



Critiquing the cinematic c

Illustrious *Gateway* A&E writers jaunted about town, previewing a handful of the flicks at this year's Edmonton International Film Festival. Read on for an inside scoop before you dish out any of your time or lunch money.

Reviews: Edmonton International Film Festival

Films, times and dates vary
www.edmontonfilmfest.com

Andrew Jenks, *Room 335*

During the summer of 2005, 19-year-old college student Andrew Jenks spent a month in an assisted living facility in Florida. Trained by his two friends that recorded the whole event, Jenks ended up filming a documentary entitled *Andrew Jenks, Room 335*, a deeply emotional look at America's elderly and their lost voice.

The film follows Andrew's interaction with the residents of Harbor Place and his encounter with issues held by individuals 70 years his senior. From loneliness to dementia to death, Andrew seems constantly strained when it comes to understanding the lives of the residents—that is, until he realizes what they need: friendship.

Room335 is filled with colourful characters that gradually open up to Andrew as they become more comfortable with the cameras. Shown through weekly interviews, Jenks questions the residents about life, love and death. But the real star of the film is Andrew and his genuine interest in the residents' lives. He closes the generational gulf that exists between them and forms an amazing bond with a handful of his new roommates. It's surprising to see such authentic emotion in a film, let alone in one directed by a 19-year-old.

Overall, *Andrew Jenks, Room 335* is an entertaining and heartfelt documentary that attempts to peer into the lives of society's forgotten generation and succeeds on all accounts.

—Ryan Heise

Man Push Cart

Man Push Cart is not a film for the impatient or those with a short attention span. The story advances unhurriedly and untroubled, and director Ramin Bahrani callously disregards society's need for instant gratification.

The movie follows the life of Ahmad

(Ahmad Razvi), who, everyday, wakes up, pushes his cart through Manhattan traffic in the dead of the night, sets up his coffee stand on his corner, sells grub, closes his stand and pushes his mobile prison back to its storage garage. A famous musician in Pakistan, Ahmad gave it all up to live with his wife in New York. Unfortunately, his wife dies and he's kept from seeing his precious son. To break up the isolation and monotony of his life, the entrance of Noemi (Leticia Dolera) and Mohammad (Charles Sandoval) allows for interesting relationships to ensue, and as a result, Ahmad's life starts to change for the better.

Though flush with absolutely breathtaking cinematography, poignant moments of human kindness and love, and hundreds of shots of Ahmad smoking a cigarette, the film fails to stir, the acting falls flat during some of the most important scenes, doing so at an exasperatingly slow pace.

—Bryan Saunders

Dark Arc

You might like *Dark Arc*. There's that small statistical possibility. You see, *Dark Arc* is a pretentious wank, and you need to be the type of person who likes films that are pretentious wanks. The main problem with *Dark Arc* is that it's written for the type of people who think that doing something like eliminating all of the outfits that aren't purely white or black from one's closet is a profound statement. And then it merges that pretentiousness with the production value of a student film.

The movie, which seems to have grown out of what should have been a five-minute film class project, relentlessly takes its characters too seriously. There are a few moments where the characters seem to be ready to set aside the artistic façades they had created for themselves and show some real emotional depth; but instead, they shy away and their pompous hot air is presented as some sort of deep examination of life. But hey, maybe I'm wrong; maybe you'll

find *Dark Arc's* obsession with intense visual images intriguing and alluring, and maybe you'll be able to stand 99 minutes of people pontificating about them. I just know I didn't.

—Daniel Kaszor

Wristcutters: A Love Story

Wristcutters: A Love Story is probably the best romantic comedy ever made about people killing themselves. The fact that it's also, as far as I can tell, the only one, doesn't diminish the certainty that it's an enjoyable and surprisingly fun, if offbeat, movie.

The film stars Patrick Fugit (*Almost Famous*) as a distraught young man named Zia, who kills himself because his girlfriend cheats on him. Once dead, he finds out that people who commit suicide go to a world that's almost exactly like the one they left, only a little bit worse. In this rather depressing new existence, Zia finds friends in the extroverted, failed Russian rock star Eugene (Shea Whigham) and a girl named Mikal (Shannyn Sossamon) who claims to have been sent to the wrong place. Together, they go on a road trip to find Zia's girlfriend, who also commits suicide, and find out that they have stronger bonds with each other than with anyone they ever met in life.

What makes *Wristcutters* work is that, despite the rather grim subject matter surrounding the story, and the melancholy setting filling every shot, the movie always has a fairly upbeat and fun air to it. Perhaps sending the message that suicide is painless isn't the best, but it definitely makes for a good movie.

—Daniel Kaszor

El Violin

Hope. Fear. Oppression. Music. It's a familiar list of themes, but writer-director Francisco Vargas handles them with startling clarity in the beautifully crafted Mexican film, *El Violin*. Gritty yet lyrical, disturbing yet hopeful, it at times feels awkward and uneven, but many of the scenes

shine. The film concentrates on a band of rebel farmers who've been run off their land by soldiers from the government. An elderly violinist named Plutarco (Don Angel Tavira), the father of the rebel leader, decides to risk it all to go back to the field where the group's much-needed supply of ammunition is hidden. In an odd twist of events, he ends up charming the captain of the soldiers camped by the village with his violin playing, and a daily game of wits begins.

El Violin almost feels like two different films in one: there's the side with the rebels and their struggle against an oppressive government; then there's the side with the likeable Plutarco and his clear-eyed vision. However, the weakness of the film lies in the fact that the two sides are very uneven—the latter part is undoubtedly the better-crafted one. Thus, it's hard to feel much empathy for any of the characters except Plutarco. It doesn't help that Tavira's performance is by far the best one here, and that the pace is flawed in the beginning.

Still, all of this hardly matters. The quiet beauty of the black and white cinematography, the aching sense of doom, the desperate fight for survival, the uplifting power of music: all these are superbly crafted, and you'll find it difficult not to fall into their simple grace and poignancy. You'll clutch at your seat with nervousness at certain scenes; you'll smile at the warmth and hope portrayed in others; you'll be completely silent during one of the most powerful finales in years. In short, watch *El Violin*. You'll be touched ... and maybe you'll even learn something.

—Diana Song

L'Appel Des Arènes

For many North Americans, the word "wrestling" will likely conjure up images of trash-talking, spandex-wearing thugs who pound one another with metal chairs. But when watching the movie *L'Appel Des Arènes* (*Wrestling Grounds*), you'll see that wrestling can have profound cultural, spiritual and musical dimensions.

The film tells the story of Nalla (Abdoul Aziz Ndiaye), a young man who's introduced to wrestling by André (Moustapha Gueye) after being rescued from muggers. A parallel, yet somewhat less interesting storyline follows an unemployed man named Sony (Ibrahima Mbaye), who scalps tickets and gambles on the wrestling matches as a way to earn some money.

The movie demonstrates the inter-relationship that exists between music and wrestling in this culture. Dancers and drummers perform at the start of all the matches, and the spiritual chanting of a shaman allows one wrestler to gain strength from his ancestors, who also wrestled. *L'Appel's* greatest strength is its amazing soundtrack, which ranges from drumming to chanting to some modern music that's played in nightclubs. As an example, the most memorable and well-directed scene in the film depicts a group of barefooted wrestlers training on a beach. Their feet move in time to a pulsating drum beat, a powerful rhythm that probably echoes the beating of their hearts. The athletes' love for their sport confirms just how real their wrestling is.

—Maria Kotovych

Everything's Gone Green

"Everyone's in on a scam or creating something nobody really needs to sell to people who are too stupid to care or notice. Whatever happened to just being real? Why aren't we content to just be middle class?" So says Ryan, a likeable BC Lotteries employee on a quest for happiness and meaning in life before he hits 30. His quote does well to sum up the theme of this Canadian comedy, which explores just how far greed will take people. Paulo Costanzo, best known as Michael Tribbiani on NBC's ill-fated *Friends* spin-off *Joey*, plays Ryan.

Canadian novelist Douglas Coupland penned the script, his first effort made specifically for the screen. He sets the story in Vancouver, which provides the backdrop for a colourful set of comedic characters—like the Chinese-Canadian grandmother with an ever-