

EIFF – Shorts Weekender

By David Kettle

Edinburgh International Film Festival director James Mullighan explained his passion for short films in his introduction to one of the EIFF's shorts weekender showings, as well as his intention to expand the festival's coverage of the format. And judging by the 27 events spread over the weekend (which actually began last Wednesday), short films are in rude health. There was a noticeable buzz around the George Square Theatre as a diverse audience headed to catch some of the intriguing and sometimes challenging works on offer.



I only caught three of the bewildering panoply of events, but even those programmes were enough to show how wildly different styles and approaches can be.

The 'Animated Extremes' programme explored some of the far reaches of animation, although to be fair the only film approaching what could be called 'extreme' was the slick but bloody *Let Me Come In*, a wild-west retelling of the Three Little Pigs tale by recent Edinburgh College of Art graduate Paul Rice. *Stuck in a Groove* by Austrian Clemens Kogler presented a dizzying sequence of animated tableaux using just some finely crafted drawings on a spinning turntable – and, we were assured, it was filmed in real time without any 'camera tricks'. Impressive stuff. As was *Pigeon's Milk* by Milos Tomic from the Czech Republic, a film that dispensed with narrative but employed everything from photographs to sewing in its ever-changing animation.

Later the same evening, 'Realms of the Unreal' returned to live-action films, but with often unsettling themes of ritual and superstition. *The Fisherman's Daughter* by young Edinburgh-based director Tom Chick featured some subtle performances in its tale of a selchie, or man-seal, in a remote Scottish

island, and Estonian director Heleri Saarik's Tale of a Nixie had a similar atmosphere, with sumptuous design and a glowing period feel.

The stand-out film for me, though, was the truly strange The Great Race by Kote Camacho of Spain, which combined found footage with newly shot scenes in a darkly humorous tale of a horse race whose jockeys are found hanged at the starting line.

Saturday's 'Animated Interactions' collection focused on more human tales, from Jessica Ashman's poignant childhood story Fixing Luca to a visually spectacular airborne battle in Paths of Hate by Polish director Damian Nenow. Danish director Helena Frank's Heavy Heads was just weird – its enormous-headed woman gaining intimate pleasure from meatballs and a fly might well have belonged more naturally in the 'extremes' programme, although it was compelling nonetheless.

Nullarbor by Scottish-born, Australian-resident animator Alister Lockhart was an impressive piece of work based around a car race across Australia's longest, straightest road – it was no surprise to hear that it had won best animation at the Sydney Film Festival and so might be in line for an Oscar. My favourite, though, was Thursday, the Royal College of Art graduation film by German-born, UK-based animator Matthias Hoegg, a visually stunning love story set in a near future populated by mimicking blackbirds, palm readers and lifts to the stars. Truly the stuff of wonder.