

Worldwide Short Film Festival

(5/11-16/04)

BY Allan Tong



James Genn's *The Dog Walker*

ANIMATION DOMINATED THIS YEAR'S Worldwide Short Film Festival (held in Toronto), which kicked off with *Destino*, an unfinished Salvador Dali/Walt Disney collaboration from 1946. Recently completed by the Disney studio, this seven-minute gem features a wholesome Disney woman dancing across a Daliesque landscape of grotesque figures, broken bridges and eerie shadows. The blend of sweet and strange is beautiful, jarring and unique.

Along these twisted lines was Chris Landreth's *Ryan*, named the Best Canadian Short. *Ryan* is a dazzling yet bittersweet homage to Canadian animator Ryan Larkin. Marrying Larkin's real voice with futuristic 3-D CGI animation (courtesy of Seneca College), *Ryan* chronicles Larkin's rise as an NFB *wunderkind*, creating influential animation 30 years ago before nose-diving into years of substance abuse. Today, Larkin panhandles on the streets of Montreal. While Landreth places too much of himself in the film, he perfectly captures Larkin's innovative genius and self-destruction with characters who appear twisted and

disembodied. Larkin's head is a decaying mass of flesh and eyeglasses, while his arms are scrawny and shrivelled like a corpse. Arguably, *Ryan* was the festival's crowning jewel.

Other Canadian animators shone. Masoud Raouf's *Blue Like a Gunshot*, Steven Woloshen's *Minuet* and Simon Goulet's *Oio* were sublime abstractions, playing with colour, shapes and music in different ways. By comparison, however, Canadian dramas were inconsistent. One exception was *Noel Blank*. Director Jean-François Rivard delivers a perfect twist ending to a dark story about a father suffering from Alzheimer's who doesn't recognize his son during Christmas dinner—in summer. Just as haunting was the wordless *Song of Wreckage* about a rural man who suffers guilt after a hit-and-run encounter with a deaf boy. Director Ryan Redford skilfully employs music, sound and montage to create a taut film.

Canadians are a funny bunch. For some reason, we make great comedy shorts but not features. Jesse McKeown's *The Big Charade* is a hilarious send-up of corny

Hollywood action flicks, cut like a movie trailer. A haunted charades champ hunts for his father's killer in the big city, confronting every action-movie cliché in the book. Albert Nerenberg's 120-second *Kung Fu Jesus* literally turns the martial arts and Biblical genres on their heads. Meanwhile, Brian Stockton presented another dry and laconic valentine to his hometown with the dry and laconic *Saskatchewan Part 2*. Stockton finely captures the flatness and charm of the Prairies on film. In Toronto, James Genn offered *The Dog Walker*, an amusing tale about a love-struck geek who walks dogs for a living.

Though the festival isn't renown for documentaries, Hubert Davis's *Hardwood* stood out. Recently acclaimed at Hot Docs less than a month earlier, *Hardwood* was named the Best Canadian Documentary. It's a confessional story of Davis's dysfunctional family, centring around his wayward father, a former Harlem Globetrotter, who reconciles with his estranged white wife and their children. The movie is powerful, candid and painfully honest. Internationally, outstanding films included France's enchanting yet bizarre *The Man without a Head* capturing the love life of a headless bachelor; Slovenia's poignant *(A) Torsion*, where a sick cow unites a choir of refugees during the siege of Sarajevo; and the German comedy (no, that's not a typo) *Meine Eltern*, where a teenage girl pretends to her boyfriend that her uptight folks are cool and liberated.

Overall, the festival started strongly and maintained a consistent level of film programming. The Mexico spotlight was tailored to the themes of love (the sensitive *Guts and Heart* starring a young Gael Garcia Bernal of *Y Tu Mama Tambien*), lust (the old-fashioned farce *You Owe*

Me), God (the enigmatic *The Miracle*) and death (award-winning animations *No Support* and *Down To the Bone*). Predictably, the program of Celebrity Shorts was a crowd-pleaser. Actress Illeana Douglas delivered a great satire on Hollywood celebrity by working the aisles in *Supermarket* ("Hey, aren't you...?"). Bob Odenkirk parodied film festivals in *The Frank International Film Festival* where an ordinary Joe named Frank holds his own festival in his living room.

Seminars and workshops offered a strong lineup of industry gatekeepers and star filmmakers. The biggest star, Albert Maysles (here to pitch his own project) enlivened one seminar when he declared Michael Moore "a son of a bitch" to a stunned crowd. It appears that neither Maysles nor Allan King are fond of Moore's style of in-your-face documentaries. The real talk

of the festival, however, was the festival itself. Traditionally a mid-June affair, Worldwide Shorts moved up a full month this year, slamming head-on into the ReelWorld/Images/Hot Docs/Inside Out train. Worldwide Shorts honcho Shane Smith wanted to capture the tail end of the student audience in mid-May and secure the Isabel Bader Theatre, the classiest movie house in Toronto. This may have been a shrewd move, but it left movie junkies and industry people exhausted. Outside of the Toronto International Film Festival juggernaut in September, Toronto's film festivals are now crammed into a narrow window between early April and early

June. This cheek-to-jowl scheduling testifies to the popularity of film in the movie-going capital of North America, but the question is: can all these festivals survive?

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The Man without a Head

Cannes Film Festival

(5/12-23/04)

by Tom McSorley



Michael Moore's *Fahrenheit 9/11*

Image courtesy of Alliance Atlantis

IT IS AXIOMATIC—BANAL, EVEN, FOR A Canadian—to observe that America is unavoidable. It's here. It's there. It's every-

where. Its cinematic reach to the Mediterranean shores of southern France has always been considerable. More recent-

ly, however, its geopolitical agendas have also imposed themselves on the plush, privileged screening rooms of the world's largest film festival. At Cannes 2003, for example, we had the unmistakable American presence of its faraway-so-close assault on Iraq. That military action permeated the mood and the substance of critical debates along La Croisette. In 2004, we witnessed the ascension to Palme d'Or lore of *Fahrenheit 9/11*, a noisy and welcome cinematic *mea culpa* about America and its foreign policy by the pre-eminent American shit-disturber, loudmouth or vulgar populist (take your pick), Michael Moore. The obstreperous combination of Moore's voice and that of jury president Quentin Tarantino gave this year's Cannes its own distinctive *vox Americana*, best described as loud and louder. Perhaps that's appropriate. After all, when the USA acts, fails, gets it right, cleans