



FILM & TALENT EVALUATION

TORONTO FILM FEST DWIGHT BROWN

F I L M F E S T I V A L S U M M A R Y R E P O R T

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YESTERDAY has its North American premiere at the Toronto International Film Festival.

TORONTO AWARDS

- AGF People's Choice Award -**
HOTEL RWANDA
- Discovery Award -**
OMAGH
- FIPRESCI Prize -**
IN MY FATHER'S DEN
- City Award for Best Canadian First Feature -**
LA PEAU BLANCHE
- Toronto City Award for Best Canadian Feature Film -**
IT'S ALL GONE PETE TONG
- Bravo! FACT Short Cuts Canada Award -**
MAN FEEL PAIN



THE HOLY GIRL (*La Niña Santa*) screens at the 2004 Toronto International Film Festival.

MAINSTREAM FILMS

Poor *

Fair **

Good ***

Excellent ****



Being Julia (*) Sony Pictures Classics** London, 1938. An aging, egocentric theater actress. A sophisticated husband. An open marriage. A flirtatious English Lord. A young lover. An ambitious, conniving blonde. And a ghostly old mentor. Sounds like a Merchant Ivory movie? Not in this case. Director István Szabo (Mephisto) takes the helm with Annette Bening in the starring role. Their unlikely pairing turns a possible, staid period film into a lark. The director composes great shots, captures the right moments and gets animated performances from Bruce Greenwood, Jeremy Irons, Leigh Lawson and, Miriam Margolyes. Thomas Sturridge as Bening's very reflective son makes a lasting impression. The script pits foes, wannabes and the aging process against Julia. Bening, with her voice lowered a register, brings a nuanced mischievous undercurrent to what could have been just another loud brassy diva role. Szabo, the screenplay (based on W. Somerset Maugham's *Theatre*) and solid production elements are the bricks and mortar. Bening gives the film heart. *Being Julia* may give her an Oscar nomination. (DB)

D: István Szabo W: Ronald Harwood C: Lajos Koltai
Contact: Sony Pictures Classics

Beyond the Sea (*) Lions Gate Films** Long in the making and written by a bevy of writers (none listed, but

many can take claim), Bobby Darin's life story finally hits the screen. Under actor/director Kevin Spacey's guidance, hit may be an understatement. Nothing subtle about this hybrid, story-within-a-story bio that breaks into song and dance without warning and slips between reality, and remembrance almost daring you to find fault. Front and center is Spacey, conjuring Darin, his moves, voice, ambition and inner turmoil. Some will say the film is more Spacey than Darin, that he's too old for the part. Some will admire the actor's cool torch singing and risk-taking. Can't deny that Spacey's audacious direction is anything less than intelligent and skillful. Visually, the film is pure eye candy, with well-choreographed scenes, rich colors and evocative black and white sequences. Brenda Blethyn, Bob Hoskins and Kate Bosworth (a dead ringer for Jessica Simpson) co-star. Love it or hate it, Darin's persona/music leaves an indelible impression. (DB)

D: Kevin Spacey W: No credit. C: Eduardo Serra
Contact: jbain@lgf.com

Crash (*) Lions Gate Films** Los Angeles. Lost souls with racial axes to grind go bump in the night... A black cop (Don Cheadle) and his Latina partner (Jennifer Esposito) investigate a body dumped at the side of a road. Two hip-hop dudes (rapper Ludacris and Larenz Tate) berate a white woman (Sandra Bullock) for grabbing her purse as they walk by. They promptly carjack her husband's (Brendan Fraser) SUV. A racist white patrol cop (Matt Dillon) and his liberal partner (Ryan Phillippe) racially profile and interrogate an upscale black couple (Terence Howard, Thandie Newton). Haven't seen this many lives intertwined since *Traffic*. An absolutely brilliant cast gives the malcontents depth beyond expectations. They deliver raw, incendiary dialogue with unbridled rage and fear. The cinematography, set design and musical score (Mark Isham) perfectly compliment the proceedings. TV director/writer Paul Haggis (*L.A. Law*) gets so much right, but some elements wrong. Too many storylines. Too many ironic moments. Too many endings. That said, *Crash* has a lot of redeeming qualities and star power galore. (DB)

D: Paul Haggis W: Paul Haggis, Bobby Moresco
C: J. Michael Muro
Contact: info@bullseyeent.com

MAINSTREAM FILMS

Poor *

Fair **

Good ***

Excellent ****

A Dirty Shame (1/2) Fine Line Features**

Baltimore. A conservative housewife (Tracey Ullman) suffers a concussion and becomes the 12TH apostle in a group of sex addicts (led by sex healer Johnny Knoxville) in search of a completely new sex act. Though not as effective as some of his early cult classics, this latest effort by Waters is one of his funniest and more coherent films in years. More an excuse for outrageous set pieces, sexual and vulgar humor and over-the-top performances, film should find a better home on DVD and cable than on the big screen. Great soundtrack, typical Waters' production values and solid comic performances keep movie engaging even as the plot becomes a bit monotonous and most of the novelty wears off. Ullman, Knoxville, Blair and Waters give title the kind of above-the-line appeal perfect for midnight showings. (RBG)

D: John Waters W: John Waters C: Steve Gainer
Contact: Fine Line Features

Enduring Love (1/2) Paramount Classics**

United Kingdom. A fateful day. A hot-air balloon wriggles loose in a field with a child aboard. Bystanders come to his aid. Too little too late. A do-gooder who holds on falls from the sky as the balloon ascends. Joe (Daniel Craig, *Road to Perdition*) is haunted by the incident and stalked by a fellow passerby (Rhys Ifans) who becomes obsessed with him. Joe's nerves and his suit or turn him into a basket case. His wife (Samantha Morton) watches in horror. Not a likely subject for Roger Michell, filmmaker of *Notting Hill*, unless you also consider he directed *Changing Lanes* similarly themed around a fated day and its aftermath. A sweet/sour piano and string soundtrack gives film a pained '60s London feel. Somber. Alluring. Something feels wrong and must be fixed. Sadness, madness and grief prevail. Few audiences will warm up to the relentless mental torment. Craig wears the anguish well. Ifans' fanaticism will scare many men. This depressing drama has no upside for any audience, though it is well made. (DB)

D: Roger Michell W: Joe Penhall
C: Haris Zambarloukos

Contact: international.sales@pathe-uk.com

Eros (*1/2) Warner Independent

Love is the drug. #1 *The Hand*. China. A young tailor (Chang Chen) flirts with a sexy courtesan (Gong Li) who felt up his crotch the first time they met. Credit D.P. Christopher Doyle for sumptuous a blue tint and seductive lighting that makes this short snore a work of art. Odd, dull story and direction in an overly staged vignette. #2 *Equilibrium*. New York. A crazed man (Robert Downey Jr.) bores his shrink (Alan Arkin) with his dreams of a mysterious woman. One-note sketch, shot in evocative, grainy sepia tone. Hard to care about any of the characters. Very hard. #3 *The Dangerous Thread of Things*. An American husband and his Italian wife bicker through Italy. His attention focuses on another woman. Can you blame him? The central theme in this trilogy is suppose to be love. Yet agony and annoyance resonate. Blame the heartless scripts. The rote performances. The lackluster direction. The filmmakers needed to stick to basic short filmmaking tenets: be succinct and make every minute count. Production quality in the first two stories saves this unique homework assignment from oblivion. Will challenge an art house audience's patience. (DB)

D: Wong Kar-wai, Steven Soderburgh, Michelangelo Antonioni W: Wong Kar-wai, Steven Soderburgh, Michelangelo Antonioni, Tonino Guerra
C: Christopher Doyle, Peter Andrews, Marco Pontecorvo

Contact: contact@roissyfilms.com

Haven (1/2) Syndicate Films**

First time feature film director Frank E. Flowers sets this mosaic drama in the Cayman Islands, where dope dealers, money-launderers, expatriates and locals consort. A white Miami businessman (Bill Paxton) and his daughter (Agnes Bruckner) flee to the Caymans chased by feds. There she's pursued by a young ladies' man/car thief (Victor Rasuk, *Raising Victor Vargas*) indebted to some gangsters. To keep them off his ass, he squeals that the businessman has lots of dough. Meanwhile a white boy (Orlando Bloom) takes the virginity of a black girl socialite (Zoe Saldana) and her brother (Anthony Mackie, *8 Mile*) seeks revenge. In jumbled,

MAINSTREAM FILMS

Poor *

Fair **

Good ***

Excellent ****

clipped, almost cryptic scenes, going back several months, Flowers delivers the backstory that converges one starry night in a heap of gunfire, missed cues, deceit, vengeance and partying. It's a heady, discernible island tang. Not always well paced (115 minutes) but always engaging. Any imperfections are balanced by Flower's direction: he blends a staccato music video style with big budget straight-on filmmaking. Nice camera placement. Nice reggae-soul-hip-hop score. A tense drama thriller with flava. (DB)

D: Frank E. Flowers W: Frank E. Flowers

C: Michael Bernard

Contact: rkegeyan@syndicate-film.com

Head in the Clouds (*1/2) Sony Pictures Classics

Charlize Theron, Stuart Townsend and Penelope Cruz star in this old-fashioned soap opera about willful young expatriates in 1930's Paris. Theron is the free-spirited rich girl; Townsend and Cruz the two people she takes as lovers but can never really love. And then along comes the Spanish Civil War, WWII, the Resistance, a Nazi lover and that whole people-caught-up-in-history ball of wax. Could have been a campily entertaining mini-series in the 1980's. Looks like a schmaltzy antique in 2004. The look of the film is elegant and tech credits are topnotch but all three actors are miscast and the script is weak in every way. Not likely to make much of a splash theatrically but has solid female appeal on television. (KO)

D: John Duigan W: John Duigan C: Paul Sarossy

Contact: Sony Pictures Classics

Hotel Rwanda (**) United Artists** Don Cheadle's credits are impressive: *A Lesson Before Dying*, *Traffic*, *Out of Sight*... Great performances, but far overshadowed by his courageous turn in this perfectly directed movie based on true events. 1994 Rwanda. Belgian colonialists have left after causing a rift between Tutsi and Hutu tribes. The once-favored Tutsis are being massacred. Paul (Cheadle) a Hutu married to a Tutsi (Sophie Okonedo, amazing) manages a Belgian hotel abandoned by its white owners. Tutsi refugees flock to his hotel. Murderous Hutu rebels surround them. Paul, stoic, contemplates a res-

cue and escape. 800,000 locals died during the genocide. Can't think of a more harrowing place to maroon a protagonist. Terry George (*Some Mother's Son*) directs the horror and heroism with a Midas touch. Right tone. Right drama. Perfect pace. Superb performances from professional and non professional cast. Nick Nolte plays U.N. peacekeeping force General Dalliare, who wrestles with his inability to stem the flow of blood. Worthy subject. Solid emotional core. Cheadle, Okonedo, George, co-writer Kier Pearson and the film are Oscar caliber. (DB)

D: Terry George W: Terry George, Kier Pearson

C: Robert Fraisse

Contact: cdavis@mgm.com

I Heart Huckabees (**) Fox Searchlight Pictures

Smart, unpredictable director David O. Russell (*Spanking the Monkey*, *Three Kings*) enters the Being John Malkovich, *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* stratosphere with this off-kilter, star-laden, dialogue-heavy comedy. Albert (Jason Schwartzman, looks like a young Luke Wilson), an environmentalist leader, sees a tall African man three times and thinks it's a message from providence. He promptly hires existential detectives (Lily Tomlin, Dustin Hoffman, who chew up the scenery) to investigate the coincidence. Meanwhile a corporate crook (Jude Law) tries to usurp Albert's authority. Mania plagues the city. No one talks in a soft voice, more in loud rants. Not easy to hear what they say, and not worth the listen anyway. Intellectual diatribes? Harmless harangues? Half the audience will understand Russell's obtuse plotting, others won't. And they may not care. With Mark Wahlberg, Naomi Watts and Isabelle Huppert added to the eccentric mix, a coherent plotline may not be the point. Chuckling is allowed but hearty laughter may be elusive. It's a matter of taste. Production elements are decent, though the lighting seems overly fluorescent and the gimmicky puzzle-piece visual effects annoy. (DB)

D: David O. Russell W: David O. Russell & Jeff Baena C: Peter Deming

Contact: healy.young@fox.com

MAINSTREAM FILMS

Poor *

Fair **

Good ***

Excellent ****

Jiminy Glick in Lalawood (1/2) Gold Circle**

Films Martin Short brings his TV creation, small-time celebrity interviewer Glick, to the big screen in this somewhat labored comedy. Alternately fawning and insulting, Glick is a character that works beautifully in a comedy sketch, modestly well in a half-hour TV show but grows tiresome in a 90-minute film. Knowing this, the film includes a rather pointless murder mystery subplot that quickly wears out its welcome. High point is an interview scene with Steve Martin but the rest of it is only modestly amusing. Tech credits are professional and this will play much better on TV than in theatres. With Jan Hooks (SNL) as Mrs. Glick and a host of celebrity cameos. (KO)

D: Vadim Jean W: Martin Short, Paul Flaherty,

Michael Short C: Mike J Fox

Contact: hjoyce@goldcirclefilms.com

Kinsey (**) Fox Searchlight**

Writer/director Bill Condon brings intelligence and wit to the story of the determined scientist whose controversial research on sexual behavior scandalized the nation and opened the door to America's bedrooms. Breezy, frank and matter-of-factly outrageous, film focuses on both the eccentric Kinsey (giving us a peek at the sexual experimentation he encouraged) and his startling work. Surprisingly light-footed and entertaining, as well as moving. Wonderful performances by Liam Neeson (a potential Oscar contender) as the driven, slightly daft Kinsey, Laura Linney as his strong-willed wife and Peter Sarsgaard, Chris O'Donnell and Timothy Hutton as his disciples. Film has pitch-perfect period sense (1940's-50's) and the direction is lively. Funny and provocative. (KO)

D: Bill Condon W: Bill Condon C: Frederick Elmes

Contact: Fox Searchlight

The Merchant of Venice (*) Sony Pictures**

Classics Kudos to Michael Radford and company for having the gall in this day and age to do a film adaptation of William Shakespeare's beautiful yet troublesome, anti-Semitic classic as it was written back in the day. The faithfulness of this now-controversial text will force audiences to challenge their own beliefs and

prejudices, as they try to understand their mixed emotions towards these incredibly well-crafted characters and their vile actions. Performances are golden across the board, with Pacino and Irons living up to their marquee names and Lynn Collins a revelation as Portia. Radford's direction is masterful as he makes the Bard palatable to modern audiences without needing to modernize it or fill it with unnecessary flashy visual strokes. Production values are all top of the line and they help audiences enter the challenging and wondrous world of Shakespeare's language and storytelling. Prestige project should do well on the specialty market, considering the star power and the controversy the film's subject might muster. (RBG)

D: Michael Radford W: Michael Radford

C: Benoit Delhomme

Contact: Sony Pictures Classics

Ray (*) Universal**

Providence provides the timing. In the year that the world loses the architect of soul music, Ray Charles, filmmaker Taylor Hackford finishes his bio-film. Reverently, Jamie Foxx, comedian turned serious actor, mines the inner soul of Mr. Charles. Mannerisms, voice inflection, movement. He conjures Charles in a consistent dead-on performance that, with the sumptuous cinematography and a dazzling supporting cast: Kerry Washington, Harry Lennix, Larenz Tate as Quincy Jones, gives the film a consistently polished feel. Movie takes viewers behind the smiling face of an icon, venturing into his drug addiction, extramarital affairs and a rough childhood. Haunted by his brother's death, and blinded at a young age, as an orphaned teen Charles went cross country to Seattle, where he kick-started his career. Hackford's reverence for the subject is in every judiciously, artfully created frame which details many highs and lows. The 152-minute length weighs the film down and may exhaust some viewers. An epic film. Noteworthy performances. Will likely win Oscar noms in a host of categories. (DB)

D: Taylor Hackford W: James L. White

C: Pawel Edelman

Contact: Jason.leib@nbcuni.com

MAINSTREAM FILMS

Poor *

Fair **

Good ***

Excellent ****

Shark Tale (*) Dreamworks** It's the hip, underwater version of *Shrek*. Kind of. Somewhere under the sea, a daddy shark, Don Lino (Robert De Niro) wants to hand over the reigns of his empire to his offspring. With the understanding, of course, that any real shark eats its prey. Well, not if you're a vegetarian like his son Lenny (Jack Black). Meanwhile a little fish, Oscar (Will Smith), with a big ego works at a Whale Wash (resembles a car wash) business owned by a puffer fish (Martin Scorsese). Lenny and Oscar's paths cross, part and cross again as they pretend Oscar is a shark killer and hero worship ensues. Fast-talk. Lots of action. Good humor and enough double entendres to make kids and parents chuckle endlessly. Vicky Jenson, co director of *Shrek*, teams up with Bibo Bergeron (*The Road to El Dorado*) and Rob Letterman (first feature film). They've got a winner. It's not likely that this venture will reach *Shrek* numbers, but even if it did, it will always be the second banana. *Shrek* is the master. *Shark*, with its controversial Italian and black inner city cliché stereotypes, skips a beat. (DB)

D: Vicky Jenson, Bibo Bergeron, Rob Letterman

W: Michael J. Wilson, Rob Letterman C: N.A.

Contact: hrichardson@dreamworks.com

Sideways (**) Fox Searchlight** Alexander Payne puts the disenchanting middle-aged American male under his microscope in this warmly humanist comedy. *American Splendor's* Paul Giamatti is the depressed wine connoisseur who takes his good-natured best friend (Thomas Haden Church) on a tour of the wine

country as a last hurrah to bachelorhood before he marries a rich woman. It's a journey of self-discovery for both men – and the women they meet, Virginia Madsen and Sandra Oh. Nicely shot (casting the Napa Valley in a golden haze), sensitively directed, beautifully written and wittily acted. Bittersweet adult comedy is sure to be a favorite at awards time. (KO)
D: Alexander Payne W: Alexander Payne, Jim Taylor
C: Phedon Papamichael
Contact: Fox Searchlight

When Will I be Loved (*) ICM International** Vera (Neve Campbell) lives in a new apartment but still has her old boyfriend, Ford (Fred Weller). She's moved on to women. He's living in the past. Vera is on his mind when an old rich guy (Dominic Chianese, *The Sopranos*) expresses an interest in bedding Vera for a whole lot of money. *An Indecent Proposal?* Ladies make love behind a sheer curtain. Mike Tyson screams up to an apartment and a white hustler tries to hang out with black hip-hop moguls. Sound like a James Toback movie? Film has same urban, cinema verité, slice of life, potpourri feel as his *Black and White*. Only the plotting takes a deadlier turn. Expect small box office grosses, though Campbell and Weller, who spew out dialogue with a panache, are almost worth the price of admission. And Chianese, as the wealthy Count, classes up the whole production. (DB)
D: James Toback W: James Toback
C: Larry McConkey
Contact: sredick@icmtalent.com

INDIES AND FOREIGN FILMS (ENGLISH LANGUAGE)

Poor *

Fair **

Good ***

Excellent ****

Blood (*) Spank Films Canada. A recovering alcoholic and his scheming sister, a prostitute and a killer, reunite to try to help –and destroy–each other. Dreadful film adaptation of a dull play, this Canadian “thriller” is more staged than most plays and features some embarrassing performances dictated by amateur direction and an incredibly talky screenplay. (RBG)

D: Jerry Ciccoritti W: Jerry Ciccoritti

C: Gerald Packer

Contact: anna@spankfilms.com



Creep (1/2) Capitol Films** London. Late one night, Kate (Franka Potente, *Run Lola Run*) leaves a party headed for another with the hopes of meeting George Clooney. Right! She goes down to the subway, waits for a train, swigs some liquor and wakes up to find the station empty and closed. She panics, but doesn't really freak until she gets chased by a creep on a killing spree. Run Kate run! Great situation for a lonely girl-next-door protagonist. Filmmaker Christopher Smith gives her plenty of obstacles to overcome, a couple of sidekicks, dank tunnels and little hope. The bloody, deformed white pasty antagonist is far scarier at a distance. He kills, he maims, he's on a mission. Up close, he's an actor wearing a plastic skin suit and looks like an inflatable doll with

bad acne. The art direction sticks to black, dark green and browns giving an icky, claustrophobic feel. The 3rd act reveals the killer's origin: preposterous and deflating element. Smith shows a knack for making blood run cold and has solid horror instincts. Midnight movie audiences will understand. (DB)

D: Christopher Smith W: Christopher Smith

C: Danny Cohen

Contact: films@capitofilms.com

Dead Birds () Silver Nitrate Pictures** Henry (*E.T.*) Thomas is more than competent but un compelling in an underwritten role as the leader of a little band of Union deserters in this Civil War-era horror film. They shelter from a storm in what turns out to be...a haunted house. Genre film set in 1863 Alabama looks appropriately creepy but fails to generate much in the way of suspense or scares. It's a little too slow-paced and low-key to grab an audience and not much happens for the first hour. Low budget and very self-contained, it gets the period details right but doesn't make much use of them. Characters seem interchangeable and the tension doesn't build sufficiently to make the ironic ending pay off. (KO)

D: Alex Turner W: Simon Barrett C: Steve Yedlin

Contact: jim@silvernitrate.net

A Good Woman () Beyond Films** Glossy update of Oscar Wilde's *Lady Windermere's Fan* is set in the 1930's on the Amalfi coast – lots of beautiful Italian scenery, great costumes, gorgeous sets, etc. Unfortunately, the film doesn't play as well as it looks. Screenplay adaptation is a little clumsy and the direction is stuffy. Helen Hunt is gravely miscast as the charismatic femme fatale who nearly ruins the reputation of a young wife (Scarlet Johansson) and then saves it. On the plus side, Tom Wilkinson is witty and quietly affecting as the older man who adores her despite her flaws. This is PBS/A&E fare gone slightly awry. Unlikely to draw a theatrical audience in art houses. (KO)

D: Mike Barker W: Howard Himmelstein

C: Ben Seresin

Contact: films@beyond.com.au

INDIES AND FOREIGN FILMS (ENGLISH LANGUAGE)

Poor *

Fair **

Good ***

Excellent ****

Human Touch (*) Illumination Films Pty Ltd.** A married woman is sexually reawakened through her relationship with an eccentric old man. Beautiful and subtle, this study of the relationship between intimacy, art, love and trust is a wonderfully layered romantic drama that will awe some audiences while perplexing or even boring others. Cox's 20th feature is a small gem – but not a perfect one. Powerful performances portray the complexities and mysteries of chemistry between people while the detached cinematography paints a world where people desire to communicate. Excellent production values and a directorial hand that uses every element of film to evoke and suggest will satisfy art house audiences but will surely alienate crossover specialty film demos. A festival film that should have a limited art-house release. (RBG)

D: Paul Cox W: Paul Cox C: Ian Jones

Contact: gopatt@senet.com.au

Imaginary Heroes (1/2) Sony Pictures Classics**

An ordinary suburban family copes with the eldest son's suicide in this offbeat drama with a comic twist. Writer/director Dan Harris (X2) is only 24 years old and his youth is apparent in a script that lacks real maturity and sophistication. It's strong on quirky details but a little weak on the character relationships that are the heart of the film. Nicely shot and competently directed, the film is given a tremendous boost by witty, confident performances from Sigourney Weaver and Emile Hirsch as mother and son. Plays like *Unstrung Heroes* and may have a tough time drawing a theatrical audience. (KO)

D: Dan Harris W: Dan Harris C: Tim Orr

Contact: Sony Pictures Classics

Keane (1/2) Populist Pictures** Lodge Kerrigan proved himself adept at pressing the paranoid revolution button with his eerie low-budget indie masterpiece *Clean Shaven*. His next film, *Claire Dolan*, dabbled more in eroticism. With this claustrophobic character study, he's back to profiling sick men with torturous inner voices. A mentally unstable, constantly jittery, always talking to himself man, William Keane (Damian Lewis, *Dreamcatchers*, *Band of Brothers*),

wanders through a bus station swearing his daughter was kidnapped. He lives in an SRO and cozies up to a distressed single mom and her daughter. Dread shrouds most of the film. Will he harm them? Will they make him sane? That could be the focus of the film. Instead your eyes stay trained on an absolutely riveting performance by Lewis who embodies every crazy tick his character generates. Dirt under his bitten nails. You can smell his B.O. from the last row. His work and stark realism makes a very small the film somewhat bigger. (DB)

D: Lodge Kerrigan W: Lodge Kerrigan

C: John Foster

Contact: fierberg@aol.com

Ladies in Lavender (1/2) Lakeshore Entertainment**

Dames Maggie Smith and Judi Dench star in this small, 1930's tale of two elderly Englishwomen who become overly attached to a young Polish sailor (Daniel Brühl of *Good Bye Lenin!*) who washes up on their beach. Dench is quietly affecting as the old woman who has never known love while Smith uses her familiar starchiness to maximum poignant effect. As directed by actor Charles Dance (*Gosford Park*) this is very Masterpiece Theatre – elegant, lovely to look at and discreetly underplayed – and probably too small to draw much of an audiences to an art house. (KO)

D: Charles Dance W: Charles Dance

C: Peter Biziou

Contact: sales@lakeshoreentertainment.com

Land of Plenty (1/2) IFC Films** Wim Wenders' post-9/11 project takes a sympathetic look at American paranoia in this understated drama. Michelle Williams (*Dawson's Creek*) is a young Christian missionary working at a homeless shelter in L.A. when she encounters her uncle, John Diehl (*Jurassic Park III*), a paranoid anti-terrorist vigilante. Together they try to solve a murder that leads them to reconciliation and understanding. Definitely not a thriller and the drama is low-key – this is Wenders' plea for tolerance in the face of fear. Saved from treacherous overkill by rigorously unsentimental performances

INDIES AND FOREIGN FILMS (ENGLISH LANGUAGE)

Poor *

Fair **

Good ***

Excellent ****

and a stylized digital look. Not as opaque as *The End of Violence* but not as accessible (or transcendent) as *Wings of Desire*. (KO)

D: Wim Wenders W: Michael Meredith,
Wim Wenders C: Franz Lustig
Contact: IFC Films

The Libertine (1/2) Odyssey Entertainment**

Screened as a work in progress, gritty bio of 17th century poet, the Earl of Rochester, is a potentially great film undermined by serious problems. Most audience members found the story hard to follow, the sound muddy and the musical score annoying. However, the dark, grainy look of the film is very atmospheric. In his first feature, former commercials director Dunmore has a tendency to throw in too many tricks but he knows how to work with actors. As the Earl himself, Johnny Depp shows astonishing range, reinventing himself in the mold of a great English stage thespian who still retains the intimate touch of a movie actor. It's an Oscar-worthy performance. Samantha Morton (as his actress mistress), John Malkovich (as King Charles II) and the rest of the supporting cast are equally fine. Adapted by Jeffreys from his own play, it's still a little stagy but this very ambitious art house film could be a bravura triumph with the right editing and technical tune-ups. (KO)

D: Laurence Dunmore W: Stephen Jeffreys
C: Alexander Melman
Contact: sales@odyssey-entertainment.co.uk

The Limb Salesman (1/2) Shoreline Entertainment**

Set in the near future after an unspecified environmental disaster, this spooky love story concerns a young doctor and the mutant woman he falls in love with after illegally supplying her with new legs. Director, cinematographer and designers create a very real frozen world where water is as precious as gold and mutations are common but shameful. Played absolutely straight and with just the right air of creepy detachment. Too bad it doesn't resolve itself in an interesting way, but the director has real talent and the little-known Canadian cast (led by Peter

Stebbing and screenwriter Ingrid Veninger) does a beautiful job with the delicate material. (KO)

D: Anais Granofsky W: Anais Granofsky,
Ingrid Veninger C: D. Gregor Hagey
Contact: mail@shorelineentertainment.com

The Love Crimes of Gillian Guess (*) Force Four Entertainment

Chaotic comedy based on the true story of a single mother on jury duty who wound up becoming involved with the accused. Director throws in absolutely everything in his bag of tricks, structuring the story around the woman's appearance on a TV talk show and telling the rest of the story in flashbacks. It shuttles wildly from satire to drama to musical in a number of visual formats, including video and Super 8. The actors seem trapped in a maze. Ultimately, it's tediously unfunny and trying too hard to be hip. (KO)

D: Bruce McDonald W: Angus Fraser
C: Danny Nowak
Contact: tv@forcefour.com

Millions (1/2) Fox Searchlight**

Shallow Grave. Trainspotting. 28 Days Later. Face it Danny Boyle is not known for his childlike fantasies. Not until now. Little Damian (Alex Etel, as astounding a child debut as Henry Tomas in *E.T...*) and his slightly older brother Anthony (Lewis McGibbon) know how to break a heart and get free things. All they say is, "Our mother's dead." It's true, and it works like a charm. They've moved to a new home with dad (James Nesbitt, *Bloody Sunday*). A bag of money gets tossed from a train and onto Damian's cardboard playhouse. The script could drift into a straight-forward crime caper. Instead, with the blessing of Mother Mary, it floats into a glorious, angelic fantasy mode where not all is as it appears to be. Then there's that nagging theme about selfish capitalism and selfless socialism. Money is the root of all evil, but will audiences want to be reminded? Sweet. Touching. Too sweet. Too touching. Boyle uses special visual effects that slide across the screen (a la Peter Greenway's *The Tulse Luper Suitcases* series) to varied success. He remains dedicated to this odd tale, consistent. But his efforts with

INDIES AND FOREIGN FILMS (ENGLISH LANGUAGE)

Poor *

Fair **

Good ***

Excellent ****

the aforementioned films were a lot stronger. Credit Etel for holding the audience's attention to the very end. (DB)

D: Danny Boyle W: Frank Cottrell Boyce

C: Anthony Dop Mantle

Contact: fierberg@aol.com

My Summer of Love (1/2) The Works** Girl power. It was a boring summer for Mona (Natalie Press). Not much excitement in her life except some backseat shagging with a local man. What's a bored working class girl to do when she lives with her born again brother (Paddy Considine, *In America*). Luckily, in the same small village, but on the rich side of town, Tamsin (Emily Blunt) is equally jaded. When the two disparate girls meet, something clicks. It clicks many times as they bed each other. Is this a life-altering lesbian romantic drama? No. Is it winsome? Yes. The two leads infuse their characters with a verve that goes well beyond the script. Director Pawel Pawlikowski (*The Last Resort*) stays focused on the relationship. Not the sex. Nor the dramatic events. Viewers leave with a feel for young female adolescence that's resounding. Production quality fits the small tale. Not a monumental story. Doesn't need to be. Based on a book by Helen Cross. (DB)

D: Pawel Pawlikowski W: Pawel Pawlikowski

C: Ryszard Lenczewski

Contact: joy@theworksltd.com

Mysterious Skin (*) Fortissimo Films** Possibly the most accessible film Gregg Araki (*Doom Generation*) has made in his 17-year career – this is a simple but poignant story of the very different ways two boys deal with being victims of sexual abuse in childhood. The methodical pace is hypnotic, though it deliberately lets the audience get way ahead of the story. Beautifully shot in long close-ups and loving detail of faces and places. Charismatic young leading man Joseph Gordon-Levitt (*3rd Rock From The Sun*) steals the show but all the performances are sensitively rendered. Based on the novel by Scott Heim. (KO)

D: Gregg Araki W: Gregg Araki C: Steve Gainer

Contact: info@fortissimo.nl

Noel (*1/2) Capitol Films Lonely people of different stratas dare to face Christmas in different ways in a desperate search for hope. Some cry, some smile...but they all learn something about themselves discovering the harsh side of Christmas spirit. A corny and ineffective cautionary tale about loneliness at Christmas, this weak attempt to create dark magic fails at all levels. Top-level actors (Susan Sarandon and Robin Williams, who goes uncredited) are wasted in a screenplay that will make most audiences cringe. Canadian location standing in for New York underlines the artificiality and lack of effectiveness of the enterprise. Despite star power and holiday theme, a bomb. (RBG)

D: Chazz Palminteri W: David Hubbard

C: Russell Carpenter

Contact: films@capitolfilms.com

P.S. (1/2) Newmarket Film Group** Second feature by *Roger Dodger* director Dylan Kidd isn't quite as focused as his first film but Laura Linney's beautiful performance makes the central story compelling. Linney brings to life the lonely, 39-year-old divorcee (an art history professor) who has an affair with a teenage student played by Topher Grace (*That 70's Show*). As long as the film stays with them it's witty and heartfelt and full of very real emotion. Subplots about Linney's ex-husband (Gabriel Byrne) and her friends (including Marcia Gay Harden) are less successful, which means the fine supporting cast is underused. The simple, low-budget look lends immediacy to the story. Based on a novel by Helen Schulman. (KO)

D: Dylan Kidd W: Helen Schulman, Dylan Kidd

C: Joaquin Baca-Asay

Contact: www.newmarketfilms.com

Palindromes (*) Celluloid Dreams** In this dour, comic examination of suburban family life, director Todd Solondz throws several curve balls. An abortion. Adolescent sex. Odd casting. A young girl bent on having a baby searches for the meaning of life. Solondz cast six actors in the that part: young, adult, female, male, black, white, overweight... He stretches

INDIES AND FOREIGN FILMS (ENGLISH LANGUAGE)

Poor *

Fair **

Good ***

Excellent ****

the protagonist's canvas and the effect is a bit jarring. But keep in mind the multi-casting is just an effect, a device that does not compensate for a sketchy script, uneven direction and obtuse themes that only the most faithful fans will follow with any enthusiasm. Ellen Barkin plays the meddling mother. Jennifer Jason Leigh joins the eclectic team that plays the lead character, Aviva. That name is a palindrome, spell it forwards or backwards and it's the same. This campy parody needed John Waters' lighter sensibility. Little of the humor sticks to the bones. Especially the funny bone. Shot on 35mm, but the dismal photography seems more like cheap Betacam. (DB)

D: Todd Solondz W: Todd Solondz

C: Tom Richmond

Contact: info@celluloid-dreams.com

Phil the Alien (*1/2) Black Walk

Actor/director/writer Rob Stefaniuk's credits include *Kids in the Hall*. He wears his TV comedy credentials on his sleeve. A UFO crash-lands in Northern Ontario, Canada. A boy (Brad McInnes) discovers there's an alien aboard, which morphs into a human that likes to screech. If this were a *Saturday Night Live* sketch, it would develop into something of grater proportion, warranting a hearty belly laugh. As is, it feels like a sketch idea *SNL* would leave on paper. Stefaniuk plays the alien, who drinks whisky like medicine, converses with a talking beaver and eventually winds up singing Christian rock music. It's the kind of humor that might work in someone's basement or a student film. But as a feature, it falls flat. Stilted, lifeless dialogue. Sloppy production elements. Stefaniuk lacks Martin Short's go-for-the-jugular brand of humor, and that desperation was needed. Some nice landscape shots of Canada deaden the blow. (DB)

D: Rob Stefaniuk W: Rob Stefaniuk C: Gregor Hagey

Contact: info@blackwalk.com

Return To Sender ()** Intandem Films Woman (Connie Nielsen) behind bars on death row. Skanky bottom feeder conman (Aidan Quinn) makes a living selling publishing rights to death row inmates' last letter, never telling the convicts. She's going down the

tubes, but may be innocent. He, an ex-lawyer, could save her. Strong movies have been built on less dire circumstances. Expectations are high for Bille August (*Pelle The Conquerer*) to find and heighten the drama in this premise. That never happens. The storytelling is engaging in a Made-For-TV-Movie kind of way. Surprises. Reversals. Cathartic moments. All are present but not on a feature film level that would attract viewers. Neilsen's performance is steadfast, but not nearly as intense as Charlize Theron's in *Monster*. Quinn milks the character, but still nothing in the film (photography, dialogue, music, etc.) crescendos to a high point, the kind that leaves audiences on the edge of their seats. A competent drama thriller. Just that. (DB)

D: Bille August W: Robert Wade, Neal Purvis

C: Dirk Brühl

Contact: andrew@intandemfilms.com

Siblings ()** **Turtles Crossing** Offbeat Canadian black comedy about four kids who kill their awful step-parents. Gleefully deadpan style is very funny for about an hour but it drags in the third act though total running time is only 85 minutes. Second feature by director David Weaver shows a real flair for dark comedy and for working with young actors. Jackie May's script is painfully real and wacky. The look is distinctly low-budget, which lends even more you-are-there veracity to the loopy story. (KO)

D: David Weaver W: Jackie May C: David Greene

Contact: jackson@turtlescrossing.com

Stage Beauty (1/2)** Lions Gate Films Billy Crudup stars in this drama about a 17th century London stage star renowned for playing women's roles who finds himself unwanted when the law allows real women to perform onstage. Crudup gives a performance that's both finely-nuanced and richly theatrical; Claire Danes is affecting as his former dresser, who becomes a star; and Rupert Everett is slyly funny as the bawdy King Charles II. The look is both lavishly sumptuous and grimy, as befits the period. Theatre veteran Richard Eyre knows how to use actors to maximum effect and has a great eye for Restoration

INDIES AND FOREIGN FILMS (ENGLISH LANGUAGE)

Poor *

Fair **

Good ***

Excellent ****

glamour. Not as mass-market friendly as *Shakespeare in Love* but this is the kind of art house/indie that can crossover to a more mainstream audience. (KO)

D: Richard Eyre W: Jeffrey Hatcher C: Andrew Dunn
Contact: Lions Gate Films

Undertow ()** **United Artists** Two kids (Jamie Bell, Devon Alan) who live isolated in the woods go on the run when their estranged uncle (Josh Lucas) reappears in their lives and kills their father (Dermot Mulroney). Just as stylized but less emotionally powerful than his two previous films (*George Washington*, *All The Real Girls*), Gordon Green's latest certainly affects the audience's visceral emotions while completely missing the heart. Fine performances, excellent photography and a sure directorial hand fail to generate magic. Gut-wrenching at times, and promising emotional revelations at others, film fails to provide the powerful punch that Gordon Green hints at in his treatment. Film looks to perform as poorly at the box office as his previous efforts, and might even further generate detractors in the specialty arena. A tighter first act and fuller characters could have done the trick. (RBG)

D: David Gordon Green W: David Gordon Green,
Joe Conway C: Tim Orr
Contact: jamie@contentinternational.com

Yes (1/2)** **Green Street Films** Sally Potter always does the unexpected. Here she writes an entire 105-minute film in rhyming iambic pentameter, and it's so well-written and well-acted that the poetry doesn't seem stilted or artificial. Joan Allen stars as an unhappily married woman who has a passionate affair with a Lebanese surgeon in London, where they are both outsiders. A very formal piece, featuring a kind of Greek chorus of cleaning people commenting on the action. Like all of Potter's films, this is as much about structure, mood and artifice as it is about the characters. She's an acquired taste – the film is enigmatic, relies too heavily on voiceover and visual tricks, and hasn't much of interest to say about the big subjects of culture clash and romance that it takes on. Superbly well-performed and shot in a style that seems to put characters under a microscope. Much better than the silly *The Man Who Cried* but it's not equal to *Orlando*. (KO)

D: Sally Potter W: Sally Potter C: Alexei Rodionov
Contact: gsfi@greenstreet.com

FOREIGN LANGUAGE FILMS

Poor *

Fair **

Good ***

Excellent ****

Acapulco Gold (*1/2) Les Films du Paris

Montreal, Canada. An aging, narcoleptic actor's young son takes a little heat from other kids at school who say he is the bastard offspring of Elvis. In fact the actor (Michel Maillot) has had visions of Elvis, whom he fondly calls Eternal Colonel. He convinces a producer to go to Acapulco where they may meet the King. A goofy premise. An eccentric performance by Maillot, who is not quite as wacky or charming as Jerry Lewis in one of his French films. But in that realm. The glib direction on the rare occasion causes a smirk. Maillot's antics can't elevate the material above the "Isn't that curious?" level. Only Elvis devotees would sit through this 84 minutes of endless pontificating. Shot on Digital/Betacam, for what looks like a shoe-string budget. Supposedly based on a true story. In French. (DB)

D: André Forcier W: André Forcier, Michel Maillot, Mark Krasnoff C: Daniel John
Contact: tparia@sympatico.ca

Almost Brothers ()** **Imovision** Brazil. A political activist and a common thief become friends in prison, then clash and collide as they continue their separate ways. A very interesting premise is left mostly unexplored in this pseudo-effective Brazilian political drama. Intercutting between time periods and places works during the first act as the filmmakers set up the situation, but as the film goes on and the intercutting continues, style supplants substance as the main engine. Good performances, unfocused screenplay, proficient execution make for an interesting festival entry but not a solid candidate for theatrical. In Portuguese. (RBG)

D: Lúcia Murat W: Lúcia Murat, Paulo Lins
C: Jacob Solitrenick
Contact: filmes@imovision.com.br

The Alzheimer Case (De Zaak Alzheimer) (*)**

The Works Antwerp, Belgium. Hell hath no scorn like an old hitman with advancing Alzheimer's. Angelo (Jan Decler) is hired to kill adults but balks when asked to snuff a young girl. His refusal brings



reprisals, and the girl gets killed anyway. His revenge is merciless and watched closely by two young detectives (Ken de Bouw, Werner de Smedt). Director Erik Van Looy co-wrote this spellbinding script with Carl Joos, based on the novel by Jeff Elsen. Story covers *Suspect Zero* territory, but oh so much better. The mind games put you in a head lock. Looy's crime/thriller intuition is right on the money: tight pacing, good rhythm, murders and action scenes are well choreographed and dispersed. The cast shines. Ditto the cinematography. The whole crew could add certain style to a Hollywood-made thriller. Not as many chase sequences as *Bourne Identity*, but almost as well done. In Flemish. (DB)

D: Erik Van Looy W: Carl Joos, Erik Van Looy
C: Danny Elsen
Contact: tiffany@theowrksltd.com

Antares ()** **Austrian Film Commission** Gritty Austrian drama tells three stories of ordinary women in love. The first – a nurse who is sexually obsessed with an old boyfriend – is the most compelling and the most graphically sexual. The other two tales are a let-down after the intensity of the first segment. Stage actress Petra Morze is dynamic and daring as the nurse, and when she leaves the screen the film loses considerable momentum. Film noir-ish in style and

FOREIGN LANGUAGE FILMS

Poor *

Fair **

Good ***

Excellent ****

shot in cold, wintry colors that emphasize the romantic misery of the characters. Deftly directed and briskly edited. In German (KO)

D: Gotz Spielmann W: Götz Spielmann

C: Martin Gschlacht

Contact: salesdesk@afc.at

Arsène Lupin ()** TF1 International France, 1800s. A young man, Arsène Lupin (Romain Duris), is an incorrigible jewel thief with martial arts abilities. He sets his sights on stealing three precious stone crucifixes and charming a bewitching lady (Kristen Scott Thomas) who's been marked for death by royalists. This period adventure story with an overdramatic musical score and sweeping cinematography rates somewhere between *Fanfan La Tulipe* and *Van Helsing*. Not as utterly miscalculated as the former, not as magic-heavy as the latter. Duris's smug, effete near comic performance is off-putting. Thomas is regal and beautiful in a character not easy to portray. The martial arts scenes are feebly choreographed and shot. Other action scenes are lackluster. *Brotherhood of the Wolf* ventured into the same kick-boxing, period film territory and aced the exam. Too many characters. Too long. May tire the target hybrid audience of action fans and romantics. Based on the novel *La Comtesse de Cagliostro*, by Maurice Leblanc. In French. (DB)

D: Jean-Paul Salomé W: Jean-Paul Salomé,

Laurent Vachaud C: Pascal Ridao

Contact: gdesaintmars@tf1.fr

Cool (*1/2) NonStop Sales Netherlands. Five teenagers who spend their lives stealing, rapping and drinking are caught robbing a bank and sent to a fascist reform school. First half-hour of this kinetic exercise in improvisation exudes a great vibe, creating tension through great pacing and taut performances from an ensemble of young non-actors. As the movie starts to rely on plot, however, the sizzle is gone and we're left with a shallow exercise in style that fails to engage for the duration. Kudos to the casting director and director for finding students from the reform school that shine on screen. Pity the filmmakers didn't know

how to focus the story to make film work as a whole. In Dutch. (RBG)

D: Theo van Gogh W: Theodor Holman,

Gijs van de Westelaken C: Thomas Kist

Contact: info@nonstopsales.net

CQ2 ()** Films Distribution Second feature by French Canadian actress Carole Laure (*Get Out Your Handkerchiefs*) uses modern dance as a metaphor for relationships in this tale of two women. Angry teenage runaway Clara Furey (Laure's daughter) is befriended by a dancer just out of prison who teaches her how to channel her anger into creativity. Tech credits are good and Laure knows how to work with actors. Although the dance sequences are excitingly kinetic, the metaphor just isn't working and the film feels self-consciously arty and abstract. In French. (KO)

D: Carole Laure W: Carole Laure C: Gérard Simon

Contact: info@filmsdistribution.com

Demain on Déménage ()** Gemini Films A moody writer of erotica has her life thrown into turmoil when her outgoing, recently-widowed mother moves in with her. Mild French comedy about mother/daughter conflict features two appealing actresses in Sylvie Testud and Aurore Clément but the deadpan humor isn't enough to carry the barely-there plot. Actresses are well-directed and the film is nicely shot but tends to be self-consciously cute and not very engaging. In French. (KO)

D: Chantal Akerman W: Chantal Akerman,

Eric de Kuyper C: Sabine Lancelin

Contact: gemini@easynet.fr

Downfall (*)** EOS Distribution Another drama about Hitler in the bunker, this time with veteran Swiss actor Bruno Ganz (*Wings of Desire*) as Hitler. This is familiar territory and although this film takes a different angle – seen through the eyes of Hitler's naive young secretary – this only creates an uncomfortable feeling of distaste. Are we supposed to feel sorry for the Nazis trapped in the bunker as the Russians close in? Great production values, solid direction and editing. It may be historically accurate – and Ganz's

FOREIGN LANGUAGE FILMS

Poor *

Fair **

Good ***

Excellent ****

performance is splendid – but at 150 minutes it's just too much. Grim and depressing with far too little exploration of the young secretary's motives. In German. (KO)

D: Oliver Hirschbiegel W: Bernd Eichinger

C: Rainer Klausmann

Contact: mail@eos-entertainment.com

5 X 2 (Cinq fois deux) (1/2) Celluloid Dreams**

Sometimes love fails. But how? France. After a thirtysomething man (Stéphane Freiss) and his wife (Valérie Bruni-Tedeschi) have just signed their divorce papers, they run to a hotel room to have one more roll in the sack. She changes her mind. He forces her. What went wrong? In chapters that tell their love story in reverse, François Ozon (*Under the Sand*, *Swimming Pool*) takes an exploration down a rocky road. Testy marriage. A wedding night with an unfaithful bride. Meeting haphazardly at a resort. The past didn't prepare them for the future. Often Ozon's movies have brilliant twists. This film is noticeably absent of any quirky window dressing. Viewers witness graceful, intimate storytelling, acted out by grounded, skilled thespians who are magically photographed and caressed with a beguiling score. That'd be enough for most romantic dramas. But Ozon's fans will expect so much more than the ordinary. (DB)

D: François Ozon W: François Ozon, Emmanuelle Bernheim C: Yorick Le Saux

Contact: info@celluloid-dreams.com

Italian Romance () Pyramide International** The title says it all – sensually photographed love story pairs a handsome married banker with an earthy beautician in Fascist Italy of the 1930's. Film concentrates solely on the two of them and their tempestuous relationship. Lushly romantic, lovely to look at and ultimately somewhat of a snooze. The cast is attractive but not charismatic. Competently directed with top-notch production values. In Italian. (KO)

D: Carlo Mazzacurati W: Doriana Leoneff, Claudio Piersanti, Carlo Mazzacurati, C: Luca Bigazzi

Contact: elagesse@pyramidefilms.com

Le Goût des Jeunes Filles (aka On the Verge of a Fever) (*1/2) Christal Films Distribution Haiti, 1971. Amid the political turmoil in Haiti after the death of dictator Papa Doc, a 15-year-old boy comes of age. Pithy view of the chaos of civil conflict puts a kid obsessed with poetry and prostitutes at the mercy of the vicious secret police (Tonton Macoute) when he is in the wrong place at the wrong time. Film itself is energetic but chaotic. In French. (KO)

D: John L'Ecuyer W: Dany Laferrère

C: Jean-Pierre St.-Louis

Contact: info@christalfilms.com

Lila Dit Ça (aka Lila Says) () Pyramide International** Marseilles. In this coming-of-age drama, a teenage boy of North African descent becomes obsessed with a 16-year-old French girl who knows how to tease. Very sexy and oh-so-French but it's light on plot, the characters are one-note and you can see the "surprise" ending coming a mile away. Hypnotically compelling for the first half, mainly due to the charisma of leading lady Vahina Giacante and the measured pace. Production and tech credits are pro. In French. (KO)

D: Ziad Doueri W: Ziad Doueri C: John Daly

Contact: elagesse@flach-pyramide.com

The Ninth Day (Der Neunte Tag) (1/2) Telepool GmbH** Oscar winning director Volker Schlöndorff (*Tin Drum*) brings another Holocaust story to screen, this one based on fact and involving a Catholic Priest (Ulrich Matthes) and an ambitious SS Officer (August Diehl). The priest is temporarily released from the Dachau concentration camp and sent to Luxemburg. He has nine days to help the officer convince a bishop that he should stop rebelling against the Nazis, or he'll be returned to Dachau and certain death. The production design, art direction and cinematography focus on dark blues, grays, browns and blacks, setting a somber tone and killing any visual sensation. You feel close to death with no light at the end of the tunnel. The sad tone is not necessarily compelling, doesn't help the viewer warm up to the priest's predicament, which is life-threatening. The cast plays

FOREIGN LANGUAGE FILMS

Poor *

Fair **

Good ***

Excellent ****

the material best they can, but it's so depressing it's hardly likely this film will find a large audience. With *The Pianist*, the anguish was gripping. In this film, agony does not like company. Competently directed, acted and written. Informative, but not theatrical. Best left for a PBS audience. (DB)

D: Volker Schlöndorff W: Eberhard Görner, Andreas Pflüger C: Tomas Erhart

Contact: cinepool@telepool.de

Notre Musique (aka Our Music) (*1/2) Wild Bunch Sarajevo. A montage of images of war and genocide, European intellectuals debating in Sarajevo, a Spanish writer speaking in symbols and a debate on whether Palestine or Israel will win their conflict due to poetry are all part of this new cinematic offering from former enfant terrible Godard. And here Godard truly underlines the former, as he bores and alienates the audience once again with what could be construed as experimental, philosophical cinema but ends up being pompous and ineffective. Godard's stature will get film shown in cinemàtèques and one or two art house cinemas, for students and film buffs. In French, English, Spanish, Hebrew, Arabic and Serbo-Croatian. (RBG)

D: Jean-Luc Godard W: Jean-Luc Godard

C: Julien Hirsch, Jean-Cristophe Beauvallat

Contact: wildbunch@exception-wb.com

Off Beat (1/2) Bavaria Film International** Germany. A young paramedic is haunted by the memories of surviving a horrible car crash that killed his parents. His life turns around when he falls in love with a pregnant girl whose junkie boyfriend he couldn't save. A mixture of jarring images and lyrical visuals characterize this interesting entry from Germany that deals with memory, loss and redemption. Excellent direction and real performances carry this movie even through its dull patches. In the end, however, film is a sad and depressing meditation on the difficulties of moving on...even with "happy" ending film might be too depressing and heavy-handed for

American specialty audiences. Kudos to the director, leading actor and actress, though, for coming up with a fresh, affecting and effective look at spiritual themes. In German. (RBG)

D: Hendrik Hölzemann W: Hendrik Hölzemann

C: Lars R. Liebold

Contact: bavaria.international@bavaria-film.de

Producing Adults (1/2) Celluloid Dreams** Finland. A 35-year-old woman and her fiancé struggle to come to terms as she tries to get pregnant even though he doesn't want children. Accusations, ruptured condoms and forced (unwanted) abortions abound in this Finnish drama. The two superb central performances give it enough heart to raise it from Lifetime-TV level. An insightful script and direction that brings out the best and the worst in the characters combine to create an engaging, challenging drama about difficult decisions in loving relationships. Film might be too dark (in subtle ways) for the US specialty audience, but festivals and European television will benefit greatly from this quietly powerful entry. In Finnish. (RBG)

D: Aleksi Salmenperä W: Pekko Pesonen

C: Tuomo Hutri

Contact: info@celluloid-dreams.com

Promised Land (*) HanWay Films Documentary-like tale of Eastern European women brought into Israel to work as prostitutes seems to move in slow motion as many scenes (where not much is happening) take place in real time. Most of the first 40 minutes are spent watching people walking. By the time the women start to form friendships and meet a sympathetic madam it's too little too late. Despite the presence of some great European actresses (Hanna Schygulla, Anne Parillaud), it's difficult to slog through this hyper-realistic drama. Shot to look like a cheap, down-and-dirty doc. In Hebrew, Arabic and Russian. (KO)

D: Amos Gitai W: Amos Gitai, Marie-José Sanselme

C: Caroline Champetier

Contact: info@hanwayfilms.com

FOREIGN LANGUAGE FILMS

Poor *

Fair **

Good ***

Excellent ****

Summer Storm (Sommersturm) (1/2) Bavaria Film International** Germany. Tobi (Robert Stadlober) and his buddy Achim (Kostga Ullmann) are on the high school rowing team. They've been friends forever, sharing their coming-of-age adolescent experience in ways other boys may not. Flirtations and intimacy take a serious turn when they go to a rowing camp, where they encounter a gay male team. Achim seeks refuge in the arms of his new girlfriend. An ever increasingly jealous Tobi misses Achim's arms. On view are the vagaries of youth, and a coming out that is about as innocent and unexpected as discovering you've got parking ticket. The script builds normal, natural teen characters who speak their mind – some bigoted, some open. The story evolves – challenging sexual mores in a very natural manner. It may be Germany, but the kids' situation and learning experiences could take place all over the world. Good mix of humor, drama and romance. Perceptive script. Bouncy pop/rock score. Nice soft but firm touch from director Marco Kreuzpaintner, who handles the topic sensitively. (DB)

D: Marco Kreuzpaintner W: Thomans Bahmann, Marco Kreuzpaintner C: Daniel Gottschalk
Contact: bavaria@international@bavaria-film.de

Turtles Can Fly (Lakposhta ham parvaz mikonand) (1/2) BAC Films** A thirteen-year-old boy nicknamed Satellite (Soran Ebrahim) is the go-to man in his small village on the Turkish-Iraqi border. He tries to hook up a satellite dish so the community can watch TV as their world changes. He manages to bring the miracle of the little screen to life, and becomes a hero. This intimate glimpse at hard life in Iraq is all the more intense as it centers on kids so desperate to survive they become land mine sweepers for a pittance. Lead character is the light of the movie; withstanding hardship and leading a large group of orphans as the American forces arrive. Script delves into the complexity of social issues, the war and culture clashes that would cause heated debate if not told through the lives of innocent kids. Masterful direction by Bahman Ghobadi. (DB)

D: Bahman Ghobadi W: Bahman Ghobadi
C: Shahriar Assadi
Contact: smoreau@bacfilms.fr

LATINO HERITAGE FILMS

Poor *

Fair **

Good ***

Excellent ****



Astronautas ()** Kevin Williams Associates Spain. A recovering heroin addict who's having problems with his 12-step program, finally gets clean when he meets and falls in love with a 15-year-old runaway. If members of the audience stay after the first fifteen ineffective, jarring, poorly constructed (and almost unnecessary) minutes, they will find a movie that provides a fresh look at a cliché by way of two excellent performances with a striking chemistry. Pity that the first quarter hour will make television audiences switch or festival audiences leave... the rest of the film is a sweet, engaging and at times powerful story about human beings discovering how to love and open up. Excellent performances, a wonderful script and solid production values are marred by a beginning where the director decided to show off with flashy visuals, jump cuts and jarring images that never quite work. Can we recut? In Spanish. (RBG)
D: Santi Amodeo W: Santi Amodeo
C: Alex Catalán
Contact: kwa@kevinwa.com

Crimen Ferpecto (aka Ferpect Crime) (*)** Sogepaq Spain. A retail salesman has only two ambitions in life: to bed all the beautiful women in the store and become its manager. When he accidentally kills his boss, the ugliest saleswoman in his department becomes an accomplice and he is forced to be

a slave to her. This very entertaining and funny black comedy shows de la Iglesia's best work since *La Comunidad*. A solid ensemble of actors help keep up the director's and editor's impeccable comic timing. Absurdist comedy becomes a cautionary tale about modern mores and obsessions as de la Iglesia slowly delves deeper into a humor so black that the laughs come out with a sense of guilt. Movie should play well on specialty film theaters and more so on television. In Spanish. (RBG)

D: Alex de la Iglesia W: Alex de la Iglesia, Jorge Guerricaechevarría C: José L. Moreno
Contact: sogepaqint@sogecable.com

Días de Santiago (1/2)** MilColores Media Peru. Returning from a war and readjusting to civilian life have troubled soldiers from every war. That universal theme resonates in this Peruvian movie, set in Lima. Santiago (Pietro Sibille) has just returned from the Peru-Ecuador war. Flashbacks haunt him. Can't get along with his wife. Jobless. Can't get credit at the stores. His hot-blooded family kicks him out. Fellow ex-soldiers urge him to join a robbery ring. The protagonist stands a crossroads and society gives him little direction. His compass comes from within. Shorts filmmaker Josué Méndez marks his feature film debut with this well-intentioned project. Purportedly shot for just \$30,000, he manages to get a volatile performance from Sibille, who carries the weight of the world on his face. Plotting falls down at several intervals. Black and white footage denotes Santiago's inner thoughts. It's an excessive device. Production elements are minimal. The supporting cast melts into the scenery, as they should. An admirable, yet blemished effort. In Spanish. (DB)
D: Josué Méndez W: Josué Méndez C: Juan Duran
Contact: films@milcolores.info

Innocent Voices (*)** Lions Gate The civil war in El Salvador is seen through the terrified eyes of an 11-year-old boy who fears forcible recruitment into the army when he turns 12. Gritty drama looks glossy but doesn't shy away from brutal realities of life in wartime. The plus here is that this is a character story and the

LATINO HERITAGE FILMS

Poor *

Fair **

Good ***

Excellent ****

kid and his family are well-drawn characters that are beautifully played. Simple and affecting with enough Hollywood finesse to make it more commercial and less art house. In Spanish. (KO)

D: Luis Mandoki W: Oscar Torres, Luis Mandoki

C: Juan Ruiz Anchía

Contact: ekim@lgecorp.com

Rolling Family (Familia Rodante) (1/2) Buena Onda Films** Argentina. *Crane World* (1999) captured blue collar life. *El Bonaerense* (2002) focused on a corrupt policeman. With his third film, director Pablo Trapero returns to his working class roots. The 84-year-old matriarch of an extended family talks her clan into going to a niece's wedding. A long, crowded road trip aboard a 1958 pick-up truck converted to a camper ensues. Family dynamics play out in humorous ways. Two young cousins kiss. An aunt and uncle flirt. The truck breaks down, and so do inhibitions. If the *Everybody Loves Raymond* cast took a road trip, it would be like this. Trapero milks the charming moments. He's not afraid of pregnant pauses in which the film is just visual. Graciana Chironi as the grandma gives a tender performance. The rest of the cast is colorful without being over-eccentric. Production elements are just fine. Road movies have natural momentum, and this one does too, even if it runs on fumes at times. Though a Latino movie, it has a very big-hearted happy Italian family feel. Not a perfect comedy, but Trapero's strongest film to date. In Spanish. (DB)

D: Pablo Trapero W: Pablo Trapero

C: Guillermo Nieto

Contact: marina@lumina-films.com

The Sea Within (Mar Adentro) (**) Sogepaq** Spain. Javier Bardem is the man to beat for the next Best Actor Oscar. A swimming accident has left forty-something Ramón (Bardem) paralyzed from the neck down. He doesn't want pity just the right to terminate

his life. Julia (Belen Rueda) a lawyer who has a degenerative disease, plans to take his case to the highest court. From his bed, Ramón receives attention from his sister-in-law, brother, nephew Javi (Tamar Novas) and an admirer (Lola Duenas). Director/co-writer Alejandro Amenábar (*Open Your Eyes*) works magic in everyframe. Controversial subject, arguments on both sides – then he tosses in a scene in which Ramón walks from his bed, flies out a window over fields and the sea. Sobering reality and the mix of fantasy is so heady it hurts. Fine performances from Rueda and Duenas as the competing platonic lovers/friends. Sumptuous musical score and cinematography. All blessed by an incomparable portrayal by a gifted actor who – with only moves of his head, facial expressions and deep emoting – steals every scene he's in. The role of a lifetime. It's a privilege to sit in a theater and experience this quality of filmmaking. In Spanish. (DB)
D: Alejandro Amenábar W: Alejandro Amenábar, Mateo Gil C: Javier Aguirresarobe
Contact: sogepaqit@sogecable.com

Whisky Romeo Zulu () Aquafilms** Argentina. A pilot loses his job when he decides to warn the airline about seriously lax security measures that could lead to accidents. Shortly after he's fired, a tragic accident occurs. Based on a true story, and written, directed and acted by the pilot himself, this Argentinean drama is well shot and carries an impending sense of doom. Still, movie is poorly structured and the heart of the story is diluted, killing the strong emotional impact film could've had. Production values and real story angle are good promotional points. Though uneven, it's still an impressive feature-length debut from a former pilot turned director. In Spanish. (RBG)

D: Enrique Piñeyro W: Enrique Piñeyro

C: Ramiro Civita

Contact: produccion@aquafilms.com.ar

AFRICAN HERITAGE FILMS

Poor *

Fair **

Good ***

Excellent ****

Bullet Boy (1/2) Portman Film** Boyz in the London hood. You'd think getting out of prison would rid Ricky (Ashley Walters) of his biggest problems. It doesn't. Shortly after the gate swings open, he gets caught up in gang warfare courtesy of his buddy Wisdom (Leon Black). Then Ricky brings a gun into his single mother's apartment, and before you can say "Uh-oh," his younger brother has shot his best friend. In his first feature film, Saul Dibb shows he's adept at framing scenes, creating viable, urban drama and writing hit-between-the-eyes dialogue. "You should have smothered your children when they were born," says the grieving father of the brother's best friend. Walters is magnetic in a Mekhi Phifer way. Claire Perkins plays his put-upon mother with conflicted emotions. Film fades towards the end. The disappointments, bad judgment and bloodshed mount too heavily. Still, the black ghetto cries real tears in this urban tragedy. (DB)

D: Saul Dibb W: Saul Dibb, Catherine Johnson

C: Marcel Zyskind

Contact: sales@portmanfilm.com

Cape of Good Hope (*) Epstein, Levinsohn, Bodine, Hurwitz & Weinstein LLP** The healing process in South Africa takes many shapes. Three women (a white, mixed race and a black South African) share their misfortune and change their destiny. Kate (Debbie Brown) manages an animal shelter, is having an affair with a married man and intimacy problems with a new suitor. Sharifa (Quanita Adams) works at the same shelter and is having fertility problems as she and her husband try to have a child. Lindiwe (Nthathi Moshesh) is a maid whose mother tries to repel her new Congolese immigrant boyfriend (Eriq Ebouney, *Lumumba*). Flawed adult women grappling with life, leaning on each other and looking for that state of grace. Husband and wife filmmaking team Mark Bamford (director/co-writer) and Suzanne Kay (writer) capture a spirit of exploration and enlightenment that gives South Africa's vast story of reconciliation a very intimate feel. Adams and Ebouney stand out in the cast. Film has a good low-budget pro-

duction quality and a strong emotional core for its target female audience. Would make Oprah happy. (DB)
D: Mark Bamford W: Suzanne Kay, Mark Bamford
C: Larry Fong

Contact: ahurwitz@entlawfirm.com



Drum (1/2) Armada Pictures International** 1950s, Johannesburg, South Africa. On the dark side of the city, Sophiatown rages. It's inhabitants mingle with whites. The top journalist (Taye Diggs) at a new upstart black magazine, *Drum*, works for a white boss and runs with a white photographer. He mixes with gangsters, flirts with nightclub singers and fights the ominous grip of apartheid by daring to write about black oppression, even with the threat of reprisal. Based on a true story, exploring a side of middleclass black South African life that is rarely seen, *Drum* shows initiative. It forays into South Africa's past, gamely exposes injustice and puts faces to figures. Competently written and directed. If anything a bit too glossy and routine: the Diggs character gets himself into and out of bad situations too neatly. An energetic supporting cast. Decent production elements. A nice step forward for South African cinema. (DB)

D: Zola Maseko W: Jason Filardi C: Lisa Rinzler

Contact: ydanielak@armada-pictures.com

AFRICAN HERITAGE FILMS

Poor *

Fair **

Good ***

Excellent ****

Forgiveness ()** **Fortissimo Films** It's an art. Turning a villain into a sympathetic character. A white ex-policeman (Arnold Voslo), burdened by guilt for killing a young black activist during Apartheid, returns to the victim's town. He visits the grieving family and begs for forgiveness. The father (Zane Meas), a humble fisherman, and mother (Denise Newman) are shocked but stoic. The sister (Quanita Adams, *Cape of Good Hope*) plots his demise. The direction wavers. There are awkward lapses in momentum. The plotting sets up dubious characters, grudges, fiendish plots – but never perfectly. Some performances prevail (Meas, Newman, Adams) others seem amateurish. The cinematography casts a taupe tone and underlines a sadness that takes an emotional grip. The premise is unique and will make viewers yearn for resolution. Vosloo in a stumbling, oafish performance provokes the kind of sympathy one reserves for the hunchback of Notre Dame. The film is deeply moving, ultimately. (DB)

D: Ian Gabriel W: Greg Latter C: Giulio Biccari
Contact: info@fortissimo.nl

The Night Of Truth (La Nuit de la Vérité) (*)** **Acrobates Films** How do you find peace after apartheid or genocide? Fanta Régina Nacro, one of the first female directors from Burkina Faso, emerges with a poignant socio/political allegory, set in a fictitious country, where adverse factions from a civil war extend an olive branch to each other. The President of Nyak (Adama Ouédraogo) and his less forgiving wife attend a dinner at the home of a rebel leader (Commandant Moussa Cisse), who is haunted by a murder. Both leaders talk their soldiers into reluctantly dropping their weapons. Anger, skepticism and fear subside until the wife discovers who killed her son. This fictional story takes on true emotions, depicts

very human characters and all the what-ifs when enemies fess-up. Nacro's filmmaking is as socially significant and deeply moving as that of legendary African director Sembene Ousmane (*Moolaadé, Guelwaar*). Topical. Heartwarming. Enlightening. Never pedantic. Should be a requisite for the Sudan, Rwanda and other war torn countries dealing with reconciliation and post traumatic stress. Great performances from entire cast. In French, Mooré, Dioula. (DB)
D: Fanta Régina Nacro W: Marc Gautron,
Fanta Régina Nacro C: Nara Keo Kosal
Contact: acrobatesfilms@anadoo.fr

Red Dust (*)** **Distant Horizon** In 2000, a white South African police officer applies for amnesty under the Truth & Reconciliation Commission, confessing to beating and torturing black prisoners. One of his former victims (Chiwetel Ejiofor, *Dirty Pretty Things*) opposes the amnesty because he knows that the officer also killed his friend. Human rights lawyer Hilary Swank is hired to press the case. As the hearing progresses, the former victim has to confront the truth about his own betrayal of his friend and the lawyer has to come to terms with the country she has grown to hate. Moving drama is a very well-made film -- beautifully shot, well-written and smartly directed, sensitively acted. It's a timely historical narrative with an important and dramatic socio-political theme in truth and forgiveness but it achieves its ends through a very moving personal story. In short, it packs a real emotional punch. There's also star power in the form of Oscar-winner Hilary Swank and plenty of star charisma from up-and-comer Chiwetel Ejiofor. (KO)
D: Tom Hooper W: Troy Kennedy-Martin
C: Larry Smith
Contact: pierrew@adelphia.net

ASIAN HERITAGE FILMS

Poor *

Fair **

Good ***

Excellent ****

Kung Fu Hustle (1/2) Columbia Tristar** Stephen Chow (*Shaolin Soccer*), the clown prince of kung fu, is back with another martial arts comedy that's as action-packed as it is wacky. Set in Shanghai in the 1930's, plot concerns a wannabe hood (Chow) who runs afoul of a deadly gang but is saved by a tenement full of poor people who are all kung fu masters. Chow seems to be making a deliberate attempt to westernize his oeuvre with bigger f/x and less verbal comedy. The story is nonsense but the jokes are good and Chow is a charismatic leading man. Production values are superior to Shaolin Soccer. In Cantonese. (KO)
D: Stephen Chow W: Tsang Kan Cheong, Stephen Chow, Chan Man Keung C: Poon Hang Shang
Contact: sal_jadestro@spe.sony.com



Low Life (Ha-Ryu-In-Saeng) () Celluloid Dreams** Nothing like a good fist fight. Young Asian gangsters reign in this melodramatic martial arts thriller. Director/writer Im Kwan-taek (*Chihwaseon*) lets his central character (Cho Seung-woo) stumble into an underworld. Fast with his fists, quick-to learn, he haphazardly hooks up with a gang and finds his world changed. Haphazard is a key word, as sequences seem to stumble into each other. Scenes shift abruptly. The pacing is arrhythmic. Fights break out without a hint, choreographed to a T. The sets never seem real, more like props from an elaborate theater piece. Time period spans from Korea's Liberal Party regime ('60s) to its military dictatorship. Gangs go in and out of style. It's a curious backdrop for what might have been a more entertaining crime movie. Artfully directed. Hard to follow. May never find more than a small audience of curious onlookers. In Korean. (DB)
D: Im Kwon-taek W: Im Kwon-taek C: Chung Il-sung
Contact: info@egmondfilm.nl

he invades – but he doesn't steal. Makes himself at home. Might even change a light bulb. One invasion turns odd: he thinks the home is empty, in fact an abused wife is inside and she doesn't call the cops. They hook up and lead the same life together. Extraordinary circumstance. Ordinary people and tone. Kim somehow makes their existence so normal, and it's the outside world that seems so wrong. He uses repetition to great effect. The couple's relationship is non-verbal. The unique, enigmatic personas just add tone. Subtle, affecting performances from the lead actors, with eccentric portrayals from the supporting cast. Final act drifts into a mystical ending that is a cop-out on one hand, but poetic on the other. A very moody piece of contemplation. A gorgeous BMW motorcycle steals scenes. In Korean. (DB)
D: Kim Ki-duk W: Kim Ki-duk C: Jang Seong-back
Contact: cineinfo@cineclickasia.com

3-Iron (Bin jip) (*) Cineclick Asia** Director Kim Ki-duk (*Spring, Summer, Fall, Winter...and Spring*) has created an unimaginable lead character. Tae-suk (Jae Hee) has no home. He shacks up in strangers' houses. First he puts flyers on doorknobs in neighborhoods, checking them daily. The ones that stay on the longest indicate that the resident is not home. Those

Throw Down (Rudao Longhu Bang) () Milkyway Image** Martial arts movies tend to favor kickboxing. Here, judo takes center stage. Tony (Aaron Kwok), a judo fighter hankers for a run-in with an ex-judo champion (Louis Koo) who now owns a seedy bar and consorts with gangsters. They meet and are joined by an aspiring singer (Cherrie Ying). Trials and tribulations follow, but the plotting is not central to the success of the movie. Director Johnnie

ASIAN HERITAGE FILMS

Poor *

Fair **

Good ***

Excellent ****

To (*Breaking News*) is a master at filming a martial arts fight. His skills extend to other action scenes, mixing humor with violence and helping his cast stay light on their feet and into their characters. Script runs out of gas after mesmerizing opening scene. The cinematography, fight scenes and incessant bloodletting may keep some diehard viewers enthralled until the end. In Cantonese. (DB)

D: Johnnie To W: Yau Nai oi, Yip Tin Shing, Au Kin Yee C: Chang Siu Keung
Contact: shan@milkywayimage.com

Tropical Malady (Sud Pralad) ()** **Celluloid Dreams** Thailand. Two friends, one a forest ranger Keng (Banlop Lomni), the other a country boy Tong (Sakda Kaewbuadee), form a flirtatious friendship that becomes loving. When a wild beast starts killing cows, Keng goes off into the woods to fight the demon. What follows, as the beast is in fact a mystical figure, is a study in human and spiritual endurance that is very Eastern and meditative. Like those existential moments in *Apocalypse Now*. The male/male relationship never becomes compelling. The survival of the fittest plotting does, but comes so late in the film few viewers will be in their chairs to witness it.

Tedious pacing and poor cinematography. Director Apichatpong Weerasethakul makes you work and wait for the movie's redeeming qualities. In Thai. (DB)

D: Apichatpong Weerasethakul W: Apichatpong Weerasethakul C: Vichit Tanapanitch, Jarin Pengpanitch, Jean Louis Vialard
Contact: info@celluloid-dreams.com

Zebroman (1/2)** **Toei Company Ltd.** Japan. At work he is a put-upon school teacher (Sho Aikawa). At home, in his hand-made black and white Zebroman costume, he is the TV super hero he admired as a kid. Life changes when an at-home fantasy becomes a street fighting hero. Audiences who like their comedy odd and far-fetched will take to this geeky guy-fights-crablike-villains comedy. The Japanese Clark Kent goes from unlikely hero to confident unlikely hero in a single bound. Atsuro Watabe stars as a cop investigating the strange goings on. His steely persona and angular face please the camera. Direction maintains a sly comic tone. Some minor special effects (green slime) help. (DB)

D: Takashi Miike W: Kankuro Kudo C: Kaz Tanaka
Contact: international@toei.co.jp

FAMILY FILMS

Poor *

Fair **

Good ***

Excellent ****

Bluebird (1/2) Egmond Film and Television**

Netherlands. Merle (Elske Rotteveel) is a model 13-year-old student. Babysits her physically disabled younger brother. She's the smartest kid in class, Should be the envy of all her schoolmates, instead is the object of their disdain. Subtle hints and secret laughs give way to stolen possessions and brutal beatings. The one silver lining in her day is a black man on the train whose positive reinforcement boosts her self-image. A very topical and important movie about a universal subject, bullying. Vulnerable, likable central character is well-played by Rotteveel. The direction is unobtrusive. The script throws enough antagonists in her direction, but at some point the viewer will wish that she exposes her enemies or stands up to them. That would happen in a movie, possibly not in real life. Credit the film for being uncompromising. It's unsettling, but that's life. In Dutch. (RBG)

D: Mijke de Jong W: Helena van der Meulen

C: Goert Giltay

Contact: info@egmondfilm.nl

Five Children and It (1/2) Capitol Films**

England, 1917. During wartime, five London children are sent to the country to live with their eccentric uncle (Kenneth Branagh). Exploring his rambling mansion they discover a secret tunnel to a beach and a sand fairy that can grant their wishes, though every wish goes awry and causes chaos. Adapted from a popular children's book, glossy production includes just the right veneer of English eccentricity and the mayhem will delight younger children, though the storytelling style may be a little precious for some. Charming but very British. Branagh is entertaining but he's upstaged by wonderful child actor Freddie Highmore (*Finding Neverland* and the upcoming *Charlie & the Chocolate Factory*). (KO)

D: John Stephenson W: David Solomons

C: Mike Brewster

Contact: films@capitolfilms.com



Steamboy (*1/2) Columbia Tristar Japanese animation takes on the socio-political implications of industrialization in Victorian England. What we get is a rather standard looking cartoon figure against a vividly photo-realistic background – and a complex and confusing story about machinery and industrial power. An inventor's son finds himself in the middle of a war over the invention that is capable of providing infinite energy. Filmmaker Katsuhiro Otomo has a lot on his mind and most of it is preachy and talky. Gorgeous to look at but short on compelling narrative and characters. (KO)

D: Katsuhiro Otomo W: Katsuhiro Otomo,

Sadayuki Murai C: NA

Contact: sal_ladestro@spe.sony.com

DOCUMENTARIES

Poor *

Fair **

Good ***

Excellent ****

Andrew & Jeremy Get Married ()** Gavin Films
England. Five years after meeting at a gay bar, a patrician 69-year-old former English teacher and a retired 49-year-old bus driver prepare to wed. Film treats them intimately as they tell their life stories to the filmmakers, exploring how their very different backgrounds have led them to the same place. Simple and touching but breaks no new ground. Andrew's South London accent can be difficult to understand. Tech credits are solid. (KO)

D: Don Boyd W: NA C: Don Boyd, Kate Boyd
Contact: info@gavinfilm.com



Going Upriver: The Long War of John Kerry (1/2)** Films Transit International Many viewers (voters) know something about Kerry's war history. Scenes of him standing at the head of a swift boat and being fired at show courage. It's his post Nam, anti-war exploits that are enigmatic. No longer. B&W footage depicts him leading a Washington D.C. sit-in with throngs of vets camping out and calling for an end to war. George T. Butler (*Pumping Iron*) is clearly an admirer, and Kerry's old friend. He's assembled vintage video recordings, shot poignant interviews with Kerry's rescues, and created a lasting impression that reveals Kerry's inner voice and outward determination. The slightly pat *Going Upriver* ... may not win him new fans, but viewers will finally see why

Kerry's still waters run deep. (DB)

D: George T. Butler W: Joe Dorman C: Sandi Sissel
Contact: janrofekamp@filmstransit.com

The Last Victory (De Laatste Overwinning) ()** Films Transit International And you think Boston Red Sox fans are a diehard crowd? Siena Italy, the district of Civetta, has been the scene of a town-center horse race for hundreds of years. It's the village's race, yet their hooves haven't crossed the finish line first since 1979. Recollecting their losses is painful. Contemplating a win puts a smile on their faces and an obsessive glare in their eyes. Dutch documentarian John Appel travels to Tuscany to get personal stories from townspeople both young and very old – a 92-year-old town councilor is the town's biggest cheerleader. Old black and white film shows a race that has stirred the locals' hearts for ages. When the latest competition rages, Appel's camera captures the exuberance, the brightly colored clothes, the animated crowds and the lightning-fast horses. A small town. A small story. A glimpse of an enduring spirit that may stir a small audience. (DB)

D: John Appel W: John Appel C: Erik van Empel
Contact: janrofekamp@filmstransit.com

Letter to True (1/2)** Just Blue Films In this personal piece, Weber channels his loves, regrets, dreams and passions through a letter he writes to his dogs. Visually beautiful and featuring outstanding editing and a soundtrack that will tug at the heart, this non-fiction film has no real storyline. Instead we get a peek at people, events and things that have influenced or moved Weber. His love for Manhattan, his dogs, his 9-11 and Vietnam experiences, his pro-soldier/anti-war stance and his pro-peace cat. Though film is engaging and at times moving for the duration, once it's over it feels like a light, almost forgettable piece that will entertain some but perhaps confuse or turn-off most. Production values are all top notch, and if personal non-linear films are your cup of tea, this one's up your alley. (RBG)

D: Bruce Weber W: Bruce Weber C: Pete Zuccarini, Evan Estern, Shane Sigler, Theo Stanley, Jim Fealy
Contact: elindeman@littlebearinc.com

DOCUMENTARIES

Poor *

Fair **

Good ***

Excellent ****

Letters to Ali ()** **Lunar Films** Straightforward Australian doc follows the trials of a white Australian family as they try to help an Afghan refugee being held in detention after seeking asylum. Basically an exposé of Australia's policy of mandatory detention for asylum seekers, which is of interest mostly to Australians. More informational than dramatic, and the Afghan refugee is never seen. Shot on digital video, tech credits are competent. (KO)

D: Clara Law W: Eddie L.C. Fong, Clara Law

C: Eddie L.C. Fong

Contact: lunar8@optusnet.com.au

Shake Hands with the Devil: The Journey of Roméo Dallaire (*)** **Films Transit International**

In 1994, 800,000 people were killed in Rwanda's civil war between Hutus and Tutsis. Lieutenant General Roméo Dallaire, the first Canadian to lead a U.N. peacekeeping mission in Africa, was assigned to Rwanda during the catastrophe. Stymied by the U.N.'s hands-off policy, he helped foreigners but few native Rwandans escape, never stemming the bloodshed. To him, the outside world failed to heed the gravity of the situation. Years later, upon the release of his autobiographical book, the guilt-filled General, along with filmmaker Peter Raymont, journeys back to Rwanda, scene of the crime. Locals speak their minds. Diplomats are interviewed. Fingers are pointed. Apologies are issued. Old wounds reopened. It's a cathartic, unsettling experience for a man who will never forget the past. This non-fiction film, with footage of bodies strewn around like leaves on the ground, is a timely, eye-opening cautionary tale. Especially as the world ignores the situation in the Sudan. (DB)

D: Peter Raymont W: Roméo Dallaire

C: John Westheuser

Contact: janrofekamp@filmtransit.com

Small Mall ()** **Icelandic Film Centre** Wry Icelandic filmmaker Douglas explores the hopes and dreams of employees of a failing shopping mall in Iceland – and puts a paid agitator in their midst to stir things up. Deadpan Nordic comedy is sympathetic to

the characters and patiently lets them reveal themselves. Very similar in tone to the small-scale cult hit *Cool & Crazy*, the doc about the Norwegian men's choir. Scandinavian humor is an acquired taste. Shot on digital betacam. In Icelandic. (KO)

D: Róbert Douglas W: Róbert Douglas

C: Róbert Douglas

Contact: info@icelandicfilmcenter.com

Three of Hearts: A Postmodern Family (*)**

ThinkFilm An intimate look at an unusual relationship – a three-way marriage between two bisexual men and one woman – that begins to fall apart when they have a baby. Fascinatingly frank and compelling narrative raises lots of issues but really shines in exploring the three characters and the way they deal with their unconventional lives. (KO)

D: Susan Kaplan W: NA C: Sarah Cawley,

Samuel Henriques, Don Lenzer, Kramer Morgenthau

Contact: ThinkFilm

Touch the Sound (*)** **Celluloid Dreams**

Pioneering Scottish percussionist Evelyn Glennie is the subject of this stirring musical documentary. Nearly deaf as a result of a neurological disorder, Glennie claims her entire body can hear and she proves it in her extraordinary performances. The doc is simple – what's important here is the extraordinary music. Plays like ideal PBS fare. (KO)

D: Thomas Riedelsheimer W: NA

C: Thomas Riedelsheimer

Contact: info@celluloid-dreams.com

Unforgivable Blackness: The Rise and Fall of Jack Johnson (*)** **Florentine Films**

First black heavyweight world boxing champion, 1908. Ladies man. Unapologetic playboy. Boxer Jack Johnson's life goes on display in this comprehensive fine-tuned documentary that is as much an indictment of racial oppression in America as it is a bio. Actor Sam Jackson voices the champ's words and thoughts. Keith David narrates. Race riots, lynchings, testy trials and an FBI conspiracy make for compelling viewing. Headed for PBS where the film's 214-minute length

DOCUMENTARIES

Poor *

Fair **

Good ***

Excellent ****

will be just fine. As strong as the Muhammad Ali doc *When We Were Kings*. This is a huge undertaking. Educational. Fit for TV, not a theater. (DB)
D: Ken Burns W: Geoffrey C. Ward. C: Buddy Squires, Stephen McCarthy
Contact: pbff@adelphia.net

A Whale of a Tale (*1/2) National Film Board of Canada Documentarian Peter Lynch shares with us his love, passion and obsession with whales, fishing and Toronto history in this well-researched but ultimately dull non-fiction piece. More an entry for a Canadian Discovery channel than a theatrical feature, Tale suffers as it hinges on an obsession with a subject but doesn't display any passion. Due in part to a passive voice-over by the filmmaker and an old school talking heads style, film will be of interest mostly to people interested in whales...and Toronto. (RBG)
D: Peter Lynch W: Peter Lynch
C: Peter Lynch, Stan Denniston
Contact: international@nfb.ca

Year of the Yao (*) Fine Line Films** Captivating sports doc follows 22-year-old, 7'6" Chinese basketball player Yao Ming through his rookie year in the NBA after being drafted by the Houston Rockets. At his side is young interpreter Colin who becomes an important friend and helps him deal with the pressure of making it in professional sports while upholding the pride of a nation of 1.2 billion people who look to him

as a hero. Witty, insightful and fascinating, even for non-sports fans. Yao himself is a charismatic leading man. (KO)
D: James D. Stern & Adam Del Deo W: N/A
C: Michael Winik
Contact: Fine Line Films

Z Channel: A Magnificent Obsession (1/2) Maja Films** Jerry Harvey killed his wife and then committed suicide. He did not have the usual profile for such a crime. A former booker at a repertory movie theater in L.A. – he took his passion for films to new heights when he took over the Z-Channel in L.A., attempting to make it the ultimate movie channel for film connoisseurs. His footnote in film history is lionized by people (Robert Altman, Quentin Tarantino, etc.) who appreciated Harvey's love of cinema and determination to extend his passion to others. Serious film fans may admire this doc. Most others will scratch their heads and wonder why the film was made. Harvey's brief film world ascension is well-explored. The more intriguing parts of the film, though, are when his depression and reasons for suicide are discussed. Sadly, these moments are few and far between. It's crucial to his story and may have added a human element the doc sorely needs. (DB)
D: Xan Cassavetes W: N.A. C: John Pirozzi
Contact: mpfpc@aol.com

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