

This land is most definitely our land

Under Rich Earth takes a look at the environmental impact of Canada's mining concerns in Ecuador

• CHRISTOPHER OLSON

"The dispute about large-scale mining in Intag has been going on for over a decade and is a very complex one," says writer, producer and director Malcolm Rogge, whose film *Under Rich Earth* will screen at Cinema Politica next week.

The film analyzes the environmental as well as social impact of Canada's powerful mining industry from all sides.

Canadian mining company, Ascendant Copper, has mining interests all across South America and decided to set up a copper mine in Intag, a small community in Ecuador. Unfortunately for Ascendant Copper, the local inhabitants thought the land had something more to offer than copper.

Ten years earlier, the residents of Intag successfully fought off Bishi Metals, a Japanese mining company, who were also trying to set up a mining operation. They burnt the company's buildings to the ground—a tactic they took out of their toolbox a second time in 2005 when threatened by Ascendant Copper.

"They did so basically out of desperation," says Rogge, who has a degree in Law and Environmental Studies from York University, and who spent some time in Ecuador back in the late 1990s, when this whole issue began.

Returning to Ecuador in 2006, Rogge started filming just four months before all hell broke loose.

"Once I had heard that the company had actually resorted to using paramilitaries, I went to Ecuador right away," he said. "The people of Intag were very curious, why a Canadian journalist travelling on a bus with a pack of film equipment was there, and wanted to make this film."

That the Toronto Stock Market financed the mining project contributed in part to his interest in making the film. Rogge lives very near the Toronto institution.

While the company referred to the actions of the residents of Intag as an act of ecoterrorism, Rogge says the term is relative.

"There's an old adage, one person's freedom fighter is another person's terrorist."

Based on an environmental impact assessment endorsed by Bishi Motors themselves, large-scale open-pit mining would have resulted in a gradual desertification of the valley of Intag. From their perspective, burning down Ascendant Copper was an act of self-defence.

"I don't think anyone is arguing that these mining projects don't have a massive impact," says Rogge. "The question is where you build these mines."

In order to get a balanced perspective, Rogge incorporated footage from multiple sources.

"I had to weave material together that was ultimately collected by dozens of people, but it was my own film. It was important to maintain that independence."

At one point, says Rogge, Ascendant Copper told him they were making their own documentary film to counter bad press.

"In fact, people saw the company employees with cameras, and I know they have footage because they showed it to me when I met them."

Forced to face the negative media exposure garnered by the project, however, Ascendant Copper was forced not only to relinquish their mining claims, but to change the name of their company.

"*The Northern Miner*, which is one of the leading mining newspapers in Canada, came



One of the residents of Intag after an altercation with one of Ascendant Copper's paramilitary groups.

to see the film in the Toronto International Film Festival," says Rogge, "and they published an editorial the next week recommending it and saying that it serves as a classic example for Canadian companies on how not to handle community relations."

But as before, no one in Intag can rest assured that the issue will ever be put to rest.

"Mining is not just going to go away," says Rogge. "But up until that point, the whole issue of mining, and the balance between eco-

nomics development and ecological impact had not been debated until these incidents. In many ways, that national debate was sparked by the events that took place in the film."

Under Rich Earth will be screened on Monday, Feb. 23 at 7:30 p.m. and will be screened in Room H-110, 1455 de Maisonneuve Blvd. Director Malcolm Rogge will be attending the screening. For a full list of screenings, check out cinemapolitica.org/concordia.

Life outside of the womb

Meet The Silly Kissers!

• CODY HICKS

If you're familiar with my column, you'll know I'm guitar-centric.

Although you couldn't pay me to listen to most modern electronic music, I do have a guilty affinity for syrupy synth-pop. I've got a closet obsession with the New Romantic movement of the '80s and groups like New Order and Depeche Mode.

Now, I'm an all-or-nothing kind of guy, so when I want cheesy dance music, I want it to be to the ultimate, and in my books that would be The Human League whose biggest hit "Don't You Want Me Baby" is always close at hand in case I feel like doing a little bit of no bones flail dancing.

I didn't think anything could top the guy-girl vocal drama of that jam but local act The Silly Kissers have come dangerously

close. When I first heard the quivering female vocals dancing around the smooth male croon on "You're The One," the second track on their new record *Love Tsunami*, I was hooked.

I'm skeptical about anything that's too derivative of its influences, but the raw honesty and passion dripping from the band's lyrics and the deceptively complex bleeps and bleeps is undeniable.

The Silly Kissers were conceived in the fall of 2007 as the lovechild of Sean Savage and Dave Carriere, two Edmonton ex-pats who wanted to make the synth-pop record of their dreams. They originally did it for kicks, but when friends and family got hold of the record they demanded more.

Savage's name will be familiar to *The Link* readers, as he's been a media darling since he moved to Montreal and unleashed his new

album *Little Submarine*. I decided to lure the other three Kissers into my bedroom for a speed-dating style interrogation on the live debut at the Art Matters festival, starting with the effervescently bubbly Jane Penny, the group's secret weapon.

Although Penny is a classically trained flutist, she is not only a first time band member, but a first time singer.

"Singing was never fun for me, but when I was offered these songs that are so glittery and shiny I couldn't resist," she says.

"I unexpectedly loved being on-stage," she says, her words interspersed with machine gun laughter. "These songs have such wild electronic textures and they make you wanna dance like crazy. Plus the beer helps."

She also has a secret method of building confidence: taking it to the streets. If you see a freckly red-

head belting out heartfelt lovesick lyrics walking down the street wearing headphones, it's probably Penny.

Next up on keyboards is the gentlemanly Jeremy Freeze who is an aspiring video game soundtrack composer. Although he's performed in a few groups in his hometown of Fredericton this will be his first time onstage in Montreal and he's apprehensive about recreating the robotic digital sounds of the record onstage.

"Some of the parts are kind of hard," he says. "Because they were recorded digitally they weren't written with the intention of being performed on an instrument, by a human."

But he is persevering; making adjustments to humanize the music, making it possible to perform live. Freeze has seen a lot in his days as a keyboardist.

Tragically, his first keyboard

died in a car accident in grade 10. Luckily for us, rather than succumb to the trauma, he chose to keep playing through the pain.

Lastly Carriere, the squinty and soft-spoken heart of The Silly Kissers, conducted this interview sprawled out on his tummy. He is perhaps the most concerned about their live debut, because he will be attempting to replicate the icy synth sounds of the record live on his guitar.

"It's really weird because we wrote the songs first and now we have to learn how to play them," says Carriere with a nervous smile. The kid is a charmer, and I'm confident his studio wizardry will come across onstage.

So, come catch the glory, the passion and the swimsuits of The Silly Kissers debut this Thursday at Bain Mathieu, 2915 Ontario E. for the Art Matters festival opening party.