

Berlin 2003

By Ron Holloway

Spring 2003 Issue of KINEMA

WITH THE WORDS "TOWARDS TOLERANCE" prominently displayed on the front cover of the catalogue for the 53rd Berlinale (6-16 February 2003), accompanied by an appropriate essay by festival director Dieter Kosslick on the Berlinale contributing to "a greater understanding between cultures," the impending Iraqi war hung over the heads of the international jury like a Damocles sword.

So the jury, headed by Canadian-Armenian director Atom Egoyan, appropriately awarded the Golden Bear to Michael Winterbottom's *In This World* (UK), a fiction-documentary about two young Afghans leaving a refugee camp in Peshawar to embark on an arduous journey along the ancient Silk Road - from Pakistan through Iran and Turkey to Istanbul and eventually London. That the film was shot with a digital camera (Marcel Zyskind) on actual locations adds to the immediacy of the journey, but it's the sound recording (Stuart Wilson) that sends some chills up your spine when the boys are confined in a container in the dark hold of a freighter.

Programmed on the second day of the festival, *In This World* set the tone for the entire Berlinale as "a statement for peace" that was to rise to a crescendo when a half-million Berliners turned out on the closing day of the festival to march through the Brandenburg Gate in an anti-war demonstration. It was also awarded the Peace Prize and Ecumenical Prize.

The 53rd Berlinale proved once again just how commercially effective a festival can be as a winter showcase for the Oscar Nominations. Rob Marshall's *Chicago* and Martin Scorsese's *Gangs of New York*, both running out of competition, respectively opened and closed the festival, while Stephen Daldry's *The Hours* (UK) well deserved top honours as the one creative artistic gem in the competition. Scripted by British dramatist David Hare (whose *Wetherby* had once shared a Golden Bear at the 1985 Berlinale) from a novel by Michael Cunningham, *The Hours* links three separate stories - set in London in 1923, in Los Angeles in 1952, and in New York in 2002 - around the seminal feminist novel "Mrs. Dalloway" by Virginia Woolf (played by Nicole Kidman in the first episode). The ensemble of Nicole Kidman, Julianne Moore, and Meryl Streep were collectively awarded the Silver Bear for Best Actress. And the film was voted the Readers' Award by the Berliner Morgenpost.

The three German entries in the competition represented only the tip of the iceberg. Altogether, 59 German films had been booked by the festival, and extra screenings had to be scheduled on the spot to handle the overflow crowds in the Perspektive Deutsches Kino section programmed by Alfred Holighaus. Immediately after the competition screening of Wolfgang Becker's *Goodbye, Lenin!*, a satire on a special phenomenon known in Germany as "Ostalgie" (to wit: nostalgia for "how wonderful it used to be in East Germany"), the film soared to the top of home box-office hit-list. *Goodbye, Lenin!* was awarded the Blue Angel Prize for Best European Film.

More impressive as a statement on social conditions in eastern Germany today was Hans-Christian Schmid's *Lichter (Distant Lights)*, awarded the International Critics (FIPRESCI) Prize. Set on the border between Germany and Poland, *Distant Lights* sketches the fates of five "losers" in an interlocking narrative that never loses sight of the tragicomic no matter how bitter it is for the protagonists to face the truth.

Another compelling though flawed statement on the human condition was Oskar Roehler's *Der alte Affe Angst (Angst)*. A personal, somewhat autobiographical, study about a stage director's laming psychosis in work and marriage, it drove many from their seats after the first drawn-out, heavy-handed, yelling-and-screaming marriage spat. Later, however, when the spectre of death enters the picture - the director's father, a haggard old writer, phones to say he is dying of cancer - the story takes on the depth needed to minimize the presence of scary ghosts in the closet.

For my taste, the best German film at the Berlinale was programmed in the Panorama: Christian Petzold's *Wolfsburg*, the third in his trilogy on moral ethics and individual conscience - after the award-winning *Die*

innere Sicherheit (*The State I Am In*, 2000), about a terrorist family still on the run, and the equally acclaimed tele-feature *Toter Mann* (*Dead Man*, 2001), about a woman's pained quest to avenge the murder of her sister. A devotee of the psycho-thriller, Petzold makes sure that each shot counts not just to push along the narrative, but also to uncover layers of personal guilt and remorse, deceit and prevarication, doubt and vacillation. In *Wolfsburg* a successful car salesman (Benno Fürmann in his best role to date) accidentally kills a youngster on a country road, leaves the scene of the accident without reporting it, and thereafter has to drag his hit-and-run conscience along with him everywhere he goes - until, finally, he meets the single mother of the victim and forfeits all that he formerly stood for. *Wolfsburg*, produced- for television, where Petzold is apparently assured of more artistic freedom, was awarded a International Critics (FIPRESCI) Prize.

Japanese cinema made waves as never before at the Berlinale. The photo on the front cover of the International Forum of Young Cinema booklet was taken from Lee Sang-Il's *Border Line*, a remarkable compilation of interwoven stories about people living on the borderline of existence: economic, psychological, self-destructive. The high water mark of the Berlinale was the retrospective tribute honouring the 100th anniversary of the birth of Yasujiro Ozu (1903-1963). Ozu's acclaimed classic, *Tokyo monogatari* (*Tokyo Story*, Japan 1953), was highlighted in the official program. This, in addition to four more seldom seen Ozu films programmed in the Forum: *Umarete wa mita keredo* (*I Was Born, But ...*, 1932), *Ukikusa monogatari* (*A Story of Floating Weeds*, 1934), *Banshun* (*Late Spring*, 1949), *Bakushu* (*Early Summer*, 1951) - all of which aptly demonstrated his maturing skill as he approached the making of *Tokyo Story*. The best of the Asian films programmed in the Panorama was also a Japanese feature: Junji Sakamoto's *Bokunchi* (*Bokunchi - My House*), based on a popular comic strip about Little Itta and his younger brother who don't realize that their elder elegant sister, who has returned to the island for a visit, is actually the younger boy's mother.

Considering that the Forum had booked 19 Asian features and six documentaries, the NETPAC Jury did not have an easy time reaching a decision. The prize was awarded to Sabu's *Koufuku no Kane* (*The Blessing Bell*, Japan). Celebrated first a pop-star - he was awarded Best New Actor in Katsuhiro Otomo's *World Apartment Horror* (1991) - Sabu has rapidly developed into a cult director in seven feature films to date. The Forum introduced him to the Berlin public with *Unlucky Monkey* (1998), a comic portrait of an unlucky yakuza gangster, followed by *Monday* (2000), the amusing story of a man waking up in a hotel room with but one clue (ceremonial salt in his pocket) as to who he is or how he got there. His overriding theme of "comic coincidences" is given full throttle in *The Blessing Bell*, whose main figure is a Japanese deadringer for Buster Keaton. Nothing seems to bother Igarishi (Tarajima Susumu) - neither the fact that he loses his new job on the first day of work, nor that he arrested by the police for happening to be present when a yakuzi boss commits suicide, nor that he finds in his hand the winning ticket of a bounteous lottery, nor that the money is stolen by a young mother whose daughter he has saved from a burning house. One humorous twist follows another, as Igarishi, the stoic, takes everything in stride. The last twist comes when he returns home - at full gallop, as all the scenes of fortune/misfortune are revisited again like pushing playback on a video cassette.

The NETPAC Jury gave a Special Mention to Garin Nugroho's *Aku Ingin Menciumu Sekali Saja* (*Bird-Man Tale*, Indonesia), a sensitive political statement on religious beliefs and national ethics in Papuan Indonesia during its current independence movement. Another Asian standout was Park Chan-uk's *Beksoneum naegut* (*Sympathy for Mr. Vengeance*, Korea), a compelling psycho-drama exploring the theme of vengeance by people caught in a web of fateful events. Hailed by critics as the best Korean film of the season, it's directed by the same filmmaker whose *JSA - Joint Security Area* (2000) set a modern-day Korean box office record.

References

AWARDS

INTERNATIONAL JURY

Golden Bear

In This World (UK), Michael Winterbottom

Silver Bear, Grand Jury Prize

Adaptation (USA), Spike Jonze

Silver Bear, Best Director

Son Frère (His Brother), France), Patrice Chéreau

Silver Bear, Best Actress

Ensemble of Meryl Streep, Nicole Kidman, Julianne Moore, *The Hours* (UK), Stephen Daldry

Silver Bear, Best Actor

Sam Rockwell, *Confessions of a Dangerous Mind* (USA), George Clooney

Silver Bear, Individual Artistic Contribution

Li Yang, screenwriter and director, *Mang Jing (Blind Shaft)*, Hongkong /China /Germany)

Silver Bear, Best Film Music

Majoly, Serge Fiori, Mamadou Diabaté, *Madame Brouette* (Canada /Senegal /France), Moussa Sene Absa

AGICOA Blue Angel Prize, Best European Film

Good Bye, Lenin! (Germany), Wolfgang Becker

Alfred Bauer Prize, for Particular Innovation

Ying Xiong (Hero), Hongkong /China), Zhang Yimou

Golden Bear, Short Film

(A)Torzija ((A)Torison), Slovenia), Stefan Arsenijevic

Silver Bear, Short Film (ex aequo)

En Ausencia (In Absentia), Argentina), Lucia Cedron

Ischov Tramwai (The Tram No. 9 Goes), Ukraine), Stepan Koval

OTHER AWARDS

FIPRESCI (International Critics) Awards

Competition: *Lichter (Distant Lights)*, Germany), Hans-Christian Schmid

Panorama: *Wolfsburg* (Germany), Christian Petzold

Forum: *Edi* (Poland), Piotr Trzaskalski

Ecumenical Awards

Competition: *In This World* (UK), Michael Winterbottom

Panorama: *Knafayim shvurot (Broken Wings)*, Israel), Nir Bergman

Forum: *Edi* (Poland), Piotr Trzaskalski

Prix UIP Berlin - Short Film

Competition: *(A)Torzija ((A)Torison)*, Slovenia), Stefan Arsenijevic

Prize of Guild of German Art House Cinemas

Competition: *My Life Without Me* (Spain /Canada), Isabel Coixet

CICAE Awards (International Confederation of Art Cinemas)

Panorama: *Knafayim shvurot (Broken Wings)*, Israel), Nir Bergman

Special Mention: *Polígono sur (Seville, South Side)*, Spain /France), Dominique Abel

Forum: *Amarelo manga (Mango Yellow)*, Brazil), Claudio Assis

Special Mention: *Power Trip* (USA), Paul Devlin

Peace Film Award

In This World (UK), Michael Winterbottom

Readers' Award of Berliner Morgenpost
Competition: *The Hours* (UK), Stephen Daldry

INTERNATIONAL FORUM OF YOUNG CINEMA AWARDS

Wolfgang Staudte Prize
Rengeteg (*Forest*, Hungary), Benedek Fliegauf

NETPAC (Network for Promotion of Asian Cinema) Award
Koufuku nokane (*The Blessing Bell*, Japan), Sabu

Special Mention: *Aku ingin menciummu sekali saja* (*Bird-Man Tale*, Indonesia), Garin Nugroho

Don Quixote Award (International Federation of Film Societies)
Edi (Poland), Piotr Trzaskalski

Caligari Award (German Association of Communal Film Work)
Salt (Iceland /USA), Bradley Rust Gray

PANORAMA AWARDS

LVT - Manfred-Salzgeber-Prize, Innovative European Feature
Pure (UK), Gillies MacKinnon

Panorama Short Film Award
Misdemeanor (USA), Jonathan LeMond

New York Film Academy Award, Short Film
Moglem byc czlowiekiem (*I Could Have Been Human*, Poland), Barbara Medajska

Special Mention - Underdog (Israel), Eran Merav

Panorama Audience Award
Knafayim shvurot (*Broken Wings*, Israel), Nir Bergman

Teddy Awards

Best Feature Film: *Mil nubes de paz cercan el cielo, amor, jamas acabara der ser amor* (*A Thousand Peace Clouds Encircle The Sky, Love, You Will Never Stop Being Love*, Mexico), Julian Hernandez

Best Documentary: *Ich kenn keinen - Allein unter Heteros* (*Talk Straight - The World Of Rural Queers*, Germany), Jochen Hick

Best Short Film: *Fremragende timer* (*Precious Moments*, Norway), Lars Daniel Krutzkoff Jacobsen, Jan Dalchow

Special Teddy 2003 - F. W. Murnau

Readers' Award of Siegesäule Magazine
The Event (Canada /USA), Thom Fitzgerald

CHILDREN'S FILM FESTIVAL AWARDS

Prizes of Deutsches Kinderhilfswerk
Best Feature Film: *Kald mig bare Aksel* (*Call Me Axel*, Denmark), Pia Bovin

Special Mentions: *Elina - Som om jag inte fanns* (*Elina - As If I Wasn't Here*, Sweden /Finland), Klaus Haro, and *Drentgen der ville gore det umulige* (*The Boy Who Wanted To Be A Bear*, Denmark /France /Norway), Jannik Hastrup

Best Short Film: *Le trop petit prince* (*Pipsqueak Prince*, France), Zoia Trofimova

Special Mention: *Houdinis Hund* (*Houdini's Hound*, Norway), Sara Johnsen

Crystal Bears - Young People's Jury

Best Feature Film: *Elina - Som om jag inte fanns* (*Elina - As If I Wan't Here*, Sweden /Finland), Klaus Haro

Special Mentions: *Miss Entebbe* (Israel), Omri Levy, *La viaje de Carol* (*Carol's Journey*, Spain /Portugal), Imanol Uribe

Best Short Film: *Le trop petit prince* (*Pipsqueak Prince*, France), Zoia Trofimova

Special Mention: *Birju* (USA /India) Heeraz Marfatia

Author Information

Ron HOLLOWAY (1933-2009) was an American critic, film historian, filmmaker and correspondent who adopted Europe as his home in the early fifties and spent much of his life in Berlin. He was an expert on the study of German cinema and against all odds produced, with his wife Dorothea, the journal *German Film*, keeping us up-to-date with the work of directors, producers and writers and the showing of German films around the world.

In 2007, Ron Holloway and his wife were awarded the Berlinale Camera Award. Ron also received the Bundesverdienstkreuz (German Cross of Merit), Polish Rings, Cannes Gold Medaille, the American Cinema Foundation Award, the Diploma for Support of Russian Cinema and an honorary award from the German Film Critics' Association.

Ron was also a valued contributor to *Kinema* for the past fifteen years.