



ADVOCATEinsider

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Cannes Day Seven: Clint Eastwood, Angelina Jolie, and the Disappeared

Changeling -- The day starts off disappointingly with a new drama directed by Clint Eastwood and starring Angelina Jolie as a single working woman in the late Twenties whose son disappears one day from Los Angeles. Months later, the cops turn up with a little boy but she immediately says, "That's not my son." What do they care? The cops have had a wave of bad publicity and are thoroughly corrupt. With a crowd of reporters ready to shoot photos of the happy reunion, they bully her into taking the boy home. As the evidence piles up, she complains more and more. Stuningly, the cops just have her committed to a psych ward to shut her up. Naturally, she fights back. We also start to see the comings and goings of a serial killer, making the fate of her boy far more frightening. The title was translated into "The Exchange" in French, which isn't much better. But "Changeling" is all wrong. A changeling is from folk tales where fairies kidnap a family's child and replace it with a changeling that looks exactly the same but is...different. My favorite movie about a changeling is Agnieszka Holland's "Olivier, Olivier." This movie isn't about a changeling -- there's no doubt from the get-go for Jolie or us that the boy isn't her son. It's really a story of injustice involving a crusading preacher (John Malcovich), wrongful imprisonment of women who make a fuss (the psych ward is filled with sane women like a hooker who complained when a cop/client kept beating her), police corruption and so on. It's more "Norma Rae" or "Erin Brockovich" than the title implies. The movie looks good and Jolie is solid. Remarkably, the film is based on a true story and very few of the facts have been changed in any way -- much of the public comments in the movie come from the public record at the time. But this ain't "LA Confidential" by any stretch. The cops aren't cartoons, but they aren't exactly fascinating or complex, either. Jason Butler Harner steals the show as the

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serial killer Gordon Northcott. He's vile, weasly, pathetic and absolutely fascinating. Jolie's big scene comes in a prison when she practically throttles him demanding an answer to what's happened to her son. Malcovich is miscast as the preacher -- I kept thinking the man (who is basically good and nobly inspired) was just looking for publicity or something, just because of what Malcovich brings to the table. The trade papers give it very strong reviews, but for me it's yet another movie that is fine, but not memorable.

"Changeling" Press Conference -- Next comes a "Changeling" press conference where the foolish questions are fewer than usual. When one reporter asks Eastwood if he's gonna tackle Dirty Harry one last time, he says, "The rumors are incorrect." Jolie jumped in, saying, "I am!" And Eastwood mused, "Dirty Harriet!" Eastwood -- like Woody Allen -- is a bit hard of hearing now. It's sweet to see Jolie casually translating the garbled, confusing questions (even I have trouble tracking some of them and what they're asking) for Eastwood during the event. She looks absolutely lovely, baby bump and all.

Elevre Libre -- The press kit led me to believe I could expect some sort of sexual identity, adult-teenager shenanigans and that's certainly what I got. The story centers on Jonas, a 16 year old very committed tennis player (though not, apparently good enough to go pro). He's at a standstill in every aspect of his life: he's not match tough (which is to say, he gets tense during tournaments and doesn't go for the juggler), he's failing at school after already being left behind a year or two because of the tennis interfering with his studies, his parents are divorced and his mother often away with new boyfriends, and he's lost his virginity with a girl but worries he's not satisfying her or doing it right. On the plus side, he does have a very good-looking older brother, who doesn't get nearly enough screen time. The main adults in his life are a trio of people -- for a while I thought they might be in a menage a trois. But ultimately they resolve themselves as a man and a woman dating in an open relationship and another slightly older man whose apartment Jonas practically lives at. They all seem to watch over him and his tennis coaching while mom is away. During dinners, the adults ply Jonas with questions about his sex life. At first, their blunt comments seemed laughably French -- are adults really this blase about love and explicit with boys? But as the film progresses and the questions get blunter, they seem manipulative and almost cruel, though I never got the sense the adults planned any of it. They really believe what they're saying and don't really think about what they say and how it might affect a kid. Really, though they seem

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to be complimenting him, almost everything they say undermines his confidence and screws with his mind. How long did the sex last his first time, they pester him. Five or six minutes. The woman immediately says her first lover lasted five or six minutes and she never even got wet. She had to have sex with an older man, the woman says, before she knew how to make love. Don't confuse love with sex, they say. They belittle the girl he's dating and likes by immediately bringing up the boy's insecurities when meeting her for the first time, driving her away. Does Jonas want to have sex with the woman, just to make sure everything is working right? Does he want to watch the couple have sex? What if one of the men gave him a blowjob? And on and on. It's really fascinatingly perverse how they manipulate him, saying things like he's a lot more mature than other kids his age and so on. I'd like to see it again, soon. But this was a very interesting movie. I went to the press conference, but unfortunately it was all in French with no translation possible. I'll try to track the director down. NOTE: Several emails to the publicist got no response so I never spoke with him.

La Mujer Sin Cabeza -- After interviewing British director Terence Davies, I head off to the final movie of the night, "The Headless Woman." Directed by Lucrecia Martel, it's one of the few movies at the fest directed by a woman. Unfortunately, it's too diffuse and abstract to do more than frustrate any but hardcore cineastes. In Argentina, an upper class woman runs over something while driving and fumbling for a cell phone. Is it a dog? A boy? She's too scared to find out and drives away. Having hit her head, she goes to a hospital to get an x-ray and wanders off before hearing the results. At first, this 87 minute movie seems to be about a woman who has lost her "head," her memory. Our protagonist wanders around in a fog, not seeming to know who anyone is or what she should do. When people call out to her, she never responds, perhaps because she doesn't know their names? Even when watching a video of her own wedding, she doesn't seem to recognize the guests. Finally she admits her fear of having killed someone and slowly the upper class world she moves in takes care of everything and slowly disappears the evidence of the accident by getting rid of her x-ray photos, the registration at a hotel the night she had the accident and couldn't drive home, the dents in the car and so on. Surely it's some sort of commentary on class and the like but I had already lost all interest.

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