

FESTIVAL *wraps*

Cannes Film Festival

CANNES, FRANCE (5/15–26/02)

By Tom McSorley

Later, when I am alone, I will say to myself: Welcome to Cannes.

One night on the rue d'Antibes, I am approached by a young man speaking an odd form of French. In my own odd form of French I tell him I'm not interested. He keeps talking, and then demonstrates for me a wrestling move where you defeat your opponent by putting one leg between his two and pull him down. Bewildered, then bemused, then angry, I tell him to back off. He does. A few moments later comes a tap on my shoulder. As I turn around, he calmly hands back my wallet. My meager evening's cash is now in his hands, but all my credit cards and identification are untouched, returned by his own nimble fingers. As he recedes into the night, I smile at him. He smiles back. Upon reflection, I don't even feel like the rube I am, the Cannes rookie who had his pocket picked. Instead, I think that this young, skilled thief is honourable. Then I think that his surprisingly ethical gesture suggests that there is hope in a world wracked by political entropy, disease, poverty and violence.

Enveloped as I am in this warm Mediterranean resort by affluent narcissism, suntanned superciliousness, phantasmagoric preening, pulchritude real and injected, my modest hope is, of course, utterly tenuous. And yet, it is also tenacious. Indeed, the battle for hope—not hope itself, I hasten to add—informs many of the strong offerings at Cannes 2002, from the Official Competition to the Critic's Week to the industry-only screenings in the gargantuan maw that is the Market. As you make your way past the many security guards with metal detectors and very cursory bag searches—a rather half-hearted, almost Ionesco-inspired response to 9/11—you are confronted again and again with films that reveal the face of hopelessness but that refuse its barren totalities.

If the lineup of the Official Competition is any indication, Cannes demonstrated that despite everything there is a renewed strength in world cinema. This section featured new works by a who's who of contemporary international cinema: Kaurismäki, Kiarostami, Leigh, Loach, Bellochio, Oliveira, Sokurov, Moore, les freres Dardennes, Assayas and Polanski (whose Holocaust drama, *The Pianist*, won the Palme d'Or). The Director's Fortnight included films by Catherine Breillat, Werner Schroeter, D.A. Pennebaker and Chris Hegedus; the Critic's Week offered Ulrich Siedl's *Dog Days*, Barbet Schroeder's *More* and Emmanuelle Chiralesse's moving *Respiro Mio*; Un Certain Regard featured affecting works from China, Algeria (especially Yamina Bashir's *Rachida*) and the ensemble film, *Ten Minutes Older: The Trumpet*, with contributions from Wim Wenders, Jim Jarmusch, Werner Herzog, Chen Kaige, Spike Lee, Victor Erice and Aki Kaurismäki. Add the major-star power of Jack Nicholson, Martin Scorsese (who showed a 20-minute reel from *Gangs of New York*), Sharon Stone, Tilda Swinton, Woody Allen (whose senile Hollywood Ending opened the festival) and Charles Aznavour, and you have, by any standard, a memorable year.

Canada, too, had significant presence. David Cronenberg's well-regarded *Spider* was in Official Competition, as was Jesse Rosensweet's animated



Spider



The Stone of Folly

Cannes

short, *The Stone of Folly*. Legendary Quebec actress Carole Laure's *Les Fils de Marie* was presented in the Critics Week. Perhaps most notably, Atom Egoyan's latest feature, *Ararat*, was presented in the Official Selection but out of competition. Egoyan felt that *Ararat*, which deals with the Armenian genocide in Turkey in 1915, should not be shown in competition because, "a whole other political process would then be imposed on what has already become a politicized film." Interestingly, *Ararat's* investigations of history, memory and conflict are echoed in many films at Cannes this year.

In this sense, three relatively modest films set in Jerusalem stand apart. In the context of that city now, each offers perceptive illuminations of and compelling cases against the end-game of hopelessness. In Official Competition, Palestinian director Elia Suleiman's *Divine Intervention* (given a Special Jury Prize) revolves around Palestine lovers who live in Jerusalem and in Ramallah and who rendezvous at a checkpoint parking lot. It's a gallery of absurdist vignettes of hostility, misunderstanding and aggression in the Holy City. Its minimalist style (hints of Tati, Beckett and Keaton) conveys the thorny predicament of Israelis and Palestinians with power and, surprisingly, with humour. Hany Abu-Assad's equally engaging drama, *Rana's Wedding*, offers another examination of the lived reality of the tension of life in Jerusalem today. As Rana tries to prepare for her wedding, she encounters the banal and exceedingly dangerous unpredictability of life during wartime. More prosaic is Rashid Mashawari's *Ticket To Jerusalem*. It concerns an itinerant projectionist in the West Bank determined to show his films to the Palestinian community despite the chaos. In its humble way, *Ticket To Jerusalem* affirms the indomitability of humanity and the value of cinema in even the worst of circumstances.

Eight months after September 11, with Israelis and Palestinians in a renewed and horrific conflict, India and Pakistan on and off high alert, the rise of right-wing extremism in Europe, and the alarming, continuing spread of HIV, filmmakers managed to argue forcefully that there is some hope in

our desperate days. At Cannes, there are thieves and charlatans, whores and artists; there is vanity, avarice and contempt; there is generosity, compassion and beauty; there is plenty to despise and plenty to admire. Ultimately, the 55th edition of this transient city of images, this carnival of commerce and celluloid with its promiscuous combinations of bazaar and boardroom, did deliver impressive and defiant films about the importance of cinema, the value of humanism and at least the possibility of finding a way through our dark labyrinth.

As I discovered in my inaugural visit to the Cote d'Azur, sometimes a tap on the shoulder can give you hope for humanity. Sometimes, as the Cannes Film Festival selections demonstrated more than once, the cinema affords us the same opportunity. Along the Croisette, as in most places these days, you take hope whenever and wherever you can find it.

The Banff Television Festival

BANFF, ALBERTA (6/9-14/02)

By Maurie Alioff

To highlight this year's 50th anniversary of SRC/CBC-TV, the Banff Television Foundation (organizer of the festival), drew up a list of "50 all-time famous faces" on our home and native tube. Informed by input from professionals and viewers, the honour roll ranged from on-air icons such as *Les Plouffe* and Barbara Frum to SCTV, Paul Gross and Adrienne Clarkson. In the capacity of her current gig as Canada's Governor General, Clarkson opened Banff 2002 with a buoyant, intimate address that raised delegate spirits somewhat dampened by the cold rain and mist hovering over the mountains. Fortunately, the weather changed the next day, and in town, or above it at the Fairmont Banff Springs Hotel, the festival's main venue, the Rockies glowed enticingly.

Following Adrienne Clarkson, writer and broadcaster Robert MacNeil offered the festival's keynote address. The Canadian born-and-raised ex-PBS news anchor's context was today's mainstream television landscape, one that many observers believe has degenerated into a toxic dump. MacNeil's talk was a witty, impassioned defence of public broadcasting (appropriately on the fest's CBC Day), which drove home its point. Commercial television's abdication of responsibility to inform and enlighten means that taxpayer-supported television is far from being an expensive frill to amuse a dwindling elite, especially in an era when democratic rights are getting a little shaky. "Television should not exist only to make some people rich," said MacNeil, who also suggested that public television can get into its own kind of rut. He jokingly tagged traditional PBS programming as "British people talking and animals mating, or vice versa."

Buzzing with the energy of MacNeil's speech, delegates flocked to a Showcase of Excellence that featured John Cleese, recipient of Banff 2002's Sir Peter Ustinov/Comedy Network Award. The master of comedic repression and rage (interviewed onstage by the CBC's Ralph Benmergui), got his biggest laugh with a story about how he responded to his late mother's complaints about the miseries of being old. "If