

Watershed, 1 Canon's Road, Harbourside, Bristol, BS1 5TX

Box Office: (0117) 927 6444

### **Watershed December 2008 Podcast**

This time of year prompts reflection on the highs and lows of the rapidly fading year – so allow me to indulge in that much loved and time honoured tradition of best and worst lists.

To begin at the beginning as the original Dylan might have said - in January and February last year were three of the strongest films: **4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days**, **No Country for Old Men** and **The Diving Bell and the Butterfly**.

All three should be in any self respecting cinephile's top ten. They were and are exceptional films. The Romanian film **4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days** in particular was one of the most powerful cinema experiences I have had. It combined a gripping narrative and excellent performances with cinematic vision and signalled the burgeoning renewed cinematic strength of a neglected country's film industry.

That renewed strength was also evident at the end of the year in the **Encounters Short Film Festival**. Radu Jude, who won last year's encounters with **The Tube with a Hat** had a new one, **Alexandra**, in this year's festival. If his short films are anything to go by he will be the next in line for amazing feature films from Romania – remember, you heard that here first.

The Coen Brothers' return to dark noir was simply exceptionally bleak, exquisitely controlled and a haircut on Javier Bardem which deserves some kind of award itself. Artist Julien Schnabel proved in **The Diving Bell and the Butterfly** that he is one hell of a visionary filmmaker

Moving onto March and April, **Garage**, directed by Leonard Abrahamson, was a beautiful sustained portrait of misunderstandings, loneliness and rural life. A great central performance from Irish comedian Pat Shortt playing straight gave the film a crushingly emotional core. Swede Roy Andersson is one of my favourite directors and **You, The Living** delivered his deadpan surreal charm in spades. Pure cinematic joy.

With the exception of Olivier Assayas' wonderfully observed **Summer Hours** there is a gap on the feature film front til the autumn with **Quiet Chaos** - which I thoroughly enjoyed and which the critics didn't really. Then came the Arthouse big hitters. Ulrich Seidl's **Import/Export** I have been talking about long enough but will only reiterate that it is not only a great piece of cinema, a pinnacle of the art of film, but it is one of the most important films to come out of Europe since Fassbinder, Herzog and Wenders shook us all up.

After **Import/Export** Steve McQueen's **Hunger** was the most intense cinematic experience. I've seen it three times now and it gets more compelling with each viewing. Powerful subject matter but realised in an exceptional way. The rhythm of the film and filmmaking is incredible. In November **Waltz with Bashir** again dealt with a powerful subject matter in the most extraordinary way and took animation to new heights. To some extent it is a documentary but in the way that **Apocalypse Now** was a documentary on Vietnam.

So in descending order then my list would be:-

- No 10 **Quiet Chaos**
- No 9 **Garage**
- No 8 **Jar City**
- No 7 **Waltz with Bashir**
- No 6 **Summer Hours**
- No 5 **Diving Bell and the Butterfly**
- No 4 **You, The Living**
- No 3 **4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 days**
- No 2 **Hunger**
- No 1 **Import/Export**

Added onto that, the best reissues that mention has to go to have to be the joy of finally seeing Wim Wenders' **Alice in the Cities** back on the big screen, the wonderful melodrama of Vincente Minnelli's **Some Came Running** and the dream team of Old Blue Eyes, Deano and Shirley and last but not least the sheer heart warming celestial romance and imagination of Powell and Pressburger's **A Matter of Life and Death**.

So moving on and to get you in the mood for award season – here are some of my own.

My revelation award goes to Icelandic film **Jar City** – A brilliantly atmospheric thriller set in the other worldly country that is Iceland. Haunting and haunted. It also gets the award for most stomach churning food ever eaten on film. Try not to think too long on that boiled sheep's head scene.

My "where did that come from" award goes to **I've Loved You So Long** which I could never even remember the proper title of but which surprised me by being so hugely popular, so much so that we've brought it back for Christmas.

My award to myself for my worst decision – thinking **The Duchess** was going to work when I knew deep down it was going to be a retread of British heritage cinema. Don't you just hate it when you prove yourself right and wrong at the same time?

My award to myself for my best decision – taking up filmmaker/artist John Smith's suggestion to screen his excellent **Hotel Diaries** series as a feature film in the cinema. I saw it as an installation in Tampere in Finland where John first mooted the idea of playing it like a proper film. We got it a press screening in London and into a handful of other cinemas. In retrospect we probably didn't do the film or John any favours, audiences were pretty terrible and maybe it would get a more sympathetic outing in the gallery, but Professor Ian Christie has made it one of his top films from 2008 in the Sight and Sound poll. Here is what he said about Hotel Diaries:

*"A deeply engaging work that provokes unexpected comparison with the aster of oblique polemic, Chris Marker."*

– so watch this space.

My confession –Shhhhhhhhhhhh - I haven't seen **Gomorra** yet.

Highlights

Bristol based filmmaker Esther May Campbell winning the Best of British award at this year's **Encounters Short Film Festival**. She was quite rightly identified by Screen

international as a rising star who watched her ascendancy. Also to the home team of Sam Hearne and Richard Penfold for following the success at the London Film Festival by winning two awards at Encounters for the powerful short **Leaving**.

Lowligh

Paddy Considine using his luminescent star charisma to get the Encounters audience behind him to watch a clip of his performance in **Hot Fuzz** rather than my choice of him in **The Bourne Ultimatum** as his Encounters question and answer session pleasurably ran overtime.

To look forward to.....

The fab animator Joanna Quinn providing a drawing of Beryl for Watershed's Animation wall of fame (if you're listening Joanna – no pressure, but please!)

The forthcoming **Slapstick Festival** and in particular the **Ukulele Orchestra of Great Britain** playing to archive silent British film – a mouth watering treat.

Those interviews from Encounters of Paddy Considine, Esther May Campbell and Joanna Quinn will become available at **[www.dshed.net/talks](http://www.dshed.net/talks)** during December.

For info on **Slapstick** fun in January visit **[www.slapstick.org.uk](http://www.slapstick.org.uk)**

Do email me at **[mark@watershed.co.uk](mailto:mark@watershed.co.uk)** with your own thoughts on cinematic highs and lows of 08 and see you in the new one.