

Festival forfeits star tribute for international experiment

By ADRIAN IWACHIW

Ten to Watch series

A notable absence from this year's Festival of Festivals was the usual tribute to a major film personality, a tribute that in past years has gone to Warren Beatty, Martin Scorsese and Robert Duvall. Instead, the festival featured a retrospective of the work of 10 directors who, in the words of Festival director S. Wayne Clarkson, should "leave an indelible impact on world cinema in the coming decade."

The decision was a wise one; it allowed festival-goers the opportunity to view almost 70 films by an international line-up of directors that included Bertrand Tavernier, Margarethe von Trotta, Paul Cox, Andrei Tarkovsky, Bill Forsyth and Alan Rudolph. Selecting 10 "up-and-coming" filmmakers is not an easy task and, in a few cases, questionable choices were made. Canadian Phillip Borsos, for instance, has only completed two features, *Grey Fox* and *Mean Season*, and has hardly shown the promise of brilliance that would qualify him to join the ranks of Tavernier and Tarkovsky.

Two of the lesser-known, yet more intriguing choices, Paul Ruiz and Chantal Akerman, stand out for the uniqueness of their individual *oeuvre* (though this could be said for others). Ruiz is a Chilean-born director who has been making films at a feverish pace since leaving his native country after the Pinochet coup in 1973; he has steadily gained a reputa-

tion as a *cause celebre* among European film circles that is only recently making itself felt in North America. Ruiz' films combine a romantic fascination with stories with a modernist sensibility that incessantly explores a variety of cinematic techniques, delves into the machinations of institutions and of linguistic and representational systems, and interrogates its own process of creating meanings.

Suspended Vocation, Ruiz' 1977 adaptation of a Pierre Klossowski novel about the struggle of rival doctrinal factions within the Catholic Church, presents itself as a composite of two films—one begun in 1942 by a group of monks and later aborted, the other made 20 years later and also left unfinished. Ruiz, in a manner typical of his style, composes an intertwined, labyrinthine structure that reflects the workings of the institution he is examining; in the end, he succeeds in creating a Kafkaesque atmosphere of suffocation which, unfortunately, translates into an interesting but rather tedious viewing experience.

More successful is *Three Crowns of the Sailor*, telling the story of a student who meets an old sailor and listens to tales of adventures aboard a ghost ship. The film situates itself in a surreal limbo world located somewhere between reality and myth, between the ports and harbors, brothels and bars through which pass sailors and ships, and through which these "immortal stories" of ghost ships and of old sailors meeting young men are always being retold and transformed.

The selection of Chantal Akerman

as a director "to watch" is a more surprising one. Akerman is an austere formalist, whose films are generally characterized by a minimal style: a static camera, little or no off-camera sound, shots whose length is meant to convey the feelings, often of loneliness and desire, felt by her characters. *Je tu il elle* (1974) typifies this approach. It is divided into three roughly half-hour-long segments which takes place, respectively, in the main character's bedroom, in a truck in which she is picked up along the highway, and in the apartment of a lover. *Les Rendez-vous d'Anna* (1978) shows Akerman delving into the area of the commercially viable "art film." It follows the travels of a woman filmmaker, for whom communication is as elusive as the hotels she sleeps in and the train stations she passes through. *Tout une Nuit* (1982), in contrast, eliminates the central character altogether and instead treats as its subject a hot summer night in the city. The film chronicles a succession of fragments from the emotional lives of its many anonymous characters. Passionate moments are lifted out of their narrative contexts and, by the end (the next morning), the night has become a familiar character with its own rhythms of amorous comings and goings, corresponding to the repetitiveness of our own emotional lives.

Ten to Watch has proven to be a worthwhile experiment, more valuable than a tribute to any single "star" could possibly be. (In fact, eight of the 10 directors attended the Festival; only Ruiz and Tarkovsky, both currently working on films, were not able to.)

Excalibur wraps up its coverage of Toronto's 10th annual Festival of Festivals



Controversial Mary a symbol of mystery

Jean-Luc Godard explores life, the universe and everything in *Hail, Mary, to the Pope's displeasure*

By ADRIAN IWACHIW

Hail, Mary (Je vous salut, Marie) dir: Jean-Luc Godard, 1984 (France-Switzerland)

When the dust settles from the controversy surrounding *Hail, Mary*—the largest controversy in the Festival's 10-year history—those who saw the film will be left wondering how it provoked such a hostile reaction.

There is, in fact, very little in the film one could possibly take offense with—certainly nothing the censor board would have reason to delete—other than (depending on your religious convictions) Jean-Luc Godard's irreverent and unassailable self-directedness in transposing the story of the Holy Family and the Immaculate Conception into a modern setting. Needless of the Pope's own request that he stop filming, Godard has delivered the story of a Mary who works at a gas station and plays basketball in her spare time, a Joseph who drives a cab, and an uncle Gabriel who arrives to inform Mary of her virgin pregnancy, and later slaps the unsure and somewhat suspicious Joseph in the face to tell him what "the rules" are. Far from poking fun at religion, Godard uses the story, even somewhat respectfully, as a pretext to ruminate on the mysteries of life, evolution, memory, DNA, the universe and God (is there anything I left out?). While Mary's school friend Eva discusses the origin of life on earth with fellow students, Mary—symbol of the mysterious origins of our own lives (yes, sex leads to procreation, but how did the first living organism arrive on our planet?)—is busy dealing with the consequences of her own predicament.

Godard has charted out an unpredictable and elliptic path, through his irreverent masterpieces of the '60s, his esoteric political experiments that followed the general French disillusionment after May 1968, his video work in the latter half of the '70s, and finally to his re-emergence in commercial filmmaking in 1980. *Hail, Mary* exemplifies a style that came to fruition with his 1982 film *Passion*, a kind of cinematic cubism that combines beautifully-constructed images with the fragmented sounds of classical music, occasional poetic voice-over, and dialogue that is sometimes synched with the action, and sometimes not. The film's recurrent images allude to Godard's thematic interests: rain in green pastures, splashes in a pool of water, the moon in a dark sky coming above a red traffic light, the sharp outline of trees in a wood behind which we see an airplane emerging, the words "AT THAT TIME" flashes repeatedly through the film. The music here is more choppy than ever: snippets of Mahler, Dvorak, Chopin and Bach intrusively punctuate the soundtrack only to escape in hit-and-run fashion.

Godard has been called the Joyce and Picasso of the cinema, and *Hail, Mary* reveals the reason for this as well as any other film of his. Since his breakthrough with the stylistically exuberant *Breathless* 25 years ago, *Hail, Mary* will not change the minds of those who consider Godard's films to be erratic, fragmented muddles of ideas and undeveloped storylines. To some degree they are correct: the relationship between Mary and Eva, for instance, is never clearly established—and neither is anything else in this film. But Godard is dealing with the dialectical interplay of ideas—Eve of the Old Testament, Mary of the New, like the interplay in *Passion* between "love" and "work," between the art of labor (the factory) and the labor of art (filmmaking). Godard the political militant has become Godard the romantic aesthete, the speculative poet, whilst remaining ever the intellectual, and ever the unnerving artistic gadfly.

Szabo portrays 'politricks' of war

By ALEX PATTERSON

Colonel Redl dir: Istvan Szabo, 1985 (Yugoslavia/Austria/FDR)

The efforts of three countries (Yugoslavia, Austria and West Germany) went into the making of *Colonel Redl*, the eagerly-awaited historical epic from the director and star of the Oscar-winning *Mephisto*. Given the Gala treatment at the Festival of Festivals last week, Istvan Szabo's military drama about the last days of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the events leading up to World War I has proved more than worth the four-year wait.

Being the adventures of Good Soldier Redl as he clambers and claws his way up through the ranks, Szabo's film intelligently compresses time so that he may cover a period of 30 years in two and a half hours.

From this acceptance as a cadet to his untimely death, the camera lines up every detail of the officious officer's life for inspection—as well as many details of the crumbling Hapsburg Monarchy which Redl ceaselessly defends, much to the detriment of his career. Also conspiring against his upward mobility are rumors of homosexuality and Jewish blood, neither of which were in great demand in the Kaiser's forces. To counter these obstacles, Redl plays the games of internal politricks, finks on his comrades, denies his heritage and becomes a jackboot-licker of some repute.

As the colonel with the scantily-clad ambition, Klaus Maria Brandauer (recently seen paying the rent in *A View To A Kill*) could hardly be better. He is a strange and terrible thing to witness when he is wronged. With his prominent forehead and his army-issue moustache, Brandauer's

Redl makes the audience believe in him through all his manoeuvres, whether on the field or in backroom negotiations of dubious ethics.

Colonel Redl is indeed "handsomely mounted," a backhanded compliment that usually means a movie is visually impressive but stodgy. Happily this is not the case: Szabo's filmmaking is meticulous but endlessly fascinating. Even without Brandauer there still would be fine cinematography and a consistent lighting scheme which works especially well with plush interiors. Bounding out of the speakers is Johann Strauss' insufferably jovial "Emperor Waltz," an appropriate choice as it is dedicated to Franz Josef I, in whose name Redl (and thousands of others) were sacrificed. Szabo has not only put together an excellent film; he has restored the "Emperor Waltz" to its proper context: war.

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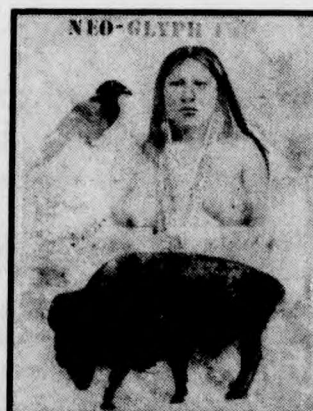
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