

WHISTLER FILM FESTIVAL

(12/2-5/04)

BY DALE DREWERY

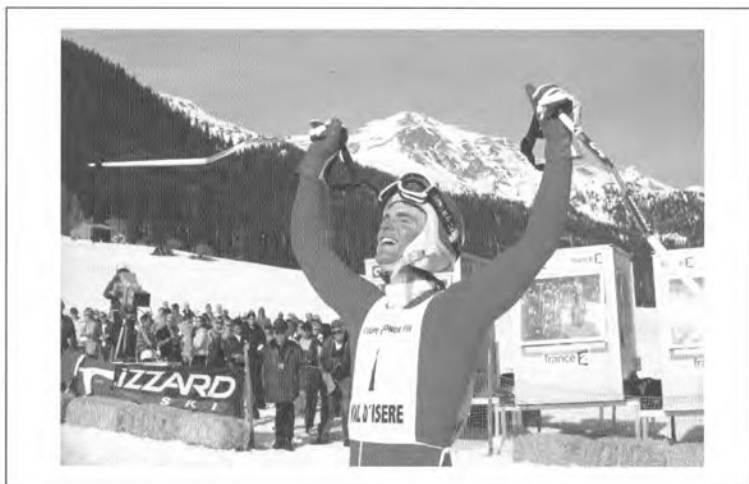
IT IS A SNOWY

December morning. In the lobby of the Westin Resort at Whistler, it's not hard to tell who's from away. The visitors, including a small Toronto contin-

gent, wear leather boots and skimpy jackets (I suspect Don McKellar has never met a ski jacket he liked), while the B.C.-based are bundled up in fleece, moon boots and remarkably ugly hats. Despite the great fashion divide, everyone seems to be getting along.

The occasion is the awards brunch at the Whistler Film Festival, which, since its inception four years ago, has progressed from the bunny hill of film festivals to groomed intermediate. American Express' corporate sponsorship helped with the transition, as did the donation of support and services from the resort and local outfitters. But it's the location that remains this festival's greatest gift.

"People want to come here, so it's not a hard sell," says festival director, Shauna Hardy. "We anchor ourselves in the first week of December not just because it's a good time on the film-festival circuit, but because it's a great time to come to the resort and ski."



Randy Bradshaw's Crazy Canucks

W R A P S

The top of Whistler Mountain played host, the previous evening, to the festival's anniversary party. A chilly evening gondola ride took filmmakers and fans to the Roundhouse Lodge where "snow angels" dressed in silver pop-tops, white fake-fur miniskirts and thigh-high boots danced on tabletops. In fine Whistler tradition, the beer flowed freely and as a result, this morning many of the brunch attendees looked the worse for wear. "It's tough making speeches after three days of being

totally wasted," said filmmaker Kenny Hotz, as he took the stage to accept the \$10,000 inaugural Phillip Borsos Award, named in honour of the late B.C. director. Borsos was the talent behind the 1982 film *The Grey Fox* and, for actor and jury member Deborah Kara Unger, there is a strange parallel between Borsos and Hotz. "There's a fearlessness about Kenny," she says. "He's unapologetic, and he's irreverent."

"I think I've been branded as a rebel," Hotz says over the phone weeks later from his Toronto home. "I don't want to increase Canadian content; I just want to make good movies." Hotz's winning documentary, *The Papal Chase*, is a zany and laugh-out-loud account of his efforts to meet Pope John Paul II on his last world tour. Spurred on by a US \$10,000 bet with a friend, Hotz forges press credentials, confronts the

RCMP and, dressed like the devil, wades into a sea of one million pilgrims, all in an effort to kiss the papal ring.

For Hotz, the success of *The Papal Chase* was particularly sweet. This \$800 film he and a friend cut on a computer at home was turned down by a number of festivals, including TIFF. "I don't think they really like me too much," he

admits, "and it's because I'm not establishment. I embrace trash and Americana, and maybe that's one of the reasons I don't fit in." Until Whistler, that is. "They're all mountain guys," he says. "They're really cool. It's their festival, and they don't have to blow anybody." Deborah Kara Unger is a little more diplomatic. "I think Whistler has the potential," she says, "to do for the voice of Canadian independent cinema what Sundance did, years ago, for American independent cinema."

It's only appropriate then that the film *Crazy Canucks* won the Audience Award for Best Feature. Based on a book by Canadian ski legend Ken Read, the film recounts the 1970s exploits of Canada's Men's Alpine Team on the World Cup Downhill Circuit. Produced and directed by Alberta's Randy Bradshaw, *Crazy Canucks* celebrates the talent and determination of five under-appreciated young athletes. Perhaps it's my fervent national pride, but I found myself liking the movie despite its obvious if-we-all-just-pull-together message and a soundtrack that often overwhelms the film. That said, I learned a lot about an impressive period in Canadian sports history, and I was reminded of just how lousy a skier I am.

Crazy Canucks was just one of 32 feature-length films and 60 shorts that monopolized Whistler's new multiplex and spilled over onto inflatable outdoor screens in the heart of the ski town. "It is exciting," says Unger, "to see this marriage of the physical athletes and the emotional ones. It makes absolute sense. There is this electricity of optimism that you can really feel here. Of course it's rough and it's new, but there is real passion."

Shauna Hardy hopes that passion will burn for years to come. "If we can leave a legacy in our life," she says, "and if it is that we have put Whistler on the map for arts and culture, then that's good enough. That's why we're doing it—for our community." As for filmmaker Kenny Hotz, the \$10,000 award means he can get started on his next movie, which—and best to stop reading now Mrs. Hotz—is all about his mother. "My mom's a widow," he explains, "and I love her and she's lonely and I want to find her a guy." And since he hasn't told her about any of this yet, "the first act is my trying to convince her," he says, "to date this parade



Kenny Hotz's *The Papal Chase*

FESTIVAL

of old guys that I'm going to be sending through her door." It's no surprise he plans to premiere the film at a future Whistler Film Festival.

Dale Drewery is a Vancouver-based journalist and television producer.



Images courtesy of the filmmaker.

SUNDANCE FILM FESTIVAL

(1/20–30/05) BY SEAN FARNEL

WHILE CANNES GIVES the mongrel aristocracy of cinema culture its annual trip to Disneyland on the Mediterranean, Sundance's winter Utah retreat seems to have found its festival niche as a cozy version of eco-tourism: small-scale outfits in remote locations guiding the tourists through the local flora and fawning to those platform-release pastures where commercialization and mass-market operations have not yet penetrated.

Who knew that independent film would prove so sustainable a resource, so beneficial to indigenous real estate agents and so damn responsible and socio-economic? Bloggers, BlackBerries and Uggs boots, the folks at the Sierra Club confirm, have relatively low-visitor impact. And after all, they screen documentaries at Sundance, don't they? Ah, the snide swiping at Sundance! Such a rite of passage for the neophyte attendee.

Let me confess, however, that for a documentary programmer—which I am—it's easy to have a swell time at Sundance. Its non-fiction programming consistently introduces important new films, and Sundance 2005 delivered another stellar documentary slate, including the sole Canadian feature in the festival, Peter Raymont's *Shake Hands with the Devil: The Journey Of Roméo Dallaire*. Sadly, my vividly imagined meeting of the two certifiable Canadian heroes attending the festival, General Dallaire and Pamela Anderson, did not materialize. Too bad, it could have been our



Peter Raymont's *Shake Hands with the Devil: The Journey Of Roméo Dallaire*