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Watershed June 2010 Podcast – Cannes 2010

Each year I approach the **Cannes Film Festival** with much anticipation especially after last year's outstanding selection which unspooled **Antichrist**, **A Prophet** and **The White Ribbon** to name but three in one competition. So for 2010 the bar was high and yes it never achieved such heady heights but it produced a handful of stimulating, and (in the hands of three British veteran directors), three solid films.

The headline for me seems to be that the critics are always looking for the next big thing whereas it's in the evolution of the little things that exciting work is happening. Apichatpong Weerasatukul's Palme d'or-winning **Uncle Bonaroo** is the case in point.

The other headline is that 3D is very much on the agenda and having a real impact on the future of cinema. On arrival my first film in the market was **The Shock Labyrinth**, a Japanese HD 3D feature film which was both classic horror and effective 3D. I followed that with a 10 minute promo of a 3D natural history feature film about elephants which looked impressive. In conferences and trade papers everyone was proclaiming the growth in 3D production – Werner Herzog, Dario Argento are but two directors entering the 3D world - and audience demand has met with this. I even bumped into film critic Mark Kermode who Watershed goes may know stated that he would eat his shoes if we screened a 3D film by the likes of David Lynch. He said he had been researching shoe recipes online!

One of the interesting and exhilarating aspects to Cannes is seeing films before any critical opinion or orthodoxy has settled. In fact it is instructive to look at the daily critics' charts to see how divergent opinion can be. One example this year was Alejandro Gonzalez Iñárritu's **Biutiful**, which I watched it at its 8.30am press screening. Now I am aware of the director's tendency to pomposity and a theory of everything – **Babel** being the prime example - but he is also capable of extraordinarily energetic visceral direction such as **Amores Perros**. **Biutiful** for me held in check the tendency towards the former with elements of the latter, all held together with a brilliant central performance from Javier Bardem (Bardem really has been watching classic Brando). The critics, well - the British critics - savaged

the film. I raised this tentatively with prime suspects Nick James and Jonathan Romney and sensed we were not going to reach a critical consensus

A major disappointment was Takeshi Kitano's **Outrage** which I was hoping might have been a return to **Sonatine** form but instead served up everything Yakuza that he thinks his audience wants to see but with no discernable plot and empathy to be had. I ended up not caring - and I had worn my best bib and tucker to walk up the red carpet to see the film!

Around the various strands of the festival there were a clutch of titles that have since been bought for the UK and are likely to find their way to Watershed. These include **La Casa Muda** from Uruguay, a horror film in a single take (and it just about pulls it off, its only the necessity of the genre that lets it down); **We Are What We Are** from Mexico (may well do for cannibals what Let the Right One In did for Vampires); and **Le Quattro Volte**, a film about an elderly Italian goat herder, which felt to me like one of the most satisfying films. I say felt like because I had to leave half way through to go to the Europa Cinemas conference. I have the press pack and from the photographs of the images I hadn't seen it looked like it could be a real cinematic experience - I spent the rest of the festival trying to see the whole film.

Two films I saw back to back on my final day were coincidentally based on fact, which gave the films deeper resonance. **Of Gods and Men** is, yes, a battle of faith but also one of humanity and common decency. The French monks are in one of France's old colonies in Muslim North Africa. They are, as with their preachings, in harmony with their surroundings, living off of subsistence farming and helping out the poor and under privileged. When extremism encroaches they have to choose between their own lives and their faith. Again the premise would have appeared almost too contrived were it not based on a true story and testimony. The result is a moving, reflective, and powerful film and one which I tipped for the Palme D'Or - it went on to win the Jury prize.

Fair Game could have been perceived as a self obsessed American perspective on Iraq, playing up the virtuous American over the very real impact on ordinary Iraqis, but in fact it was based on the real story of CIA agent Valerie Plame. Plame's undercover identity was revealed in a spat between her husband, former

Diplomat Joe Wilson, and the government over verification of facts about Iraq having WMD capability. It becomes a more interesting perspective revealing how far the State was prepared to go to achieve its objective on Iraq. On reflection the film is more interesting than I considered on first viewing.

Jean-Luc Godard's new film **Film Socialisme** played in the Un Certain Regard. I always pay respects to JLG when he has a new film, especially at Cannes, a festival he and colleagues literally stormed and brought to a stop in 1968. Let's face it: he changed the way film was made and thought about. In his new one he shows the same creative restless uncompromising energy. Some of the images and contrast of images are sublime. It was, however, for me a film of two Godards. The first, the experimental filmmaker who is still capable of transforming cinema in front of your eyes – indeed the sound editing in *Film Socialisme* was for me the most radical and exciting I have come across - and the second, the agent provocateur who can't resist challenging and testing the audiences' patience. I know which one I prefer.

Finally, I haven't mentioned the British triumvirate of Leigh, Loach and Frears. I confess straight up that I didn't see their films knowing that I would get easy access to them in the UK. It was of course great to see such strong presence at Cannes but as critics and indeed Leigh pointed out where are the young generation? These are three directors who cut their teeth on BBC television drama – where are the new talent going to find their training ground to hone their cinematic skills is the big question. Having said that I saw Alicia Duffy's **All Good Children**, a strong debut from the award-winning director of short film *The Most Beautiful Dad in the World*. She clearly has talent but will she have the forum to develop such longevity?

Many, if not all, of the above films will be screened at Watershed over the coming year.