

anti-FTAA protests in Quebec City.

Younger directors trying their hands at drama, rather than documentaries, had a more challenging time of it. Shirley Cheechoo's *Bearwalker*, which screened at Innis, was the first dramatic feature by a Canadian Aboriginal director (pre-dating *Atanarjuat*), and the film has the battle scars to prove it. Originally shown at Sundance in 1999 under the title *Backroads*, Cheechoo's harrowing tale of three sisters coping with sexual violence on a Manitoulin Island reserve was heavily edited by the film's American distributors who were subsequently unable to secure a theatrical release for their commercialized product. Disillusioned, Cheechoo secured a loan from the fledgling Aboriginal People's Television Network (APTN) to buy back the rights to the film. After re-editing, rescoring and adding a narrative voice-over, she changed the film's title to *Bearwalker* and sold it to TMN-The Movie Network, where it enjoyed a lengthy run in 2002 before moving over to APTN.

Most of the other new dramatic works seen at the festival clocked in at under 30 minutes, as young filmmakers pragmatically set their sights on half-hour television slots rather than wide theatrical releases. Pamela Matthews's tragicomic *Only the Devil Speaks Cree*, shown on Saturday night, depicted a young girl's dogged attempts to escape an abusive residential school in the 1950s. Warmly received, the film picked up the festival's Best Dramatic Short Award. It was followed by two 24-minute works from Big Soul Productions, the Toronto film and television production company established in 1999 by actor Jennifer Podemski and producer Laura Milliken. The first Big Soul short, *RepREZentin' in Fort Chip*, examined date rape and alcohol abuse on an isolated reservation in northern Alberta. The second, *Laurel*, traced the nightmarish existence of an inner-city prostitute, played by Podemski herself. The film drew hostile questions from some audience

members who felt it was unnecessarily violent and judgmental.

The Spirit of Annie Mae, a powerful new documentary from Catherine Anne Martin, the chair of APTN, closed the festival. The NFB film traces the life and death of Annie Mae Pictou-Aquash, a Mi'kmaq Native rights activist from Nova Scotia whose unsolved murder in South Dakota in 1976 provoked accusations that both the FBI and Annie Mae's fellow warriors in the American Indian Movement (AIM) were involved in the crime and its cover-up. According to Native activists interviewed in the film, Annie Mae was executed by AIM members who had been duped by FBI infiltrators into believing that she was an informant. At the time of her killing, scores of Aboriginal activists were being murdered on the Pine Ridge reservation in South Dakota, allegedly by an FBI-sponsored goon squad. In this bloody and paranoia-ridden atmosphere, the successful "snitch-jacketing" of an activist was tantamount to a death sentence. One of Annie Mae's daughters, Denise, attended the screening, as did Minnie Two Shoes, an Aboriginal activist and journalist who worked alongside Annie Mae in the 1970s during AIM's historic battles with the FBI in South Dakota and Washington, D.C.

"It's overwhelming to see how far we've come in this world of film and video and media," Martin told the enthusiastic closing night audience. "It took about 15 years before Annie Mae's daughters agreed that it was time to tell the story. But one of the things [we realized was that] if we were going to follow Annie Mae we'd have to follow her road. So we did. It took us about three years," she explained, recounting her sometimes frightening trips through South Dakota where some of Annie Mae's killers are still thought to reside. "I'm really honoured to have this chance to tell her story."

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Catherine Anne Martin's *The Spirit of Annie Mae*



Image courtesy of NFB.

International Documentary Filmfestival Amsterdam

(11/21-12/1/02) By Henry Lewes

Canada was well represented last year at the International Documentary Filmfestival Amsterdam, both with films and the exuberant presence of Peter Wintonick, who ran a Master Class and chaired one of the evening discussions. Some notable risks were taken by a number of Canadian filmmakers. *In the Line of Fire* (made by Patricia Naylor for CBC's *Witness*) investigates the way in which journalists working on the West Bank are shot at by Israeli soldiers. *Seeing Is Believing* (Katerina Cizek and Peter Wintonick) deals with how lightweight videocams have become a powerful tool for exposing official abuse. Black-veiled women of Damascus are interviewed in *Veils Uncovered* (Nora Kevorkian) as they shop for sexy underwear in the



Image courtesy of Heritic Films

marketplace. Not as risky, but charming, was *Olivia's Puzzle* (Jason daSilva), which contrasts the lives of two seven-year-old girls, one living in Canada, the other in Goa.

Three Canadian films attempted in different ways to tackle how humans perceive and interpret reality: *Cyberman* (Peter Lynch), *McLuban's Wake* (Kevin McMahon) and *EVO* (Oliver Hockenhull). The subject of *EVO* is the recent discussion among scientists as to whether evolution is gradual or takes place in leaps and bounds, and how this has affected the ways in which societies have developed. Hockenhull warned his audience before the screening that what they were about to see would be "demanding and intellectual," which was no understatement. The film includes several long and repetitive sequences: a colourful ball floats above the Cambridge lane where Charles Darwin used to walk; a geisha slowly revolves while speaking in a robotic voice; images with confusing text snippets speed across the screen; and chunks from a lecture by Richard Dawkins, the evolutionary expert, are endured. Questioned afterwards as to whether he had an audience in mind, Hockenhull responded: "Yes, maybe an audience in another 20 years, or for my future self."

Kevin McMahon's *McLuban's Wake* recounts the life story and tribulations

of Marshall McLuhan, remembered by most people only for his rather chilling statement: the medium is the message. What McMahon reveals is the very human story of an academic who, as a child, lost his brother when he was struck by a terrible storm

while out sailing. The film suggests that, as a result, McLuhan saw new technical developments as "maelstroms" that, if not examined critically, could be disastrous. By combining animation, dramatic reconstruction and rare footage, a moving story is told of a man who deserved better treatment for his ideas than a rather jealous academic establishment was prepared to allow him.

The theme of 2002's festival was What Do You Believe In?, a topic dealt with by about 30 of the films screened. The titles were often expressive: *Advertising Missionaries* (Gauthier Flauder and Chris Hilton) follows a theatre group whose job is to sell products like Colgate and Coca-Cola to primitive Papuan New Guineans; *Christ Comes To the Papuans* (Thomas Balmes) concerns the many different churches competing to

obtain converts; however, it was Peter Wintonick's *Seeing Is Believing: Handicaps, Human Rights and the News* that most clearly illustrated how visual evidence affects belief. At the heart of this film is the packaging and dispatching of minicams to development-aid workers, followed by examples of their use. In particular, we observe Philippine human rights activist Joey Lozano, who, with extreme bravery, documents acts of violence in his country.

That video evidence can endanger as well as protect lives was pointed out in the last of three discussions entitled Religion, Terrorism and Extremism. "Terrorism basically means that people can commit any crime and put it down to terrorism," said Sweden's Agnieszka Lukasiak, who made *The Nameless War* about the ongoing civil war in Algeria. She admitted that filming her gay acquaintances in the outdoors, where they might have been seen or overheard, was dangerous. "But they were so tired of being scared. They wanted to talk and be in the film." In *My Terrorist*, a different response to terrorism was proposed by Israel's Yulie Cohen Gerstel, who was seriously injured in an attack in 1978, but decided to work toward the release of her attacker. "I am trying to take the hate out of my system. To break the vicious circle," she said. "I think the West Bank settlers are developing religious terrorism."

Several important events ran alongside the festival: the Annual Seminar

FESTIVAL WRAPS

Katerina Cizek's and Peter Wintonick's *Seeing Is Believing*



examined the concept of cultural identity as seen in some of this year's films; a Mediamatic Workshop investigated new ways of telling stories using digital and interactive methods; leading documentarists talked about their

David Sexter's *The Offering*



work in three Master Classes; the Market offered some 400 titles for sale; and there was the Forum, where 44 projects were pitched. For the first time network commissioning editors were invited to take centre stage and describe their program strands, which resulted in some hard-hitting comments. For example, Nick Fraser of the BBC was grilled over the way the Beeb "reversions" documentaries, cutting them shorter or adding voice-overs in a bid to make them more acceptable to British audiences. Forum director Fleur Knopperts said she had yet to decide whether or not to repeat the experiment. "If we do, we want to make it more of a discussion. Another idea is that commissioning editors should only be invited to pitch if they have new strands to announce."

Winnipeg's Jeff McKay, who pitched for his project *Haunts of the Black Masseuse*, was enthusiastic about his experience. "My film will be a celebration of the swimmer as hero, illustrated

by diving in art, literature, sport and culture, right from the ancient Greeks to the 20th century. I found the Forum ultimately a very positive event, because it forced me to evaluate my project again with a fresh eye. The process of doing the pitch helped me to focus it tighter and tighter. I came away from the Forum with one significant licence deal and offers of others. Besides there is the opportunity to talk with the commissioning editors and filmmakers one-on-one. You can't beat that."

Henry Lewes is a film journalist based in England who has reported for Cinéaste and Take One.

Toronto Reel Asian International Film Festival

(11/27-12/1/02) By Allan Tong

Rock music, Oedipal rebellion and cinema history were the highlights of the sixth Toronto Reel Asian International Film Festival. The autumnal festival gathers the cinematic best of the global Asian diaspora, shunning the chop-socky flicks of the *Fantasia* festival and ignoring the big-budget Jet Li's of Hollywood. Shorter, yet more focused than last year's edition, this year's program highlighted Thai cinema and Asian-Canadian film pioneer, Mary Stephen.

The Bloor, Toronto's venerable rep cinema, was packed for opening night film, *Lolo's Child*, by hometown director Romeo Candido. The audience warmly received this drama about a young Filipino-Canadian coming home to resolve his relationship with his abusive father who's dying. *Lolo's Child* evolved out of a one-man stage show and book on domestic violence. The movie is an uneven but sincere debut that suffers from excessive voice-over narration and a patchy script. The film doesn't dig deep

enough into the central father-son relationship and could have lost some of its minor characters and subplots. However, *Lolo's Child* is stylishly edited and features a tremendous soundtrack. Candido has a sharp ear and eye that will yield great rewards in the future.

The generation gap also ran through the Dirty Laundry program, a strong collection of shorts examining dysfunctional families. Helen Haeyoung Lee's *Sophie* is a chilling study about a Korean-American girl trying to whisk her and her mother away from her abusive father. Writing, acting and direction are solid. The complex mother-daughter relationship feels real and poignant as the child gets caught in the middle of conflicting family loyalties. *Surplus*, by American Joy Dietrich, offers a more sympathetic Korean father, a peasant who must sacrifice one of his four young daughters so he can feed the rest. Set in rural Korea in the past, *Surplus* never lapses into melodrama. It tells the tragic tale of child abandonment with economy and grace. In contrast, Georgia Lee's *Educated* is a delightfully vicious black comedy about an Asian-American girl who can't stand the pressure of scoring top marks to get into university. With a nod to *Heathers*, *Educated's* kids are led on leashes by their shallow, materialistic parents.

Two Canadian shorts, *Ohm-Ma* by Ruthann Lee and Carolyn Wong's *Yin Yang/Jade Love*, try to bridge the generation gap. Both are bittersweet valentines to the filmmakers' mothers. The former examines the gulf between a daughter and her mother who disowns her for being a lesbian—taboo in Korean culture. The latter is a compelling bio about Wong's grandmother, who endured forced marriage and racism to immigrate from China. The story of Wong's grandmother could be that of countless Chinese women who moved to Canada at the turn of the century when it was hostile to Asians. Life was hard and unfair, yet she endured for the sake of her children. She emerges as a hero.

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