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Watershed October 2009 Podcast

Agnes Varda is quite rightly seen as the godmother of the nouvelle vague – that furious cinematic moment at the end of the 1950s and early 1960s in France which shook cinema to its core, changed the way filmmaking was thought about and, for one crazy moment, it felt that cinema could even change the way we lived.

The godparents in fact were Varda and her husband Jacques Demy whose films combined a love of Hollywood, particularly musicals with a distinctive French sensibility. Varda's own filmmaking leaned more towards visual art or at least a dialogue with visual art rather the Nouvelle Vagues's love/hate affair with Hollywood.

Her most recent films are exquisite exploratory personal documentaries that have, at their core, the presence and personality of Varda exploring the world and its contradictions. At the age of 81 she has made a memorable film **Beaches of Agnès** which finds her remembering and re-imagining her past, in particular her childhood on the Brittany beaches and of course her defining relationship with Demy.

Her playful intelligence and warmth are a joy to behold. If Portuguese director Manoel de Oliveira can be making films into his 100s then long may Varda continue with her cinema of generosity and wisdom.

Beaches of Agnès is on from Fri 2nd until Thu 8th Oct and is being shown as part of Bristol City Council's **Celebrating Age** initiative. Other films in Watershed's contribution to **Celebrating Age** are

Cloud 9 directed by Andreas Dresen from Germany, a moving honest film about a woman in her late 60s who on the surface is happily married with grandchildren until she embarks in a passionate affair with a 70 year old colleague. **Cloud 9**, unusually in cinema, suggests that passionate emotions and affairs of the heart can afflict at any age and is not the preserve of those under 30.

The Mother and **Venus** both from the pen of Hanif Kureishi and directed by Roger Mithchel address the issue of older love for younger emotion. In the case of **The Mother** recently widowed May finds herself seeking comfort in her son's friend (a pre bond Daniel Craig). Anne Reid is wonderful as the bereft widow simply seeking solace and comfort. In **Venus** the tables are turned with an older man finding a new lease of life in his friends great-niece. **Venus** allows two great elderly British actors Peter O Toole and Leslie Phillips to give great performances shifting seamlessly between perfect double act routine and the loneliness of old age

About Schmidt sees Jack Nicholson in fantastically restrained mood as Warren Schmidt on the verge of retiring, his wife recently died, he is desperate to find something meaningful in his life. A journey to his only daughter's wedding sees him reassess his life and his current situation.

Cloud 9 screens on Sun 4 Oct at 1200noon.

The Mother screens on Sun 11 Oct at 1200noon

Venus screens on Sun 18 Oct at 1200noon

About Schmidt screens on 25 Oct at 1200noon

Katalin Varga is a truly extraordinary British film. When I saw it earlier this year at its premiere at the Berlin Film festival I had no idea of its British provenance. It is a near old testament tale of revenge set amidst the Carpathian mountains on the Romanian/Hungarian border inhabited by farm peasants very much as though the industrial revolution never happened. In mood and atmosphere it is reminiscent of the early films of Werner Herzog; **Aguirre Wrath of God** and **The Enigma of Kasper Hauser**. Imagine my surprise when I discovered that it was directed by a first time feature director from Reading.

The director Peter Strickland had made some short films and a few years ago came into some inheritance. In his 30s and instead of taking the conventional approach and buying a house and settling down, Strickland took the more precarious approach and decided to realise his ambition of making a feature film. The script was set in the Hungarian speaking part of Romania of which he had had some experience. But his knowledge was by no means fluent. Having shot the film on less than a normal film production would spend on catering, Strickland had the film in the can but nowhere near finished. The choice was to take the unprocessed films in the can back to his flat in Reading until two Romanian producers agreed to cover costs of post-production. The finished film was snapped up by the Berlin Film Festival and Strickland's film played in competition amongst some established greats of World cinema.

Strickland's, passion, tenacity and adventurous spirit paid off for **Katalin Varga** is a distinctive beautiful haunting revenge tragedy and, along with **Fishtank**, is one of the best British films of the year.

Katalin Varga opens on Fri 9th Oct.