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THE SEATTLE TIMES

May 17, 1998
Edition: FINAL
Section: ARTS, ENTERTAINMENT
Page: M1

FILM FESTIVAL FAVORITE 'STILL BREATHING' IS BACK IN TOWN

Author: JOHN HARTLSEATTLE TIMES MOVIE REVIEWER

Article Text:

As this year's edition of the Seattle International Film Festival begins its 25-day run Thursday at the 5th Avenue Theatre, reminders of festivals past are everywhere.

One of last year's entries, "The Other Side of Sunday," recently turned up at the Varsity; right now it's at the Grand Cinemas in Tacoma. "Gonin," which played the 1996 festival, has just opened at the Varsity. "All Things Fair," another 1996 entry, makes its American television debut at midnight Wednesday on Cinemax.

Starting Friday, "**Still Breathing**," one of the top Golden Space Needle winners from the 1997 festival, will be back for a theatrical engagement at the Metro.

It won the best actor prize for Brendan **Fraser**, a Seattle actor who wasn't that well-known at the time, although he became everyone's favorite "George of the Jungle" just a month later. After his festival visit, he returned to California to co-star with Ian McKellen in "Gods and Monsters," which will be shown as part of the 1998 festival.

Fraser said the role of Fletcher McBracken, the Texas street performer he plays in "**Still Breathing**," reminded him of "character traits in artists I'd met in Seattle." He was impressed by the quality of the script by writer-director James F. Robinson, and actively pursued the low-budget project during a break between studio movies.

"It's immensely romantic, and it had great potential for a beautiful film," said **Fraser**. "The locations were domestic and exotic at the same time. We used a house in San Antonio, with this river running through (the property), that captures the spirit of this neighborhood that has such vitality and mystery."

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Although the story line has fantastic elements, he feels that it "evolves organically. The spiritual quality reminded me of 'My Life as a Dog.' "

"**Still Breathing**" was also a Golden Space Needle runner-up for best actress (Joanna Going plays Roz Willoughby, a Los Angeles woman Fletcher pursues) and for Robinson's direction. The movie marks his feature-film directing debut, although he has a long list of television credits, including documentaries and music videos. It took him 12 years to raise the money for this debut.

"I thought, I'm going to write something that would have been one of my favorite movies if someone else had made it," said Robinson.

"The Lady Eve" came to mind. He set out to create a romantic comedy in the vein of Preston Sturges' 1941 classic, with Going in the Barbara Stanwyck role as a cynical con artist and **Fraser** as the naive young man who becomes infatuated with her (the Henry Fonda part).

"I wanted to have those two trains collide with each other," said Robinson. The script is designed to contrast the comparative rural innocence of San Antonio (Robinson's hometown) with stressful, earthquake-prone Los Angeles.

"It was partly inspired by the L.A. riots," he said, "and I've been fascinated since I was a kid with the two cities."

Although Spanish architecture turns up in both locations, the styles are different. Robinson set out to use the differences to comment on his characters, "each of them with a separate palette." Also in the cast: Ann Magnuson as Roz's mentor, Lou Rawls as Fletcher's musician friend and Oscar winner Celeste Holm ("Gentleman's Agreement," "All About Eve") as Fletcher's nurturing grandmother.

"Fletcher is the person everyone wants to be," said Robinson.

"Roz was where I was after three years of not making a living in L.A., and trying to raise children in the inner city. That gave me something to talk about when I started writing the script."

Fletcher's trip to Los Angeles, inspired by a dream of a woman he's never met, sets the plot in motion. He thinks he will meet her in Formosa and books a flight to Taiwan. Shortly before his plane leaves, he accidentally finds her at the Formosa Cafe in L.A.

"The premise to me is essentially this life-or-death issue," said Robinson. "This is his moment. He could screw it up. And it's a huge emotional risk for Roz, who doesn't want to fall in love.

"It really is about the single most important thing in your life."

Caption:

BRENDAN **FRASER**, PICTURES WITH CO-STAR JOANNA GOING, WONS THE BEST-ACTOR PRIZE AT LAST YEAR'S SEATTLE INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL FOR HIS ROLE AS A STREET PERFORMER IN JAMES F. ROBINSON'S "**STILL BREATHING**." IT WILL BE BACK FOR A REGULAR RUN FRIDAY AT THE METRO CINEMAS.
PHOTO

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