

MOVIE REVIEW

Young Triffie's Been Made Away With delights festival audience in Halifax

By KAREN SHEWBRIDGE
SPECIAL TO THE TELEGRAM

The 26th Annual Atlantic Film Festival audience had a great "rant and roar" Friday night in Halifax at the premiere of comedian Mary Walsh's feature film "Young Triffie's Been Made Away With."

Based on the play by well-known Newfoundland writer Ray Guy, Walsh's feature film directorial debut was a solid hit with moviegoers at the Atlantic Festival gala.

The action takes place in the isolated outport community of Swyers Harbour in 1947, prior to Confederation. A clueless young Newfoundland Ranger, Andrew Hepditch, played by Fred Ewaniuk (Hank on Corner Gas), is sent to investigate a common sheep-shagging/mutilation. However, before the unsuspecting Ranger arrives, a young woman's body washes up on shore, making it a murder scene.

During the screening, the audience "heaved it out of 'er," laughing and applauding uproariously at the frenetic antics of stars Ewaniuk, Mary Walsh, Andy Jones and Andrea Martin. Ewaniuk and Martin's physical comedy drove this comedic tour de force from its strange beginnings to its ultimately zany conclusion.

A scene in a post office between Walsh and Jones brought the house down. The exchange of insults, colourful and loosely biblical in nature, was at a pace and pitch I've never witnessed before. But I hope to again, maybe in Walsh's next film.

Two comedic actors at the height of their powers and talent take us to the edge and back again. I would enjoy watching this scene again just to experience the raw humour reach its crest, explode and then subside with a mock heart attack and the healthy "F--- you" from the loving son upstairs, whom we never actually see.

Authentic Newfoundlanders needed

There were a few awkward scenes in the film, particularly in the beginning. First of all, a film set in Newfoundland has to set the scene early. Casting non-Newfoundlanders in both major Ranger roles was a stretch.

Colin Mochrie is a wonderful comedian, but one of the two characters needed to obviously "be" a Newfoundlander with an accent. A Newfoundland actor could easily have played the part and would have strengthened the opening scenes. The Shipping News suffered the same weakness in some of its casting. This may be a side effect of collaboration between Newfoundland filmmakers and outside producers.

Another scene that didn't work and was almost awkward was the arrival of Ewaniuk in Swyers Harbour and miscommunication regarding the dead sheep. You could see the joke coming from miles away and even the actors seemed to have trouble with it.

The only other weakness is a bit of confusion regarding who is related to whom and its relevance to the plot. It wasn't always clear what was going on with this part of the storyline. Perhaps the answer is on the cutting room floor.

However, these are small criticisms of a film which is a must-see for anyone who loves a great laugh, a good whodunit and amazing comedic acting.

Stellar performance

Ewaniuk is a revelation as the young Ranger Hepditch. From the moment he wallows in a field with a herd of sheep to the incredible vision of him eating his first banana — skin and all — Ewaniuk establishes himself as a leading comedic talent.

He is engaging, refreshing and completely honest, with a subtlety in his physical comedy which belies his boyish good looks. His timing is excellent and he is utterly believable. There is not a false note in his performance. In fact, I could not think of another actor who would do a better job in this role.

Besides veterans Mary Walsh, Andy Jones and Cathy Jones, a whole slew of Newfoundland actors — including Glenn Downey, Rick Boland, Donna Butt and Pete Soucy — turn this film into a delicious Newfoundland concoction brimming with strange, lovable and not-so-lovable characters.

Jonny Harris — of Hatching, Matching & Dispatching — as Billy Head is a hilarious breath of fresh air. From his first moments on the screen, he transports us to a Newfoundland outport. I look forward to seeing more of his work.

Four-time Genie award-winning Quebecois actor Remy

Girard plays the heavy-drinking local doctor, Percy Melrose. Girard has an amazing list of credits, including the Canadian films Jesus of Montreal and Les Invasions Barbares.

As Mrs. Melrose, the doctor's wife, Andrea Martin is a woman filled with secrets and other exotic substances which threaten to overflow and consume her and anyone around her. Martin is brilliant in this film, adding her professional brand of physical comedy and exquisite timing to some already stellar scenes.

Suezn Carpenter, as young Brenda Piercey, is the perfect foil for the hapless young Ranger Hepditch, and makes an impressive debut in her first feature film. She is not a model attempting to play a Newfoundland outport girl. She is an attractive, solidly built, nubile young woman. Ready and willing, with an unsophisticated approach to life and love, she is just the thing to attract an eager young man sent around the bay.

Francis David as Old Man Washbourne, adds his significant talent to the heady brew.

Young Triffie has excellent cinematography, compliments of Eric Cayla, combined with a fine musical score, by Alan Doyle and Keith Power and supported by the talent of Ron Hynes in the opening song, "Hard Times."

Based on the reaction from the Atlantic Film Festival audience, Mary Walsh has a hit on her hands and can feel proud of her directorial debut when it opens in theatres in February.

Karen Shewbridge lives and works in Halifax.

FROM THE DIRECTOR OF SCARFACE



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