

## REALITY SHOWS

THE RENCONTRES INTERNATIONALES DU DOCUMENTAIRE MAY NOT BE COOL BUT IT FEATURES SOME HOT FILMS

MEG HEWINGS



ROGER TOUPIN, ÉPICIER VARIÉTÉ: BOUGHT AND SOLD

Sometimes earnest “uncool” documentaries can be very cool. For the past six years, Montreal’s foremost documentary forum, *Rencontres internationales du documentaire*, has tirelessly championed the less flashy (dare I say, more “Canadian”) tenets of documentary filmmaking: modesty and patience. In the age of fast, sexy and cheaply made versions of “reality,” *Rencontres* is dedicated to a rich array of direct, often intimate stories (international and homemade) that don’t necessarily fit the TV mould, but which doc and cinema enthusiasts – heck, all those with an attention span longer than five minutes – are bound to love.

With over 90 films showing during the week-long *rencontre*, there are far too many movies, good workshops and round tables to recommend in such a short space. But without further ado, here are a few that have particularly blown my mind, ticked my funny bone or awed my senses.

### Roger Toupin, épicier variété

I cried four times (four!) during the screening of Benoit Pilon’s home-grown documentary about a man who’s been running his family’s small grocery store on a quiet Plateau street for the past 25 years. Maybe it’s because the story takes place here in Montreal, or because it makes palpable the effects of gentrification and the rapid-fire changes we’ve all seen happening in the district over the years. Maybe it’s the way in which the camera painstakingly lingers on one small store, and its increasingly barren shelves and aging patrons – or how it seems to mimic the very manner in which Roger himself dotes on his store and its visitors.

Whatever the particular brand of magic at work here, this film is utterly stunning, at once beautiful, achingly sad and all-consuming. Roger Toupin is the best kind of everyman – a character that gives of himself in a humble, gracious and extraordinary manner.

Shot over many years, the camera settles in amidst the dusty candy jars, catches under Roger’s yellowed fingernails, is moved by the plucking of old violins, and makes you see the extreme Montreal seasons bloom and die, over and over again, through an endearingly lazy, hazy eye.

And slowly, the film becomes its own artful meditation on the perpetual wait for closure, on the passage of time, on age and nostalgia, and on community and family. More than a masterful portrait of the effects of the changing pace and face of urban life, *Roger Toupin* is a graceful homage to a particular way of life in Montreal that is fast disappearing. Whatever you do, don’t miss it.