

*A Problem with Fear*, received very enthusiastic responses at its screenings in the festival's Panorama section. John Greyson's South African co-production, *Proteus*, also impressed audiences, as did Ron Mann's engaging and engaged documentary, *Go Further*. In the more experimental International Forum section, veteran documentarian Allan King's sublime *Dying at Grace* was lauded for its courage and compassion.

Over at Marlene-Dietrich-Platz, meanwhile, the festival's flagship Official Competition section was its usual muddle of the latest good and bad Hollywood fare (*Monster*, *The Missing*, *Cold Mountain*, et al.) and emerging international talents such as Denmark's Annette K. Olesen (*In Your Hands*) and Germany's Fatih Akin. Akin, born in Hamburg to Turkish parentage, became the first German filmmaker to capture the Golden Bear in two decades with *Gegen die Wand* (*Head On*), his dramatic and timely portrait of love and cultural collision. The

Competition also featured, with mixed and even disappointing results, the return of veterans like the U.K.'s Ken Loach (*Ae Fond Kiss*), France's Patrice Leconte (*Confidences trop intimes*) and Eric Rohmer (*Triple Agent*), and Greece's Theo Angelopoulos (*Trilogy: The Weeping Meadow*). With the exception of Romuald Karmakar's unfortunate, unintentionally hilarious parody of art-house existentialism, *Nightsongs* (which makes Vincent Gallo's execrable *Brown Bunny* looklike an Antonioni film), the 54th Competition had no real masterworks but no howling embarrassments either.

As *Variety* critic Eddie Cockrell put it, the festival's solid programming and peerless organization signals that perhaps Berlin "is going to give Cannes a run for its money as the pre-eminent European platform for launching new films." High hopes, indeed. Beyond the intra-festival rivalry and struggles for international film festival supremacy, though, there were many remarkable films about life, strife, death and love in our dangerous times at Berlin 2004. Maybe the true slogan of this year's festival, unspoken but urgently felt hovering over the windswept Potsdamerplatz, comes faraway from John and Yoko (who chose, it should be remembered, to live in the USA): War Is Over, If You Want It.

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## NSI's FilmExchange (3/2-6/04)

By Peter Vesuwalla

David "Sudz" Sutherland looks exhausted and keeps saying he's about to leave the party and go to bed. It's the second day of the National Screen Institute's FilmExchange Canadian Film Festival held in Winnipeg, and his first feature, *Love, Sex and Eating the Bones*, has just played to a small but enthusiastic audience. Sutherland is about to head back to Toronto for the film's theatrical release and he's hoping ThinkFilm's novel marketing strategy of distributing coupons offering a six-dollar discount to build an audience and create buzz will pay off.

Seeing him again, hanging out at a late-night party in somebody's room at the Fort Garry Hotel,

Sudz Sutherland's *Love, Sex and Eating the Bones*



reminds me of the first time I covered the festival, back in 2000, when it was still called Local Heroes. It was at a similar party, possibly in the same hotel room, when all the booze was gone and the conversation turned back to the quest for the Holy Grail: a commercially successful English-Canadian film. After careful, drunken deliberation, the filmmakers



Carl Bessai's *Emile*

in the room created *Dogme 2000*: "We will make movies that don't suck."

Four years later Sutherland has delivered. His first feature is hip enough that it should pack houses across North America if it has the promotional clout, and is witty enough to deserve it. The film, about a man so obsessed with pornography that he's incapable of consummating a serious relationship with a real, live woman, is a rare breed. It's a legitimately funny, English-Canadian sex comedy, featuring a predominately black cast. It's as if Sutherland has never heard of the Canadian inferiority complex. Our nationwide sense of self-deprecation was on full display, however, the next morning at a panel discussion on marketing moderated by *Now* magazine critic Cameron Bailey. The mood ranged from somber to frustrated until a woman in the audience stood up and suggested Canadians should be legally obligated to see indigenous films.

Later that afternoon, during a panel on working with U.S. broadcasters, Hans Rosenstein of Whalley-Abbey Media Holdings, discussed the lengths to which he goes to make the Montreal-based home improvement show *Debbie Travis' Facelift* look like it's made in Anytown USA. Apparently, making movies that don't suck just isn't enough. Too bad, considering that of the 13 features playing this year, most were excellent. Winnipeg director Jeff Solylo premiered *East of Euclid*, his debut feature, a hilarious tribute to Winnipeg's Ukrainian community, film noir, The Guess Who, hockey and garlic sausage. More than five years in the making, the black-and-white comedy about a Russian gambler's plot to kidnap a Finnish hockey player blends some gloriously low-key special effects, obvious scale-model shots and the funniest scene involving a projectile eyeball since *Evil Dead II*. Mild-mannered Solylo, whose credits as an art director include a large

chunk of Guy Maddin's filmography, seemed surprised and delighted when his film sold out Winnipeg's Cinematheque at a late-night screening.

Maddin's own *The Saddest Music in the World* closed the festival with another sold-out screening at the Globe Cinemas. He loathes public speaking and relied on star Mark McKinney to man the spotlight at the Q&A session following the film. McKinney, who had earlier given a chat session with CBC Winnipeg Comedy Festival artistic director Al Rae, came to the rescue with a hilarious impression of co-star Isabella Rossellini. Rounding out the list of sold-out Winnipeg films was Gary Yates's *Seven Times Lucky* starring Kevin Pollak, Liane Balaban and Jonas Chernick. This neo-noir, apparently inspired entirely by Winnipeg's Chicago-style architecture was a hit at Sundance this year and received a well-deserved rave review in *Variety*.

While about 5,000 people attended the festival (up 1,000 from last year), films from outside the city only played to half-full houses at best. It seems the movie-going public was too busy putting its hard-earned dollars on Mel Gibson's collection plate. Léa Pool's *The Blue Butterfly* prompted local arts columnist Morley Walker to storm out of the theatre midway through the movie, shaking his head. The film, about a young cancer patient's quest to see an elusive South American butterfly before he dies, did, however, receive a warm reception, as did Peter Wellington's *Luck*. Ardent party girl Deborah Kara Unger was on hand to introduce Carl Bessai's *Emile*, in which she plays Sir Ian McKellen's niece, and Alex Rice came to town to support Nathaniel Geary's *On the Corner*, a gripping drama set in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside. Paula Tiberius's ultra-hip *Goldirocks* was a perfect choice for a late-night screening, and Canadian film history buffs were treated to an afternoon screening of a newly restored print of Ted Kotcheff's *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz*.

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Guy Maddin's *The Saddest Music in the World*

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