

Motovun 2000

By Ron Holloway

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MOTOVUN FILM FESTIVAL 2000

Twice as exciting as its first outing, Motovun Film Festival -- "The Second" (1-8 August 2000) showed no signs of that fabled jinx of the follow-up year. Rather, under the anxious gaze of the local populace, the five-day festival prompted a pilgrimage to this picturesque medieval town perched atop a hill on the Istrian peninsula in Croatia (closer to Trieste and Ljubljana than to Zagreb). Indeed, too many cineastes and visitors came, as the open-air arena on the town square comfortably seats only a couple thousand, while the restored town movie theatre can't squeeze in more than 200. Thus, just a day after the box office opened, the circa 50 films on the program were nearly all sold out, so ad hoc screenings had to be arranged on a school playground in the lower town.

Ask artistic director Rajko Grlić where all this flamboyant festival flair comes from, and he will tell you the story of last year: how he had to buck short-sighted officials in the previous reactionary Croatian government, abetted however by supportive local county and town leaders. Pose the same question to festival director Boris T. Matić, and he will expound on the future: about how important both the Motovun Film Festival and the Imaginary Academy in nearby Grosnjana are to the revival of New Croatian Cinema. Talk to the dozen key staff members, and they revel in the joys of the present -- indeed, they can hardly contain their joy of belonging to a "media event" that is crucial, creative, visionary -- indeed indispensable -- to the social, cultural, and political welfare of the country. Add to this an indispensable Dutch contribution -- open-air projection equipment and computerized beam-subtitling -- plus an input from some thirty sponsors (KLM, Renault, DHL, Kodak, Microsoft) -- and Motovun ranks as a must-see event on the festival circuit.

The core of the 14 feature films competing for the Golden Propeller -- named for the naval propeller invented by Motovun native Josef Ressel (1793-1857) -- were all previously awarded films by cult directors or talented newcomers: Lars von Trier's *Dancer in the Dark* (Denmark-France-Sweden), Paul Thomas Anderson's *Magnolia* (USA), David Lynch's *The Straight Story* (USA), Veit Helmer's *Tuvalu* (Germany), Fridrik Thor Fridriksson's *Angels of the Universe* (Iceland-Norway-Germany-Sweden-Denmark), Damien O'Donnell's *East Is East* (UK), Sasha Gedeon's *Návrat idiota (Return of the Idiot)* (Czech Republic-Germany), Takeshi Kitano's *Kikujiro no natsu (Kikujiro)* (Japan), Lou Ye's *Suzhou River* (China-Germany), Yesim Ustaoglu's *Günese yolculuk (Journey to the Sun)* (Turkey-Netherlands-Germany), and Zhang Yang's *Xizhao (Shower)* (China), the warmly received opening night presentation.

Sweden's Bibi Andersson and Erland Josephson visited Motovun, along with a score of directors and filmmakers. Croatia's Vatroslav Mimica introduced his classic *Kaja, ubit cu te (Kaja, I'll Kill You, 1967)*, a film that made Yugoslav history by being invited to the New York Film Festival. Producer Martine de Clermont-Tonnerre (MACT) programmed a New French Cinema series in the town theatre. The current status of Croatian cinema was discussed one afternoon under a mulberry tree. Representatives of a half-dozen Croatian film festivals scattered across the country -- in Zagreb, Pula, Split, and Pozega -- were on hand with wine, song, and other promotional ploys.

But what makes Motovun particularly unique is its knack for reinventing itself. One would have to look far to find another festival with a better mix of eye-catching computerized information in its program booklet, to say nothing of an imaginative homepage on the Internet (www.motovunfilmfestival.com) and an online competition of shorts to be voted on by surfers. By the third day, no less than 12,000 had visited Motovun OnLine, with queries coming from as far away as Oman. On opening night, artistic director Rajko Grlić greeted the crowd on the square from the set of his new production in Prague via a video hookup. Mike Downey, President of the Council of Advisers, linked with Dušan Makavejev to co-venture an hour-long compilation-film composed of festival trailers.

In addition to being the runaway favourite of the festival audience, Stephen Daldry's debut feature *Billy Elliot* (UK) was awarded the Golden Propeller. Set during the bitter 1984 Miners' Strike that challenged an adamant Thatcher government, it tells the story of a boy (Jamie Bell) who takes a yen for ballet classes,

skips boxing lessons, and proves to his antagonistic father and older brother that he has both the drive and talent to be admitted to the London Academy. Three awards were handed out in the Croatian Documentary Competition, the top prizes going to films that bear the imprint of the fall of Yugoslavia: Zvonimir Jurić's signed *Tvrđja 1999* (Best Documentary) and Damir Cucić's *Bia na slika* (*Creatures from the Pictures*) (Special Mention). As for the freestyle on the OnLine Award, it went to Clara Lopez Rubio's *Aurora*.

One resurrected documentary stood out as an historical chronicle of some political consequence: Branko Ivanka's *Poezija i revolucija: studentski strajk 1971* (*Poetry and Revolution: The Student Strike of 1971* (1971-2000)). While a student at the Zagreb Academy, Ivanka and colleague Zoran Tadić filmed the riots and resistance at Zagreb University to Tito's repressive government tactics. When the strike was violently crushed, the footage was confiscated and believed lost -- until a portion of it turned up recently in the archives of the state police. Thirty years later, Branko Ivanka was given the chance to edit the material into an uneven, though impressive 60-minute documentary that well deserves further exposure on the festival circuit.

References

AWARDS

Feature Film Competition

Golden Propeller (Grand Prize): Stephen Daldry's *Billy Elliot* (UK)

Croatian Documentary Competition

Best Documentary: Zvonimir Jurić's *Tvrđja 1999*

Special Mention: Damir Cucić's *Bia na slika* (*Creatures from the Pictures*)

Best Camera: director/cameraman Radoslav Jovanov's *Cubismo - Turismo*

OnLine Award: Clara Lopez Rubio's *Aurora*

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.