



GUY MADDIN

My Winnipeg

UK distribution for the films of the avant-garde Canadian director Guy Maddin has been erratic, with only *The Twilight of the Ice Nymphs* (1997), *Dracula Pages from a Virgin's Diary* (2002) and *The Saddest Music in the World* (2003) earning fully fledged releases here. But even those not fluent in Maddinese will pick up in a flash the director's stylistic lingo in *My Winnipeg*, a multilayered docu-fantasy that doubles as a nifty Maddin primer. As an onscreen surrogate dozes his way through a never-ending train journey, Maddin fantasises in his italicised, mock dramatic narration about how best to leave the place where he has spent his life. 'What if I film my way out of here?' he wonders, introducing the idea of cinema as psychological liberation, before trying to work through Winnipeg's history and his own, the better to shake it off at last.

In the film's dizziest, most Charlie Kaufmanesque sections, Maddin moves into his childhood home where he stages key moments from his youth using actors as his three siblings (one of whom died aged 16). Ann Savage, scarcely seen since playing the vinegary femme fatale in Edgar G. Ulmer's 1945 *Detour*, takes the part of their fearsome matriarch. ('Mother is in the moment!' whoops Maddin hilariously when Savage comes up with the goods). With his childhood pet Toby the chihuahua, played by Spanky the pug, looking on, and a lump beneath the living room carpet representing Maddin's exhumed father, this fake family re-enacts scenes which themselves reflect on the process of re-enactment – particularly the ritual of watching the TV serial 'LedgeMan', in which each episode sees the same highly strung young fellow poised to jump from the window ledge, only to be coaxed indoors by his mother in preparation for a repeat performance the following day. It's a perfectly ripe metaphor for the soothingly repetitious hysteria of family life.

It would be unrealistic to expect conventional dramatic energy from a film this skittish and freeform, which takes in everything from Winnipeg workers' riots to a medium who interprets her messages from the dead in dance. That said, there's quite a kick to the performance of the aptly named Savage. 'No matter where I am, I can feel her watching me,' complains Maddin, as back-projected footage of her scowling face appears magnified in train windows and she assumes the infantilising omnipresence of the mother in Woody Allen's *Oedipus Wrecks* (from the *New York Stories* portmanteau).

Allen's *Manhattan* is also a clear precursor of *My Winnipeg*, as are city-based film essays like *London* or *Tokyo-Ga*, and especially *True Stories*, the spaced-out hymn to everyday eccentricity directed by David Byrne of Talking Heads. As with Byrne, Maddin's most skew-whiff ideas – such as the frozen horses sunken in a snow-covered field 'like 11 knights on a great white chessboard' – assume a poignancy that outlasts their silliness. Scattershot it might be, but *My Winnipeg* nudges at the heart of what it means to dream, and how our fantasies of who we are spring from the reality of where we are.

This is articulated most sharply in the revelation of an alternative web of back lanes, known as 'black arteries', that don't appear on any map of Winnipeg – 'lanes with names known only by word-of-mouth – illicit things, best not discussed.' There's an entire tantalising mythology for this secret network, but

its real value lies in contributing another layer to Maddin's wildly fabricated Winnipeg, where veracity matters less than evocation. Who cares if, as Maddin claims, Winnipeg really has ten times the sleepwalking rate of any city in the world? What counts is that the cap fits.

The level of invention in Maddin's writing is so high that there are times when the film's visual style, for all its busyness, lags behind noticeably. The textural collage is appropriately jumbled and hallucinatory: the editing is so frenetic that many shots register only subliminally, while dissolves make the images bleed together into abstract shadows and smudges during a spooky tour of three vertically stacked swimming pools. Noirish monochrome puts up a good fight against colour inserts and burnished shadow puppetry, but this is still a film that rewards the ears more than the eyes. It's no new thing for audiences to be coerced into buying the soundtrack of a film they've just seen. On this occasion, I'm hoping there'll be an audiobook.

Ryan Gilbey, *Sight & Sound*, July 2008

Guy Maddin on 'My Winnipeg'

I firmly believe that *My Winnipeg* is a documentary, but in a pre-emptive strike against tiresome arguments I just call it a 'docu-fantasia' and that seems to at least limn out a sub-genre of documentary for itself. In addition to facts, it also presents a lot of opinions, nakedly and unashamedly so, and then it's all presented dreamily. I made a shorter film with Isabella Rossellini to mark her father Roberto's centennial (*My Dad Is 100 Years Old*, 2006) – I don't think she did any research, and yet it's full of rock-solid emotional truth. Emboldened by that and by precedents set in literature by W.G. Sebald, I went on a little Möbius-strip train trip through my home town.

Every so often you get impassioned, particularly on the subject of the destruction of much-loved buildings.

I realised I was getting obsessively vitriolic when the movie was screened to puzzled Berliners; I wondered how much empathy they might have for me when I'm griping about a couple of buildings and their entire city was pounded flat a generation ago. But I could hear in the silence of that Berlin audience a lot of poststructuralist eyebrow knitting going on.

Was the title always My Winnipeg?

There was a civic pride slogan in the 1970s that I always loved because it sounded a little bit threatening: 'Love me, love my Winnipeg.' For the longest time I was calling it that, but its working title was always *My Winnipeg*, and when it came for me to change it to my preferred title, those associated with the project wouldn't let me. Never ever have a working title.

Interview by Michael Brooke, *Sight & Sound*, July 2008

The Heart of the World

Maddin has said of his short, 'to this day the only film that turned out as I planned it.' This 4K restoration only heightens the sense of wonder produced by the filmmaker's take on Soviet propaganda filmmaking.

THE HEART OF THE WORLD

Directed by: Guy Maddin

©: Toronto International Film Festival Inc.

In participation with: TMN - The Movie Network, Super Écran, Astral Media

Presented by: Sun Life Financial

In partnership with: Téléfilm Canada

Executive Producer: Niv Fichman

Produced by: Jody Shapiro

Co-produced by: Jennifer Weiss

Casting: Barb Pritchard

Written by: Guy Maddin

Director of Photography: Guy Maddin

Co-camera: Deco Dawson

Co-editors: Guy Maddin, Deco Dawson

Production Designer: Rejean Labrie

Art Director: Olaf Dux

Costume Designer: Meg McMillan

Make-up/Hair Design: Beverly Hamilton

Music Co-ordinator: Vladimir Gabyshev

Sound Design: David McCallum

Re-recording Mixer: Lou Solakofski

Cast

Leslie Bais (*Anna*)

Caelum Vatnsdal (*Osip*)

Shaun Balbar (*Nikolai*)

Hryhory Yulyanovitch Klymkyiew (*Akmatov*)

Tammy Gillis (*Mary Magdalene*)*

Carson Nattrass (*centurion*)*

Canada 2000©

6 mins

MY WINNIPEG

Directed by: Guy Maddin

©: Paddlewheel Productions, February Pictures Inc

Produced with the participation of: Canadian Television and Cable Production, Manitoba Film and Sound Development Corporation

Produced by: Everyday Pictures, Buffalo Gal Pictures

Presented by: Documentary Channel

Produced with the assistance of: Government of Manitoba, Manitoba Film and Video Production Tax Credit, Canadian Film or Video Production, Ontario Film and Television Tax Credit Program

Produced with the participation of:

Canadian Television and Cable Production

Executive Producer: Michael Burns

Producers: Jody Shapiro, Phyllis Laing

Production Executive: Jean du Toit

Production Accountant: Colette Desjardins

Production Co-ordinators: Colleen Wowchuk, Lindsay Hamel

Production Manager: Shelly-Anne Hays

Location Manager: Sarah Jane Cundell

Post-production Co-ordinator: Lindsay Hamel

1st Assistant Director: Ronaldo Nacionales

2nd Assistant Directors: Danielle Dumesnil, Richard Duffy, Lori Stefaniuk

3rd Assistant Director: Leona Krahn

Casting: Jim Heber

Extras Casting: Patricia Kress

Screenplay: Guy Maddin

Conceived by: Guy Maddin

Additional Dialogue by: George Toles

Scenario Consultant: Noam Gonick

Director of Photography: Jody Shapiro

Lighting Directors: Michael Drabot, John Clarke

Additional Camera: Guy Maddin, Shauna Townley, Rob Thomson, Evan Johnson, Lindsay Hamel, Len Peterson, Stephan Recksiedler, Charles Venzon

1st Assistant Camera: Shauna Townley

2nd Assistant Camera: Jason Heke, Charles Venzon

Key Grip: Rob Thomson

Gaffer: John Clarke

Animation: Andy Smetanka

Train Set/Model Sequence Designer: Ricardo Alms

Editor: John Gurdebeke

Post-production by: Technicolor Creative Services (Montréal)

Assistant Editor: Ryan McKenna

Additional Editor: Matthew Hannam

Production Designer: Réjean Labrie

Art Director: Katharina Stieffenhofer

Set Decorators: Alexis Labra, Chad Giesbrecht,

Bill MacInnis, John Jennissen

Set Dresser: Allan McGowan

Props Master: Jason Gibbs

Props: Brian Barnhart

Construction Co-ordinator: Denis Duguay

Construction Co-ordinator Train Sequence: Bill Sinosich

Costume Designer: Meg McMillan

Key Make-up: Brianne Lewin

Key Hair: Ediena Hawkes

Colour Timer: Louis Casado

Film Processing: Black and White Film Factory, Exclusive Film & Video

Choreographer: Stéphane Léonard

Production Sound Mixer: Marvin Polanski

Boom Operator: Jordan Pede

Voice Over Recording Engineer: Michel Germain

Re-recording Mixer: Martin Lee

Post Sound Facility: Tattersall Sound & Picture

Sound Editors: David McCallum, Steve Medeiros,

David Rose, Jane Tattersall

Narration Interviewer: Robert Enright

Narrated by: Guy Maddin

Cast

Ann Savage

Louis Negin

Amy Stewart

Darcy Fehr

Brendan Cade

Wesley Cade

Lou Profeta

Fred Dunsmore

Kate Yacula

Jacelyn Lobay

Eric Nipp

Jennifer Palichuk

Deborah Carlson

Kevin Harris

Scott Hamel

Wayne Hamel

Althea Cornish

Olie Alto

Jeremy Dangerfield

Daniel Hussey

Tim Kiriluk

Lee Major

Roy Trumpour

Chris Turyk

John Warkentin

Will Woytowich

Brett Donahue

Canada-USA 2007©

80 mins

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* Uncredited

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