

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

up its act, or, as in the Moore film, actually criticizes itself, it's *everybody's* business. The U.S. domination of the festival *Zeitgeist* could not have been more in evidence at the 57th Festival de Cannes. A full three festivals after the events of September 2001, we can say that America—and that inevitably and irritatingly means the rest of us, too—has finally gotten its Cannes 9/11.

Thankfully, Cannes mounts a sprawling enough cinematic canvas to permit one to say, "but enough about them." In spite of the requisite and mercenary inclusion of commercial Hollywood fare (*Shrek 2* and *The Ladykillers*) in the prestigious Official Competition, Cannes 2004 included new work in its elite section from such international art-house stalwarts as France's Tony Gatlif (*Exiles*), Brazil's Walter Salles (*The Motorcycle Diaries*), Serbia's Emir Kusturica (*Life Is a Miracle*) and Hong Kong's Wong Kar-wai (*2046*). With the exception of the Wong Kar-wai, the critical consensus rightly settled on the opinion that the Competition was rather lacklustre. The official selection out of competition featured more satisfying fare, including new films by Chile's Patricio Guzman (*Salvatore Allende*), France's Raymond Depardon (*10e chambre, instants d'audience*), Iran's Abbas Kiarostami (*Five*) and China's Zhang Yimou (*House of Flying Daggers*). Most exciting of all in this section was a new film from the now *eminence grise* of the French new wave, Jean-Luc Godard. As is usually the case when he arrives with a new film, the buzz of Cannes for cinephiles was Godard himself. His stunning new feature, *Notre musique*, is a meditation on media, history, contemporary barbarity and the possibilities of hope. Beyond his remarkable film, he also waded into a labour dispute taking place during the festival, allowing union leaders to read their statement at his press conference. He criticized Michael Moore and America in his usual clipped, aphoristic, incisive manner. Even in his 70s, Godard

remains the most radical, cantankerous and challenging image-maker of our time.

The other sections of the festival (Un Certain Regard, Critics Week, and the Director's Fortnight) also yielded a scattering of worthy films. Australia's Cate Shortland wrote and directed her engaging coming-of-age first feature film, *Somersault*. Set in the vast plains of Kazakhstan in the early 1990s, *Schizo*, an impressive Russian film, traces the tangled relationships between a young man, an ex-boxer and a single mother who live on the edge of town. Its director, Guka Omarova, makes an auspicious debut with this taut, raw, poetic drama.

If Cannes 2004 can be said to have revealed anything in a consistent way—U.S. dominance aside—it's the remarkable cinematic renaissance underway in Latin America. From the Rio Grande to Tierra del Fuego, Latin American filmmakers offered up ferocious, tough-minded, tender and aesthetically freewheeling films about death (in the enervating and utterly captivating *Los muertos* from Argentina), loss of innocence (in the Louis Malle-esque tale of boyhood friendship set during the coup in 1973 Chile in *Machuca*), dreams of freedom (in the talented young Brazilian director Jorge Furtado's latest, *The Man Who Counted*), the peculiarities of human relationship (in the International Critics Prize-winning *Whisky*, the second feature by the Uruguayan directorial team of Juan-Pablo Rebella and Pablo Stoll) and the absurdities of adolescence (in the wry Mexican feature that is one part Jim Jarmusch, one part Carlos Carrera, *Duck Season*).

Considering the relatively heavyweight Canuck presence in 2002 (*Ararat*, *Spider*) and 2003 (*Les Invasion barbares*, *Seducing Doctor Lewis*), it's not especially surprising that Canadian representa-

tion was diminished in 2004. Canada was onscreen, albeit briefly, in Olivier Assayas's France/Canada co-production *Clean*, and in Carole Laure's co-production *CQ2*. There was also a special screening of François Prevost's and Hugo Latulippe's moving feature documentary *What Remains of Us?*, about a Tibetan refugee in Quebec. From the NFB's French animation studio, Michele Cournoyer's animated meditation on technology and desire, *Accordeon*, won much admiration in its Official Competition slot. Elsewhere, Chris Landreth's *Ryan*, an homage to the talented and troubled ex-NFB animator, Ryan Larkin, was critically acclaimed in its Critics Week presentation.

All these diverse riches notwithstanding, Cannes 2004 ultimately spoke with an American voice, for better and for worse. Indeed, the 57th Festival de Cannes could rightly echo former Mexican dictator Porfirio Diaz's famous phrase, "Poor Mexico: so far from God, so close to the United States." After all, this is no longer a Mexican or Canadian condition. It's everywhere.

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Maggie Cheung,
winner of Best
Actress for *Clean*.



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