



SURVIVORS: Director Alfons Adetuyi

BY MARJORIE BEAUCAGE

REFRAMING THE IMAGINATION

THE RIGHT TO CREATE AND CONTROL IMAGES

is at the heart of independent cinema. Making images is a commitment, especially in these times when cultural voices are determining a place in the already marginalized independent film community. Where race is concerned, artists are being devoured by economically-driven institutional and personal agendas which are not our own. Reframing the imagination, representing ourselves, and re-claiming our images and stories is the struggle we are facing across the land. The multiplicity of cultural voices unbound by dominant values and market place measures of success are emerging with

strength and power. We will no longer be defined as "other"; our cultures are no longer "minorities." We are taking our places which have been denied for too long.

Access to more of the mainstream venues and festivals has been difficult. To get in beyond the established boundaries or modernist avant-garde means to challenge the notions of "progressive," and to establish other contexts for seeing. Different values and styles of storytelling need to be programmed and affirmed from the inside out, rather than from the outside "expert" or critic. A new language and form of presenting cultural works is being developed; however, the main-

Going beyond mainstream,

stream notion of "stars" still dominates our expectations of what makes a work "good." Yet there are many artists who have been producing cultural works for a long time.

Stories of the Road Allowance People is a six-part series of half-hour dramas about Métis people and places directed by the Saskatchewan Métis storyteller, Maria Campbell. **Joseph's Justice**, set during the Northwest Rebellion, and **La Beau Sha Shoo**, a story traditionally told on New Year's Eve about a fiddle tune that came directly from Jesus Christ, have been completed. These stories have been produced after 20 years of working in native communications, writing and storytelling.

New Year's Eve 1992 has been chosen as the date to premiere Iroquois photographer Shelly Niro's first film, **It Starts With a Whisper**. This experimental narrative's last scene takes place in the last 25 minutes before 1993, so the screening at that time in the Six Nations community will be "live." The juxtaposition of the ultra-commercialized Niagara Falls, and the powerful natural and spiritual forces of the Iroquois world are experienced in a very personal way through the eyes of a young woman.

Also coming in '93 are two first-time

feature films dealing with cultural identity. Miki Onodera, a Japanese-Canadian writer and director of **The Sadness of the Moon**, is known for creating controversial works. This psychological drama about gender identity is being produced by Moira Holmes, who co-produced Bill Robertson's **Events Leading Up to My Death**.

On the West Coast, Mina Shum is writing and directing her first feature **Banana Split**, a comedy about a Chinese-Canadian actress still living at home and the dichotomy between her career needs and her family's needs. Moving from "the rebel fringe to the bigger system for a young Chinese female" is an absurdity says Shum, yet she won't be marginalized.

From Atlantic Canada, black filmmaker Errol Williams has been telling the sto-

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ries of immigrant families in films like **Driftwood**, a drama of generational conflict in the Caribbean experience, and **A Darker Side**, about the exiled victims of apartheid. His newest work, **Echoes in the Rink: The Willie O'Ree Story**, is a documentary that examines the life and athletic career of Willie O'Ree, a native of New Brunswick who withstood indifference and racial intolerance to become the first black hockey player in the National Hockey League in 1958.

In Ontario, black filmmakers are also experimenting with images and representing themselves, their experience and their history. This year Alfons Adetuyi explores the impact of AIDS on a black family in his hard-hitting drama, **Survivors**. Roger McTair presents **Jennifer Hodge: The Glory and the Pain**, an intimate portrait of filmmaker Jennifer Hodge de Silva, who died of cancer in 1989. African-Canadian film and video is establishing its own range of forms in a complexity of contexts, and many new voices are being heard.

These are only some of the voices that are emerging across the land. In every

community there are artists creating new and exciting work in spite of the scarcity of resources. Some have been working in various forms for a long time and are now turning to film or video as a means of expression. Going beyond mainstream, independent film is a new cultural battleground for many emerging artists in this country. The right to space in the mainstream is not recognized because difference is not easily tolerated, and there is very little cultural space to be shared in the first place. Some image makers have moved into the mainstream to carve out a space there, while others continue to work from a community-based perspective. Many more are seeking entry.

Race is barely on the agenda in the exhibition of film and video. Work by people of colour and First Nations only gets programmed if it fits into existing standards and styles.

The only alternative is to have separate festivals, or to be programmed in separate programs in

in this country.

larger festivals. However, this alternative only puts us further on the margins, with room for only a few voices out of the many to be heard. The multi-versal reality that we live in is not represented in the selection of works that are screened at most festivals.

Even though we represent the majority of population, cultural institutions have yet to shift their practices and continue to respond to us as "minorities." We will no longer be silenced. We have a right to see our images represented on the screen, and to have access to the tools of production to tell our own stories rather than to have others define us. The day our work is featured in opening festival galas, will be the day for racial and cultural equity. Then we will have learned to celebrate difference, not fear it. **11**

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