film's premiere. Several people told me that they could sense the Junge's will to live ebbing as they were watching the film. However, the most impressive contributions were from South Korea. Jae-eun Jeong's *Goyyangleil butaghae (Take Care of My Cat)* is an exquisite drama about five young women, all recent high-school graduates, who try to hang on to their friendship despite the pressures of adult life. Layered and full of beautifully observed moments, the film is sweetly sympathetic to even its least likable characters. For example, a pompous and insensitive young office worker is humanized when she gets her surprise comeuppance. It is also lightened by unexpected moments of comedy. *Take Care of My Cat* recalls Shunji Iwai's international breakthrough, *Love Letter*, but in place of Iwai's lush, sombre romanticism, Jae-eun substitutes a subtle social conscience mixed with a well-developed sense of the collision between adolescent dreams and adult responsibilities.

At the other end of the aesthetic scale is Ki-Yong Park's *Camel(s)*, a black-and-white digital video production that suggests Abbas Kiarostami's more demanding and formalist work. Ki-Yong drops us into the action with little or no explanation of who his two middle-aged characters are. Clearly they're involved in some sort of assignation, but the

real focus is on their desperation and inability to communicate. When they finally make it to a hotel room, they wind up having a distanced and furtive encounter that leaves them lonelier than they were initially. The film is ferociously claustrophobic, not simply because the principals are confined to cars and restaurants or because Ki-Yong refuses to cut away or let us look away, but because it's penned-in quality perfectly mirrors the character's anomie.

There was a very sizable Canadian contingent at this year's Berlinale, including Catherine Martin's *Mariages*, Carl Bessai's *Lola*, Anne Wheeler's *Suddenly Naked*, Mike Hoolboom's *Tom*, Lynne Stopkewich's *Lilith on Top* and three Kinderfest entries: Guarav Seth's *A Passage to Ottawa* (which won a special mention from the Crystal Bear jury), Peter Markle's *Virginia's Run* and Maria Sigurdardotir's Canada/Iceland co-production, *Regina*. Stopkewich's underrated look at Sarah McLachlan's brainchild was part of an intriguing, markedly different subset of films concentrating on music. Wim Wenders's *Ode to Cologne* pays homage to local rock legends, BAP, and Mika Kaurismaki's exuberant *Moro No Brasil* is a history of Brazil's regional variations on the samba. Slyly funny (a blond giant, Kaurismaki seems like the classic fish out of water as he careens around the Brazilian countryside, interviewing musicians) and ferociously rhythmic, *Moro No Brasil* was probably the best example of and most seductive argument for the festival's theme - accept diversity.

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## Les 20e Rendez-vous du cinéma québécois

MONTRÉAL 2/15 -24/02

By Claire Valade

Founded in 1982 by a group of québécois filmmakers, critics and artists eager to promote and honour their peers, the 2002 Rendez-vous du cinéma québécois marked its 20th anniversary by simply doing what it has always done best: celebrate and recognize new emerging talents in all fields of the medium as well as seasoned veterans or those whose body of works beg to be re-examined, such as Jean-Claude Labrecque and the late Gilles Groulx. In addition, this year the Rendez-vous also took the opportunity to underline the 25th anniversaries of two other important Quebec institutions; the Montreal-based independent distributor Cinéma Libre and production company La Coop Vidéo de Montréal.

The past year was marked by many trends. For one thing, multi-tasking seemed to be the operative word in Quebec cinema. Actors stepped behind the camera, including Stephanie Morgenstern, who impressed with her Prix Jutra-winning short, the intriguing mood piece *Remembrance*, and Robin Aubert, who explored a rough and marginal universe rarely tackled in Quebec cinema with his short *Les Frères Morel*, co-directed with Daniel Grenier. Screenwriters and playwrights took to directing for the first time, including Émile Gaudreault with his megahit *Nuit de*



Catherine Martin's *Mariages*.

*noces*, winner of the 2001 Golden Reel Award, Michel Monty, with the interesting short drama *Adieu Grosny*, and Chilean-born Daniel Diaz, with his well-received short, *Nada*. Also acclaimed documentary director Bernard Émond switched to fiction for his heart-wrenching drama *La Femme qui boit*, which earned the Best Actress Prix Jutra and Genie Awards for Élise Guilbault's riveting portrayal of a lonely alcoholic. Others, it seems, wanted to diversify their artistic output in as many ways possible. Artistic director André-Line Beuparlant, whose name appeared on the credits of two of 2001's most important films—*Mariages* and *La Femme qui boit*—also directed two documentaries, the short *Elvis l'Italiano* and the acclaimed feature *Trois princesses pour Roland*, a harsh and gripping yet incredibly tender cinéma vérité-style portrait of three generations of women stuck in a vicious circle of abuse, violence and poverty.