

Insight Film & Video CEO Kirk Shaw is doing his best to ignore his insistently ringing mobile. The Vancouver production company is one of the busiest in the city. Last year, among other projects, they completed 10 movies, four of which went straight to DVD in the U.S. "What we've seen happen," Shaw explains, "is that the DVD companies are willing to pay larger amounts [in distribution advances] for bigger names. So that there is more pressure to get a better cast ensemble that will draw the public to the product."

Shaw believes that the DVD market is about to undergo a significant change. "I think we are going to see sponsored collaborations," he predicts,



Kevin Pollock in Gary Yates's *Seven Times Lucky* the winner of the Citytv Western Canada Feature Film Award at VIFF.

"like Proctor & Gamble and *Playboy* movie releases. Certain publishing companies, for example, own the space beside the cash register at every Wal-Mart and they're filling it right now with magazines. I think they'll soon fill it with DVDs that somehow relate to the magazine." Most importantly,

they must appeal to the public. "When DVDs first started coming out," says Sanderson, "the titles that sold the best were the big action ones, with huge explosions on screen. We call them testosterone movies." Males made up the vast majority of the audience, and the product was marketed accordingly. "In the old days," recalls Wragg, "the joke was, if you wanted to sell your video to a guy, you put a tit, a gun or a helicopter on the cover. All three, and it was a blockbuster."

Linda Sanderson has some thoughts on what makes a DVD sell. "If the consumer hasn't heard of the movie before, or they don't know the actors, they need a reason to take a chance on it." In other words, package the film so that looks like somebody actually put some thought into it. One of her favourites is *The Butterfly Effect*. "It seems like people lean towards a darker palette with rich reds and gold." So, forget white, which for some reason or another turns people off, and think sex appeal. "Even though people are not inclined to look at the extra features, it is a big selling point, so give the DVD added value with something that people wouldn't get if they went to a theatre to watch it."

Include material on the making of the film, interviews with cast members, even outtakes. "Create something of a buzz around the product and be every bit as creative as you were with the production of the film," says Sanderson. Particularly for films with a limited publicity budget. And last, but hardly least, "Practice aggressive pricing." The fastest growing section of the market is DVDs under \$15, a price that allows the public to buy even more of them and continue to feed their seemingly insatiable DVD appetite. "You now see them in grocery stores, pharmacies, even truck stops," says Martin Wragg. "Anywhere that has a door that opens and human life form that goes inside should be able to sell DVDs. And even if it's not a human life form, but they have some cash in their pocket, that'll do as well."

BY TOBY OSBORNE



OTTAWA INTERNATIONAL ANIMATION FESTIVAL

(9/22-26/04)



The majority of the winning films at the 2004 Ottawa International Animation Festival relied primarily on traditional animation styles, instead of complex CGI. Films like Jacques-Rémy Girerd's *La Prophétie des grenouilles* (*Raining Cats and Frogs*)—a quaint French-language feature film offering a new spin on Noah's Ark—held off stiff competition, including Daniel Robichaud's CGI-animated *P3K: Pinocchio 3000*. When *Raining Cats and Frogs* won the Feature Film Grand Prize, it seemed inevitable that "Machinima" was doomed.

Hyped as an exciting new animation category, Machinima (movies made entirely on personal computers and filmed in real time using computer game technology) was allowed into the festival for the first time. However, the judges strangled this concept at birth by deeming that the four Machinima entries, *Anna*, *A Great & Majestic Empire*, *Fake Science* and *The Journey*, all lacked "a certain level of excellence of expression." Ultimately, none were awarded a prize in the Machinima category, yet another poke in the eye for computers.

The festival's five-day schedule also included a Hayao Miyazaki (*Spirited Away*) retrospective, a celebration of 75 years of *Popeye* and a presentation by *Ren & Stimpy* creator John K. arguably putting further emphasis on the notion of going back to basics instead of CGI ultrarealism. This would be true if not for one glaring exception, the ultra-surreal *Ryan*, which won the Nelvana Independent Short Film Grand Prize. Overflowing with imagination, enthusiasm and, ironically, humanity, this CGI-crafted biographical tale examines the life of legendary NFB animator Ryan Larkin. Creator Chris Landreth takes the unusual step of joining his subject in the film to interview the ubiquitous Larkin. The animators sit across from one another, with their 3-D heads seemingly broken,

perhaps pushed apart by their own immense creativity that spills out into luminescent rainbow colours and a mass of twisted wires.

Landreth and Larkin were reunited on stage in the cavernous studio theatre at the National Arts Centre where the winners were announced during the festival's closing ceremonies. It was an emotional affair for Landreth, and the audience, as he dragged Larkin up to

take a bow. *Ryan* is a deeply felt film, and what makes it more unimaginably personal is that viewers have literally seen inside the heads of the stars, making it even more difficult to separate the real people collecting the prize from the lifelike CGI models on screen.

A popular favourite with the audiences, and in the genre of 1980s Saturday morning children's cartoon, David Wachtenheim's and Robert Marianetti's *Saddam and Osama* reinvents the notorious troublemakers Saddam Hussein and Osama bin Laden as superheroes, who use their magical powers to evade capture by the American "infidels." *Saddam and Osama* scooped two awards, Best Television Special and the Mike Gribble Peel of Laughter Award, presented to the most hilarious film in competition.

One of the film's highlights included a mock-commercial break promoting a children's toy called Rocks, pieces of rubble that come in a variety of cool collectable colours and designs, "perfect for throwing at U.S. tanks."

Political satire was also welcome in the form of Gregg and Evan Spiridellis's *This Land* (winner of the New Media Work Grand Prize), featuring photo heads of U.S.

presidential candidates Bush and Kerry attached to tiny bodies and then manipulated to dance and sing about their election platforms. Much more fun than watching the live debates on television. Another comedic favourite was Jennifer Shiman's *The Shining in 30 Seconds, Re-Enacted by Bunnies*,





which is exactly as the title suggests, a re-enactment of Stanley Kubrick's *The Shining*, condensed into 30 seconds with bunnies instead of Jack Nicholson and company.

Compared to the colourful offerings of *Saddam and Osama*, *This Land* and *The Shining in 30 Seconds*, the black-and-white pencil work of *Son of Satan* and the charcoal shadings in *La Piccola Russia* were stark, dark and frank. Gianluigi Toccafondo's *La Piccola Russia*, which picked up Best Narrative Short Film Under 35 Minutes in the Independent Short Films competition, capitalized on grainy sketching to corrupt photographs, adapting them from portraits and snapshots into a void of disturbing violent and sexual fantasies. Then there was J.J. Villard's *Son of Satan*, described by one festival judge as "fucked up," and for good reason. In this raw and unpretentious film, cartoony young bullies pick on a fellow student. They curse and beat on him and eventually try to hang him while the artist's pencil seems to be motivated by this hate, even driven by it. Nevertheless, *Son of Satan*

is undeniably charged with genuine passion, particularly visible from the hand-drawn nature of the film. And one might ask: Would it have worked so well if had been constructed out of pixels on a sterile computer screen? Of course, the computers will have their chance for revenge next year as the festival has officially announced that it will now be an annual event. In 2005, it will run from September 21 to 25. Based on the talent at this year's festival, I've already noted the dates on my calendar.

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Jennifer Shiman's
The Shining in 30 Seconds,
Re-Enacted by Bunnies



Atlantic Film Festival

BY
Ron
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(9/17-26/04)

Standing on the edge of a quarter century, the 2004 Atlantic Film Festival (AFF)—the 24th—surprised itself with more local feature films than initially expected in what was supposed to be a slow year.

The proceedings opened with a maximum of Canadian star power with the Nova Scotia-shot Daniel MacIvor feature drama *Wilby Wonderful*. Actors Rebecca Jenkins, Maury Chaykin and Callum Keith Rennie joined producers Sherri Johnson, Camilia Frieberg and MacIvor himself to launch the film—and the festival—in style. Ellen Page eventually won a Best Actress Award for her role in the Altman-lite film about the denizens of a mysterious seaside island in danger of rapid overdevelopment. Other East Coast features that made their debuts included the Saint John-shot comedy *Geraldine's Fortune*, helmed by *Boys of St. Vincent* director John N. Smith and starring Mary Walsh and Jane Curtin, John Vatcher's long-awaited Newfoundland drama *Making Love in St. Pierre*, and the bracing BBC/CBC miniseries *Sex Traffic*, where Halifax stood in for Boston under three feet of snow.

The real strength of the this year's Atlantic work, however, lay in the non-fiction end of things, reflecting the surging strength of documentary right across the board in North America and the rest of the cinematic world. With the East Coast's Salter Street Films (reborn as the Halifax Film Company and retaining most of Salter's previous production commitments such as *This Hour Has 22 Minutes* and the stop-animation show *Poko*) still basking in the Oscar glory for *Bowling for Columbine*, documentaries seemed to be everywhere at this year's AFF. Newfoundlander Gerry Rogers followed up on the success of her widely-acclaimed *My Left Breast* with a similarly themed cancer-survivor film entitled *Pleasant Street*, which follows, over a period of a year, three neighbours on an unassuming St. John's street as they struggle with the disease. Rogers compassionate, lively and surprisingly humorous film won her a Sobeyes Best Director Award along with the NFB's Rex Tasker Award for Best Documentary.

Other strong nonfiction work came from a new generation of filmmakers including *Trailer Park Boys* cinematographer Adam Liley, whose *Come on Down: Searching for the American Dream* did turn-away business at the cavernous Park Lane Cinema complex where most of the festival