

FESTIVAL wraps

22ND ATLANTIC FILM FESTIVAL

9/13–21/02

By Ron Foley Macdonald

Halifax-based director Thom Fitzgerald and Toronto-based Cape Breton writer/actor/filmmaker Daniel MacIvor were the two big winners at this year's Atlantic Film Festival (AFF). The AFF itself bounced back from last year's post 9/11 difficulties to gain a 28 per cent increase in audiences while unspooling a record 16 feature films from the region.

The festival kicked off with a strange kind of homecoming for American documentarian and activist Michael Moore. His controversial film *Bowling for Columbine* opened this year's AFF, as it was produced by Halifax's own Salter Street Films. Moore's visit to Halifax (his second, after premiering his America-invades-Canada-comedy *Canadian Bacon* almost a decade ago) saw the popular contrarian generously taking questions on the film for more than 45 minutes, delighting the sold-out audience. The film went on, unsurprisingly, to win the People's Choice Award, the only award voted on by the audiences themselves.

Both Thom Fitzgerald's film, *The Wild Dogs*, and Daniel MacIvor's *Past Perfect*, were part of imX producer Chris Zimmer's innovative low-budget program of feature films by emerging directors. The series, entitled *Seats 3A and 3C*, is tied together by the narrative conceit of two strangers meeting on a plane and telling each other their respective stories. Shot on digital-video (DV) tape and budgeted at under a million dollars each, the series' films include Tricia Fish's comedy *dragonwheel* (which received its own sold-out screening) and three films either in production or planned for later in 2002 or 2003.

In fact, the number of DV-shot features at this year's AFF reached unparalleled levels. Whether it was Will Fraser's \$4,000 black-and-white downtown Halifax drama *Dying Fall*, or Dorris Dörrie's latest German comedy *Erleuchtung Garantiert*, the DV revolution seems to be growing in strength and intensity. The 2002 Atlantic Film Festival was also very strong on nonfiction offerings. Noted First Nations filmmaker Alanis Obomsawin returned to this year's AFF (after last year's complete retrospective held at the Dalhousie Art Gallery) to premiere her new feature-length documentary *Is the Crown at War with Us?* The film detailed the confrontations at Burnt Church over the last two years between Mi'kmaq fishermen and federal officials in the wake of the Marshall decision on First Nations fishing rights. Moncton filmmaker Herménégilde Chiasson treated the same subject from the Acadian point of view in his film *Ceux Qui Attendent* "Those Who Wait". Both works covered much ground lost in the rather shrill media reportage on the subject, particularly the long, peaceful and very productive relationship between the Acadians and the Mi'kmaq that reaches back to 1604.

Fredericton's Errol Williams delivered one of the festival's most talked-about documentaries with his film *When Voices Rise...*



Michael Moore's *Bowling for Columbine*.

A feature-length portrait of how segregation came to an end in Bermuda, it briefly illuminated an often forgotten corner of North American, showing that the American South has no monopoly on gripping race-relations stories. New Brunswick continued its strong showing this year with one of the strongest feature dramas ever to be made in the province. Tim Southam's



Thom Fitzgerald's *The Wild Dogs*.



The Bay of Love and Sorrows, adapted from and co-scripted with the acclaimed Miramichi novelist David Adams Richards, was a powerful and deeply moving film about how class can ultimately trump loyalty in the rural Maritimes. By far the most effective screen adaptation of any Richards work, *The Bay of Love and Sorrows* ranks with the finest naturalistic dramas of this or any year.

Ultimately, however, it was Thom Fitzgerald's and Daniel MacIvor's year. Fitzgerald's *The Wild Dogs*, shot in Bucharest, Romania, draped in the relentless beige tones of a still-decaying Eastern Europe, was perhaps the most purely cinematic of all the films at the festival. With Fitzgerald himself playing the lead as a Canadian porn merchant in search of new, cheap talent as the city effects a cull of the wild dogs of the title, the film takes some astonishing risks with subject matter and approach, particularly when dealing with issues of sex and commerce.

MacIvor, who won Best Actor for his appearance in his own film *Past Perfect* while picking up another award for writing the adaptation of his play *Marion Bridge* for the screen for director Weibke von Carolsfeld, expressed a longing to return to Nova Scotia permanently. Having presented two plays here this year (*Cul De Sac* and *In on It*) and armed with another script to be shot here next year, MacIvor might just get his wish. Meanwhile Fitzgerald's latest film, *The Event*, is in post-production, raising the possibility that the acting/writing/directing duo may well be in contention for the very same prizes at next year's Atlantic Film Festival.

SUDBURY

CINÉFEST SUDBURY 2002

9/16–22/02

By Christopher Heard

For the past 14 years every late September, hot on the heels of the Montreal World Film Festival and the Toronto International Film Festival, there is another film festival that is growing in stature, is just as much fun as the aforementioned bigger ones, and should be checked out at least once by every fan or supporter of Canadian cinema. Run by executive director Tammy Frick and held together by a legion of dedicated volunteers, this little festival is rapidly approaching that place where it can no longer be called little. Cinéfest Sudbury, Ontario, focusing on Canadian films and filmmakers, is well organized, well sponsored and features an impressive array of very diverse titles from all over the world.

Sudbury, known more for its mining trade than anything else, would not be the first place you would think of to host a film festival; however, this remarkable little festival has enormous civic support and is a place that filmmakers take seriously. The gala presentations at the 2002 edition included *Bollywood/Hollywood* from Deepa Mehta, from France, Francoise Ozon's *8 femmes* (this festival also featured a retrospective of the films of Ozon); Michael Moore's *Bowling for Columbine*, Atom Egoyan's *Ararat*, and David Cronenberg's *Spider*. Each gala was shown at Cine Plus, a comfortable old theatre, while all other films were screened at the ultramodern Silver City.

The festival programs included called It's All True featuring documentaries, World Cinema featuring films from all corners of the globe, and Features Canada showing Canadian films. There was a children's film component and a Cinema Classics feature where I caught Norman Jewison's *Rollerball* and Roger Vadim's *Barbarella*. And a favourite of mine was *Yamakasi*, an action-packed film from France about seven young children who invent a new sport to be played amid the high-rise apartment complex they live in. The film was produced and written by Luc Besson and directed by Ariel Zeitoun.

Of the 82 films screened (including shorts) one of the more interesting ones was *It All Happens Incredibly Fast* from first-time Toronto filmmaker Jai Dixit. This taut psychological drama set in a bar on an

Roger Vadim's *Barbarella*.

