



ADVOCATE*insider*

May 17, 2007

Three Good Movies In A Row

That's rare at any time of the year. But at a film festival like Cannes you usually spend the first two or three days wading through the junk, wondering if you'll ever see a good movie again. The programmers save the good movies for the heart of the fest, with one or two surprises for the end. But at the beginning, when many journalists still haven't arrived? You're usually seeing the filler. Not this year.

We've already seen a strong Romanian film about life under communism and a memorable French film about the complications of sexuality and friendship among three 15 year old girls. And now I've just come back from *The Banishment*, a sober two and a half hour film from the director of the acclaimed movie *The Return*. Bleak? Quiet? Slow? Check, check, and check. Throw in some music by Arvo Part and a short story by ready-to-be-reappraised author William Saroyan and you've got yourself an art house hit.

My roommates had mixed reactions, so we'll have to wait for the reviews tomorrow to see if more people agree with me or them. But clearly the director is a major talent to watch. -- Michael Giltz

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Too Busy Covering The Fest To ATTEND The Fest

CANNES -- May 17 evening

In previous years, I've come to Cannes with my lowly yellow badge, filed one or two stories (often after it was over) and soaked up the movies. I've seen as many as 40 movies here at one festival, pretty amazing when there are really about eight days filled with screenings. This year, I'm blogging daily for The Advocate and writing features for several other publications. The result? I have to go to so many press conferences and round tables (a chance to interview a celeb alongside five or so other journalists instead of one on one) and special events (like Seinfeld's Bee Movie stunt this morning) that I don't have any time to actually ATTEND the fest. File this under:

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irony.

Late this afternoon, I had to do a last minute story for the New York Daily News. That meant missing a screening of Leonardo DiCaprio's environmental documentary *The 11th Hour* and that means having to skip the round table interview with DiCaprio tomorrow and that means I wasted my time reading Edmund Morris's *The Rise Of Theodore Roosevelt* in preparation. (Huh? DiCaprio is linked to a biopic about the young Teddy Roosevelt and I wanted to read the book for background and in case I could tie in a question to the movie that involved TR -- Teddy was a big player in the early days of the conservation movement. Of course it wasn't a total loss. The book was very good.)

Now I'm grabbing a bite to eat and heading off to *The Banishment*, a two and a half hour film from the director of *The Return* (one of my favorites when it came out about three years ago). It starts at 10 p.m. which means home and in bed by 1:30 or 2 a.m. (thank God there's no more *Idol* till next week) and then up again at 7:30. -- Michael Giltz

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Getting In Synch With "Water Lillies"



CANNES -- May 17 early afternoon

I can't remember the last Cannes festival that could boast of two good films right at the beginning. But that's the delightful surprise of *Water Lillies*, a serious film about first love. (No one takes childhood or first love more seriously than the French.)

First time director Celine Sciamma peers intimately into the lives of three 15 year old girls exploring their sexuality against a backdrop of competitive synchronized swimming. Anne is heavy and determined to lose her virginity as soon as possible, preferably to the dashing Francois. Floriane is naturally sexy and flirtatious but hasn't actually slept with anyone, even her nominal boyfriend, the ever-present

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Francois. And then there's our heroine Marie (a gawky Pauline Acquart with lovely full lips who will clearly be a beauty when she grows up). Marie is friends with Anne but shadows the black sheep Floriane around, becoming so besotted with her that she steals Floriane's trash and even eats scraps of food that were thrown away by her.

Beautiful and sharp-edged without being sad, it has some quiet passages that are grippingly frank. Water Lillies is one to mark down. It's pure art house fare, but anyone who can't see it in a theater will definitely want to check out the DVD. I've already arranged to chat with the director tomorrow morning and will let you know what the 27 year old Sciamma is like.

-- Michael Giltz

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It's A Bird, It's A Plane, It's...Jerry Seinfeld?



Photo: Getty
CANNES -- May 17 noonish

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Jerry Seinfeld donned a giant bee suit, perched on top of the Carlton Hotel and then plunged down across the street to the beach below. Of course, there were guide wires and about a million safety precautions. It was a silly stunt to promote his Nov 2 animated film Bee Movie.

Costar Chris Rock narrated the stunt for the assembled mob of photographers and international press, insisting that Seinfeld looked like "an insane Pittsburgh Pirates fan!" Seinfeld (heard on a mike and seen on a big screen projection while performing the stunt) said, "One thing I hate is any sort of movie promotion that smacks of desperation." Then he jumped off the building and waved his arms and legs in a silly fashion while gliding some eight stories to the ground. His mike was on during the entire event, but there was no worry that jitters might cause him to curse.

During interviews, Rock reminded us that Seinfeld skydives and bungee jumps for fun. I'm sure Jerry would have been delighted to hear the press corps while he was getting ready. Virtually every group you passed included someone saying, "Gee, wouldn't it be a story if something went wrong?" Just as scary was watching the reporters swarm over the free food after the thrill ride was over. And no, it can't be avoided: that's one nutty way to build buzzzzzz for a movie. -- Michael Giltz

Posted at 11:51 AM in [Cannes Film Festival](#) | [Permalink](#) | [Comments \(0\)](#) | [TrackBack \(0\)](#)

The Problem With A Gay Roommate

CANNES -- May 17 early morning

Hey, after years of Canne-ing it with friendly straight guys, I was looking forward to a gay roomie. Who else could I chat with about the forbiddingly handsome security guards found at every entrance to the Palais? But now I know there's a downside. The two straight guys take about 5 minutes in the bathroom each morning, tops. (And that includes the shower. I'm not sure they even know where the soap is.) But the new roomie? Half an hour, complete with blowdryer and the clock was ticking before the first event of the day. Of course, when he did come out, he looked great, which made it all the more annoying. -- Michael Giltz

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May 16, 2007

Late Night Revelation

CANNES -- May 16 late at night

So four of us go out to La Pizza, the surprisingly good pizza joint that is a cheap refuge for people at the fest without an expense account. It could flourish in New York City - the pizza is that good.

One of my roommates is attempting a crazy stunt: he has avoided the trade papers for months and wants to sit down for the 22 Competition screenings without the slightest idea of what's in store. He doesn't want to know the director or the stars or even the title. He'll be testing the auteur theory but mostly just having fun. It's almost impossible, really: every building in town is adorned with movie posters, everyone is talking about the movies they've seen and the movies to come to the exclusion of all else; he can't even pick up his own mail. But with an iPod to block out distractions and keeping his eyes on the ground, he's determined to avoid every scrap of info. He has no idea that Gus Van Sant and Julian Schnabel and Kim Ki-Duk (one of his personal favorites) are all screening movies here. It does make dinner conversation difficult. We resort to discussing old movies and catching ourselves every so often from spilling the beans.

When we get home, the new roomie returns from...Le Pink Bar. He says both Le Pink and Zanzibar were pretty quiet and he didn't care for Le Pink: it's just like the gay bars he avoids at home. Well, that answers that.

Up Thursday: Jerry Seinfeld is screening footage to promote his animated film, a remake of The Red Balloon comes courtesy of Hou Hsian Hsien and actress Juliette Binoche, Russian director Andrei Zviagintsev follows up his marvelous drama The Return, I'm seeing Leonardo DiCaprio's environmental documentary The 11th Hour, sitting with Seinfeld and Chris Rock at a roundtable, and hopefully seeing Water Lillies, whose suggestive poster implies some Sapphic content. -- Michael Giltz

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Dark, Dour and Depressing -- It's The First Good Film!

The other Competition film screening today is Four Months, Three Weeks and Two Days, a Romanian film about life under communism in the Eighties as seen through the eyes of two college women. They're arranging a secret abortion just two years before it would become legal. The film has such a dark and depressing air (corruption and indifference is rampant, hallways and street corners are invariably poorly lit, etc.) that you can't but thank your luck stars you didn't have to live there. (I'm sure Romania is far brighter now.)

The film is quietly gripping as it follows the one young woman all day long. She buys cigarettes on the black market, slips onto a public bus without a ticket, meets the abortionist, reserves the hotel room, has an uncomfortable dinner celebrating the birthday of her boyfriend's mother and finally disposes of the fetus. Unblinking, powerful, with some quietly remarkable scenes, it's pure fest fare that will please critics and do well in art houses. It's very, very early, but the audience

applauds strongly and the lead actress could well be remembered come award time on May 27.

This is why we come to festivals -- to see unheralded movies by new talents who could flourish into important filmmakers in the years to come. Sometimes you'll go three or four days at the fest before seeing anything decent and here's something good on the first day? It bodes well.

Back at my apartment, the new roomie speaks smartly about American Idol but doesn't bother to join me when I mention I'll be watching it on my Slingbox. So is he gay? I think so, but with kids these days, who can tell?

-- Michael Giltz

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The Battle Of The Bars

CANNES -- May 16, late afternoon

For many festgoers, the hot spot that people congregate at for late night beers and networking changes from year to year. But for the queer crowd, a mainstay has been Zanzibar: Bar Musical. When John Cameron Mitchell's sweet-natured *Shortbus* premiered at Cannes last year, many of the beautiful young men in the cast could be found drinking and hobnobbing at Zanzibar. But just three doors down from Zanzibar is Le Pink Bar. It has a very pink awning, retro-mod white stools and a bigger sidewalk patio. To top it off, there's a gay pride sticker on the front door I've never noticed before and you won't have that old Billy Joel running through your mind when you walk inside. Could there be a fight between the two for the gay crowd? Having them so close together almost seems cruel. If one of them triumphs, the other will look all the more forlorn. I'll have to check them out later tonight after I return home from my last screening. -- Michael Giltz

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My Blackberry Days and Blueberry Nights





CANNES -- May 16, late afternoon

I don't hold out much hope of getting into the second and final screening of *My Blueberry Nights*, the film debut of Norah Jones, but I arrive early. There's nothing else left to do (almost no movies are showing on the first day). Unfortunately, that's also why a lot of people will show up for it. I enjoy my first showdown with a French journalist who tries to cut the line (they think lines only apply to foreigners). And then, as if by magic, a clueless new guard (most of them return year after year and I know them by sight) bizarrely decides to let in the yellow badges before the blue or the pink or the white badges. A ripple of panic spreads through the blue-badged reporters as we scurry up the red carpet hoping to get in before someone realizes their mistake. This isn't like getting a Golden Ticket to Willy Wonka's factory. It's better: it's like getting into the factory while all the people with Golden Tickets are kept outside and wondering what went wrong.

My delight is dimmed when I realize the word of mouth from the first screening must have been poisonous. The theater is easily 4/5ths empty, which is really shocking considering there are absolutely no other movies to see and the esteem Wong Kar Wai is held in here. My friends had been politely nonplussed by the film but I was sorely disappointed. I loved *In The Mood For Love* and admired or loved much of his earlier work. I even found *2046* -- widely considered merely "more of the same" -- enjoyable, perhaps because I was literally the last person to get into its one and only screening at Cannes when a crush of frantic filmgoers practically rioted (no exaggeration) when they realized no more seats were available.

Norah Jones stars as a wandering waitress trying to get over a broken heart. It almost plays like a parody of Wong Kar Wai, what with the gleaming surfaces, stunningly gorgeous women and repetitive use of music. Rachel Weisz and Natalie Portman do look amazing -- any woman who ever gets a chance to work with him knows she'll never look better. And singer Norah Jones has nothing to be ashamed about. If Wong Kar Wai asked me to be in his movie, I would too, even if I couldn't act. She's a mild presence, mostly listening while the people around her tell their stories and often narrating cliché after cliché. Jones certainly isn't the problem with this misfire, though she's not a plus either; I doubt somehow she'll be making many other movies. It might have worked better with the distance of a period piece and in a foreign language. (Never underestimate the power of a foreign language to help you accept sentimentality and cliché at the movies.) But really, does anyone need to go cross country just to realize that Jude Law is worth kissing? Chan Marhsall aka Cat Power has a fun cameo and her song "The Greatest" is featured prominently.

Maybe Wong chose the wrong muse? Cannes' favorite son is definitely due for a comeback now, an odd thing to say about one of the most accomplished directors of the last 15 years. But it's true. -- Michael Giltz

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Ooo-la-la and a Lot Of Groveling

CANNES -- May 16 afternoon

The first official day at Cannes is atypical, with most journalists still arriving and people just starting to establish a routine. The biggest theater at Cannes is the Lumiere, a massive single-screen complex that houses 1000+ journalists in a room with a massive balcony, loads of security and an exposed ceiling of pipes and gridwork that seems to say: we take movies very seriously. For most of the fest, the first screening of the day is a major film in competition and is shown at the Lumiere, where every critic is guaranteed a seat. For the rest of the day, it's catch as catch can in a series of other theaters where your badge color determines when you can enter. Pink, delightfully, is better than blue and blue is better than the lowly yellow. I have a yellow badge, which means I will stand forlornly in line as people with pink and even white badges stride in (I don't even know anyone with a white badge, it's so rare and powerful), and then five minutes before the film begins and then and only then if all the blues are in and there are still seats left the yellow badges might get to trickle in. Half of navigating Cannes is figuring out what screenings to shoot for and when you should get in line. But today is not typical.

The opening film is Wong Kar Wai's *My Blueberry Nights* and it's showing at the Debussy. The second nicest theater, it only seats about 800; a hot ticket can be very hard to get into with a yellow badge. The director is a favorite of Cannes so of course the screening is mobbed and not even all the blues get in. More than a hundred people are turned away, including all of the yellow badges (like myself) who fruitlessly got in line. So I spend the rest of the morning going around to publicity offices and begging and pleading and groveling for invites to parties and events like the Golden Compass screening and party. It's a holiday fantasy film and *Compass* is following the same path as *Dreamgirls* and *The Lord of the Rings* by screening some footage and holding a lavish party to build buzz. Stars Daniel Craig and Eva Green (both of James Bond, of course) will be here and it's one event I'm loathe to miss.

As a final task, I head back to the Palais and go through the security gauntlet to pick up my mail at the press boxes. There's a line to get in, with guards pointing you to women who search rather dismissively through your bags before passing you on to another person who "wands" you before letting you in. I'm right at the front of the line, waiting while the woman ahead of me has her bag searched. She

leans over the table and the elderly guard holding me back casually points at her pert bottom (quite fetching, I must admit) and smiles and laughs and says in heavily accented English, "Very nice, no?" I burst into laughter and say "Oui, tres bien" and we both look at her admiringly until she moves on and I'm waved in. Welcome to France.

-- Michael Giltz

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