

Sex, Net and hosers

What the Canuck filmmakers are bringing to this year's Film Festival

by JOANNE LATIMER

"There are so many deadly earnest and determined documentaries that give documentaries a bad name," says Peter Wintonick, co-director of *Ho! Kanada: A Cross-Cultural Diary*, one of the homegrown offerings to be screened at the World Film Festival this year. Wintonick's and Barbara Doran's film dispels the myth that documentaries are dry and brings some yucks to the Festival's "Can Con."

Ho! Kanada is one of the 105 Canadian production in the catalogue this year, within the festival's grand total of 400 films. As Montreal starts to dress Ste-Catherine Street with antique benches, souvenir stands and potted plants, Canadian filmmakers are bumming rides to Montreal and lining up crash pads. If "everyone knows everyone" in Canadian film, there'll be lots of schmoozing around town, with this record number of Panorama Canada selections.



Michel Côté in Jean-Marc Vallée's *Liste noire*

Ho! Kanada

is the last thing you'd expect from Wintonick and Doran. Wintonick is best known for co-directing *Manufacturing Consent: Noam Chomsky and the Media*, and Doran for her powerful documentary about battered women, *Women Who Kill*. It's not that *Ho! Kanada* isn't important. It's just not that heavy. You could even say it's slapstick at times.

Ho! Kanada is a travel diary of several groups of Japanese tourists who visit Canada and lesson in the cross-cultural stereotypes that Canada and Japan exchange. Wintonick and Doran go to northern Japan to visit Canadian World, a Disney-like theme park that features a replica of Anne of Avonlea's green gabled house. Then the filmmakers join a two sep-

arate groups of Japanese tourists for an eight-day jaunt across Canada that starts in PEI and ends in Victoria. Their companion is Masaaki Kagami, a Japanese man who lives in Banff and makes souvenir videos for Japanese tourists. Along the way, they collect on film the impressions and misconceptions the Japanese have about the cold country "that has all that electricity."

"This is lightweight, for sure, but we didn't want to make a rhetorical and boring film about racism and stereotypes," explains Wintonick. "You need new strategies. The same message will essentially be transmitted to the audience."

The filmmakers think of *Ho! Kanada* as their personal response to the referendum, but to "the referendum question that doesn't exist." Doran asks, "Do we exist as Canadians, or are we a figment of our own



Masaaki Kagami (left) with *Ho! Kanada* directors Barbara Doran and Peter Wintonick

imagination? Rather than look at it directly, why not step back and look at it through somebody else's eyes."

But why Japanese eyes? "I was plagued with the same kind of curiosity that we're all plagued with when we see a bus load of Japanese tourists, decked out with cameras, jumping on and off buses. You wonder what the attraction is, and why they're often in a group."

Ho! Kanada's production history should be chronicled in a Canadian film almanac. Wintonick and Doran were at the Banff Television Festival two years ago, with no money to get back to Montreal. They were hanging out at a "techie party" and sat beside Masaaki. After learning that he made souvenir videos for Japanese tourists, they immediately got the idea and sold some CBC folks on doing the documentary.

"Films about stereotypes can become stereotypes. And when you're using humour to look at a culture, it's a dangerous line to walk," says Wintonick. "But we've been taking on international issues, like the media and human rights, for over 10 years, so it's kind of nice to turn our sights on Canada and have it projected in Montreal."

Wintonick is amped to cruise the festival as what he calls a "cinema tourist" at the new Virtual Film Festival, a parallel online festival he spent six months creating with co-producer Glen Salzman as an adjunct to the main event. "There'll be demonstrations in the bar at the Meridien Hotel and at the trade forum," he says. "It's a participatory space, with 15 chat rooms and an [online] café and magazine that emulate the feeling of a film festival."

The Virtual Film Festival will sport film clips, sound bites and a job bank for filmmakers.

Jean-Marc Vallée

Vallée is wired in a different sense, preparing for the premiere of *Liste noire*, his first feature film. It's in the official competition, which cranks the pressure and sharpens the critics. *Liste noire* is a thriller that Vallée hopes will do Hitchcock proud.

"The story is a sex scandal, but I didn't want to do *Basic Instinct* Part II. The film's principal emotion is fear, not eroticism."

"It's a classic thriller," explains Vallée. "I'm a very big fan of Hitchcock. My approach is maybe close to his. Hitchcock spent all his life experimenting with the genre. He wanted to direct the audience's minds, as well as the actors on screen. So *Liste noire* isn't trying to be anything different than a genre film—a thriller that tells a good story. The language of cinema is very complex, and in order to speak it well within a genre, it needs to be experienced and practised."

Vallée's local

competition is Robert Ménard, a seasoned filmmaker and moneymen in Montreal. Ménard and partner Claire Wojas got a plump budget of \$3.5 million from Telefilm, and other places to make *L'enfant d'eau*. It's a story about a mentally handicapped man and a 12-year-old girl stranded together on a tropical island for 49 days.

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Ten films to watch for at this year's film fest

Georgia Jennifer Jason Leigh perfects on-screen self-destruction in *Georgia*, where she drinks and drugs herself out of a singing career. This drama about sisterly resentment is a one-woman suicide film that makes *Mrs. Parker and the Vicious Circle* look like *Masterpiece Theatre*. Don't miss Leigh's rendition of Elvis Costello's "Almost Blue."

Things to Do in Denver when You're Dead It's good to see Andy Garcia back playing a gangster in this pulpy thriller about the underside of the underworld. Treat Williams turns his

Stanley Kowalski into "Critical Bill," a crazed civilian with a military streak and impulse-control problems. It's the ultimate Friday-night film.

The Usual Suspects is the other crime thriller you should see, after ...*Denver*. An America customs agent and five petty crooks are being wound up by a criminal mastermind. The draw? Check out the cast: Gabriel Byrne, Chazz Palminteri, Kevin Pollak, Kevin Spacey and Stephen Baldwin. Mystery: how can Stephen Baldwin's name come first in the press-kit credits?

Ulysses's Gaze won the Grand Jury Prize at Cannes this year, and nobody fell asleep during the 8 a.m. screening. Harvey Keitel plays a filmmaker on a journey home. It's a long,

thoughtful journey, but it's worth the setup. Since the story is mostly in its images, the subtitles aren't a chore.

The Mule and the Emeralds, by Bashar Shbib. You can't love to hate Shbib with any kind of authority unless you see his work.

Don't Die Without Telling Me Where You're Going may have an ungainly title but it should be seen on good faith because its director, Argentinean Eliseo Subiela, won the big film prize here in 1992.

The Brothers McMullen should also be seen on good faith, 'cause those prize-givers at the Sundance Film Festival can be trusted. *The Brothers McMullen* won the Grand Jury Prize there this year, and director Edward Burns's

romantic comedy has been sizzling ever since.

Don't Touch My Holocaust is in the Spotlight on Israeli Cinema of Today. Asher Tlalim uproots the trouble of remembering and forgetting in Israel and Germany. Serious think piece.

Love and Hate—European Stories is one of those multi-ethnic composite films by five directors, each secretly wanting to out-do the others. The segment called *Pigs and Pearls*, by the Yugoslavian director Dragan Nikolic, sounds promising.

Hate got a standing ovation at its premiere press screening in Cannes. It's about violence and racism in a suburb of Paris. Director Mathieu Kassovitz gives us a funny look into tough-guy loyalty, and he knows how to build dramatic tension while you're laughing.