

'Air India 182' opens Hot Docs fest

By BRUCE KIRKLAND - Sun Media

TORONTO - Documentary films can change the world. Just ask Al Gore, host of An Inconvenient Truth. Now Toronto filmmaker Sturla Gunnarsson wants to change Canada, in a subtle but significant way, with Air India 182.

Gunnarsson's brilliantly crafted film made its world premiere yesterday as the opening night gala of the Canadian program in Hot Docs. It repeat screens today at 1:30 p.m. in the Isabel Bader Theatre.



This film will haunt viewers and shake them from complacency as it recreates, examines and reinterprets what Gunnarsson is calling "the most deadly act of air terrorism in history before 9/11." Most of the 329 victims of the bombing, in June of 1985, were Canadian citizens. Yet a true understanding of this disaster eludes most Canadians, according to the filmmaker. His film is geared to change that -- in dramatic fashion.

Air India 182 is one of the hottest of the Hot Docs as the 15th annual edition of the festival gets underway. By the final curtain on April 27, Hot Docs will have screened 173 documentary films from 36 countries. No one has seen them all, including this critic. We offer highlights, but there are other gems to be discovered:

* Air India 182: Gunnarsson succeeds by meticulously piecing together available evidence, dramatizing the human element of families who lost loved ones, and interviewing everyone available. That includes retired CSIS and RCMP investigators. The results, seamlessly juxtaposed, transform this doc into a classic of its genre and an important page of Canadian history.