

# LONDON CALLING

*Limey hospitality at the Raindance Film Festival.*

BY HOLLY HUDSON-GROVES

FROM SOHO IN LONDON'S WEST END, THE Raindance Film Festival kicked off its seventh and largest edition yet. Helmed by Canadian ex-patriot Eliot Grove, the festival anted up an ambitious slate of 73 features and 223 shorts from October 8 to 21.

"In 1993 there were only nine British feature films made [in the UK]. I decided that a lot of people would make movies if they had a place to show them, so I started Raindance," says Grove. One can feel the effects of Britain's film boom; this year approximately half the line-up hailed from the UK.

Early on Grove dubbed this event "The Raindance Film Showcase and Market," but later simplified the name. He shrugged off initial protests from the Sundance Film Festival and claims he chose the name because of "the dance people have to do to get their film made." But even though it's no longer officially called a market, Grove stresses that in actuality it is a "hybrid—a market for the industry, screenings for the public." Scheduled to coincide with London Screenings and one week before MIFED, Raindance aims to catch the run-off of buyers attending these major film markets. Judging from last year's festival, the plan seems to be working. "Of the 43 features screened, 23 secured distribution deals," according to Grove. "You'll see just about every international acquisitions executive here that you'd hope to see at Cannes or IFFM."

In addition to the home-grown product, this year's line-up included pics from Denmark, Australia, Greenland, and the United States, as well as sections devoted to new films from Yugoslavia and South Africa. *The Blair Witch Project* opened the festival with its British premiere and cast a tall shadow over the ensuing selections. Nevertheless, there were a few other stand-outs. *Rupert's Land* (Jonathan Tammuz, Canada) traced the reunion of two half brothers, one a British attorney and the other an out-of-work British Colombia fisherman, as they set

out on a road trip to their maligned father's funeral. Another was *Karnaval*, the debut feature of French director Thomas Vincent. Set and filmed in the midst of Dunkirk's carnival, which is a colorful orgy of nightly drunkenness, the story involves a love triangle that examines

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questions of betrayal and responsibility.

Grove likes to showcase shorts, calling them "a laboratory of cinema," and says that buyers attending the festival watch them to assess their viability for airlines or British TV. While being screened is a blessing to any filmmaker, being seen is a necessary component of the equation—and one Raindance had trouble fulfilling. Many of the daily shorts programs were under-attended (in fact, even the features rarely boasted full houses). Perhaps a greater service could have been done by screening selected shorts before the features.

With legions of shorts to choose from, gems were easily found. These included *P1* (Seth Wiley, U.S.), in which a man is seduced by the female voice of the anti-theft system of a car he is stealing; *Snarl* (David White, UK), a surreal nightmare of a man caught in a traffic jam; and *Los Taxios* (Lars Damoiseaux, Belgium), in which out-of-towners seeking a tour of Brussels become captive of a manic cab driver intent on showing them the "real" city.

In between screenings Raindance sponsored the usual array of seminars geared toward making an independent filmmaker out of Jane the Civil Servant. A seminar on "Pitching for the Absolute and Utter Beginner," led by Grove



Soho's Metro Theater, venue for London's Raindance Film Festival.

himself, was entertaining, but offered some dubious advice on how to behave during a meeting with a potential buyer. Grove stressed the importance of flattery and encouraged hopeful deal-makers to find out and use personal information about buyers, including "their children's birthdays, if possible."

This year marked the festival's first two-week run, and the growth spurt had its downside, as organization was sorely lacking. Some invited producers traveled from Italy only to find their film was not listed in the program nor was it screening. Conversely, a filmmaker from the U.S. found out after the fact that her film was shown by the festival. There was a general lack of cohesion to the festivities, the result, in part, of the absence of identifying name tags or any way of separating filmmakers from the general public.

Despite an atmosphere that at times felt more like a hipster gallery opening than a festival, Raindance tried hard. With big ambitions and little funding, Grove has managed to put the festival on the map. He was grateful for Channel 4's contribution of a slew of "Raindance Brollys" (umbrellas) emblazoned with logos, which staffers handed out to buyers at the nearby hotels. One can only hope that Grove's tireless enthusiasm will iron out the wrinkles next year, and that he'll remember quality speaks louder than quantity.

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