

# The seventeenth annual

## THE HANGING GARDEN

This year's Atlantic Film festival kicked off with *The Hanging Garden*, which was filmed in Nova Scotia. The film has won accolades from critics at the Toronto Film Festival, including the People's Choice award.

The relatively low budget film

actors their performances are so human. There were no false notes anywhere in the cast, or in their dealings with each other.

Fitzgerald chooses to keep some crucial information from the audience, which only adds to the film's appeal. However, some may prefer their movies to be somewhat more straight-forward.

and inner-turmoil that Frank is experiencing. He demonstrates how reality and a feeling of moral obligation, when combined, make it difficult to distinguish right from wrong.

RAYMOND CHABOT

## DINNER AT FRED'S

*Dinner at Fred's*, the debut film



The Hanging Garden

(it was shot on a \$1.5-million bankroll) is set in rural Nova Scotia, and focuses on the relationship between a young gay man and his family.

Sweet William (Chris Leavins) has returned to Nova Scotia, after an absence of ten years, to attend the wedding of his sister Rosemary (Kerry Fox).

The film jumps between William's teen years and the present. Through these flashbacks we learn that the young William (Troy Veinotte) was both overweight, and abused by his father (Peter McNeill).

When young William's sexual orientation is discovered by his family, the pressure to solve his "problem" is left to his mother (Seana McKenna), who is sympathetic, but unable to deal with her own feelings. The situation quickly degenerates, and Sweet William attempts suicide.

Though dealing with some pretty heavy themes, such as identity, homosexuality, and abuse, the film is as much comedy as it is drama. Though writer/director Fitzgerald seemingly chose a definite "art-house" feel for the film, nothing in the dialogue or characters seems false. These are real people, with a very real way of dealing with their problems.

*The Hanging Garden's* greatest strength is in its characters. You can identify very strongly with any of them. It is a tribute to the

A shame, really, because this is definitely a must see at this year's festival. It isn't scheduled to play again for the duration of the festival, but you can count on it coming back to metro in the coming months. Don't miss your chance next time.

MARK REYNOLDS

## THE ASSISTANT

*The Assistant* is a story about a man trying to earn a living during the Depression. Frank Alpine (Gil Bellows) is a young and confused man who grew up in orphanages and foster homes.

The movie begins with Frank huddling in a crowd, pleading for a job. After another man, also down on his luck, notices that Frank has a gun hidden in his pocket, the stranger forms a partnership with Frank. The two turn to crime, and set out to rob a store.

The robbery does not go smoothly and it is very clear that Frank is not a skilled thief. He also lacks the conviction of a hardened criminal.

For the remainder of the film, Frank constantly tries to pay back the store's owner, Morris Bober (Armin Mueller-Stahl, of *Shine*). Eventually, he starts to work for Mr. Bober in order to clear his conscience, and slowly develops an interest in the shopkeepers daughter.

Producer Daniel Petrie, a native Nova Scotian, shows the hardship

by writer-director Shawn Alex Thompson, is one of those films that tries to be too cute, too quirky and a little too funny.

The story centres around Richard Wilson (Gil Bellows), a corporate executive who leads the perfect yuppie life — he has a large office in a glass building and is about to become engaged to his boss's daughter.

While driving home from the city to spend Christmas Eve with his family, Richard runs into car troubles and finds himself stuck in what appears to be a caricature of a small town. Without enough money for a hotel room, Richard accepts an offer to spend the night at the house of one of the locals, whom he befriends at the town pub.

The local in question, Fred (played by *Kids in the Hall* alumnus Kevin MacDonald), turns out to have an exceptionally strange family, as well as an ulterior motive for inviting Richard to spend the night.

Fred had learnt that Richard practiced magic as a hobby, and invited him home in hopes that his magic could be used to lift a curse on the family which keeps them trapped in their house. When the family car also breaks down, Richard finds himself stuck at Fred's for Christmas Eve.

Fred's family includes his eccentric mom, his well-beyond-eccentric dad (Christopher Lloyd who reprised the haggard look of his *Taxi* days) and his sister Celia (played by the queen of indie films herself, Parker Posey). As Richard gets to know Celia, his stuffy life of stocks, bonds, corporate mergers and boss's daughters becomes less appealing, to say the least.

Shawn Alex Thompson's movie is about love more than anything else. It might seem unfair, but mawkish sentimentality only really has any credibility when it is played out on the screens of big-budget Hollywood movies. Lower-budget movies, which are burdened with the task of catering to a more discriminating movie audience, lack that glossy finish, and don't really have that luxury of being escapist entertainment.

The film's other problems lie in its tendency to try to be too quirky and funny. The humour seems telegraphed and contrived, or even trite. Despite its shortcomings, the movie does manage to keep your attention. Thompson doesn't use many languorous shots, and keeps the story moving quickly towards its somewhat predictable conclusion, which seems like a parody of so many Hollywood endings.

KARAN SHETTY

## LOVE AND DEATH ON LONG ISLAND

*Love and Death on Long Island*, partially filmed in Nova Scotia and based on the Gilbert Adair novel, is a moving portrayal of a detached English writer who becomes obsessed with an American film star.

Giles De'Ath (John Hurt) is a relic of a former era. His apartment is void of a television, a fax machine, a computer, and other technical innovations of our time. As he says, "I don't process words. I write."

When he finds himself locked out of his apartment, he spends a rainy afternoon in a movie theatre watching a movie entitled "Hot Pants College 2" (in which Dalhousie's own Arts and Administration Building serves as the college setting). He becomes instantly infatuated with Ronnie Bostock (Jason Priestley) an actor

psychological problem, and as much as that may be true, there is something entirely comedic about an elderly man, shamefully slipping a rolled up teen magazine into his inside pocket.

Soon De'Ath travels to Chesterton, on Long Island, to find Bostock. When he does, the two forge an immediate friendship.

The film in *Love and Death on Long Island* ranges from excellent to poor.

Hurt is brilliant as De'Ath. He succeeds in allowing the viewer to see the film through the eyes of De'Ath, but he does not give away all of De'Ath's secrets. Even after the conclusion of the film, one does not know if the love that De'Ath has for Bostock is pure infatuation, a friendly desire to enhance Bostock's career, or a physical attraction.

Priestley is adequate as Bostock, an insecure yet egotistical actor. However, due to the traits and healthy economic situation of his character, Priestley's scenes are very much like the fare seen on *Beverly Hills 90210*. He does excel as a B-Movie actor. The cheese oozing throughout Bostock's films "Hot Pants College 2" and "Tex Mex" is second to none.

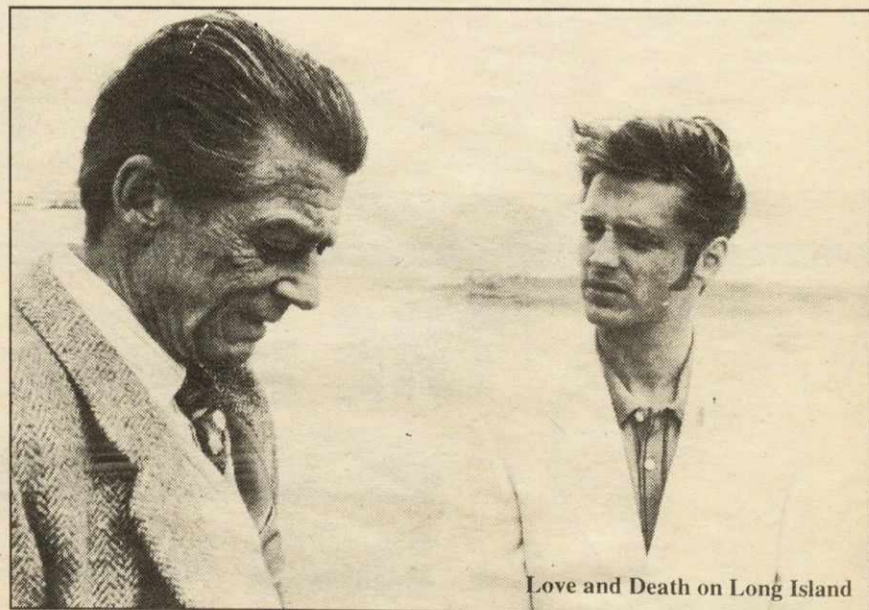
Fiona Loewi, who plays Bostock's fiancée, is not very impressive. Her character comes off as being too cool, and almost forced.

In this film, Kwientowski tackles many issues. He explores the differences between generations, and between continents. Bostock is stuck in the middle of a tug-of-war — go to Europe with De'Ath, and make prestigious films which "change one's way of thinking", or flee to Hollywood for quick cash and more "Hot Pants" movies.

Yet, even while trying to convince Bostock to take the higher road, De'Ath is indulging in



The Assistant



Love and Death on Long Island

who stars in the movie.

What follows soon after is hilarious. De'Ath begins to covertly buy and steal teen magazines, and proceeds to cut out images of Bostock, keeping them in an album he names "Bostockiana".

Director Richard Kwientowski could have staged this section of the movie differently. In the film, disturbing music and dark lighting accompany this part. One gets the feeling that De'Ath has a

American Pop Culture and the latest technological items, showing how love can change the way one lives their life.

GREG MCFARLANE

## STOLEN MOMENTS

*Stolen Moments* is an interesting documentary that takes an uncompromising look at the hardships the lesbian community