

ARTS

# Accousta gig: painting a (coffee) room

BY NATASHA RYAN

BEING AT THE ACOUSTIC Concert in Cafe Mokka on Friday night was like going to a very mellow, very black, and very cool party in an attic. The place was so packed that they had to stop letting people in by 8:30 and a huge crowd developed on the sidewalk to watch and listen through the windows.

MUSIC  
Adinsong, Cool Blue Halo, Infra Dig  
Cafe Mokka

The phenomenal crowd was probably due to the lure of a free night of entertainment, the idea being that everyone would purchase coffees and other things to produce a profit. This kind of fell through, as with so many people there it was impossible to tell who were actually customers. We will probably see a different format next time around.

First up was Adinsong, consisting of one guitar and a flute. They did mostly their own songs, as well as a very... shall we say original, but unbelievably funny, version of Tom Petty's "Free Falling". And for those of you who missed the performance or, couldn't get enough, Adinsong is releasing a six song cassette and video single in November both entitled "Systems of Belief."

Following that we had Cool Blue Halo, doubling member size of the last band and including the only electric guitar of the evening as well as the only drum. They had a mature sound with really tight harmonies. Perfect for the given surroundings. One of their songs will be available on the upcoming "Hear and Now" compilation disc, along with each of the other bands who appeared that night.

Playing mostly originals as well as a few covers, Spike N was a crowd pleaser. They did an incredible four part harmony of "I Go Blind" by 54-40 and everyone was eager to join in on "Superman" by REM and even the band's own "Full Circle Round."

The final group of the evening was Infra Dig, formerly known as Tetrus. Perhaps it was due to the fact that it was towards the end of the night and only the die hards were left, or maybe it was simply due to the music, but for once everyone seemed to stop talking long enough to just listen. The songs were relaxing and intriguing, bringing about a perfect close to the concert.

Infra Dig is releasing a five song cassette, named after their song called "Broken Promises," nationwide on October 22 at a concert at the Flamingo Café and Lounge. For a schedule of bands and events call the Flamingo or drop in and pick up your own entertainment



Before and after the radical haircut.

guide.

I'm sure there's lots of you out there who are wondering who we have to thank for this whole Acoustic Gig thing. Well, a good start would be with the Mokka's owners Candace Gardner and Peter Wenc for their tolerance, casual attitudes and, of course, their cozy cafe.

Next, responsible for the musical organization portion, we have Halifax's newest independent record label, Whitby Records. Brought about by a recent merging of Infra Dig Records and Adinsong Productions (sound familiar?)

Whitby's current undertakings include the publication of *Painting a Room*, this city's only independent music magazine (co-published with D.T.K. Records), as well as the two cassette releases mentioned earlier and, naturally, the Accousta Gig series which runs the last Friday of every month at the Mokka (remember to get there early!).

For those of you who are not in the least bit musically inclined but do have other talents, don't be shy. The Accousta Gig is keeping its options open to new ideas. Look into it, you could be the first female (gender providing) to grace that

performance area. There was a definite lack of them on Friday, hopefully a small oversight.

But please don't let this be the only time you visit the cafe. Located at 1532 Brunswick Street, across from the Public Library, it's a nice place to go in between concerts to try any of their wide variety of incredibly confusing but pleasantly strong coffees. They also have cold drinks, snacks and light lunches, all at reasonable prices. The atmosphere is great, the owners are nifty and I think this spot is going to give the Second Cup a run for their money.

ARTS

# Return to the road

BY ROLAND LINES

IT DIDN'T WIN any awards at the festival, but it drew a crowd of more than 100 people to the Oxford Theatre last Wednesday night.

I'm talking about *Highway 61*, the new rock 'n' road movie from Bruce McDonald, the Toronto director who brought us *Roadkill* in 1989.

FILM  
*Highway 61*  
Atlantic Film Festival

McDonald had a lot of that *Roadkill* gang together again, both in front of and behind the camera, to make this film about love, death and damnation on Highway 61.

Don McKellar wrote the screenplay and takes on the role of Pokey Jones. Pokey is the tuneless barber of Pickerel Falls, Ontario, who becomes the centre of attention when he finds a dead kid in his back yard.

Halifax's own Steve Fall is Jeffery the Corpse, a skinny, long-haired, rat-faced kid who sold his soul for a bus ticket and then froze to death in a bath tub. Fall's band, Acid Test, is featured on the soundtrack.

Julie Buhagiar plays ex-roadie Jackie Bangs, a fugitive from the rock 'n' roll circus who thinks Pokey and the skinny corpse are her best chance for freedom. Jackie claims to be Jeffery's sister and convinces Pokey to drive her and the body to New Orleans for the funeral.

Some of the actors might seem a little wooden at times (especially Fall) but Earl Pastko sizzles as Mr. Skin. He is the man who bought Jeffery's soul and now he wants to claim it.

Death is a big player in *Highway 61*, but this is no David Lynch shock-fest. This film is not macabre as much as it is bizarre. Like any self-respecting road movie it is full of oddball characters.

The American border guards, one played by ex-Dead Kennedy Jello Biafra, are more concerned with why Pokey doesn't have any kids than they are with the coffin. Once in America Jackie and Pokey run into the Watson family, an ambitious stage father and his three tone-deaf girls, who travel the mid-West spreading their own version of "feelgood pop." Then there are rock superstars Otto and Margo, who like to hunt for their dinner, and the biker gang that just wants a decent shave.

The journey along *Highway 61* is a musical odyssey that traces the history of popular music back to its roots in New Orleans jazz. Bob Dylan's song is not in the soundtrack, but we make a stop in Minnesota to visit his childhood home.

If you missed *Highway 61* at the festival, don't worry. Cineplex Odeon Films is the domestic sales agent, so it should get decent distribution. And, failing that, you can always buy the novelization from Vortex Comics.

# Tragic, haunting eccentricity in *The Adjuster*

BY ANGEL FIGUEROA

THE FLAMING HAND. The bow and arrows. The testimonial photographs. All these serve as motifs in an intoxicating film which leave you abashed and wondering if these relics of surrealism are but pretentious decoys of an absurd film, or loaded symbols of an incredibly jarring experience that seems too profound to truly grasp.

FILM  
*The Adjuster*  
Atlantic Film Festival

*The Adjuster* is Atom Egoyan's newest film since the critically acclaimed *Speaking Parts*, and it rejuvenates much of the familiar subject matter - isolation in a confining, eccentric, society - but what appears new to the Egoyan genre is a heightened sensibility of human consciousness that borders on Sartrean sympathy and manifests into a Huxlian tragedy of frightening proportions. On the surface, this is a film which Lynch followers will love, and which Lynch critics will despise, but careful study shatters all that Lynch nonsense and reveals a truly avant-

garde film perhaps as seminal as Hal Hartley's *The Unbelievable Truth*.

The film begins with bizarre vignettes of the three major characters, each immersed in an eccentric, if mad, lifestyle that is at once comic and horrifying for its parody of contemporary life. The centre-piece is Noah, an insurance adjuster, who leads a double life that jumps between career and family ambitions and a neurotic responsibility to keep his clients happy in more ways than one. This facade is betrayed, however, by a mania of shooting reckless arrows onto a billboard of "family happiness" that advertises the new, suburbic ideal - one which he tragically epitomizes in his own model home that bleakly stands on an abandoned housing development.

His targets are only too real, as his Orwellian profession plays upon his clients who have been affected by tragedies themselves - fires which have destroyed their homes and possessions. Yet, instead of being resented as one who intrudes upon their personal lives, he is treated in a way which his biblical name implies - a saviour, one who reorders their lives and makes

promises of better things to come. But his inner convictions are jumbled, and his zealous actions are tinged with resignation, as he is aware that his life and purpose is ultimately destined, uncontrollable, and certainly unlike the messiah he is made out to be.

This anxiety is also mirrored by the other main characters. His jealous wife, Hera, is plagued with nightmares of her dispassionate job as a censor of pornography, at which she secretly records explicit scenes for her curious sister to watch later at home. She is trapped within a sterilized, complacent bureaucracy, where the work ethic is to be aroused while viewing a myriad of vileness that they, as censors, will prevent others from seeing. Bubba is a millionaire ex-football player, who along with his mad wife, Mimi, spends his life acting out proverbial sexual fantasies that leave both destined as advocates and victims to the corrupting material life that they transcend.

Halfway through the film you realize all are converging towards a mutually absurd destiny, where madness reigns and the stark stagnancy of eccentric lifestyles belie the glimpse of humanity each had

once possessed. But it becomes the grossly eccentric Bubba who, addicted to his life of isolated fantasy by "having the means to get all he wants," emerges as the thematic focus of the film, as he discovers how unobtainable are his own needs when he encounters Noah's "family happiness." This disturbing moment unveils the insane Bubba as the suffering being he is, and delivers a poignant glimpse of sad humanity which redeems the film from all of its surreal frivolity.

In a twisted tragic vein, however, Bubba acts out his last fantasy by psychotic suicide, engulfing himself in the flames of Noah's own house while Mimi sings blissfully in the shower upstairs. What materializes from this act of dark catharsis is a Borgesian flashback of Noah, who remains stupefied before the flames of his house like the adjuster before his maker.

Photography is an effective mix of rich colours and stark silhouettes that parallel the building quagmire of senseless corruption. Elias Koteasis is brilliant as Noah, and he seems an uncanny hybrid of Robert De Niro and Mickey Rourke playing a character out of William Gibson. His resigned nonchalance

however, is contrasted by the typically bland nature of Arsinée Khanjian as Hera, who is the trademark of any Egoyan film. Maury Chaykin as Bubba rounds out the cast by handling both a pathological facade and a sympathetic core with startling sensitivity.

But much of the dialogue is excruciatingly slow, and has as much depth as in *Waiting for Godot* - an effective device to saturate the characters as cold, cardboard personalities lost in the unrewarding dynamics of modern life. Somehow, however, each experiences a moment which enliven their human capacity for the purest thing in life - love - but they all evade it as if destined for something else: either madness and flaming death (Bubba), labyrinthine self-contemplation (Noah), or escapist nightmares of sexual perversion (Hera).

This film is cold and has no feeling to awaken any sort of sentiment in one who expects to be touched. But within the farcical maze of surrealistic exploration, there seems to lie the embryo of humanity, and to this end it illustrates the scope of Atom Egoyan's genius and appreciative audience - despite Lynch.

# Sam & me

BY BRUCE GILCHRIST AND KYLE DINAUT

THERE IS A SPECIAL quality surrounding films with East Indian leads. *My Beautiful Launderette*, *Salaam Bombay*, and *Sam and Rosie Get Laid* are all poignant examples. That special quality is kindness. *Sam and Me* is no exception; with a showering of non-self-righteousness it presents the tale of an immigrant developing and unfolding into the Canadian lifestyle.

FILM  
*Sam and me*  
Atlantic Film Festival

The immigrant is Nikhil (pronounced Niki), a young man of decency and promise, except that the world left behind wasn't decent, and held no promise. So he has been sent to work in Canada, on his uncle's ticket: the "five year plan", to get in and out without really ever having been here.

His greedy uncle (greedy uncles are favourites in Indian movies) sells Nikhil's time to his boss as a personal caregiver to the boss' 75 year old and very reluctant father. Thus the relationship between *Sam and Me* is born.

Although *Sam* is unequivocally displeased with any notion of care, the two manage to combine forces against the displaced situation they share. *Sam* wants to go back to Israel, mainly to die, and is pre-

vented by his thoughtless son, and Nikhil has freedom of movement, but no idea where to go. So they suffer together, and celebrate it with witty delight and youthful antics, or reflect in somber tones. The time spent together is always sharp, cutting to the spirit.

From this, the bond develops unpredictably, Nikhil replacing *Sam's* son, with the both of them wondering what happened to the middle generation.

Although it may not seem so, this film pairs strongly with Spike Lee's *Jungle Fever*, as two cultures clash, and stereotypes, some true, some ridiculous, some just wrong, are exposed. However, *Sam and Me*

Always sharp, cutting to the spirit

is a kinder, gentler film which deals more with missed opportunity, and less with anger and oppression. *Sam and Me* does end similarly, with no solutions, although it slips away rather than screaming blindly.

Directed by Torontonian Deepa Mehta (last seen directing an episode of *Danger Bay*), *Sam and Me* is a film about men. Mehta crosses the sexual barrier as successfully as Spike Lee amazingly portrayed women in *Jungle Fever*. Likely aiding her cause is Chandrit Rowndhray's superb screenplay and performance as Nikhil. Mehta is not afraid to let scenes develop and continue, and both Nikhil and *Sam* are up to the task. *Sam* is remarkably played, so enigmatically well, that the actor's name is lost.

Although this is a Canadian film, it is a novel view. Canada is ever-present, but never a part of their lives, other than that they are stuck in it. For instance, there are many cultural digs in the film, such as the well used Indian cab-driver jokes (the steering wheel is covered with lime rubber grip), and probably some Jewish motifs that were missed. Also culturally played are relationships between men, which are physically closer, but more emotionally distant than usually seen.

*Sam and Me* is at its best dealing with the displacement of its lead characters and the relationship between *Sam* and his "Schadze" (little black boy) Nikhil. It falters with *Sam's* family however, as Mehta seems less sure in directing that part of the supporting cast, which is noticeably weaker than Nikhil's side. It still does provoke the questions of how people learn to be what they are, and why they are. *Sam and Me* will be coming to *Wormwood's* soon; try to catch it, a different perspective of Canadiana.

ATLANTIC FILM FESTIVAL

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ATLANTIC

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