



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

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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,

including veteran producer Rock Demers, wrote an angry letter to Canadian Heritage and Quebec's Culture and Communications ministry, and the *Gazette* published a pro-MWFF editorial. To further complicate matters, major sponsors such as Air Canada and VISA announced they were on board for the 2005 edition. As I write this, the game of chicken is in maximum overdrive. On their October 8 deadline, the agencies received four propositions for a new event. The contenders for the approximately \$1 million in government money were: Le Festival du Nouveau Cinéma; Groupe Rozon, the organizers of Montreal's Just for Laughs Comedy Festival; the post-production oper-

announced that the proposals were excellent but they needed another month of tweaking before the agencies could reach a decision. Moreover, Telefilm chairperson Charles Bélanger stated unequivocally that there would be no backing off. Losique's festival would not get the money. Meanwhile, the L'Équipe Spectra contingent confirmed it was in the running but had reportedly dropped the idea of Losique remaining in charge. In another development, Just for Laughs and FanTasia said they would fuse their ideas into a festival that would highlight the genre pictures FanTasia programs and the comedies Just for Laughs screens in Comedia, its annual film event.

As the convoluted story wore on, Quebec's film milieu developed a case of the heebie-jeebies. Even some diehard critics of Losique and his team flipped from *shaudenfreude* to dread that a horribly embarrassing mess loomed on the horizon. If Telefilm, SODEC and MWFF collide (after all, Losique is free to plunge ahead with MWFF, competing on every level with the new festival, as well as go to court), the splat will be heard loud and clear on the international film scene. By mid-October, Odile Tremblay, *Le Devoir's* senior film critic, was calling the situation a "Grand Guignol spectacle" and a "circus."

As for this year's MWFF, it played 416 movies from 72 countries. The festival's guest list included French acting legend Isabelle Adjani and Greek auteur Theo Angelopoulos, who were in town for tributes and special prizes. Spanish beauty Penelope Cruz also showed up in support of two films, Sergio Castellito's *Non Ti Muovere* and John Duigan's *Head in the Clouds*. The latter gets its energy from Charlize Theron's performance as a spectacularly gorgeous bohemian in 1920s and 1930s Paris and had its world premiere at MWFF. The festival had a pretty good year in 2004, but will it return in its present form? As I write, the only certainty is that Losique will not go gently into the good night. Director of communications and veteran publicist David Novek, who returned in 2004 to head the press office that he ran from 1977 to 1991, has no doubt that "Losique is a fighter. He's announced that the festival is going ahead next year and he's not going to let anybody push him around."



Charlize Theron and Penelope Cruz in John Duigan's *Head in the Clouds*

ation Vision Globale, which sponsors the FanTasia genre film festival; and a group of 15 major industry professionals who would be guided by L'Équipe Spectra, organizers of the city's hugely successful jazz festival. The latter proposition imagined Losique remaining but under the supervision of an active board. Naturally, Losique refused to buy into the proposal, and at one point, L'Équipe Spectra's president, Alain Simard, apparently denied that he had made one.

As for Le Festival du Nouveau Cinéma, its president, Daniel Langlois, first said he would not make a proposal and then submitted one. A press release indicated that Langlois, the software entrepreneur who built the high-tech culture palace Ex-Centris, will play this one out carefully, one step at a time. If Le Festival du Nouveau Cinéma receives the Telefilm and SODEC money, allowing his event to actualize its "vision for growth," Langlois and his new executive director, Sheila de La Varenne, will present its "final development plan" in March, 2005.

At the end of October, the story took another twist. On Friday, October 29, the much-anticipated day of decision, Telefilm and SODEC



UN FILM DI SERGIO CASTELLITO
NON TI MUOVERE
PENELLOPE CRUZ SERGIO CASTELLITO GIULIO GERINI

Penelope Cruz in Sergio Castellito's *Non Ti Muovere*