

Curtis' Charm

BY RIES VAN BEEK

Too many movies over the last three months have been promoted as "the next Pulp Fiction." With fingers crossed, I ventured to these pretenders, hoping for a winner, and was always disappointed.

However, during the film festival I went to see *Curtis' Charm*, a low-key street drama based on a true story by American author Jim Carroll. It made me realize that the missing ingredient in so many movies lately has been the creation of a connection between the characters in the film and the audience. There is too much graphic violence being substituted for character development and a good story.

Curtis' Charm is a smooth story that unfolds a day in the life of two characters: Jim, a recovered heroin addict in his early thirties, and Curtis, an old friend from his rehab program and is still a crack addict. The tormented Curtis is desperate for Jim's help, and their conversations and adventures take them through the backstreets of the city. The humour and emotional sincerity of this black and white film, combined with great directing, make it easy to watch and very dramatic.

Lately, it seems that a lot of movies are trying to push as many cinematic extremes as far as possible with no regard for the effects on the quality of the film. *Curtis' Charm*, however, is modest enough to deal intensively with thoughts and feelings within a very focused period of time and concerning a very focused event: Jim's efforts to help



Curtis. The development of Jim and Curtis' relationship, and Jim's narration of the film, are just two elements that are very well done, and serve to intimately connect the audience with the movie.

Of course, though *Curtis' Charm* is a wickedly cool flick, it has very little else in common with *Pulp Fiction*, but if you can get past that you should check it out when it comes back to Halifax.

Not the next Pulp Fiction



Sci-fi skater Newfs

(and The Hardship Post, too)

Anchor Zone

BY MATEO YORKE

I'm sure many of you are wondering what the rest of the *Degrassi High* gang are up to since you met Pat "Joey Jeremiah" Mastrioni at the Grawood last St. Patty's Day. Well, I've found one of them.

The futuristic Newfoundland production *Anchor Zone* stars Nicole

"Stephanie K." Stoffman. She plays a 16 year-old graduate of a mega-corporation executive training program who plans to use her new security clearances to track down her estranged father. She crosses paths with a neo-police Wondracorp guard, an escaped ten-year-old with an I/O interface in his forehead, and a pair of skateboard-toting rebels. Together, with her training, the genius kid's computer skills, and the rebels' street smarts, they evade capture by Wondracorp and the Eaters, a rival street gang. From their hideout in the dockyards of a post-apocalyptic St. John's, the teens must confront the Wondracorp scientist who controls an evil intelligence-enhancing experiment.

This film is targeted at a younger audience, but I enjoyed it despite myself. T.H. Hatté's story has many

interesting ideas about our future and the way technology affects the smaller places of our region. Unfortunately, the plot isn't quite so interesting. Very few surprises here.

Some of the film's fun points include the futuristic backdrop of a St. John's lit by purple light and more trendy skater dudes than you could find at the Halifax Library. I also liked that the three year intelligence/confinement experiment was a thinly veiled high school analogy. The acting is not overwhelming, but the cool music video-like sequences make even the lack of special effects tolerable.

I spoke with producer Ken Pittman after the film. He told me that *Anchor Zone* played St. John's Avalon Mall before coming to Halifax and it is due for general release shortly after the conclusion of the film festival.

Bottom line: three reasons to see this film. First, you can enjoy an afternoon of Goonies-era nostalgia with a movie that you would have enjoyed at age twelve. Second, you can see that Stephanie K. has changed her looks even less than Joey Jeremiah. Third (and the best reason to see this film), it's filled with some of the Maritimes' best musical talent, and they just don't quit from start to finish. *Anchor Zone* features *Hardship Post*, *Bung*, and the *Liz Band*. If none of them are in town, catch this instead.

the Reel Deal



A look back at the 15th Atlantic Film Festival

The 15th Atlantic Film Festival has come and gone, and judging by all the sold-out shows it was a huge success. For those of you who missed this year's festival we at the *Gazette* have put together reviews of some of the best of the over 130 features, documentaries, and shorts shown the past nine days. For those who were there, this should be a pleasant reminder of the festival that was.

Many of the films shown at the festival will be coming back to Halifax in the near future. So make sure to check your *Wormwood's Dog & Monkey Cinema Guide* because film distributors being the uncultured geeks they are, that's likely the only place you'll be able to see such fine cinematic fare. The theatre is in a bigger building with a larger screen and surround sound: what more could you ask for?

So, until next year's festival, remember this...

The more time you spend in a movie theatre, the less chance you have of getting melanoma from that nasty UV radiation outside. And *Wormwoods* has multi-flavoured popcorn, too...yummy!

Rude

BY RIES VAN BEEK

Rude was one of the biggest draws for the Film Festival, and for good reason. This film continues the popular trend of depicting the trials and tribulations of life in a stylized inner city. However, this film employs many different methods to obtain its objectives. Directed and written by Torontonian Clement Virgo, *Rude* is a surreal, vivid portrait of three characters struggling for redemption.

General is the character that drives the central story of the film, and his desire to re-enter society and legitimately support his family without getting involved in the criminal culture that landed him in jail is perhaps the most engaging and well acted of the three stories.

Maxine, a lonely window dresser who battles depression, is haunted by her decision to have an abortion and the subsequent end of her relationship with her boyfriend. The repetition of the hurtful events in Maxine's memory are brought out with such subtlety and tact that the audience can completely relate to the curse of regret and bad memories. In addition,

there is a young girl that is always in her apartment skipping. This girl seems to cleverly represent themes of lost innocence, regret and perhaps eventually, forgiveness.

The last story is a sympathetic look at the life of a promising young boxer named Jordan. This story provides a very direct and honest confrontation between Jordan and his feelings about homophobia and homosexuality.

Each of these stories has its own distinct tone and atmosphere, ranging from General's intense and pressured situation, to the lonely portrayal of Maxine.

Punctuated by the mysterious dialogues of *Rude*, a D.J. on an illegal radio broadcast, the story rolls smoothly and passionately along. I found something inspiring about *Rude*'s calm reactions to the repeated promises by various figures of law enforcement to shut her down "sooner than she thinks". The super confidence with which Virgo empowers *Rude* reminded me that writers like Virgo do exist, and that their visions are finding effective mediums. Apparently a receptive audience as well, as evidenced by *Rude*'s popularity at this year's Cannes Film Festival.

The movie is tremendously successful at developing the personalities of every significant character, and adds tremendous depth and dimension to the difficulties of each situation. The sincerity of each of these stories is a strong indication of Virgo's talent for both writing and film-making.

Virgo and Williams took Cannes by storm

Soul Survivor

BY MATEO YORKE

This Canadian Cannes-released piece by director/writer Stephen Williams and producer Paul Brown was a solid film with the complete look and feel of a big production movie. Set in Toronto's Jamaican community, this film felt a lot more like a Spike Lee joint than a Canadian Film Board production (which it wasn't). More proof that Hollywood North is going strong.

The acting in *Soul Survivor* was solid and meaningful. Performances of note include Peter Williams as Tyrone Taylor and David Smith as his Rastafarian cousin Reuben.

This is an insightful look at a part of the Canadian mosaic from the inside of the Jamaican culture of Toronto. Taylor is an ambitious young man who dreams of owning his own restaurant. In the meantime, he leaves his work at a beauty salon to become a debt collector for a local money lender. His rise within the organization is guaranteed, if not for the debt on which his cousin continues to default. Taylor is forced to examine what his place is within his community and if he is to survive the ensuing tension.

This movie was more than I had expected. It was not a film about an oppressed minority dealing with the challenges of racism and being consumed by a white culture. It had a more Canadian feel about it — it was a look at real life within the solid culture of a distinct part of



Toronto. It examined the hardening of one man struggling against his situation — drugs, organized crime, a disabled father, and the inability of a dope-smoking cousin.

While this film could have had more depth in the development of the characters (to give a better feel of where their motivations came from), it was certainly better than half of the films that made the top ten all summer. Watch for the killer soundtrack featuring some very '90's reggae and hip-hop.

Big-Up to the producer of this one, Jah Guide and Peace Out.

Long isn't always better

Tim and Ries give thumbs up to short films

There were a lot of non-feature length films, or shorts, at this year's festival, as well as a number of television productions. These shows were fun and the quality was usually extraordinary. A lot of the pieces came from up and coming film makers, both locally and nationally, and there was a wide variation in subject and content. A couple of our Film Festival reporters, in their post-coital bliss, were asked about pieces that caught their eye.

Tim Covert: I went to see the *Atlantic Local Heroes* and the *Edmonton Local Heroes* as well as the *Nova Scotia Film Development Corporation's Atlantic Focus Show* and *TV at the Edge*. There were some really superb films, some as short as two minutes and some as long as half an hour.

The *Sandbox*, an animated piece with an earth-conscious message, comes from Charlottetown's JoDee Samuelson. It takes place in the imaginations of a boy and a girl as they play in their sandbox with their stuffed friend Bear. The animation is fast-paced and has a flow-

ing complexity that is visually stunning. The technique used was under-camera animation using water-soluble markers and cut-outs, and the result is one of the most creative pieces I've ever seen.

Halifax's *Jest* in Time theatre troupe had two silent film contributions in the festival with the funny (yet oddly frightening) *A Dog and His Man* and the comedic send-up of hair removal in *Lulu Keating's Follicle Follies*. Have you ever noticed how women are always trying to get rid of hair as they age while men are always trying to grow more? Surely some sort of a deal could be worked out.

A couple of non-Atlantic shorts caught my attention as well. The beautifully shot *Love Interruptus* by Carol Ducharme of Montreal was a delight to eye and ear with a slightly disturbing ending.

Café Utopia, from Edmonton's Ken Berry, is an extreme take on the unfazable coffeehouse crowd that would ignore a dying man on its doorstep.

Don McKellar's *Arrowhead* was

a hilarious piece that very simply involved a guy taking a camera crew through the places and memories of his somewhat vicious youth as he recounts his discovery of mastodon bones. The movie was so believable that everyone in the theatre was genuinely surprised to find that it was fiction and not a documentary.

Ground Zero TV was a half hour FAX-type show by Halifax's Steve Comeau. This was professionally done and I can see no reason why the show isn't currently on the air.

Baseball Girls was a fun, informative documentary by Lois Siegal that showed it isn't just guys who play with balls. By far the most amusing short I saw was one of three pieces done for *Sesame Street* by Mike Clattenburg, Clattenburg, a young, fast-rising producer of TV and music videos in Halifax, enlisted the help of local artist Stinkin' Rich to do "The Grocery Store Rap," a high-speed careening trip through a grocery store. I would buy this as a single just to hear Rich rhyme. "So here we go, we're off from

the start, my sister, she likes to ride in the cart." I wonder if Rich has ever considered doing "That Fresh Pharmacy?"

Ries Van Beek: On September 23, I had a chance to catch the *Animation Bonanza* that featured international submissions such as *The Gogs*, a sort of goofy, fun claymation representation of *Quest for Fire*. There were several excellent shorts; but the last production stole the show — the clever claymation spoof mystery/thriller *The Wrong Trouser*, made in the United Kingdom, this 30 minute show features our heroes Walter and his dog Gromit. They find themselves needing to take in a boarder to make a little extra money. The hilarious evil Penguin they take in quickly takes control of the house, alienates our little buddy Gromit, and manipulates Walter into becoming an unsuspecting accomplice to a robbery. This Oscar-winning classic features one of the coolest chase scenes ever, and made me laugh like I did the first time I saw *Monty Python's Quest for the Holy Grail*.