

My SIFF Diary 2011

Tom

Honey

Turkish movie. Marion liked this a lot. I tolerated it and would not go again. This is one of those very atmospheric and ambiguous movies with sparse dialog, little joy and lots of gorgeous scenery. The wind! Oooh! There is a story about a boy in there someplace. I have no idea whether there was any correspondence to life as it is lived, or if the story was just the auteur's invention. My main experience during the movie was the guy 8 seats away who farted more often and more loudly than any human I have encountered. In a role reversal, I was grossed out and Marion started laughing and couldn't stop.

Cairo 678

Interesting to see a pre-Arab spring movie set in Egypt. I wonder if things have changed. The movie reminds me a bit of Crash (with the great Don Cheadle). The three main character's stories intersect in similar ways. The movie is about what the movie calls "sexual harassment" and we would call molestation, kind of hard. Recommended, lots of daily life in Cairo, and the cop is great.

Apart Together.

Chinese movie. Another one to be seen just for a look at the current culture. The main characters are dealing with the dislocations of the really rotten 20th century China had; and I kept thinking that the actors must, like pretty much any Chinese of that era, gone through a lot of bad stuff themselves. Great portrayal a detached ironic 20something girl with an iphone. Recommended.

When I see a movie like this I often think, well, that could be adapted to an English speaking setting pretty well. But to get it made there would need to be one of 10 or so mandatory scenes that have to go in that kind of movie. I know what it would be for this movie, but my anti-spoiler ethic will not allow me to say what wont be in the movie either. Not a lot of cliches in this movie.

Nuummioq

Basically a Danish movie, set in Greenland, which I suspect is Denmark's Alaska. Excellent movie. Basic premise is one those "what if x happened to you?" thoughts everyone has had, done very well. A terrific guy movie. This is another movie that is pretty free of the genre specific cliches we expect to see. Fart guy was in attendance, but seemed to have it under a little better control. One of our SIFF rules is to avoid danish movies, which are often depressing and bleak.

Silent Souls

Russian movie set in the Volga region. Both the title and the program description would have made me not want to see this movie, but Marion chose the films that day so it was just the title, and I'm not that prejudiced. I loved this movie. It deals with a couple of guys who are members of a culture so old and broken up they only kind of know what beliefs their rituals reflect. I think the way their observances are shown is pretty likely to be more accurate of traditional people than a more woo-woo oriented film would have us think. I like the way they do things with great care but not really reverence, like how the older guy throws a certain personal object into the water. Recommended

The Trip

Set in England. Its supposed to be a fake documentary, but other than the characters playing themselves, it did not seem very documentary like. The house was packed, not a seat left empty, except the one the guy next to me vacated about ½ hour in. I saw his reasoning. Apparently the star, Steve Coogan, is a famous comedian in real life and his co star, Rob Brydon, is as well. Coogan looked vaguely familiar. Big in England, one supposes. He projects that self-centered, narcissistic, insecure, competitive, sour-pus show biz persona which has had all possible humor squashed out of it for years. But I laughed a lot during the movie, loud belly laughs at that, mostly at the impressionist competitions they did at some length. For the next few days if any one just says, "Michael Caine" to me, I'll laugh.

Here is a link to a review on Fresh Air of The Trip, which I wrote about earlier
<http://www.npr.org/2011/06/09/137063175/british-comedian-steve-coogans-improv-based-trip>

Kosmos

Another atmospheric, windy Turkish movie. Marion raved about this one as well. A Mysterious Stranger movie, and it has a great in media res opening scene showing his appearance in the village. There was a good story being told, and parts where it was told very well. But it went on and on with the wind and the atmospheric and the chasing. This may be one of those movies where the cultural references are not apparent to someone outside the culture. Not to me, anyway. I probably would have liked it better if there were more Hollywood cliches. I'm not perfect.

Times and Winds

Turkish again, but less atmospheric and I liked it a lot. I don't know where, but I have seen this movie before. That's a first for me at SIFF. It gives nothing away to say this is life in a mountain village from the perspective of the older children. All of the mothers were great, I loved watching them. Recommended

Love

One of our SIFF rules is to avoid movies by local film makers. They almost always suck. I don't know why. This was an exception, I loved this movie. Highly recommended. A sci-fi treatment of another, "What would you do if X happened to you" setups. I think the highest compliment one can give a sci-fi movie is, that's how it would be, and this movie nails it. The writer/director/set designer/polymath (he did everything) and his producer (what a blowhard that guy is) were there. He built the set, which totally worked, in his parents driveway for \$15,000 out of stuff from home depot. The film was reverent to its sources, Kubrick first and foremost, without being derivative. It has a wow finish. It would be so very wrong if this director does not go on to great things.

Hooked

Russian shoot em up. This movie can't be spoiled, there is nothing original in it. Cheesy and bad. A group of video game experts are suddenly endowed (for nefarious purposes?!) With the fighting skills (Firearms! Kung fu! Speed racing!) in real life!!! Against real bad guys!!! I left early. My first time leaving early.

Edit

SIFF May 24

by Tom O'Brien on Tuesday, May 24, 2011 at 12:44am

The Darkest Matter

USA. Great title. One of the great things about sci-fi movies is that they can be done anywhere. You could film the whole thing in an empty parking lot, come up with a rational explanation based on string theory or some such and go with it. The audience doesn't care. It does not need decent sets or even decent acting (The first Star Wars movie, early Star Trek) just a good story. This movie also shows how hard it is to do things like act well or set up a scene. The movie was made using high school kids for all of the roles and much of the crew, and it really, really shows. Wooden, standing around, but pretty sincere. Lord of the Flies in space, filmed almost entirely before a green screen. This is the movie George Lucas would have made in about 5th grade.

Microphone

Egypt. One of the finest movies I have seen in a long time. Terrific music. Set in Alexandria (the one named after Alexander, not the one named after Alexandria) Set in the street level art scene, and much cooler than that might suggest. Very engaging actors giving great performances. Its hard to do something that is a staple of movie making in an original way, and there is a set of flashbacks to a single conversation that manages this. Alexandria is the hip liberated city in Egypt, sort of a cross between Miami, Vegas and Austin, I think. This is not a movie where the cultural references are hard to catch, because these people and us are part of the same culture. Another win for the internet, there is a world culture now. This is another movie that helps one to understand who made the Arab Spring happen, and why. Again real life intersecting with art: I bet most of the people involved in this movie ran into each other in Tahrir square.

Shocking Blue

Denmark. Marion and I have a shorthand for a certain type of movie, based on certain tropes that come up a lot in the thumbnail descriptions. It's a coming of age story set in [uganda/a barrio/cleveland] in which a young [boy/girl/transgender] comes to terms with [his homosexuality/an abusive father/the holocaust/acne/a deep dark family secret] and is changed forever. This is such a movie. Beautiful, liberated 17 year olds living in Eden, then stuff happens. I didn't love it and didn't hate it.

Pinoy Sunday

A movie made for a Filipino audience in Tagalog, set in Taipei. You have to love stuff like that. A comic buddy movie set among migrant workers in a bike factory. Most of the action revolves around their efforts to move a cast off couch from point A to their dormitory. I had the idea that Laurel and Hardy's Piano Movers was an inspiration, but it probably was not. The main actors are two comedians who are famous in the Philippines. It was OK. There were a lot of Filipinos and a lot of Taiwanese in the audience, based on my racial profiling, and they seemed to enjoy it. Me: just OK. I liked the love lorn-ness of the skinny guy, and I liked the scenes where they and the locals tried to talk in spite of the language barrier.

I took an evening off to sleep yesterday. This is grueling.

Bicycle, Spoon, Apple

Spain. Documentary. The subject of the documentary is a former Mayor of Barcelona who went public with his diagnosis of Alzheimer's Disease. They follow him for 2 years. Its not at all what you would expect. He seems like a great guy. Very charismatic, a natural politician, I'm sure. He comes across as kind of a Walter Cronkite figure. Hmm, I can't think of a current figure in the culture who compares to Cronkite. Oprah? His family are all terrific. He spends a lot of time gladhanding and doing awareness/fundraising gigs, and in my favorite scene one of the nurses he has his picture taken with acts exactly like she was meeting, oh, Bono. It does not show a long slow depressing slide into complete dysfunction. He's in a hurry to get all the stuff done he wants to do. This is not at all a bummer to watch. The title comes from the mini-mental status exam.

I just figured out who our Walter Cronkite is. Not Oprah. Jon Stewart. Sorry, young people who never heard of Cronkite. He was quite a guy. One of Murrows' boys, and they made a movie about Murrow. George Clooney was in it. OK?

Thief of Bagdad

USA, Douglas Fairbanks, made in 1924, 155 minutes. An expensive extravaganza for its time. The draw is the wonderful amazing re-imagination of the musical accompaniment using the music of the Electric Light Orchestra. It was fine, but failed to transport me. The music was way too loud and I seriously recommend earplugs. Janaki gave me a hard time for sounding like such a duffer complaining of the music of my own generation being too loud (I couldn't understand the

lyrics either). People should really see more silent movies like this one. Fairbanks is pretty cool, very graceful, and buff even by today's standards.

Viva Riva.

Congo. In French. Set in Kinshasha. A crime genre film, every character familiar to anyone who has seen such movies, and who has not? The director was there and said his big influence is Sergio Leone, among others. I was surprised, I expected him to say Michael Mann. Very similar pacing and story. The only thing missing was high tech car chases and explosions, which for my money makes it a better movie, the director having in the alternative to fall back on story telling. Oh, and more sex, I think. The movie is as good as the genre has to offer. Terrific bad guy, I would go to the movie again just to watch him. If Will Smith and Chiwetel Ejiofor had a baby together, it would be the lead actor. This is the first movie to be released out of the Congo in 30 or 40 years. They have been having a rough time of it, crazy dictator-wise. There was a brief reference to the Ali Foreman fight in Kinshasha in 1974, the famous Rumble in the Jungle that was the subject of a terrific documentary, "When we were Kings", and was won by his use of the rope-a-dope. I mention this because the director referenced this as being the greatest event in the history of Congo. The director is pretty optimistic about how things are going, and if you see the movie this is symbolized in the very last image in the film. Highly recommended.

Nobody

Greek movie set in rival Albanian and Russian immigrant communities in Greece. Also street racer car culture as the locus of conflicts between them. Hows that for a combination? Star crossed lovers defy their respective houses. The references to Shakespeare are explicit and well crafted but not so rigidly applied as to make the story completely predictable. The title, however, comes from another classic source(can you guess?. Great cast, good story, well told.

1000 Idiots

Spanish absurdist comedy in a series of unrelated vignettes. I left after about the 4th one. I tend to leave a movie at the point that I just don't care what happens next. When I was a kid we used to go to the Aurora Drive in. Its gone now of course. I remember seeing a Jerry Lewis movie there called "The Bellboy" that had a similar feel to it. Here's the deal: the Jerry Lewis movie was a lot funnier. And I am not even a little bit French.

May 28

Page One: Inside the New York Times

Documentary, made pretty much as an ode (I almost said elegy) to journalism as done by newspapers with the Times as the ideal of the type (so to speak). Some great stuff as they follow a guy named David Carr around. He's a former crack addict turned respectable, but not boring, journalist, and plainly the smartest guy in any room he inhabits. One can't argue that many things

are killing newspapers, and that none of them are better written or sourced than what good newspapers do. The two best scenes in the movie are Carr debating journalism with smarmy self-satisfied hip new media types.

Mysteries of Lisbon

Portugal, 4 ½ hours. Recommended. My high concept description is Barry Lyndon meets Slackers, screenplay by Charles Dickens. Like Barry Lyndon it set is the 1600's among European aristocrats, seems to use a lot of available light photography (I'm not sure) and is slow paced, as was life at the time. Like Slackers, it follows a character for a while then another, then another, all looping back on itself. There was a lot of voice over narration by the characters, and the narrator switched from one to another, sometimes in the same scene. Complicated reversals and double reversals ala Great Expectations. I like that a lot. Not one but two classic Men of Mystery.

Paper Birds

Spain. I went because the blurb described it as set among a vaudeville troupe in Spain just after the civil war. Vaudeville is pretty interesting, heir of of commedia del'arte, forefather of variety shows, sketch comedy and sitcoms. Turns out that there is a lot in story to remind us how much we hate fascist sons of bitches. Very good movie.

Codependent Lesbian Space Alien Seeks Same

USA, of course. I went to the longest movie of the festival, so I figured I should go to the best named movie as well. Very silly, laugh out loud funny at times. The lesbians in the audience, and it was 75% full, loved it. The director answered questions and was much funnier than the movie.

May 30

Young Goethe in Love

German, of course. Goethe's first published novel was about a guy who committed suicide in the end, starting the Romantic movement along with a suicide craze. It was supposedly loosely biographical (except Goethe lived to be 81), as is the movie. Well made Hollywood style movie. Recommended.

Black Bread

Spain yet again, and yet again set just after the civil war. We tend to lose sight of the way that war as well as World War Two was in France, in little villages where guys who knew each other from birth ended up putting the knife to each other. The blurbs in the catalog and on the SIFF website are often misleading and none more so than for this movie. I wonder if the writer really watched the movie. Ignore it. Recommended.

Route Irish.

English. With English subtitles, which was kind of weird. The characters are mostly from the North, so the subtitles were occasionally helpful, but I found I kept reading them unnecessarily. Route Irish is the road from Bagdad airport to the Green Zone and was famous for being very, very dangerous. The director is Ken Loach, a famous director who is not very well known. Idiosyncratic. Scenes are shot in sequence. He often does not tell the actors what the other actors lines will be, or allow them to know what happens next. Pretty cool. I think it makes a better movie. This is the most gritty and realistic seeming war movie I can remember, a lot of the footage has got to be the real thing acquired from journalists, and its pretty rough. I would have avoided the movie had I known, since I prefer more escapism in my movies, but it was a good story well told and I am glad I went. Another movie that makes you hate the fascist bastards, in this case us. If you like that sort of thing you should go. I predict a limited release, like most of Loach's movies.

The Hunter

Iran. I almost always like Iranian movies. My theory is that the overpowering censorship there requires better story telling and characters. This movie is not like that.

A man exits a movie theater. He looks both ways up and down the sidewalk. Thinks for a moment. Turns right. Walks to the corner. Looks at a car parked on the street for a moment, then crosses. A man crossing the other way says into a cell phone, "No way!" . Our man continues for a block. As he enters a grocery store, a woman suddenly looks at him and then walks on. The man gets a basket and selects some items. He goes to the checkout stand. The bagger, a young Asian woman, stands with her hands on the counter looking up bathed in florescent light with a vacant expression. The man leaves the store, and walks back to the car at which he had glanced earlier. He puts the groceries in the car. He goes back to the theater and enters. He has not said a word to anyone.

I could go on for pages. That wasn't the movie, that was me between movies at the Admiral. Some film makers seem to think that just following a guy around with nothing actually happening is artistic. There is another technique of taking a guy and having a series of crappy things happen to him and then ending the movie. There have been many such movies at SIFF. The techniques can be combined, as occurs here. But, I'd rather see an Iranian movie like that than an American one.

Dance Town

Korea. Here is something I did not know: In North Korea people live in apartments and wear normal clothes and have VCRs and TVs. I swear to God, this came as a surprise to me. My mental image of the place is basically a Siberian labor camp. Most of the movie is set in good old materialistic South Korea. Movies always glitz up what real life is about (the good ones are just like real life, only with the boring parts cut out, as Hitchcock said), but I have the feeling that this one captured a lot of what the life of a person in this situation would be like in a place like South Korea. There was a bit of just following her around, but the effect was to tell the story, not

substitute for a story. The director was there and made the projectionist stop the movie about 20 minutes in because the color was not right and needed adjusting. Good for him.

Grandma a Thousand Times

United Arab Emirates. Short movie, just over an hour. I almost always enjoy movies from the Mid-East, and this one is my new favorite. A sentimental but not gushy documentary that focuses on the director's grandmother, who, I have to say, reminds me a great deal of my mother. On the surface this does not sound like the makings of compelling film, but this is definitely worth seeing.

Fuck My Life

Chile. I wonder if the translator was precise about the title? A by-the-book genre romantic comedy. Could have been made here with almost no changes. Probably would have been set in Chicago. Very au courant. The credits at the end included the Twitter feeds of the cast. The thing about genre films is that they are always subject to the criticism that the characters and story are derivative, but this claim is generally only made by people who do not like the movie. Look up "Greek Comedy" in Wikipedia. Everything has been done for 2500 years. This movie was a stupid comedy with a few updates to the usual business. I can't say I recommend it, but fans of this kind of movie will enjoy it.

Spark of Being

USA. Not long after Janaki was born her doting grandfather made me a gift of a video recorder. These were new at the time, but not so new that taping your kid's every move was not already a cliché. I remember Poppop saying, in the nicest possible way, "You have a new hobby!!" and me saying to myself, "Ugh". So I would put it on a tripod, aim it at Janaki, and just let it run. When I had an hour or two I'd send it off. Poppop later recounted how the tapes were kind of annoying until he figured out that because he was watching on TV, he kept expecting something to happen, some development that he finally realized was not going to occur.

A lot of the footage in Spark of Being looks to have been made in a similar way by people more enthusiastic than I was. It mostly looks to have been filmed in the 20's, in the early days of portable movie cameras. I think the point of making a lot of the footage was just to do it. Hey, let's put it on a train car and film going through a tunnel!! Hey, let's film the crowd at the parade!! Some of it was probably a documentary. The crown scene footage is amazing; and much of what is on the screen is interesting to watch if, like me, you like that sort of thing. The makers of this film appear to have found a lot of this stuff, in very bad shape, and edited it to make what they are offering as a retelling of Frankenstein.

This may well be a good stoner movie, but it was not working for me. There seems to be a movement to put modern scores to silent movies, which I think is a pretty cool idea, but in this case I basically hate the music, not least because it was WAY TOO LOUD. The story they have in mind may have been on the screen somewhere, but I did not see it. I enjoyed seeing a lot of the old film, and they did a good job of working with the oxidized film to good psychedelic effect. But some of the more degraded stock was put in, I assume, just to accompany the music, and the

effect was annoying. My sense is others in the small audience had similar reactions. Still, worth seeing. Bring earplugs.

Mammuth

France. Gérard Depardieu is really, really fat and, be warned, he takes his shirt off at several points during this movie. Unlike many French comedies, this one has number of funny scenes including subtle but effective physical humor. A lot of people will pay to watch Depardieu cross the street, and this is really the movie for them.

Salvation Boulevard

USA. It is always a disappointment to me when one of my favorite SIFF movies is a Hollywood style movie with a lot of known stars in it. Kind of destroys the edgy, indie ethos of the festival. But I loved this movie. Well known big names who are good actors and not so well known good character actors- all doing, in my opinion, some of their best work. Great story with lots of noir style twists and turns. The setting is among members of a modern evangelical mega-church, and I thought they did an amazing job of threading the needle of having fun with the belief system without mocking it (much), especially in the case of Pierce Brosnan's character. Ed Harris is in it and eerily resembles my friend Phillip. It got the most enthusiastic audience reaction I've seen so far in the festival.

June 4

A Few Days Respite

Algeria, in French. Its about a couple of Iranian refugees trying to get through France. The blurb on the SIFF website makes it seem like a Gay Movie, but its just about a couple of guys trying to get through life, and they are gay. Not a great deal happens in the movie, and this is not at all a bad thing in this case. It is a non flashy story that is just about how we are.

12 Angry Lebanese

Lebanon. This is a beautiful movie. A documentary about guys in prison in Lebanon. They are not political prisoners, they are criminals doing hard time. They are enrolled in a drama program and are working on a production of the seminal Sidney Lumet film "12 Angry Men", (which was first a tele-play, then a play, then the movie). It appears that putting themselves in the position of the Jury and not their accustomed role of the Accused prompted a lot of reflection. The camera loves these guys. This is not the first portrayal of a drama program in prison I have experienced, and I find this to be deeply moving, why, I cannot say.

Clink of Ice

France. The movie sets out to be a surreal black comedy, and I guess it succeeds. It had a few walkouts, and I would have been one, but I had nothing to do till the next movie anyway.

Circumstance

Iran. When one goes to a lot of movies in a row it is not unusual to forget entirely what movie is

up next right up to the start of the movie. So, I'm at the Exit and the place is completely full and I'm wondering why. The things that make for crowded theaters are usually some combination of known stars, English language, and some special interest. This one is not in English. Looking around some more, my aha! moment came when I detected many lesbians (according to my stereotyping) in the crowd. There are a lot of LGBT movies at SIFF., and I suspect that good movies that cater to a LGBT audience are not widely available. So here they all were.

Excellent movie. Its really too bad that foreign language movies get so little play in the US, this is an example of a movie that should really be widely seen. Very good story, very well told. Set mostly in the underground upper class 20something youth culture in one of the most repressed cities in the world, Tehran. Pretty much everything most affluent 20somethings in the world think and do and strive for is illegal in Iran. As I have mentioned in connection with several other movies there is a cross-cultural plot element that a lot of movies use: those fascist bastards are *such* shitheads. Just the way they grind us all down to their stupid pointless level. This makes the movie sound preachy and tiresome, which is not at all the case. It makes the movie universal. I strongly doubt that this movie will be seen in Iran itself except underground.

Burke & Hare

English. Directed by the American John Landis. A movie with some highly accomplished actors, including the great Amy Adams, that just completely sucks. I already despised John Landis, and my attitude is cemented by this movie. Among the many offensive things in this stupid pointless movie is the accents, which are not quite as authentic as those in, say, "Darby O'Gill and the Little People". Another offensive aspect is that it was made at the legendary Ealing Studios, which did for dry English comedy approximately what the Delphic Oracle did for Greek literature. Landis seems to specialize in creepy humor, and nails the creepy part, not so much the humor. I do not think there is a single joke or piece of business that is in any way imaginative or creative. The first 5 seconds of the movie tell the whole story. The place was packed (English, known names) and the audience seemed to love it. In retrospect, the line of series pass holders was short, and the line of people buying tickets was long.

Marion and I have a signal we use that says "I'm ready to walk out on this when you are". Our rule is that if the other of us wants to stay this is not allowed to dampen the enjoyment of the movie and no guilt is attached to choosing to stay. I would have left after maybe 10 minutes, but I was with my big brother Bill and did not want to impose. I found it almost physically painful to sit through this piece of shit movie.

June 5, 2011

On the Ice

USA. Set in Barrow, Alaska among Inuit natives, I think. This movie is the reason to go to SIFF in the first place. A story that could be set almost anywhere, any time, but that requires precise insight to the chosen place and time. Owing to the obvious parallels, I don't like making the comparison, but it reminds me of Frozen River in that it's a compelling story and this movie should (but probably won't) become well known. Everything about this movie is well crafted: the

writing, the filming, the acting, the plot development, the cinematography, the music all come together beautifully.

Speaking of things universal every movie, without exception, that has delved in any depth into current culture, and just off hand I'm thinking Inuit, Egypt, Iran, Greece, England, Chile, Denmark and, just to complete the circle, the Congo has included hip hop music in the local vernacular, and a lot of that style street talk.

Nim

USA. Documentary about a chimpanzee raised in a human family for the purpose of seeing what language skills it would develop, which were a lot. Our species does not come off very well in comparison to our primate cousins. Nim is short for Nim Chimpsky, a spectacularly clever name of which little is made, for some reason. The film maker's interview style and editing is very smartly done

The Off Hours

USA. Again violating our rule not to against movies by local film makers. This is a regular people and their daily grind kind of movie. It has a beginning, a middle and an end, the characters have complexity and develop and are from life. These are just cookie cutter characters as a lot of movies in this style give us. Well acted by unknown performers. A decent movie. But, it has to be said, not a feel good movie. This is not a movie that is likely to be seen other than at film festivals.

I'll mention that although we agree roughly 80% of the time, Marion hated, hated this movie.

Kinshasa Symphony

Congo. A documentary about members of a symphony orchestra composed of working people from Kinshasa. Beautiful people who, for the most part, are barely getting by in a recovering third world dystopia. Beethoven's Ninth, Carmina Burana, Bolero. The crowd pleasers. In one scene, 7 or 8 musicians do improvisations on Bolero, and that is fabulous. Inspirational, probably the most feel good movie in the festival. Very much worth seeing.

June 8

The White Meadows. Iran. Iranian movies are consistently my favorites, this is an exception, but I will not say a bad word about it. The director, Mohammad Rasoulof, is in prison in Iran for his movies, which everywhere else in the world win major awards. He is a beacon of free speech in the face of crazy dictatorships. Iran has a lot of film makers and journalists in jail. Oh, and "in jail" - that means tortured. Here is a link to a Fresh Air interview with a journalist who went through this. It's a great interview, and the guy is a natural storyteller

<http://www.npr.org/2011/06/03/136862056/then-they-came-for-journalist-maziar-bahari>

I have no idea what the movie is about. It is a surreal movie set in weird landscapes (real places that are weird looking) with the main guy rowing around a lake having unexplainable encounters with strange people on islands, and collecting tears. I was unable to detect a particular message except maybe that people are weird. SIFF has this labeled a political movie, which I suppose

means that in Iran making a surreal movie is a political act.

SIFF

USA. As SIFF winds down I thought I would do a review of SIFF itself. And this one time I will to the traditional reviewers job of talking smack about the subject. So let me first say that SIFF is amazing. There are not many things for which I will give up all of my free time and most of my sanity for 3 weeks a year. SIFF manages that. Three completely non-ironic cheers for SIFF! Hurrah! Hurrah! Hurrah! Great, Great movies. I actually do not go to many non SIFF movies. Most movies do not measure up.

OK thats done.

I like to watch Mad Men and Breaking Bad and The killing on AMC. I have evil Comcast and can time shift my viewing. Watching the on demand episodes, they do have commercials (and let me here say that the remote control Comcast hands out is made of dung) and the commercials include ads for the *show that is being watched*. "Hey, person watching Mad Men, you should see how great Mad Men is." What are they thinking. Really, does anyone know? Do they know? SIFF does the same thing. Before the movie begins they play 4 or five trailers for SIFF. I have seen these trailers 45 times now, and they have become torture to me, in addition to the pointlessness making me crazy.

And then before the movie one of the programmers gets up and makes a little speech. Necessary announcements. Off with cell phones and their kin, the director will/will not be here, applause for the donors (blessed be the donors, by the way). The end time for the movie. The majority of the people who do this, though, feel the need to inject a bit of personality into the proceedings, with uniformly lame results. These people know movies, they pick the movies and do it well. Like most movie lovers (me included) they are probably frustrated performers. But, it must be said, frustrated because they are not good at it. Thats fine too, but I just sat through 5 pointless trailers I've seen 40 times, can I please not listen to any more of you than I need to and please watch a movie? Please?

I am convinced that many of the blurbs on the SIFF website are written by people who have not seen the movie. I understand. There are so many movies, so little time. They describe a movie like the movie being blurbed, but different. The most egregious of many examples is calling "Burke and Hare" a comedy about grave robbers. Burke and Hare were real people and were not grave robbers, they murdered people and sold the bodies, and the movie shows the funny ways people can be murdered for their bodies. So, SIFF, no, it was not like "Garden State", it was like a comedy about the Boston Strangler. (By the way, let me say here in case I forgot: Fuck you, John Landis.)

In order to do the wonderful things SIFF does they need to have a lot of volunteers. A lot of them. And they hare polite and helpful and enthusiastic. Again, all non-ironic praise for the volunteers. But. They hand out ballots for the movies with the exact amount of assertiveness I would use for smallpox vaccine, its hard to get in the door. They congregate around the entrance/exits so getting out of the theater (to get to your next movie that starts in ½ hour

someplace else) is like going through airport security with your shoes on. On a movie that is going to fill the theater 1/4 full, tops, they treat Back to Back passes like letters of transit on the Lisbon plane. To a line of, say, 8 series pass holders they will call out "Platinum Passholders may enter!" as if they worry maybe they should have brought their plastic shields to hold back the hoards of non-platinum pass holders who may appear from hyperspace and rush the door. One year at the now lamented Uptown, they had closed off one of the entries to the theater. I asked why and the volunteer explained that they had figured out a better way for people to enter the theater. This to people who go to movies all the time and really do know how to find a seat in a movie theater. Volunteers! This is fun! Be loose! Its going to be OK!

June 11

Roman's Ark

Australian. This is a long short film. I mentioned earlier that the great thing about sci-fi is that it can be made out of a vacant lot and a concept, and here is exactly that. Well, more of a vacant desert than a lot, but the same idea. Great movie, very high production values, terrific props. One of those Possibly Last Man Alive stories.

Lys

German. Sci-fi. A short long movie. The Germans make some good sci-fi movies. There is something about German movies that gets me. Like when the Mr. Big character says, "Perhaps she will be of use to us." in *German*. Again, low budget, small cast, looks great on the screen, very effective story telling.

Absent

Spain. I left after ½ hour. Nothing had happened yet. Walking out of a movie is not an act of pique. Its more like you order some dish you never heard of and it turns out you don't like octopus eggs, or whatever. You just don't finish it, nobody's fault. It can be dicey if the director is around. I have done that without realizing it, and I felt really bad.

The Destiny of Lower Animals

Ghana. The blurb says, and the director confirmed, that they started with elements of the great, great Kurosawa film. "Stray Dog". (I recommend the Janus Collection versions of Kurosowa movies, the commentaries are terrific. Netflix has them.). Good movie. Ghana does not appear as ravaged as the movies show Congo to be, and I understand that they have political leaders who are actually willing to lose elections and give up power, which is pretty special. It is a genre crime film of the smart variety. No car chases, not that much violence. By the way, the trailer for this is completely misleading and makes it look like a complete shoot em up. I would not have gone but Marion wanted to see it. I'm glad I went, as so often occurs. The movie is about what most crime films are about, finding ones soul.

Gorbaciòf - The Cashier Who Liked Gambling

Italy. The title gives more away that I usually like to do. Another slightly misleading blurb on SIFF website. This is one of those movies with overtones all over the map. Plot of a western, bit

of a boy meets girl movie, bit of a genre suspense/crime/gritty underworld movie. The ending is outright stolen from the middle of one of Tarantino's movies. It all comes together really well. I think most people will agree with me that one ends up liking the protagonist a lot. He has hidden depths. Also, he has a terrific walk. Not as up there as Denzel, who has the best walk in the movies (in addition to being my favorite actor); but in with Russell Crowe, whose walk I love. Watch him walk in "Proof of Life", for example.

Roadie

USA. I wanted to see this movie mostly for the picture on the poster. Often, these stills are breathtakingly concise summations of a movie. I think my favorite is the photo of Tom Hanks for "Big". That may be the best acting the guy ever did, that one still, and he is a great actor.

This is a Guy Goes Back to Hometown After Many Years Away movie. In this case the home town is some specific part of Queens. I like this type of premise a lot and I think the movie tells the story really well. The action of the film occurs over just one 24 hour period, and I like that a lot. I never really noticed Blue Oyster Cult, who are all over the soundtrack, and I very much liked the music. In my favorite scene the lead character sings along with this great metal ballad. Very soulful.

Marion did not like this movie, but I did. We both had a hard time watching the one extended drugs and alcohol scene, and I mention this not to spoil the movie but to talk about it. There are certain conventions that movies use to mess with reality in the interests of story telling. Time is compressed, people become best friends in 2 scenes. The violence is almost always overstated, even in good movies. The hero gets beaten badly where in real life he's in the hospital, black and blue for a month, and probably has a concussion if he is lucky; then he limps for 1/2 of a scene, is over it, and has the rest of the movie. I loved Chinatown for having Jake Giddes wear a bandage for most of the movie after the iconic encounter with the bad guy. And then there is alcohol. I'm sure there are lots of masters theses on this. So many movies require booze to get the character to the Big Emotional Insight, or to otherwise overcome defenses. And the amount people drink is, like violence, overstated. Impossible amounts. So I usually divide such reality bending devices by 5 or so in my head.



