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## Michael Giltz

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# Cannes 2010 Day Four and Five: Mike Leigh's New Gem and *Inside Job* Rocks The Fest

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Cannes reflects both the movie industry and the world at large. So it's no surprise that the economic recession has meant fewer movie posters along the Croisette, fewer lavish parties and indeed fewer parties period, fewer journalists (with the rise of online journalists making up for the lack of traditional print reporters), and indeed fewer stars. On the flip side, that same economic angst has fueled a number of films, notably *Wall Street: Money Never Sleeps* (there's no 2 in the print I saw) and especially *Inside Job* by Charles Ferguson, a documentary film about the Wall Street meltdown that has immediately vaulted into everyone's consciousness. It's not in Competition (god knows why) or everyone would be

calling it the front runner for the Palm d'Or.

With more serious fare and fewer glitzy stars, that means even the streets are a tad more navigable, which is nice. Running back and forth from cinema to cinema, it's a relief not to always face a mob of people outside the Lumiere. Of course, it's a matter of degree; there are still people everywhere. But if no Tom Cruise, Will Smith, Brad Pitt, etc means fewer fans to dodge, I won't complain. And even the girls are friendlier on the streets, without so many parties and billionaires to woo them. Three women perched on a rail with their backs to the Croisette enjoyed being ogled by every man in sight. When I strolled by behind them and just smiled politely at their enjoyment over being the center of attention, one of them leaned back, giggled and tickled my chest as I walked by. No, no, no, she seemed to say in French, you have to love us too. And I wasn't even in a tux. The recession does have its upside, as every trader will tell you.

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## DAY FOUR

**ANOTHER YEAR** \*\*\* 1/2 out of \*\*\*\* -- Director Mike Leigh -- one of the best working today -- has fallen into an interesting pattern. A really inspired film is often followed by a smaller, less ambitious one, a sort of throat-clearing before the next big effort. It's just happenstance, I'm sure; he certainly approaches every film with dedication and intensity. But there it is: his worldwide hit *Secrets & Lies* (1996) was followed by *Career Girls*; his atypical but brilliant Gilbert & Sullivan film *Topsy-Turvy* (1999), my favorite, was followed by *All Or Nothing*; the piercing *Vera Drake* (2004) followed by the lesser *Happy-Go-Lucky*. All of them are worthy additions to his CV, but that's my observation and I'm sticking with it. Besides, it meant I could hotly anticipate *Another Year* and that eagerness has been rewarded with one of the best films of the fest and surely the year. Simply put, we watch a year in the life of a happily married couple (the great Jim Broadbent and disarmingly natural Ruth Sheen) as Tom and Gerri. (Yes.) We see the family and friends in their orbit, all punctuated by the seasons and their work at the local cooperative vegetable garden. It begins brilliantly with Gerri, a psychiatrist at the local clinic, talking with a tightly wound Imelda Staunton. Staunton simply wants some sleeping pills because she hasn't slept well in weeks or even months. Gerri gently probes to find out what the real trouble might be. ("On a scale of 1 to 10, how would you rate your happiness?" asks Gerri. "One," says Staunton brusquely. "Well, there's a bit of room for improvement there," observes Gerri.) Staunton's character is so vivid, so wounded and yet defensive that we spend the rest of the movie anticipating her return -- if Judi Dench can win an Oscar for a brief appearance as the Queen in *Shakespeare in Love*, Staunton can win for this turn. As my friend Stephen pointed out, in a brilliant bit of writing, we see Gerri go home. When her husband asks about her day and she launches into an anecdote, we immediately expect her to talk about Staunton. When she doesn't (Gerri talks about another patient, an alcoholic teacher who showed up drunk), it lets us know that desperately unhappy people aren't so scarce on the ground. Indeed, the film is filled with them: their lonely but stable son, then there's the brother of Tom who has lost his wife and barely knows what to do with himself, an old college pal who is single and grossly overweight and stuffing himself with potato chips and beer plus many others as well. But above all there's Leslie Manville -- a Leigh regular -- who plays a co-worker of Gerri's and slowly becomes the heart of the film. She's a mess, kindly indulged by Gerri and Tom. Divorced, her big plan is to buy a car, which becomes a cock-up: it breaks down, she gets lost, piles up ticket after ticket and so on. She's painfully eager in conversation, awkwardly attracted to their son (who is 10 years her junior and thinks of her as an aunt and certainly not a love interest) and just desperate, really. Quietly, masterfully, the film reveals itself: everyone's life is messy and difficult at times, but some people look around and see their friends with homes and careers and children and just know, just *know* that life is passing them by. They're slightly dazed by the thought and wondering exactly what they did wrong. All these characters are so vivid, it's a while before you realize who is taking center stage, since any one of them could. Leigh's improvisational approach to building the script means scene after scene flows naturally, with hilariously awkward moments following delicately sad ones. And it ends just beautifully, with the sound dropping out and the audience looking compassionately at the tense and confused face of Manville's character. If you're not looking at yourself at that point and wondering where *your* life went wrong, you should just thank your lucky stars.

**YOU WILL MEET A TALL DARK STRANGER** \*\* out of \*\*\*\* -- Is it worth seeing? No. At this stage, as mediocre film follows mediocre film and the bad outnumber the good and threaten his reputation (which deserves to remain high, no matter how many bad films he makes), I think most fans just want to know if seeing the new Woody Allen movie will diminish him in their eyes just a tad more or keep his integrity undimmed. This comedy is too innocuous to tip the scales either way, but if it isn't a net positive like *Match Point*, why bother? Why cloud your memory of *Annie Hall* and *Manhattan* and *Husbands & Wives* and *Hannah And Her Sisters* and *The Purple Rose Of Cairo* and his other great works from the 70s and 80s with more of the same, only less? *Tall Dark Stranger* certainly won't surprise you in the least. Josh Brolin and Naomi Watts are an unhappily married couple; he's a frustrated novelist (one success, multiple failures) who has a wandering eye; she's an assistant in an art gallery whose sexy new boss (Antonio Banderas) isn't being nearly forward enough. Anthony Hopkins is her dad, saddling himself with a dim-witted prostitute turned girlfriend. (At least this time the old man with the young gal looks foolish.) And her mom is the redoubtable Gemma Jones, who comes off best as a woman sideswiped by her husband's abandonment but consoled by a faux psychic who promises her that she's in a glow of triumph and all will work out well. Everyone does their job, a few moments sparkle (a little) and Freida Pinto (of *Slumdog Millionaire*) as Brolin's quite reasonable obsession is ready for a great Hollywood role. But it's telling that a director so identified with one city doesn't even begin to capture London here. Clearly, shooting overseas woke Allen up out of his 90s stupor. But this film could be set in any major city without making the slightest difference and the characters are equally cardboard. London should not feel like Barcelona or New York. It should feel like *London*. So I don't come to bury Allen or to

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praise him but to shrug my shoulders and wish again that Woody would stop making movies out of habit and start making them only when he feels truly inspired. He certainly wasn't this time.

**SOMOS LO QUE HAY/WE ARE WHAT WE ARE** \*\*\* out of \*\*\*\* -- Another film at Directors' Fortnight and another quality pick. I'm three for three there and that event is clearly having a great year. What made me pluck this Mexican drama out as one to see? Well, it's "the Mexican cannibal movie" as everyone describes it, a serious-looking film about a family whose father has suddenly died. Unfortunately, dad's the one who always procures the people for them to eat and without him around, the two teenage sons need to step it up. Everyone has a slightly tired look about them (apparently flesh isn't the most well-rounded of diets) and is edgy and unexpectedly violent. The mother resented the father for always dabbling with whores, the sister and younger brother seem to have some sexual tension going on and older brother Alfredo (a memorable Francisco Barreiro) may be more bothered about possibly being gay than being a cannibal. The obvious comparison is *Let The Right One In* and it's a good one: *Somos Lo Que Hay* isn't that accomplished but it takes its subject very seriously, even as the film escalates into some blackly humorous scenes when the family members must awkwardly subdue one of their victims. (An axe comes in awfully handy right about then.) Their home is wonderfully oppressive (with all the windows blocked and the light a sickly brown) as is every detail overseen by director Jorge Michel Grau. It's probably not violent or "out there" enough for midnight movies nor is it quite successful enough as a drama for arthouse audiences. But *Somos Lo Que Hay* is certainly an impressive, distinctive debut.

**BELLE EPINE** \* 1/2 out of \*\*\*\* -- Hmm, a French coming of age tale crossed with a Roger Corman exploitation flick? Count me in. *Belle Epine* doesn't live up to the promise of that build-up unfortunately as it details a teenage girl mourning the death of her mother just days ago. She takes to shoplifting and then starts hanging out with the out of control youth who risk their lives racing motorcycles on an abandoned strip of asphalt every weekend. Our heroine is quite adrift, since her dad is in Canada dealing with his wife's effects and seemingly paralyzed by grief while her older sister can't bear to even be in the home. So she's all alone, which means wild parties with the bikers, one of whom happily takes her up on the offer of sex. It becomes quite silly, eventually, with the biking and "dangerous" scenes played at a music video level that undercuts the solid performances all around. The two genres don't play off each other or give each other a fresh spin; they awkwardly coincide and never truly cross-fertilize. That intriguing description at the beginning proved too good to be true, just like the idea that foolishly risking your life or offering yourself up to strangers could make you feel better.

**LES AMOURS IMAGINAIRES/HEARTBEATS** \*\* out of \*\*\*\* -- One of my most highly anticipated films of the fest is both a mild disappointment and a step forward for its director, Xavier Dolan. He had a smashing debut last year at Cannes with the blackly humorous drama *I Killed My Mother*. It won three top prizes at the Directors Fortnight and was one of the major hits of the fest. (It went on to acclaim in Canada and festivals around the world.) This year, his second film played *Un Certain Regard*, which is where young filmmakers go on their way up and elder statesmen go on their way down. At this rate, Dolan will be in Competition with a film in the next few years. Let's certainly hope so. His new movie, which has the godawful English title *Heartbeats* when *The Imaginary Lovers* is far better, is a bisexual *Jules & Jim* with a dash of Wong Kar Wai thrown in for good measure. The movie is interspersed with people talking about their doomed romances in faux documentary style, with an Almodovar-esque beauty (the actress has a wonderfully angular face) especially memorable. Then we meet best friends Francis (Dolan) and Marie (Monia Chokri). He's gay and makes little slashes on his bathroom wall every time a guy turns him down for a relationship (really? 40+ guys wouldn't want him?) and she wears vintage clothing and hangs out with him while they run down everyone in sight. Like a dappled deer, in wanders Nicolas (Niels Schneider), a tall curly-haired Adonis who loves ingenuously flirting with both of them. He shares a bed with the two friends -- innocently of course -- and is then surprised when they both develop crushes. The film is a tug of war between the two, with Nicolas either bemused or unaware of their desire. Mostly it's an excuse for Dolan to develop his skills as a filmmaker. *I Killed My Mother* was accomplished and had some nice framing of its characters but was by and large dialogue driven. *Les Amours Imaginaires* is a huge leap forward stylistically with Dolan telling much of the story through visuals. He goes a bit overboard, with some scenes playing like music videos, and his choice of classical music cues are far more cliched than his taste in pop. But if he's to become a great filmmaker, these are exactly the sort of talents he needs to develop. Dolan and Chokri are inherently appealing but the audience should be given more reason to care for them; they're so busy being sour and dissing each other that we don't get to warm up to them like we should. The eye candy of Nicolas should just be an excuse for them to spar as only friends can. And Dolan uses the Wong Kar Wai trick of repeating a pop song over and over and over again but only proves how difficult that can be to pull off. He also finds the perfect ending -- a nice visual moment -- only to tack on a coda that is thoroughly unnecessary. The movie looks great but seems to

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have been made on a dime, if that makes any sense, which is another good sign. Hopefully Dolan -- who is also acting in other films -- will continue making movies at a furious pace and keep pushing himself to grow artistically. He's got a great film in him and perhaps a great career as well.

## DAY FIVE

To prepare for the deluge of movies at Cannes, I try to read as many books as possible. Huh? That is, I try to read any books that movies are based on or, failing that, any books about the subject the film covers. That means I read Valerie Plame's *Fair Game*, since her memoir is the basis for a drama starring Sean Penn and Naomi Watts. A French film about atrocities in Algeria led me to *A Savage War Of Peace* by Alaine Horne, the definitive account of France's final days in that troubled colony. *Wall Street: Money Never Sleeps* and the documentary *Inside Job* (about the financial meltdown) convinced me to lug *The Big Short* by Michael Lewis, *Fools Gold* by Gillian Tett and *House Of Cards* by William D. Cohan. You get the drift. So another French film -- this one about Cistercian monks slaughtered in 1996 (in Algeria, no less) -- led me to another book. And that explains why I am surely the only person in the entire world who will be lining up for Gregg Araki's super-gay apocalyptic college sex comedy *Kaboom* while reading *The Cistercian World: Monastic Writings Of The Twelfth Century*. People in line would glance at the book, get a very puzzled look on their face and then turn their backs. Not a conversation starter, apparently. I knew I should have brought Michel Foucault instead.

**LA PRINCESSE DE MONTPENSIER** \*\* out of \*\*\*\* -- In keeping with my book theme, I'll mention that I'd never read the novels of Madame De Lafayette. Rather than reading this one, I purchased her masterpiece *The Princess Of Cleves*. Considered the first modern French novel (it dates from 1678), the novel demonstrates LaFayette's subtlety and focus on ethics and mores rather than heaving bosoms. But this film of her other great novel, by director Bertrand Tavernier, has no subtlety or charm or wit. It's flatly obvious as we follow a princess forced to marry one (rather jealous) man but in love with a dashing competitor and inspiring love in her spouse's older mentor. Swords flash, with Christian wars as a backdrop for her passion. We're told the Princess has rejected her lover and come to appreciate her husband (quite a winning fellow, actually) but then it's back to the lover and the film is too simple for us to know whether she genuinely changed her mind again and again or was dissimulating. The same is true for all the characters so instead of the devious, thrilling intrigue of *Dangerous Liaisons*, we just follow the surface action without ever really knowing or caring about who really loves whom.

**ARMADILLO** \*\* 1/2 out of \*\*\*\* -- A fine Danish documentary this follows a group of soldiers on a six month tour of Afghanistan. The director's statement said the film was about the addiction of war. Clearly, he came in wanting to understand why anyone would choose to go to a war zone, especially people as nominally involved in the politics of the US occupation of Afghanistan as young Danish men. Happily, the film evinces no such agenda. We follow the guys as they're tearfully hugged goodbye and then endure months of boredom. Many scenes are depressingly familiar, with local Afghans caught between soldiers who show up during the day and the Taliban who show up at night. The men reinforce the idea of soldiering as frat boys with guns: they party, call each other gay, wrestle around, watch a lot of porn and do public service -- in this case serve their country with diligence. It's only late in the film when we witness two firefights and the filmmakers are so clearly in danger that we become frightened for them. The rush of actually facing the enemy (the soldiers are worried they'll go home without being tested in battle) is clearly the key as far as the filmmaker is concerned. Their actions on the field, which may be callous by civilian standards (they boast about their actions, joke about the enemy dead) seem perfectly reasonable. But in the film one soldier's mother calls in to complain about his description of the events and an investigation is launched that peters out. Now, with the release of the film, a new investigation has been launched into whether anyone behaved inappropriately. What's no surprise is that about half the men re-up. I think it's not that momentary rush a la *The Hurt Locker* but more the camaraderie and sense of genuine purpose they have. Perhaps most striking is the film's strong visuals under very difficult conditions. The material is too similar to other documentaries to recommend it, but it's a solid work nonetheless.

**COUNTDOWN TO ZERO** \* 1/2 -- The most entertaining moment of this documentary about nuclear proliferation is when the first talking head pops up: it's Valerie Plame, the CIA agent who specialized in this issue. Right wingers who demonize her will learn she's always been smarter and more hawkish about the threats around the world than they'd like to admit. That was about it for me. A perfectly competent movie, it tells us remarkably banal facts: nuclear weapons can cause a lot of damage, major powers like the US and Russia have at times almost launched them, accidents and mistakes continually happen and if you want some enriched uranium of course you should head for the former Soviet Union. Other than middle school students who grew up post Cold War, it's hard to imagine most people not knowing and agreeing with these facts. People may not know the number of countries that officially have nuclear weapons (9, if you count Israel) or the number of weapons out there (around 16,000), but there's precious little beyond a few vivid anecdotes to engage adults. The cause is impeccable (of course, [there's a](#)

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website) but the film is forgettable.

**INSIDE JOB** \*\*\* 1/2 out of \*\*\*\* -- What a difference a screening makes! From a banal examination of a compelling international issue we go to a wonderfully illuminating documentary about an especially complex topic. *Inside Job* is unquestionably the most important film that will play at Cannes and hopefully can arouse people into forcing legal action to be taken against those who have so clearly broken the law and swindled the taxpayers and citizens out of literally hundreds of millions of dollars. *Inside Job* is a relentless, accurate and highly entertaining look at the financial meltdown. Director Charles Ferguson clearly maps out the origins of the crisis, how it could have been prevented, how it could have been lessened, where the bodies are buried and who buried them. From Elliot Spitzer to a spokesman for the financial industry on Wall Street, from France's head of finance to guys living in tents in Florida, Ferguson went everywhere and spoke to everyone willing to talk. (He also has a ball noting when people refused to talk, typically after a damning fact in the film about them is driven home.) It's like a Michael Moore movie without the light touch that can allow some people to dismiss the substance of what is said. No one can dismiss this film; Ferguson is too thorough, too specific. Interview after interview, he politely makes people squirm. If the result is not even sterner reforms from Congress than those pushed by Obama to wholesale ethics reform on our college campuses, the only one we can blame is ourselves. Ferguson has done his part.

**KABOOM** \*\*\* OUT OF \*\*\*\* -- I should probably give this film 2 1/2 stars out of four but sometimes you have to be honest and just admit you had a blast, whatever a movie's flaws. In this case, the movie is Gregg Araki's totally ridiculous apocalyptic, end of the world, cult crazy, lesbian witch, fluid orientation college sex comedy. Yeah, I enjoyed it. The movie marries the absurdist, out there scenarios of his early work with the formal mastery of his masterpiece *Mysterious Skin* and the stoner flick *Smiley Face*. The result is queer-friendly, polished fun. It stars Thomas Dekker of TV's *Heroes* and *Terminator: The Sarah Connor Chronicles* as Smith, a gay-ish college student who considers his orientation "undeclared." (Labels are so 90s.) In an homage to *Risky Business*, it starts with a dream. Typically for Araki, when Smith is naked by God he's fully naked and in the end he spots...a red trash container. Huh? Don't worry. It all soon spirals into a sexual cornucopia of a surfer roommate who digs chicks but wants to self-fellate, a female best friend trying to dump a vengeful sexy witch, a disappearing girl, another girl who booty calls him every five minutes...oh, and a massive cult that may spell the end of the world, thus dooming Smith from having a date with an actually sane guy who met him at a party. Someone called it The CW on acid and it's hard to get that description out of my head. If it sounds up your alley, it is. If it sounds a little dicey for your tastes, *Kaboom* won't win you over with subtlety. It's a nutty, silly ride. Oh and for those who were bitterly disappointed that Dekker's gay character on *Heroes* was turned straight and then dumped from the show, you can discover that revenge (in this case his role here) is sometimes a dish best served hot. And sexy.

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Michael,

Great inside look at Cannes and the movies. Enjoyed your look at how the people and the town are different since the meltdown, especially the girl tickling your chest. Can't wait to see Inside Job.

But I have to ask, where are your priorities, man? You choose to be at Cannes instead of watching American Idol? A couple of good movies instead of seeing Casey going home to Cool, Texas. I'm guessing, of course, and we won't know for a few more minutes. He could surprise; the girls love him and he's likable enough. But he didn't seem to try very hard last night. Lee killed; maybe the best singing of the season. And Crystal was quite good.

But I confidently predict that Lee, Crystal, and Casey will comprise the Bottom Three tonight.

Tell France hi for me. And thanks for covering Cannes. I'd hate to be there when I can sit here instead and watch TV. :- )

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