



AMREEKA

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From Life & Arts:

Los Angeles Film Festival



Dear Lemon Lima, a hit at the Los Angeles Film Festival. photo courtesy of LAFF

Lynne Bronstein, *Mirror* Staff Writer

Rarely-seen foreign films, short subjects, new independent features, a mix of music videos-whatever you were looking for in films, it was there at the Los Angeles Film Festival, June 18-28 in Westwood.

Presented by Film Independent, a non-profit dedicated to advancing the careers of independent filmmakers, the Festival's offerings this year displayed some definite trends: many films were helmed by women; themes included stories of unique individuals struggling for acceptance, internationalism, diversity, and the creative urge.

Some highlights:

Dear Lemon Lima. Suzi Yoonessi's feature deals with an Alaskan teen whose infatuation for an uncaring boy drives her to enter a school team competition, through which she finds friendship, self-esteem, and a knowledge of her Native Alaskan background. Like the title, the film is tart but refreshing, its' wellpaced humor balanced by an unexpected serious twist.

Hollywood Je T'Aime. In this bilingual (French-English) film, a naïve young Frenchman visits Los Angeles, with the vague hope of getting work in the movies. Since the young man is gay, he is open to some opportunities that a straight leading man might not act upon. Jason Bushman's film is a good example of how Hollywood might do gay romantic comedies.

When You're Strange. Tom DiCillo's documentary about Jim Morrison and the Doors is much better than Oliver Stone's scripted feature. Utilizing footage shot by Paul Ferrara, a friend of the band, as well as clips from TV shows and concerts, DiCillo captures the excitement and contradictions of Morrison's brief career as the symbol of America's rock and roll subconscious. However, a few factual errors in the text of the Johnny Depp voice-over narration should be corrected.

Born Without (Nacido Sin). From Mexico's Ambulante Film Festival comes this documentary by the late Eva Norvind about Jose Flores, a three-foot tall armless man who earns his living as a street musician. The film unfolds as a picaresque story of a man who despite his physical condition, travels, runs a computer with his feet, loves many women (and they love him!), has a wife and seven sons, and lives his life to the hilt.

Cold Souls. Sophie Barthes's film, in the tradition of Charlie Kaufman's metaphysical fantasies, has Paul Giamatti, playing 'himself,' visiting a clinic where souls can be extracted and stored, leaving the soulless humans relieved of their inner angst. The idea is great, Giamatti is hilarious, but the last third of the film sags in its pacing and could have used more conflict.

Amreeka. The Festival's best narrative film seen by this writer is a sharply observed, yet warm and loving portrait of a Palestinian family in the suburbs of Chicago, rocked by the bigotry that wells up during the early days of the America-Iraqi conflict. Cherien Dabis's debut feature shows a confident director's hand and her characters, including the central figures, a mother and teenage son just arrived from the West Bank, come across as people we would enjoy knowing.

For more information on the Los Angeles Film Festival, go to LaFilmFest.com