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FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 09, 2011

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TIFF



The Legend of Beaver Dam, screening in Short Cuts Programme 6



Short Cuts Canada

TIFF's annual short-film component ups the festival's CanCon ante with 40 films spread across six programs. From brutal comedies to subtle parables, omniscient meditations to gory musicals, EYE WEEKLY's Adam Nayman rounds up the best of them.

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BY ADAM NAYMAN September 01, 2010 15:09

PROGRAMME 1

Sep 10, 9:15pm, Isabel Bader Theatre; Sep 11, 1pm, AGO Jackman Hall.

Monkey Warrior Nadia Litz (see our [interview](#)) takes a sharp stab at directing with *How to Rid Your Lover of a Negative Emotion Caused By You!* (pictured) As it turns out, the title is literal:



frustrated by the rough edges of her boyfriend's personality, Sadie (Sarah Allen) attempts some DIY metaphysical surgery, removing his flaws one gooey blob at a time. Litz massages the brittle comic tone towards shock horror without sacrificing thematic continuity: find in Ryan Cavan's script a sly but substantial meditation on what it is to want to try to change somebody. Bleak laughs can also be found in Michael Vass' *The Old Ways*, about a hanging conducted with the help of a proudly old-school gallows jockey. The anti-capital punishment sentiment is thin but (nun alert!) the execution is solid.

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PROGRAMME 2

Sep 10, 6pm, AGO Jackman Hall; Sep 12, noon, AGO Jackman Hall.

Brandon Cronenberg improves on his previous *Broken Tulips* with another exercise in speculative lo-fi sci fi: *The Camera and Christopher Merk* is set at an apartment complex where a closed-circuit TV system allows (or forces?) each tenant to get to know their neighbours via their television sets. The surveillance-culture anxiety is familiar, but Cronenberg's knack for deadpan jokes — and shivers — carries it through. The aesthetics are also clinical in *Sophie Lavoie* (pictured), but towards more empathetic ends. After presenting one of the best shorts at TIFF in 2009 (*Naissances*), Anne Émond tops herself with this tense black-and-white short, which describes eight nerve-wracking minutes in the life of a young woman (the sensational Catherine de Léán) being interviewed by a doctor about her sexual history.



PROGRAMME 3

Sep 12, 2:30pm, AGO Jackman Hall; Sep 13, 4pm, AGO Jackman Hall.

"By the end of this little video, I'm going to huck this camera over the edge," says Trevor Anderson at the beginning of *The High Level Bridge* (pictured), a wry five-minute account of Edmonton's most famous suicide spot. Not the most sensitive gesture, perhaps, but it's an effective visual correlative to the tales of those moved to commune with the North Saskatchewan River. The rest of this non-narrative-themed programme is a (very) mixed bag, but Firas Momani's *The Adder's Bite* — surely the only film at TIFF explicitly adapted from Nietzsche — is an example of pure tactile indulgence done right. Its darkly lit mix of freakily made-up performers, creepy FX and brutal insectoid subtext suggests a Tool video without the tunes.



PROGRAMME 4

Sep 13, 6:30pm, AGO Jackman Hall; Sep 14, 5pm, AGO Jackman Hall.

There are two films in this programme that might have been dubbed *Woman Waiting*. The one that actually bears that title is a keenly observed character piece from Paris-born director Antoine Bourges, who zeroes in on a woman (Carmen Casanova) navigating the frayed edges of Vancouver's social safety net. But there is also a waiting woman in Sophie Goyette's *Manèges*, which strands its isolated, ambiguously unsettled protagonist in a low-rent Quebec go-karting facility — a vivid and imaginatively photographed backdrop to her inner turmoil. The other standout here is Toronto animator Nick Fox-Gieg's *Interregnum* (pictured), which pays stylish animated tribute to René Carmille, a heroic proto-computer hacker who confounded processing systems in Vichy, France.



PROGRAMME 5

Sep 14, 7:30pm, AGO Jackman Hall; Sep 15, 4:30pm, AGO Jackman Hall.

Green Crayons (pictured) makes it three sterling efforts in a row for Toronto-based filmmaker Kazik Radwanski (working, as always, with his producer Daniel Montgomery). The director's signature glancing, observational style is employed to powerful effect in what might be described as an elementary-school parable: this brief episode of



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crime — namely, pre-emptive loogie hawking — and punishment is really about our first nascent stirrings of guilt and responsibility. Slightly less subtle but no less accomplished, Cam Woykin's *Open Window* wrings suspense from long-take tactics, the camera moving restlessly among the guests at a child's birthday party thrown by a deeply troubled couple. The punchline, when it comes, is literally and figuratively bludgeoning — and no less powerful for feeling so inevitable.

PROGRAMME 6 & PRE-FEATURES

Sep 15, TIFF Lightbox 2, 9pm; Sep 17, AGO Jackman Hall, 2:45pm.

Sean Cullen's performance as a sadistic, guitar-slinging camp counsellor in Jerome Sable's *The Legend of Beaver Dam* (screening before *FUBAR II* at Midnight Madness, Sept. 9 and 11) is just irritating enough to justify his character's fate, after which the film finds its stride as a gore-soaked rock musical. Sable and co-writer Eli Batalion are the guys behind the 2003 Fringe hit *JOB: The Hip-Hop Musical*, so it's no surprise that the songs are good; the only flaw is the "gotcha" ending, which strains for more pathos than the material can support. By contrast, the final, surprisingly poetic punchline in Marius Borodin, about a prodigious young inventor, goes a long way towards redeeming its otherwise familiar mockumentary construction. There are also some lovely, surreal ideas sprinkled throughout, such as a kite designed to float indoors.



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