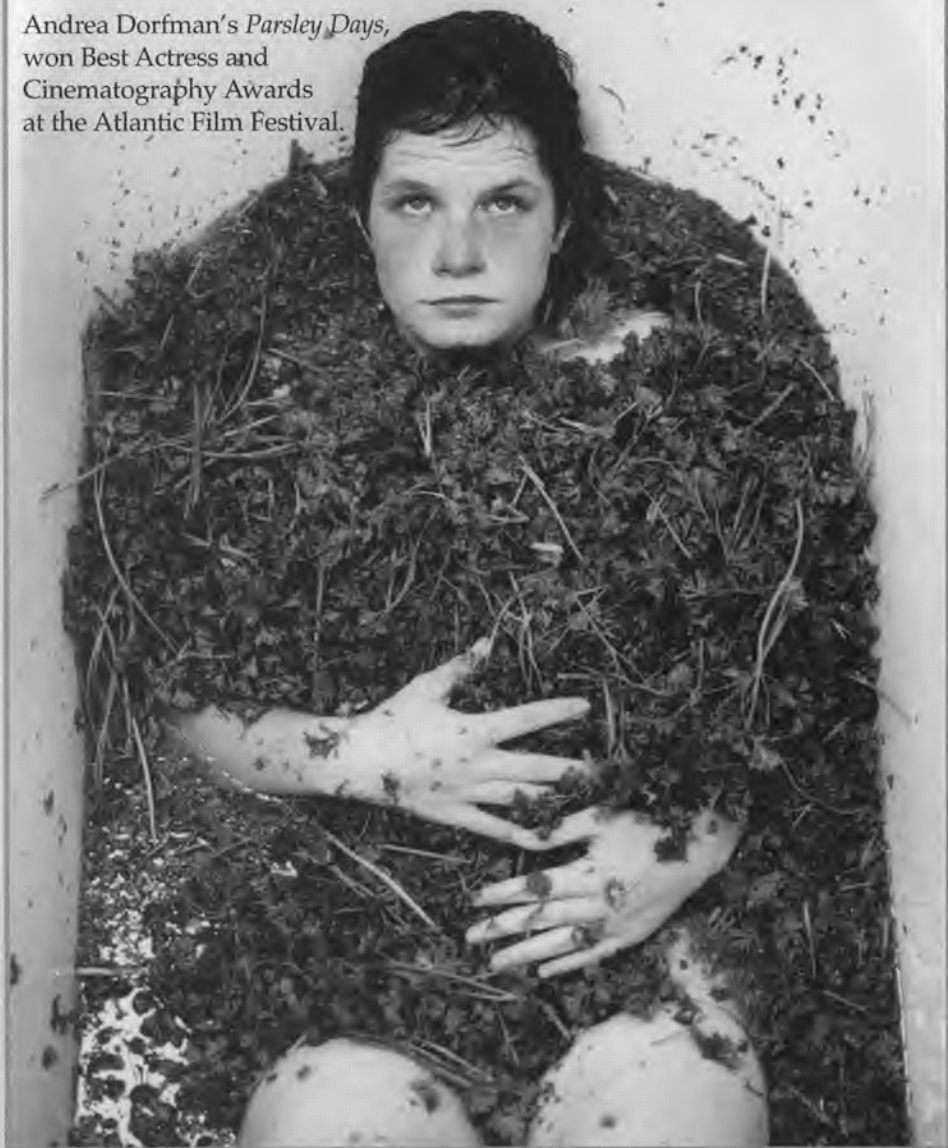


Andrea Dorfman's *Parsley Days*, won Best Actress and Cinematography Awards at the Atlantic Film Festival.



FESTIVALWRAPS

THE MONTREAL WORLD FILM FESTIVAL (08/24-09/03/00) & FANTASIA (07/13-31/00)

Dedicated to the late Luis Buñuel, offering special tributes to an array of living movie virtuosos from around the world, the 24th edition of the Montreal World Film Festival (WFF) was out to affirm its vision of itself as a champion of international film art.

Every year, certain media types complain loudly about the WFF's lack of star power, meaning A-list Americans. And every year, fest president Serge Losique retorts that the grippers' concept of stardom is laughably narrow. By the end of the WFF 2000, which according to communications director Henry Welsh sold substantially more tickets than the 1999 event, it was clear that Losique had won the argument. The grumbling turned to praise of the fest's stance, which in the midst of today's non-stop celebrity wanking comes through as maverick. At the closing ceremony, the big names sharing the stage were not *Entertainment*

Weekly covers, but who could deny their talent power? Actresses Gong Li and Maria de Medeiros, directors Paul Cox and Abbas Kiarostami have contributed some of the most indelible films of the past 20 years.

Cox's competing *Innocence* emerged as a clear favourite amid the 360 movies screened at the fest. It went on to take Air Canada's People's Award and share the Grand Prix of the Americas with Parisienne actress/writer/director Agnès Jaoui's tart comedy of manners, *The Taste of Others*. *Innocence* is a typically unconventional Coxian romance about two sixtysomethings who meet again and dive back into the affair that possessed them when they were young. The Dutch-born Australian says the film, which dares to portray an elderly couple getting hot and bothered, echoes themes he explored in movies like *Man of Flowers*

FESTIVALWRAPS



Paul Cox's *Innocence*

and *Cactus*. As Cox munched on smoked salmon during a lunchtime interview, he talked about his picture's evocation of fundamental emotions, its "sense of loss and sense of hope. There's always life and love until you die."

Of the four Canadian films in competition, Denis Villeneuve's *Maelström* was the critical and audience favourite, closely followed by Michel Jetté's biker drama, *Hochelaga*. A Winnipeg actor, who had just driven to the WFF in a vintage Oldsmobile, told me he intended to catch 10 minutes of *Maelström* and split. But he found himself instantly mesmerized by the harshly elegant fable and its ironic suggestion that a shallow woman's life can be given meaning through a struggle with shame and guilt. As for Villeneuve's take on a movie narrated by a fish being chopped to pieces, he told me, "Sometimes, the line between comedy and tragedy is very, very narrow. In *Maelström*, there's a lot of travelling between dark moments, emotional moments and comedic ones. And this kind of frontier can be explosive, and closer to life." The WFF jury recognized the film's striking visuals with a cinematography award for Villeneuve's talented DOP André Turpin, and festival goers deemed the movie the best Canadian feature at the fest.

A month before the WFF, a very different, much smaller, movie showcase also fine-tuned its identity. In its 1996 debut edition, Fantasia billed itself as the "Festival of Asian Fantasy and Action Cinema." Underwritten by Montreal post-production house

Vision Globale, whose president Pierre Corbeil is an ardent genre fan, Fantasia drew huge crowds with programming that accentuated Hong Kong masterworks like Johnny To's *The Heroic Trio* and John Woo's *Bullet in the Head*. Fantasy aficionados, Goths and Asian Montrealers could also space out on Jackie Chan, Jet Li and choice Japanese animation.

At Fantasia 2000, HK martial arts and gangster pictures were few and far between. The specialty event had become the "International Festival of Fantasy, Action and Genre Cinema," and its impassioned programming directors Mitch Davis, Julien Fonfrède, Karim Hussain and Anthony Timpone described it this way: "Fantasia 2000 is a savagely eclectic festival, born under the sign of surprise. It's a festival of transgression where porn meets love, Satan plays with puppets, women emancipate themselves through violence and rage, Godzilla spits fire over the gates of hell and even more."

This year's Fantasia also introduced Comedia, a competitive sidebar in partnership with Montreal's Just for Laughs festival. Among other goodies, *Monty Python's* Terry Jones showed up to present hard-to-see *Flying Circus* clips, while Stephen Kessler's *The Independent* affectionately mocked shlockmeister producers and the Z flicks they make. In this hilarious picture, Jerry Stiller plays an exploitation maven whose 427 productions include "The Man with Two Things," and his latest, "Ms. Kevorkian," about a busy gunslinger dedicated to upholding the right to die. Gabriel Pelletier's *La Vie après l'amour*, a Quebec-made comedy, won Comedia's Prix du Public and then struck gold during its theatrical release.

Fantasia's Canadian offerings included Attila Bertalan's *Between the Moon and Montevideo*, a downbeat futuristic item starring Pascale Bussièrès shot in Havana, and Isabelle Hayeur's claustrophobic horror movie, *Les Siamoises*. From Japan, Takashi Miike's *Audition* was a brilliantly orchestrated tale about a movie producer whose quest for a new wife drops him into an unimaginable hell and Takashi Ishii's *Freeze Me* took female revenge fantasies to delirious heights.

Meanwhile, Korean bad boy Jang Sun-Woo's *Lies* deromanticized S&M, and Hollywood editor/actor/producer Frank Mazzola (he played one of the hoods in Nicholas Ray's classic *Rebel Without a Cause*) presented a re-edited version of the late Donald (Performance) Cammell's *Wild Side*. Featuring Christopher Walken, Stephen Bauer, Joan Chen and Anne Heche, this startling film was chopped up by its low-rent production company, a butchering that may have contributed to Cammell's 1996 suicide.

Finally, the screening of Johnnie To's breathless thriller *Running Out of Time* was graced by the appearance of its leading man, top Hong Kong actor Lau-Ching Wan. When he and his wife climbed onto the stage of the Imperial Theatre, the Fantasia audience went berserk. Would they have given Gwyneth or Brad the same roaring ovation? Probably not. As Serge Losique keeps saying, stardom is in the eye of the beholder. ●

MAURIE ALIOFF

WRAPS FESTIVAL