

BROCK'S BANTER: Sober Second Thoughts

By Brock Weir

'Bullying is very hot this year,' joked Aurora filmmaker Alex Broughton Thursday at the Aurora Cultural Centre during the intermission for Aurora screening on the Multimedia Film Festival of York Region's Circuit of York Region.

The film festival culminates next Wednesday with the closing night awards gala and if the sampling screened last week is any indication, Aurora could have some top winners in the mix once again this year.

Our discussion followed several films made by elementary school students, many of whom, for better or worse, had similar but distinct takes on bullying, evidently a subject uppermost on their minds.

Some of the films showed the effects of bullying on their victim, another took a different tack of putting one's self in the shoes of the bully himself. Yet another one touched upon cyber bullying, complemented by another, urging people who are at one with their laptops, Blackberries, and iPhones to disconnect, at least for a little while, and take in the world around them.

It is a testament to the sad state of affairs that these themes are represented so frequently and so evocatively at each and every outing of the Multimedia Film Festival.

Speaking strictly as an armchair critic who spends more than his fair share at movie theatres the length and breadth of the Greater Toronto Area, this is a veritable hotbed of filmmaking talent and it should come as no surprise when, a decade or two from now, we hear much more from these thoughtful kids.

Reflecting on the films afterwards, however, I couldn't help but wonder what emotions and political commentary they would be putting in their films of today if they got their start in 1993, or even 2003. If their keen eyes and raw emotions carried them through their careers, avoiding commercialism or cynicism, they would have no shortage of material to work with by simply leafing through the national newspapers over the past week.

Vivid photo and video essays practically write themselves on the latest, hazy exploits of the once and incumbent Mayor of Toronto Rob Ford, or the awe-inspiring transformation of Mike Duffy from a person who was, just a few short years ago a byword for inspired and insightful political commentary, to a satirist's dream, embodying everything that is wrong with Canada's senate.

DEATH BY 1,000 CUTS

Let me say at the outset I do not support an elected Senate. I do not see the purpose of yet another chamber divided by party lines and elected on a mandate which could ebb and flow with the tide of public opinion. Canadians deserve something more, but what might be is the big question.

For those of you on the electoral boat, however, these past two weeks must have been something of a mental pleasure cruise. Unless, of course, your name is Stephen Harper.

One must step back and question whether his handling of the spending debacle for certain members of what was once purported to be the nation's primary chamber of 'sober second thought' was either a spectacular error of judgement, or a cunning plan not unlike a controlled burn.

Now, we shouldn't believe it is simply a spectacular error of judgement, after all, if recent television commercials indicate, if a politician wears a hard hat, he means serious business.

If it was discovered that these senators had significantly damaged whatever dignity remained in the upper chamber, letting it continue (perhaps until just before your own Chief of Staff was about to be implicated) would serve to underscore perceived inequities in the unelected, patronage filled corridor.

It would drive home the view an elected senate would somehow be a magic bullet, curing the senate of all its ills that have compounded over the last 146 years. Surely the public will want reforms.

Or will it drive home an idea that the senate is completely useless altogether and it is time to push the fat cats gently out the door to go out on their own into the night?

From my perspective, not all is lost. Although Senators seem determined to bring pox after pox directly onto their houses, I believe there is still room in this country for, yes, a 'sober second thought', although it will be foolhardy to suggest we should leave well enough alone.

Appointments as is, under party lines, do nothing to diminish the sense that this is a room where political cronies go to die.

In an ideal world, political lines would be dropped, vacancies would be filled by a panel of eminent Canadians, they themselves selected in whatever process citizens find most palatable, based on their own qualifications and the variety of valuable input they can

bring to public discourse.

They would not be beholden to a party or changing tastes, and can bring something valuable and productive into play.

But, alas, I fully concede that is merely my ideal with no chance of that ever happening. Instead, the Mike Duffies and Patrick Brazeaux of the Senate will continue to shape the future of the chamber.

CORRECTION

Last week we reported on Aurora dancer Eric Abel landing a significant role in the upcoming Toronto production of CATS. The show is actually being produced by Marlene Smith with Nu Musical Theatricals Inc. in association with Classical Theatre Project and Starvox Entertainment.