

TORONTO INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL: 2008 LINEUP

## A cornucopia of Canadian movies

GAYLE MACDONALD

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The Toronto International Film Festival announced a lineup yesterday of Canadian films that struck a balance between showcasing the work of firmly established players and emerging new talent.

Acclaimed directors Deepa Mehta's *Heaven on Earth* and Atom Egoyan's (previously announced) *Adoration* will rub shoulders in early September with edgy new works such as Michael McGowan's *One Week*, Kari Skogland's *Fifty Dead Men Walking* and *Toronto Stories*, a 90-minute feature film crafted by four directors, David Weaver, Sook-Yin Lee, Sudz Sutherland and Aaron Woodley.

Mehta, one of the few household names on hand at the TIFF press conference at Toronto's Fairmont Royal York Hotel, told the crowd that she remembered "collapsing with joy" when her first film, 1991's *Sam & Me*, was invited into the festival.

Mehta's new film, *Heaven on Earth*, earned a special-presentation slot this year. Set in the Toronto suburb of Brampton, Ont., the film stars Bollywood actress Preity Zinta as Chand, a vibrant young Indian woman who comes to Canada to meet her new husband and his very traditional family. The director, whose other works include the Oscar-nominated *Water*, said after the press conference that *Heaven on Earth* is "perhaps my favourite film. It's where my two worlds come together. They come together right here because the film's deeply rooted in my community - which is the Punjabi community - and it's also deeply rooted in my adopted homeland, which is Canada."

Skogland's *Fifty Dead Man Walking*, starring Ben Kingsley, Rose McGowan and Kevin Zegers, is a gala presentation. Set in the late 1980s, at the height of the Irish civil conflict, the story follows Martin (Jim Sturgess), a recruit of the British police ordered to spy on the IRA.

The second gala is McGowan's *One Week*, which follows the cross-country journey of Ben (Joshua Jackson), a young man confronting his mortality. McGowan was at TIFF in 2004 with *Saint Ralph*.

Writer/director/actor Paul Gross was not present to promote his First World War epic *Passchendaele*, which is slotted as the festival's opening-night gala. Also unable to attend (because of other commitments) were Egoyan and director Bruce McDonald, whose first horror film, *Pontypool*, is part of the Vanguard screenings.

David Weaver, who co-produced *Toronto Stories*, said he was thrilled to learn that his multiple-effort production made it into the 33rd annual event. "I was motivated to make this film because of the fact that Toronto, when it appears in films, very rarely plays itself. With so many people coming to it in the past 10 to 20 years, it's a brand-new city that hasn't really been on the screen before," said Weaver, who was at the press conference with all of the project's directors. "I'm hoping this will be a whole new perception of Toronto."

*Toronto Stories* stars Gil Bellows, Lisa Ray, K.C. Collins, Joris Jarsky, Carly Pope, Julian Richings and Sook-Yin Lee.

Fernando Meirelles's apocalyptic thriller *Blindness* - a Canadian co-production with an all-star cast including Mark Ruffalo and Julianne Moore - will be a special presentation, along with Philippe Falardeau's *C'est pas moi, je le jure! (It's Not Me, I Swear!)*.

Canada First! opens with Neil Burns's *Edison and Leo*, Canada's first stop-motion animated feature. That series also includes Marie-Hélène Cousineau and Madeline Ivalu's *Before Tomorrow*; Warren Sonada's *Cooper's Camera*; Justin Simms's *Down to the Dirt*; Charles Officer's *Nurse. Fighter. Boy*; Ingrid Veninger and Simon Reynolds's *Only*; Randall Cole's *Real Time*; Terry Miles's *When Life Was Good*; and Cameron Labine's *Control Alt Delete*.

The Contemporary World Cinema category will showcase Rodrigue Jean's *Lost Song*, Léa Pool's *Maman est chez le coiffeur*, Carl Bessai's *Mothers & Daughters* and Francis Leclerc's *Un Été sans point ni coup sûr*.

Real to Reel includes Malcolm Rogge's *Under Rich Earth*, Astra Taylor's *Examined Life* and Luc Bourdon's *La Mémoire des anges*.

Short Cuts Canada presents 38 shorts this year, including Denis Villeneuve's *Next Floor*, Guy Édoin's *La Battue* and Helen Lee's *Hers at Last*.

Two prominent international players - French director Olivier Assayas (*Paris, je t'aime*) and British producer Stephen Woolley (*The Crying Game*) - will help oversee the fifth-annual Talent Lab, a four-day workshop for 22 emerging filmmakers.

The festival runs from Sept. 4 to 13.