

Vienna 2003

By Ron Holloway

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VIENNA INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL 2003

Right from the start, V'03 - The 2003 Vienna International Film Festival (17-29 October 2003) - was something special. An extra day had to be added onto the schedule to accommodate the run on tickets - 5,000 more sold than last year, for an overall attendance of 75,200. Altogether, "a nearly historic number of visitors," said festival director Hans Hurch at the close of the Viennale.

To my regret, I arrived a day too late to see John Ford's *Bucking Broadway* (1917), a "Cheyenne Harry" Carey five-reeler found three years ago by chance in the archive of the Cinémathèque Française under the title Far West Drama. It was the sixth of 26 films made with Harry Carey and featured a rescue scene with a posse of cowboys ride down Broadway.

But I did make in time to see Erich von Stroheim's silent classic *The Merry Widow* (1925), starring Mae Murray and John Gilbert, and screened to musical accompaniment. It was followed a few days later by Ernst Lubitsch's *The Merry Widow* (1934), the sound musical version of Lehár's operetta, starring Jeanette MacDonald and Maurice Chevalier. Both films were introduced by German film historian Enno Patalas at the screenings in the Metro, the venue for the Austrian Film Archive. Two years ago, at the 2001 Viennale, Hurch had persuaded 94-year-old Fay Wray to attend the screening of Stroheim's *The Wedding March* (1928), also a restored print with a Carl Davis score inspired by Viennese melodies on the soundtrack. *The Merry Widow* was thus a fitting sequel to that Stroheim event.

Another festival highlight, and a big hit with the young public, was the tribute to American documentarist Emile de Antonio (1919-1989). All his political documentaries were programmed: *Point of Order* (1963) on Joe McCarthy, *Rush to Judgment* (1966) on the assassination of JFK, *In the Year of the Pig* (1968) on the Vietnam War, *America Is Hard to See* (1970) on the assassinations of Martin Luther King and Robert Kennedy and the riots at the 1968 Democratic Party Convention in Chicago, *Millhouse: A White Comedy* (1971) on Richard Nixon, *Underground* (1976) on the Weathermen revolutionaries, *In the King of Prussia* (1982) on the trial of the antiwar "Plowshares Eight" in Pennsylvania, and *Mr. Hoover and I* (1989) on himself being tracked by the FBI.

De Antonio's *Underground* drew the most audience attention. And with good reason - for it had been programmed back-to-back with Sam Green and Bill Siegel's *The Weather Underground* (USA, 2003). A well researched newsreel-style chronicle on the "Weathermen" (named after a Bob Dylan song), a group of young revolutionaries (mostly from well-to-do families) who were once on the FBI's "Most Wanted List!" and later turned themselves in, *The Weather Underground* is remarkable for the forthright interviews given by the leaders of the group. On one occasion, they talk about the visit of Emile de Antonio to their hideout for the interview that appeared in his *Underground* documentary - thus, one film inside another.

The Emile de Antonio tribute underscored some little known facts about a filmmaker who was also a producer, distributor, and actor. When I met him at the Leipzig DOKfilm festival in 1988, a year before his death, he was preparing a compilation documentary for Channel Four that would retrace all the important stations in his life. When I asked him if he would include his own acting performance in an Andy Warhol film (*Drunk*, 1965), he responded with a noncommittal shrug. But he was proud of having produced Robert Frank and Alfred Leslie's *Pull My Daisy* (1959) and Dan Drasin's *Sunday* (1961), both seminal films that caught the emerging spirit of a coming decade and paved the way for his own input on both the American political and documentary scene.

Pull My Daisy (aka *The Beat Generation*) was introduced at the Viennale by painter-filmmaker Alfred Leslie, who regaled the audience with stories and anecdotes about the making of this 16mm, black-and-white, underground classic, scripted by Jack Kerouac and featuring Allen Ginsberg, Larry Rivers, Gregory Corso, Larry Rivers, Peter Orlovsky, and Delphine Seyrig in her first screen role. Leslie also presented

his latest documentary, *The Cedar Bar* (USA, 2003), an amusing sketch of a typical night at his favourite Manhattan bar - a rendezvous for artists and critics, both friendly and hostile, depending on the *tête-à-tête* on any given evening.

The Art Theatre Guild Retrospective of "Independent Japanese Cinema, 1962-1984" - programmed in the Austrian Film Museum under the direction of Alexander Horvath - was a windfall for Asian cineastes. Roland Demening wrote the introduction to the collection of 66 films programmed in the retro, French critic Max Tessier contributed an essay on "Facts and Perceptions in Japan and Europe on the Art Theatre Guild," and a quarter of Japanese critic-historians (Kuzio Kinshiro, Hirasawa Go, Yomota Inuhiko, Okubo Ken) contributed essays and interviews to put the entire retrospective in proper focus.

Retrospective tributes also paid honour to Warren Beatty and Vincent Gallo. Beatty's *Reds* (1981) was well worth another look, if only because that flawed epic spawned a slew of books on John Reed, Louise Bryant, Emma Goldman, Max Eastman, and other American "anarchists" who don't have a role in the film: Big Bill Haywood, Raymond Robins, and the martyrs of the Haymarket Riots. As for the Vincent Gallo retrospective, it offered the actor-director the chance to lop off 30 merciful minutes for the two-hour version of *Brown Bunny* screened at Cannes - enough to win him the FIPRESCI (International Critics) Award at the Viennale "for its bold exploration of yearning and grief and for its radical departure from dominant tendencies in current American filmmaking" (whatever that means).

Last but not least, a heated discussion took place in the Urania press centre over a controversial decision by Austrian cultural minister Franz Morak to appoint a Serb, Misa Vukotic from the Belgrade Film Archive, to head the Diagonale, the annual showcase for Austrian cinema in Graz. After two hours of deliberation, a vote was carried to organize a "counter Diagonale" - preferably in Graz - under Alexander Ivanceanu, the current head of the Austrian Producers Association. An Austrian revolution? Or a pie in the sky? Whatever - the protest was well founded.

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.