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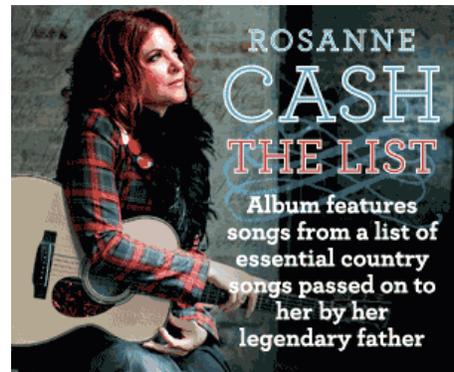
 **Michael Giltz**
Freelance writer and raconteur
Posted: September 14, 2009 02:47 AM

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Toronto Film Fest Day 4: Two Documentaries and a Little Girl



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You could spend an entire film festival going from press conference to round table to one-on-one interviews. I'd rather see the films and worry about interviews some other time. Besides, at festivals there are so many reporters milling about that 20 minutes one-on-one is akin to an hour together at any other time of the year. Still, Vera Farmiga was so sexy and good in *Up In The Air* that I was happy to do a drive-by with her (how else to describe a 14 minute chat?) and miss

the first film of the day (starring, ironically, Vera Farmiga). After that I had a carefully choreographed string of films -- all thrown off by the fact that Michael Moore's documentary had unexpectedly grown from 107 minutes to about 120 minutes.

CAPITALISM: A LOVE STORY ** 1/2 out of **** -- The movie was longer than I expected; more haphazard than *Sicko*, one of his strongest efforts; and didn't throw an early diss at Obama like I assumed. Still, it had its moments, should stir up talk and get people thinking again about what just happened on Wall Street and Washington. Moore's patented approach is on display here: he begins with a cute appropriation of an old film about the decline of the Roman Empire to illustrate the parallels between it and the US. He gets personal by showing old home movies, taking his dad to the desolate field where a factory used to be that his dad worked at; and returning to Flint. In the movie's weakest element, Moore also revives some old tricks, like walking up to the corporate headquarters and demanding to speak to the CEO. But he also captures some real heartache, like the farm family being evicted from their home and some real hope, with workers at a plant standing up to their dismissal from their jobs with only three days notice. And while the link is a tad tenuous, the story of teenagers sentenced to a juvenile detention center by a judge getting kickbacks is horrifying. I wish anyone other than Moore would narrate his films: I just don't like how he reads his own material. And going back to Flint didn't really pay dividends ... until he discovers that Flint is actually a routing center for sending out foreclosure notices to people all over the country. Kicking people out of their homes is about the only source of job growth for Flint, a town that Moore immortalized by showing the pain of foreclosures with his breakthrough hit *Roger*

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& Me. Using Wallace Shawn to talk about the economy is just bizarre (and I like Shawn). But Moore gets some gold out of angry Congressmen and women who felt sideswiped by the Bush administration. And his clip of FDR pledging to fight for a new bill of rights as soon as WW II is over is inspiring. A job, a roof over your head, decent medical care -- these aren't pie in the sky radical notions because a hugely popular president was ready to push for them more than 60 years ago. And if Moore's film can get people talking about financial bailouts and whether medical care is an inalienable right then I'm certain he'd be happy indeed. Note: at the end of the press screening, the film got some strong applause, which doesn't often happen. Maybe the room was filled with freelancers like me who can't afford health insurance.

Unfortunately, the movie ended at 2:15 p.m. rather than 2 pm., which threw my carefully mapped out schedule into disarray. So I took a chance on a film I knew nothing about that was close by and worked for me, time-wise.

A BRAND NEW LIFE *** out of **** And what a happy treat it was. Apparent first-time director Ounie Lecomte shows an assured touch in this reportedly autobiographical story about a little Korean girl whose widowed (?) father takes his little darling on a "trip" to a Catholic orphanage and then leaves her and sadly walks away. She's a determined little girl, but the orphanage is peopled with very understanding staff so her outbursts and stubbornness are treated with empathy and care at every turn. Not that the orphanage is idealized. One older girl with a deformed leg weeps when she realizes she is being placed with an old couple that really just want to use the girl as a cheap servant. But our heroine settles in -- albeit warily -- until we realize that this orphanage can't be a brand new life. This is just a way-station. And the routine when a little girl is adopted -- the other kids sing "Auld Lang Syne" and then the adopted child is ushered into a car while the others break into another song. It's like a ritualized dance of leaving. The child actress in the lead gives one of those natural, unaffected performances that arise only from a child who hasn't acted being overseen by a sensitive, smart director. And while the film isn't a depressing affair, it pulls no punches either. Our heroine's genuine despair over her lot is dramatized in some remarkable scenes of fury and pain on her part. A final memory of her father seemed to provide the perfect grace note for the film, until an unnecessary scene follows it. That doesn't ruin the film by any stretch, but it's always sad to see the perfect final grace note superseded by less inspired touches. Lecomte has delivered a very confident debut.

Then after dinner with my host and friend Chris at a Japanese restaurant, I buckled in for a 2 hour and 38 minute documentary about ballet.

LA DANSE: LE BALLET DE L'OPERA DE PARIS *** out of **** -- I might be underestimating the recent work of legendary documentary filmmaker Frederick Wiseman. We are so familiar with his work and style that a new movie by him doesn't astonish or surprise on some level. But it adds to his body of work, which typically includes a detailed look at an institution of some sort.

Of course, Wiseman doesn't interview people or create a narrative (at least, not an obvious one). He just observes and shares what he's seen. In this case, it's the world of the Paris Opera Ballet company, one of the best in the world. Certainly they must have the best digs: the dancers rehearse in an endless series of spaces, one more dramatic and inspiring than the next. Anyone with even a casual knowledge of ballet won't be surprised by anything here. But the attention to detail, the way a choreographer will have dancers repeat one bit of business again and again until he's molded them into what he wants or conversely loves a little fillip done by a dancer and highlights it and gets them to rehearse that again and again so it can be a formal part of the piece. Staff meetings, cafeteria workers, union meetings, live performances, planning for the arrival of "Big Benefactors," all of it unfolds for us without the luxury (or distraction) of some forced narrative, like the birth of a new dance piece or some such thing. The asides of some of the instructors are priceless, but we don't really get to know them or the dancers or the administrators or anyone really except -- somehow -- the company itself, the Paris Opera Ballet. Engrossing.

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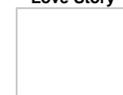
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Michael Moore: This Is It! World Premiere of *Capitalism: A Love Story* Tonight

Tonight, at the Venice Film Festival, I will premiere my new movie, "Capitalism: A Love Story." After 16 months of production, I am proud to present this work of mine to you. It is unlike anything you'll see this year.



Michael Moore: From Toronto to Pittsburgh to Jay Leno, *Capitalism* Marches On...

My crew and I had one thought in mind while we were filming *Capitalism*: What if the powers-that-be refuse to give us funding for the next movie after they see what we've put in this one?



Ted Johnson, Maegan Carberry, Teresa Valdez Klein: *Rude Awakening: Has Me-Centric Culture Stymied Our Democracy?*

It's "awkward public outbursts by public figures" week! Woo-hoo! We can start with Michael Moore. Next up is Joe Wilson. Oh, and Kanye?



Erica Abeel: TIFF's Guilty Pleasures

The past day's crop of films has ranged from moderately interesting to guilty pleasure.



Randy Shaw: Michael Moore's New Film Rocks AFL-CIO

This is not only Moore's best film, but it is the most politically incendiary film put on the American screen in memory.

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