



Indian Country Media Network Logo

FIRST NATIONS

The Healing Winds Trailer

The late Reepah Arreak played an Inuit residential school survivor to perfection in 'The Healing Winds,' which took Grand Prize at the Montreal First Peoples Festival 2014.

Residential School Survival Drama 'Healing Winds' Takes Grand Prize at Montreal First Peoples Festival

Theresa Braine • August 7, 2014

From struggles against giant oil companies, to a children's tale, to residential school survival, the films that swept the awards of the Montreal First Peoples Festival 2014 each offered a unique view into the indigenous psyche.

Grand Prize went to *The Healing Winds*, which used the very poverty and limitations that could have hampered filmmaker Joël Montañez to instead serve as the impetus for this Inuit story of residential school survival.

"The poverty of the means at the filmmaker's disposal, far from confining him to creative indigence, seems on the contrary to have opened doors to inventiveness to him, letting the blast of polar winds that gives his film its title penetrate his work," said Montreal First Peoples Festival organizers in their comments.

The film tells the story of Michael, a psychotherapist assigned to work in the village of Salluit, in the Arctic region of Nunavik, and his interaction with Reepah, a patient recovering from years of abuse and trauma in the residential school system. Though fiction, it is based on the experiences of the filmmaker himself.


"In this singular cinematic work, fiction reaches its full documentary potential," the description reads.

Starring Reepah Arreak, who has since died, the English-French-Inuktitut film took 15 years to make—possibly because of its wrenching subject matter, Montañez told the Nunatsiq News.

"It's an extremely complex and painful process and that's why the film was made," Montanez told a packed auditorium after the screening at Cinémathèque Québécoise on Sunday August 3, according to the Nunatsiq News. "It was dramatic as it could be in certain moments, it was as informative as it could be in another moment."

Arreak is one of three cast members who have died since the movie began filming in 1999, the Nunatsiq News said. She "froze to death out on the land," the newspaper said, attributing the information to Montañez.

The Healing Winds was just one of 47 films that screened, many of them premiering, at the Montreal First Peoples Festival, which wrapped up on August 5. Information on all the films can be found at the Montreal First Peoples Festival 2014 website.

 Tunteyh o el Rumor de las Piedras took second prize in the festival competition.

Tunteyh o el Rumor de las Piedras took second prize in the festival competition.

Tunteyh o el Rumor de las Piedras took second prize in the festival competition “for the osmotic relation it establishes with an Indigenous reality too complex to be grasped by an outside eye,” the festival’s judges said of this film about the Guarani in Argentina, made by Marina Rubino.

“Far from cinematographic pretensions aiming to endow images with all the weight of reality, here is a documentary that adopts the patient rhythm of Guarani speech and lets itself be infused with the spiritual fluidity of the world as seen by Amerindians,” said the festival comments on this documentary.

The Guarani have received international attention for being persecuted by ranchers in Brazil, but the Guarani live throughout South America, including parts of Paraguay, Argentina, Uruguay and Bolivia.

RELATED: Roadkill: ‘Indians in This State are Not Even Worth a Traffic Sign’

Gunmen in Brazil Caught on Video Shooting at Indigenous Guarani

Two films received first and second place, respectively, in the Rigoberta Menchu Award. First prize went to *Le Chant de la Fleur* by Jacques Dochamps and José Gualinga, another story of Amazonian First Nation survival—this time in battling an oil company for integrity of the land—told via the wife of the chief of a Sarayacu village.

 Still from Crazywater

Still from Crazywater

Crazywater (*Eau de Feu*), by Dennis Allen, chronicles an environmental battle of another sort, that waged in one’s own body. It won second place in the Menchu prizes for its profile of the alcoholic’s life, and attempts to overcome it while facing the pain that such self-medication is trying to mask.

The Cinematography award went to *He Who Dreams*, by Dana Claxton, “For the convincing visual depiction of a dreamlike experience” and “for visual creativity that fearlessly rips up the conventions that clutter the imagery associated with Amerindians.”

The children’s tale *The Orphan and the Polar Bear*, by Neil Christopher, won for its “faithful cinematic transposition of a tale from Inuit imagination” as well as “for the quality of the animation that fully conveys the dramatic nature of a story that is part of the rich legacy of Northern legends.”

Best documentary was recognized under the Séquences Award, and it went to Sanansaattaja, a Tibetan film illustrating the great literary work of the Saga of King Gesar. The film was made by Donagh Coleman, Lharitgso.

The Aboriginal Peoples Television Network offered an award for the first time this year, and it went to Rhymes for Young Ghouls, by Jeff Barnaby, for his success “in conveying the critical mass of violence and frustration that decades of colonialism, repression and marginalization have left as a legacy to the First Nations,” the festival judges said. “The end result is a dense, paroxysmal and incantatory work.”

The film has received numerous accolades, and it secured U.S. distribution just days before the Montreal First Peoples Festival began on July 30.

RELATED: Chilling Rez Drama ‘Rhymes for Young Ghouls’ Secures U.S. Distribution

Winning both the Young Hope Award and the Short Award was Sayachapis, another boarding-school depiction, by Mar y Sol. This movie shows, “with no superfluous effects, with the pared-down but extremely effective resources of direct cinema,” the survival attempts of those who came through the “concentration camp experience of residential schools,” the festival said.

Lastly, La tête haute by Christopher Grégoire garnered a “special favorite” nod from the Fabrique culturelle Télé-Québec, which sponsored many of the showings, for its portrayal of boxing as the symbol of a young man’s fight against his own weaknesses.

La tête haute



La tête haute

“A very young filmmaker displays astonishing maturity both in his life as in his short film,” the award comments said of the French-language film, made under the auspices of Wapikoni Mobile.

This was the 24th Montreal First Peoples Festival.



Comments

Comments are closed.