

The Montreal World Film Festival • Fantasia • The Toronto International Film Festival • The Atlantic Film Festival • The Ottawa International Animation Festival • The Vancouver International Film Festival • The Montreal International Festival of New Cinema and New Media

the year, is a brutally honest yet lyrical account of terminal illness, painful memories and missed opportunities.

The aforementioned year of extremes in the Canadian programming was also reflected in the international programming. For the most part it was a phenomenal year in this category, with many of the world's masters offering up new films, including Chantal Ackerman, Raoul Ruiz, Edward Yang, Nagisa Oshima, Claude Chabrol and Bela Tarr. Of course, reactions were mixed but the sheer variety and numbers are worthy of note. Major disappointments included French wunderkind Olivier Assayas and his relentlessly pedestrian costume drama *Les Destinées sentimentales* and the uncharacteristically sappy *Bread and Roses* by Ken Loach. Personally, I got a big kick out of Takeshi Kitano's parody of Japanese action/adventure Mafia pics, *Brother*. Apparently, die-hard Kitano fans found this effort rather tired and predictable. But for those of us unfamiliar with this filmmaker's work, it was a riot. It was certainly a highlight of the festival for me. More seriously, though, two of the best films of the year were part of the international programming: *In The Mood For Love* by Wong Kar-wai and Agnès Varda's *Les Glaneurs et la glaneuse*. They may just be masterpieces (a second viewing will undoubtedly verify this) and they will certainly reward repeat screenings. Varda's simple tale of the joy of discovery is inspiring, while the master of playful aesthetics, Wong Kar-wai, offers the vision of a mature artist – a subtle and delicate expression of those uncontrollable yearnings of true love.

The undeniable benefit of the 25th anniversary year was the inclusion of some of the films screened in the festival's rookie year. Watching vintage films like *Dersu Uzala* by Akira Kurosawa was a welcome trip back in time, along with the Maysles Brothers' documentary classic, *Grey Gardens*, and Wim Wenders' *Kings of the Road*, touted by many as his masterpiece. One of the most satisfying and rewarding outcomes of this section of the festival was the happy coincidence of the inclusion of both Barbara Koppel's first film, the now classic *Harland County USA*, and her latest film, *My Generation*. Besides the fascinating insights into one person's career that such an exercise inspires, these two visions of America's contradictions, and the changes that have occurred over almost three decades, are the perfect complement to the slew of memories invoked as we celebrated 25 years of "the little festival that could." ●

BARBARA GOSLAWSKI

THE ATLANTIC FILM FESTIVAL (09/15-23/00)

The 20th Atlantic Film Festival (AFF) managed to uncover a few trends amid the many screenings, workshops and parties. The three big winners were all intimate, low-budget works that point to a smaller-scale, much more risky approach to both dramatic and documentary filmmaking. Two features dominated the proceedings: Andrea Dorfman's *Parsley Days*, which picked up the Best Actress prize (Megan Dulong) and the cinematography award, and Barry Newhooks' Newfoundland digital video (DV) flick, *The Bingo Robbers*, which copped writing, acting and soundtrack awards. Both were made on minuscule budgets with little agency or distributor interference in the scripts or direction. Whether either film goes on beyond the festival is moot. It seems that local Atlantic writer/directors have decided not to wait for the lumbering funding process to tell them whether they can make films anymore. This defiant do-it-yourself attitude popped up throughout the AFF program. DV features from Vancouver, Marc Retaileau's *Noroc*, and Scotland, May Miles Thomas's *One Life Stand*, show that this new wave is not an isolated phenomenon. And while many established producers were still waiting for Heritage Minister Copps to refill the feature-film funding tank (she finally announced more money for the fund at the Vancouver International Film Festival), it would seem that the DV future may have already arrived.

Meanwhile, Halifax seems to have become the festival of second choice. The relaxed atmosphere and still-human scale attracted the top echelon of Canadian directors, including François Girard, Bruce McDonald, Don McKellar and Denys Arcand, whether they had new films in competition or not. And the slow trickle of Toronto producers – including Cheryl Wagner, Camelia Frieberg and Wayne Grigsby – is finally beginning to make a difference to the Atlantic scene. Most have brought new work with them, and Grigsby, in particular, seems most adept at getting his projects to full funding despite the lineup at the federal-funding trough. Perhaps the most tantalizing film not shown at the festival was the Grigsby-produced, David Wellington-directed MOW, *Blessed Stranger: After Flight 111*. Based on the events surrounding the aftermath of the crash of Swissair Flight 111, it's a rare, powerful and effective "torn-from-the-headlines" work that missed the festival deadline by a single day. Sparked by a terrific lead performance by Kate Nelligan, the film would have made a singular impact in a public screening. [Ed's note: *Blessed Stranger* was broadcast on CTV in October.]

The most honoured documentary at the festival was Matthew Welsh's astonishing examination of two brain-damage victims attempting to recover their basic motor skills. Entitled *Breakaway*, the film scored Best Atlantic Documentary and won Welsh a Most Promising Director statuette. Intimate and very moving, it's the kind of out-of-nowhere film that almost perfectly makes use of the festival's ability to build word of mouth and a larger market for what is essentially a small but visionary piece of factual filmmaking. As the festival closed, word circulated yet again that the monstrous shoot for *The Shipping News* was headed back to Nova Scotia with Kevin Spacey still in the lead and Lasse Hallstrom as director. ●

RON FOLEY MACDONALD

Takeshi Kitano's *Brother*

