

Look again

FilmExchange shorts original, entertaining

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“Local Heroes Canadian Film and Video Festival.” The very phrase brings to mind the feeling of cramming into the Cinematheque and sitting through a seemingly endless program of low-budget videos about marital strife – told from the point of view of the children, narrated by said children who are now adults and have since come to terms with themselves – all the while praying to whatever god you believe in that the next one will be a comedy.

Perhaps that's why the National Screen Institute has changed the name of Winnipeg's largest film festival to FilmExchange. A much more significant change is the overall quality of the shorts, which has improved dramatically over last year's Festival of Yawns. With only a handful of exceptions, the production values of the 30 submissions are top-notch, the ideas are original and even the ones about marital strife are honest enough to be entertaining.

The series begins on a strong note on Wednesday with two dark comedies concerning suicide. Julia Kwan's *Three Sisters on Moon Lake* effortlessly crosses back and forth between comedy and drama as the children of Asian immigrants adopt rather cult-like behaviour but marry it with a childlike innocence. Marred only by the fact that its 20-minute runtime doesn't allow enough subtlety, it is one of the few short films that you actually wish were longer. Jeremy Peter Allen's *Requiem contre un plafond* gets everything just right, as a man about to put a gun in his mouth accidentally finds a new lease on life while trying to achieve a perfect death.

Friday's program includes three of the best-looking, though radically different, films at the festival. Deco Dawson's *FILM(dzama)* pulls out all the stylistic stops to deliver a strange myth about the creative process. Sean

PREVIEW

FILMEXCHANGE SHORTS CINEMATHEQUE

Thompson's marshmallow-textured animation complements his sister Kim's *Hockey Stories*, a warm-hearted look at three great tales from the former half of the 20th century. It's the kind of film in which the narrative isn't quite as important as the filmmakers' infectious love for the sport (Howie Morenz is even depicted sporting a halo). Stephanie Morgenstern's *Remembrance* is an absolutely stunning film noir about a man whose memory seems infinite. Ultimately, *Remembrance* amounts to little more than an exercise in style, which isn't such a bad thing considering how damned gorgeous everything looks.

Saturday's program closes the festival with one of its best films, Paul Quarrington's *A Man's Life*, about a woman who unwittingly plans her husband's funeral on Super Bowl Sunday. Diana Leblanc's character manages to be both mesmerising and hilarious at once.

The French-language comedy *Jingle* presented a unique challenge for this critic, whose copy lacked subtitles. Still, I had no trouble following the story, or understanding the jokes for that matter, which is a testament to Geneviève Poulette's skill as a director. The festival rounds out with *I Shout Love*, the third short film directed by actor Sarah Polley, about a couple undergoing probably the least healthy break-up in the history of break-ups. It plays like an actor's workshop to be sure, but fortunately Kristen Thomson and Matthew Ferguson are up to the task.

FilmExchange runs from Feb. 23 to March 2. For more information, visit www.filmexchange.ca or call NSI at 956-7800.