



# ADVOCATE *insider*

May 20, 2008

## Cannes Day Six --Belgians, Brits and Joaquin Phoenix

The Silence of Lorna -- The day begins with one of the movies I've anticipated the most this fest, the new feature by the Dardenne brothers. They're Belgian directors and I basically love everything they do. Typically, their movies are shot with handheld cameras and stay right on top of the actors in not a you-are-there style but a you-are-there-and-about-to-bump-into-them style. They've triumphed at Cannes with "Rosetta" in 1999 (the year before I started coming) and again with "L'Enfant." Their characters are invariably down and outers who make one small decision and then watch helplessly as the repercussions pile on. I suppose their earlier stories were pretty extreme -- including the selling of a baby to get some cash -- but this film struck me as melodramatic. A woman from Albania is in the midst of marrying a junkie and thus gain Belgian citizenship. The junkie will then be killed so she can marry a Russian mobster so HE can get Belgian citizenship. She has regrets once the junkie starts kicking his habit and tries to go clean but trying to get out of such an arrangement is never easy. And of course anyone who thinks people who will kill someone to speed up a marriage by a few weeks will then leave someone else alive with the knowledge of that murder simply isn't very bright. And that's my main problem with the film: the woman at the center does seem bright and decent and I could never buy into the idea that she had agreed to such a murderous scheme in the first place. Their trademark style still appeals but an even wackier plot twist at the end really ruined it for me.

Of Time and the City -- And here's ANOTHER film I've been hotly anticipating. It's the first new film in eight years from out British director Terence Davies, the man behind two of my favorite films of all time, "Distant Voices, Still Lives" and "The

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Long Day Closes." It's a 72 minute documentary about his childhood town of Liverpool, though documentary isn't quite the right word for this very personal reverie. Docu-poem, perhaps? Fans of Davies will feel right at home from the get-go: it begins in a movie palace with the curtains parting for a show and some grand old music on the soundtrack. But two things are new: much of the film is composed of found footage and we get the addition of wry, wickedly funny narration by Davies himself. And who knew he wasn't a Royalist? I would have assumed the pageantry would have won him over, but Davies is scathing about "The Betty Windsor Show" and Betty & Phil, disparaging the Queen for living so lavishly while Britian had some of the worst slums in Europe. I loved his quote from an old court ruling condemning two men for naughtiness which said not only were they guilty of gross indecency but they had done so it noted with dismay "under one of London's most beautiful bridges." Davies also refers to horrible public housing architecture and the "British genius for the dismal." Later he amusingly recalls fetes in the better neighborhoods where they "sandpaper their H's" and a race where a runner collapses from heatstroke because the temperature rose "a few degrees above zero." Catholic guilt, furtive homosexuality, old movies and afternoon teas all put in a show. Newcomers should still begin with "The Long Day Closes" (preferably on a giant movie screen) but this is a fine addition to his body of work.

Serbis -- Then I caught up with "Serbis" aka "Service," a Filipino film that -- it's safe to say -- has received the worst reviews of any film in Competition. So why did I go? Because I slept in (till 9 am, mind you, after getting to sleep at 4 am), only to find out it was filled with queer action. Indeed it was. Set in a crumbling movie palace that is truly rambling and houses an extended family, the movie shows a constant stream of rent boys, old queens (really, there's no other way to describe the busload of older men who flounce about so aggressively that they're flaming even by flaming queen standards) and transvestites all getting it on in one way or another at the movie theater. There's one son who gets a blowjob from a prostitute that certainly looks like a girl but is referred to as a "faggot" and another who has gotten his girlfriend pregnant but is more concerned about a big boil on his butt. People run up and down the countless stairways again and again and again and it all becomes very wearing. It doesn't help that the location they shot at is apparently in the middle of the loudest intersection in Asia -- most of the soundtrack contains an overwhelming amount of street noise and honking cars, with the characters sometimes shouting their dialogue. It had a compelling sort of

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awfulness about it. But good? No, 'fraid not.

Sanguepazzo -- Up next is an Italian film by the director of "The Best Of Youth," an Italian miniseries that played triumphantly at Cannes and remains one of my happiest viewing memories here. I keep seeing his movies, but this melodrama (which is putting it politely) is the latest sign that Marco Tullio Giordana's skills don't compress well into a two hour movie. Set during World War II, it follows three people: a beautiful woman from a simple background who wants to be a star (Monica Belluci), the gay producer/director who makes her a star and loves her in his way and the wildly hammy actor who makes passionate love to her when not doing drugs. The gay director (who is never seen with a man or even acknowledges his gay-ness) joins the Italian resistance. The actress and the actor are swept up by the Fascists and mingle with them but don't really care for them. The movie begins with the actors captured by the resistance towards the war's end and facing trial and execution for being collaborators. We flashback to get their stories. Luca Zingaretti is notably awful as the hammy actor. In one scene, he's supposed to be goofing around at a dinner party, mocking and taunting the other guests with his hilarious Chaplinesque cavorting and it's so embarrassingly unfunny I had to turn away. He acts loud, louder and (usually) loudest, making this the most Italian film I've seen in a long time. They scream at each other when they're happy and scream even more when they're sad. It descends into soap-y ludicrousness by the end. Throughout the ENTIRE film we watch the actor carry around rolls of film he shot, which we soon discover is documentation of the cruel colobator who did torture patriots and the whore-ish woman who apes the famous actress's every outfit and taunted the men who were dying. (In one scene, the actress sleeps with her rabid fan to get more drugs for the actor.) You might think that at some point during the trial -- in which the actor and actress are accused of the very crimes he has footage showing others committing -- the actor might say, "Hey, let's look at this footage that exonerates me and my lover completely." But no, he says not a word and the footage is lost in the rubble of Italy as partisans take revenge. It's that kind of absurd movie.

Two Lovers -- The final film of the night was a raucous free-for-all. The Italian film started half an hour late, throwing everything into turmoil. "Two Lovers" -- the James Gray film starring Joaquin Phoenix, Gwyneth Paltrow, and Vinessa Shaw -- was playing in two theaters next to each other. The larger, more comfortable DeBussy was supposed to begin first but that got switched to the Bazin when the Italian film ran so late.

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People mobbed the DeBussy, then rushed over to the Bazin, only to find the guards saying absolutely nothing and not revealing until the last moment that the theater was full and then everyone rushed back to the DeBussy, crushing each other underfoot, kicking and biting to get into a theater...that had hundreds of empty seats and could have easily held everyone. But it was all so mismanaged that everyone was on edge and frantic. The film itself was an improvement on the woeful "We Own The Night" and Gray continues to attract top talent and make good-looking movies. Best of all, he's ventured beyond the criminal world that had offered diminishing returns from his solid debut "Little Odessa" to the mannered "The Yards" and the total misfire of "We Own The Night." This movie has the same quiet intensity and eye for detail while telling the story of a bi-polar suicidal (but damn good looking) young man who lives with his parents and suddenly finds himself juggling two women. One (Vinessa Shaw) is the daughter of his father's future business partner, warm, stable and wonderfully understanding; the other (Gwyneth Paltrow) just wants to be a friend because she's a drug addict live wire having an affair with a wealthy married man who pays for her apartment. No bonus points for guessing which one Phoenix falls harder for. All too obvious where it's headed, the film fails to generate any tension or interest or even believability. Paltrow, a good actress, has nothing to play here with this one-note character and everyone else is adrift. We're not sure what to think at the end -- not because the movie is particularly ambiguous but because it's handled so vaguely.

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Is this reviewer also PopSurfer of Alfred NY on Netflix? Because the same review appears in both venues, yours and theirs.

Posted by: Twerpette | [December 03, 2008 at 04:05 PM](#)

Yes, my personal website is [www.popsurfing.com](http://www.popsurfing.com). I'm based in NYC but my friend in Alfred likes to keep up on what movies I recommend and posts all my reviews onto Netflix. Thx for mentioning, though -- I have found websites illegally posting articles of mine and had to badger them into taking the articles down.

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