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Posted: May 17, 2009 07:25 PM

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Cannes 2009 Day Five: Lars Von Trier Is (Unshockingly) Shocking!



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Day Five of Cannes was slow on the quality front, but did contain the cinematic provocations of Lars Von Trier. When a film is named Anti-Christ, you know you're not in for subtlety.

Venegance ** 1/2 (out of four) -- I'm not a big Johnnie To fan, so when I say this is the most enjoyable movie of his I've seen yet, you can take that with a grain of salt. He's the Tarantino-like B movie king who's been churning them out for years but recently been getting lots of notice. And with good reason, in a way. This movie wants to

be cool like John Woo's Hard Boiled but it plays more like a spoof. The cast is fun, led by French rock star Johnny Hallyday. But the To film has the usual awful score that sounds like it was composed in a day on a Casio keyboard, silly action sequences that look sort of fun if you completely turn off your mind and a plot that hinges on memory loss and -- I kid you not -- fine tailoring. One ludicrous action sequence sticks in my mind. Our heroes are in a garbage dump of sorts and are surrounded by bad guys who are closing in. How do the bad guys close in? Each gangster is rolling a giant bale compacted of trash end over end, hiding behind them for protection and firing over the top or from the side. The good guys grab their own bales and form a circle. You literally see giant bales careening towards each other across a field, like some clunky, slow-moving video game. The kicker is when the bad guys seem to be mostly destroyed when we see yet ANOTHER ring of bales closing in: the bad guys are actually just getting going. It's certainly supposed to be funny. But surely it's also supposed to be kind of cool and different, rather than just ridiculous. The idiocies pile up the closer to the finale we get, but it's good-natured silliness right down to the goofy last shot of people laughing for no particular reason. Director To certainly has talent and surely it's only a matter of time before Hollywood gives him a big budget to play with. I won't be the least bit surprised if he out Woos Woo in Hollywood. He's actually made for the place whereas Woo's genuinely original talent belongs back in Hong Kong.

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The Army of Crime ** -- After interviewing the director of a documentary on Rwanda and it's post-genocide reality, I slipped into this French film about the Resistance directed by Robert Guediguian. I'm not familiar with him and a friend insisted he wouldn't go because he's already seen four or five films by Guediguian and each and every one of them was consistently dull and middle of the road. Well, he certainly nailed this one in advance. It's based on the true story of the Manouchians -- 30 or so French patriots who wrecked havoc for a while on the Nazis in their midst only to be rounded up and summarily shot. The film could serve as a master class for the obvious. It begins with a voice over naming the names of each beloved patriot. When something tragic happens, classical music is certain to swell on the soundtrack. Or things move in slow motion. Or they move in slow motion AND the classical music swells. And the roll call is repeated at the end. It's always fun to see the Nazis get outwitted. (Sorry, Germany.) And the Manouchians, as portrayed in this film, at least, are certainly the best-looking members of the Resistance imaginable. Thomas Elek (played by Gregoire Leprince-Ringuet) is called a "dirty Yid" by a fellow student but surely the guy is just jealous of how handsome Elek is. There are worse movies at Cannes but few that embody the idea of "pedestrian" more perfectly.

Le Pere De Mes Enfants * -- Thoroughly French film (much talk, little action) in which a movie producer is swamped in debt and sees his world implode. His wife must pick up the pieces and try and see a few final film projects through to completion. It's typical of this sort of meandering, pointless movie that one of their three daughters vaguely begins to date a boy but we have no sense of their relationship or whether it's important. Also introduced and dropped is the fact that the producer has a son out of wedlock with another woman, whom the daughter goes to meet, doesn't and then is never mentioned again. Nor do we find out if any of the films falling apart financially actually get made. Nor do we care. Their children (especially the two youngest girls) are pretty darn adorable, but that's it for this tiresome affair.

Anti-Christ* -- Von Trier's latest scandal will be easily dismissed by many as ludicrous...because it is ludicrous. I say this as a fan of *Breaking The Waves*, *Dogville*, *The Five Obstructions* and other Von Trier projects. I've never really seen him as misogynist but in this case he seems to have said, "Misogyny? I'll show you misogyny!" It's a difficult film to discuss without giving away too much plot. But in the very opening scene, we see a husband and wife having sex while their little baby boy climbs up onto a window sill and falls to his death. Both are crippled with grief, naturally. But the wife is truly paralyzed and when her husband -- a therapist -- doesn't like how heavily medicated she is, he decides against all standard practice to take over her therapy himself and they retreat to a cabin in the woods called Eden.

"Chaos reigns!" as one unexpected character. Grand Guignol hysteria, to be exact. One friend gave a neat defense of the film -- which includes multiple examples of genital mutilation to give you an idea of the craziness that ensues -- by saying it's about the hubris of man in the face of the mystery that is woman. The husband was being egotistical in taking over her therapy himself, and boy does this movie prove that's a bad, bad idea. The only problem with this defense is that it's far more coherent and compelling than the film itself, proving exactly what the movie fails to do. Obviously meant to be button-pushing, albeit with some driving narrative purpose, the movie is ultimately just absurd nonsense. Not "absurdist" nonsense because that might be interesting. Just absurd. A few hardy souls clapped (and a small band of sympathizers stayed through the credits to clap loudly again) but most booed lustily. Heck, people applauded when the films inter-titles said "Epilogue" and we realized the movie was almost over. It's that kind of movie.

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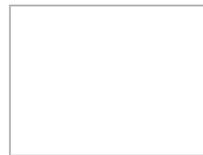
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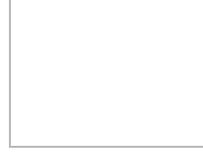
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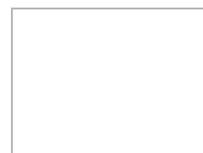
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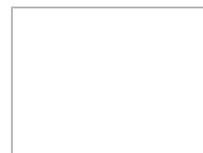
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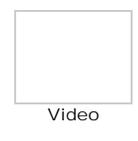


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Babbaganoosh *I'm a Fan of Babbaganoosh* [permalink](#)

I'm danish, so this is extra fun to read - sounds like crazy Lars is talk of the town yet again. I always find his movies difficult to watch, so it will probably be a couple of years before I work up the nerve for this one - it sounds extra crazy, even for LVT. That depression must have been one bad trip.

But I gotta hand it to him: He's done it again. In five years, noone will remember who won the Palme D'or, but everyone will remember Antichrist and crazy Lars. I personally love him, just cause he's a true original, and the world would be so boring without these people.

I'm sure when I do get up the nerve to see it, I will agree with both the negative and postive reviews as I always do when I watch his movies. They're pompous, bloated, way over the top and extremely painful, but also beautiful and quite often hilarious.

If you want to watch the best, LVT has ever done, seek out 'The Kingdom'. The danish version (Riget) is absolutely hilarious and very, very scary. And no genital mutilation!

Favorite Flag as abusive Posted 12:34 PM on 05/19/2009

audiodramatist *I'm a Fan of audiodramatist* [permalink](#)

You know when someone does something so magnificent, so awe inspiring, that no matter what else they ever do. You will always support them. After experiencing MANDERLAY, i feel that way about LVT. So i will check it out if it ever gets to Cape Town. I'll probably have to be a punk and cover my eyes with the mutilation stuff though.

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Michael Giltz - Huffpost Blogger *I'm a Fan of Michael Giltz* [permalink](#)



I feel the same way about Breaking The Waves. You'll find stuff of interest but it's no Dogville or Manderlay.

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klondiker *I'm a Fan of klondiker* [permalink](#)

Interesting. Thanks for the update!

I don't think Von Trier is a misogynist, although his films seem purposefully devoted to documenting misogyny. Almost all of his films that I've seen are about how a woman is subjected by society. And each one is more cruel, extreme, and unbearable than the last. There's Dogville which has 3 hours + of Nicole Kidman being bashed around. Then there's Dancer in the Dark, which is so difficult to watch because one terrible thing after another keeps happening to this innocent blind woman and there's no respite.

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Michael Giltz - Huffpost Blogger *I'm a Fan of Michael Giltz* [permalink](#)



I agree completely. Arguably, Anti-Christ is the same: it is basically about the hubris of man in the face of the mystery of woman. The man's pride and egotism and lack of love drive the woman insane. We see her horrible acts but she's been driven insane by the man, a pattern that stretches throughout history. All these points are made explicit in the film and especially the finale. They show misogyny but they do not celebrate it. Still, not a successful film.

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