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WILLIE NELSON AMERICAN CLASSIC
HIS BRAND NEW ALBUM OF GREAT AMERICAN STANDARDS
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Cannes 2009 Day Nine: Parents, Palestinians and Panic



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The critical consensus is as strong as I've ever seen at Cannes: the best film of the Festival is *Une Prophete*. Mind you, that doesn't mean the jury will pick it. Choose 12 people at random and there's no telling what you'll end up honoring. Typically, there will be two camps and they end up compromising on a third film each of them likes second best (perhaps *Fish Tank*?). Or they'll swap the Palme d'Or winner for an acting award or directing (you give me Christoph Waltz in

Inglourious Basterds and I'll give you *The Time That Remains* as runner-up best film). We shall see what horse trading takes place but there's no question Jacques Audiard of *Une Prophete* has grown into a world-class director. Here are the movies I saw on Thursday, two of them very good indeed:

I KILLED MY MOTHER/J'AI TUE MA MERE *** (perhaps *** 1/2 out of four) -- What a promising debut. Twenty year old Xavier Dolan wrote, directed and stars in this story of a 16 year old boy who is ferociously critical of his single mom (played by Anne Dorval, who somewhat resembles Shirley MacLaine circa *The Apartment*). (His dad lives in the same town but is utterly indifferent to the boy, called Hubert.) Hubert hates how his mom eats, hates how she puts on makeup while driving, hates what station she turns to on the radio, hates her clothes and hates everything else about her and lets her know this in a stream of invective and criticism that is helplessly funny for the first half hour and then calls our sympathy for him into the question as the film goes on. Interspersed with their wrangling are black and white excerpts from his video diary. These are quite different in tone from the initially brutal comic nature of the film and either reflect a teenager's hyper-self-importance or just indicate the more serious problems at the heart of the film. Hubert really is horrible at times and his mom isn't so awful but you can't help laughing. It's like hearing all the meanest fleeting thoughts you might have felt about your parents voiced with lacerating precision. In the car, he tries to change the station and she complains that she wants to listen to the news, so he angrily puts on headphones and she responds by asking why they can't talk -- she's not his chauffeur. So he retorts, "I was letting you savor your news program," getting a laugh out of his use of the word "savor" and her repetition of it. Their battles are endless. Is she horrible? No. Is he unhinged? No, just a verbally precocious teen taken to extremes. He could be

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angry at his absent dad. He could be nervously pushing her away as he prepares to tell her he's gay (he's got a darn cute boyfriend they've been dating for two months). He could just be -- as he ponders in his diary -- the sort of person who wasn't meant to have a mother. Hubert proposes moving out and getting his own apartment; his parents respond with boarding school when his grades suffer. I really want to see it again before making a judgment, but the movie did go on a tad longer than I expected and a beating late in the film (a gay bashing or just picking on the new kid?) felt out of place. And perhaps the black and white inserts (probably not five minutes total, I'd guess) are unnecessary. But Dolan holds the screen easily and confidently. His floppy, curly black hair makes him look like a Romantic poet or perhaps Johnny Depp in his *21 Jump Street* era. Funny, caustic and with charm to spare, Dolan will be fascinating to watch in the next few years. This isn't a "promising" debut; he's already delivering. Some visual signatures are evident here. When two people are together, he often sits them side by side. A close-up of the person on the left, will show them on the far right of the screen. A close-up of the person on the right frames them on the far left of the screen. It's the sort of internal consistency that shows an artist at work. He has a shaky camera shot on a bus of our hero that could have been intentional all along -- or maybe he couldn't get the shot he wanted due to a lack of equipment and realized it captured Hubert's jangled state of mind. Dolan is so in control, you can believe happy accidents were part of his master plan. He dresses his mom in her tackiest sweater when she's going to be at her best in protecting her boy. When he lashes out and says what would she do if he died today, Dolan waits until he's out of frame and lets her say softly "I'd die tomorrow" and it doesn't feel sentimental or false; it feels completely earned and moving. As does the rest of this strong film.

THE TIME THAT REMAINS *** 1/2 -- Elia Suleiman is a stone-faced heir to Buster Keaton who makes absurdist comedies about life in the Palestinian territories and Israel. His last film, *Divine Interventions*, was the first of his I saw and it was frustrating. The first wonderful hour of the film was virtually a silent comedy a la Jacques Tati, with comic bits of business in a small community building and expanding and circling each other with increasing hilarity...until politics stepped in and ground the movie to a halt. It could have been a classic without the heavy-handed message. But Suleiman established a personal comic style that was wonderful -- quite often he'll place the camera in a certain point (say a bench on a street or outside a window looking into a room) and have people criss-cross back and forth in front of our view, telling mini-stories of frustration or annoyance or tenderness that delight in their simplicity. Everything he promised is fulfilled in *The Time That Remains*. It succeeds not by abandoning its message but by subsuming it effortlessly in the story as a whole, which charts his family history from 1948 to the present in elegant, moving fashion. Showing his father as a young man, then middle-aged and finally old, with Suleiman himself growing from a little kid into the director of today, it's a deeply humane movie that encourages all sides in the conflict by managing to see the humanity of the Jews even as his sympathies are clear. Yes, a tiny Israeli soldier who has to step on a rock just to tie a blindfold on a prisoner is funny. But I can't help thinking it was a humanizing touch rather than a cruel one. Wonderful moments abound, like the guy who blithely takes out the garbage as the muzzle of a gigantic Israeli tank on his block swings around to follow his every step. When he gets a cell phone call, the man wanders back and forth with the tank's gun cranking back and forth again and again. It makes the tank look silly and shows how life goes on under extreme circumstances and yet also takes the fear out of the Israelis: look how sad they look, scared of a man taking out his garbage or from another point of view look how the Israelis are making themselves foolish. Two soldiers pull up to a late night dance club and say over their loudspeaker that a curfew is in effect. They keep repeating it, until their speech sounds like part of the pounding disco tune and soon the soldiers are bobbing their heads in time to the music while they say again and again that there's a curfew. Surely this can only be seen as revealing the soldiers as just like the Palestinians. And yet, in a lone fantasy sequence when Suleiman takes a pole vault and flies over the wall, there's no doubting where he sees the problem lying. But it's a rich, funny, touching film, far better than any message or political analysis might reveal. I have no idea how audiences in the Middle east would react. I'd like to thank Jews and Palestinians could watch it together and see themselves and laugh and smile.

A TOWN CALLED PANIC ** -- Based on a Belgian children's TV show, this is a stop-motion animated film about the lives of Cowboy, Indian and Horse, three friends who live together in a house next door to a very loud, boisterous farmer. Horse loves the local music teacher but is too shy to admit it. Cowboy and Indian order bricks online to build a BBQ pit for Horse's birthday but accidentally get 50 million bricks instead of just 50. The bricks become a problem, of course. The hyper voices of the characters like the Postman and the Policeman are very winning and the occasional "bastard" and "merde" shows the tone is slightly more adult than the series presumably is. It feels stretched out even at 76 minutes but it does make one long to watch the TV series it sprang from. Twenty two minutes an episode with these guys sounds like a blast.



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It remains a quiet fest in the market and late at night but definitely exciting and vibrant when it comes to the new films screening in and out of Competition.



Karin Badt: Cannes 2009: The Underside of the Philippines

What I want to show in my film is the abuse of power; the police are like god. They can butcher people. I don't expect people to like the film, but I want them to think about it after they go to bed.

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