

The 1992 Films from the Canadian Film Centre

BY DONNA LYPCHUK

THE EVENING opened with a screening of award-winning playwright Sally Clark's directorial debut, *Ten Ways to Abuse an Old Woman*, a piece of "dark-on-wry" about a senile old woman who, much to her daughter's frustration, boils too many eggs and wanders the garden in search of the family's long-dead dog. Clark's first film is a *pièce de résistance* about anger and denial in the dysfunctional family, a touching but very sad visual portrait of a lonely old woman.

Screenwriter Howard Wiseman's first film, *Dirty Laundry*, is a witty little ditty, about a relationship between a waitress and writer who fall in love, move in together, and then decide to split up. A sharp, funny, and visually economic film (without a word or image wasted), Wiseman tells the story of Natalie and Rob's eventual disenchantment with each other through a series of brief bedtime scenes which

unfold over a period of eight months.

Writer-director Siobhan Flanagan's *Liquid Bread* is the story of a displaced young man who becomes "obsessed with brewing the perfect beer" after being kicked out of a monastery. *Liquid Bread* distinguished itself from the first two (which were shot in one or two rooms) by its colourful cinematography, many beautiful locations and a somewhat more serious dramatic tone that is augmented by composer John Copping's original musical score. A classic morality tale about "greed" (with classical Canadian content), Flanagan's not-so-tragic hero finds solace for his soul in the idea that the best things in life are free.

Peter Wellington's first film, *Morning Glory*, is a "bad-day-in-the-life-of" narrative that you find in so many first films. A genuinely funny film about how life's petty little inconveniences can drive you crazy, Wellington's Kafkaesque citizen learns to "love" being in a bad mood.

Albertan John Fawcett's film *Half*

Nelson is his second short. His first, *Children's Day*, won Best Direction and Best Original Screenplay at the 1991 Alberta Motion Picture Industries Association Awards and best film made for under \$15,000 at the 1991 Yorkton Short Film and Video Festival. *Half Nelson*, which capped off the first half of the evening, is an exceptionally funny, fast-paced, well-acted and surprising glossy-looking film about a bookwormish little boy who thinks he is suffering from porphyria, "the vampire disease." Basically, a story about a self-fulfilling prophecy, in which fantasy is mixed cleverly with fact, keeping the audience wondering if the boy really is a vampire, the little boy eventually ends up killing his hated gym teacher. This film features an exceptionally fine performance from Julian Richings who plays the little boy's eccentric artist dad and is literally one of the best short films I've seen anywhere, anytime.

The second half of the evening began with a film by Virginia Rankin called *The Loathly Lady*. A revisionist

Stills 1 and 2: In *Lovely Boys*, Shannon Lawson reflects on the loss of her virginity. Director Anna Bourque. Still 3: David Cronenberg in *Blue*




The year-end screening of short films made at Norman Jewison's Canadian Film Centre has traditionally been closed to the public, as well as the media, intended only for the students, cast, crew, friends and industry "types." However, freelance writer Donna Lypchuk was able to slip in as an invited guest and this is her report.

version of an Arthurian legend in which his knights ride snowmobiles, Rankin's Monty Pythonesque King Arthur is challenged by the Black Knights to answer the age-old riddle: "What do women really want?" This was followed by screenwriter Anna Bourque's funny and flip fantasy called *Lovely Boys* about a modern girl's many experiences with men. *The Fairy Who Didn't Want to Be a Fairy Anymore* is a modern allegory, set in a stylized storybook setting (a kind of colourful, cardboard version of *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*), directed by Laurie Lynd, and written by award-winning playwright Daniel MacIvor. *The Fairy Who Didn't Want to Be a Fairy Anymore* also features an original musical score by John Alcorn that is highlighted by a brassy production number in which the fairy's plight (whether to have his wings cut off to make him the same as all of the rest) is argued musically by a bizarre medical team (played with great aplomb by Micah Barnes and Holly Cole) in a surreal medical office. This film is a les-

son on what kind of magnificent set can be designed (in this case by John Dondertman) on a shoestring. *L'Ombre*, directed by filmmaker Catherine Martin, literally a "shadow play" about a dark stranger who claims to be a shadow, features visuals as dark and sultry as its title suggests. The second half of the evening was topped off by a much more ambitious short entitled *Mump and Smoot in the Princess Who Would Not Smile*. Writer-director Paul Quarrington concocted a bloody, violent, cartoon-like tale full of metaphysics and bizarre rituals, with a large cast featuring the best of local clowning, creating an alternative reality whose barbarism is parallel to the barbarism of the modern world.

Don McKellar's *Blue* is a day-in-the-life story—the day in the life of a porno addict played with great bemusement by director David Cronenberg. He flirts with his secretary (Tracy Wright), confronts an employee about his hygiene problem, checks out the new carpet sample, and mechanically

masturbates. This typical office routine is punctuated by the flickering images of a 50s porno flick—a parallel narrative (told in voice over) about a one-time porn star and a "day porter." McKellar degenerated the 16mm stock to look like the real thing. A Film Centre success story, *Blue* has been sold to German and French television, and will be going to the Berlin, and Sundance film festivals this year.

After seeing the entire evening of films, I came away with the impression that some of the films suffered in their realization from script to screen because of the constraints of a low budget, but mainly I was impressed with the ingenuity, creativity and progressive content that characterized most of these films. It is unlikely that all eleven of the films made at the Film Centre in 1992 will be screened in one evening again; however, it is possible to make an appointment to have a film screened for you on an individual basis. 

Donna Lypchuk is a Toronto writer.

Stills 4 and 5: In *The Fairy Who Didn't Want to Be a Fairy Anymore*, Daniel MacIvor considers surgery. Director Laurie Lynd

