'Rosetta,' 'Limey' top films at Toronto film festival

BY MARTEN HANDYER & KIM SEARBERT
SPECIAL WRITERS

It was yet another superlative selection of cinema's latest at the 24th Toronto International Film Festival, and already, some of the big titles featured there are playing in the metro Detroit area.

"American Beauty," the festival's People's Choice Award winner, is on screens here now. This scathing black comedy of middle class America starring Kevin Spacey and Annette Bening with a fine supporting cast is already generating Oscar buzz.

Critics were not as kind to "Mumford," the latest from University of Michigan alum Lawrence Kasdan. The writer/director's ensemble piece about a small town and an ersatz shrink both named Mumford (there's no connection at all to the Detroit high school) fell flat with just about everyone. It too is already on screens here.

Kasdan stumped for "Mumford" in person in Toronto, as did Spacey and dozens of others, including Catherine Deneuve ("Est-Ouest"), Bruce Willis and Nick Nolte ("Breakfast of Champions"), Elton John (executive producer, "Women T>lking Dirty"), Susan Sarandon ("Anywhere But Here") and dozens of others.

All of the films mentioned here should eventually make it to Detroit. "The Limey" opened at the Main Art Theatre on Oct. 8, while other titles may take much longer to open. Watch listings for the Detroit Film Theatre, The Main or The Maple.

The best

Director Steven Soderbergh, who wowed us a decade ago with "sex, lies and videotape" and last year's "Out Of Sight" with George Clooney, continues his winning streak with "The Limey." Veteran actor Terence Stamp portrays a tough, British ex-con trying to avenge his daughter's death in Los Angeles, with Peter Fonda as a rich record producer who was her lover and had something to do with her demise. Stylish and entertaining, "The Limey" is a gritty, superbly acted crime drama that sports dazzling, arty camera work and editing -- a stunner all the way around.

"Rosetta" was the controversial winner of the Palme d'Or, the top honor at this year's Cannes film Festival and a hot ticket in Toronto. A jagged, uncompromising look into the desolate life of a teenager who struggles to support her alcoholic mother, this film features an exquisite performance by the young actress Emilie Dequenne. The uncompromising "Rosetta" will continue to divide audiences but its strong, ultimately hopeful vision will reward those who are willing to take on this emotionally challenging film.

Canadian films made a particularly strong showing this year. Atom Egoyan's psychological thriller "Felicia's Journey" stars Bob Hoskins as a caterer with an ultra-dark secret who befriends newcomer Elaine Cassidy.

Jeremy Podeswa's "The Five Senses" follows a quintet of city dwellers who has each lost touch with one of their senses. Mary-Louise Parker walks off with the film in her role of a cake decorator who can't decide what to do with her hunky Italian boyfriend. "The Five Senses" was voted best Canadian feature by audiences at the Festival. Also leaving an indelible image was Montreal-based director Lea Pool's "Emporte-moi," a coming-of-age tale set in Montreal of the early sixties.

Documentarian Errol Morris ("The Thin Blue Line," "A Brief History of Time") is back with the truly disturbing and thought-provoking "Mr. Death: The Rise And Fall of Fred A. Leuchter, Jr."

Fred Leuchter builds and maintains electrocution devices in U.S. prisons. Somebody's gotta make sure those electric chairs and gas chambers are in fine working order. Then we learn how Leuchter became involved in defending a notorious Holocaust denier.

With his investigation into the nature of evil, personal belief systems and the roots of fascism, Morris has crafted his finest, most profound work to date.

"Sweet and Lowdown" is a nice departure for Woody Allen, a low-key but thoroughly enjoyable look at the fictitious life of jazz guitarist Emmet Ray starring Sean Penn.

All the rest

Kevin Smith ("Clerks," "Chasing Amy") brought his controversial religious satire "Dogma" to town, and the results were a mixed bag. Smith writes his usual potty-mouthed dialogue that belies a surprisingly profaith message.

The script is something less than first-rate, with uneven performances from Ben Affleck, Chris Rock, Linda Fiorentino, Matt Damon and Alan Rickman.

Slight but silly and good-natured is "Happy, Texas," which follows two prisoners (Steve Zahn and Jeremy Northam) who escape from jail and assume the identities of two beauty pageant producers who are gay lovers. One of few films to generate Lelly laughs at this festival.

"American Movie" is a documentary about low-budget filmmaker Mark Borchardt's struggles to complete a cheesy horror flick called "Coven." Borchardt may have very little money and even less talent, but what he doesn't lack is determination. Funny at first, this one turned predictable quickly.

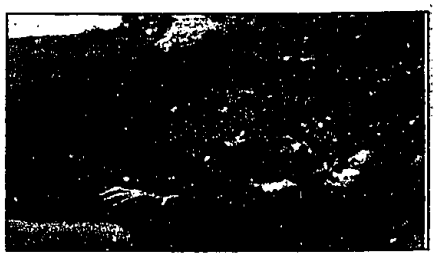
Three dark horses

Seek these out. Just do it.

"Spring Forward," which looks at the workaday lives of two municipal employees who clean parks, features excellent, heartwarming performances by Ned Beatty and Liev Schreiber.

Werner Herzog's "My Best Fiend" is a hilarious, touching, sometimes shocking documentary about the late, crazed actor Klaus Kinski. Herzog directed Kinski in several films, including "Aguirre," "The Wrath of God" and "Fitzcarraldo."

The "Wind Will Carry Us" is the latest enigmatic masterpiece by Iranian Abbas Kiarostami. This film may captivate you or leave you scratching your head, but you won't soon forget it.



Ex-con: *Terrence Stamp (left) and Peter Fonda in "The Limey" struck a chord with festival viewers.*

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'Guinevere' lacks passion

BY VICTORIA DIAZ
SPECIAL WRITER

Here's the picture: There's this young woman named Harper Sloane. She's played by Sarah Polley. She's a Calista Flockhart/Gwyneth Paltrow/Cate Blanchett/Claire Danes/Cameron Diaz type. Waifish, wispy, and fairy-pretty, she looks, now and then, as if she might subsist on a strict diet of exotic butterflies.

She's sort of the odd-person-out in this family of well-to-do attorneys, all of whom have attained their law degrees at Harvard and all of whom are expecting Harper, now that the time has come, to do the very same.

Then, Harper meets this guy. His name is Connie Fitzpatrick and he's played by Stephen Rea. Connie is the photographer at her sister's wedding. He's Irish, he drinks too much, he's artsy, and he's 30 years older than Harper. First thing you know, these two are exchanging meaningful glances.

Next thing you know, they're exchanging much more than that.

As time passes, he calls her things like "baby" and "my good girl" and "Guinevere." As time passes, she giggles and grins an awful lot.

Jazz in the background. San Francisco as the backdrop. Soon, Harper yearns to leave her household and snuggle in with Connie at his bohemian loft.

"You'll have to create something to stay here," he tells her.

"You're mistaking me for someone with potential," she purrs.

Maybe yes. Maybe no.

Anyway, Harper moves in with Connie (surprise), starts to read Sartre, and gets to attend middle-to-highbrow discussions between Connie and his mostly-male intellectual buds. Just about everybody seems to find Harper just about as cute as a cookie, which, of course, she is.

But then, guess what happens. Harper learns she's only one in a long line of Guinevere girls (surprise again). Looks like that rascal, Connie, is afraid of commitment (surprise, surprise, surprise), especially if it's a commitment to anyone who's over 21 and just a tiny bit worldly-wise.

In a scene almost worth the price of admission, Jean Smart, playing Harper's glam, rich-bitch mother, practically steals this entire movie. Mrs. Sloane, it turns out, has some opinions on who her daughter has been hanging out with in the artsy love lair, knows how to articulate these opinions, and does not hesitate to express them when she pays the two of them a memorable visit. The lovers pretty much just sit there and listen as she dishes out the razory invective, made even sharper by the honeyed tones in which it is delivered.

After Mrs. Sloane walks out, this movie starts to hurtle downhill about as fast as a bike with no brakes in the knobby city by the bay. Not that it's gone much of anywhere in the first place, unfortunately.

Its lack of freshness, its predictability, and an ending so silly you don't know whether to laugh or cry don't really kill "Guinevere," however. Even with all that, this picture might have survived somehow, and taken on enough life to engage its audiences. After all, it is a romance and what's more filled with possibility than romance?

What delivers the fatal blow here is the picture's lack of passion. It's stars (especially Stephen Rea) seem oddly unemotional, not just within themselves, but toward each other.

In a story that centers around passion and chemistry, passion and chemistry are hard to find. "Guinevere" seems a love story with very little heart. Consequently, it seems hardly anything at all.

MUSIC

BEAM to aid local musicians

BY STEPHANIE ANGELYN CASOLA
STAFF WRITER
scasola@oe.homecomm.net

As the frontman for the Smithereens, Pat DiNizio remembers what it was like to be in an emerging band.

Surviving 20 years in the music business as a successful artist, he also knows what struggling musicians need to get started: a place to rehearse, a way to connect to fans through the Internet, money to record and distribute a CD, and promotion.

DiNizio made a stop at Rochester's Hamlin Pub Thursday to let local musicians in on a new program designed to assist emerging talent in these areas. Benefiting Emerging Artists in Music, or BEAM, is funded by Jim Beam Bourbon and offers $50,000 in grants, along with publicity and exposure to new talent.

"Our first record did not take long to put out," said DiNizio, recalling Smithereens history. "The second record took three years of playing five nights a week and saving every penny. With a program like BEAM, we might've achieved what we achieved, earlier. Although it would've been nice to have some help."

DiNizio, the distinctive voice behind The Smithereens, has been known for his efforts helping other musicians strive for success. Through his Web site, www. psycholaborations.com, he's created the first interactive songwriting program. "People send me the words and I write the music," he said.

And in December, he'll start up an Internet radio station specifically made to highlight the work of unsigned and emerging talent. "Ninety-nine percent of the music that's being made is made by non-professional musicians."

Doug Schrock, manager of Hamlin Pub and a Rochester resident, said he supports local music and sees a need for the type of assistance offered to BEAM winners. "I've been going to see local bands since I could," said Schrock. "I'm all for it. I hate to see someone in music give it up just for the (lack of) money or support."

The program touches on all genres of music, from modern rock, to country, jazz, blues and classical.

"BEAM has been involved with emerging artists for over a decade," said DiNizio. "We're trying to reach people in the Detroit area to go to the Web site. We'd be happy to give them some money...I could've just come out on a promotional tour, but I wanted to play as well."

DiNizio performed several sets, beginning at 9 p.m., which included Smithereen hits like "Girl Like You," "Blood and Roses," and the occasional cover,

Please See BEAM, E7