

Pop applies to movies too

Brought in for festival

One boasts edginess, great score, humour, etc.; another's the story of a great musical outsider

What, you may fairly ask yourself, are movies doing in Pop Montreal?

The short answer is – screening in public places for your viewing enjoyment this weekend. The long answer is – fulfilling youth culture's commitment/compulsion to self-expression through the production of generationally relevant art.

Lila Yomtoob is a 31-year-old native Chicagoan who has lived in New York since the age of 18 and is currently testing out San Francisco as a potential place to call home.

When she called at the crack of dawn Pacific time this week, I felt like I already knew her. The familiarity came from a barrage of emails, ingenious D.I.Y. press kits (love the buttons) and a DVD/videocassette combo pack of material surrounding her rocking 72-minute digital fiction feature, *High Life*.

Yomtoob's movie can lazily be called a Big Chill for the nervous noughts – a crew of late twentysomethings converge in a Brooklyn loft one day to backhandedly investigate their lives, relationships and potential for survival in the world.

The beauty of the \$5,000 film – apart from the acting, edginess, great score, humour, pathos and bathroom bathos – is the fact it got made. To modify a Frank Zappa line that he had taken from Varèse, the modern-day artist refuses to die, and Yomtoob never let little things like money or the film industry come between her and her vision.

She workshopped *High Life* with her talented cast – Michael Wiener, Sharon Eisman, Sam Marks, James Ford, Priscilla Holbrook, Doug Paulson, Max Faugno and Sunah Bilsted – for three solid months in her own Brooklyn loft. When it came time to shoot, everyone was familiar enough with their backstories and their physical location – her place is the film's main set – to run with the story in a volatile improvisational format.

The result feels real. Who among us has never wondered about our place in society while frantically partying like there's no future at all? Who has never panicked under deadline pressure to produce?

Perhaps only Yomtoob, who put her own quarter-life crisis into the film, then got so busy with the four-day shoot, three months of post-production and continuing efforts to have her baby seen that she has little time to wonder about anything but the ongoing process of creation.

High Life screened at the San Francisco Independent Film Festival in Febru-



JOHN GRIFFIN
AT POP MONTREAL

ary, scored a door-opening rave review in industry bible *Variety*; piqued the interest of the Pop Montreal people and found a home here. She and actors Wiener and Eisman will be around after today's 5 p.m. screening of *High Life* at Le Cabinet, 3810 St. Laurent Blvd., to talk about it all. Feel free to buy *High Life* at www.highlifemovie.com.

Everything's Coming My Way is a similar adventure, only completely different. Montreal-based filmmakers Stacey DeWolfe and Malcolm Fraser have done society a huge favour by tracking down octogenarian American outsider musician Gordon Thomas, and letting him tell his life story. It's as odd and inspirational as anything in print or the multiplex, on TV or the Internet, or playing in your iPod right now.

Thomas is one of life's innocents who has been quietly and almost anonymously proving the Zappa/Varèse pronouncement for the past 40 years with independently produced albums of his own strange and strangely appealing songs. (Think of the naive music that a damaged Brian Wilson made in the mid-

1970s – *The Beach Boys Love You* will do – then lose the thought and watch this movie).

Lacking even the faintest idea of how to promote himself beyond sending records to radio stations and giving them away on the streets of his New York hometown, Thomas has remained unknown to all but an international clutch of diehard fans.

Like most of them, DeWolfe and Fraser came to Thomas through "a tape of a tape of a tape that had passed through many hands," as Fraser described it this week.

"It was a two-hour tape full of music – all Gordon Thomas – produced so weirdly neutral you couldn't even tell when it had even been recorded. We became intrigued with the search for him. At first it seemed impossible, but with a fair amount of detective work and a fair amount of coincidence it eventually happened."

Thomas was hiding in plain sight in New York, and *Everything's Coming My Way* became his portrait.

"He has a real charm. He lights up a room when he comes in," said Stacey, whose own roots are as singer and keyboardist for local bands Permanent Stains and The World Provider. "By design and circumstance we're made a film in his spirit."

The lovely *Everything's Coming My Way* screens tomorrow at O Pasto Vys, 356 Mount Royal Ave. E., at 7 p.m., followed by a Gordon Thomas live performance and a Q&A with the filmmakers.

jgriffin@thegazette.canwest.com



James Ford as Benji and Sharon Eisman as Maya in *High Life*, which was shot in four highly improvisational days after being workshopped for three months.