

world premiere of George Lucas's latest *Star Wars* instalment, and a well-regarded offering from the ever-prolific Woody Allen, *Match Point*. In addition to the considerable contemporary cinematic riches, there was the peerless Cannes Classics section, offering up restored prints of films by Michael Powell, Louis Malle, Satyajit Ray, Emilio Fernandes and Luis Buñuel, as well as new documentaries about Ingmar Bergman and by Jean-Luc Godard.

As usual at this cinematic Mecca, away from the paparazzi and the red carpets, tucked into small market screenings, there were wonders to be found. For example, from Italy there was Francesco Munzi's *Saimir*. Reminiscent of early Pasolini, this spare and tough-minded film chronicles the coming of age of a young Italian man of Albanian parentage who helps his father smuggle Albanians into Italy. Then there was Igor Sterk's *Tuning* from Slovenia (a small cinematic powerhouse, the most consistently impressive national cinema in Europe these days), a mature, minimalist portrait of a long-standing marriage gone stagnant. Also from Slovenia was *Desperado Tonic*, an omnibus film by four young directors about

cinema itself, and one of the year's most inventive, unpredictable, thoroughly enjoyable film experiences. From Croatia came Tomislav Radic's low-budget gem, *What Iva Recorded*. It's a clever comedic drama involving a birthday party, a video camera and an expected guest who never turns up.

While 16-year-old Iva records the evening on her new camera, the family squabbles and fights, loves and laughs, and a microcosmic portrait of the tensions of Croatian society is rendered with intensity and humour.

In spite of these impressive international film experiences, at Cannes 2005, Canada just won't let go. Incredibly, mere days after the gathering at the Canadian Pavilion, Conservative MP Belinda Stronach crossed the floor to join the Liberals. The Liberals survived the vote and there will be no summer election. The filmmakers I spoke to in Cannes were visibly relieved at the news. Their dread of anticipated draconian Conservative cultural funding cuts has been stilled. For now. As ever in Canadian cinema circles, here and back home, nothing is certain except uncertainty.



A History of Violence

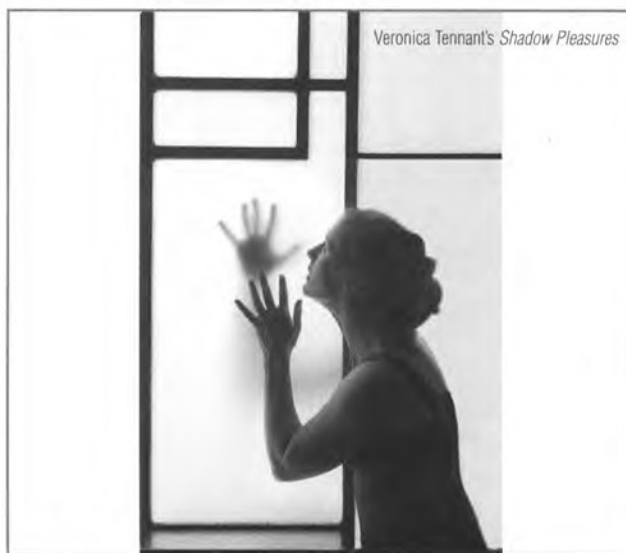
## Yorkton Short Film & Video Festival (5/26–29/05)

By Calvin Daniels

It was the night for *Shadow Pleasures* at this year's Golden Sheaf Awards. The performing-arts film based on the works of famed author Michael Ondaatje, *Shadow Pleasures* took home the Golden Sheaf Award of Excellence, the highest honour of the Yorkton Short Film & Video Festival. It was nominated in seven categories at the 58th annual festival and won six other Golden Sheaf Awards, including Best Performing Arts/Entertainment Film.

The 58-minute film is a fusion of poetry, prose, dance and sound directed by Veronica Tennant. Tennant, who has an Emmy Award to her credit as well as being a former prima ballerina, collected the Golden Sheaf for Best Director-Fiction at the awards gala Saturday evening. Ondaatje, best known for *The English Patient*, narrates the film. "This really is a film of love," said producer Peter Gentile shortly after accepting the major award at North America's longest-running film festival. He explained the film ran into a number of obstacles during production, including a funding situation that left them scrambling for dollars. "We were shooting while the power outage was going on in Toronto. We were in the dark, setting-up sets for the next day, but no matter what was in our way, we kept going."

*Shadow Pleasures* has been doing well on the festival circuit, and was nominated for four Geminis, picking up one for Art Direction, the only Golden Sheaf to elude the film, which went to Mark Gabriel for *Yellow Bird*. Gentile said winning awards at Yorkton is an honour, but he went farther than that. "These are the things that really keep you going," he said, adding collecting so much hardware in Yorkton "was beyond my wildest imagination. In the end, filmmaking is a hard way to make a living. It's not even a living. It's an affliction. It's something you just



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have to do." That being said, success is not always achieved, so when awards do come, it "gives you encouragement" as well as spurring one on to do better in the future.

The Best of Saskatchewan Golden Sheaf Award went to *Escape from Iran: The Hollywood Option*, from Regina-based Partners in Motion. The film commemorates the 25th anniversary of the Iranian hostage crisis and the part Canadians played in helping some of the hostages escape. Nova Herman, producer of the film, says the award was not expected. "It was a complete surprise to win. I watched a lot of the other shows nominated in the same category, and I was impressed."

Herman states the quality of the Best of Saskatchewan category speaks to the depth of filmmaking taking place in the province, and feels it's certainly possible to succeed in the industry from here. "I'm born and bred in Saskatchewan and proud to be a Saskatchewan filmmaker," she says, adding films produced here "can compete around the world." Five other films earned two Golden Sheaf Awards each this year: *Their Brothers' Keepers: Orphaned by AIDS*, *Shipbreakers*, *Milo 55160*, *Hatching, Matching and Dispatching* and *Last Dance: The Life and Times of Rex Harrington*.

The festival announced a major new award, the Grant McLean Memorial Award for Emerging Filmmakers, which will be presented for the first time next year. A native of Yorkton, McLean joined the NFB in 1941 as an assistant cameraman. For 26 years, he photographed, directed and produced numerous films, worked for 10 years as the Board's director of production, and spent 15 months as acting commissioner from 1965 to 1967. He began the change from film units to

production pools and was responsible for initiating the NFB's first regional offices in the 1960s. He left the Board in 1967 when he was passed over for commissioner, and joined the private sector. Details of the criteria for the new award will be announced in the coming months.

A highlight of the 2005 festival was Revisiting Great Britain, a two-day celebration of Canada's most renowned documentary

filmmaker, Donald Brittain. Canada is justly famous for its documentary filmmaking, and there was no better practitioner in the genre than Brittain. Famous for films such as *Bethune* (1964), *Memorandum* (1965), *Volcano: An Inquiry into the Life and Death of Malcolm Lowery* (1976), *Paperland: The Bureaucrat Observed* (1979), *Canada's Sweetheart: The Saga of Hal C. Banks* (1985) and many others, Brittain's best work was produced decades ago, but they are still fresh.

For noted documentary filmmaker John Walker (*Men of the Deep*s), who participated in the two-day event, the answer comes from Brittain's skills as a filmmaker. "Why we continue to enjoy them is because they're well-crafted. That's why we're sitting here today," he offered, adding that starting on the road to become a filmmaker is as easy as buying a \$5,000 camera, but it's the craft that makes works timeless. Daniel Cross, another documentary filmmaker, whose credits include a Golden Sheaf Award for *Danny Boy*, pointed out that his initial interest in the medium of film came about because of Brittain. "When I saw *Volcano* I really first fell in love with the idea of filmmaking," he said in the discussion panel. "I wanted to be a hockey player when I grew up, but when I saw *Volcano*, the only thing I wanted to be was a filmmaker."

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Donald Brittain directing Maury Chaykin in *Canada's Sweetheart*

