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Jan '07 - Watershed Podcast Transcript

Thanks for downloading this Watershed Podcast.

My name is Mark Cosgrove, Head of Programme here at Watershed and along with my team responsible for putting together the cinema programme. This podcast will give you more of an insight into the forthcoming film selection, the reasons we get fired up about the cinema we screen and maybe some interesting diversions into the world of film, culture and the big wide world. In film parlance a back-story if you like.

First up this month is Kevin Macdonald's **The Last King of Scotland** – I have to declare an interest here as the title and my accent might give away. I first became aware of Giles Fodden's novel when it came out a good few years ago, and at the time thought it was a documentary account about a young Scottish doctor who befriended Idi Amin in Uganda in the 70s. When the film was surfacing last year on the festival circuit and I discovered that it was directed by **Touching the Void** director Kevin Macdonald it reinforced my misguided perception that it was a documentary. What it is - is based on the real dictator and a brilliant terrifying dramatisation of power and paranoia. The acting by Forest Whitaker as the increasingly unstable dictator will go down as one of the great performances. If there is any justice he should walk away with an Oscar®.

My own interest in the film and the story of last King of Scotland though goes back to the 1970s and the time when Amin was in power. I was at primary school in Barrhead - a new-build working class enclave on the outskirts of Glasgow. The idea of foreign was Neilston – 5 miles up the road or Uplamoor, thoroughly exotic as it was indeed in the middle of a moor. Into my white working class world came Rosario Vaz an Asian lad who joined our school. The Vaz's had moved into the neighbourhood – and rumours seeped into my 11-year-old brain that they had had to flee Africa. I was only vaguely aware of news reports and the tyranny of Amin. On seeing the **Last King of Scotland** I started thinking about the Vaz's and what they must have had to go through – being thrown out of Uganda as a result of Amin's racism, paranoia and showdown with Britain. And also what it must have been like to end up in Barrhead – there's a story in that. I wonder if he and his family see the film.

The **Last King of Scotland** runs from the Fri 12 January til Thu 9 February.

Also opening that week is Philip Groning's **Into Great Silence** most definitely a documentary. In the mid 1980s Groning approached the Carthusian order of Monks to make a study of their lives. This particular order devotes their life to God in the splendidly isolated monastery of Chartreuse near Grenoble in France. The response he got was to get back to them in 10 or 12 years. Then in 2000 he got a call saying they were ready. Running at just under three hours **Into Great Silence** is a privileged insight into this most ascetic of lives – as a viewer you have to give yourself over to the film in the same way the monks have given themselves over to God. In order to capture the rhythms and not be intrusive Groning lived the monastic life for a number of months. The film is silent in the sense of no dialogue except for the chanting during

prayer and it can only hint at the possibility of transcendence and revelation these monks try to achieve. To what end one might ask. As we are faced with the harsh realities of the world around assaulting us via print, broadcast, podcast there is something quite appealing about a group of people steadfastly sticking to a routine of contemplation and meditation and a relationship with nature which is natural and seasonal. They are indeed an example to us all. I watched it again coincidentally when Celebrity Big Brother started and couldn't help but draw a comparison between a group of people coming together in one household for the purposes of tension and disharmony whilst another come together to find tranquillity and harmony. I know which one I would go for.

Even God keeps abreast of technological developments and I see the monks have a website. You can find out more about them at www.chartreux.org – better still experience the film.

Mexican director Alejandro González Iñárritu burst onto our screens a few years ago with the furiously paced and ambitious **Amores Perros** which not only made a name for the director but launched the career of Gabriel García Bernal. The follow up **21 Grams** was equally ambitious and now with **Babel** we have the conclusion to a loose trilogy. I think of Iñárritu as a philosopher searching for a theory everything. I don't mean that in a flippant way. I've heard him talking about his films with such intensity and depth that you know he isn't just about making a throw away piece of entertainment. These are deeply considered, passionately felt works and **Babel** is really quite an extraordinary film. 6 characters lives from around the world – Morocco, America, Mexico, Japan – are all shown to be interrelated and interdependent in profound and dramatic ways. A sign of Iñárritu success is that **Babel** is a film that stays with you long after you've left the cinema. It makes you think more about this crazy world we live in – I'm sure the monks would have approved.....
Babel opens on January 18 and runs through to February 8.

In a similarly thought provoking way **Ghosts** is a dramatisation of the circumstances leading up to the deaths of the 23 Chinese cockle pickers in Morecambe Bay in 2004. A terrifying fate for these poor people who were drowned by the treacherous tides in that part of the UK. What a tragic event – to feel you are escaping poverty for this to then happen. I was recently reminded about the furore around **United 93** when it came out and whether enough time had passed before dealing with such a tragedy. I don't think **Ghosts** will raise the same furore but the story deserves as much coverage and attention.

Last up is **Old Joy** – a film I haven't seen yet – but some of my younger colleagues extol its virtues and the presence of Bonnie Prince Billie and with music by Yo La Tengo its hip credentials are kind of stratospheric – I'm must get myself along to see it.

If this has all sounded a little bit earnest then can I refer you to the following website www.slapstick.org.uk because, if you missed this years silent comedy festival then you should be able to catch up on some via webcasts which will be available to view from the end of January.