

Men with Guns, a doctor with hope

BY SHELLEY ROBINSON

Men with Guns is a road movie. But instead of winding along the excesses and peculiarities of North America, it bushwhacks through the lives of indigenous people in an intentionally unidentified Latin American country. And like all road movies, it is about travelling — and who you travel with — rather than arriving.

Dr. Fuentes is a privileged white doctor living in the capital who, three years earlier, organized and trained students in a government program to bring medicine to the country's remote villages. Fuentes considers the program his legacy. But when he runs into a bitter former pupil his idyllic visions are challenged, and so are all his easy assumptions about his country, the government and the indigenous people to whom he thought himself a saviour.

As one character put it, Fuentes is the most learned man he ever met, and also the most naive. A coming of age story then, for an old man.

Fuentes sets out to find his

students, picking up an orphan, a wounded soldier, a faithless priest, and a mute village girl along the way. But every town Fuentes visits has first been visited by men with guns. His students are dead, their towns burned. The villagers say it is the army, the army says it is the guerillas.

And, as a comment on the export-dominated development process, every town is inhabited by people characterised by their product. The banana people, the gum people, the coffee people — who can't eat because coffee prices are too low to buy food and can't grow food because they grow coffee.

The subtitled movie, largely in Spanish, also has two recurring American characters. Their terrible, embarrassingly familiar accents — English and stuttering Spanish — are purposely jarring against the smooth flow of the rest of the movie's dialogue.

They serve as comic relief, and their horror movie-style appetite for the country's supposedly bloodthirsty religious and ethnic traditions is particularly skewered. When a little boy says he

tells Americans that priests used to sacrifice virgins by ripping out their hearts, you know these two would eat it up.

But while Fuentes laughs at their foibles, he still denies the truths they seek about his country's current injustices.

Road movies need quests, and this story's evolves into a search for *Cerca del Cielo* — loosely translated as "Near the Heavens". A village with a questionable existence, it is rumoured as a place so high, and so hidden, the army cannot penetrate it — a place where Fuentes hopes to find the last of his students, and a place where his ragtag companions hope to find peace.

The movie is beautifully shot, has an astonishing soundtrack, and can be a terrible thing to watch. The flashbacks of atrocities are often deeply disturbing, but are integral as generalized accounts of actual events.

Ultimately, the movie is a hopeful one, though thankfully it avoids a pat, over-simplified resolution. It is an imperfect ending to a journey of fits that starts in a imperfect place.

Del Dako Quartet hits the right notes

BY JANET FRENCH

The Del Dako Quartet treated a roomful of people to their varied and amazing talents at the Holiday Inn. The performance, which took place on Oct. 18, was one of a series of concerts organized by JazzEast, a non-profit organization created for the promotion of jazz music through performance and education.

The quartet consists of four highly talented individuals with extensive and impressive backgrounds. Baritone saxophone player Del Dako had been awarded the title of "Top Baritone Saxophonist" in 1993 and 1994 by *Jazz Report Magazine*, and pianist Bernie Senensky has released eight albums which have earned him several Juno nominations. Duncan Hopkins, the rhythmic bassist, has studied with Neils-Henning, Orsten Pedersen and Dave Holland.

Hopkins has also released two successful albums of his own. Drummer Greg Pilo had spent twelve years playing for the Pat LaBarbara Quartet. Like the other band members, there is an impressive list of famous jazz musicians that he has played with.

The Quartet played mostly their own works, but had a couple famous favourites in their set. The pieces ranged from uplifting high-tempo songs to soothing mellow ballads. The most exciting piece of the evening was "Blue Salami," their slightly-crazed finishing piece. However, there was also a highly impressive duet, performed by Duncan Hopkins and Del Dako. The duet was amazing because even without the other instruments, there was still a perfect sense of rhythm, harmony and melody.

Although all the musicians were enormously talented, Pilo and

Hopkins were certainly the most impressive. It is truly amazing what a variety of sounds can be made by a huge wooden four-stringed instrument. Although Hopkins had some impressive and astounding solos, he certainly did not make bass playing look easy, for he was covered with sweat by the end of the show.

Pilo, the drummer, was also a master of complexity. It was incredible how the rhythm of the percussion instruments was altered slightly in each bar of music. I recall wondering how he remembers all those subtle rhythm changes.

Overall, the Del Dako Quartet was quite impressive. It is amazing that individuals from such a variety of backgrounds can come together and have such a unified sound. The performance made for a relaxing listen, and was enjoyed greatly by the audience.

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