

Good vibes wrap film fest season, north and east

The Atlantic Film Festival Atlantique

by Christopher Majka

Those who are familiar with the Atlantic Film Festival all are also familiar with its history of administrative troubles. The ship has stayed afloat but it has seldom sailed on calm waters. Happily, it seems that the festival has now put most of those crises behind it. A new administrator, a new board of directors, a new mandate and a new image (and a new name, Atlantic Festival Atlantique) have radically changed its footing and it appeared this year, from Oct. 23-26, if not firmly on its feet, at least standing.

According to festival director Brian Hannington, this year was one of healing, and certainly considerable healing was required. The controversy which had raged around the structure of the previous festival had deeply alienated the film and video community from the concept of a festival with, at one point, the National Film Board, the Atlantic Independent Film and Video Association and the Atlantic Filmmakers Co-op, among others, all withdrawing from support of the festival and boycotting its activities. This was obviously an unhealthy state of affairs, especially in a community as small and as close as the Atlantic one. There were great divisions as to the fundamental objectives of the festival and particularly the way it was administered. At the end of last year's festival, which almost ended in cancellation, the previous board resigned and a new one, much more representative of the film and video community, took over.

In practical terms this meant a number of things. One was a much decreased emphasis on films outside of the region. In the past, the programming of the festival was about equally divided between productions from the Atlantic provinces and those from 'away'. The reasoning was that it was valuable to introduce filmmakers from elsewhere to what was happening in this region and equally valuable for people here to see what was going on elsewhere. As an industry forum it was thought that such an interchange could result in collaborations between areas. I, for one, greatly lament this narrower focus of the festival since it resulted in an event which lacked some of the sparkle and interest which outside productions could, and did, bring. Seeing 35mm features from Iceland but also low-budget documentaries and experimental films from New England helped to open some eyes and bring a wider spectrum of people into the festival activities. So this narrowing gave a slightly dull overcast to the festival and seemed to cut down attendance for the event.

Award-winning photographer and filmmaker Christopher Majka lives in Halifax.

The system of awards is just as unclear and complicated as it ever was before. Previously awards were presented under various curious, and sometimes inappropriate, categories (anyone familiar with my own meager acting skills who discovers that I won an award for "best dramatic performance" at last year's festival will quickly agree). This year, categories as such were eliminated and awards were given for whatever was found to be meritorious in a production. This resulted in a total of 47 awards to 23 different productions. Of these, 16 received certificates of merit while seven received certificates of excellence. While I am as confused as anyone else, there is nevertheless a kind of Maritime down-home forthrightness about this process and it may be that this is as good as we are ever going to do without resorting to arcane categories.

The awards, meanwhile, are the newly christened "Moonsnails", a lovely creature of the same name encased in a plexiglass block. If you put them up to your ear you hear the sound of plastic. They are very charming nonetheless. Awards of Excellence went to:

- *Linda Joy*, a powerful and moving documentary by Halifax director Bill MacGillivray, which chronicles the final months in the life of filmmaker Linda Joy Busby, and her fight with cancer.
- *Fiddleheads*, a short film juxtaposing the sound of fiddles and timelapse footage of the growth of fiddleheads, by Arthur Makosinski.
- *Energy Management - A Tool For Productivity*, a creative industrial video by Kevin Matthews of Design Media.
- *Floating Across Canada*, an hour long musical adventure starring Murray McLaughlan produced by Schafer Thurling Productions.
- *Bateau Bleu, Maison Verte*, a charming look into one aspect of Acadian culture by Betty Arsenault.
- *Pas fou comme on le pense*, an examination of insanity, patience, and conflict by Québec filmmaker Jacqueline Levitin, and
- *Self-Hypnosis*, an inventive and droll mockery of the anaesthetic character of television by Douglas Porter.

This year's Pioneer Award, sponsored by the CBC, went to Gordon Parsons of Wormwoods Dog and Monkey Cinema, Nova Scotia's only independent cinema. ACTRA Awards went to Mary Walsh for her performance in *Da Boom*, and to John Brett for writing in *Where the Bay Becomes the Sea*. A final award, sponsored by ATV, for community service, went to the NFB's sound editor Les Halman for his generosity and special concern for the training and encouragement of young filmmakers.

Undoubtedly the most moving moments of the festival came at the premiere screening of *Linda Joy*, directed by Bill MacGillivray. Linda Joy Busby was the coordinator of the Atlantic

Filmmaker's Co-op, and a dynamic, creative, and loving presence in the local film community. Her death last autumn from cancer sent a shock through everyone who knew and valued her. Before she died Michael Jones, of Newfoundland's NIFCO, shot some extremely powerful, thought-provoking and wrenching footage of Linda talking about the issues that her illness had raised for her. The screening of the film was timed with the announcement of the creation of the Linda Joy Busby Media Arts Foundation devoted to encouraging the development of new and creative work in film, videography, photography, holography, and other areas of the media arts.

The counterpoint to this very emotional screening came from the selfsame

Michael Jones who arrived with a double system, cutting copy of Newfoundland's 'perpetually in production' whacky film, *Faustus Bidegood*. Contrary to rumours that it would never be completed, the light now seems to be visible at the end of the smoke-house. It would be unfair to comment upon a film as yet unfinished, however, suffice it to say that it is two hours of some of the most offbeat situations and scenarios that the Newfoundland lunatics have yet been able to conceive.

Out of the ashes of the past, a seagull (the Atlantic phoenix) has arisen. It's not always steady on its feet, sometimes a little dull, and it's not clear just where it's going, but Atlantic film and video makers are watching, and it looks like it's going to be a good flight.

Abitibi-Témiscamingue 4th edition

by Jamie Gaetz

The fourth Festival of International Cinema in Abitibi-Témiscamingue, held from Nov. 9 to 14, represented a continuation of the well-organized, successful events of earlier years. A total of 46 films were viewed by over 4,000 people, averaging approximately 480 people at each screening. The schedule included several world and North-American premieres, a good number of which were Canadian. Adding to the pleasant experience of the festival itself was that fact that, on every level, the Canadian films more than held their own, often proving more memorable than those films representing well-established film cultures.

Jacques Matte, Festival director, believes that films should be fun and that a cinematic experience should be an entertaining one. This attitude is reflected in all aspects of the Festival, producing an outstandingly enjoyable event in the crowded calendar of Canadian film festivals.

One of the Canadian premieres, Michel Moreau's *Le Million tout puissant* is a disconcerting film in many respects. Moreau explores the phenomenon of Quebec's loto-millionaires (as representative of a general phenomenon) in a documentary-fiction format. He uses three actual winners as well as one impostor; a clown; and a mysterious and bizarre kind of "master-of-ceremonies" or visible narrator who provides comments, explanations and insights. *Le Million tout puissant*, in its study of the modern version of the "rags to riches" fable, poses some interesting and piercing questions about modern values, albeit subtly.

Une Guerre dans mon jardin from Diane Létourneau of the NFB/ONF uses essentially the same documentary-fiction (dramatized documentary) format. This tremendously moving film recreates an actual tragedy experienced by the Gentes family of Quebec when a live-ammo shell was thrown into a

campfire at the family home, killing one member of the family. Rather than concentrating on the event itself, Létourneau focuses on the important period preceding it. Létourneau treats the story with respect and imagination, making it much more than just a documentary recreating a tragic event. The film is a very real story about human love, courage and the commitment to a dream.

Le Matou, the latest feature by Jean Beaudin, currently doing very well in Quebec theatres, was also shown. Both Beaudin and the film's M. Emile, young actor Guillaume Lemay-Thivierge, were in attendance for the public screening and press conference at a local shopping mall. Beaudin's 1984 film, *Mario*, took the Grand Prix du Public at last year's festival.

The Grand Prix du Public this year was awarded to Erik Clausen's *Rocking Silver* from Denmark. A new prize, the Télébec was also inaugurated at the 1985 festival. Awarded by jury for the best short/medium short, the Télébec went to *Le Film d'Ariane* by Quebec's Josée Beaudet.

For many reasons, the festival at Rouyn-Noranda is a special event. Much thought was given to the scheduling and to the current conferences and receptions. Credit has to go to Matte's crew, mostly volunteers, who ensure that any questions are answered, problems taken care of and everything clicks along at a smooth and tolerable pace.

Far from the madding crowds and big-city confusions of southern-central Canada and the festivals it hosts, Abitibi-Témiscamingue offers a unique opportunity to see interesting cinema in a relaxed atmosphere. The abundance of Canadian films it shows are an added benefit for anyone interested in the state of this country's cinema. Devoid of pretensions, infused with warmth and friendliness, this festival is like a breath of fresh air on the festival circuit. It is an event with the idea of enjoyment at its roots, an idea that obviously makes all the difference in the world.