



ADVOCATE *insider*

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Cannes Smorgasbord: Highlights of 2008

Okay, here's a collection of highlights from the 2008 Cannes Film Festival. Below are the top award winners, favorite quotes, queer moments, ratings of all the films, the movies I missed but heard were good, fights in the line with French festgoers, insane questions from the press conferences and more.

CANNES AWARD WINNERS

Palm d'Or (Top Prize) -- The Class/Entre Les Murs

Grand Prix (Runner-up) -- Gomorrah

Jury Prize (Third Place) -- Il Divo

Best Director -- Nuri Bilge Ceylan for Three Monkeys/Uc Maymun

Best Actor -- Benicio Del Toro for Che

Best Actress -- Sandra Corveloni for Linha De Passe

Best Screenplay -- Dardenne brothers for The Silence of Lorna
Un Certain Regard -- Tulpan

Camera d'Or -- Steve McQueen for Hunger

Director's Fortnight Winner -- El Dorado (which received several other awards from outside groups)

Critics Week -- Snow

Special Prize (consolation prizes) -- Clint Eastwood/Changeling and Catherine Deneuve/A Christmas Tale

What a great year for me as far as awards go. There are two ways to think about it: one, you hope to see the films that get awards, whether you like them or not because you want to be able to say you've seen them and two, you hope that of the movies you saw and really liked that the jury really liked them too. On both counts, I got very lucky this year. My favorite film -- The Class -- won the Palm d'Or. Two of my other favorites which were not as widely embraced by international critics -- Il Divo and Linha de Passe -- also scored big wins. The directorial debut (Camera d'Or) I liked most won that award -- Hunger. My second favorite film of the fest -- El Dorado -- won the

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Directors Fortnight and a raft of recognition from other groups that announce their favorites of the fest. I knew that missing Gomorrah was a bummer and so it proved. And ironically I'm a huge fan of the Dardenne brothers but I thought the screenplay of their new film *The Silence of Lorna* was the weakest aspect of that movie and yet they won an award for it. On the other hand, I was mixed on *Uc Maymun* but thought the direction was the strongest aspect and it won for that. Overall, the films I was most enthusiastic about did really well.

CANNES GETS A WOODY FOR INDY AND MONSIEUR ALLEN

Two of the splashiest highlights of the fest were the world premiere of "*Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull*" and Woody Allen's menage a trois romantic comedy "*Vicky Cristina Barcelona*." Indy had a queer spin for two big reasons. First, the delightful Cate Blanchett had a ball playing the nasty Russian villainess with a fabulous page boy haircut and an outrageous Boris & Natasha style accent. She's constantly barking out orders and looking extremely dominating and best of all showing no interest in Indy whatsoever. An even gayer moment occurs when Mutt (Shia LaBeouf) makes his first appearance. Riding a motorcycle through the smoke, LaBeouf is decked out in leather to look exactly like Marlon Brando in "*The Wild Ones*." But given his age and general demeanor, LaBeouf looks less like a rebel and more like one of the Village People. Really, his cap is tilted at such a jaunty angle and he looks like such a boy in that leather jacket that a few people (ok, me) burst out laughing.

The Woody Allen movie was more annoying than fun when it came to the press coverage of the film. In the movie, Penelope Cruz and Scarlett Johansson kiss passionately in a photography dark room and later have a threesome relationship with Javier Bardem (though we never see the two women or they and Bardem in bed together). The very first question for Allen referred to the threesome as a "classic male fantasy." How about the classic female fantasy of two women who desire each other in which the man is the furthest thing from their mind? Next came Cruz, who gave such an indifferent answer to the inevitable questions about kissing Johansson. She answered in a bored voice, "I've had that question four times today. I didn't give any answer because I didn't have a good answer. I've been wondering what would Woody say in that situation and I'm still not inspired." Are we supposed to be so post-gay that asking about being physically intimate with another actor for a film is too boring to broach? First, actors always get asked about what it's like to kiss a co-star of the opposite sex. Second, actors get

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asked about imaginary things (like shooting guns, beating up bad guys, flying through the air) they pretend to do in movies. Third, when actors have a sex scene, it's (usually) just pretend. But when they kiss, they really kiss. They really do it. So why not have some sort of playful, friendly answer rather than just acting as if the question is too boring or provincial or juvenile to respond to? Frankly, it's hard to tell whether they're too sophisticated or the issue actually makes them uncomfortable. And I'm sure that's the last thing a worldly actress and friend of Pedro Almodovar would want to imply.

THE MOVIES I SAW AT THE FESTIVAL (from best to worst)

- Entre Les Murs/The Class **** (out of four)
- El Dorado *** 1/2
- Il Divo *** 1/2
- Linha De Passe *** 1/2
- Waltz With Bashir *** (out of four stars)
- The Good, The Bad and The Weird ***
- Of Time and the City ***
- O'Horten ***
- Hunger ***
- Elevre Libre/Private Lessons ***
- It's Hard Being Loved By Jerks -- The Trial ***
- Che ** 1/2
- Wendy and Lucy ** 1/2
- Vicky Cristina Barcelona ** 1/2
- Uc Maymum ** 1/2
- Rumba ** 1/2
- Synecdoche, New York ** 1/2
- Tyson ** 1/2
- Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull ** 1/2
- The Changeling/The Exchange **
- Un Conte de Noel/A Christmas Tale **
- Two Lovers **
- Acne **
- The Silence of Lorna **
- Tokyo Sonata **
- The Chaser * 1/2
- Sanguepazzo * 1/2
- La Mujer Sin Cabeza/The Headless Woman * 1/2
- La Frontiere De L'Aube/The Frontier of Dawn * 1/2
- Tokyo! * (three shorts; stayed for two)
- My Magic *
- What Just Happened? *
- Serbis -- no stars
- Movies I Missed and Regret:
- Gomorra, Leonera, 24 City/Er Shi Si Cheng Ji, Snow,

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Theater I Saw in London before and after Cannes:
Yazmin Reza's "The God Of Carnage" in London with Ralph Fiennes and Janet McTeer ***
"Fram" at the National * 1/2.

Books I Read:

Che Guevara: A Revolutionary Hero by Jon Lee Anderson ****

Blindness by Jose Saramago ****

Reminiscences of the Cuban Revolutionary War by Ernesto Che Guevara **

Ten Men Dead: The Story of the 1981 Irish Hunger Strike by David Beresford ***

The Bolivian Diary by Ernesto Che Guevara * 1/2

Haroun and the Sea of Stories by Salman Rushdie **

WACKY PRESS CONFERENCE QUESTION #1: INDY AND COMMUNISM

Among the delights of the festival are the press conferences. They're free for all with everyone from serious writers to rabid fans/"journalists" who wait for the event to end so they can rush the podium with scraps of paper and beg the stars to give their autographs. Combine that with journalists from all over the world who have their own obscure agendas ("Angelina, would you consider having your twins in Sweden?") and you just never know what to expect. But you always know the stars will get some head-scratching puzzlers they try to answer as politely as possible, no matter how odd or obscure the question may be. Case in point, Steven Spielberg's first question after the world premiere of "Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull" from an Asian reporter for an outlet called "Epic Times." After 19 years, the first Indy movie -- which probably cost \$180 million or so to make -- has just debuted at the Cannes Film Festival. This is the very first question asked at the press conference.

Reporter: Epic Times has declared that the Chinese earthquake people warned the authorities a week before the drama. The authorities decided not to pay attention to these warnings. They have decided to review their own findings from these experts. As for your experience Spielberg, you have experience with communism. Did you get pressure on you that impeded your liberty and freedom, and what about the work that some of you have done about good and evil...uh, I apologize. Do you know whether today there are new Schindlers?

Spielberg: Do you actually want me to try and answer that question?

SAPPHIC HIGHLIGHTS

"Leonera" aka "Lion's Den" was a women-in-prison flick with prisoners aggressively hitting on our heroine. "Vicky Cristina Barcelona" featured Penelope Cruz and Scarlett Johansson making out (though the women I spoke with felt Cruz wasn't convincing -- they thought her character would have been much more aggressive and passionate). Mischa Barton of "The OC" had a film in the market about two girls falling in love at a T.A.T.U. concert. Lisa Ray and Sheetal Sheth -- two actresses I'm unfamiliar with -- are apparently making a career of lesbian romances. Their previous film "The World Unseen" is in the market paired with a new drama called "I Can't Think Straight," which has the tagline, "Just another British, Indian, Muslim, Arab, Christian, lesbian romantic comedy." But they were all trumped by real world events: when Lindsay Lohan kissed a girl at Cannes, it immediately exploded onto gossip pages all over planet.

THE BEST PARTY I WASN'T INVITED TO

Actor Alan Cumming was apparently at Cannes and staying on Denise Richards' yacht. Naturally, there was a party. Not being fabulous, I wasn't invited.

DIRECTOR TERENCE DAVIES RETURNS TO FILMMAKING

Out British director Terence Davies has made two of my favorite films of all time: "Distant Voices, Still Lives" and "The Long Day Closes." His two other features are "The Neon Bible" and acclaimed period film "The House of Mirth" starring Gillian Anderson. Davies has been struggling to get financial backing for a number of projects ever since then, including the period film "Sunset Song," another movie that's a murder mystery or noir (I think) set in New York City and says he's now just about ready to shoot a romantic comedy. But it's been eight years since "Mirth," so it's a delight to have something from him, in this case "Of Time and the City," a documentary, or really a docu-poem to his hometown of Liverpool. I covered the film below on Day Six. At roundtables for the film, Davies was amusing and friendly, though clearly delivering his usual routines for the various reporters. (It's inevitable that you depend on a few well-chosen lines when you speak to dozens if not hundreds of reporters and they all invariably ask the same questions.) But one moment stood out. In the film, Davies speaks about a boy he liked and longed to emulate -- a masculine boy named Jimmy Preston who once rested his arm on Terence's shoulder and -- as Davies narrates in the film -- "I didn't want him to take it off." I was going to ask Davies what it was like to use the real name of a boy you'd had a crush on in

childhood when he mentioned that after 48 years and quite out of the blue Jimmy Preston contacted him last week. Davies said Preston was going to see the film at an event in Edinburgh. "Does he know you fancied him?" I asked. "He will after he watches the film," laughed Davies.

NAZIS ON THE MOON!

There's an entirely different festival -- the business side of Cannes -- that most journalists like me never cover beyond the big announcements, such as the Weinstein Company saying they're gonna make Paolo Coelho's "The Alchemist" with Laurence Fishburne directing and starring. I always make at least one or two trips to the lower level of the Palais to stroll the aisles and check out the endless posters of B movies that will go straight-to-DVD (if that) in the US. But a little bit of the market came to my apartment building since on a lower floor, the Blind Spot/Wreck A Movie companies had set up shop to plug two films. One is a horror movie with grim gothic imagery depicting a man drowning in (or rising up from) a lake in a gloomy forest. The title is "Sauna" and the tagline is "Wash Your Sins." I giggle every time I see it. But more intentionally funny is "Iron Sky," a comedy which insists that the Nazis built a rocket and fled to the moon at the end of World War II and now they're coming back! Now that's a movie I want to see.

PRESIDENT BUSH AT CANNES

The Bush administration popped up at Cannes in two ways. First, with five people stuffed into a one bedroom apartment and three reporters constantly using WiFi to file stories, we each set up camp at different corners of the place. Stephen wrote his reviews for Esquire.com on the couch or the table on the patio. Sperling delivered his pieces for Film Stew from the lone desk and I perched my laptop on a counter in the kitchen area which was within arm's reach of the fridge and a power outlet and looked out on the balcony. Sperling offered several times to make room for both of us at the desk, but I was fine. However, since there was no bar stool available, this did mean I was standing up for hours at a time doing my typing. My nickname during the fest? Rumsfeld.

Even better, director Oliver Stone plugged his upcoming movie "W: The Improbable President" with a two-page spread in Variety that included a greatest hits compilation of Bush quotes, along with casting announcements like Josh Brolin as Bush, Scott Glenn as Rumsfeld (but we look nothing alike!), Jeffrey Wright as Colin Powell and Toby Jones as Karl Rove (great choice, that one). The list of Bush quotes never fails to brighten up my day. Among my favorites: "I'm honored to

shake the hand of a brave Iraqi citizen who had his hand cut off by Saddam Hussein." "I welcome you all to say a few comments to the TV, if you care to do so." "They underestimated me." "I can press when there needs to be pressed; I can hold hands when there needs to be...hold hands." "Families is where our nation finds hopes, where wings take dream." And, "I know the human being and fish can coexist peacefully."

WACKY PRESS CONFERENCE QUESTION #2: WOODY AND RUSSIA

Reporter: Question to Mr. Woody Allen. I'm from Uzbekistan and I'm sure this film is going to have huge success over there in Central Asia because in our [world] we still have many women in the family as wives. [General laughter.] I really hope that next film you will plan to do in Russia or Central Asia. I hope you have story to do with Russian actors. We have beautiful actresses.

Woody Allen: You're asking me if I plan to be shooting in Russia?

Moderator: Or Uzbekistan or Kazakstan.

Woody Allen: I have no plans at the moment. [laughter] The thought had never occurred to me, I'm sure. I'll tell you an interesting story. Years ago, I visited Russia with my family. I was planning to be there in Leningrad for five days. I was there for about two hours and I went to the travel agent in the hotel and said, 'Get me the first reservation out of here. I don't care where it goes.' [huge laughter -- reporter shaking her head in dismay] That was my memory of it. It was a terrible, terrible time when I was there. I haven't been back since then and I'm told that it's greatly changed. But it would take a lot because I'm a fearful traveler and it would take a lot to get me back to Russia.

MY ANNUAL FIGHT WITH SOMEONE ON LINE FOR A FILM

Europeans in general seem to think a line for a movie was meant to be jumped -- especially when they're French and the line is at the Cannes Film Festival. (This does not include the British, who of course love to queue up at the drop of a hat.) Combine that general attitude with an in-demand movie like "Che" and you've got a recipe for tension. Invariably, one movie at the fest is high in demand and located in a small location, making it impossible for even half of the 4600 journalists to get in to the first screenings. The result? Angry words, tension and a fight or two. This year, it wasn't even someone cutting in line that I butted heads with. My friend Stephen got in line four hours early and I got in line two hours early (with a much better

badge, I didn't need to be as cautious as him). We were both at the front of our respective lines, standing next to each other with a barrier dividing us and discussing Che. Behind us piled in more and more people, all desperate to see the movie, angling to keep their space. Then, with just a few minutes to go before everyone starts pushing in, a young French woman suddenly spots a friend, a handsome man coming out of the previous screening and standing about a foot in front of me past the line. She shoves her way to the front and I politely stand awkwardly to one side (there's no room to move and I'm really contorting myself to give her a moment with her friend). She of course just pushed in between my friend Stephen and I to chat gaily away. And chat and chat and chat. I'm getting uncomfortable in the yoga-like position I've adopted (Standing Cat, I think), when after literally five long minutes I see the guards moving into position, which is the last signal before the chaos begins of letting us in. I say, "Si-vous plait" to her and gesture/ask her to move back again. Astonished, aghast at my insolence, she barks at me, "I'm talking to my friend!" turns back and starts talking again. I say, more angrily, "Si-vous plait!" and gesture firmly that no, the conversation is over. She is, if anything, even more astonished, says something to her friend like, "This fat American is such an ass!" and with many sighs and shock over my crass behavior pushes her way back to her line and starts gesticulating at me and speaking to the people around her in a loud voice about the insanity of my request. "Desole," I say half-mockingly as she continues. "I was talking to my friend!" she says. "Yes, and I was talking to my friend and I waited five minutes and finally asked you to move back again. They're about to let us in and everyone is tense." The key issue is that whenever there's a major line, people get anxious and annoyed when others stroll up to talk with friends or seem to be cutting the line in one way or another. She continued to act aggrieved, making snorting noises for several minutes and talking to her friends. Finally, when her attention was elsewhere, the people around me leaned in and one after another thanked me in low-key whispers. (They were behind me but ahead of her in line so they would have been the ones most affected by her cutting ahead and believe me, time and time again you can be the last person to get into a screening or miss out by being two or three people away from the front when the doors are shut in your face and the sign saying "Complet" is posed. "I think you were right," said one woman. "Don't tell me; tell her," I laughingly responded. But of course no one wanted to start her up again. Then we all rushed in, I grabbed two seats on the far right for my friend and I and we spent the next four and a half watching "Che" ...with the French woman I fought

with sitting right in front of me.

SEARCHING FOR THE GAY

The entire festival, I'm always on the lookout for movies with any queer content, whether obvious or subtle. While I'd prefer to ignore the plot summaries provided in fest catalogs, I usually glance through them searching for any gay (sub)plots or hints of something same-sex erotic. Those plot descriptions are often terribly vague -- not to mention translated into English after being translated into French from say Spanish or German -- so good clues can also be found in the photos. I also badger friends every day about gay content in the movies they see. (With hundreds of movies on tap, we're often at different screenings.) Then they can tell me not to miss such and such a film. One day, my schedule opened up and I was looking forward to a relaxed sit-down meal before the evening movies began. Then I glanced at the film playing in the Directors Fortnight, "El Dorado." The plot description of the Belgian film said, "Yvan, a quick-tempered 40 year old vintage car dealer, surprises young Elie trying to burgle him. But he doesn't beat him up and develops a strange affection for him." Damnit, I thought, that sounds vaguely gay. I really wanted to relax but dutifully trooped off to see it. It wasn't gay in the least (though writer, director and star Bouli Lanners would make a fine bear), but it turned out to be my biggest find of the fest. And since no one else I talked to saw the film, it would have remained unknown to me if I hadn't checked it out.

I stayed at that location for the next film, "Acne," which was the last movie of the night and one I planned to meet a friend for. (One more reason to check out "El Dorado.") I didn't expect any gay content and there wasn't really, though perhaps a gay subplot had been excised. The film is about a 13 year old Jewish boy in (I think) Argentina. (The film is listed as Uruguay/Argentina/Spanish/Mexican so damned if I know where it's set.) In the film, our hero has another slightly older kid at school who always says "Hi" to him in the hallway. His buddies say, "Here comes your friend" when the other kid walks by. The guy definitely pays attention to our hero, though he barely has five lines of dialogue. But at one point, they're both away at summer camp of some sort when late at night our hero goes to the communal bathroom after everyone is asleep. The older kid shows up. (Was he watching to see if our hero would be out and about alone?) Then he offers a cigarette and lights them both up at the same time with his lighter in a Paul Henreid gesture that stirred my gaydar. My fellow movie-goer leaned over. "Is it about to get gay?" he asked. "Could be." Then the older kid said he liked the hero's hair and then asked if he

wanted to get stoned. Now my gaydar was off the charts, but the hero declined and the scene ended and the other kid was never heard from again. Was some subplot cut from the film involving the older kid making a pass? I wouldn't be surprised or it could be completely my imagination. But that's the effort I go to just for you.

WACKY PRESS CONFERENCE QUESTION #3: CHARLIE KAUFMAN'S GAY AGENDA

Reporter #1: Would you say that you understand loneliness? Charlie Kaufman (writer-director of "Synecdoche, New York"):
Um, I'm not sure I understand anything. I've experienced loneliness.... But to understand it, I'm not sure what that means.

Reporter #2: How should we consider homosexual relationships are...are heroes in your film? Is it some kind of critic or irony or whatever or is it some story, that's all?

Charlie Kaufman: Is it just a story?

Reporter #2: Is it just a story or is just we should think of some kind of message you want to say about....

Charlie Kaufman: No, no. I don't have any message. I don't really have any message about anything but what happens in the movie.

Reporter #2: OK. Thank you.

THE YEAR OF MARINA

A personal note to end on. People come to Cannes with a million movie proposals and ideas and dreams and most of them are lucky to make it to the basement of the Palais with some straight-to-DVD flick that never really sees the light of day. So this year is delightfully surreal to me. I've been going to Cannes since 2000 and one of my roommates for several of those years was Marina Zenovich. She's a good friend of my roommate Stephen and I at first wasn't quite clear what she did. But over the years she would mention she was working on some documentary about Roman Polanski and no, she didn't expect or need to get his cooperation to make the film. Imagine my surprise when her film "Roman Polanski: Wanted and Desired" made its world premiere at Sundance, got rave reviews and will be seen on HBO June 9. To qualify for the Oscars, the film had a one-week run in New York City, but they buried it at a run-down cinema on 183rd St. I trekked up there and paid my \$10 to see it. At first I was relieved it didn't suck. (You know how awkward it is when you have to watch your friend's play or see their band or read their book -- you just hope you can find something polite to say without struggling too hard.) Then I was pleased and finally jealous: the movie was really, really

good. Now Marina has returned to Cannes and the film is making a specialized, prestigious debut in the main batch of films Out of Competition. Filmmakers and producers and agents and hangers-on circle her the entire fest, she spends endless hours giving a head-spinning number of interviews, goes to parties, dresses up for the big premiere and gets introduced on the big stage as "realisatrix Marina Zenovich!" and walks out to huge applause. She's so busy I barely see her and I couldn't be happier -- it's a sign of what a big opportunity this is for her and the admiration everyone has for her film. People really do come to Cannes and succeed tremendously. It may have been a slow fest for most people, but watching her triumph has made it one of the happiest yet for me.

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