The Toronto International Festival of Festivals

"Sweet 16" birthday marred by dearth of new directorial talent

THE TORONTO INTERNATIONAL FESTIVAL OF FESTIVALS

By MANAVENDRA S. THAKUR

The Toronto International Film Festival celebrated its 16th birthday this year. Once the festival was over, however, it became clear that the occasion wasn't quite as sweet as originally hoped. As usual, the festival showed hundreds of films from around the world and of every conceivable variety. The festival's reputation as a cinematic Mecca for serious filmgoers continues to grow—and certainly the lines seem to get longer every year.

But perhaps due to circumstances beyond the control of the festival's hard-working programmers, the overall quality of the films declined palpably. While there were definite winners among the bunch, the festival showed more than the usual amount of clunkers this year.

To be precise, this was a year when serious filmgoers had to look toward the established directors of contemporary interests and artists. Canadian Radha Bhardwaj scored a hit in her new film, Closet Land.

Canadian Radha Bhardwaj scored a hit in her new film, Closet Land. Brighter Summer's Day, and Canadian Radha Bhardwaj (Closet Land) and Transylvanian expatriate Andraian Vodnik (Trumpet Number 7) both marked their directorial debuts with flawed but markedly stylish films.

Conversely, established directors such as Peter Greenaway (Conservatoires), Maurizio Nichetti, and Paul Leduc all produced films that were, in one way or another, disappointing and not comparable to their prior successes.

Overall, though, there was a dearth of new talent. What could have caused this? No one knows for sure, of course, but there are at least two possible explanations for the phenomenon. One is the tumultuous effects of the Persian Gulf war, and the second is the addition of three questionable film series to the Toronto festival line-up.

The Persian Gulf theory is that the war restricted people's ability to travel, disrupted previously organized conferences and events and otherwise delayed many ongoing projects. It probably also prevented many projects from even starting in the first place.

The genesis of this theory came during this year's Cannes film festival, where film quality was at an ebb, according to reports of critics attending that festival. While the Cannes festival organizers may be passing the buck, it is plausible that the war disrupted the lives of hundreds of thousands of people could also have added financial economic and political risks for filmmakers and artists.

Clearly, the increased risks would affect more handsomely the efforts of independent, first-time or unknown directors than it would those of directors with more established reputations. The exact nature and degree of influence of the war is debatable, but it does seem likely there would be some deleterious effect. That effect is being reflected in film festivals that attempt to survey the global filmmaking scene, as do Toronto and Cannes.

The other reason for the lack of new talent originates closer to home. This year's festival included three new film series, and

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On Friday Oct. 25 at 9pm:

• Astrid Hadad: "Heavy Nopal." A reinterpretation of Mexican history through songs and performance.

On Friday Nov. 8 at 8:30pm:

• Giovanni Hildago, congo drum virtuoso.

Reservations may be made IN PERSON ONLY at the Office of the Arts, E15-205.

• One ticket per MIT student ID. • A $5.00 deposit is required (and will be returned after the trip). • Valid MIT student IDs must be presented.

Tickets will be distributed at Building E15 one hour before curtain time on the date of each event. Round trip transportation provided. For information call: 253-4003.

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