

Tokens are a friendly gesture

So far, the Toronto film festival's new ticketing innovation has been little more than a "token gesture."

But big American reviewers like Roger Ebert are singing its praises anyway.

"Good idea," said Ebert, arriving for his 14th festival in as many years. "Now, why don't we get them to do this at Cannes?"

As a means of reducing lineup squabbles, coupon- and pass-holders are, for the first time, being given a paper "token" as they arrive at the theatre for evening and weekend screenings, excluding galas.

Once the tokens have been handed out, late arrivals are told seats are no longer available. It means, theoretically, that they still have enough time to get to another movie.

But, with smaller crowds than expected at some Friday night screenings, buffs hardly had to worry about guaranteeing their place.

Festival volunteer Bonnie Rubins still had a thick wad of tokens as the lights went down for Australian director Paul Cox's *Golden Braid* in the big, 708-seat Varsity 2.

Needed or not, the new system



still earned rave reviews: "It's a little fairer," said 29-year-old Eileen Melnick, who showed up an hour early for *Golden Braid*.

"Last year you could stand in line for 1½ hours not knowing if you could get in. With the tokens, you know right away."



Cancer is never an easy subject, but for Montreal film maker Giles Walker, his movie about a summer camp for terminally ill kids had an even deeper resonance. Walker's first wife died of leukemia 17 years ago, and he feared that the making of *Princes In Exile* — it has its final festival screening at Cumberland 3 this morning at 10.45 — would open old wounds.

"It's something I had basically tried to put behind me, because I'm remarried and have two children," Walker told me. "I was terrified that doing the film would put me right back into a very painful time."

But the director of *Masculine Mystique*, *90 Days* and *The Final Straw* admits he was drawn inexorably to the project after making a 1988 visit to the Hole In The Wall Gang camp for cancer victims in Connecticut.

"The main thing was that every time I make a film it turns out to be a harrowing experience and it has to be, otherwise it's not any good," he says.

"The only time I've been caught flat-footed is when I'm overconfident."

At the Connecticut camp — built by actor Paul Newman — Walker encountered young children with unimaginably debilitating illnesses.

But more than that, he was drawn to the "inner strength" of the young victims, most of whom had learned to cope with cancer.

"Being a parent, myself, I find it almost impossible to contemplate what it must be like," says Walker.

As a director, however, he has fashioned a truthful, moving and ultimately life-affirming story.

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