

Robert DeLeskie's *Peep Show: Entrance*.

## Montreal International Festival of New Cinema and New Media

(10/9-19/03)

By Matthew Hays



Weeks before it had even launched, this year's New Film Festival (the event has suffered so many name changes over time I've settled on referring to it in the simplest way possible) found itself shrouded in controversy. In a public letter to Telefilm bigwig Richard Stursberg dated September 15, Montreal World Film Festival (MWFF) director and notorious crank Serge Losique lashed out at the federal film funding body's patronage of festivals in Canada. Losique, as festival onlookers will know, has taken quite the beating over the past six months (even more than usual). First, his festival's A-list status was yanked by an international producers's organization and then there were rampant rumours in the Montreal film community that his festival might not even come off. It did, but with its calendar placement overlapping with the colossal Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF) seemingly never-ending comparisons between TIFF and MWFF only grew worse, with the World on the ropes once more. Losique's solution to all this seemed, on September 15 anyway, to be to lash out at the New Film Festival, saying it was nothing more than an extension of the Toronto event and a way for the MWFF event to be further handicapped in its efforts to program a solid roster of films.

Certainly, it has been noted that the New Film Festival, chiefly programmed by Claude Chamberlan, gains by its calendar placement so soon after TIFF. This means many of the best and most high-profile films slated for a Toronto run can have their Montreal festival run shortly thereafter, with distributors simply ignoring MWFF altogether. As per usual, there were a number of holdovers this year: Lars von Trier's *Dogville*, Bent Hamer's *Kitchen Stories*, Guy Maddin's *The Saddest Music in the World*, Siddiq Barmak's *Osama*,

Robert Lepage's *La Face cachee de la lune*, Errol Morris's *The Fog of War*, Roger Michell's *The Mother*, John Greyson's *Proteus* and Wolfgang Becker's *Good Bye Lenin!* among them (and this is merely a partial list).

Having said that, it would be entirely unfair to reduce the New Film Festival to a mere extension of TIFF. Chamberlan and his team must be commended for their extensive programming of short films, experimental works and their focus on new media as well. This year a number of the most striking things I saw were neither handled by major distributors nor of feature length. Toronto-based filmmaker Robert DeLeskie's *Peep Show*, part of the excellent Bravo!FACT-produced anthology of shorts, is an often hilarious, intensely clever four-minute adaptation of a dance duet performed by David Danzon and Sylvie Bouchard of Toronto's Corpus Dance Company. DeLeskie's previous short, *Makeup*, was a standout at the New Film Festival two years ago, and this is a worthy follow-up. Also in the experimental vein comes Richard Kerr's *Collage d'Hollywood*, an astonishing montage created by the filmmaker after he found a series of trailers in a shoebox at a dilapidated Saskatchewan drive-in. Horror and sci-fi representations of the apocalypse are artfully interwoven, matched by a searing soundtrack and the results are disturbing and unsettling. This is a film any cinephile will want for their private collection, demanding to be screened many times over.

While the festival also offered a master class with Peter Greenaway and an exhaustive retrospective of German demigod Werner Herzog, thankfully, programmers did not shy away from taking risks with the local film scene.

# FESTIVAL WRAPS

Karim Hussain's *Ascension* is a cryptic second feature (after the filmmaker's *Subconscious Cruelty*), about three women ascending what seems to be a never-ending spiral staircase. The film is audacious, to say the least, and undoubtedly distributor-defying, but *Ascension* deserved a big-screen debut at an event like the New Film Festival. Kudos to them for providing Hussain with a forum.

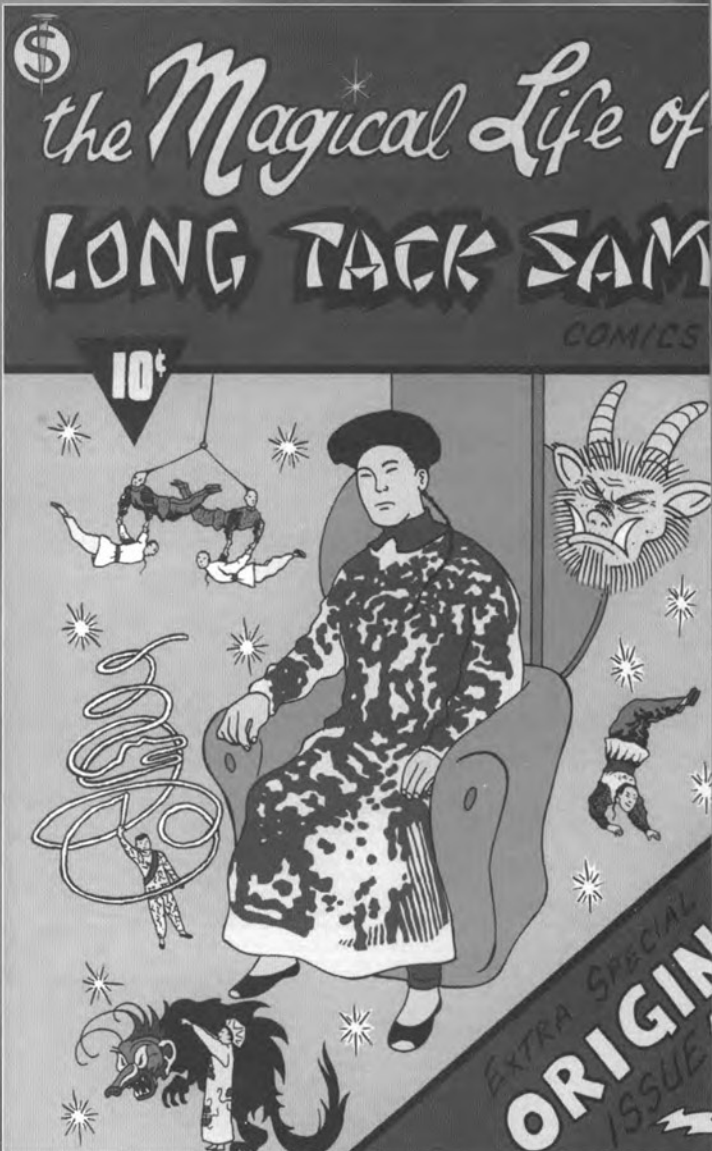
Where festival types did seem a bit out of the loop was in their ultra-proud proclamations about nabbing Martin Scorsese's *The Blues* series for PBS. Undoubtedly, this is an important anthology, with movies about blues artists by directors such as Clint Eastwood, Mike Figgis, Wim Wenders and Scorsese himself. But before the films aired at the New Film Festival, they were already being screened on the local PBS station, meaning anyone in Montreal with cable could watch the series from the comfort of their own home. A bizarre claim of a coup for the festival, and probably more than somewhat embarrassing.

Still, given this oversight, Losique's heavy-on-hot-air charges about Montreal's New Film Festival are direly unfair. Taken together with FanTasia, the city's mid-summer celebration of cult cinema, these events are probably the most crucial in Montreal's overcrowded film festival landscape. Losique's pre-emptive diatribe says less about the New Film Festival's importance and more about the lack of his own.

*Matthew Hays is the film critic and associate editor for Montreal's weekly Mirror.*



Barbara Doran's *The Man Who Studies Murder*



## St. John's International Women's Film and Video Festival

(10/15-19/03)

By Wyndham Wise

Radio deejays begin the day with "Canada, Newfoundland's youngest territory." T-shirts read "Free NFLD" and "Newfoundland Liberation Army." The only time zone in North America that is marked by the half-hour. Welcome to the parallel universe that is Newfoundland and Labrador.

The St. John's International Women's Film and Video Festival—which advertises itself as "Hot Chicks. Hot Flicks. What more could you want?"—is a small gem of a festival that seems retro at first glance but is refreshingly free of politically correct, male-bashing cant.