

Montreal 2004

By Ron Holloway

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MONTREAL WORLD FILM FESTIVAL 2004

The 28th Montreal World Film Festival (26 August to 6 September 2004) is the story of the right film being at the right festival at the right time. Eran Riklis's *Hacala Hasurit* (*The Syrian Bride*, Israel-France-Germany) was awarded the four top prizes: Grand Prize of the Americas, FIPRESCI (International Critics) Prize, Ecumenical Prize, and the Air Canada People's Choice Prize. Never mind that the same film had also been voted the *Prix du publique* at the Locarno festival in August, for the FIAPF rules governing the eligibility of competition films in major festival are currently undergoing drastic change - due in great part, one might add, to last year's decision by Montreal director Serge Losique to drop his festival membership.

And one can only cheer the good fortune of a modest film with quality production credits directed by an Israeli based in London, whose screenplay about a Palestinian family living in a Druze village on the Golan Heights under Israeli occupation border was co-written by a Palestinian. A humanist film of this high caliber, one dealing with a social dilemma still on the UN's political burner, deserves all the audience it can muster at festivals to pave the way for broad commercial release.

The Syrian Bride, set on a wedding day, is the story of a Druze Palestinian who should be celebrating the happiest day of her life. Instead, Mona knows that once she has crossed into Syria to marry Tallel, a television star whom she will meet in person for the first time, she will be forbidden by Israeli authorities to return to Majdal Shams, her Druze village on the Golan Heights, and thus might be separated forever from her family. At the same day, the border is experiencing a wave of unrest. Demonstrations are being organized on the Syrian side in a show of support for Syrian President Bashar Assad. Israeli soldiers on the Israeli-Palestinian side are on the alert with patrols that can hinder cross-overs of any nature. The family, too, is divided. There's the tough, authoritarian, politically oriented father. There's the playboy brother and an elder sister trapped in a traditional culture she no longer want any part of. The no-man's land at the border is mirrored in the shattered family. And when government and military officials are thrown into this cauldron of mental, psychological, emotional, and heated political feelings, anything might happen when Mona attempts to cross the border.

To Eran Riklis's credit, a veteran Israeli director based in Israel and England, he leaves the audience at the end to take a position on their own. "*The Syrian Bride* is an attempt to create a film out of love," he said in an interview. "A love of freedom, a love for the spirit of freedom, a love for the physical and emotional landscapes that surround all of us, a love for women who fight for their place in the world, and a love for people who still dream and hope." And he added on a note of some gravity: "Not only here, across this border - but everywhere." Judging from the Audience Award at Montreal and Locarno, Riklis's plea for humanity in a chaotic world has indeed been heard.

Another festival coincidence saw double awards split between the same two competition films. The runnerup Jury Prize was shared by An Zhanjun's *Kan che ren de qi yue* (*The Parking Attendant in July*, China), a tongue-in-cheek marriage mix-up melodrama, and Jordan Roberts's *Around the Bend* (USA), a road movie that draws its power and poignancy from around a fragmented father-son relationship.

Both stories shift into high gear when the ex-husband in the former and the long-lost father in the second are unexpectedly released from prison. This was trumped by Best Actor awards shared by Fan Wei in *The Parking Attendant in July* (he plays the title role) and Christopher Walken (he's the jailbird on the run) in *Around the Bend*. Yet another coincidence occurred when the opening night film, Ghyslaine Côté's *Elles étaient cinq* (*The Five of Us*, Canada), was doubly cited by the international jury as well - it received the Award for Best Artistic Contribution, while the Best Actress Award went to Karin Viard.

All in all, the 2004 Montreal World Film Festival went down as one of the best in recent memory. Certainly, a festival that can boast of long lines circling around the corner before the Imperial Theatre for the galas, in addition to crowds milling before the Le Parisien multiplex with its seven screens for the early morning

shows, is to be envied on both artistic and commercial counts. As for the Golden Zenith Awards for Best First Feature, it went to a Latin American entry: Jaime Aparicio's *El Mago* (*The Magician*, Mexico), the compassionate story of a street magician who, upon discovering he is afflicted with a brain tumour, decides to settle some of the open accounts of his past. A film of magic realism, *The Magician* draws upon a still vital Mexican tradition of story-telling.

This year's Lifetime Achievement Awards at Montreal went to actress Isabelle Adjani and directors Theo Angelopoulos and Krsto Papić.

References

AWARDS

INTERNATIONAL JURY

Grand Prize of the Americas

Hacala Hasurit (*The Syrian Bride*, Israel-France-Germany), Eran Riklis

Jury Award (ex aequo)

Kan che ren de qi yue (*The Parking Attendant in July*, China), An Zhanjun
Around the Bend (USA), Jordan Roberts

Best Director

Carlos Saura, *El septimo dia* (*The 7th Day*, Spain-France)

Best Actress

Karin Viard, *Elles étaient cinq* (*The Five of Us*, Canada), Ghyslaine Côté

Best Actor (ex aequo)

Christopher Walken, *Around the Bend* (USA)
Jordan Roberts; Fan Wei, *Kan che ren de qi yue* (*The Parking Attendant in July*, China)

Best Screenplay

François Favrat, Julie Lopen-Curval, Jérôme Beauséjour, Roger Bohbot, *Le rôle de sa vie* (*The Role of Her Life*, France), François Favrat

Best Artistic Contribution

Elles étaient cinq (*The Five of Us*, Canada), Ghyslaine Côté

Innovation Award

Fuon (*The Crying Wind*, Japan), Yoichi Higashi

Short Films

Best Short Film

Little Terrorist (India), Ashvin Kumar

Jury Award

Mabel's Sage (Canada), Joe Dee Samuelson

Most Popular Canadian Feature Film

Elles étaient cinq (*The Five of Us*, Canada), Ghyslaine Côté

FedEx Award - Most Popular Canadian Short Film

Mabel's Sage (Canada), Joe Dee Samuelson

Air Canada People's Choice Award

Hacala Hasurit (*The Syrian Bride*, Israel-France-Germany), Eran Riklis

Special Grand Prizes of the Americas - for exceptional contribution to the cinematographic art Isabelle Adjani, French actor; Theo Angelopoulos, Greek director; Krsto Papić, Croatian director

OTHER AWARDS

International Critics (FIPRESCI) Award, Feature Film

Hacala Hasurit (The Syrian Bride, Israel-France-Germany), Eran Riklis

Ecumenical Award

Hacala Hasurit (The Syrian Bride, Israel-France-Germany), Eran Riklis

ZENITHS - FIRST FICTION FEATURE FILMS

Golden Zenith

El Mago (The Magician, Mexico), Jaime Aparicio

Silver Zenith

Tres veces dos (Three Times Two, Cuba), Pavel Giroud, Lester Hamlet, Esteban Inausti

Bronze Zenith

Comment conqu rir l'Am rique en une nuit (How to Conquer America in One Night, Canada), Dany Laferri re

Special Mention

Trying the Knot (USA), Jim De S ve

GOLDEN ZENITHS - FILMS OF DIFFERENT CONTINENTS

Best European Film

Cachorro (Bear Club, Spain), Miguel Albaladejo

Best Canadian Film

Everyone (Canada), Bill Marchant

Best U.S. Film

Dear Frankie (USA), Shona Auerbach

Best Latin American Film

Conversaciones con Mama (Conversations with Mama) (Argentina), Santiago Carlos Oves

Best Asian Film

Marmouliak (The Lizard, Iran), Kamal Tabrizi

Best African Film

Beat the Drum (South Africa), David Hickson

Best Oceania Film

Aman's Gotta Do (Australia), Chris Kennedy

Best Cinema and Sport Film

America Brown (USA), Paul Black

Best Documentary Film

Travelling with Che Guevara (Italy), Gianni Min 

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.