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Michael Giltz

Freelance writer and raconteur

Posted: September 21, 2009 12:53 PM

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Toronto Film Festival Wrap-up



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The Toronto Film Festival ended over the weekend. My first experience there after a decade of covering Cannes was very pleasant: it's a press friendly event and the stress level is much lower than the Wimbledon of film fests. I saw some Oscar hopefuls that actually delivered, some 24 films in all, as well as reading several books, interviewing Vera Farmiga for an all too brief 14 minutes, visiting with family and friends (thanks for the guest room, Chris and Noriko and

Momo!), doing two podcasts (including my first solo one), publishing an interview with musician Matthew Sweet and appearing on CP24's *LeDrew Live* to talk about the festival.

The winners were announced, including audience favorite *Precious*, which I saw at Cannes. With Oprah and Tyler Perry supporting it and general success at festivals from Sundance to Cannes, it's definitely getting every opportunity to be the indie breakout of the year.

My films in order of preference (all ratings out of four stars):

- UP IN THE AIR *** 1/2 (definite Oscar hopeful)
- A SERIOUS MAN *** 1/2 (should get the Woody Allen slot come Oscar time)
- DOGTUOTH *** (genuinely odd absurdist film; can't wait to see again)
- A BRAND NEW LIFE *** (a real find -- Korean drama about little girl in orphanage)
- SOUL KITCHEN *** (lighter fare from Fatih Akin)
- WAKING SLEEPING BEAUTY *** (interesting documentary about resurgence of Disney animation)
- NORTHLESS *** (another find, this one about illegal immigrant trapped in Tijuana)
- A SIMPLE MAN *** (Tom Ford debuts as director; Nicholas Hoult given matinee idol gloss)
- I AM LOVE ** 1/2 (Tilda Swinton in lush Italian melodrama)
- HUGH HEFNER: PLAYBOY ACTIVIST AND REBEL ** 1/2 (Hef with minimal naughty bits)
- CAPITALISM: A LOVE STORY ** 1/2 (Michael Moore in another conversation starter)
- HUACHO ** 1/2 (typical fest fare -- made with care but no commercial prospects)



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MAX MANUS ** 1/2 -- Norwegian WWII resistance hero biopic
 LIFE DURING WARTIME ** 1/2 (Solondz revisits *Happiness* with unhappy result)
 THE PRIVATE LIVES OF PIPPA LEE ** 1/2 (director Rebecca Miller continues to develop)
 SOLOMON KANE ** 1/2 (refreshingly serious sword and sorcery romp)
 COLE ** (standard indie fare showcases strong lead Richard de Klerk)
 THE TROTSKY ** (teen comedy that never transcends its very high concept)
 LEBANON ** (Israeli tank crew story no gripper a la *Das Boot*)
 VALHALLA RISING ** (arty Viking movie? Why not?)
 YOUTH IN REVOLT * 1/2 (yet another quirky comedy with hyper literate hero Michael Cera)
 PHANTOM PAIN * 1/2 (cyclist loses leg but doesn't gain any interest to viewer)
 BITCH SLAP * (great title, loads of attitude, little else)
 DORIAN GRAY * (makes debauchery seem dull)

OVERHEAD IN TORONTO #1

The man in the row in front of me at one screening was being greeted by practically everyone who walked down the aisle. But one woman stood out. They whispered their thoughts about some movie (I couldn't hear which one) and then she said, "I wished it were more explicit, more gratuitous!" and then she laughed and added, "More tits, please!"

BOOKS I READ IN TORONTO

THE VAMPIRE DIARIES: AWAKENING BY L.J. SMITH * out of ****
 UP IN THE AIR BY WALTER KIRN ** 1/2 out of ****
 A SINGLE MAN BY CHARLES ISHERWOOD *** out of ****
 THE DEEP BLUE GOODBY BY JOHN D. MACDONALD *** 1/2 out of ****

OVERHEARD IN TORONTO #2

Guy and gal walking down the street laughing.

Guy: I just want clarification that you lied to Lindsay Lohan!
 Girl: Lindsay Lohan lies to herself every single day!

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The Road didn't even make your list. How sad is that?

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The festival was notably front-loaded with major films often playing opposite each other with only one screening so only one chance to see. Also, with The Road, I knew it would be out in theaters shortly. I have the freedom to pick and choose what I want to see and if I know a film is going to be in theaters, I might prefer to see something that doesn't have a distributor yet or something less well-known. There are literally hundreds of films playing at Toronto and it's simply impossible to see them all or even all the "big" movies. Further, The Road already played at Venice so it wasn't going to make a stir at Toronto because it wasn't "their" movie, ie. a movie that premiered there. I decided to see Dorian

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Gray at 11:45 am at the same theater. The Road played in that theater immediately following, but if I wanted to be sure of a seat I would have either had to skip the earlier screening or leave in the middle of Dorian Gray in order to get into line. I chose instead to see two movies completely and The Trotsky, an interesting looking Canadian film. And to cap it off, the reviews in Venice for the film were mixed (with the NYTimes being especially brutal) so I didn't feel the pressure to see it right away the way I did for Venice top prize winner Lebanon.

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...But you didn't bother to watch or review the most talked about film of the festival? That would be CoLLapse by filmmaker Chris Smith. This was the most important film of the festival, by far. Where were you? Jeez...too many books, man...

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Hi Douglet,

Didn't "bother" to watch or review? I saw an average of three films a day over eight days, as well as filing 10 stories for various outlets, recording two podcasts (one of which discussed this very film with a critic who did see it) and appeared on TV to talk about the fest and the movies I liked. The books I read were just while standing in line for screenings or riding the subway, not in place of seeing films. And scheduling again: this film screened at the same time as Michael Moore's Capitalism. I really liked American Movie and look forward to seeing this film as soon as I can. Like everyone who attends film festivals, I have a list as long as my arm of movies I wish I could have seen. This is one of them. In fact, Toronto was a great chance to catch some Cannes films (like Dogtooth) that I missed there. It's just impossible to see 1/10th of the movies showing and invariably the one you miss gets tons of buzz. Can't wait to see it.

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I wish I had attended. I heard this year was great. There are so many submissions that it is hard to get into that festival, as well as Sundance, SXSW, etc. If I were Dictator, how this would change.

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I've never heard of a dictator focusing on making film festivals better, but if you seize power, I look forward to lots of positive changes!

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