

19TH RENDEZ-VOUS DU CINÉMA QUÉBÉCOIS

LOCAL HEROES FILM FESTIVAL, WINNIPEG

LOCAL HEROES FILM FESTIVAL, EDMONTON

THE IMAGES FESTIVAL OF INDEPENDENT FILM AND VIDEO

FESTIVAL WRAPS

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Ezra Soiferman's *Man of Grease*

Michel Jetté's *Hochelaga*



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(2/15-25/01)

BY CLAIRE VALADE

Without a doubt, the most exciting thing about the 2001 Rendez-vous du cinéma québécois was the arrival of Ségolène Roederer at its helm. After a decade under the wing of Michel Coulombe, this annual retrospective of Québécois cinema was in great need of a breath of fresh air. A film lover and a purist, Coulombe did a terrific job for many years in promoting Quebec film auteurs, trying to change the long-held cliché in the public psyche that our cinema was boring. His somewhat restricted view of what Quebec cinema was or should be, however, was problematic in the late 1990s in face of the change in Quebec society, which is becoming more and more multi-everything - ethnic, linguistic, cultural et al.

The difference between the old and the bold, new and improved version of the Rendez-vous was instantly evident in the joyful and ebullient creative atmosphere that permeated the entire 10-day event. A funky and relaxing café was temporarily set up in one of the Cinémathèque québécoise's exhibition rooms so that people could have a cool place to chill out between films, perhaps even run into the filmmakers or attend one of the daily panels held on various subjects. Another marked change was how Ms. Roederer opened up programming to include more underground material as well as film artists often not considered as such by the public. One such artist was Dédé Fortin, the late and beloved frontman of the Quebec band Les Colocs, who wrote and directed every single music video produced by the band as if they were low-budget short films instead of flashy MTV-style musical extravaganzas. The special evening dedicated to Fortin and his work, which included a documentary about him made by his friends as well as a one-night-only concert by Les Colocs, was one of the highlights of the festival.

Another highlight was the special Quebec City programming, which included a program of short films produced for the Festival Vitesse Lumière, a unique science fiction, fantasy and genre film festival hosted in the capital and dedicated entirely to short films produced on shoestring budgets by young Quebec filmmakers. Amazing pieces of inventive craftsmanship and dark humour, such as Patrick Boivin's hilariously vicious sci-fi films *L'Instinct grêle* and *Gracien Tremblay Ap-26 329* (co-directed by Francis Lauzon) and Mathieu Fontaine's completely wacked out *Tomate Tomato*, proved that this kind of filmmaking has its place in the Quebec cinematic landscape just as much as Denis Villeneuve's *Maelström*. Other special events included a tribute to veteran filmmaker Gilles Carle, who was being awarded a special Jutra Award for his career, as well as a cultural exchange with Thécif, an independent film organization from France.

As for the film and video selection itself, considering the festival is primarily a retrospective with very few premieres, one cannot expect too many surprises. In the feature-film selection, in addition to the star vehicles of last year such as *Maelström*, Denys Arcand's *Stardom*, Robert Lepage's *Possible Worlds*, and the critical favourites *La Moitié gauche du frigo* directed by Philippe Falardeau and *Full Blast* directed by Rodrigue Jean, there was Michel Jetté's *Hochelaga*, a dramatic, well-executed, if somewhat longish, film about Quebec's biker wars. The Rendez-vous' closing film, *Lauzon/Lauzone* by Louis Bélanger and Isabelle Hébert (see *Take One's* review on page 44), was also a very pleasant surprise in that it managed to present a portrait of late filmmaker Jean-Claude Lauzon, which was at once engaging, revealing, unapologetic and moving, through interviews with some of his closest friends and collaborators, as well as through never-before-seen pri-

vate video footage of Lauzon's famous hunting expeditions in Northern Quebec.

However, I must say that my favourite discoveries were in the short and documentary sections. Among them was former actor Robin Aubert's *Lila*, a gripping, well-written and beautifully acted love story set in the rough world of street punks; Quebec City-based Jeremy Peter Allen's *Requiem contre un plafond*, a very funny comedy about suicide and bad cellists starring Yves Jacques at his manic best; Jean-François Monette's sensible exploration of a young man's coming to terms with his emerging homosexuality in *Take-Out*; former rock musician Michel Gagnon's brilliantly whimsical *La Vénus de Milo ne peut pas se faire plaisir*, a very funny explanation as to why the Venus de Milo statue lost its arms; and animator's Claude Cloutier's extraordinary *Du Big Bang à mardi matin*, an engaging and imaginative account of man's evolution, from protozoa to stuck-in-traffic businessman.

Some experimental films also caught my attention, such as Dorion Berg's *ASCII Alphabet*, a very interesting collage of sounds and images based on antique children's alphabets, edited in such a way to illustrate international computer binary language; Chantal DuPont's *Du front tout le tour de la tête*, a stirring and minimalist account of the artist's struggle with cancer; and Pascal Grandmaison's brilliantly absurd *Guide d'utilisation*, which proposes a new "embracing" approach to working with heavy machinery and tools.

Among the great documentaries featured in the event, my three favourites were Ezra Soiferman's *Man of Grease*, a hilarious and surprisingly touching portrait of Montreal original Tony Koulakis, who owns and operates a very popular but tiny greasy spoon in the city; Richard Jean-Baptiste and Yann Langevin's beautiful and moving *Guantanamo Boxe*, which follows two Cuban teenage boxers training while examining their dreams and aspirations for themselves and Cuba; and Carole Poliquin's powerful *L'Emploi du temps*, a vibrant and intelligent look at the effects of globalization on our culture and our society.

Unquestionably, Ségolène Roederer won her first challenge. By bringing her fiery spirit, insatiable curiosity and open-mindedness to the event, and by working closely with industry insiders as well as with her team of programmers and collaborators, she managed to update the Rendez-vous' mandate while keeping its essence intact. She also wisely decided to push forward with some transformations that had already been put in motion (such as implementing a selection process for the submitted films, instead of accepting just about everything as it had been done for a long time). Roederer literally breathed new life into the Rendez-vous and gave it a new exciting direction. Simply put, she gave it a vision.

TAKE ONE

LOCAL HEROES FILM FESTIVAL, WINNIPEG

(2/25-3/4/01)

BY CHERYL BINNING

Kanadiana



The Local Heroes Film Festival in Winnipeg is a bit of an anomaly as festivals go. Whereas the best in world cinema is often a festival's biggest draw, Local Heroes Winnipeg unabashedly promotes its unique stance as an all-Canadian film festival. And while short films are often given short shrift at these events, the Local Heroes program is weighted heavily in favour of the less-than-15-minute format. In fact, the opening night of the festival is devoted entirely to a premiere of new short films and only six features screen over the seven-day event. And unlike most festivals where you beg, borrow and plead to get party tickets, Local Heroes blatantly shuns the idea of VIP-only passes. First-time short filmmakers rub shoulders at the same parties as the likes of Don McKellar and Niv Fichman.