

(9/9-18/04)

By Lindsay Gibb

In last year's *Take One* review of TIFF, Kathleen Cummins asked the question: "Is Perspective Canada even necessary anymore?" It seemed that the program was ghettoizing films of well-established Canadian directors by segregating them from the rest of the programs in the festival.

So this year TIFF dropped Perspective Canada in favour of two new programs that it says will better promote new Canadian talent. Short Cuts Canada delivers short films from across the country and Canada First is devoted to introducing the feature films by up-and-coming Canadian filmmakers.

The latter featured 10 films in its inaugural year, and three of these stood out above the others. Since the critical success of *FUBAR* (2002), Michael Dowse has written and directed a second, much better feature about a hugely successful techno DJ, Frankie Wilde, who goes deaf and loses his career and his family; by the way, it's a comedy. With witty appearances from real DJs commenting on Frankie's plight as well as a giant badger in a dress who violently hinders Frankie's attempts to kick his cocaine habit, *It's All Gone Pete Tong* is smarter and funnier than *FUBAR*. It won the Toronto City Award for Best Canadian Feature.

Pete Tong was picked up by Lion's Gate and is due for theatrical release in 2005.

Daniel Roby's thriller *La Peau blanche* won the Citytv Award for Best Canadian First Feature Film. Roby's haunting debut is about a student who finds redheads creepy because of their pale complexions, but becomes enamoured with one anyway. His love (and her bright white skin) blinds him from noticing the odd—and possibly murderous—undertakings of her family. Roby definitely has the hang of suspense, and for a first-time feature, this thriller deserves as much attention as *Ginger Snaps*. The third Canuck flick to garner festival buzz, Rob Stefaniuk's *Phil the Alien*, is a more modest budget, independent picture. Stefaniuk, a Toronto actor turned director, managed to pull out all the stops when it came to casting as many

i
n
t
e
toronto
n
a
t
film
o
n
festival
|

recognizable Canadian faces as possible. He has Boyd Banks, Bruce Hunter, Sean Cullen, Graham Greene, musician Bob Wiseman from Blue Rodeo, *Canadian Idol* Ryan Malcolm and to top it off, Joe Flaherty as the voice of a talking beaver who turns out to be a hit-beaver for

the CIA. Phil (played by Stefaniuk) is the alien who lands in the woods of Canada and morphs himself into a human shape, full lumberjack gear and all. The quintessential Canadian moment comes when Phil is drunkenly hobbling through the woods and the familiar synthesizer of Rush's "Tom Sawyer" breaks in loud. It had to happen. Although the premise is hilarious, the film does begin to lose steam about two-thirds of the way through when it stops being clever and starts to feel like it's being silly for silly's sake. It's hard to say how well a film like this would go over outside of Canada, but if Bob and Doug MacKenzie could do it, then why not *Phil*?

Even though *Pete Tong* won the award for Best Canadian Feature, one film that came close to rivaling it was the comedy *Siblings* (screened in the Contemporary World Cinema program). This is a surprising second feature for director David Weaver, whose first film was the critically-panned *Century Hotel*. Born out of the Canadian Film Centre's Feature Film Project, *Siblings* is a black comedy about four kids who live together as brothers and sisters but are barely related due to the multiple remarriages of their parents. Their current mom and dad, played by Sonja Smits and Nicholas Campbell, embody the word cruel. Mom says the youngest daughter would be better off dead and dad's behaviour borders on the incestuous when it comes to his older daughter. Even though she is probably not biologically his, it's creepy and disturbing all the same. The last straw comes when dad puts the children's beloved and healthy dog to sleep just to get him out of the way. It's clear, these people deserve to die, and then they do.

Two big-name Canadian films this year were *Being Julia* and *Clean*, both minority co-productions and both were given Gala screenings.

Hong Kong star Maggie Cheung has been praised for her performance (she won the Best Actress Award in Cannes 2004) in Olivier Assayas's *Clean*, which clearly was written with her in mind, but it is Nick Nolte who really stands out in the role of the subdued, gentle grandfather. Apart from these two performances, however, the film itself, about a woman recovering



Top: Annette Bening in István Szabó's *Being Julia*
Right: Maggie Cheung in Olivier Assayas's *Clean*





Michael Dowse's *It's All Gone Pete Tong*

from heroin addiction in hope of reconnecting with her son, is nothing special. One of the best performances at this year's TIFF came from Annette Bening in István Szabó's *Being Julia*. Like *All about Eve* before it, *Being Julia* is the story of a stage legend who is idolized by a younger man, who instead of flattering the star into letting her guard down, seduces her. Aside from its ensemble of fabulous performers (Jeremy Irons and the Canadian contingent: Bruce Greenwood, Sheila McCarthy and Maury Chaykin), this *Masterpiece Theatre*-styled costume drama runs on far too long.

If there was a prize at this year's festival for the most Canadian stars in a film, it would have gone, hands down, to *Wilby Wonderful* (also screened in the Contemporary World Cinema program), the story of a small town and its inhabitants, written and directed by Daniel MacIvor. However, despite its fine cast—Maury Chaykin, Paul Gross, Sandra Oh, Rebecca Jenkins, Callum Keith Rennie and others—the film ceases to thrill. It's one of those convoluted films where describing it would cause a person to say something like: "the lady who runs the coffee shop is having an affair with a cop, who is married to the real estate agent, who is selling a house for the guy who is trying to kill himself, who is being followed by the house painter..." and so on. It's not so much confusing as it is tedious.

The purpose of Perspective Canada in years past was to carve out a safe spot for domestic films and prevent them from being buried under the bigger international names. With the dissolution of this very successful program, it seems that TIFF has finally decided to let Canadian filmmakers grow up and fight it out with the big boys and girls and introduce two programs that will help the up-and-coming ones to make it on their own some day.



Photo by D. Gerard Mackay

"GOD GRANT ME SERENITY TO ACCEPT THE THINGS I CANNOT CHANGE" BLACK WALK PRESENTS
BRUCE HUNTER AS "JONES"
PHIL THE ALIEN
 A MONTREAL FILM
 99 BUDBURY STREET UNIT 101 TORONTO, ONTARIO, CANADA M6J 3B7 t:416-933-2864 f:416-933-2016
 WWW.BLACKWALK.COM CONTACT MIKEL NARLAIS MIKEL@BLACKWALK.COM

Montreal World Film Festival

(8/26-9/6/04)

By Maurie Alioff

There were several potent movies on view during the Montreal World Film Festival's 28th edition, but they played out in the shadow of an intense real-life drama. Just before the festival opened, Telefilm Canada and Quebec funding agency SODEC released a report chastizing MWFF for numerous sins. The litany of alleged offences included bad management, poor relations with the industry and the media, and ticket sales that are not high enough for a city the size of Montreal. When the show was over, the agencies invited proposals for a new international film event. MWFF president Serge Losique and his V.P., Danièle Cauchard, scoffed at these moves and refused to play along. The duo insisted that the 2005 edition will go ahead even if they are cut loose from Telefilm and SODEC funding.

After saying nothing about the public scolding, Losique "showed his teeth," as one daily put it, in mid-September. He hauled a lawsuit-threatening lawyer into the picture and fired off open letters that pushed every possible button. According to the missives, which deployed an arsenal of World War Two and Cold War invectives, the 28-year-old MWFF was being assaulted by "apparatchiks" and "putschists" at two levels of government. Signed by Losique, Cauchard and MWFF chairman Pierre Goyette, the letters unleashed blistering critiques of their own. For instance, they charged that SECOR, the consulting firm that issued the report, had a bias against MWFF. Not only was the study full of distortions, claimed festival brass, it set a precedent endangering other government-aided events. The funding agencies, claimed Losique, were behaving like "the Soviet Union during the era of Andrei Jdanov and the Stalinist 'social realism' that controlled all creative activity."

There was a lot more, far too much to detail here. Suffice to say that Telefilm responded to the charges with a Web page and SECOR defended itself. Meanwhile, supporters of the festival,