

Fest unites women in film

> BY HELEN HALBERT

On March 7, Kathryn Bigelow made history when she became the first woman to win the Academy Award for achievement in directing, for her war drama *The Hurt Locker*. Her win underlined the fact that women are just as capable behind the camera as men, but it also raised some questions, such as why was Bigelow one of only four women ever to be nominated in the category? Why did it take more than 80 years of Oscars for a female director to win?

Roslyn Muir, chair of Vancouver's Women in Film Festival, says she believes that the issue of unequal female representation—particularly in directing, writing, and producing as well as in lead acting roles—remains largely invisible.

"People ask me, 'Well, why do you have Women in Film? Women are in films; we see them all the time,'" Muir tells the *Straight* over the phone. "But she's not the leading person, she's not the director, she's not the producer. She's kind of the fluff in the corner."

Women are anything but fluff in the films screening at this year's Women in Film Festival (www.womeninfilmm.ca/), taking place this weekend (April 17 and 18) at the Vancity Theatre.

"Our criteria is that each film should have three positions above the line [filled by women]—so that would be, like, director, producer, lead actor, editor, writer," Muir explains of the selection process for festival programming. The unique criterion ensures the inclusion of films made by women while allowing for submissions of films that are directed by men or centred on a male protagonist.

The festival—now in its fifth year—includes the Real Women; Real Life documentary series, pitching sessions for filmmakers and actors, and Female Firsts, a collection of



Nicholas Campbell and Tara Nicodemo improvise in *A Wake*, a feature directed by Vancouverite Penelope Buitenhuis that kicks off the Women in Film Festival.

shorts by first-time directors. Other highlights include an opening-night screening of Vancouver director Penelope Buitenhuis's entirely improvised feature *A Wake* and a Women in View panel that will explore some of the reasons female filmmakers are underrepresented in the industry.

Fortunately, the festival hasn't been as affected by arts cuts as other local events, partly because of contributions from sponsors and members of Women in Film. It's also because the festival hasn't received much government funding at all over the years, despite the fact that a study completed last year by Women in Film and Television Vancouver found that the proportion of female-directed films included in film festivals across Canada hovers around just 20 percent.

"We've actually found it difficult

to get funding for a women's film festival, believe it or not," Muir says. "Often we're told, 'Well, we don't really need another film festival in Vancouver.'"

But the statistics show that women are far from being on par with men when it comes to holding above-the-line positions, regardless of recent recognition of directors like Bigelow, Lone Scherfig (*An Education*), and Jane Campion (*Bright Star*), which may lead some to believe that the struggle of female filmmakers for equal representation is a thing of the past.

"We need to be careful," warns Muir. "They're still having problems getting into predominantly male industries. Everybody thinks the problem was solved in the '70s, but it's still ongoing." ♦