

# Sam & Jim's Excellent Adventure

*and other side trips at the 44th Berlin Filmfestspiele*

BY HARLAN KENNEDY

**M**idnight in Berlin. "Follow me!" a hirsute pal cried as we scrambled from the Kongress-Halle press show and hit the Arctic sidewalk where festgoers wait for transport back to the city center. "Over here!" he called, dodging away from the mile-long queue for chauffeured festival minivans, into an all but empty double-decker public bus. Ah! Warm, comfy, spacious... and (*Torn Curtain* music, please, Mr. Hitchcock) headed the wrong way, bearing us straight into East Berlin.

Half an hour later, after vainly hoping the vehicle would do a return loop, we were thrown terrified into the snow. Miles beyond the West; beyond the Brandenburg Gate; beyond even that Friedrichstrasse café—"Weel you be my spon-soors for United States of Amerreeka?"—where Lila Kedrova once stood Paul Newman and Julie Andrews to *Kaffee*.

But then that's what happens when a Wall comes down: nothing stops you going in the wrong direction. With the East now a free-travel area, humanity can once more get hopelessly, wonderfully lost. (We finally caught a taxi back to the West; it was driven, we both swore, by Gromek, Hitchcock's kill-resistant Stasi.) And with film festival nations now one big happy family, are we saying goodbye to that defining tension between cultures that used to hot-wire every Berlin film spree?

Near the start of the '94 fest I began to see the answer. It came during Alain Resnais's two films, *Smoking* and *No Smoking*. The titles, with their parlor-

game adversarialism, indicate the Euro-filmworld's new flavor: *Dialectics can be apolitical and fun*. The new tension in pan-cultural pictureland is not between nationalistic blocs—the hell with them—but between opposed fiefdoms much more ancestral. Let us call them art and entertainment; or hedonism and hair-shirtism; or modernism and triplepost-modernism.

Resnais's two pix, the most heraldic of the festival, are a dazzling vacation to apocalypse country from the man who started by giving us serious business trips thither—*Hiroshima, mon amour* and *La Guerre est finie*. Take an eight-playlet cycle by Brit farceur Alan Ayckbourn, turn it into two 140-minute movies, and milk the multiple-choice narrative potentialities from a story in which we keep rewinding to earlier scenes to rewrite destiny! Here are headmaster Toby Teasdale (Pierre Arditi) and his wife Emma (Sabine Azéma), playing *amours musicales* somewhere on the northeast English coast, sketched in picture-pretty on a soundstage by designer Jacques Saulnier. She runs off with the gardener *or* has a nervous breakdown *or* starts a catering business *or* stays faithful to hubby. (Rewind for further possibilities.) He falls for the daily help *or* has a stroke *or*...etc., etc. Finally, fate is retraced to its primal hinge: back to Scene 1 itself, and did she or did she not light up that all-important cigarette?

Many, including me, found the films fun. Many, including me, also found them a touch long and maddening. But

But the two best things to come from Showbizland were the veterans: Sam Fuller and Sophia Loren. *La Voluptuosa*, sharing retrospective screentime this year with Erich von Stroheim, appeared looking like a billion dollars, allowing for inflation. And Sam arrived to squire his star vehicle *Tigrero: A Film That Was Never Made* through the Young Film-Makers Forum.

This documentary directed by Finland's Mika Kaurismäki is a total joy. Room-filling Berlin audiences exploded with glee as they watched Mad Sam, smoking Havanas as if they were no mañana, de-boat in a patch of godforsaken Amazon jungle. Here, forty years ago, Sam shot footage for a never-finished, indeed barely started, John Wayne actioner called *Tigrero* (you've seen some of it in the color-insert sequences of *Shock Corridor*). Now he's back, and with him is narrator-chum Jim Jarmusch, dressed in hep cat black, sporting shades and haute-coiffure silver hair, and looking like James Coburn after a rejuvenation drug.

Sam reminisces. Sam and Jim meet the Karaja Indians who once appeared, or had relatives who appeared, in Sam's film. And Sam, Jim, and Mika screen the surviving footage so the natives can goggle—this is wonderful—at a moving scrapbook of their past.

*Tigrero* is not a movie, it's 90 minutes of sheer heaven. Fuller and Jarmusch make the cinema's best double act since Laurel and Hardy. And they end by joshing the very nature of these back-to-the-fount moviemaking docus. There (last scene) is Jim having his face daubed with tribal paint by a friendly Indian woman, and there is Sam moving towards the departure bank yelling time to go. But Jim says he's found peace and truth here (man) and he's gonna stay. Sam—great take—pauses; then rasps out *Instant Understanding*; then shuffles off into his chauffeured canoe; then cries, "Now I'll go back to the uncivilized world!" The movie fades on a piece of human and Hollywood history floating forth into the great cosmic mulch. ⊕

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