

BY DAVE BARBER

# WINNIPEG UPDATE

Film Exchange festival director Bill Evans assembled a rockin' festival in late February with 30 short films – many from Quebec – the five drama prizes, the theatrical premiere of Guy Maddin's *Dracula: Pages from a Virgin's Diary*, produced by Vonnie Von Helmut, and a closing night gala of Paul Gross's romantic comedy with Molly Parker and Leslie Nielsen, *Men with Brooms*. The National Screen Institute joined forces with Ace Art to present an outdoor video exhibition called Sno Screen. The screening included Cordell Barker's Academy Award nominated *Strange Invaders*, classic Winnipeg animation and video art on a screen made entirely of snow.

One of the more exciting developments on the local film scene of the last few years has been the creation of Catacomb Microcinema, operating out of the historic Travellers Building in Winnipeg's Exchange District. While living in Seattle a few years back, founder Bevan Klassen was inspired by the number of small screening venues located throughout the city. He returned to Winnipeg, and with the help of friends Kevin Nikkel and Tim Engbrecht, set up a monthly screening space for the works of established and emerging filmmakers. Bevan says, "Megaplexes have depersonalized the cinema. Local people need more opportunity to connect with the film artist and each other. We hope the Catacomb attendee is more a participant than a consumer." Inspired by the common purpose of Winnipeg's independent film community, Bevan has developed a growing and loyal audience. Now in its fourth year, highlights include the packed premiere for deco dawson's award-winning *Film (dzama)* and a screening of John Paizs's earlier works.

This is shaping up to be one of deco dawson's best years ever. He has attracted huge interest for his award-winning fictional biography of artist Marcel Dzama, which is screening across the country and abroad, most recently at the Rotterdam Festival. He is now writing a feature about the Hungarian-born filmmaker Paul Fejos and his 1928 musical *Broadway*. He is also directing a short film called *Defile in Veil*, about how a pure, virgin woman cannot survive in a logical, bewildering and callous world. The film will premiere at the Chicago Underground Film Festival this summer. Once again dawson assisted Guy Maddin, this time on *Dracula: Pages from a Virgin's Diary*, as cinematographer, editor and associate director. He says they tried many different things and added, "essentially we shot the ballet as a movie, breaking every rule about how to shoot a dance film. The ballet was shot as a silent film, filled with intertitles and double exposures."

Jeff Erbach (*Soft Like Me*, *Under Chad Valley*) is finishing up post-production on his creepy new feature, *The Nature of Nicholas*, using the same sound-editing team Guy Maddin used on *Twilight of the Ice Nymphs*: Russ Dyck (creator of the legendary *Joe 90*) and highly respected audio artist Ken Gregory, here working as a sound-effects editor. Erbach, who seldom uses music in his films, says he is attempting to "break some dramatic rules by including ambient sounds that don't relate to the environment." He says, "there is no ambient music in the film; instead atmospheres and swelling tones contribute psychologically in a way that music might have."

Former Winnipegger Tom McCamus (*Possible Worlds*) plays the role of Nicholas's father.

After several years pursuing various projects, filmmaker John Kozak (Hellbent) has turned to full-time teaching as a professor of film at the University of Winnipeg. Kozak is trying to finish up *The Eulogy*, a dramatic story of five sisters who haven't spoken and gather in their hometown for their father's funeral. He's still searching for funding for his comic book documentary, *The World According to Comic Books*. Kozak, who has an impressive collection himself, probably snagged one of the last interviews with legendary comic book artist Gil Kane (*The Green Lantern*) just before he passed away at the age of 76. This summer Kozak received funding from the Manitoba Arts Council to shoot a half-hour film called *Target Practice*, about what happens when some kids steal their father's rifle.

Former Winnipeg filmmaker Joel Sectar is shooting a biography about his uncle, David Sectar, a filmmaker currently living in Long Beach, California, who directed the groundbreaking early Canadian feature *Winter Kept Us Warm* in 1965. Made on a low budget with support from the Canada Council, it was the first English-Canadian feature to be selected at the Cannes Film Festival.

John Paskievich's deeply personal journey into his past history and the lives of Ukrainian immigrants, *My Mother's Village*, premiered to a packed house at the Winnipeg Art Gallery. Paskievich recently returned from the Bratislava International Film Festival where he won a Special Jury Prize for his film *The Gypsies of Svinia* (1999). Paskievich discovered at a crowded press conference that there is huge interest in his gypsy film as it has never screened on the Slovak state-owned television.

TAKE ONE

Jeff Erbach's *The Nature of Nicholas* with Tom McCamus

