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## ***"L'Origine de la tendresse" and Other Tales.***

Before reviewing the collection, **James Van Maanen** interviews the programmer. A few notes follow. **Updated through 5/30.**



It's so rare that a program of short films opens commercially here in NYC that this alone makes the May 30 release of six French shorts newsworthy (not to mention watch-worthy: the program is a good one). Under the title ***"L'Origine de la tendresse" and Other Tales,*** the collection is the second theatrically released presentation from **The World According to Shorts.**

After watching the program (my impressions follow), I talked with **Jonathan Howell** - director, programmer and founder of The World According to Shorts - to get some background on him and his organization and to learn if there might be more movement and/or interest these days in the short film as art form.

**Why shorts, Jonathan? When and how did your interest in this form begin?**

It started when I was in the position of short film programmer at **Ocularis** in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, where we would show a feature film preceded by a short every Sunday evening at **Galapagos**. The program actually began back in 1997, and I joined up in 1998. I found myself fulfilling a need because the group wanted to replace a programmer for short films who was leaving, so I started helping out. I was told about a very fine annual international festival devoted to short film in Clermont-Ferrand, France. So I went. And it was terrific; however, I could not program anything at Ocularis because we only had 16 mm facilities available. Everything at Clermont-Ferrand was 35. The Brooklyn Academy of Music's recently opened **BAMcinémathèque** then offered me a couple of days to program shorts, and this was the beginning.

Getting involved with shorts was matter of chance, mostly, but having stepped into this, I have discovered that the short format is neither superior nor inferior to the full-length. It's a matter of what the individual filmmaker brings to the project.

**Do you think shorts are garnering more interest these days. And if so, why?**

They are a little bit higher-profile, now that the Oscar-nominated films get a yearly theatrical and DVD release. There is more attention paid in that sense, and also now short films are available at the Apple iTunes store. There is just more availability, in part, because of things like these. People have been saying for years that the web is a perfect exhibition ground for short films. And we're getting closer to this. Now, with the ubiquity of broadband, this is even more feasible.



**When was the World According to Shorts' first theatrical release?**

We started releasing them theatrically via **New Yorker Films** in 2006. This new set is our second, though it's not through New Yorker this time - we're doing it on our own. It's not an annual thing, just whenever we can get a new project together.

**Who is your biggest audience for a program like this?**

I find the programs tend to skew more toward

foreign film lovers than to short film lovers, perhaps because the films are not primarily **O Henry**-type stories with twist endings or calling card features.

**I know that **Film Movement** always puts one short on each of its monthly DVD releases. And the **Ironweed Film Club** also sticks a short or two on its monthly release.**

This past year, Film Movement actually used one of the films we premiered in New York in its compilation, **Pauline Pinson's *Aided Migration***. We also had the New York premier of a film that was subsequently nominated for an Oscar: **Samuel Tourneux's *Even Pigeons Go to Heaven***.

**Great. We'll hope to see more of this in the future. And we'll look forward to seeing the next **World According to Shorts** program, whenever that might be.**

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*"L'Origine de la tendresse" and Other Tales* offers six short films ranging from eight to 32 minutes in length, all in French with English subtitles. ***Pen-Pusher***, the shortest of the six and directed by **Guillaume Martinez**, offers an original "meet cute" scenario on the Paris underground that is sweet but not cloying, coolly funny and makes a nice statement about how "writing" can bring us together.



**Felipe Canales's *My Mother*** is maybe my favorite of the bunch. In just 15 minutes, the director leads us through a story of an immigrant family, Algeria to France, centering on its women: three generations of them, though the meat of the movie involves the writer and her mother. The form is like a scrapbook of black-and-white photographs, with narration and (as I recall) music, all of which makes the story seem like a tale told from long ago that is somehow terrifically immediate and beautiful. I don't recall becoming so involved in someone else's story so quickly and strongly - and have it linger with such tenacity in my memory. Howell tells me that film, narrated by the woman who wrote the original autobiographical book/photo essay with the same title, was put together by the filmmaker on his computer. Talk about a wonderfully productive collaboration!



For the politically inclined, among whom I count myself, ***One Voice, One Vote***, will be much appreciated. Here, in the run-up to the 2007 French Presidential campaign, **Jeanne Paturle** and **Cécile Rousset** combine the taped conversation of a politically active older woman and a political slacker of a young man with animation to give us a 13-minute lesson on why it might be a good idea to get involved. Their conversation is by turns charming, frank, funny and needling. But with the subtitles (at least for us non-French-speakers), I found the animation distracting and not all that helpful. I'd rather have had the man and woman photographed as they speak. You may feel differently.



**Olivier Bourbeillon's *The Last Day*** gives us just that - at the 1867 Schneider and Co power hammer No 125, which ceased operation at the former smithy of the Brest military harbor on the day in question. The three remaining workers spend their remaining hours on the job talking to the filmmaker and each other about the past and present. The film fascinates for a number of reasons: visually (I'd never before seen a machine like the one used here to create huge metals parts), social/political/economically (neither the men nor the filmmaker natter about it, but you can't help feel their pain, worry and wonder at what is to come next) and historically (we learn something of the type of business the men are engaged in, where it comes from and where it is going). This is one of those small films that you probably would not intentionally seek out but which, by its conclusion, you feel pleased - even privileged - to have witnessed.

The gem and wonder of the group is also the longest. I generally find that size does matter in short films. I've seen few five-, ten- or even 15-minute shorts in my life that had as much impact on me as (equally good) ones at the half-hour mark. **Alain-Paul Mallard's *L'Origine de la tendresse*** tracks the life of a relatively attractive, approaching middle-age museum attendant. It is beautifully observed and shot and possesses that reticence and philosophical bent that seems to appeal to the French (and to me, as well). This is a rich, thoughtful mix, wonderfully acted and, I think, worth just about anybody's time.



The program closes with a zinger: **Alice Winocour's** 15-minute ***Kitchen***, starring **Elina Löwensohn** (***Schindler's List***, ***My Antonia***, and various **Hal Hartley** movies), which alone makes it worth watching. Ms Löwensohn plays a little homemaker who has decided to cook for her hubby, who wants a lobster entree. Mistake. By turns funny, ugly, sad and unsettling, this is a very strange little short. Though my French is paltry, I believe that the end credits assure us that "no lobsters were harmed," etc. You could not prove this by me.

*-James Van Maanen*