



ADVOCATE *insider*

May 25, 2007

Au Revoir

CANNES -- May 25, morning

The festival still has two more days to go, but everyone is leaving already. The market is over and most journalists are headed home. Outside the Palais, the crowds can be thicker than ever. Inside the Palais, it's a ghost town. Instead of pushing your way through throngs of journalists, you stroll through empty hallways, walk into movies two minutes before they begin, wait two minutes in the press room for a computer instead of 20 and get your mail without jostling for position alongside dozens of people. The festival is all but over. -- Michael Giltz

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What's In A Name?

CANNES -- May 25, early morning

You would think the title of a movie would be one area there would be no confusion on. But as I've mentioned before, the new Denys Arcand film is L'Age Des Tenebres in French and every poster for it in town includes the English language title, The Age of Ignorance. Then the pr people behind the film sent out an email saying, "There seems to be some confusion about the translation of the title in English" and insisted we all call it Days of Darkness. I finally saw the film and even on the print it says The Age of Ignorance. And why say there seems to be confusion? Why not just say, "We've changed our minds. Please use Days of Darkness as the English language title rather than implying we all stupidly got it wrong?"

In any case, the closing night film is usually a dog, but this one isn't half bad. I quite liked Arcand's Barbarian Invasions. This isn't as good, but it's interesting. Our hero is a Walter Mitty-esque public servant with a wife focused like a laser on selling real estate (she even takes phone calls in bed) and two daughters oblivious to him. He escapes into fantasy sequences of being a famous writer or politician, with beautiful women invariably begging him to take them, take them

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now, take them roughly. The film is bookended with Rufus Wainwright -- dressed like a prince of the realms -- singing some arias I was unfamiliar with. At one point, our hero begins to sing, drowning out Wainwright with his caterwauling. Wainwright takes control even in someone else's dreams and says simply, sir, shut up (or please be quiet or something, but he definitely brooked no interruptions).

The story gets more fact-based when our hero's wife leaves him and he dates a woman obsessed with medieval fairs and her status as a princess in that world. He finds out living out a fantasy is unsatisfying too and heads for the country for refuge. Nothing remarkable, but not bad. -- Michael Giltz

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Director Of "Watermelon Woman" Resurfaces At Cannes

After the vicious boos for We Own The Night, my friends and I decide to hit La Pizza -- the local cheap restaurant good enough to succeed in New York -- for one last dinner. Afterwards, I try to hit a late night market screening of a movie but it doesn't have English subtitles so I leave. After working on some stories, a group of us head out for drinks at Grand Hotel until they flick the lights on and off, turn them completely out and finally turn them on very brightly to get us to leave.

On the way home, I make the nightly check on Zanzibar. Its triumph over Le Pink seems complete. Le Pink has some clients while Zanzibar is filled to the brim. (Mind you, most everyone stands outside since the bar is tiny and the night is so hot. Also in its favor: Zanzibar seems to serve drinks until the last customer is ready to leave, sometimes till 5 in the morning. Perhaps the chief of police is gay? The bar itself was born in 1885 and has been variously described to me as one of the oldest in Cannes, one of the oldest in France (which seems unlikely), one of the oldest gay bars in France, and one of the oldest gay bars in the world. In any case, it's pretty old. The roof is very low with sloping alcoves here and there. Behind the bar are faux classical statues, one of a cherub, the other of a woman, I believe. There are paintings drawn on the actual wall (obviously pretty recent), depicting the sailors. One shows two sailors who seem to have become buddies, another shows a sailor looking for a buddy, and another shows a young man with his shirt opened to his waist and playing the accordion. If the man outside my window from noon to 10 p.m. looked anything like this guy, I would find him far less annoying.

We step outside and who should be sitting there but director Cheryl Dunye, of The Watermelon Woman. Naturally, my new gay roommate has already met her; in fact, she calls out his name when

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we're going by and we chat for a minute. She's in Cannes reconnecting with people. After Watermelon, she made the very good TV movie Strangers Inside, which was a festival favorite for many gay cineastes. Then came the Eddie Griffin comedy My Baby's Daddy, which did not make good use of her talents. Dunye upped and left for Amsterdam, but she's working on material and is ready to dive back in. And that's some of the best news I've heard the entire festival. -- Michael Giltz

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The First Real Boos Of The Festival



Photo: Getty

CANNES -- May 24, evening

One of the great traditions of Cannes is booing. At the critics' screening, if people really like a film they'll applaud strongly. If they really don't like it, they'll boo. If they hear people applauding when they don't think a movie deserves it, they'll boo as well just to make clear that not everyone agrees. It might only seem the worst of the worst would deserve booing, but it's very common. It took me a year or two to get used to it (and I still rarely boo; silence seems just as damning to me), but I can let a "Wooo" hen necessary or particularly displeased.

But this Cannes has been so solid -- even the unsuccessful films have some interesting elements - that almost no booing has occurred. Til now. James Gray debuted his first film since The Yards in 2000. It has a terrific cast, including Mark Wahlberg, Joaquin Phoenix, Eva Mendes and Robert Duvall. Unfortunately, it also has a very familiar script about two brothers, one a cop and the other working in a club controlled by the Russians and not wanting to get involved in police investigations. Violence ensues. Two very good scenes appear: one in a drug raid, the other in a car chase. And Gray is clearly talented. But somehow it never becomes even remotely emotionally compelling.

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The ending is also extremely thudding and obvious, which sparked a chorus of lusty "Boos!" Frankly, I think the critics were just lucky they could finally unleash their inner beast on something. Cold comfort for Gray, but there you are. -- Michael Giltz

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"You, The Living"

CANNES -- May 24, morning

Clearly, this is not the festival where I see a lot of films. Normally, I'd hit around 40 movies. This year, I'll be lucky to hit 25. With the AmFAR benefit late into the night, lots of free drinks and then heading to the Hotel Grand for a nightcap with friends in the hope of rescuing the evening (covering parties is exhausting and just not my idea of fun), well, getting up at 7:45 for Alexandra, a film by the glacially paced director Alexander Sokurov.

Besides, I want to get in line early for You, The Living, one of my most anticipated films of the fest. It's by Ry Andersson, who delivered Songs From The Second Floor in 2000, still a movie that lingers in my mind as utterly original. His new film is very similar: the scenes contain one static camera shot, with the energy and excitement and humor developing from the characters that pop in and out of the frame. And his production design is extraordinary, each one a work of art. If a daughter is bending over her elderly mother, you'll soon notice her handbag bending over the arm of the couch nearby, a subtle echo that celebrates and undercuts the moment. Plot? There is not plot, though a large drunken woman who keeps bawling "Nobody understands me!" while her biker boyfriend and dog patiently wait nearby is a recurring character. Dream-like moments, and songs are interspersed in what is -- for Andersson -- a very droll, amusing tone. The first half hour of this 94 minute film is sheer joy. It loses a little steam and the finale is heavy-handed even if the symbolism isn't intended. But when someone asks you who to compare Andersson to, you simply shake your head and say you can't.

Did I mention the New Orleans jazz band, the apartment that moves down the street like a train, the doggie tied up in its leash, the man annoyed by a tuba player who gets so frustrated he keeps pounding the roof of his apartment until the light fixture falls and plaster rains down on him, the bartender who calls for last rounds and insults his customers as "homeless bastards" but then reminds them "Tomorrow is another day?" Since his last film barely got released in the US (and only two years later), this is the joy of Cannes: being able to see a film like this right away.

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May 24, 2007

AmFAR With Sharon Stone -- Part Two



Photo: Getty

CANNES -- May 23, evening

So I finally arrive at the annual AmFAR auction/dinner. And who is in front of me in line? Catherine Deneuve, who couldn't be bothered to give her fellow AmFAR-ian a lift. Oh well, I try to be gracious. This is as close as I've ever come to a truly major red carpet arrival photo shoot. Dozens of photographers wait across the street snapping people as they get out of their car. And dozens more stand behind a barricade and snap dozens of shots of each star as they stand in front of an AmFAR banner showing off their outfit. The blinding flashes and screams of the photographers are really startling. I forgot to mention, but at the Hotel Martinez, as I watched celebs assaulted with attention, I really did get a sickening sense of how unhealthy all that focus must be. It was exhausting and it was only for an hour and wasn't even directed at me.

Anyway Deneuve finally moves on and my shoe friend, Spanish friend and I walk in front of the same bank of photographers. Not

ONE of them wastes even a single digital shot on the off chance that one of us might be someone. They know better and we burst out laughing at the extreme difference. (Or should I say indifference?) But now I can't get inside. I've got my ticket but haven't a clue as to the last name of my benefactor, so they don't know what table I'm at. I have to stand by the entrance table, so I get a good look as Sharon Stone pops out for some fresh air in her gorgeous sparkling gold outfit. Mischa Barton also creates some waves. And this stunning young French man I spotted at the Martinez who I dubbed the Dauphin smiles impishly and casually gets anyone and everyone to pose for his little digital camera. I don't think he's a model, but whatever he does I'm sure his life is one of ease and beauty. If they do a French Brideshead Revisited, he's a natural. How can I capture his innate sense of ease and privilege? How's this: he looks as if he's spent his entire life in a jewel-encrusted case with luxurious red velvet lining.

Finally, I'm allowed in just as the auction begins. Stone strides the stage like a jaguar, cajoling and demanding that people bid more for each item for sale (about 15 in all). The Ocean's 13 guys (not all of them) pop in for a moment to plug one item and then head back to Cannes for a premiere. Kylie Minogue sings (after 20 people chip in \$10,000 each to make it happen). Julian Lennon ends the show with "Stand By Me." And Marilyn Manson's wife Dita Von Teese does her burlesque act in a spangly cowboy outfit with pasties and pink boots and a giant spangly tube of MAC lipstick she rides as if it were a mechanical bull.

It's very hot in the room, dreadfully hot and everyone complains that the food is always bad but getting worse. I did enjoy the endless stream of champagne, wine and cognac. Not a smart combination, but a fun one, served by a fetching wait staff. It turns out I'm seated next to a very friendly journalist for Variety, based in France, and we have a fine time chatting, aided and abetted by another woman at our table who really knows her stuff and IDs every celeb in sight. Soon enough it's all over and I head back outside and wait for the shuttle taking journalists back to town. Who's standing next to me, waiting for her car to arrive? Catherine Deneuve. Is she stalking me? And if she needs a ride, I just don't know what I might do or say. All in all, more than \$7.5 million was raised for AmFAR. -- Michael Giltz

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AmFAR With Sharon Stone -- Part One

CANNES -- May 23, evening

After coming down from my Clooney, Pitt and Damon event, I head back to Cannes proper and start filing several stories. I have a ticket for the annual AmFAR auction/party led by Sharon Stone, who's turning this into a second career. (She's doing a similar event at the

Dubai Film Festival this December.) But it's only for the red carpet, which means I would stand alongside a bank of screaming photographers and try to yell out questions to the celebs. Not my idea of fun at all. The best part of AmFAR is hearing Stone cajole the audience into giving more and seeing all the stars close up. Plus, I really do have a ton of stories to file and they keep asking for more. I just can't make the deadline for the bus, but that's okay since I was going to skip it anyway. But then suddenly I get a ticket for the actual auction and dinner. All I have to do is throw on a tux and rush all the way to the other end of the Croisette to the Hotel Martinez and meet my benefactor.

I do, arriving 8 minutes late. I have no last name, no phone number, my cell phone died and none of my roommates are home to check email, which is how we (very quickly) communicated. So after standing there for 40 minutes and walking up to every guy in a tux and asking if he was Gary (something I even did to Quentin Tarantino; hey, he had his back to me) I finally decide he must have left or given new instructions so I RUN back home all sweaty only to see he's just sent me an email wondering where the hell I am. He agrees to leave the invite with the concierge and I rush back and then ask the doorman for a cab. "Dificil" he says, pointing to the endless line of limos picking up celebs to take them to AmFAR and the crowds that block the streets all around the hotel. Masses of people line the street behind barricades (most of them just tourists or locals and not professional photographers). When a celeb comes out they scream out their names. Sometimes the celeb poses, more often they wave briefly and jump into the car, saving the money shot for the pros at the event. People then boo them or beg "roll down the window." There are even people sitting on the roof across the street cheering any celeb that notices them.

The doorman calls for a taxi repeatedly but they can't get through, aren't answering their phone, etc. I wait for an HOUR. When Catherine Deneuve appears (looking lovely but in an unfortunate tiger print dress), the crowd goes crazy. I'm about ten feet away from where these people stand waiting for their car and I almost go over and ask for a lift. Surely she would say yes? I'm wearing my brand new used tuxedo, after all. Finally, finally a taxi arrives and I share it with a guy and girl. Turns out they're not a couple; he's Spanish and claims to be producing Steven Soderbergh's "Che" biopic and she works in shoes and is here at the fest trying to get stars to don her shoes and cursing the fact that lengthy hemlines almost always make the shoes invisible. Both politely nice and fun to see him slowly trying to charm her.

But best of all is our cabbie. He unnerves me a bit in Cannes proper by driving too fast for the narrow streets jammed with people. But once he gets going on some semi-major roads, he's a dream. The road is packed bumper to bumper for miles, but there are what I can only call charming little strip malls along one side and he heads off the

road, tears through as many parking lots as he can before hitting a dead end, then rides back onto the shoulder of the highway passing miles of cars before back onto our private strip mall highway. We are saving easily an hour of driving time and arrive at AmFAR even before the party begins. Tres bien. --Michael Giltz

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The Rat Pack



Photo: Getty

Okay, just one interview Wednesday: a one-on-one with George Clooney, Matt Damon and Brad Pitt for the New York Daily News. It takes place at the Hotel Du Cap, a super-exclusive hotel about 30 minutes away from downtown where the REALLY rich and powerful live. I was here yesterday for Jolie and now I'm here again today for Ocean's 13. The gang is doing overseas press (mostly TV) and a few US ones. There must be 20 cabanas by the sea, with the numbering COMPLETELY out of order, so that cabana 17 is next to cabana 22 and in front of cabana 54. Everyone has to find out where to go again and again. The number of publicists is frightening, with publicists representing each of the dozen stars, the studios, the producers and outside firms to handle it all. Out on the water, speedboats are bobbing up and down as papparazzi try to snag a picture of a celeb. Really, it's madness. The actors are grouped together in seemingly endless combinations of people: this TV outlet gets Damon, Pitt and Cheadle; that outlet gets Clooney, Damon and Barkin; someone else gets Garcia, Cheadle and Pitt and so on and so on. Finally, my turn comes with the uber-pairing of Clooney, Damon and Pitt. They're all ring-a-ding-ding and fun and the 25 minutes goes by in a flash and then I head back to the real world and they stay right where they are: at the center of everything. -- Michael Giltz

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"The Golden Compass Party"

CANNES -- May 22, evening

And finally the last of the Golden Compass events. I had to file my Angelina Jolie story for another publication, not to mention the regular stories I do every week that still had to be done even though I'm in another country. The result? I didn't head to the event till 11 p.m. I'm still bitter over missing the Lord of the Rings party back in 2001 (people still talk about how amazing and lavish it was), so Golden Compass is going to be my recompense.

The free shuttle picks people up at two locations on either end of the Croisette. One of them is near my house so I head out there and then wander around like a fool for half an hour. No signs, no assistant to tell you where to go or what to do. Turns out the shuttle wasn't stopping there. So I had to head all the way to the other end of the Croisette (about a 20 minute walk since the crowds weren't bad) and I arrived at the party just before midnight. It was held at a lovely villa that now serves as the local library, a fitting setting for a movie based on a book that begins in Oxford. Unfortunately, the party was already dead. Very few people, three-quarters empty dance floor, whole areas of the site devoid of people, four or five bar areas that were simply empty of customers and everyone complained about the tiny little bits of food. Apparently, Daniel Craig and Eva Green were there very early but had long since disappeared. Ultimately, the party would be rated 2 1/2 martini glasses out of five, which was being nice, I think.

Not the best way to end the day and not the best final impression for Golden Compass with the media. People on the shuttle say things to each other like, "What the hell is a golden compass anyway?" I start to explain but they don't really want to know. None of this will matter if the movie delivers and from the extended trailer I saw, it does. But a shame, nonetheless. -- Michael Giltz

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May 22, 2007

Angelina Jolie, Alone (Almost)





Photo: Getty

CANNES -- May 22 afternoon, and then late afternoon

A classic Cannes experience. I got in a shuttle bus with just a handful of journalists and we were allowed to scuttle into the servant's entrance at the Hotel Du Cap. Many powerful studio execs and celebrities stay along the Croisette. But the Hotel Du Cap is even more exclusive and secluded (about 20 minutes away by cab) and truly a glimpse into another wealthier world. George Clooney is walking the grounds, looking dapper. Don Cheadle is on the patio having a drink. And I'm attending an "intimate" press conference in a beach-side cabana with Angelina Jolie and director Michael Winterbottom (above, far left).

Jolie looks far more beautiful in person than I ever realized by seeing her in films. Just lovely. And smart and poised. But after it was over, we were whisked away again to the entrance of a restaurant. (The hotel itself is one or two football fields away along a grand driveway (the word is inappropriate) that looks like something out of Versailles.) Half the journalists clamber into the first van and then another five of us wait for the second. And wait. And wait. Frantic phone calls are made and we still have to wait. Our initial appearance flustered the doorman, who tried to get the pr people to have us stand, oh I don't know, around the corner among the bushes? Anywhere but where we were: the place where you stand and wait for your Rolls or cab or (if you're a journalist) your free van ride.

The publicist had disappeared after defending our honor at the start. But after half an hour had passed, we were asked to move ten feet to the bench on the other side of the driveway. Fair enough. Then one of the journalists spotted a producer he knew who was walking into the restaurant. They semi-shouted at each other from 15 feet away, never dreaming of moving closer to each other and the gulf between reporters and the wealthy people we interview was never starker. A guy came up in a red Ferrari and the valet drove off with such panache and speed that even the owner couldn't help but smile. Finally, after nearly an hour of tapping our toes, a van arrived and we were plunked back down in the real world again. -- Michael Giltz

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