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Michael Giltz
Freelance writer and raconteur

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Cannes 2011 Day Two: Angry Kids, Dying Kids and Kids in Danger!

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CANNES 2011 DAY TWO

Critics remain in a very friendly mood, I must say. No film has broken out with huge buzz, but everyone seems to want to cut them slack and look on the bright side. And you thought critics just couldn't wait to get their digs in! (Actually, critics see so many movies they are always desperately hungry for something even remotely good and entertaining. That impulse is only heightened when you see four or five movies in a day for 10 days in a row.) Here's my video report on the first day and a half at the fest followed by full reviews of every film I've seen so far.

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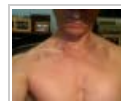
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WE NEED TO TALK ABOUT KEVIN ** 1/2 out of ****

Director Lynne Ramsay has a marvelous eye, a gift for strong visuals and a hunger for dark material. She was a bold but smart choice to adapt *We Need To Talk About Kevin*, the best-selling novel by Lionel Shriver. The book is nominally about a school shooting in America. But it's really about a reluctant mother (played with uncompromising skill by Tilda Swinton) who from the moment her child is born simply doesn't love him, simply *isn't* flooded with the emotions everyone assured her she would feel because "it's different when it's your own." For her, it's not different. It doesn't help that the baby seems to reject her too, refusing to even breast feed a drop. She never stops trying to connect or understand the child even as she sees him growing into a disturbingly unempathetic little boy. Did she feel no love for him because he was born this way or did he become this way because she couldn't offer him the maternal love every baby deserves? Here's a clip showing her overwhelmed by a baby she believes is intentionally crying long after its needs have been met because the child doesn't like her (and, more to the point, just doesn't like living).

This emotional journey is fitfully captured in the film, which is inevitably dominated by the school shooting itself and Swinton's miserable life afterwards in the community and her repeated visits to her son in prison where he remains unrepentant. Is he human or just a monster? And is she a monster for not being able to love him? All of this is addressed visually and intellectually in the film, but the dots aren't quite connected emotionally. The film misses the career as a successful travel writer and businesswoman that Swinton sacrificed (it's alluded to briefly) and loses some of the impact of the climax by ditching the novel's narrative decision to have the mother address her husband in letters talking about their son. It's a film to admire, but not one that quite wrenches your heart out the way it should. And the horror of the killings (echoed too often with the color red dominating the film's palette) just doesn't let us focus on what made the book more than just a fictional Columbine: the horror of a mother who fears she never should have become pregnant in the first place.

RESTLESS * 1/2

Moment to moment, I didn't mind this romantic weepie directed by Gus Van Sant. It stars two very appealing actors -- Mia Wakowska (who looks like a young Mia Farrow here) and Henry Hopper (the son



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of Dennis and so handsome and CW-ready it reminds you how good looking his dad was in the days of *Rebel Without A Cause*). The plot is a shameless update of *Harold & Maude*, but with a sexier male lead (all apologies to Bud Cort, who had a genuine charm all his own, but Hopper is *Tiger Beat*-ready) and instead of an old coot/Holocaust survivor bored with life, what about a sexy young female with a terminal illness? So Hopper is an orphan who is scared of cars because his parents died in a horrible accident. He gate-crashes funerals and Wasikowska bravely battles cancer (looking smashing every step of the way) while teaching him to embrace life again. As if the twee-ness weren't already off the charts, Hopper -- in a truly absurd bit of whimsy -- is befriended by the ghost of a young Japanese kamikaze pilot. Yep. Hopper has no fascination with World War II or flying to explain such a bizarre conceit, but there you are. The use of pop music is impeccable -- ranging from current tunes to Nico -- and both "troubled" teens look dreamy when they're in love, dreamy when they're fighting and dreamy when they're dying or watching someone else die. It's perfect for the teens waiting for the next *Twilight*. But if you're a genuine outsider, *Harold & Maude* is still the one to watch.

POLISSE ** 1/2

Actress Maiwenn Le Besco (now going simply by Maiwenn) leaps into the majors with her entertaining if superficial look at a Parisian Child Protection Unit of the police force. It feels essentially like a very good TV pilot. We're introduced to a large, sprawling cast of characters and follow them as they do the very difficult job of catching pedophiles and trying to rescue children in danger. The stress of the job is so high that many of their relationships are rocky. One member of the team leaves her husband, egged on by a female partner who says all men are scum. Another male member leaves his wife and finds himself attracted to the female photographer assigned to their unit to capture the work they do. Two others are in love and so on. Some of the vignettes are terrific -- a teenage girl who admits offering blowjobs to teen boys to get her phone back is puzzled when a cop says she shouldn't trade sex for a cell phone. "It was a smartphone," she responds, as if that explains it. A mother blithely tells the cops she can't get her baby to sleep because the social worker told her not to give it handjobs any more. (She still does that with the older boy; it always works.) Best of all is the scene where a female Muslim officer berates a Muslim man and demands he show her in the Quran where it says a woman shouldn't work; watching her rising anger and the way her teammates both keep violence from escalating but let her vent is hilarious and touching.



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The film stumbles with a very awkward, unearned "dramatic" ending and a scene of corruption where a pedophile with high connections happily confesses to raping his daughter but they're forced to let him off scot-free. It's completely unbelievable that a team of eight people would all agree to letting that happen without at least going to the papers. Still, Maiwenn keeps a lot of balls in the air for most of the movie. If it was the start of a TV series, I'd be sure to keep watching. As a standalone film, it feels a tad superficial. But there's genuine talent here and a solid cast.

LA FEE/THE FAIRY ***

The team behind *The Fairy* also made the charming *L'Iceberg* and *Rumba*, which was fun it not quite as assured. This falls in the middle of the two others, but there's no question this writing, directing and performing team are a wonderfully original trio delivering the slapstick pleasure of silent comedy and a romantic vision of life that is buoyant and delightful. In this tale, Dominique Abel works the night shift of a tiny hotel. In walks Fiona Gordon (a gawky delight that echoes Shelley Duvall). She says she's a fairy and offers him three wishes. The rest of the film shows the result of his wishes and how the two of them quickly fall in love. Mixed in is a man who smuggles his dog into the hotel inside his luggage, which forces him to say things like "Have you seen my bag?" when his dog goes missing. Three men hope to illegally emigrate to the UK, two not-so-bright cops want to end the wacky goings on and so on.

The heart of the movie are their comic set pieces. The fairy walks along the back of our hero to massage out the pain after he's taken a tumble -- that means we see a close-up of her feet traveling up and down his spine, squeezing here, playfully fondling there and suddenly jumping into the air to flip around or cross them and hold in the air like a ballerina before landing again an impossible ten seconds later. It's a simple little effect, but the willing suspension of disbelief it calls for puts you right in the mood for the rest of the film. It's a bauble, a trifle, filled with oddball touches. When the fairy needs a new pair of shoes she just walks into a shoe store and finds a good pair of high heels. "I'll take them," she says and then asks if perhaps they have a pair of running shoes? She puts them on, says "I'll take them" too and then rushes for the door, arms akimbo. The saleswoman chases after her -- despite being in high heels -- and somehow manages to nearly track the fairy down. Then the race cuts to a main street where the fairy nearly bumps into another thief who is fleeing on foot from the butchers he stole from. They jog in place with a painted backdrop giving the illusion of movement, introducing themselves and shaking hands politely (all while being chased) before each peels off in a separate direction. That's the sort of nutty, weird little touches this movie relishes. If you like Buster Keaton and Harold Lloyd, there's no reason you shouldn't also take pleasure in the movies of these two (and their collaborator Bruno Romy). They're in a world all their own and it's a sweet one.

THE SLUT **

In this drama written and directed by Hagar Ben-Asher, a single mother of two girls enjoys sex. She has three men on call and though they often do things for free (like fix a flat tire), it's clear everyone is having a good time, and the casual sex is just that. This relatively happy arrangement is thrown into turmoil when an old friend of hers drops in, a veterinarian she clearly has a fondness for. Their sex isn't quick and good-natured; it's passionate and deeply satisfying. Almost against her better judgment, our heroine finds herself falling in love. But can she actually enjoy being with just one man? And exactly how patient

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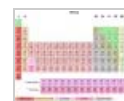
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is he going to be as she figures this out? To complicate matters, he's becoming a real presence in the lives of her two girls. And then she gets pregnant. This is a quiet, well-made film, if a bit slow. It's hard to discuss because the major bones of contention I have with the movie come towards the very end. The final scene is vivid and believable but the major twist before that is completely unconvincing. Vague enough for you? Let's just say these are decent if confused people. Anything is possible (nice people can do terrible things and terrible people can have moments of humanity) but for a movie to work we must believe those moments truly happened for those particular characters. That doesn't happen here but Ben-Asher does create characters believable enough to make us resent when he pushes them into new directions.

Thanks for reading. Michael Giltz is the cohost of *Showbiz Sandbox*, a weekly pop culture podcast that reveals the industry take on entertainment news of the day and features top journalists and opinion makers as guests. It's available free on iTunes. Visit [Michael Giltz at his website](#) and his [daily blog](#). Download his podcast of celebrity interviews and his radio show, also called *Popsurfing* and also available for free on iTunes. Link to him on [Netflix](#) and gain access to thousands of ratings and reviews.

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Michael Giltz: Cannes 2011: Woody Loves Paris; Sleeping Beauty Gets Dark

Critics were in a forgiving mood on the first day of the Cannes Film Festival. They treated Woody Allen's latest trifle with a generous spirit, though none would claim it ranks with his great works.



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Michael Giltz: Cannes 2011 Preview: Woody Allen, Johnny Depp and "The Tree Of Life"

CANNES 2011 PREVIEW The 2011 Cannes Film Festival starts Wednesday, kicking off ten days of movie, party and celebrity gluttony. That's why I cut "party"...

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