

Films Transit, NFB and four pix to Berlin

BERLIN - The 34th annual Berlin International 'FilmFest-spiele' wound up here on Feb. 28, after 12 days of hectic Film-Messe (Market) and on-screen activity. Berlin '84 was marked by the return in force of American big-budget product (*Terms of Endearment, Star 80*), a free-wheeling selection at the young directors' Forum, and the impressive presence of smaller film-making countries, notably Holland, Austria and Spain.

Canada, however, was thinly-represented at the FilmFest screenings: only four Canadian productions were selected (out of a reported 20 submissions), two of which were shorts. *Aloud Bagatelle*, an NFB short featuring the poetry of Earle Birney, was a Competition short, while Gilles Groulx's feature musical fantasy *Au Pays de Zom* was shown as part of the Forum selection. *Snow*, a short Christmas fable with gangsters, cocaine, Santa Claus and a miracle, played to full houses in the children-oriented Kinder-Fest.

The Canadian film which generated the most interest in Berlin, however, was an independent production, *Mother's Meat & Freud's Flesh*, which was screened in the Info-Show, a grab-bag of independent and low-budget productions.

Canada had twin booths in the FilmMesse (Market) this year, with the NFB and Films Transit of Montreal sitting side-by-side in the giant Cine-Centre hall. The NFB screened 15 films in the Market, including *War*, whose Oscar nomination encouraged interest during the FilmFest. Films Transit was in Berlin to promote feature films *Rien qu'un jeu* and *La turlutte des années dures*, as well as a variety of other Quebec productions.

As well, buyers representing Prima Films, Spectra Films, Radio-Québec and Les Films René Malo were scouting for product. Finally, Canadian film festival officials were out in force, scouting for their 1984 festival lineups: David Over-

bey (Toronto Film Festival), Serge Losique (Montreal World Film Festival), and Dimitri Eipides and Claude Chamberlan of Montreal's New Cinema festival.

"It's important for Canada to be well-represented here," argued Jean Lefebvre of the DOC's film festivals' bureau. "This is one of the most important markets in the world."

But the one Canadian film screened in Berlin stood out markedly from the traditional short/documentary/NFB fare which festival-goers often expect from Canada was *Mother's Meat & Freud's Flesh*, an independent ("not low-budget, no-budget"), experimental film by 22-year-old Montreal director Demetrios Estdelacropolis.

Mother's Meat is a 90-minute, 16mm, underground film, which ostensibly parodies the Freudian analysis of homosexuality through the "story of a mother and her boy." The

film relies on loud colour, wild discontinuity and patent absurdity, a formula which clearly pleased the audiences at the sold-out Filmkunst 66 art-house in Berlin.

The "mother" of the story (played by Esther Vargas) is an outrageous bleached-blond, the sort one might expect to meet in a Brooklyn laundromat or on the beach in Fort Lauderdale. Her son, Demira, (played by director Estdelacropolis), is a listless and emotionally-dependent porno actor. When Demira's mother calls from New York to invite herself to "visit for a while", Demira resigns himself to listening endlessly to his mother's inanities. During her visit, Demira alternately struggles against his mother, and consults with a lecherous psychiatrist/dentist who is dedicated to unravelling Demira's Oedipus complex and 'curing' him of his homosexuality.

"*Mother's Meat & Freud's Flesh*," reads the film's blurb, in what must be the most candid (and accurate) press release of all time, "treads a thin line between the grim quality of low-budget pornography and the creativity of the art film. Stereotyped characters, waves of dumb lines, and a cartoon plot are balanced by moody lighting, innovative camera work and the happy/sad minimalism of the Trio soundtrack. This marriage gives the film its ambiguous edge."

Director Estdelacropolis is unhappy with easy comparisons of his film to *Pink Flamingos* or other John Waters films, preferring to underline his "affinity to Walt Disney."

The critical reception for *Mother's Meat* indicates that he succeeded. The left-leaning Berlin daily *Der Tagesspiegel*, for example, panned the slate of New York avant-garde films at the festival, and berated the German underground for its "impotence," while in the same breath praising *Mother's Meat* for its "*Struktur und Dynamik*."

The film is now slated for young directors' festivals in Italy and Sweden, as well as a gay

film festival in New York. No Canadian dates have yet been arranged.

Jean Lefebvre, the federal department of Communication's film festival's bureau chief, underlined that the Berlin festival should be of special interest to Canadian filmmakers, given its openness to 'author films.'

"Unlike Cannes, Berlin provides a very large audience for films which are not in competition, and which have a strong content and political tone. In Berlin, author films not only have a big audience in the Forum and the Info-Show, but are also strongly represented in the Market. A film such as *Les bons débarras*, which did well here in 1981, is ideal for Berlin."

"But Canada - perhaps like Australia - is now past the 'discovery stage' with festival-goers. Canada doesn't arouse curiosity as being 'new' anymore. And festival directors will not allow us to be complacent: to succeed in Berlin, Canadian films are simply going to have to be very good."

David Winch ●

TORONTO - Repping the Taiwan film *If I Were For Real* at the Berlin Film Fest market Feb. 25 was Canadian Russell Chan. The film, which has been banned both in the People's Republic and in Hong Kong, prompted Fest organizers to disclaim any responsibility for films screened at the market and "stress our traditional good relations with the People's Republic of China."

Chan, who first saw the film - a satire of daily life in post-Gang of Four China - in Toronto was so impressed that he wanted to represent director Wang T'ung's first feature-length effort.

In Canada, a pay-TV web has expressed interest in licensing the film, turning down, according to Chan, a Chinese government offer to supply ten free pix on condition *If I Were For Real* would never be shown.

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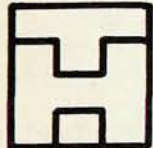
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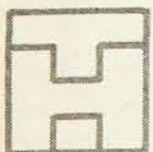
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