



Foreign cinema gems at MWFF

## Description

# MWFF and Cinéma du Parc present some fine international films

By **Byron Toben**

The 40th Montreal World Film Festival was in many ways, to use an apt Yiddish word, truly Vermisht.

After many successful decades, it had lost government financing and could not pay the many volunteers or rentals to the two large cine complexes near St. Denis or on Atwater. No film market, no media relations, no catalogue or printed program. A web site constantly juggling schedules. A juror also died.

And yet, the indomitable Serge Losique managed to show the completion films at the huge Imperial.

... my straw poll of attendees confirmed that the majority were pleased with the quality of what they did see, often on blind hunches.

The Théâtre Outremont helped out with the documentary program and the Cinéma du Parc and the Dollar Cinema pitched in with some screen time for the array of student films.

OK, films were shown only once instead of the usual three, but my straw poll of attendees confirmed that the majority were pleased with the quality of what they did see, often on blind hunches.

So the festival lives to fight another day... we hope, most likely with a more modest format.

By chance, the Cinéma du Parc happened to be presenting several terrific Polish and Hungarian films during that period, so foreign film devotees had another outlet for their passion during the period.

Here are some I saw and loved:



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## At the Imperial

### The Distinguished Citizen (Argentina/Spain)

This film is in running for the Golden Lion award at the Venice Film festival (ends on September 10) so its fortunes are not as affected by the Montreal World Film Fest as others.

Here, world weary writer Daniel Mantoverdi wins the Nobel for literature and reluctantly, on a whim, accepts an offer to return to his tiny home town in rural Argentina that he left decades earlier. He obviously had not read Thomas Wolfe's posthumous book, *You Can't Go Home Again*.

Initially granted a medallion as a distinguished citizen of the town, he gradually incurs the wrath of the locals in a cultural clash with his now urban Barcelona ways and the local inferiority complexes as they feel that he has made a fortune by basing his books on insulting their inadequacies.

To me, this had the feel of Mordechai Richler being condemned by Quebec segments as having made money by feeding American prejudices against Quebec (as if Americans really cared about Quebec).

Nice touches with old girlfriend, old school mate buddy, teenaged nose ringed groupie, and art auction judging.



Scene from *New World*



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## New World (Poland)

This excellent study examines the difficulties around three immigrants to a new life in the New World offered in Poland. But Poland isn't a real new world as in Terrence Mallick's magnificent 2005 Pocahontas epic.

One of the immigrants, Zhanna, is from Belarus. Resettled in Warsaw with a young daughter, she works a cleaning lady while pursuing a degree. In the mean time, her husband, a punk provocative musician, is imprisoned again in Belarus. Support groups in Poland try to use her as a symbol in cries for his liberation.

However, she has fallen out of love with him and the time and energy interferes with her search for a normal life

Another immigrant, Azzam was a translator for Polish forces fighting in Afghanistan. A soldier befriends him, helps to come to Poland and employs him as a helper in his nightclub. Cultural clashes and post-traumatic war syndromes beleaguer him.

The third immigrant, Wiera from Ukraine, is a man living as a woman about to have a gender changing operation when his father unexpectedly arrives with Wiera's young son from an abandoned marriage. The mother has just died. Decision time... self sacrifice vs. selfish decision to live one's own life. The child solves the problem accepting his father to be a girl.

The segments were directed by three different directors.



## At Cinema Du Parc

### Dekalog (Poland)

The amazing Krystof Kieslowski, creator of three colour titled and themed triumphs, Red, Blue and White, which were featured at Cinemania a few years ago (he lived and studied in France) now has a ten part series very loosely based on the 10 commandments, called Dekalog.

The ten episodes are packaged in 5 shows of two each, playing until September 20. I saw at press time, Episodes



one and two. I plan to see all. This is a must see series for fans who appreciate philosophy, subtly blended with impressive photography, humanity and even humour.

**Episode One** features a scientific single parent devoted to math and rationality. He and his religious sister dote on his inquisitive son, who tries out his father's gift of ice skates on the supposedly frozen river. What went wrong with the calculations? Can God talk through a computer?



Scene from Dekalog Episode 2

**Episode Two** features an elderly bachelor surgeon who is approached by a fellow tenant in their high-rise tower. He may bear a grudge against her for running over his pet dog two years prior. She is a violinist whose husband had been operated on by this doctor.

She is desperate for an appointment with him to evaluate whether her comatose spouse will survive.

Later turns out that she is now pregnant by another man whom she loves and an abortion is scheduled. If the husband will assuredly die, she will cancel the abortion. But if he is recovering, she will go through with it. Should the doctor tell her the truth in this judgment call?

### **Mom & Other Loonies in the Family (Hungary)**

The seven-film Hungarian week ends tonight September 8.

I caught the excellent leadoff film, which captures much of the disturbed 20th century history of Hungary through the



eyes of a 94-year-old lady who tracks her family over four generations.

She moved 27 times over this period to avoid conflicts with Nazis, Russians, economic changes and even Protestant-Catholic confrontations.

[Mom and Other Loonies in the Family \(trailer\)](#) from [Hungarian National Film Fund](#) on [Vimeo](#).

## At Théâtre Outremont

### The Lost City of Cecil B. Demille (USA)

This admirable documentary reminds us of how important Cecile B. Demille was to the development of Hollywood. His 1927 Ten Commandments was the most expensive film of the silent era and his sound and colour remake in 1956 (with Charlton Heston as Moses) both made mega bucks.

The huge artificial City of the Pharaohs he built on the sand dunes north east of Los Angeles for the silent version disappeared after the shooting. Suspected of being buried under the dunes, its excavation took some 30 years to embark on due to environmental regulations.

This documentary also reveals that Demille received permission from the anti Western Nasser government to film version two in Egypt due to his fair handed portrayal of Muslims decades earlier in his film on The Crusades.

[Official trailer "The Lost City of Cecil B. DeMille" \[SBIFF\]](#) from [dan coplan](#) on [Vimeo](#).

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*Byron Toben is the immediate past-president of the Montreal Press Club*

[Shaved Head Challenge - September 22, 2016, 12pm – 3pm - Alexis Nihon, Metro level](#)

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