

Les Rendez-vous offered a series of awards to participants, and during its run, Quebec's own film awards ceremony, Les Prix Jutra, took place (on February 23). Les Rendez-vous winners this year included Jerome Labrecque for his sublime *Le Boulevard Saint-Laurent*, *opéra numérique surréaliste en trois actes*, which took the Prix à la création artistique du conseil des arts et des lettres du Québec. The Prix Radio-Canada du meilleur premier scénario de long métrage de fiction mis à l'écran went to Ricardo Trogi, Jean-Philippe Pearson and Patrice Robitaille for their hit feature *Québec-Montréal*,

directed by Trogi, also a big winner at Les Prix Jutra.

Here are some of my additional unofficial honours; personal choices for various Quebec film and video types,

in no particular order: Most Worthy Resurrection of an Unsung Hero: Merrily Weisbord and Tanya Ballantine Tree deserve serious kudos for their *Ted Allan: Minstrel Boy of the 20th Century*, an in-depth look at the superb left-wing novelist and screenwriter Allan. They even got the divine actress Gena Rowlands to chime in. Best Illumination of Local Dire Situation Made Even Worse By Unthinking Authorities: *Squat!*, Eve Lamont's take on the struggle for local homeless people to find shelter in a decreasingly livable Montreal. Most Endearing Look at Vintage Montreal: *Les Rossy*, Jennifer Alleen's documentary profile of the family behind the famous Quebec chain of shops. Strangest but Truest Tall Family Tales: Ole Gjerstad's NFB documentary *My Doukhobor Cousins*, a film about the cultural experiences of the Doukhobors that demands to be seen. Gutsiest Political Doc: *Maxime, McDuff et McDo*, in which the inimitable Magnus Isacson tackles the Golden Arches, the youth who work beneath them and their struggle to unionize. Most Trailblazing Animation that Demands to Be Seen Again (and Again): *Flux*, the sublime NFB-produced seven-minute-and-40-second ode to the life cycle, brought to us by Chris Hinton, the animation genius behind such oddities as *Blackfly* and *Watching TV*.

Matthew Hays is an associate editor for Montreal's Hour Magazine and a regular contributor to The Globe and Mail and Take One.



québec-montréal



National

SCREEN INSTITUTE'S FILMEXCHANGE
(3/4-8/03) BY PETER VESUWALLA

It's Winnipeg. It's March. It is outdoors. And it's freezing. I'm sitting on a bale of hay and watching the National Screen Institute (NSI) Zed Drama Prize winners projected onto a 10-metre block of ice. The temperature is a relatively balmy minus 21, but when you account for the wind-chill factor, it feels about minus 40.

Only someone from Winnipeg would bother to distinguish between what minus 21 and minus 40 feels like. We even brag about it to the delegates from Vancouver who have never experienced such merciless temperatures in their lives. Mayor Glenn Murray jokingly suggests traditional activities that take place in darkened movie theatres to help the audience preserve their precious body heat. The delegates smile while the icy wind burns their cheeks and the excruciating pain in their toes gives way to the numbness associated with the more advanced stages of frostbite. Welcome to the NSI's FilmExchange, the largest film festival dedicated to 100 per cent Canadian content.

There are 300 of us out here in the cold. Some are gathered around campfires. Others retreat to the heated tent or the nearby University of Winnipeg. Still more head over to the Winnipeg Art Gallery to get the party started early. But the Winnipeggers remain, battling the elements with perverse, masochistic pleasure. Fortunately, most of FilmExchange takes place indoors at Winnipeg's new Globe Cinema, the only theatre in the city outside of our small Cinematheque to specialize in art-house fare.

Master classes, receptions and workshops all took place at the historic and allegedly haunted Fort Garry Hotel. More than a few guests, and even a Member of Parliament, have claimed to have encountered the spectre that lurks in one of the 90-year-old hotel's rooms, apparently refusing to check out until the weather warms up outside. Still, despite being in a city so frigid even the walking dead prefer to stay indoors, FilmExchange attracted about 5,000 people and enjoyed a record number of sold-out films.



maxime, mcduff et mcdo

Charles Binamé's *Séraphin: Heart of Stone* was the first to sell out days before the festival even began. The NSI had to add a second screening. In between, Binamé and actress Karine Vanasse were flocked by appreciative French-Canadian fans eager for autographs. The second most popular feature was the Winnipeg premiere of David Cronenberg's *Spider*, which closed the festival. The sad tale of a madman's descent to the depths of despair hardly provided the most upbeat ending to the festival but created a stir in the audience. Ralph Fiennes wearing five shirts at once wasn't taken as a sign of mental illness, so much as a sensible way to beat the cold.

homosexual zombie playmate and his desire to please his doting mother and undead father.

Brad Fraser's homoerotic sex comedy *Leaving Metropolis* and Rodrigue Jean's mournful road movie *Yellowknife* rounded out the list of local films. Neither sold out, but FilmExchange has reached a state such that filmgoers moving at Winnipeg's trademark relaxed pace are in danger of being left out in the cold. But Canadian films that have achieved higher profiles at other festivals didn't do as well here. Mina Shum's *Long Life, Happiness & Prosperity*, Keith Behrman's *Flower & Garnet* and Wiebke von Carolsfeld's *Marion Bridge* played to theatres that were but half full.

Nicholas Racz, is a sly, slow-moving but never boring Jewish heist film that follows that great film noir tradition of one damn thing leading to another as the protagonist gets further and further in over his head. The other, Thom Fitzgerald's *The Wild Dogs*, is bold, unflinching and heartbreaking. It grew out of producer Chris Zimmer's series of low-budget features entitled *Seats 3a & 3c*, in which five emerging directors were commissioned to make films where two characters meet on an airplane. Working within those guidelines, Fitzgerald (*The Hanging Garden, Beefcake*) told the story of a Canadian pornographer in Bucharest navigating his way through a moral minefield to some degree of success. Alas, neither of the latter two films generated a particularly big audience and will probably join the league of great Canadian films that never go into general release in this small city of about 650,000.

How appropriate then that one of the special events at the festival was a Q&A session with Telefilm Canada's CEO Richard Stursberg, who discussed Telefilm's mandate to emphasize commercial projects so Canadian films will account for five per cent of the domestic box office. Vonnie von Helmolt, producer of Guy Maddin's *Dracula: Pages from a Virgin's Diary*, asked if she will have to get out of the movie business and become a cab driver. The final day's chat session with Gordon Pinsent, hosted by Terry David Mulligan, received a warmer reception as Pinsent discussed his illustrious career and the early days of Winnipeg theatre. There was a particularly touching moment when the floor was opened up to questions and an elderly woman introduced herself as one of Pinsent's first co-stars on stage. The Fort Garry of Winnipeg let out a sigh.

Peter Vesuvalla is the Winnipeg-based film critic for Uptown Magazine.



Let no doubt remain about this city's obsession with strange characters and dark obsessions. The two local feature films that sold out were Nicolas Winding Refn's *Fear X* and Jeff Erbach's *The Nature of Nicholas*. The former stars John Turturro as a single-minded and profoundly lonely security guard who has all but cut off human contact in the course of his relentless search for his wife's killer; the latter stars Jeff Sutton as a 12-year-old boy torn between his attraction for a

Local-boy-made-good Adam Beach, of *Dance Me Outside* and *Windtalkers* fame, was on hand to promote a late-night screening of Katie Tallo's *Posers*. He told me he was disappointed when only about 50 people showed up, but he remains optimistic that he can use his notoriety to be a role model for other disadvantaged Aboriginal youths.

The two best features couldn't have been more different from one another. *The Burial Society*, by B.C. director