



# Hot Docs 2008: A Bunch of Films and Sadness Later...

by **Monika Bartyzel** Apr 30th 2008 // 8:03PM

Last year was the easy selection of Hot Docs. I got to see a ton of films, and most of them were pretty damned uplifting. I laughed at the sheer awesomeness of *Billy the Kid*, cheered for *Girls Rock!*, got a huge craving for tea with *All in This Tea*, got some art on with *A Walk Into the Sea*, gaped at *Seven Dumpsters and a Corpse*, and was in awe of Jessica Yu's *Protagonist*.

It wasn't a smile fest this year. This time around, the theme was death, tragedy, and all sorts of seriousness. Most of them were pretty damn good, but it's been an exhausting week and a half seeing these films, thinking about them, and then writing about them. I still wish scheduling had permitted me to dip into the worlds of Wesley Willis and Kathy Acker, and some of the other docs I was itching to see. I have a feeling they would've helped matters a little.

What else would have helped was *Green Porno*. I must admit: Aside from *Dear Zachary: A Letter to a Son About His Father*, the only film I was itching to see was Isabella Rossellini's bug-filled and sexy short film. I was so very happy that it was going to play at Hot Docs. It was supposed to screen on opening night, along with *Air India 182*. It wasn't quite the best fit of themes, but I didn't care.

Things got started late, and finally, the lights dimmed. [Sturla Gunnarsson](#) came out to introduce his film, and then poof! There was *Air India*. No *Green Porno*. There wasn't even a mention of why it wasn't screening. This writer wasn't (and still isn't) a happy camper. So, the film I was most excited about was the one film I didn't get to see. To add insult to injury, I hear that Isabella was actually in town for it as well. Be still my heart and screaming heart.

Okay, enough of the melodramatic. It was surreal to watch *Air India* in a crowd with some of the families of the victims of that terrible bombing. It was more surreal to watch a film indoors, with fake plants hanging from the ceiling. (The film screened at the Winter Garden Theater.)

Since I live here in the kickass T-dot, I had to balance the fest with regular work and chores, the rest of fest was intermingled with real life. Last Tuesday night, I was in a rush after *Letter to Anna*, but I had to stop for a

Rocchi-esque blur-shot -- two young men were performing for the rush of cars in front of a statue at the Royal Museum of Ontario.

Beyond that, the most noteworthy Hot Docs moment was *Dear Zachary*. I can't really say much, since to describe the post-film Q&A would be to spoil the whole thing, but after a film that was accompanied by loud

gasps, the low muffle of nose-blowing, and many snuffles, they were still able to pull the tears out when Kurt Kuenne was accompanied to the stage by a few very special people. This moment resulted in one powerful standing ovation, the likes of which I have never seen at Hot Docs before.

The film is also the only film in eons that I've voted on for the audience choice award. Since they started the system of ripping and submitting your ticket, I've bowed out. I'm the sort of movie geek who likes to keep her tickets. I wish I could tell you, then, that *Zachary* scored the viewer's choice award, but that honor was given to *Taking Root: The Vision of Wangari Maathai*. Second was *Planet B-Boy*, and finally, third, came *Dear Zachary*.

Luckily, my last day offered a few giggles. Pinny Grylls' *Peter and Ben*, the story of a man and his orphaned lamb, is absolutely sweet and one heck of a cute short documentary. It's well worth the 10 minutes if you get a chance to see it.

For the most part, this may have been an emotional cinematic journey, but as usual, Hot Docs was worth it. If you love documentaries and films fests, [Hot Docs](#) is where you need to be next year. Seriously. There are great films timed perfectly to when the big city is just again warming up and coming to life after a long, cold, and dreary winter.