

FESTIVAL wraps

incredibly tense evening stars Maurice Dean Wint. It's also interesting that the filmmakers decided that their film should make its debut at Cinéfest Sudbury because the likelihood of it being seen and appreciated by an audience of real moviegoers would be greater than if it got lost in the hundreds of films screened in Toronto. The ploy worked; the screening was held on a Friday afternoon and it was jammed to the rafters. Later, at the closing night party I conducted an informal poll of filmgoers as to what they thought of this film. The response was unanimously positive. "Bringing the film to Cinéfest Sudbury was a way of test screening it. No pressure to sell the film or have the film evaluated," said Jai Dixit in the Sudbury Ramada Inn the day after his successful screening. "I didn't screen it with the expectation that Harvey Weinstein would be sitting there with cheque book in hand—it was just to feel the audiences' reaction to the film."

Cinéfest Sudbury also has the Forum Series, well-supported seminars where discussions on the practical side of filmmaking in this country take place. These seminars are hosted and conducted by professionals who have films in the festival or have had films in the festival in the past—an example being Vancouver filmmaker Dwayne Beaver who attended Cinéfest Sudbury last year with his film *The Rhino Brothers* and returned this year to conduct a seminar on directing actors on film. This year's seminars included Show Me the Money: Funding Your Film; Lights, Camera, Action: Directing Actors on Film; The Underscore: Placing Music into Film; The Score: The Role of the Composer; and Date with a Tape: The Demo Tape Critique.

Prizes are given out at the closing night gala celebration: winners this year included first-time filmmaker Wiebke von Carolsfeld for his film *Marion Bridge* with Molly Parker, and Soo Lyu for her film *Rub & Tug*. Both filmmakers were on hand to enjoy their victories. One thing that makes this festival fun is the relaxed atmosphere. The Toronto International Film Festival has become huge in size and stature and with that comes pressure. Cinéfest Sudbury is about filmmakers getting together to share their films with film fans who aren't exposed to these types of films. I watched Peter Mettler wandering around one of the parties—he was in Sudbury with his sprawling documentary *Gambling, Gods and LSD*—being approached by other filmmakers and Sudbury residents alike to talk about the film and their reactions to it. No publicists, no agents, no nothing; just a bunch of moviemakers and movie lovers hanging out together in a place where there really is little else to do but screen movies and commune with the filmmakers.

21ST VANCOUVER INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL

9/26–10/11/02

By Dale Drewery

Come on, admit it! You know the feeling. The one you get when you're sitting in a darkened theatre watching a movie and wondering whether you're the only one who completely perplexed. Your eyes dart furtively from side to side looking for any indication that someone else thinks the film is as tedious as you do. But on this particular day, my fellow filmgoers are no help at all. The man to my left is busy eating his lunch, and the one to the right is asleep. Welcome to a

media screening at the 21st annual Vancouver International Film Festival.

The movie in question is *Shanghai Panic*, a contender for the Dragons & Tigers Award for Young Cinema. The Award carries a prize of \$5,000, and it's presented to a new director from Pacific Asia for the most creative and innovative first or second feature-length film. I had already seen quite a few of this year's contenders and, having loathed many of them, I am desperate to like *Shanghai Panic*. And it is truly amazing the excuses one can dream up in the interests of being open-minded, verging on politically correct: the subtitle translations are probably poor; I clearly don't understand the culture; and, am I getting too old to watch films about young people? Director/cinematographer Andrew Cheng follows a group of confused kids through the dance clubs, night streets and anonymous apartments of Shanghai tackling some tough subjects along the way, including HIV/AIDS, sexual identity and suicide. The film, however, never seems to rise above its indulgences, and I can't seem to develop a shred of interest in the characters. I leave early, stumbling over my comrade's lunch bag on the way.



Mina Sham's *Long Life, Happiness and Prosperity*.

Besides, I am already a few minutes late for *Punch*, which is in the running for the Citytv Western Canada Screenwriters Award. Established this year, it carries the not-too-shabby prize of \$12,000 awarded to the top screenwriter of a film from Western Canada, which, apparently, includes Manitoba. Splitting the country down its geographic middle is bound to enrage Newfoundlanders, since they must now officially include Ontario in "the East"! *Punch* is a first feature for Vancouver writer-director Guy Bennett and it explores the unusual relationship between a single dad and his troubled 18-year-old daughter. What feels stilted off the top reveals itself as a profound discomfort they feel

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Keith Behrman's *Flower & Garnet*.

with each other and, more importantly, themselves. Despite the description, *Punch* is quite a funny film, and it has been picked up for distribution by ThinkFilm.

Flower & Garnet is writer/director Keith Behrman's debut feature, and it's a standout. The disturbing tale centres around a strange child, a father who refuses to participate in his boy's life, and the daughter, played terrifically by Jane McGregor, who keeps them together. Callum Keith Rennie is excellent as the dysfunctional dad, and the script has barely a false moment. A shoe-in for the Citytv Screenwriters Award.

Figuring out who is going to win before the judges make their announcement is enormously satisfying. It's an opportunity to prove how good your instincts are. So, when I finally see *Too Young to Die*, I proudly recognize this year's Dragons & Tigers Award winner. It's a charming and humorous docudrama by South Korean director Park Jin-Pyo that makes you confront your ignorance about the elderly. Seventy-three-year-old Park Chi-Gyu and his 72-year-old partner Lee Sun-Ye have a sex life that puts any swinging single to shame, and we, the audience, are privy to every uninhibited moment. The remarkable thing is that, after a while, you stop feeling uncomfortable, and start to hope that, when you reach their age, you are as fortunate as they are.

Although I'd already pegged the winner for the Citytv Award, I wanted to see Vancouver's perennial sweetheart Mina Shum's latest, *Long Life, Happiness and Prosperity*. Co-written with screenwriter Dennis Foon, it's a gentle movie that follows a young girl, played by Valerie Tian, as she tries to bring happiness back into the life of her harried, single mother, played by Sandra Oh. As usual Shum finds her inspiration in Vancouver's Chinese-Canadian community, and the film is peopled with her cast of eccentric and charming characters. It turns out Shum will win a Special Citation for *Long Life* and I'm truly

Christopher Hinton's *Flux*.



hoping that festivals everywhere put a stop to this strange practice. It seems to me that you either win an award or you don't, and that a tip of the hat to a favourite son or daughter is embarrassing. This, however, is fodder for a whole other story.

The Vancouver festival ended on October 11th with all the usual hoopla. At the closing-night gala screening organizers announced that attendance had climbed past the 150,000 mark, up 10 per cent from the previous year. Not bad considering that the weather was beautiful and, when the sun shines, Vancouverites, determined to get out in it, are notorious for putting off things like watching films and even writing about them. The Air Canada Award for most popular film went to Michael Moore's *Bowling for Columbine*, and Vancouver documentary maker Nettie Wild was honoured for her film *FIX: The Story of an Addicted City*. Wild shared the Federal Express Award for most popular Canadian film with Ontario director Deborah Day, who won for *Expecting*.

When the Citytv Western Canadian Screenwriters Award was announced, I found myself scrambling to borrow a pen from the person in the seat in front of me. Writer/director Nicholas Racz won for *The Burial Society*, which I hadn't seen then, but I have now. It is a smart, intriguing movie full of twists and clever surprises. Rob Labelle is brilliant as the tortured Sheldon Kastner who, after being dangled from a bridge by his employers, decides to change his life. What transpires is a tale of theft, deceit and double-crossing. And yes, despite my previous prediction, *The Burial Society* deserves the Citytv Award.

The ink on the back of my hand was barely dry when I was forced to make another sheepish note. The Dragons & Tigers Award for Young Cinema was given to *Shanghai Panic*. So, in my open-minded, verging on politically correct fashion I have just watched it again, this time from beginning to end. I don't like it any better, but I do now feel better about saying that I don't like it. In any case, the sun has just come out, which means that, like a good Vancouverite, it's time for me to head outside.

OTTAWA 02 INTERNATIONAL ANIMATION FESTIVAL

10/2-6/02

By Patrick Lowe

"I don't make films," quietly proclaims Polish animator Pitor Dumala. "I discover them." Before a captive audience at the Ottawa Courts Library, Dumala demonstrates his signature techniques on a flat slab of plaster. By recarving one image after another directly under the camera, he infuses his films with a fluctuating, ethereal quality—a style that somehow reinvents itself with each passing frame. That same spirit of spontaneous innovation was also evident in the opening ceremonies at the National Arts Centre for the Ottawa 02 International Animation Festival (OIAF), with the presentation of "the world's first performance of live optical sound"—an animated orchestra, as it were. Headed by Richard Reeves and Ellen Bessen, the group Scratch Track projected a freshly hand-painted 16 mm filmstrip