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## June 07 – Watershed Podcast Notes

Welcome to Watershed's podcast.

The Cannes Film Festival, Mark Cosgrove, Head of Programme, Watershed

There's a great moment in Roman Polanski's **Chinatown**, which really explains the whole film, the whole problem facing Jack Nicholson's Private Eye J.J. Gittes. The problem, he realises is beyond comprehension, its just got more complex than Gittes or we can imagine. This guy has just realised he is out of his depth, and in the end when the full horror has revealed itself a cop says to Nicholson 'Just leave it Jake, its Chinatown – its own rules apply.' This is also the case with the Cannes Film Festival – a festival which takes you on your very own rollercoaster ride of exhilarating cinematic highs and bewildering lows – how come they got a ticket for the Coen Brothers and I couldn't? Why wont they let me into the screening when everyone else can get in? For 10 days you are in a bubble and often it is heard, by way of explanation, 'Just leave it Mark, its Cannes.'

The Cannes Film Festival wrapped last weekend, and for its 60th year it produced an absolute vintage. At the last count I must have got through about 30 odd films and all (bar one) were strong films in one-way or another. If Cannes is a barometer of forthcoming art house cinema then the prospects look damn good from where I stand.

The competition was peppered with familiar names all of whom delivered the goods. The Coen Brothers were back on nail-biting diabolical form with **No Country of Old Men**. Adapted from a Cormac McCarthy novel it is a return to **Blood Simple** territory. Gus Van Sant's **Paranoid Park** delivered a thought provoking account of morality in young people thorough the eyes of a teenage skateboarder. Some of the cinematography courtesy of Chris Doyle was sublime. Artist turned increasingly successful filmmaker Julian Schnabel has done a brilliant job of realising on screen **The Diving Bell and the Butterfly**. Jean Dominique Bauby was the charismatic editor of French belle who suffered a massive stroke leaving him paralysed and only able to communicate by blinking one eye through which he quite extraordinarily wrote this account of his experience. I wondered how this was going to work on screen and Schnabel pulled it off wonderfully. When the film finished the sound of unrestrained sobbing could be heard around the auditorium.

More on the margins – that's the great thing about Cannes competition is that it puts cinema centre stage, which is so often marginalised by the mainstream – as was Russian director Alexander Sokurovs **Alexsandra**. Now I am a big fan of Sokurov and I enjoyed the rich visual and aural texture Sokurov creates and the subject matter he is dealing with topical – relationships between Checyna and Russia – but cinematically I didn't feel he pulled it off as successfully as his more allegorical films like *Mother and Son*. However after the 8.30am screening I bump into film critic, Mark Cousins who hails it a masterpiece. It's Cannes after all!

It is one of the adrenalin rushes of the festival, seeing films fresh before any critical opinion has been formed into the consciousness.

The buzz on the croisette is about a Romanian film showing in competition. I make a point to see it at a market screening in one of the smaller auditoriums. I arrive early, as when the buzz kicks in you know the buyers will be circling. And so it passes that whilst I might be at the front of the queue, buyers are let in first, and I have a few anxious moments wondering if I will get in. At this stage Bill Shankly's famous quote about football passes through my mind 'some people think football is a matter of life and death – well I can reassure them it is more important than that!' and in Cannes this aptly applies to film.

The Romanian film **4 months 3 weeks 2 days** is indeed a compelling, uncompromising film about a young woman and her friend who plan an abortion during the oppressive communist era. It's terrifying in a horror film kind of way but completely unstaged and matter-of-fact. It's a moral film but importantly not moralistic. It stays with you and deservedly won the Palme d'Or.

It was definitely a wide-open field in the best sense for the Palme d'Or. The Coens were hotly tipped, as was Schnabel as was **4 months 3 weeks 2 days**. For me though the outstanding film in competition was Ulrich Seidl's **Import Export**, a tough and again uncompromising view of migrant life in Northern Europe, and the flow of lives necessitated by economic need between the Ukraine and Austria. The director works in extremis – shooting in –30 in the Ukraine, shooting in geriatric wards and working with untrained actors. The effect is deeply powerful and socially aware filmmaking. It's going to be a tough sell but in the way that Kieslowski's **Short Film about Killing** was a tough but rewarding sell. For what it is worth I would have given it top Prize.

A last thought on the main competition should go to **Persepolis** – a French produced Iranian Animation. It is based on graphic novels of the same name and set in Tehran in 1978 it tells the story of an eight year old girl who dreams of being a future prophet – nothing like a bit of subversive animation.

In other sections Swedish director Roy Anderson's **You, the living** was an absolute joy, poignant heartfelt and with razor sharp comic timing, laugh out loud funny. You might have seen his earlier feature the sublimely surreal **Songs From the Second Floor** – this new one follows in that vein but with a more profound sense of optimistic pessimism.

Photographer Anton Corbyn, who made his name with celebrated covers for the New Musical Express in the 80s has made his first feature **Control** about the Joy Division lead singer Ian Curtis. Corbyn captures the era – Manchester, Macclesfield in the late 70s early 80s. This is music pre pop idol, pre Internet, pre mobile phone – the first time actor Sam Riley is unnerving in his performance and hairs rise on the back of necks when he recreates the poetic, tragic power of Curtis's live performances.

Irish film **Garage** is a sharply written and performed drama about small town Ireland and the kind of characters you know populate them. The main character is Josie a harmless misfit who becomes the focus for an unwitting tragedy. There is a subtle tinge of Beckett in the exchanges. This is the kind of cinema which is steeped in its own country's identity yet transcends national boundaries.

A personal highlight for me was seeing Martin Scorsese give a lesson in cinema, talking with animated passion he describes such people as Jimmy Cagney, Cassavettes, Rossellini, Truffaut, Godard and a host of others as influences. There is a great moment when he describes shooting the scene in **Goodfellas** where Joe Pesci says to Ray Liotta 'what's so funny?' and why a medium shot created more tension than close ups. Even Quentin Tarantino had to sit at the feet of the master.

And so, one evening after a hard day at the cinema, and a late evening meal with colleagues, we walk past the red carpet which is surrounded by thousands of people – what's happening? we wonder, what is that drum kit and guitar doing at the top of the red carpet? – When suddenly U2 are introduced, Bono says 'howyadoing Cannes' and they launch into a live performance at the top of the stairs to the Palais cinema. What is happening? 'Just leave it Mark, Its Cannes.'