

THE CANADIAN FILM CENTRE'S WORLDWIDE SHORT FILM FESTIVAL (6/6-10/01)

BY KATHLEEN CUMMINS

On June 6, 2001, the Canadian Film Centre launched its newly acquired Worldwide Short Film Festival in Toronto. The five-day festival screened 159 films, divided into 23 categories, offering \$40,000 in prizes to award winners. The festival, now in its seventh year, was founded by Brenda Sherwood, a very determined ex-filmmaker who felt there wasn't sufficient exposure for short films in the already existing festival circuit. She built the festival almost single-handedly, attracting corporate sponsors if not the respect from local critics. Her programs were eclectic at best and the festival suffered from a lack of focus. But Sherwood was not to be deterred and her efforts ultimately paid off when the Canadian Film Centre essentially bought out the festival and she was replaced as festival director by Shane Smith. Sherwood now serves on the festival advisory committee and served as this year's international programmer. The Film Centre brought professional expertise to the venture (Wayne Clarkson, the executive director of the Film Centre, was the head of the Toronto film festival from 1978 to 1985), and this year's event featured a Canadian Program, a Spotlight on Iran, an Errol Morris Retrospective, a Brother's Quay Retrospective, a Midnight Mania, an Inspired by Hitchcock Program and an International Program. The lineup was accompanied by a two-day symposium entitled Short Films: Big Ideas. Aside from the festival offering awards to film entries, it also ran a Screenplay Giveaway Prize (\$14,000) and a Funding Forum Pitch Prize (a Toronto International Film Festival pass).

Tara John's original and surreal *Killing Time* won the Sun Life Financial Award for Best Canadian Short (valued at \$25,000). *Killing Time* is a well-crafted fiction that constructs tension and alienation through its minimalist aesthetic, as well as its economical use of dialogue and expressionistic sound design. Honourable Mentions in this category went to Henry Lu's two entries, *Miguel* and *Fish* and Charles Officer's *When Morning Comes*. Lu's magical *Miguel*, which premiered at Sundance, is powerful visual storytelling. Interestingly, the film was shot on location in Argentina and is a US/Canada/Argentina co-production. Officer's *When Morning Comes* tackles heroin addiction and fatherhood with a gothic melodramatic tone.

The Kodak Award for Best Live-Action Short (\$5,000) was awarded to Anja Breten's haunting *To See a Boat in Sail* (Norway). The interconnecting of memory, dream and landscape captured a realm of enchantment echoing the cinema of Tarkovsky and Cocteau. The C.O.R.E. Digital Pictures Award for Best Animated Short (\$5,000) went to Jonathan Hodgson's dark fable *The Man with the Beautiful Eyes* (UK). The script was penned by literary bad boy, Charles Bukowski, which explains the nihilistic, visceral and gorgeous writing. Bukowski's poetry often overpowers the animation, however. Virgil Widrich's wildly funny and surreal *Copy Shop* (Austria) picked up the Best Experimental Short. The Best Documentary Short was awarded to Andrey Osipov's chilling *Et Cetera...* (Russia), also selected at Berlin 2001. The film relentlessly contemplates the horrors and futility of war linking past sacrifice with present-day patriotism. Luciano Larabina Zapata's *Shoes* (Mexico) received Honourable Mention.

The Star Choice Audience Award for Favourite Short at the festival (\$1,500) went to Canada's Christy Garland's *Dual Citizen*. More traditional fare, this entertaining comedy was a clever, light-hearted take on national and cultural identity. The film's strength is rooted in the comedic performances and the writing, although the final reference to the Quebec flag was a definite crowd-pleaser, a non-Canadian audience might miss the comedic impact.

Two entries from *la belle province* were particular cinematic delights. Jeremy Peter Allen's *Requiem contre un plafond* from the Quebec film collective Spirafilm and Serge Denoncourt's fantastical *Via crucis*. Both films were mature works, featuring excellent performances and demonstrating pristine craft. Allen has a significant body of shorts under his belt, which might account for his film's sophistication. Yves Jacques, in the lead, delivers a knockout flawless performance as a suicidal and mean-spirited music lover living below an unknown musical genius. *Requiem contre un plafond* is traditional classic storytelling at its finest. Denoncourt's *Via crucis* explores a boy's imaginative interpretation of the Catholic iconic representation of the crucifixion and ascension of Christ. Denoncourt offers a gender-bending child's vision of his mother as Christ, rather than the conventional Catholic mother/Virgin Mary association. The performances, cinematography and production design capture the paradoxical operatic and oppressive Catholic culture of 1950s Quebec priest-ridden society with great cinematic opulence.

Mary Lewis's *Clothesline Patch*, a parable of a girl's awakening toward womanhood, is enchanting and lyrical. Set in 1960s Newfoundland, the engaging characters adopt allegory to articulate and suppress truths about everyday occurrences like menstrual cycles and childbearing. Lewis captures the stifling sense of loss and responsibility experienced by her young heroines with humour, honesty and meaning.

There were a few other highlights from the fiction category. Andrea Mann's over-the-top *XXXPosed*, featuring the terrifically funny Linda Kash as a sex-starved urban professional, is a classic comedy with great comedic set-ups and imaginative use of public statues. Robert Kennedy's bizarre *Dinky Menace* video was a hilarious satire on the subject of Hollywood dreams and aspirations. The narrative chronicles the humiliating career path of the strange auteur wannabe, Irving Speck. In a similar vein was Harry Killas's video *What Else Have You Got?*, featuring a pitiful and desperate screenwriter pitching the life of Christ to an uninterested impatient invisible producer. In the animation category, Bronwen Kyffin's *Cecil's Insomnia* was sweet and poignant portraying a few moments of a man's loneliness and longing for his lost beloved. The lingering Florida postcard shot was a perfect ending.

TAKE ONE

Above: Tara John's *Killing Time*

Inset: Bronwen Kyffin's
Cecil's Insomnia

