

filmcomment

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SUNDOCS: MEMORY CAPSULES

By Rachel Rosen

ROBERT REDFORD WAS mostly absent from this year's festival, at work on *The Horse Whisperer*, but Sundance maintained its share of celebrity interest as the humanism of the 1997 nonfiction crop gave ground to the notoriety of '98. At times it seemed there were more famous people on screen in documentaries than in the audience. Topics ranged from the beautiful to the simply bold, from B-movie players (*Some Nudity Required*) to supermodels (*Beautopia*), from music icons (*Lou Reed: Rock and Roll Heart*) to celebrity killers. The biggest of them all, Nick Broomfield's *Kurt and Courtney*, about the suicide of Nirvana's Kurt Cobain and the possible role played by his wife, Courtney Love, gained even more notoriety by being pulled from the festival under legal pressure. What kind of portrait will this accelerated documentation of popular/celebrity culture leave of the end of our century? What might future generations make of *Party Monster's*

willing subject, club-promoter-turned-unrepentant-killer Michael Alig, secure in the belief that his sheer fabulousness made him a worth filming?

Still, several Competition films focused on more intimate stories to make art from the simple horrors of everyday life. Ellen Bruno's *Sacrifice* uses the beauty of the natural world to underscore the tragedy of young Burmese women and their seemingly inexorable descent

into prostitution in Thailand. Bruno makes wonderful use of the video format that has become the norm for independent docs: Pixel-ated images turn the face of a young Burmese girl dancing by a fire into a surreal topographical map of potential future suffering.

Vicky Funari's *Paulina* also uses the natural world as a counterpoint to human suffering in her moving portrayal of the difficult past and spunky present of an exceptional woman. Paulina's early life in Veracruz was speckled with hardship; misidentified as a rape victim, she suddenly lost her child status and was later traded by her father to the town boss for land. Funari uses beautifully cast and photographed dramatic reenactments intercut with interviews to present multilayered and shifting perspectives on Paulina's past. The crafting

of the film – details like the framing of still photographs in leaves or shells – is impressive, but in the end it's Paulina's engaging, forthright personality that makes the film soar.

Paulina

A non-fiction feature film from CineMamás Productions

