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First Ever Spotlight Gala Sold Out!

Test of Our Status a Resounding Success

The ballroom at the Hotel Vancouver got tarted up, we all got dressed up, even the god Shiva came in drag for the first ever Women in the Spotlight Gala.

The event served as a test - a test to the status of our awards and to whether four women's arts organizations could work together well enough to pull off a high-class event without going broke or looking shamefully inept in the process. Did we pass? I say, with resounding applause, yes!

Sure, there were one or two programming glitches, but overall the sold-out evening was even better than I had expected. I wasn't expecting the high-tech media show that introduced the different groups or highlighted the work of several recipients – kudos to whomever scored that support

and expertise. I wasn't expecting dinner to be so yummy (flashback to VIFF and you know what I mean), but the salmon melted on my palate like ice cream on a hot day - for those of us who can still remember a hot day. I also wasn't expecting Sarah McLachlan to show...gee, no surprise there.

When the house lights came

corner WIFVV award winners for a quote. First accosted was Mary Ungerleider, up from her home in Victoria sporting a short new do and glowing from daughter Suzi's recent Genie award. Husband Charles was at Mary's side, gratefully acknowledged for his support and patience during the time she spent with us. Ungerleider's speech also had the dutiful "Many, many other wonderful people deserve one of these awards" clause which, though gracious, belied the hours and hours of behind-the-scenes work she did for us while WIFVV President. Considering that few women, other than actresses, achieve any status in this biz and are properly recognized for their contributions...well, I guess I'm still waiting for the woman who'll just get up and say, "I worked hard, I deserve this, thank you."

I then cornered Producer Camelia Frieberg who admitted to the joy of receiving recognition for a role rarely acknowledged by the media. In an industry focussed on stars – star actors, star directors – the one who brings it all together is usually left watching from the sidelines. Said Frieberg, "When you produce you're so used to being in the background and the limelight generally doesn't drift far enough to include the producer, and so the thanklessness of the task; you know, you have to find different rewards and there are lots of other rewards like seeing the films get out there and do well - but to actually receive the kind of honor this is and to be able to get up there and talk about

yourself and the people who make it possible for you to do what you're doing, that's an amazing opportunity."

It was also amazing luck those many years ago when Frieberg hooked up with the then-unknown Atom Egoyan, whose The Sweet Hereafter took Frieberg to the Oscars last year. What made the moment so sweet was the international recognition for someone who, as Frieberg says, "very strongly identifies himself as Canadian." When I remarked that I often feel that Canadian film is where Canadian music was 10 years ago before the Shania Twains and Celine Dions cleaned up at the Grammys, Frieberg interjected, "And before the CRTC regulations came into effect." A good point and one that should be heeded by

broadcasters, legislators, and

Spotted Sandy Flanagan next who, like Frieberg, brought his mother to dinner. Figuring she'd have the better

those dishing out the dough. The question an event like Women in the Spotlight raises isn't "Do we have the talent?" but rather "Do we want to nurture our own or do we want to continue to import it?"

stories I introduced myself and innocently asked Mrs. Charmian Shaforost if it were true this was the first award Sandy's gotten since a bowling trophy at the age of ten. Found out there was a swimming prize at the age of six as well but no, nothing since pre-adolescent bowling. Was just about to get the low-down on Sandy's childhood when a voice from behind demanded to know "What are you doing with my mother, with a tape recorder?" Busted.

Finally, tried in vain to find Sylvia Jonescu Lisitza amidst the stragglers but gave up and headed with friends to the bar. And this, perhaps, was my only beef about the evening: little opportunity to talk with friends or schmooze. Would have liked to introduce myself to members of our co-hosts - Canadian Women in Communications, Wired Women, and Women in Music – since this was one of the rare opportunities to do so. Would have liked to chat with our Global hosts, Simi Sara and Suzette Meyers. Would also have liked to talk to representatives of the event's many sponsors and dance to a bit more Mother of Pearl, but no such luck.

At \$50 a head the evening was reasonably priced, even more so for me as a pal picked up the tab. Still, the reality of the average woman filmmaker's poverty was not lost on me later as I stood in the freezing rain waiting for the bus. Woke up Saturday morning with a cold and blamed it on the wrath of Kali.



Michelle Demers