

ARTS

Lemmings, ducks, brain eaters: Cultural rarities at the Festival

By MICHAEL REDHILL

At the Park Plaza Hotel, concierges and bartenders alike are boning up on Canadian politics, the postal strike and Kirby Inwood. As the world's film talent and film shmoozers gather in our city, the Festival of Festivals is sparing no expense, intellectual or otherwise.

Personnel at the Park Plaza are given a news update each morning, enabling them to recite salient pap to visiting auteurs. You can picture it, can't you? Julien Temple getting out of his stretch limo and asking the doorman what remaining issues there are in the Bell strike?

So for 10 days the city is soaked in talent and glamour. It all starts tonight at the Ryerson Theatre, where the spotlight barrels will have the familiar clunk we've grown to love. For all its fakey-fakey Gala speeches and its line-ups, this is one of the world's finest film festivals so we put up with the rest, like Helga Stephenson's droll leather miniskirts and sleep-o-ramas like last year's *Landscape Suicide* and Jean Luc Godard's *King Lear*, which Shakespeare would never have been able to prove in court was a bastardization of his play.

The Festival does have its share of dross, more than in regular theatrical releases. Keep in mind as you choose films this coming week that a) variety is a watchword among programmers, and b) variety is not necessarily trustworthy. Read the programme guide carefully and trust your instincts. There are often clues in the preview write-ups. You may want to stray from films that are about Ukrainian townsfolk trapping lemmings, or any film where the main character is described as wistful.

But don't panic when you find the film you thought was a light comedy is actually a serious introspective

examination of a man's feelings for a duck. Just remember that most of these films are looking for a buyer, and most of them will never be seen again.

Pretend that you have had the special pleasure of discovering a cultural rarity. If that doesn't work, calm yourself with the knowledge that you have bought the filmmaker at least one more lunch.

Prices are up again this year. By this point, if you don't have a Gala pass, it will cost you \$90. The full pass without Galas is \$125, and for interest's sake, the Gold Patron pass is still only \$1500, and entitles you to all films and unlimited hob-nobbing. For serious movie-watchers who are also students (read: broke), the best bet — save lining up and hoping individual tickets will be available after all pass-holders are in — is the coupon book. \$50 buys 10 admissions and still gets you in before those who only have (gasp) cash.

Line-ups will be a problem again this year. Although it's romantic to roam about with a crumpled copy of the *Sun* and decide on the spur what to see, one is well-advised to make those decisions ahead of time — especially for those films with a draw of any kind, and this year that's basically anything American or Russian.

There is already a buzz out on a few films, among them: Ron Mann's *Comic Book Confidential*, a documentary about comic book artists; David Cronenberg's *Dead Ringers* (originally titled *Twins* until they found out Paramount had a film of

the same name starring Arnold Schwarzenegger and Danny DeVito); *Women On The Verge of A Nervous Breakdown*, by last year's spotlight director, Pedro Almodovar; *A Taxing Woman's Return*, by Juzo Itami, the maker of *Tampopo*; and *The Kino Eye* series, a comprehensive collection of Russian films, one of the largest ever mounted.

The Kino Eye is bound to have its share of soporific testaments to freedom, but chances are that most of these films will disappear after the festival, although most will have merit. Russians are scrupulous filmmakers, and this series will be worth taking in.

The spotlight this year is on two Finnish brothers, Aki and Mika Kaurismaki. A review of Aki's *Hamlet Goes Business* appears in this issue.

For night-owls there is the *Midnight Madness* series, playing at the witching-hour at the Bloor Cinema. They are billed as underground films by bizarre geniuses, but looking at some of the previews, it looks as if these are films that just didn't fit anywhere else. Who would want to claim that a film about brain eaters is Contemporary World Cinema? Plus, it's just about the only place they could justify screening the sequel to *Hellraiser*.

Watch this space next week for a comprehensive look at the Festival's offerings. At this stage, so much remains hearsay, but until then, don't play it safe. Take chances and keep your ears open.



"GET THEE TO A NUNNERY": Not in this film.

Finn Aki Kaurismaki does Shakespeare?

Hamlet Goes Business
Aki Kaurismaki

Aki Kaurismaki's adaptation of William Shakespeare's play is so loose it may as well be *King Lear*.

In this version — a black comment on corporate politics and women — Hamlet is hardly the tense heroic prince faced with the dark realities of duty and his own shortcomings. Rather, he is a fat, chain-smoking doughboy with a juke box and a strong hankering to lay the anything-but-fair Ophelia. His loyalty to his murdered father does not extend too far, and we find out exactly how far by the end of *Hamlet Goes Business*.

Claudius, the murderous uncle, wants only to take over the family corporation ("The Concern"), sell its assets and buy into Sweden's rubber duck industry. The movie is full of brilliant absurdities. Polonius' familiar money lending speech is reduced to "and if the person you borrow from dies, all the better for you."

Kaurismaki uses the backdrop of *Hamlet* to construct an ugly world in direct opposition to Shakespeare's themes and character traits. Ophelia

is an anaemic drug addict with an underbite. Rosenkrantz and Guildenstern are hit men. Laertes ("Lauri") is a neurotic dope. Hamlet's mother is an ineffectual idiot. Polonius is an evil corporate executive, later shot while hiding in the armoir.

In *Hamlet Goes Business*, Kaurismaki tends to show men as powerful and portray women as weak and unattractive. Ophelia, seemingly sexless, is nevertheless pursued by Hamlet, but his drive rather than her allure keeps him near. (Sample dialogue: Ophelia: "Can't you think about anything else?" Hamlet: "No... not when I'm around you, baby.") His characterizations point up a deliberate divorce from the original material, reinforcing the power of his interpretation.

Hamlet Goes Business will be a must-see of the Festival. Not only is it a tightly-written, highly intelligent satire, it is also filmed beautifully in black and white. Pirkka-Pekka Petelius is perfect as the seedy Hamlet, and the subtitles manage to maintain what must have been an even more hilarious script in the original Finnish. Don't miss it.

Watch for Festival coverage next week

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