

FESTIVAL WARRIORS

study of a rural house built as a fulcrum on a triangular landscape and the slapstick events that transpire during one eventful afternoon; after this homage to Charlie Chaplin's *The Gold Rush*, *The Periwig Maker* was shown. It is a small German masterpiece of puppet animation that effectively depicts life in plague-filled London during the 17th century, set to the words of the *A Journal of the Plague Year* by Daniel Defoe; then, a very clever advertising piece entitled *Rally's G-Force* rocked the crowd with its dynamic cel animation; Paul Fierlinger's *Member of the Club*, the next short, is part of his series of animated documentaries about contemporary women. It won applause as did a tough piece on domestic violence called *Insurrection*; a couple of films later, veteran Vancouver animator Marv Newland's rude, sardonic episode from the hit TV show *The PJs* entitled "The Preacher's Life" again garnered full marks from the audience; three shorts later, David Gaïney's *Fishing* finished the evening nicely by showing off some clever computer effects while playing with ideas around daydreams and nightmares.

Competition No. 4 contained a number of the festival winners: "The Preacher's Life" won for best TV series; *Rally's G-Force* was the best commercial; *At the Ends of the Earth* garnered the Gordon Bruce Award for Humour; *Fishing* took The Best Computer Animation prize; Fierlinger's *Drawn From Life* docu-animation was recognized as the Best Commissioned Series; while *The Periwig Maker* was awarded The Best First Professional Film Prize. As one can see, Ottawa is very generous with its prizes. Other winners included Wendy Tilby's and Amanda Forbis's haunting depiction of mortality, *When the Day Breaks* (for Best Canadian

Film); Paul Driessen's very funny skewering of silent film clichés, *The Three Misses* (The Mike Gribble Peels of Laughter Prize); Barry Purves's beautiful musical recap, *Gilbert and Sullivan - The Very Models* (for Object Animation); and Michael Dudok de Wit's loving look at a personal relationship, *Fathers and Daughters* (Best Independent Film).

Ottawa 2000 found time and space to host an animation market where studios and schools could ply their wares and sponsor a host of seminars and workshops for animators. However, not all films are new at the Ottawa festival. Retrospectives are important to Robinson, who is an essayist with a knowledge of animation's history. A number of surveys were screened at Ottawa 2000, notably Edwin Carels' look at scratch animation and experimental films, "From Scratch"; Mark Langer's study of model animator, and latterly sci-fi film producer, George Pal; Pierre Hebert's fond look at fellow animator Suzanne Gervais; Robinson's study of Paul Fierlinger, "Dogs, Drinks, Dads and Dante"; and Marc Glassman's and Mark Langer's homage to jazz animation, "From Boop to Bop and Beyond."

A huge success this year, the inimitable Ottawa International Animation Festival seems to be going from strength to strength. It's a form that Canadians understand, having grown up in an environment that extolled great short films. Clearly, animation is here to stay and, like documentaries, is something that seems to be unique to our culture. ●

PAUL TOWNEND

THE VANCOUVER INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL (09/22-10/05/00)

While in a cab on my way to the Opening Night Gala - Ang Lee's *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* - my cab driver innocently asked me what I did for a living. Replying that I worked for the Vancouver International Film Festival (VIFF), prompted him to launch into an excited disquisition on the "subtle comedy" of John Candy (I'm not making this up). And he knew his stuff. Yes, it was festival time again in Vancouver, a two-week window on the world when the surreal and the sublime comingled to invigorating and disorienting effect.

Still reeling from my taxi driver's genuinely heartfelt eulogy to M. Candy, I found myself listening to festival director Alan Franey address the sold-out crowd at the cavernous Vogue Theatre. "Yes, we're tired



Ang Lee
Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon

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of answering questions about why we have no 'stars' here," said Franey. "But the truth is we do have stars – many of our guests are stars in their own countries..." Yes! Franey took a much-needed, succinct and subtle jab at the "Hooray for Hollywood" mentality that is still present in some of the local press, before going on to introduce "our kind of star" – a magnificent Bengal tiger brought out on stage, to gasps from a stunned audience. The surreal and the sublime, indeed.... Of course, all of the staff showed up just to see if the tiger would run amok and eat Telefilm's Laurier LaPierre or one of the other dignitaries.

Like past festivals, the 19th VIFF ("shorter but undiminished in scope," as it shrunk from 17 days to a more manageable 14) stayed as far away from Hollywood as possible, a long-time policy that sets it apart from, for example, the Toronto festival. And given the critical post-Toronto fest editorial in *The Globe and Mail* that concluded, "Both [the TIFF], and the media, need to rethink the star-spangled navel gazing," Vancouver's anti-Hollywood focus seems to be gaining in popularity elsewhere.

Here on the still-political West Coast, however, the VIFF's stance has always been popular where it counts – with the film-going public. Aside from the Canadian Images section – the largest sidebar of Canadian cinema in the world – one of the VIFF's primary goals has been the promotion of the documentary form. The Nonfiction Features sidebar has grown to the point that no fewer than six of the top 15 most popular films at the 2000 festival were documentaries, with three of them – Audrey Brohy's and Gerard Ungerman's damning look at American involvement in the Gulf War, *Hidden Wars of Desert Storm*; Kevin McKiernan's damning look at American foreign policy vis-à-vis the Kurdish nation, *Good Kurds Bad Kurds: No Friends But the Mountains*; and veteran John Pilger's damning look at UN sanctions in Iraq, *Paying the Price: The Killing of the Children of Iraq* – representing the kind of political filmmaking that Vancouver audiences eat up. Those widely publicized APEC demonstrations a couple of years ago did not spring out of nowhere.

The other major focus of the VIFF has been the Dragons and Tigers: The Cinemas of East Asia sidebar, wherein the Dragons and Tigers Award for Young Cinema – given to a director of a first or second feature – has served to alert the international film community to rising young talent. The eighth

annual award went to Thai director Wisit Sasanatieng for *Fah Talai Jone*, a "wholly original, stylistically bold and utterly enjoyable homage to Thailand's cinematic past." Sasanatieng's gorgeous film was the most prominent of a strong Thai contingent consisting of five features, including Apichatpong Weerasethakul's haunting blend of reality and fiction, *Mysterious Object at Noon* (winner of a Special Mention from the Dragons and Tigers Award jury), Yongyoot Thongkongtoon's immensely popular Thai transvestite volleyball team epic *Iron Ladies*, and Danny and Oxide Pang's hyperstylish and ultra-violent *Bangkok: Dangerous* (which nabbed the FIPRESCI prize in Toronto). Together they served notice that Thailand is undergoing something of a production renaissance.

Now that I've mentioned awards, the People's Choice Award for Most Popular Film went to Jan Hřebek's *Divided We Fall*, a dramatic comedy about a couple in Second World War Czechoslovakia who shelter a Jewish neighbour. Most Popular Canadian Film was won by Gary Burns's *waydowntown*, which also garnered the Rogers Award for Best Western Canadian Screenplay. James Ronald Whitney's brave look at the history of abuse in his family's past, *Just, Melvin*, copped the NFB Award for Best Documentary. Edward Yang's *Yi Yi (A One and a Two)* nabbed the Chief Dan George Humanitarian Award. And, finally, Ross Weber's *No More Monkeys Jumpin' on the Bed* was given the Telefilm Canada Award for Best Emerging Director of a Feature Film from Western Canada. Weber couldn't resist an ironic comment when picking up the award. Smiling ruefully he said, "It's nice to be called 'emerging' at 41 years old." The same attitude of slightly melancholy self-deprecation permeates his black-and-white debut, an ensemble relationship comedy/drama that is as modest in its ambitions (a positive thing) as it is successful in capturing the Zeitgeist amongst single, thirtysomething Vancouverites.

No More Monkeys is a good starting point for what I found to be the most exciting development on the local front. Actors Nancy Sivak and Tom Scholte – frequent collaborators with Bruce Sweeney (*Dirty*) – have leading roles in the film, which was written and directed by Sweeney's former editor. Sivak also stars in Bruce Spangler's *Protection*, which was shot by DOP Brian Johnson, who lives with actor Marya Delver (she's the lovely and talented recipient of some workplace oral sex in *Dirty*), who appears in both *No More Monkeys* and Arne



Olsen's *Here's to Life*. Cinematographer Dave Pelletier, another Sweeney collaborator, shot Anne Wheeler's *Marine Life*. Add to this, new work by Lynne Stopkewich (*Suspicious River*) and the recent success of Reg Harkema (*A Girl Is a Girl*) and James Dunnison (*Stuff*)...I think you can see where I'm going here. I don't think it's stretching things to say that the local scene has reached a critical mass not unlike the Toronto new wave of the 1980s – the rise of Egoyan, McDonald, McKellar et al. – written about in these pages a couple of issues ago (*Take One* No. 28). The cross-fertilization happening here in Vancouver is paying off in spades and things can only get more interesting. All eyes are on Sweeney's upcoming *Last Wedding*, which involves many of the aforementioned talents.

I wish I had more room to get into such things as The Great Vancouver One Piece! challenge (local filmmakers like Sweeney, Harkema, Dunnison, Spangler and others competing against a host of Japanese filmmakers in a showdown of shorts shot during the course of the festival) and the Trade Forum's session on new digital technology. Next time, maybe. Suffice it to say that, with only 36 hours of rain over the course of the whole festival (an unheard of streak of good weather), it did seem like the gods were watching over this year's event.

JACK VERMEE