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Watershed June 2011 Podcast

I intended to do a round of **Cannes** in the last podcast but got carried away with the imminent centenary celebrations of Bernard Herrmann - of which a footnote later on.

This year's **Cannes Film Festival** was one of the strongest for a few years. Not a vintage I would say – as many have written. It certainly promised a vintage: what with new films by Lars von Trier, Terrence Malick, Gus van Sant, Nuri Bilge Ceylan. Some of those though were treading water – but I have to say Aki Kuarismaki treading water is a wonderful entertaining sight to behold and his film **Le Havre** had many Kuarasmakian pleasures. Ditto Nanni Moretti with **Habemus Papam**. A premise worthy of Monty Python – a newly elected Pope gets cold feet and can't handle the responsibility - has some very funny set scenes but doesn't quite make a full hour and half. However, Michel Piccoli makes a brilliant anxiety-ridden Pope.

And then there was Lars von Trier – but more of him later...

For me the stronger and most interesting films were to be found elsewhere - for example, Markus Schleinzer's **Michael**. The topic put me off – a non-judgmental portrait of a paedophile – (Your first thought is "do I really want to go there?") but the unequivocal critical praise made me search it out in a repeat screening toward the end of the festival. And indeed it was an outstandingly crafted film taking you into a most disquieting discomfiting place. The main character lives alone and keeps imprisoned in his basement a young boy who he abuses.

Cases like this have come to light recently with some in Austria and America and Schleinzer takes a hard deeply unsettling look at the subject. The very ordinariness of the whole setting is one of the reasons it feels so uncomfortable. It is however neither exploitative or prurient. When you find out that the director has worked with Michael Haneke and Ulrich Seidl you can see he is well equipped to tackle such challenging subject matter without resorting to simplicity or easy answers.

Lynne Ramsay's return to filmmaking after an extraordinary absence of 9 years made you remember what we have been missing: a powerful mature British directorial vision who understands the language and power of cinema. **We Need To Talk About Kevin** is an expertly realised piece of filmmaking which deserves all the accolades.

Michel Hazanavicius' **The Artist** was one of those sublime moments when the sheer exuberance of the story - a silent era star who refuses to accept the transition into sound - and the performances - transports the audience through joyous euphoric entertainment and you leave the auditorium with a damn huge big smile on your face.

Of those more established names The Dardenne Brothers' **Boy with a Bike** was a finely honed masterpiece whose ordinary setting reveals a morality tale of profound proportions.

Terrence Malick's **The Tree of Life** was without doubt the sensation of the festival. The director has become something of a mythic, if not shamanistic cinematic figure. His small but significant cinema offerings are treated akin to tablets coming from the mount. I confess to be something of a sceptic - a doubting Thomas to follow the religious theme. Yes **Days of Heaven** is a great debut film but after that I was never too sure. Others though are sure and given the added frisson of Tree of Life being pulled from last year's festival it all added to the buzz. As I have said elsewhere I felt I had seen an intriguing mystical mess. However the film (ahem) took roots and was the one of some thirty that I saw which kept coming back to me. I am looking forward to seeing it again. And of course there was the birth of life sequence which it was no surprise to discover was put together by Bristol based producer Nigel Ashcroft who has made numerous excellent natural history films for the BBC. At time of writing we hope to have Nigel at Watershed to talk about his experience on Tree of Life.

And then there was Lars Von Trier. His new film **Melancholia** is a visually ambitious piece but for me didn't pack the punch of Antichrist. However the punch duly arrived when a rather bored Lars pitched up with tales of his new Nazi outlook in what up to then had been rather pedestrian press conference. He was I am sure being mischievous - at one point he said "how do I get out of this

sentence." But when you are in a room with the world's press, it's probably best not to be mischievous about Hitler and Nazism.

The Tree of Life opens at Watershed on **Fri 22 July**, and all the other films mentioned will be opening at Watershed over the coming months.

The response to the **Bernard Herrmann** season **On Dangerous Ground** has been fantastic; great audiences for some classic films. What has been restated is just how much of a genius the composer was and how influential his music to films has been. We are acknowledging that influence with a short **Brunch Season** in July which are films with scores that owe a debt to Herrmann's impact. From Brian De Palma's **Carrie** which would have been the next film Herrmann would have scored had he lived to Tim Burton's **Batman** scored by Danny Elfman. Elfman always credits Herrmann as the reason he became a conductor.

The season runs every Sunday at noon through July. Also we have been recording and publishing some of the Herrmann events. Visit **www.watershed.co.uk/herrmann** to see an interview with his widow, with his friend and composer Laurie Johnson and also an interview with musician Adrian Utley about the soundtrack to Herrmann's last film **Taxi Driver**.

Finally you may be aware that there are currently changes taking place in the wider world of UK film policy. The new government abolished the UK Film Council and passed responsibility to the British Film Institute. They have also set a Film Policy Review Group and consultation process inviting comment on a range of aspects relating to film in the UK. We aim to organise an event at Watershed in September but if you have any thoughts and are interested in being involved email me and/or go to the DCMS website for more information. Type Film Policy review in to search engine and you should find it. My email is **mark@watershed.co.uk**.

That's it for this month.