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Cannes Day Four -- Brazil

Linha De Passe -- This Brazilian film by director Walter Salles is a look at the hardscrabble life of the urban poor. Salles is always sentimental, but he's getting subtler and quieter. His US breakthrough "Central Station" was drenched in it, "The Motorcycle Diaries" (about Che Guevara) was more sophisticated about its cheery outlook and now "Linha De Passe" is even better. But keep in mind that I apparently liked it much more than most. It follows a single, pregnant mom and her four sons. The eldest has found religion and works a responsible job at a gas station. The next is a motorcycle messenger who has already fathered one child. The next is 18 and just about too old to capitalize on his promising football/soccer skills and the youngest rides the city buses all day long, obsessed with finding out who he father is. (Apparently he was told his dad was a bus driver; the other three perhaps were fathered by another man.) If you've seen any movies, you can guess at some of the plot twists: a desperate son turning to crime, the one with faith having it shaken, the athlete getting a shot at a pro career and so on. But it's done with subtlety and a mostly non-pro cast that really delivers. I can easily see why someone might find it predictable. But I was engaged and frankly, the modest optimism at the end is so low-key if not downright invisible, that I think it is Salles's best to date and a worthy contender for the runner-up prize if not the Palm D'Or or for the ensemble. The young men are pretty darn cute, too.

The Chaser -- After a string of arty films, I went into "The Chaser" with modest hopes that a potential genre piece would entertain me. Mind you, if I never see another film about serial killers again, I won't be sorry. This one puts a few modest spins on the tale: our hero is a cop turned pimp who realizes missing girls have all been clients of one guy, a harmless looking young man who is impotent and vicious. The pimp races against time

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to try and rescue the latest girl he now realizes is in terrible danger. Lots of running and shouting and slow-motion anguish ensues. Our anti-hero is a good one, which made the film bearable for me. But the way it was structured kept some of the suspense out of it. And the silly cops who have the serial killer in custody, listen to him confess and yet still somehow must release him and then fail to even trail him effectively turn the film into a cartoon. There's a dour twist but it's all very familiar. Someone kill the serial killer movies, please.

Tokyo Sonata -- After press conferences with Woody Allen and Mike Tyson (more on that later), I went to the final movie of the evening, Kurosawa Kiyoshi's "Tokyo Sonata." Kurosawa has a great first name for a filmmaker (clearly he was destined for the movies), but I'm just not a big fan of his movies. This one is more low-key and realistic than most of Kiyoshi's horror flicks -- at least for a while. A businessman loses his job but doesn't tell his family. The eldest son ignores them and signs up for the US military to serve in Iraq. The wife is bored. And the youngest son is secretly using his lunch money to take forbidden piano lessons. All fine, if unremarkable. Then the wacky plot twists start piling up, including the husband working as a cleaner of toilets and finding a pile of money, the eldest son switching sides in the war, the wife getting tied up by a burglar and then deciding to run away with him and the youngest son turning into a once-in-a-generation piano prodigy. Oy. I lost all patience with this one, though others who actually like Kiyoshi liked this one too.

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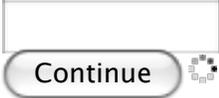
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	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30				

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