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Cannes 2009 Day Eleven: Two Minor Films and One Major Talent

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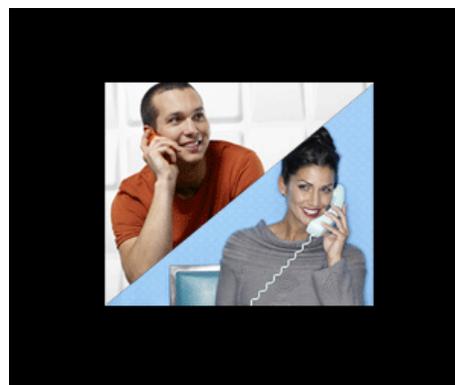
You would think after coming to Cannes for a decade that I would have the place down cold. No such luck. Thanks to ever-changing rules and an odd refusal to share info in advance on when movies are actually screening, the final two days of Cannes consist of saying goodbye to friends and finding out a movie you really wanted to see began an hour ago. The Directors Fortnight recaps its winners today and tomorrow every film in Competition is shown, as well as the closing night film. I dutifully looked at the Fortnight schedule and showed up at 2 p.m. for *La*

Pivellina. Ha! What they actually began showing was *Montparnasse*, a film I had heard literally nothing about. C'est la vie, no? I settled in, imaging, nay, hoping that this might be fate and I was about to watch a wonderful movie.

Nope. Just one hour in length, it contained three vignettes seemingly unrelated -- two sisters talk about the fears and instabilities one of them suffers from, a nice guy has dinner with the father of a friend they'll soon be picking up at the train station, and a young single mother invites the burly but sweet singer of a band she's watched perform to come back to her apartment for a drink. They're all of minor interest but when you combine them together they seem even less interesting.

I rushed outside, found a schedule of screenings posted on a pillar (why didn't they distribute them last night to our mailboxes?) and found out *La Pivellina* was playing next at 3:30 p.m. Voila! I get in line, go back and take the same aisle seat I was in a moment ago and wait for the movie. It received one of four awards handed out at the Directors Fortnight (while three were won by one of my favorites, *I Killed My Mother*), so I settled back, imagining -- no, believing I was about to see a wonderful movie.

Uh, I don't speak French and the movie had no English subtitles. (I am a little pleased that it took five minutes for me to realize this because the opening scene was so simple (a gypsy-looking

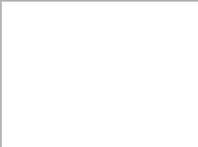


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woman -- or Romany, if you want to be polite) finds a baby seemingly abandoned in a park and tries to get someone to help her with it) I followed it for a while before realizing I shouldn't have to guess what she was saying. I go outside and ask the numerous guards and ushers if they know the English subtitling is off and they shrug their shoulders. I give up and head to the Directors Fortnight press office and explain the situation, trying to find out if the next two movies would or would not have English subtitling. She responded brightly that yes, of course *La Pivellina* naturally would have English subtitling. I explain I just came from the screening and in fact it did NOT have English subtitling. She's puzzled but brightly assures me that the next two movies indeed would.

I'm not filled with confidence. Anyway, it's off to the Majestic Beach where I interview, Xavier Dolan, the handsome talented 20 year old writer-director-star of *I Killed My Mother*. He apologizes several times about his English not being so perfect even though I don't speak a word of French and make clear his solid English is far superior to my pidgin French. We only have 20 minutes but it's the sort of casual but serious interview that used to be a staple of Cannes for the press and all the directors and stars of the major films. Now, the number of media is so massive that except in rare cases all you get is a press conference quote (where you can ask one question) and maybe a round table with six or seven other journalists (where you get to ask two or maybe even three). Only with new, rising talent like Dolan can you actually sit down and talk at length, with the surf in the background and the festival buzzing all around.

I reluctantly take leave of Dolan and head to the only other screening I can make for the day, a well-reviewed movie called *The King Of Escapes*. It's not a good movie but it's certainly wacky as it describes the life of a burly, bearish middle-aged guy who cruises for men with his good friend and then rescues a 16 year old girl from rapists and unexpectedly finds himself attracted to her. And she is most definitely attracted to him. Sexual fluidity doesn't even begin to describe the goings-on here, with older straight men taking a new drug and then going out into the woods to masturbate with each other, our gay hero having oodles of sex with his Lolita, and a reserved police chief who walks in at the most unexpected moments. It has a certain loosey goosey appeal and I really enjoyed the end of the fest crowd I saw it with -- the blue-haired ladies who snagged a ticket gasped with delighted shock as the men went at it with elan. A truly horrible score and weak visuals (though I won't soon forget our hefty hero running through the woods in his underwear) contribute to the over-all shabby air of a movie that does at least keep you off balance and ends well.

AWARDS PICKS

Sunday, the top awards will be handed out. It's a fool's errand to try and pick what will win because you're not talking about the consensus of the critics, you're talking about the reactions of the jury and the deals and counter-deals they make with each other in order to honor the movies they felt passionate about. So these are NOT my predictions for the winners; these are the awards I'd give out if I could.

MICHAEL'S PALME D'OR: *Un Prophete* (this is also the critical favorite of all the movies in Competition)

MICHAEL'S GRAND JURY PRIZE (RUNNER-UP) -- *The Time That Remains*

MICHAEL'S BEST ACTOR -- Christoph Waltz of *Inglourious Basterds* (though I'll be very happy if Tahar Rahim of *Un Prophete* gets it)

MICHAEL'S BEST ACTRESS -- Katie Jarvis for *Red Road* though Charlotte Gainsbourg for *Anti-Christ* makes sense too

Now this is where it gets tricky. The unspoken rule after the Coen Brothers swept is to limit any film to two major awards. So the trade-offs become very apparent here.

MICHAEL'S BEST DIRECTOR -- Andrea Arnold for *Fish Tank*

MICHAEL'S BEST SCREENPLAY -- Elia Suleiman for *The Time That Remains*

MICHAEL'S CAMERA D'OR -- Perhaps the most combative category, with three very good movies battling it out. My guess is *Samson & Delilah* will triumph, but it could also be *I Killed My Mother* or *Dogtooth* and everyone would be happy. (*Dogtooth* just won Un Certain Regard so that might kill its chances at this award.

MICHAEL'S JURY PRIZE -- these are just random awards to make sure a notable achievement doesn't fall through the cracks. I'd say The Best Rewriting Of History to Quentin Tarantino for *Inglourious Basterds* and Best Performance By An Athlete to Eric Cantona for *Looking For Eric*.

And I haven't even mentioned *Police, Adjective*. It was the runner-up for the Un Certain Regard prize and may well be the best reviewed film of the festival in any category (Competition, Directors Fortnight, etc.) It will certainly be on my best of the year list. I'm seeing four movies on Sunday

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and so for the first time I will have seen every film in Competition while at Cannes. Huzzah. Come back Sunday for reviews of four films and coverage of the awards.

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