

Toronto Festival gives birth to a host of films by women

by Ira Nayman

After one of the press screenings of a program of shorts which will appear at the Festival of Festivals, one local critic, noted for the pomposity of his writing, said, "Not another film about women giving birth!" I knew, then, beyond a shadow of a doubt that the world needed more women filmmakers.

He was commenting on *Creation*, a short film by Fumiko Kiyooka. The film is an extended close up of a woman's vagina as she gives birth, intercut with shots of various pregnant women taking pleasure in their

movie
Creation
 Directed by Fumiko Kiyooka
When Women are Crazy
 Directed by Rosemary House
Artemesia: A Woman's Story
 Directed by Adrienne Clarkson

fertility, close ups of lactating mammarys and a woman in a white wedding gown sitting among infants.

It is a sad comment that most men would rather watch graphic scenes of violence than a woman giving birth. *Creation* successfully desexualizes the female body, giving a positive view of the act of birth, an act about which we can never have enough films.

Creation is one of a number of excellent films by and about women featured in Perspectives Canada at the Festival of Festivals. On the same program, for instance, is *When Women are Crazy*, a short experimental film by Rosemary House. It combines lovely yet simple black and white images (a woman hanging her wash, two women lying next to each other on grass) with a strange, but oddly appealing voice over narration.

The audience may, at first, find the film difficult to sit through, being used to films where the images were controlled by men and excluded

women's point of view. However, the film projects a feeling of women comfortable in their bodies, a comfort sensitive audience members will come to enjoy.

Other worthwhile films on this program include *Lovely Boys*, a hilarious short about one woman's search for sexual fulfillment (another subject infrequently dealt with in an honest way by male filmmakers) and *Do Not Feed This Child*, which effectively uses repeated images and a chilling, matter of fact narration to convey the terrors of child abuse.

Some of the strongest work of the Perspectives Canada program is made

up of documentaries, with women directors leading the way. Adrienne Clarkson's *Artemesia: A Woman's Story* is likely to be a sensation at the Festival of Festivals, and justifiably so: it has a compelling story, expertly told.

Artemesia Gentleschi, the daughter of a seventeenth century Italian painter, was raped by an artist friend of her father's, Agastino Tassi. What has been recovered of the transcripts of the trial which followed shows that Artemesia was tortured in an effort to get her to recant, while Tassi was treated lightly by the court. Despite this, Artemesia became a well-known, well-patronized painter, whose works contained an unfashionably feminine point of view.

Clarkson combines lengthy period recreations with close looks at the artist's surviving works and an interview with feminist author Germaine Greer to tell the remarkable story of Artemesia's life and importance in the art world. The scene of her rape is particularly effective; Clarkson portrays it as an act of violence, not seduction.

Artemesia: A Woman's Story will be shown on Clarkson's CBC program; the Festival may be your only chance to see it on a large screen.

Another film which may be difficult to see after the Festival (so you should make every effort to see it there) is the National Film Board's *Toward Intimacy*. Four disabled women talk about their lives, focusing on their sexuality. If the thought of disabled women's sexuality disgusts you, grow up; as a couple of the women eloquently point out, the attitudes of the abled are the biggest obstacle to intimacy faced by the disabled.

The film is primarily made up of talking heads, punctuated with footage of the four women shopping, getting married, attending support groups and doing other things which abled people take for granted. Shots of a blind woman fixing food and chopping wood in a camp in the middle of a forest help to explode the myth that disabled people are helpless.

Some of the women have stories about verbal and sexual abuse, for which all too many of the disabled seem easy targets. But, they all seem to be happy, no small feat no matter what your ability.

Toward Intimacy is a fascinating portrait of lives we seldom see on film, told with great warmth and humour.

Ballard puts a little twist in Ron Mann's flick

by Eric Alper

To say Hank Ballard is one happy man right now is an understatement. He is ecstatic, and with good reason. The man who wrote "The Twist" - yes, it was *the* twist - back in 1959 - is a leading candidate for comeback of the year. But he will dispute this.

"Comeback?" He says. "Hell, I never went away, man, I've been recording and rehearsing and singing and performing and dancing."

Born in Detroit, 1936, Ballard's high-pitched tenor was the trademark being the leader of The Midnighters. Reminiscent of Clyde McPhatter, his voice was on the radio almost daily in 1954, when the group's enormous sales and popularity peaked.

Ballard and the Midnighters also carried twelve top 40 hits from 1960-62, most of which featured dances or dancing. Among them were "Let's Go, Let's Go, Let's Go," which had Ballard singing "There's a thrill up on the hill!" and "Finger Poppin' Time"

contained the metaphysical thoughts of "HEY now! HEY now! I feel so goo-ood!"

"Get It" and "Work With Me, Annie" in 1953 were highly eroticized works that lead their label, Federal Records, to recall the disks responding to public pressure. It didn't hurt sales, as the song climbed to number one and was a best-seller charts for six months.

"Man, it's crazy that Ice-T is being banned almost 40 years for say-

movie
Twist
 Directed by Ron Mann
 Starring thousands of really cool dancers in really weird outfits, to really fine tunes.

ing something on records. We were deep. And we were dirty, they said. We were nothing compared to the stuff now."

Some may beg to differ. The lyrics "Can't work no more ... that's what happens when the gettin' gets good," has the same message, if only less graphic, as a 2 Live Crew rap.

"When we were dancing, we'd say 'Work with it, Baby.' It was an everyday expression, you know. We were banned, and still got number one. But, I don't do that stuff anymore, you know what I'm saying? I

got grand-children now, but I got no need, 'cos the new album is good."

"The Twist," was released originally as a B-side to a Henry Glover ballad, "Tear-drops on Your Letter," in

1959. A year later, the song became a smash for Chubby Checker, and became one of the biggest dance crazes of the '60s.

He is sensitive about Checker's success. Although Ballard is credited as composer on the record, it is Checker who people continue to as-

sociate with the song.

"But I get to return the favour. Stevie Ray Vaughan's song, you know, 'The Sky Is Crying?' Well, I'm doing it on the new album, and man, you never heard anything like it before. Not to take anything away from Stevie, but... Oooooowwwwwiiiiiee! Is it hot!"

Before getting into the new album, I needed to know one last piece of Ballard trivia: "Did you really record 'Let's Go Streaking' (1974) in the nude?"

"It was nothing, man. There were no women in the room. It was only me and the band. They mentioned it at the Hall Of Fame awards [he was inducted in 1990] and people haven't stopped buggin' me since."

His legend status aside, Ballard is still looking for new and fresh ideas on gospel and r&b music. His most recent album, three years in the making, is called "The Down and Dirty Twist."

Ballard is also featured in an upcoming movie about the dance craze appropriately called "Twist".

Director Ron Mann, (*Comic Book Confidential* and *Poetry In Motion*) follows *The Twist* from its beginning - when teenagers started the trend in Baltimore, demanding it to be played

on "The Buddy Deane Show" - to Chubby performing "his" signature song on "American Bandstand."

Its success spawned other not-so-famous dance steps like "The Fly," "The Monkey," and "The Mashed

Potato." Mann took three years to produce the film, most of it editing. Expect a fast paced film with lots of funny dressed people dancing like they've got monkeys or mashed potatoes in them.

"Ron was very careful about the film, man. It's his baby. It took a long time, but it is worth it, and man oh man, I hear there's gonna be a biiiiiiing party for it up in *Toronto, Canada!* Man! I tell all my friends about Canadianians! You guys

are neat, clean, and the night life is beautiful... Like Chicago. And New York. Man, I might even stay a week!"

Taking interviews from his home in Los Angeles, California, it seems Ballard's set to ride another wave of popularity. Which could be another understatement, something like calling New York clean and neat.



Hank Ballard (above) is the original creator of the dance craze the Twist. Ward and June Cleaver (left) give it a cautious try.



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