

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 Papel Chase*

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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.

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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.

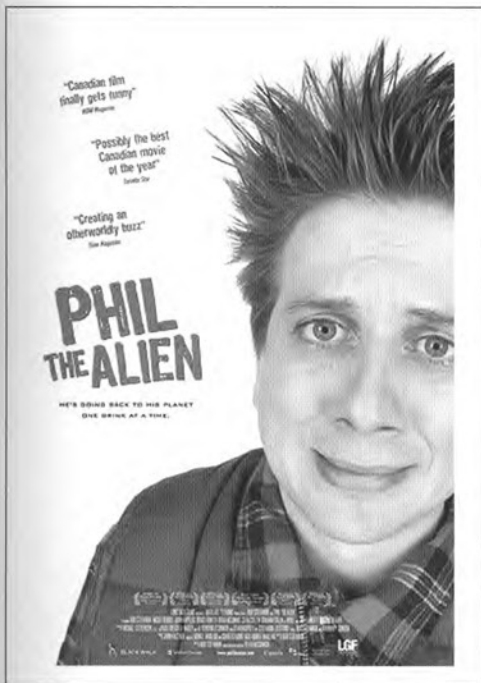
Let me confess, however, that for a documentary programmer—which I am—it's easy to have a swell time at Sundance. Its non-fiction programming consistently introduces important new films, and Sundance 2005 delivered another stellar documentary slate, including the sole Canadian feature in the festival, 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*

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Einstein and Monroe and surely worthy of a speculative script by Don McKellar; although, Dallaire did get the rare honour of having Bob "le Flanne" Redford introduce him at the public screening of *Shake Hands with the Devil*. Redford's benevolence brought good fortune to Raymont's powerful documentary, which later in the week won the Audience Award in its category, World Documentary.



Otherwise, it was not a good year for Canadian features at Sundance, although we were represented by several fine shorts, including Chris Landreth's Oscar®-nominated *Ryan*, Annie Bradley's *Tongue Bully*, Jeff Barnaby's *Cherry English* and Debra F elstead's *Stronger*. Canadian cinema fared better up Main Street at the increasingly credible festival

sidebar, Slamdance, which screened Mark Lewis's *Ill Fated*, Blaine Thurier's *Male Fantasy* and Rob Stefaniuk's *Phil the Alien*. A Canadian connection did figure in the completion of the other non-fiction Audience Award winner, Henry Alex Rubin's and Dana Adam Shapiro's *Murderball*, a film about quadriplegics who play full-contact rugby in wheelchairs. It follows a dominant U.S. team through three mettlesome matches with a Canadian squad prior to the Paralympic Games in Athens. I found it riveting, funny and, yup, inspiring. *Murderball* will be among the 10 or so documentaries that keep the theatrical market bullish for non-fiction well beyond 2005.

Even as *Murderball* was restoring my receptivity to sports documentaries, another non-fiction staple, the musical biography, was strongly represented by two competition films. One of my festival favourites, Jeff Feuerzeig's triumphant *The Devil and Daniel Johnston* explores the

impressive art and inner anguish of the Austin-based artist/songwriter. For better or worse, this film is sure to bring attention to Johnston's music and drawings. *New York Doll* is Greg Whitely's tender profile of bassist and born-again Mormon Arthur "Killer" Kane as he rejoins his former notorious bandmates, at Morrissey's behest, for a reunion concert.

I'm still arguing with *Rize*, another of the performing-arts documentaries that drew much attention. Photographer/music video/commercial director David LaChapelle fleshes out his 2004 Sundance short about krumping, a kinetic urban dance movement that originated in the streets of South Central Los Angeles. While many festival attendees were "dazzled by its beauty and energy," as Lions Gate stated in its release announcing the company's acquisition of *Rize*, and while the dance sequences do melt the screen, I just felt the chill of another street movement with political roots being co-opted, bottled and deoxygenated at the source for commercial consumption.

Another documentary standout was Werner Herzog's *Grizzly Man*, the initial offering from Lions Gate's new documentary production unit. Kudos to whoever hired Herzog for this mesmerizing and surprisingly moving profile. It's his most coherently compelling and satisfying film since *My Best Fiend*, the legendary director's meditation on his friend and foe, the actor Klaus Kinski. And it is so because the film's subject, the self-styled Grizzly preservationist Timothy Treadwell, is, like the late Kinski, very Herzogian.

Moving onto the more overtly political documentaries such as Fenton Bailey's and Randy Barbato's *Inside Deep Throat*, about the making of the infamous 1970s porn flick, and Marion Lipschutz's and Rose Rosenblatt's *The Education of Shelby Knox*, about a Texas teen who lobbies for sex education, are entertaining explorations of the culture wars being fought in the U.S., then and now. Then, it seems, was not much different than now. However, the festival's best documentary was Eugene Jarecki's *Why We Fight*, an elegant, pungent and moving dirge that in its smouldering 90 minutes eviscerates America's economic and psychological addiction to war. Certainly the most eloquent political film in recent times, *Why We Fight* also provided a revelatory contrast to another big-ticket political documentary at Sundance, Alex Gibney's noisy *Enron: The Smartest Guys in the Room*. Good old-fashioned muckraking, and a penetrating reconstruction of the Enron debacle, Gibney's film suffers from a reliance on its grating and glib need to entertain. I enjoy the films of Michael Moore and *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* is hilarious, but watching *Why We Fight* a day after seeing *Enron: The Smartest Guys in the Room* left me with a question that has nagged me since Sundance—at what point is it just not funny any more?

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Rob Stefaniuk's *Phil the Alien*