

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.

LOCAL HEROES FILM FESTIVAL, WINNIPEG



John Greyson's *The Law of Enclosures*

For all the above reasons, Winnipeg's Local Heroes Film Festival has a certain refreshing charm that sets it apart from its much larger, much glitzier festival cousins in the big cities to the east and west. Perhaps one of the main reasons for the uniqueness of Local Heroes is that it is organized not by a cinemathèque or a group of film buffs, but by the National Screen Institute-Canada (NSI), a national training organization that is mandated to develop the skills of emerging filmmakers and provide them with the breaks they need to succeed in the highly competitive world of film and television. In fact, organizers see the festival as a place where new filmmakers have the opportunity to showcase their works, talk shop, mingle with industry veterans and perhaps make the deal that will cement their careers or meet the mentor who will help them develop their next film. And for the industry wearied veterans, the festival provides an opportunity to meet the filmmakers of tomorrow and scout for new talent. The formula appears to be working - over 450 registered delegates from across Canada braved the cold for a late February romp in Winterpeg.

The feature-film program of the third annual Local Heroes Winnipeg had a decidedly made-in-Manitoba flavour, with four of the six films either produced entirely or co-produced by Manitobans. The biggest buzz surrounded the Canadian premiere of Noam Gonick's *Hey Happy!*, still fresh from its screening at Sundance. The post-apocalyptic rave-scene film played to a sold-out Winnipeg house (with a long line of disappointed people turned away) and, according to Gonick, received a far more receptive response from its home audience than it did at Sundance.

Also from Manitoba was *Kanadiana*, directed by first-time feature filmmaker Jon Einarsson Gustafsson, a native of Iceland who now resides in Winnipeg. Set in the bitter cold landscape surrounding Lake Winnipeg, *Kanadiana* is a film noir, *Fargo*-esque thriller that tells the story of two brothers who head north to lie low after a diamond heist, and wind up

following a runaway waitress who unknowingly ends up with the diamonds stashed in the back of her truck. The film has previously screened at the 2000 Montreal Festival des Films du Monde, San Juan's Cinemafest and Planet Indie in Toronto. John Greyson's *The Law of Enclosures* and Colleen Murphy's *Desire*, both of which opened at the 2000 Toronto International Film Festival, were co-produced by Winnipeg's Buffalo Gal Pictures and completed the Manitoba component of the festival. Also screening were Toronto filmmaker John Fawcett's campy teenage-werewolf tale *Ginger Snaps*, a definite hit with Winnipeg audiences, and from Newfoundland, Rosemary House's *Violet*, starring Mary Walsh.

But the heart of this festival was the short films. Sold out daily, the Showcase of Canadian Short Films screened just under 40 shorts from emerging and established filmmakers. The line up included the premier of new films produced through the NSI's Drama Prize Program, which annually provides \$44,000 in training, cash and services

LOCAL HEROES FILM FESTIVAL, EDMONTON

(3/16-23/01) BY JACK VERMEE

When I left Edmonton in 1985 for what I expected to be the sunnier cultural climes of Vancouver, I had no idea what I was actually leaving behind. Naively, I believed that Vancouver, being bigger, would probably be better. It wasn't, at least not back in the mid-1980s. Still the West's best-kept secret, Edmonton's cultural life encompasses everything from a burgeoning movie industry (writer/director Anne Wheeler and producer Arvi Liimatainen got their starts there) and a fantastic theatre scene (the Edmonton Fringe Theatre Festival annually attracts more than 100,000 patrons and is justly famous worldwide) to a community of sculptors whose work was championed by no less an authority than New York art critic Clement Greenberg. And because on the prairies these things matter, Edmonton also has the best bar scene west of Toronto, not to mention the best folk music festival. Need more convincing? If you look at voting patterns you'll see this enlightened cultural attitude reflected in the fact that Edmonton has

to six teams of filmmakers from around the country to make a short film. The Winnipeg Film Group also had the opportunity to showcase its latest crop of shorts, always an eclectic array of experimental works produced by its members.

Beyond the screenings, Local Heroes is very much an industry event where filmmakers can take part in a daily line up of intensive workshops and master classes catering to writers, directors and producers. Among the notable names leading the master classes were writers Edward Kay and Semi Chellas, directors Sturla Gunnarsson, Don McKellar and John Greyson, and producers Christine Haebler, Damon D'Oliveira and Niv Fichman. The festival also provided an opportunity for the NSI to showcase its core training programs. In addition to announcing the latest Drama Prize teams, the NSI launched a third round of its Features First Program which develops scripts from first

and second time writer/director/producer teams to a production-ready phase. The Genie Award-winning *My Father's Angel* and *Violet* were among the first features to be developed through the program.

The NSI also unveiled a new initiative, the NSI Global Marketing Program. Recognizing the imperative for film and television producers to sell their programs to international buyers, this program is aimed at teaching Canadian producers the skills required to successfully market their projects at major international markets and festivals. Canada's provincial film agencies and the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade are lending their support to the new program.

TAKE ONE

consistently bucked the Alberta-wide trend, refusing to embrace the extreme right-wing, cutback mentality espoused by Ralph Klein's Big Blue Machine.

For the last 15 years, Edmonton has also been the home to the Local Heroes Film Festival, an institution in itself that has been likened to the Telluride of 10 years ago by *Variety*, no less, for its anti-hype attitude and easy atmosphere. A celebration of the spirit of independent filmmaking, Local Heroes has played host to such directors as Paul Cox, Krzysztof Zanussi, Werner Herzog (particularly memorable for advising would-be filmmakers to steal cameras and learn how to pick locks and forge documents in order to get films made), Costa-Gavras, Bruce Beresford and Iceland's Fridrik Thor Fridriksson, as well as the usual Canadian suspects—the three Ms (McDonald, McKellar and Maddin), Patricia Rozema, Lynne Stopkewich and many others.

The 15th edition opened with the homecoming of Wheeler and Liimatainen, whose *Marine Life* kicked off a festival that delivered 38 features and a handful of shorts over a week. The *de rigueur* champagne reception followed the sold-out screening where Arvi could be found in the corner counselling younger filmmakers and dispensing advice.

That image of Liimatainen giving the benefit of his experience to newcomers serves as a perfect example of what separates the Local Heroes experience from the norm. The usual barriers between filmmakers and the public that exist at most film festivals are nowhere to be found in Edmonton. Daily afternoon "Pub Chats" feature guests and interested audience members drinking and talking film at Sorrentino's restaurant in the festival's host hotel, the Varscona on fashionable Whyte Avenue in the heart of the Old Strathcona district. Post-screening revelry continues at the Savoy or the Black Dog pub located on a two-block stretch of Whyte Ave. that has

more bars per block than any city this side of Berlin or Prague. It's common (more like a dead certainty) to find guests, festival staff and anyone else who cares to join in hunkered down at the bar until the wee hours, enjoying Edmontonians' legendary friendliness, openness and capacity for ale.

For many – me included – the highlight of the festival was the chance to meet and talk with self-titled "filth elder," John Waters, who blew into town to give a sold-out presentation of his Shock Value talk. As friendly and forthcoming as he is intelligent and urbane, Waters had the audience laughing out loud and giving him a standing ovation by the end. At his press conference he entertained the media by calling *Patch Adams* the "scariest" movie he'd seen in a long time and listing *Dancer in the Dark* and Volker Schlöndorff's *The Legends of Rita* as two recent favourites. Festival boss Bill Evans was all smiles after that event and was doubly happy by the festival's end, citing the sold-out, closing-night international premiere of Lyndon Chubbuck's Canada/U.K. co-production *The War Bride* (with Anna Friel, Brenda Fricker and Molly Parker) and overall attendance figures approaching 10,000 – a new high for the fest – as reasons for his happiness. He was probably a little relieved as well, because the brouhaha that surrounded the future of the festival was finally settling down.

When the NSI – the festival's organizing body – announced in February that it was pulling out of Edmonton to concentrate on training filmmakers and putting on the Winnipeg edition of Local Heroes, the Edmonton media were angry. After all, Edmonton had supported the Local Heroes festival from the beginning; the NSI's move to Winnipeg and subsequent decision to shutter the Edmonton fest was seen as a betrayal. The good news is that the NSI has handed over the reins to a three-year-old organization known as the Edmonton

International Film Festival Society, a coalition of arts representatives, under the interim chairmanship of Josh Keller, that was formed when it began to look like the NSI's long-term plans might not include Edmonton. Keller told the *Edmonton Journal* that the 2002 edition will "follow the concept that has been successful over the past years," which is good news for Edmonton and film fans of independent cinema throughout the West.

And it is good news for Bill Evans, who will be moving to Winnipeg in May to assume leadership of the Winnipeg fest. Evans took the brunt of the media heat, despite the fact that he's been one of the strongest champions of Canadian and international cinema in Edmonton for many years, first as a filmmaker, then as programmer at the Metro Cinema art house and finally as Local Heroes director. As a former Edmontonian, a frequenter of both the Metro and the Local Heroes festival, and a friend, I would like to thank him for his work and wish him all the best.

TAKE ONE



Anne Wheeler's *Marine Life*

LOCAL HEROES FILM FESTIVAL, EDMONTON