

THE BEST OF SECTER & THE REST OF SECTER

2005 58m exp Joel Sectar, Rachel Rodin, p/d Joel Sectar, ph Paul Suderman, ed Michael Margolis, sr Drew Malamud, s ed Andrew Malamud, mus Kaveh Nabatian; with David Sectar, David Cronenberg, Joy Fielding, Philip Glass, Paul Hoffert, Michael Ondaatje.

In the mid-1960s, a young Canadian filmmaker came out of nowhere to make two films that shattered taboos and put Canada on the international movie map. The filmmaker was David Sectar and his movies were *Winter Kept Us Warm* (1965), which was the first Canadian feature to be invited to Cannes, and *The Offering* (1966), which Columbia Pictures eventually released. After varying success in New York as an indie filmmaker, however, Sectar and his movies faded from memory.

Forty years later, his nephew, Joel, a neophyte film producer and first-time director, pays tribute to his pioneering uncle in a new documentary, *The Best of Sectar & The Rest of Sectar*. The film is an affectionate portrait of his uncle and offers extensive access to its subject. It is divided into three sections: his early success in Canada; working as an indie filmmaker in Manhattan; and making a living in today's California. By far, the first segment is the most rewarding, both cinematically and historically. When Sectar arrived from the Prairies in the early 1960s to study at the University of Toronto, there was no Canadian film industry to speak of. "You didn't see trucks on the streets. You didn't have friends whose fathers were in the film business," David Cronenberg recalls in the documentary. "There was no connection to movies at all. They came from somewhere else, just like automobiles came from somewhere else."

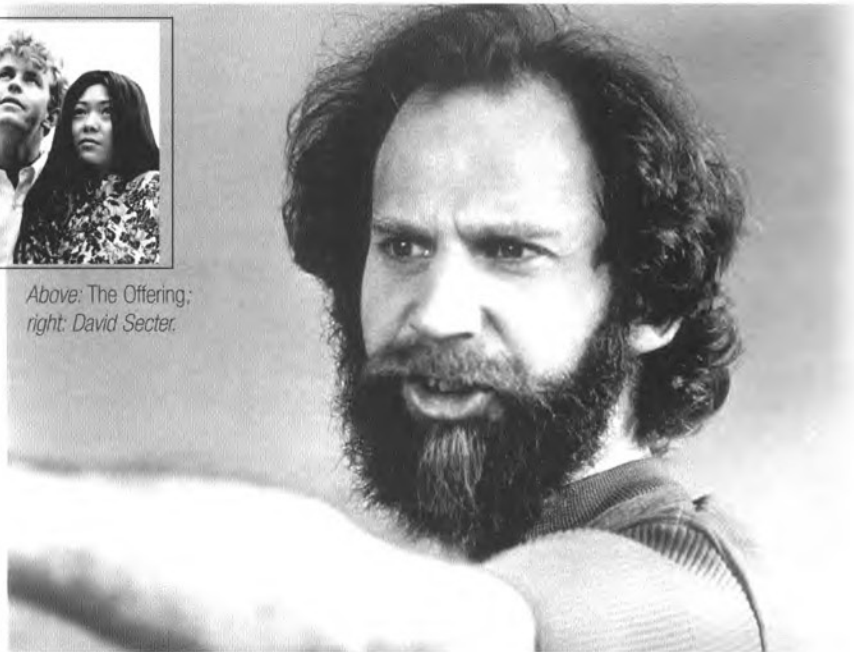
By mixing interviews with key people such as Cronenberg with stock footage of vintage Toronto, the first section of the film faithfully recreates this era for today's audience. Out of sheerchutzpah and ignorance, recalls Sectar, he embarked on *Winter Kept Us Warm* with a

crew that had absolutely no experience. "It was a student film in every sense," he says, and it was the first gay-themed English-language movie ever made in Canada at a time when gay movies didn't even exist outside of the underground. Unfortunately, *The Best of Sectar* barely describes the plot or explains why a fourth-year English literature major dove into the deep end of feature filmmaking. According to an article Sectar wrote for *The Varsity*, the campus paper, he was inspired by *Citizen Kane* and its director, Orson Welles, who was only 24 at the time he made that movie. The

The Offering landed Sectar a Hollywood agent, an American distribution deal and a studio offer, but in the spirit of the times, he turned his back on the establishment and set up a communal production house in New York City. For the next 20 years, Sectar made more films, including a bohemian comedy called *Getting Together* and the soft-core *Blow Dry*. *The Best of Sectar* paints a vivid portrait of these years, mixing interviews with indie film guru John Pierson and composer Philip Glass, who place these films in the context of the vibrant indie film and New York art scene, along with clips of



Above: *The Offering*;
right: David Sectar.



22-year-old Sectar took this as a challenge, and in a remarkable Cinderella story, the little student film was accepted at Cannes.

Sectar's next film also broke new ground by portraying a romance between a white male stagehand and a female performer from a visiting Chinese dance troupe. In 1965, when *The Offering* was shot, China was a closed country and Toronto a buttoned-down, Anglo Saxon town. But the place was blooming, and *The Offering* was the first film to capture the brand new City Hall and Nathan Phillips Square, the international airport and TD Centre; locations that are expensive if not difficult to secure today. Interviews with the cast and crew (including production assistant and future playwright and novelist Michael Ondaatje) speak to Sectar's boldness and originality.

his former collaborators reminiscing about these productions. Sectar comes off as a bohemian ringmaster, but the movies themselves look badly dated.

The Best of Sectar chronicles Sectar's career into the late-1970s, yet leaves the 1980s and 1990s virtually blank. The film fails to address this period or ask any of the hard questions. *The Best of Sectar* will go a long way in restoring David Sectar's rightful place in the Canadian film canon. It is an affectionate ode to a rebel filmmaker and pioneer, but it doesn't reveal enough about its subject, who still remains something of a mystery.

Allan Tong

REVIEWS