

ARTS

Dreamy Hello Hemingway full of magic and beauty

BY ANGEL FIGUEROA

CUBAN FILM MAKER Fernando Pérez, director of the award-winning *Hello Hemingway* at the 11th annual Atlantic Film Festival, describes his alluring film as an affinity between the influences of his father, his wife, and a deeply touching theme found in the classic short novel, *The Old Man and the Sea*.

FILM

Hello Hemingway
Atlantic Film Festival

"My father was a great dreamer. At one time he wanted to be an astronomer. At another time, a geographer, and also a film director. But all he could ever become was a mailman, due the economic reality of Cuba at the time. This film is dedicated to him, and to all those who have a dream in life. But it is also a tribute to Hemingway and to his universal message: A human being can be destroyed, but never overcome."

Sentiment such as this is not new to Pérez, reputed as among Latin America's most acclaimed documentary producers, who came to Halifax to introduce the screening of his latest film. His best known film, *Los Clandestinos*, is a gripping portrayal of Cuban students organizing a rebellion against Batista. *Hello Hemingway* lies on a different vein, but the intuition and insight into human emotion remains omnipresent, uplifting, and forever touching. Based on a short story by Mayda Royero, his wife, *Hello Hemingway* is his first feature film which won



Fernando Pérez at the screening of his award-winning film during the Atlantic Film Festival.

best picture at the 1991 Festival of New Latin American Cinema, and tied for two awards here in Halifax — one for best writing and one for best leading role.

Such awards are indicative of the magic and beauty of a film that offers a lucid glimpse into the vibrant, passionate island which for decades has been hidden in obscurity due to the ominous blockade by the United States. But a mesmerizing opening sequence convinces you this film will offer more than just slices of Cuban life, as a story unravels to touch your very soul.

Dreams and an undying ambition are what take hold of Larita, a spirited, but poor young girl who is trying to finish her studies at high

school and win a scholarship to attend university. Although she lives beside the estate of Ernest Hemingway, and finds solace by roaming on its grounds, she is unaware of his stature as a great writer. But the influence of an aged and pious book-seller prompts her to read *The Old Man and the Sea*, the novel which will eventually guide her into adulthood. Caught in the throes of first love, she is enraptured by Victor, her boyfriend, and at the same time touched by the sad story of Santiago the fisherman. However, her ambition to study abroad and the effects of the revolutionary spirit tears her love apart, and she finds herself lonely and overwhelmed by the forces infringing on her dreams.

A new understanding of Hemingway's story then broadens her maturity. In a poignant transformation where she realizes the cruelty that life can bring, she finds a striking parallel between her and Santiago, as both must battle austerity, adversity, and what she fittingly understands as bad luck. Broken but not overcome, a faithful diary and the security of a solitary ocean are what accompanies her as she comes of age in a world she realizes is unfair but which she begins to understand — a world in which she must forge a new life, and where dreams will always be dreams.

Larita holds a sentiment found in all of us, and one which we immediately recognize, and one

which we eternally share. There is a grace of character forever glinting from her eye, one which discloses the deep core of her powerful soul, one not unlike the quiet humility of Santiago himself. She evolves into a sublime character that captures your spell and moves you to share her joys and tears, her pride and struggle. The beauty in her soul is what drives you to understand that dreams are but an element of the human condition; another is its tenacity and vigour, and ultimately the maker of its own happiness.

Gifted acting by Laura de la Uz as Larita is complemented by an equally talented cast of real-life characters, who together present the vitality of Cuban social dynamics in all its fervour. This spills out of the screen and leaves you drenched with the passion and merriness of the distinct culture and lifestyle that Hemingway himself fell in love with. Coupled with an original photographic style, this film leaves you enchanted with an experience hard to find from Hollywood. An ethereal soundtrack interplays with the elemental beauty apparent to Cuba itself, and what lingers in your mind are the vivid scenes of languid afternoons playing on the beach by an endless, emerald ocean.

Dreams are what Pérez himself once had, when at the age of 14 his father took him to the cinema for the first time. There began a passion for film and an ambition which has only now been fulfilled with his first feature film. Aptly enough, it leaves you dreaming.

Neptune builds a better mousetrap

BY JULIE LUOMA

WE CAN'T HELP but get caught in the trap. Christie's writing compels us to play the game. During the intermission, and even after the show, the audience seems to talk of nothing but "whodunit?"

THEATRE

The Mousetrap
Neptune Theatre

Neptune Theatre's production of *The Mousetrap*, directed by Linda Moore, plays right into Christie's skillful hands. From the stately decor accented with blood-red, to the players' comedic timing, this production is carefully plotted and paced.

From the first throat-grIPPING murder (the very first scene), the masterfully crafted keeps humming along to the sinister but catchy tune of three blind mice. The writing is lyrical, and clever,

sure to win over anyone with no previous exposure to Christie's work.

The show sets an eerie atmosphere, not to frighten the audience, rather to seduce us into the intrigue. Moore's direction plays up the humour to get us involved. The amusement isn't limited to those comical British mannerisms either.

Each character brings a different comedic element into the piece. A manically flamboyant Chris Wren (Kenneth Wilson-Harrington) walks a tightrope between charming us and going over the top, choking out gasps of surprised laughter from the spectators. Mr. Paravicini (Joseph Rutten), the stranger in black, keeps us grinning by reflecting, accurately, on the plot devices. The "bloody old bitch" (Joan Orenstein) and the bumbling, inexperienced husband and wife team (Ian Deakin and Melissa Mullen), are players in



danger of falling prey to stereotypical roles. But they get a crack at more than the usual gags for their comedic types. The performances are polished and pleasing, carefully timed except for some difficulty in tying up the loose and hasty ending.

Superficially, *The Mousetrap* is about types, plot devices and entertainment. It is crass, grisly, cyni-

cal, sexual and farcical to boot. On another level, enlightenment arises out of reflection about ourselves as an audience: how eager we are to solve the mystery. We fall easily into the cat and mouse game between the players and the audience. With the alternating seriousness and lightheartedness of a parlour game, we identify with the characters: quick to accuse, and

quick to forgive.

Agatha Christie's *The Mousetrap* reminds us of the pleasure of watching, and of listening. The closer the plot comes to its resolution, the more we can point a finger at any of the players. But no matter which character you favour as the guilty party, you're sure to be surprised by the outcome, and you'll be glad to have played along.

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