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SURFING THE WAVES OF POPULAR CULTURE
BY MICHAEL GILTZ & FRIENDS

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Surfing Through "The Death Of Mr. Lazarescu"

Here are my initial thoughts on "The Death Of Mr. Lazarescu" when I saw it at Cannes last year. It opens today at Film Forum.

*** -- A tiring but rewarding Italian film about an old man who falls ill and gets shuttled about the health care system during one long, depressing night. It's two hours and forty minutes in length, but the film covers about seven or eight hours of action and might as well have been shot in real time, since it truly exhausts its audience. Some were bored but I was into it every step of the way. Mr. Lazarescu is an intriguing old man, with somewhat helpful neighbors. But as his illness worsens and worsens, the weight of the film moves from Mr. Lazarescu (who becomes almost catatonic) to the ambulance medic who finds herself saddled with this man that no hospital in town wants to admit. Sad, funny and ultimately humane, with sheer determination the medic does what she can for Lazarescu which makes this black comedy rather touching -- especially since the movie avoids sentiment every step of the way. But nothing could equal the amusing drama off screen, however. The movie was shown in the Bunuel, which has steps leading up to a short stage in front of the screen. In the dark, it's easy to find yourself walking across the stage instead of down lower in front of the first row of seats. Just as the film began, a man stumbled onto stage, realized where he was, panicked and -- in his rush -- fell over his own feet and collapsed with a tremendous thump onto the ground. He paused for a moment and -- in the vain hope that no one had noticed -- he began to CRAWL offstage until people started laughing and he gave up and scurried off in bent-over embarrassment.

POSTED BY MICHAEL IN NEW YORK AT 6:22 PM



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