

35 Shots of Rum*35 rhums***Dir: Claire Denis** **France, Germany** **2008** **100 mins** **Cert: TBC****Starring: Alex Descas, Mati Diop, Gregoire Colin, Nicole Dogue****Language: French, German****Available: November****Formats: 35mm**

A small, subtle film whose very simplicity makes it a winner, *35 Shots of Rum* describes a father and daughter's love for each other, as the time for the girl to leave the parental nest grows near. Claire Denis, not always an easy director, is in top form here directing an almost all-black cast with grace and delicacy. This is French art house cinema at its unpretentious best; one can only ponder why it was screened out of competition in Venice.

The story takes its time opening on a long, wordless train sequence as Lionel (Alex Descas) and Jo (Mati Diop) make their separate ways home after work. Their tender relationship is evident as they share a meal in their cramped apartment on the far outskirts of Paris. They are on close terms with neighbors Gabrielle (Nicole Dogué), a taxi driver with a long-standing crush on widower Lionel, and Noé (Gregoire Colin), a cool-looking guy with a cat who is often away on business. The love story between Jo and Noe is so understated it's barely visible, until the whole gang heads off to a concert together and, while they dance in a bar, their feelings are revealed in front of Jo's father.

An excellent cast fills in the blanks of the slight storyline, making more narrative superfluous. It is almost a shock when, toward the end, something out of the ordinary happens: Jo and Lionel take a trip to Germany to visit the grave the dead mother and stop by to see Jo's self-centered aunt (Ingrid Caven.) The scene comes late to delve into the past, but it does make an original bridge to film's typically understated conclusion.

Descas is a monument to paternal dignity as he gently, and against his feelings, pushes the reluctant Jo out of their comfortable life together. At the same time he confronts his own aging as he sees his life as a train conductor reflected in the unhappy retirement of his friend René (Julieth Mars.) Colin, flaunting the impish charm of a French Johnny Depp, makes a fine pair with Diop, the soap-and-water girl next door with the serious eyes. A modern soundtrack performed by Tindersticks matches Agnès Godard's stylish cinematography. - *Deborah Young, The Hollywood Reporter*

Anything For Her*Pour Elle***Dir: Fred Cavayé** **France** **2008** **96 mins** **Cert: 15A****Starring: Olivier Marchal, Vincent Lindon, Diane Kruger****Language: French****Available: October****Formats: 35mm & digital**

The things a man will do for a beautiful woman. Take Diane Kruger's Lisa. She's the kind of ravisher most men would commit murder to stay married to. Not only is she stunning, but she happily jumps on her husband in the lift, just before they relieve the babysitter of their toddler Oscar (Lancelot Roch).

Little wonder then, her middle-class teacher husband Julien (Vincent Lindon) will do

anything to bust her out of jail when she is suddenly yanked out of her family life for a murder she does not commit.

Lindon, with his crinkled head and heavy-lidded eyes, looks like a lizard in a leather jacket with heat-stroke. Perhaps he doesn't fancy his chances of improving on Lisa, so he puts the prison under surveillance and concocts a plan to get her out.

Director Fred Cavayé's debut is a reasonably taut thriller with shades of Hitchcock. Some of the plot's cause-effect is on the side of forced and the French police are able to draw connections at bizarre speed.

Cavayé keeps things interesting though by thickening the moral stew. Julien is warned by an ex-con he will "be burned" by going down the path towards criminality. In his desperation — time is ticking before Lisa is moved to another prison — he becomes a robber and a murderer. It's a rugged looking film, low on frills but gets the job done.

- Paul Lynch, *Sunday Tribune*

Blue Eyelids

Párpados azules

Dir: Ernesto Contreras Mexico 2007 98 mins Cert: Club
Starring: Cecilia Suárez, Enrique Arreola, Ana Ofelia Murguía, Tiaré Scanda, Luisa Huertas
Language: Spanish
Available: September
Formats: 35mm

Boy-meets-girl is the oldest story in the cinema, and yet this gem of a film from Mexico shows that it can always be made to live again. Ernesto Contreras's debut feature finds its own kind of heightened, dreamy realism, a kind that skirts the frontier of reverie and hallucination in one direction, and that of gloomy disillusion in another; but it is always down to earth on the most down-to-earth of subjects: love, sex, loneliness and the dating game. The tone is seductively elusive: mysterious and serio-comic and yet with a robust kind of frankness about what is at stake for each party on beginning a relationship

Cecilia Suárez gives a tremendous performance as Marina, who works at a garment factory making uniforms for maids, nurses, air stewards, etc; owned by Lulita (Ana Ofelia Murguía), a somewhat autocratic old lady with a penchant for tiny caged birds. Contreras brings these creatures into metaphorical alignment with timid Marina, emphatically enough to let us suspect, for a moment, that Marina is a dream the old woman is having about her younger self. Marina wins a prize in an office competition rather grandly sponsored by Lulita: a luxury beach holiday for two. But she has no one to go with, and it at this moment that she is accosted in a cafe by Victor, played by Enrique Arreola, who claims to be an old school friend. For the life of her, Marina cannot remember Victor at all - and yet he seems pleasant and personable, and Marina's prize has brought to a crisis the question of her own loneliness. Might Victor be a candidate for her holiday? Tentatively, they begin going out.

Blue Eyelids is great at showing the pure awkwardness of the first date. Happy and excited, Marina and Victor go dancing at a nightclub, but there is a mix-up over their table and some drinks they ordered, and the atmosphere suddenly goes sour and even desolate, like a mysterious chemical reaction. On such tiny things turns the mood of a fledgling romance: it is so delicate and vulnerable, and yet it is precisely this volatility

and insubstantiality that makes it liable to alchemise into something blissful. Victor and Marina are two people who know next to nothing about each other, and perhaps not much more about themselves, and they are on the verge of a great risk. What a humane treat this lovely little film is: a pinsharp cine-poem of romance.

- Peter Bradshaw, *The Guardian*

Winner - Special Jury Prize, Sundance Film Festival 2008

Chéri

Dir: Stephen Frears **UK** **2008** **100 mins** **Cert: 15A**
Starring: Michelle Pfeiffer, Kathy Bates, Rupert Friend, Felicity Jones, Frances Tomelty, Anita Pallenberg, Harriet Walter,
Language: English
Available: September
Formats: 35mm only

Stephen Frears has followed *The Queen* with *Chéri*, a period adaptation of a Colette novel that reunites him with writer Christopher Hampton and actress Michelle Pfeiffer exactly twenty years since the release of *Dangerous Liaisons*. With this sober evocation of belle époque Paris, Frears and Hampton walk a difficult line between seriousness and amusement, suitable décor and mere decoration, but they emerge with a satisfying, if disposable, portrait of love bought, found and lost among the rarefied courtesan circle of early-twentieth-century France.

The 'Cheri' of the title is Fred Peloux (Rupert Friend), a pretty, vain young man of hollow cheekbones and exquisite dress and the son of wealthy former courtesan Madame Peloux (Kathy Bates), a woman who long ago accepted that age brings with it changes to both body and beauty – the twin assets of her trade. It's through his mother's social circle – a fun bunch who celebrate the finer things in life but endlessly fear the loss of looks and wealth – that he meets Lea (Pfeiffer), another courtesan, whose beauty is far from diminished, despite Madame Peloux's constant comments about her wrinkles and the increasing elasticity of her skin.

Defying the difference in age, Fred and Lea fall in love and enjoy a six-year affair but part when Madame Peloux arranges a marriage for her son – partly out of spite, partly out of avarice – with Edmee (Felicity Jones), a 20-year-old innocent who comes with a significant dowry. Each struggles to put the relationship behind them: she decamps to a Biarritz hotel and woos a chinless bit of fluff; he shirks marriage and dabbles in opium. But a final stab at reconciliation throws their essential differences into relief.

There's a playful tone to Frears's film – helped, surprisingly, by the sound of Frears's own, deep, knowing voice on the film's narration – and some of the scenes of the wider cast, especially those involving Bates, have an air of Oscar Wilde to them: characters trade in polite put-downs and subtle one-upmanship while maintaining an air of respectability. The frisson between Bates and Pfeiffer is entertaining, as is the aloof bitchiness with which Fred regularly addresses his mother. Friend turns out to be perfect as a vapid, beautiful wastrel, although he struggles in the film's more heavy, more demanding scenes, especially towards the end when tragedy truly kicks in. Alexandre Desplat's score is a little too evident and overbearing, but the costumes and sets tastefully reflect the colour and wealth of this social circle without dominating the eye or

drowning the characters in frippery.

It's Pfeiffer who is the star and delivers the emotional core of *Chéri*, a film which threatens to float on the surface of emotions rather than fully ride them: she offers a brittle beauty and masks the vulnerability of her character with an outward strength that's on the verge of crumbling. She brings a welcome tenderness and reality to the relationship between Lea and Fred – a relationship that begins by operating entirely on a superficial level and only later becomes deeper before either of them is even aware of it. The closing voiceover tells of the end of the belle époque and the coming of the Great War, somehow suggesting that the intimacy of what we have just witnessed somehow mirrors at a personal level the passing of an entire age. *Chéri* never feels so significant, but neither is it solely a vapid confection: it's a cake with a heart.

- Dave Calhoun, *Time Out London*

Class, The

Entre les murs

Dir: Laurent Cantet **France** **2008** **128 mins** **Cert: 12A**

Starring: François Bégaudeau, Franck Keïta, Esméralda Ouertani, Rachel Regulier, Nassim Amrabt

Language: French

Available: September

Formats: 35mm & digital

Work evidently fascinates Laurent Cantet, the richly imaginative French writer-director who has explored that theme from different angles in four feature films. Cantet's debut, *Human Resources*, found wrenching drama in its depiction of industrial conflicts during the transition to a 35-hour working week in France. He followed it with *Time Out/L'Emploi du Temps*, which acutely observed a businessman's desperately elaborate plan to conceal his newly unemployed status from his family. In *Heading South/Vers le Sud*, the workers were penniless Haitian teen males, but the dramatic focus was on the sex tourists they served, who happened to be well-off, middle-aged American women.

Cantet deservedly received the Palme d'Or at last year's Cannes Film Festival for *The Class*, in which the protagonist is a teacher at an inner city Paris school. Substantially improvised through a workshop process, this enthralling film follows one academic year in the lives of the teacher and his class of 14-year-olds.

The Class is based on a book by François Bégaudeau, a 36-year-old teacher who wrote it while on leave of absence. Bégaudeau himself plays the central role of the dedicated teacher with such charisma that other roles surely will beckon, and he may never return to the classroom. Like him, none of the cast had any previous acting experience. Most of the children Cantet chose were found in the same school, and they take their own first names in the film. With one exception, their parents are played by their own parents. The title of Bégaudeau's novel, *Entre les Murs*, translates literally as "between the walls". That is apt in the context of a film that never moves outside the school where it's set and was shot. Cantet's mobile use of HD cameras contributes to the energy it generates and ensures that the setting never turns claustrophobic.

As it addresses the hopes, dreams and failures of that multi-racial class, the film presents a microcosm of contemporary France. It extends its scope to encompass the

staffroom, where one teacher reveals his sheer frustration with his class, and parent-teacher meetings where the ethnic and economic circumstances of the parents inform their children's personalities.

Bégaudeau's teacher is a man with a capacity for making mistakes, and his portrayal is far removed from that contrived archetype, the supposedly inspirational teacher too often found in such scenarios. His thoughtless dismissal of one girl as a pétasse, which can mean a slut, illustrates his human propensity to lapse, and it has repercussions.

His fictional students are similarly drawn as complicated characters, alternately prompting the viewer's sympathy and disapproval. They tease him by asking if he's gay. One girl rejects the conventions of grammar with the riposte, "No one says that." Inevitably, some pupils fare better than others, and towards the end, a girl who has featured peripherally gets to say that she hasn't learned anything over the whole year.

On a superficial level, *The Class* has the feel of a documentary, enhanced by its fly-on-the-wall shooting style. However, it would be more accurate to describe it as a fully formed drama evolved through the improvisational process favoured by Mike Leigh. Cantet's astutely paced film becomes more and more involving as we get to know the pupils and to care for them and their prospects, and as we empathise with the teacher and the responsibilities and challenges facing him. *The Class* is fascinating and irresistible. - *Michael Dwyer, The Irish Times*

Winner - Palm D'Or, Cannes Film Festival 2008

Cloud 9

Wolke Neun

Dir: Andreas Dresen **Germany** **2008** **98 mins** **Cert: Club**
Starring: Ursula Werner, Horst Rehberg, Horst Westphal, Steffi Kühnert
Language: German
Available: September
Formats: 35mm & digital

Love hurts - even when you're over sixty. That's the message of German indie director Andreas Dresen's tough new drama, which follows with stark handheld directness the confusion, joy and suffering of apparently happy-married Inge, a woman in her mid-sixties who begins an affair with an older man. The camera does not shy away even when things get steamy, but this film draws its strength from its tight dramatic focus rather than any shock value.

This is easily Dresen's most austere film, though the talent for unforced humour that came through most strongly in 2005's *Summer In Berlin* breaks the surface tension more than once. There are times when the script is a little too raw and pared-back - things sometimes drag, and it comes as a relief when the script's relentless focus on the senior triangle is broken by a couple of scenes between Inge (Werner) and her daughter Petra (Kuhnert).

The action kicks in quickly: within the first two minutes, home-based seamstress Inge is making out on the couch with Karl (Westphal), a gentlemanly 76-year-old whose trousers she has altered. It's only later that we realise Inge has a husband - gruff-but-decent Werner (Rehberg), also in his sixties, who likes to watch videos about diesel

engines in the evenings. The catch is that Inge is still attached to her sprightly, still virile husband of thirty years, and leaving him for another man is not going to be easy.

Though the film is all about relationships, there are long passages of silence: Inge doesn't need to say much to Karl, and after thirty years there's not much she hasn't said to Werner. When Inge's decision to reveal her affair forces them to speak, they sound like twenty-year-olds rowing. The dialogue is spot on, and Werner's performance as a woman surprised by passion when she thought there were no surprises left, is outstanding.

Dresen finds a new visual calm here, and even a touch of Vermeer in a recurring shot down a corridor into a sunlight-filled kitchen, which is a long way from the jerky, grainy aesthetic of the director's award-winning *Grill Point* (2001). A couple of recurring motifs are neatly and sparingly used and include trains, which play a role - we infer - in the film's devastating denouement. - *Lee Marshall, Screen International*

Winner - Un Certain Regard / Jury Coup de Coeur Award, Cannes Film Festival 2008

Coco Before Chanel

Coco avant Chanel

Dir: Anne Fontaine France 2009 105 mins Cert: 12A

Starring: Audrey Tautou, Benoît Poelvoorde, Alessandro Nivola, Marie Gillain, Emmanuelle Devos, Régis Royer, Etienne Bartholomeus AND Yan Duffas

Language: French

Available: October

Formats: 35mm

Spectacle, a love triangle, heritage settings, bravura acting, witty dialogue, a bittersweet finale: There's something for everyone in Anne Fontaine's *Coco Before Chanel*. There also is -- not the least of the movie's pleasures -- the sense of a keen intelligence marshaling and shaping the material, shunning cliché and sentimentality and creating meaning out of what for once is not the standard biopic procedure of ticking off the boxes in a celebrity CV.

Fontaine's focus is on Chanel's formative years just before World War I, the transition from the modest, virtually peasant background of her childhood to the world of fashion and haute couture that she came to revolutionize. The young Gabrielle (Audrey Tautou), or Coco as she soon became known, meets and moves in with the wealthy racehorse owner Etienne Balsan (Benoit Poelvoorde), leading the life of a courtesan, resenting her dependence, keeping a tight rein on her emotions and all the time observing and learning from the elevated circles in which she finds herself.

She is befriended by another of Balsan's many mistresses, the actress Emilienne (Emmanuelle Devos), who encourages her to develop her talents and strike out on her own. She then finds love in the shape of Arthur "Boy" Capel (the U.S.-born Alessandro Nivola), an English businessman who steals her from under Balsan's nose and finally sets her up in business.

The love story is engagingly done, but Fontaine's core interest is in showing how Coco becomes Chanel, in pointing out the markers along the path that led a penniless young woman, with no resources other than her inner strength, to become a key figure in

shaping contemporary tastes in style and design.

Tautou fully inhabits the role of Coco, her face a mask as if her character has yet to determine which identity she is to assume, sexually as much as socially. The flamboyant Balsan, by contrast, appears to be all of a piece -- Poelvoorde is excellent, stealing many of the scenes he appears in -- but Fontaine shows that his force-of-nature persona too is a mask, concealing deeper vulnerabilities.

Coco is Fontaine's first venture into costume drama, but her portrayal of a woman making her way in a perilous prefeminist world is wholly convincing. Alexandre Desplat's score is tasteful and unobtrusive and the period detail impeccable.

- *Bernard Besserglik, Hollywood Reporter*

Dead, The

Dir: John Huston UK 1987 83 mins Cert: TBC
Starring: Anjelica Huston, Donal McCann, Helen Carroll, Dan O Herlihy,
Language: English
Available: September
Formats: 35mm

John Huston's 1987 adaptation of James Joyce's short story was a labour of love that fully earns its reappearance. At the time, it was surrounded by an aura of respect for the director's passion and high-mindedness in making a film whose title - remaining unchanged - was never going to inspire much ch-ching at the box office.

There was a sense also, however, that it was a great man's self-indulgence, and also a worry that it was too literal an adaptation. And for the famous final passage to come in voiceover, however beautifully spoken, was an admission of defeat: Joyce's literary performance could not be successfully converted into cinema.

Almost 20 years on, however, I believe this movie stands up. In fact, its literalness is interestingly what gives it its class. It is almost a real-time transcription of Joyce's slice-of-life tale about an upper-middle class couple, Gretta and Gabriel Conroy (Anjelica Huston and Donal McCann) attending a fancy musical evening among the leisured professional classes of Edwardian Dublin.

What looked unimaginative then now appears bold, almost experimental: *The Dead* sometimes looks a little like an old-style live television broadcast of a stage-play on a single set, but this unitary effect has rigour, clarity and life. Huston holds his nerve and just follows, with eagle-eyed attention to detail, the inconsequential chatter and the to-ings and fro-ings of the dinner-jacketed folk, giving no hint of the final revelation: Gretta's confession, triggered by a singing of The Lass of Aughrim, that she is still transfixed by the tragic memory of a 17-year-old boy, who died for love of her.

This is the real truth behind her placid married prosperity. Another sort of adaptation would have industriously found ways of stitching back premonitions and flashbacks into earlier passages of the script, but Huston knows that it would not have its piquancy if it did not come out of the blue: mysterious, undramatised. Fine performances from everyone, and a self-effacing, enigmatic star turn from Anjelica Huston herself.

- *Peter Bradshaw, The Guardian*

Delta

Dir: Kornél Mundruczó **Hungary, Germany 2008 92 mins Cert: Club**

Starring: Felix Lajko, Orsi Toth, Lili Monori and Sandor Gaspar

Language: Hungarian

Available: October

Formats: 35mm

Muted and very dark, this isn't an easy film to like, as it continually evades our glance, telling the story as if out of the corner of an eye. But it's a startlingly gripping tale, beautifully shot and edited.

Mihail (Lajko) is a young man who returns to his hometown in an isolated Danube delta and sets about building a home on the river near his late father's cabin. His mother (Monori) is happy to see him and introduces him to Fauna (Toth), the sister he's never met. But his new stepdad (Gaspar) is immediately suspicious and stirs local mistrust until everyone is sure brother and sister are up to no good, shacking up together down on the river.

The man-vs-nature theme is extremely strong from the beginning, as the camera positions the characters against the elements. The film has a rough, earthy, rain-soaked tone similar to *There Will Be Blood*, and just like that film, we're pretty sure this one isn't going to end happily. It also clearly shows the influence of Hungarian filmmaking guru Bela Tarr (an advisor on this film) with its long tracking shots and virtually wordless scenes. Meanwhile, director Mundruczo keeps the imagery lush and textured, with deep colours and heavy shadows.

All of this echoes the suppressed emotions in this community, which is so small that everyone is involved in each others' lives. Most of the neighbours rally round to help Mihail and Fauna as they build a house on stilts in the middle of the river. But in this place, we can understand why it might be unsettling for a brother and sister to cohabit, as well as why their mother doesn't really mind. At the same time, the stepdad's jealousy is much darker stuff, and even as it is expressed in startlingly nasty ways, we know much worse is to come.

Through all of this, Mundruczo's direction is insinuating and subtle, carefully catching important perspectives while also keeping us at arm's length, like outsiders. Through our eyes, these people look oddly primitive, living in such close contact with their surroundings, eating and often interacting in ways that seem eerily animalistic. So of course we would never want to cross them. No wonder this has been called Hungary's *Deliverance*. - Rich Cline, *Shadows on the Wall*

Winner - FIPRESCI Best Director award, Cannes Film Festival 2008

Divo, II

Dir: Paolo Sorrentino **France, Italy** **2008** **110mins** **Cert: 15A**
Starring: Toni Servillo, Anna Bonaiuto, Piera Degli Esposti, Paolo Graziosi, Giulio Bosetti and Flavio Bucci.
Language: Italian
Available: September
Formats: 35mm & digital

Paolo Sorrentino's magisterial *// Divo* reaches into the tumultuous political history of post-war Italy to craft a dazzling portrait of one of the period's most complex and ambiguous figures, Giulio Andreotti (Toni Servillo). Arguably the most important Italian politician of the last fifty years, Andreotti entered politics in 1946 and led seven governments, turning his Christian Democratic party into a force that ran Italy in what was essentially a one-party system. To do so clearly required a man of singular abilities – but Andreotti was, and remains, an enigma to his fellow countrymen.

The film eschews the traditional biopic format in favour of a far more claustrophobic, focused look at the man. This concentration of energy and force pays high dividends, especially as Sorrentino has found a perfect vessel in Servillo, an actor who loses himself in the role and effectively “becomes” Andreotti before our eyes. From the film's opening moments when we are confronted with Andreotti – in intense close-up, with acupuncture needles covering his face – we are unmistakably in the hands of a master.

What is fascinating about *// Divo* is the manner by which it hones in on a man who is apparently more interested in obtaining power than actually wielding it. Andreotti is a tightly coiled, extremely controlled, almost emotionless field of energy who successfully navigates the backroom corridors of power but appears unconcerned and uninterested in issues of policy. Sorrentino's conceit is not to skim the surface of Andreotti's political accomplishments, but to stare as if through a microscope into the more private corridors of his thoughts. This he does with an intense desire to see and understand, though perhaps only the enigma remains. - *Jameson Dublin International Film Festival 2009*

Winner - Jury Prize, Cannes Film Festival 2008

Encounters at the End of the World

Dir: Werner Herzog **USA** **2007** **99 mins** **Cert: Club**
Language: English
Available: October
Formats: 35mm

There is a hidden society at the end of the world. One thousand men and women live together in unbelievably close quarters in Antarctica, risking their lives and sanity in search of cutting-edge science. Now, for the first time, an outsider has been admitted. In his first documentary since *Grizzly Man*, Werner Herzog, accompanied only by his cameraman, travelled to Antarctica, with rare access to the raw beauty and raw humanity of the ultimate ‘Down Under’.

The result is *Encounters at the End of the World*, Herzog's latest meditation on nature, which beautifully explores this land of fire, ice and corrosive solitude. The nature of Antarctica ensures that it provides its own form of natural selection where professional

dreamers are forced to either acclimatise themselves or admit defeat and return home. Throughout the course of Herzog's own narration, he maintains that he made the documentary to satisfy his own questions about nature, and many discussions are raised concerning technology, the natural world and humanity.

- *Cork Film Festival Programme, 2008*

Everlasting Moments

Maria Larssons eviga ögonblick

Dir: Jan Troell Denmark, Finland, Norway, Sweden, Germany 2008 131 mins

Cert: 15A

Starring: Maria Heiskanen, Mikael Persbrandt, Jesper Christensen, Callin Ohrvall

Language: Swedish

Available: October

Formats: 35mm only

Discreet, old fashioned, traditional and altogether admirable, this is Jan Troell in what he does best, a period drama about a woman photographer living in Sweden at the turn of the last century. Paying minute attention to the smallest details, taking its time but never appearing to drag its feet, immensely sympathetic to its heroes and villains alike, this is an intimate family portrait and at the same time a rich canvass of working class life at that particular time.

Agneta Ulstater Troell, the director's wife, based the novel she wrote and its subsequent screen adaptation on the life of her own ancestor, Maria Larsson, a simple woman married to a charming but hopeless redneck, who became a photographer at a time when no woman would have dreamt of embracing such a profession and no man, certainly not the kind of working class lout she had for a husband, would condone it.

Emerging behind the story of the married couple and their seven children, there is the image of Sweden itself in the early 1900's assuming its capitalistic identity, while labour unrest is erupting all over the place, socialism and anarchism are blossoming in the shadow of strikes and public demonstrations and strict protestant traditions still overrule any thoughts of women's rights or common sense. Over it all, there is Jan Troell eye behind the camera, wrapping it all up in splendid monochromatic images, a perfect choice to portray working class life of that time, also allowing some stunning visual effects, such as showing a girl walking away into the frozen wintry mist and disappearing in front of one's eyes.

Maria (Heiskanen), who got her camera in a lottery, ignored it for years, far too busy working her fingers to the bone, first as a cleaning woman and then as a seamstress. Married to Sigfrid (Persbrandt), a former sailor fond of drink and women, frustrated by his own inadequacies and often venting his temper on his wife, she had far too much on her plate to think about photography at all. One day she tries to sell the camera to the local photographer (Christensen), who insists she should try it first before getting rid of it and offers her some useful tips. This is the beginning of a beautiful, platonic friendship which Sigfrid hates and distrusts, his wife's hobby pointing out his own limitations, which went unmentioned before, for fear of his wrath. But Maria is a tough woman, with every new crisis she stands up to him a bit more, though to the bewilderment of her oldest daughter, Maja (Ohrvall), who narrates the story, never does she muster the courage to leave him. Even for such a strong person as Maria, flaunting traditions to the wind beyond a certain point, was not an option.

Told in a precise, authoritative manner, the dense fabric of the plot and all its various ingredients are put together in an exemplarily clear narrative, accompanied by a spectacularly homogenous visual style. Heiskanen's Maria is a striking character, a small, determined, courageous woman, who dares her husband and her fate, fiercely defends her brood and almost gives up her natural talent for images, only for their benefit. Sigfrid, as played by Persbrandt, is a cheerful brute who has trouble controlling either his thirst or his temper. The two, pitted against each other, are the driving force behind a plot which, despite its considerable length, never overstays its welcome.
- *Screen International*

Fermat's Room

La habitación de Fermat

Dir: Luis Piedrahita & Rodrigo Sopeña Spain 2007 88 mins Cert: CLUB

Starring: Federico Luppi, Lluís Homar, Alejo Sauras, Santi Millán, Elena Ballesteros

Language: Spanish

Available: September

Formats: 35mm

It can't be easy to make such a twisty and clever a thriller based on mathematical theories. But Spanish filmmakers Piedrahita and Sopeña do a terrific job keeping things tense and brainy. And thoroughly entertaining.

Sexy young Galois (Sauras) wows the girls at university with his maths prowess. Is this a fantasy sequence dreamed up by a computer geek? No, he's one of four experts invited to an isolated location, given mathematician names and told they'll be solving the biggest enigma ever. The others are Hilbert (Homar), a 64-year-old gentleman; Pascal (Millan), a bearded quick-thinker; and Oliva (Ballesteros), a scooter-riding babe with brains. Their host, Fermat (Luppi), is called away suddenly, leaving the foursome with a riddle. And the walls are closing in.

Fortunately, instead of obscure formulas, the puzzles are tricky brainteasers, which means we can play along with the characters without feeling left too far out in the cold. And with the room shrinking, things start getting extremely tense, especially when the furniture starts splintering around them. As this is happening, they're also trying to solve the bigger question of why they're here in the first place, including an attempt to unravel the connections between them and Fermat's true identity.

And as the room squeezes in and conundrums keep coming, there are a remarkable number of revelations. The four characters react very differently to all of this; some use brains to figure out alternatives, others try brute force and at one point Galois combines the two with an engineering solution. But the walls relentlessly keep moving, and the biggest enigma may turn out to be how to survive this crazy day.

This is played coolly by the cast, with likeable wit that's realistically grounded. And the filmmakers establish a brilliant visual style with unusual, telling angles that make great use of lines, proportions and numbers. There are also scenes outside the room, as we follow Fermat on his own journey. One convenient plot point provides the only false note; otherwise the film keeps us gasping or laughing at this playful bundle of mystery, hints, innuendo and lots of red herrings. And it's great fun to figure out what's what.

- Rich Cline, *Shadows on the Wall*

Fugitive Pieces

Dir: Jeremy Podeswa **Canada, Greece** **2007** **105 mins** **Cert: TBC**
Starring: Stephen Dillane, Rade Serbedzija, Rosamund Pike, Ayelet Zurer, Robbie Kay and Ed Stoppard
Language: English, Greek, Yiddish, German
Available: September
Formats: 35mm & digital

This adaptation of Anne Michaels's 1996 poetic novel about survival, death, memory, inheritance and the role of art and learning is far more than honourable. Director Jeremy Podeswa's Holocaust movie plays, pleasingly, more like a meditative mood piece than the usual literary memorial. In many ways, it is the film's suffusion of genuine emotion and lack of histrionics which win a victory over the director's conventional style – the warm but trite honey and mahogany tones of old remembered interiors, even the holiday-ad picaresque of the film's more buoyant, Greece-set later stages.

In a film of multiple flashbacks and flash-forwards, Podeswa focuses more on the first of the novel's two protagonists: Jakob is a man 'living with ghosts' since the rest of his family were rounded up by the Nazis, never to be seen again. He's played by two actors: Robert Kay as the traumatised Polish-Jewish boy of the 1940s and Stephen Dillane as the abstracted adult Toronto writer from the '60s to the '80s. Both performances, man and boy, are highly internalised but still sympathetic and engaging. Both, too, are upstaged by the fine Serbian actor Rade Serbedzija, who is highly moving as the stoic archaeologist who saves the boy in Poland and takes him to safety in Greece and later Canada.

Podeswa is to be congratulated, too, for his restraint in the film's (many) moments of pathos, as is composer Nikos Kypourgos for his nurturing, understated score, which helps make this 'conversation with the past' one of the most delicate, approachable and rewarding Holocaust movies of recent years. - *Wally Hammond, Time Out London*

Winner - Audience Award, Sarasota Film Festival 2008
Winner - Best Actor, Rome Film Festival 2007

Genova

Dir: Michael Winterbottom **UK** **2008** **94 mins** **Cert: 15A**
Starring: Colin Firth, Perla Haney-Jardine, Willa Holland, Catherine Keener, Hope Davis
Language: Italian, English
Available: September
Formats: 35mm only

Who'd have thought it? After a decade of dizzyingly prolific eclecticism, Michael Winterbottom finally threatens to fall into something like a rhythm. In recent years, the director has offered us, among other things, pretentious erotica (*9 Songs*), curious science fiction (*Code 46*) and Georgian post-modernism (*A Cock and Bull Story*). Now, Winterbottom follows up *A Mighty Heart*, his 2007 study of events surrounding the

kidnapping and murder of Daniel Pearl, with another film focused on a recently widowed parent.

There, however, the similarities end. Whereas *A Mighty Heart* tended towards documentary realism, the spooky, elusive *Genova* nods in the direction of classic art films such as Nicolas Roeg's *Don't Look Now* and Michelangelo Antonioni's *L'Avventura*. Though prone to moments of obtuseness and outbreaks of travelogue fever, it is desperately moving in its engagement with the withering effects of loss.

Colin Firth plays Joe, a university lecturer, who, following the death of his wife in a car accident, accepts a post teaching in the gorgeously crumbled, titular Italian city. Kelly (Willa Holland), his older daughter, is at the stage where every one of her father's gestures – each blink of his eye, each clearing of his throat – is a cause for petulant sighing and door-slamming. Mary (Perla Haney-Jardine), the younger child, who feels some responsibility for the accident, frequently wakes up screaming piteously for her mother.

In the opening weeks of their Italian adventure, the family members find different ways of processing their grief. Kelly climbs on the back of various unacceptable scooters. Joe flirts with a student and renews an acquaintance with an old chum (the reliably charismatic Catherine Keener). Mary comes to believe that her mother is lurking in the shadows between the disintegrating buildings.

Despite the slipperiness of the scenario – are we allowed to believe in Mary's ghost? – the first-rate cast flesh out their characters impressively and invest the film with real emotional ballast. Haney- Jardine, who excelled as Uma Thurman's daughter in *Kill Bill*, is particularly affecting as the disturbed Mary.

There is, however, no avoiding the cliché that will appear in every other review of this peculiar picture: The real star of the film is Genoa. Relishing the sharp contrasts between light and darkness, Marcel Zyskind's camera makes the city look every bit as ominously delicious as the Venice of *Don't Look Now*. The city's Chamber of Commerce may wish to consider giving Winterbottom some sort of decoration. - *Donald Clarke, The Irish Times*

Winner - Best Director, San Sebastian Film Festival 2008

Winner - Best Director, Tallinn Film Festival 2008

Girl Cut in Two, The

Fille coupée en deux, La

Dir: Claude Chabrol Germany, France 2008 115 mins Cert: Club

Starring: Ludivine Sagnier, Francois Berleand, Benoit Magimel, Mathilda May, Caroline Sihol, Etienne Chicot, Marie Bunel, Valeria Cavalli, Thomas Chabrol, Jeremie Chaplain, Jean-Marie Winling, Didier Benureau and Edouard Baer

Language: French

Available: October

Formats: 35mm & digital

The old master's touch is certainly evident in this latest missile elegantly lobbed in the direction of the French class system, which, as the title suggests, follows the travails of an innocent young woman torn between two powerfully different lovers.

Ludivine Sagnier, a seductive screen presence in François Ozon's *Swimming Pool*, here shows another facet of her talent, ambitious yet also tragically naïve as a wannabe social climber with terrible taste in men. Firstly, she finds herself falling for famed author François Berléand, a greying roué who exploits his literary-celebrity status while using her as a plaything, and only later does Benoît Magimel enter the frame as the petulant heir to a pharmaceuticals fortune. She thinks she's manipulating them, but, alas, it soon becomes apparent that the reverse is true.

Of course, there's exquisitely skewed comedy of manners here, since we can see disaster looming a mile off, yet also an undertow of suspense as Chabrol carefully controls the string of revelations which agonisingly morph romantic misapprehensions into the stuff of tragedy. The central trio are note-perfect in their roles, yet, arguably, the film's main pleasure is its fuss-free storytelling, which sketches in characters and situations with unflinching, utterly assured economy. When you're this good, you just don't need to show off. — *Trevor Johnston, Irish Film Institute programme*

Grocer's Son, The *Fils de l'épicier, Le*
Dir: Eric Guirado **France** **2008** **96 mins** **Cert: Club**
Starring: Nicolas Cazalé, Clotilde Hesme, Jeanne Goupil, Daniel Duval and
Stéphan Guérin-Tillié
Language: French
Available: October
Formats: 35mm

The lead actors are hot and the living is easy in the French summertime idyll *The Grocer's Son*. Despite more than a few contemporary fairytale elements and extremely pretty leads and landscapes, the second film from French director Eric Guirado is also touching and surprisingly honest, with a genuine eye for character and the small battles of everyday life. As headlined by the excellent Nicolas Cazalé and Clothilde Hesme, this small story of a grocer's son's return to his village of birth to take over his father's shop has all the trappings of a potential crowd-pleaser. The film sold almost 300,000 tickets during its limited summer release in France.

Nicolas Cazalé is well cast as Antoine, the 30-year-old bum who left for the big city ten years ago but is forced to go back to the French mountain town of his birth when his father (Daniel Duval) has a heart attack and the family's grocery shop and only livelihood would otherwise need to close. After having quit his umpteenth job as a waiter in the city and upon his brother François's (Stéphan Guérin-Tillié) insistence he finally give the family a hand, Antoine arrives at home, where his mother (Jeanne Goupil) is the only one who seems remotely happy to have him back in town.

Travelling with Antoine is Claire (Clothilde Hesme), a bubbly and pretty girl from the city who feels she could use some peace and quiet in the country to prepare for her upcoming exams. Like many of the story's elements, Guirado and co-screenwriter Florence Vignon take a slightly different route with this boy-girl set-up than the expected bucolic love story (though through some shrewd plotting they get some of that, too). Antoine in fact has feelings for Claire, but she is a free spirit who is glad to help him out on his rounds of the mountain villages with the shop's smaller cousin, a shop on wheels, but she remains non-committal. The fact that they don't know each other all that well

also offers some opportunities for unexpected humour, such as a dinner table conversation during which Antoine discovers that despite her young age, Claire was once married. "Shit happens," is her laconic comment.

Guirado hit on the subject of his second film after making a series of documentaries for television about people who hit the road for their jobs. Without making a point of it, *The Grocer's Son* clearly shows that even in the age of the internet and mobile phones isolated villages and especially the older inhabitants still rely on something as simple as a grocer coming by regularly for their daily needs. As Antoine discovers, this does not only mean selling them bread, butter and eggs but also helping them out in all kinds of other ways, which incidentally gives Guirado some more opportunities for some gently comic scenes.

Despite some small plot contrivances -- notably one involving an envelope containing Claire's mock exams and the fact that the state of Antoine's father's health conveniently runs parallel to the demands of the plot -- and the somewhat obvious combination of landscapes with rolling hills and pretty guitar music, the overall effect is one of a small and optimistic film that is somehow never unrealistic. Credit the screenplay and the luminous actors for making *The Grocer's Son* a small but nevertheless delicious summer treat. - *Boyd Van Hoelj, European Films*

Heart of Fire

Feuerherz

Dir: Luigi Falorni Germany, Italy, Austria, France 2008 92 mins Cert: TBC
Starring: Letekidan Micael, Solomie Micael, Seble Tilahun, Daniel Seyoum, Mekdes Wegene and Samuel Semere.

Language: Tigrigna

Available: November

Formats: 35mm only

Inspired by the memoir of the same name by Senait G Mehari, Luigi Falorni's *Heart Of Fire* is valuable as a document illustrating the absurdity of using child soldiers in any conflict as well as a glimpse into the specific struggle for liberation in Eritrea.

If Falorni, making his solo feature debut here after co-directing docudrama *The Story Of The Weeping Camel* in 2003, falls into traps of heavy-handed symbolism and war-is-bad cliché, the film is saved by his naturalistic style and the glorious child performance he gets from Eritrean-born Letekidan Micael in the lead role of Awet.

Awet is a bright young girl being raised lovingly by Italian nuns (Eritrea was formerly an Italian colony) in an orphanage in the Ethiopian-occupied city of Asmara. She gets a Catholic education, but is a spirited girl with fantasies of her freedom fighter father, and rankles at the nuns' suggestion that one should turn the other cheek.

One day, her older sister Freweyni (Solomie Micael) arrives to take her to her father who has finally summoned her. She excitedly leaves the orphanage and travels by bus with her sister into liberated territory, only to find out that her father is a fraud and a drunk. She lives in squalor with her numerous siblings and is forced to perform hard labour while her father sits around and drinks.

Having answered back to her father one too many times – and indeed turned the other

cheek when he hits her – Awet is taken with Freweyni to a nearby outpost of one of the liberation armies which is more at war with a rival faction than it is with the Ethiopians.

There she becomes in awe of Ma'aza, a female freedom fighter (Tilahun), whose rousing speeches and striking afro hairstyle inspire Awet. She unties her hair out of its prohibiting cornrows, works hard and makes friend at the camp; she is even angry when her sister is given a gun and she is deemed too young to carry one.

But once she has been exposed to a few dead bodies and wounded comrades, her outlook changes. When she herself is armed, she starts to question the sense of the killing and becomes an outcast when she removes all the bullets from her child comrades' guns.

The title refers to a Virgin Mary icon with a heart of fire which inspires Awet throughout, and although the use of Christian doctrine here is not proselytising, Falorni indulges in a few too many biblical turnings-of-other-cheeks and thou-shalt-not-kill.

Awet's insistent questioning – why do we kill the other faction when they wear the same shoes as us? Why do they want to kill us? – is incongruously obvious in a story which doesn't need to hammer home the point. Bold, brazen and big-haired, Letekidan Micael gives one of those memorable child performances which transcends the familiar material. We can only hope to see her on screen again.

- Mike Goodridge, *Screen International*

Helen

Dir: Christine Molloy & Joe Lawlor **UK, Ireland** **2008** **79 mins** **Cert: Club**
Starring: Annie Townsend, Sandie Malia, Dennis Jobling, Sonia Saville, Danny Groenland and Sheila Hamilton
Language: English
Available: September
Formats: 35mm only

Helen is a subtly drawn story of a young woman poised on the brink of adult life, and an auspicious feature debut for its writer-directors. Dubliners Christine Molloy and Joe Lawlor (also known as 'Desperate Optimists') adopt the same approach as in their series of nine short films, the Civic Life Series – shooting in 35mm scope in mainly long takes, featuring local non professional actors – but here add an all-important element of storytelling. When a young woman, Joy, disappears, the police ask for help in staging a reconstruction. Helen volunteers and is chosen, and does bear an uncanny resemblance to the missing girl.

But whilst Joy had loving parents, a boyfriend and a wide circle of friends, Helen has been raised in care and is very much an outsider. The complexities and impact of 'playing' another on Helen's life are fascinating and skillfully drawn, and newcomer Annie Townsend impresses with her understated performance in the title role. Where naturalism meets a controlled and beautifully composed aesthetic, *Helen* is a gentle, distinctive discovery. - *Sandra Hebron, London Film Festival Programme*

Winner - European Jury Award, Angers European First Film Festival 2009

O' Horton

Dir: Bent Hamer **Norway, Germany, France** **2007 89 mins Cert: Club**

Starring: Bård Owe, Espen Skjønberg, Ghita Nørby, Henny Moan and Bjørn Floberg

Language: Norwegian

Available: September

Formats: 35mm & digital

Retirement is a difficult stage in life, especially for somebody who has spent a lifetime dedicated to the same profession. The early scenes in this film, where we see a train gliding in and out of tunnels through a beautiful snow-covered landscape, illustrate something of how much Odd Horten (Bård Owe) loves being an engine driver, so it's easy to anticipate that this will be a story of sadness and loss. In fact, it's almost the opposite, as Odd embarks upon a series of adventures which reveal how many strange and wonderful things there are to be found in the world all around us.

Although he meets a number of remarkable people along the way, there's nothing in Odd's experiences that lies outside the possible - rather, it's the combination of events, the unlikeliness of them and the unblinking way they are observed that lends this film its magical atmosphere.

Its gentle, absurdist humour is perfectly complemented by a charmingly understated performance from Owe, who merely has to widen his eyes or raise an eyebrow to achieve what other comedy actors routinely feel the need to flap their arms and shriek for. Odd's willingness to open himself up to possibility is all that is needed to set the story in motion. Whether he's accepting a tour of the city at night from a blindfolded driver or watching confused businessmen slide down an icy road, he shows a spirit and tenacity more often associated with the very young than with the old. But at this stage in his life, what does he have to lose?

Bent Hamer's dry humour is as evident here as always, but *O'Horten* has a warmth and generosity of spirit almost entirely absent from his last work, the cynical *Factotum*. It's a delightful film which (provided you're not too sensitive about a bit of nudity) will appeal to the whole family.

It's also beautifully shot, produced with an evident care and attention to detail one rarely sees these days. The cinematography is glorious and the most intimate scenes are handled with a confidence that brings out every nuance in the superb performances. It's a real return to form, so let's hope it presages more such work from Hamer in the future.
- *Jennie Kermode, Eye For Film*

Winner - Best Director, Flanders International Film Festival 2008

Katyn

Dir: Andrzej Wajda **Poland** **2007** **121 mins** **Cert: 15A**
Starring: Maja Ostaszewska, Artur Zmijewski, Andrzej Chyra, Danuta Stenka, Jan Englert
Language: Polish
Available: October
Formats: 35mm & digital

A towering presence in the world of post-World War II cinema, Andrzej Wajda has spent his career analysing in great detail Poland's gradual social and political evolution with a considerable amount of sensitivity while maintaining an uncompromising attitude towards his complex subjects. Famous for drawing inspiration from Poland's history, he has created a magnificent oeuvre of work that devastates even as it informs. Presented with an honorary Oscar in 2000 for his contributions to world cinema, Wajda himself is the son of a Polish cavalry officer who was murdered by the Soviets in what is known as the Katyn massacre – the subject of *Katyn* his latest and typically unflinching work.

After Nazi Germany's invasion of Poland and following Joseph Stalin's order, on September 17, 1939, all Polish Officers found themselves in Soviet slavery. Anna, the wife of an Uhlan Regiment captain is waiting for her man, and receives with disbelief all obvious evidence of his having been murdered by the Russians. The wife of a general, in April 1943, learns of her husband's death after the Germans discovered mass graves of Polish officers in the Katyn Forest. Silence and lies about the crime break the heart of Agnieszka (Magdalena Cielecka), a sister of a pilot, who shared the lot of the other Polish soldiers. The only survivor is the captain's friend Jerzy, who entered the ranks of the Polish People's Army.

What is the life of women, waiting for their beloved in the Polish state after the war going to look like, they being still dependent on Soviet Russia? Will homeland and freedom still retain the same meaning for those who have accepted the new system? This latest offering from one of Europe's greatest directors is a powerful work, forcing audiences to acknowledge the sheer scale of brutality meted out and the grievous consequences for the families affected. - *Colm McAuliffe, Jameson Dublin International Film Festival 2008*

Last Thakur, The

Dir: Sadik Ahmed **UK, Bangladesh** **2008** **81 mins** **Cert: TBC**
Starring: Tariq Anam Khan, Ahmed Rubel, TanveerHassan, Anisur Rahman Milon and Tanju Miah
Language: Bengali
Available: November
Formats: Digital only

UK film-maker Sadik Ahmed directs this intense contemporary Western, which takes place in a remote town in the marshlands of Bangladesh. A mysterious young man, Kala, arrives armed with a rifle. He immediately creates a stir in the small town and especially attracts the attention of two rival leaders: the ruthless and powerful Chairman who runs the place and purports to represent his people and the one man that stands in his way: the local Thakur, one of the last Hindu landlords, who is manically re-claiming all the surrounding land for which loans remain un-paid in order to build a temple.

Walking into the middle of this bitter feud, Kala soon finds himself approached by both men to take their side. Broke and hungry, Kala begins to bargain with them, but he is here on his own mission, to find the man that raped and killed his mother and take his revenge. Some of Bangladesh's finest theatre performers offer great performances. Ahmed's training as a cinematographer is clearly evident in the bold picturisation of haunting landscapes and hollow-face-men with murder on their minds.

- Cary Rajinder Sawhney, *The BFI London Film Festival*

Let The Right One In

Låt den rätte komma in

Dir: Tomas Alfredson Sweden 2008 114 mins Cert: 16

Starring: Kare Hedebrant, Lina Leandersson, Per Ragnar and Henrik Dahl

Language: Swedish

Available: September

Formats: 35mm & digital

Let the Right One In borrows its title from a Morrissey song, but don't let that put you off. It's an angular and lusty teen horror movie based on John Ajvide Lindqvist's bestseller in which lonesome, whey-faced 12-year-old Oskar (Kåre Hedebrant) becomes smitten by a young, female vampire named Eli (Lina Leandersson). After initiating an adorable romance in the snow-coated forecourt of their glum housing complex, they soon realise that both of them are baying for blood. He's privately fantasising about stabbing up his schoolyard tormentors with a pocket knife and she needs to sate an appetite for the red stuff that keeps her from dropping dead... again.

It might sound a little like recent coffee-table vamp style exercise *Twilight*, but this is a more sinister and ambiguous work. It runs on similar rails to something like Abel Ferrara's *The Addiction* in that it retools the themes and metaphors that stem from the vampire myth – craving, hostility, impulsiveness, eroticism – and neatly dovetails them with a cool, sort-of-realist examination of the horrors of adolescence and poverty that triumphantly ditches cliché and overstatement.

Tomas Alfredson's light, subtle direction, combined with DoP Hoyte Van Hoytema's crepuscular visuals, makes the courtship elements all the more tender and the staccato scenes of extreme violence all the more disturbing. The bashful, impassive hue of the central performances also gives the film an anything-could-happen edge: feelings of anger and desire don't provoke hysterical outbursts but remain bewildering within the minds of the juvenile cast.

Where the film falters is in its (arguably) reactionary final scenes. There's an eye-wateringly vicious romantic gesture that celebrates Oskar's new-found fondness for violent revenge without ever allowing him to step back and survey the absurd amount of damage that he and the young bullies have wreaked. But these are mere quibbles as this bruised and brilliant fairy tale is one of the year's true originals.

- David Jenkins, *Time Out London*

Winner – Dublin Film Critic's Circle Best Film, Jameson Dublin International Film Festival 2009

Mark of an Angel

L'empreinte de l'ange

Dir: Safy Nebbou France 2008 95 mins Cert: TBC

Starring: Catherine Frot, Sandrine Bonnaire, Wladimir Yordanoff, Antoine Chappey, Michel Aumont and Michèle Moretti

Language: French

Available: September

Formats: 35mm & digital

Meet Elsa. She's under a lot of stress. Her husband has left her and they're arguing over custody of their son, Thomas (Arthur Vaughan-Whitehead) - he threatens to bring up her 'history'. Despite everything, she's doing her best to be a good mother. But when she takes Thomas to a fancy dress party, she sees a little girl there, and a strange obsession unfolds.

It starts with questions to Thomas, carefully put - who is this girl? What can he find out about her? Wouldn't he like to go and play with her older brother? Soon she's inviting herself into the girl's home, or creeping around it outside at night, watching. Alarm bells begin to ring for the girl's mother. What is going on?

Mark Of An Angel is a powerful, character-based thriller in the manner of Hitchcock classics like *Marnie* and *Vertigo*. Parts of it are hard to believe, but we're told it's based on a true story, and the performances are convincing throughout.

Catherine Frot is compelling as the obsessed woman, at once loving and threatening - even when we are afraid of what she might do, we feel for her and don't want her to get caught. Sandrine Bonnaire, as the girl's mother, turns in an equally powerful performance, more understated at first but just as complex. The masterful script will keep you guessing throughout, wondering who to trust, as the fragile girl hovers around them.

Where a lesser film-maker would have been tempted to use simple physical violence and introduce crude motives like profit or revenge, *Mark Of An Angel's* Safy Nebbou keeps his head and maintains a tight focus, which ultimately packs far more emotional punch.

The film he has created is unusually unnerving without needing to resort to any of the usual tricks. Bright daylight sequences will make your skin crawl. And through it all, for all that he's sidelined, there's the humanising presence of Thomas, asking by his very existence where Elsa's attention ought to be.

This is a fine example of two great actresses getting to show what they're made of, and it's an intriguing, haunting film. - *Jennie Kermode, Eye For Film*

Mesrine: Killer Instinct

Mesrine: L'instinct de mort

Dir: Jean-François Richet France, Canada, Italy 2008 113 mins Cert: 16

Starring: Vincent Cassel, Cecile De France, Gerard Depardieu, Gilles Lellouche,

Language: French, English, Arabic, Spanish

Available: December

Formats: 35mm & digital

The first installment of the two-part biopic devoted to Jacques Mesrine (1936–1979) is a whirlwind introduction to the charismatic career criminal who became a household name in France. Despite an abrupt narrative approach, formative episodes in Mesrine's larger-than-life reign flow together well enough to yield a frequently gripping whole. Vincent Cassel's performance, which entailed gaining and losing over 40 pounds to resemble Mesrine over the span of two decades, is excellent in the service of a tale marbled with action, violence and brass balls chutzpah.

During tense opening credits a man and woman load items into the boot of a car and head off into Paris traffic circa 1979. Moments after driver Mesrine (Cassel) remarks to his passenger that he was born not far from that very spot, the couple are fatally ambushed by police. The split second border between ordinary activities and explosive violence characterizes the entire film to come.

The action cuts straight to Algeria in 1959 where young Mesrine, a soldier in the French army, takes part in a brutal interrogation. Discharged and back in the Paris suburb of Clichy, he doesn't stay long in his parents' comfortable bourgeois home. His dad has a job lined up for Jacques in a lace factory, a prospect the viewer knows is risible even if his ineffectual father doesn't.

With childhood buddy Paul (Lellouche) who works for crime boss Guido (Depardieu), Jacques meets Pigalle prostitute Sarah (Thomassin) whose honour he later recklessly defends. Initiated by Paul in the ways of burglary and robbery, Jacques' knack for quick thinking is swiftly revealed.

Jacques falls for Spanish beauty Sofia (Anaya) in 1960. After doing time in a French prison, he lives with her and their three children but when legit work dries up, Mesrine again takes up arms for Guido and never looks back.

An already lively, if episodic, narrative really picks up in Paris in 1966 when Jacques meets Jeanne (De France), who's as violent and fearless as he is. Two years later, with police and rivals literally gunning for him, Jacques escapes to Montreal with Jeanne. An escapade with their wealthy employer lands the couple in prison. After surviving the spectacular indignities of solitary confinement in a Canadian penitentiary – a harrowing primer on why crime does not pay and rehabilitation doesn't work -- Mesrine ingeniously busts out with buddy Mercier (Dupuis).

While Mesrine's exploits make for good theater, the film-makers don't judge their subject or attempt to spell out his motivations. Mesrine is never glorified. He may be despicable, but he's a man of his word, right down to returning to a prison from which he's escaped to spring others.

In limited screen time, De France radiates love and passion. Filmed in close-up during a covert phonecall, she nails the heartbreaking complexity of being emotionally committed

to a homicidal hothead.

Boldly employing mosaic screen effects, the film is stylish but not ostentatiously so. -
Lisa Nesselson, Screen International

Winner - Best Actor, Cesar Awards 2008

Winner - Best Director, Cesar Awards 2008

Mesrine: Public Enemy no. 1

Mesrine: L'ennemi public n°1

Dir: Jean-François Richet France, Canada 2008 133 mins Cert: 16

Starring: Vincent Cassel, Ludivine Sagnier, Mathieu Amalric, Samuel Le Bihan, Gerard Lanvin, Olivier Gourmet, Georges Wilson, Anne Consigny

Language: French, English

Available: December

Formats: 35mm & digital

Public Enemy Number One: Part 2 is a relentless portrait of Mesrine in his Scarface-like prime as he tips over into half-baked political motivations and continues his tightrope act between living life to the full and catapulting toward his inexorable fate. Bloody shoot-outs, daring escapes - from a courtroom in mid-trial, from prison, from an impressive manhunt - and grandstanding for the press illustrate Mesrine's assurance and arrogance with expedient strokes.

Anyone still wondering why they should care about this guy after Part 1 will get a rousing reply in the highlights of Mesrine's final six years of sangfroid and bravado. Even when cornered or captured, as he is by police nemesis Broussard (Gourmet) long before he gets his man for good, Mesrine takes his temporary defeat in stride. In custody in March of 1973, Mesrine strenuously denies knowing gangster Michel Ardouin (Le Bihan). They know each other alright, as a breathless escape and shooting spree energetically demonstrate.

In a long sequence shot and edited for maximum suspense, Mesrine later breaks out of prison with fellow convict François Besse (Amalric). Besse preferred to keep a low profile. Mesrine, conversely, was something of a pioneer in media manipulation, admitting to over 40 murders is an autobiography he published from prison before going on trial. Throughout Part 2 Mesrine willingly feeds his own legend.

Mesrine rarely resorted to disguise in the period covered in Part 1, robbing banks unmasked. In Part 2, now dubbed 'the man of a thousand faces,' he repeatedly walks into the lion's den – posing as a doctor to visit his dying father or disguised as a police inspector to make a few pointed inquiries at the Deauville police station before knocking off the local casino.

Because criminals commit crimes, there's a certain degree of repetition here. Bored with his own prowess and ever the provocateur, Mesrine takes superficial inspiration from the Red Brigades, the Palestinian struggle and the Baader Meinhof gang to beef up his rhetoric. There's a whiff of *Pretty Woman* in the sequences where Mesrine and new girlfriend Sylvia (Sagnier) buy a BMW off the showroom floor and pay cash for costly baubles in Paris's Place Vendome. The nominally fun side of being public enemy

number one does, however, underline the extraordinary fact that Mesrine was able to hide in plain sight for so long.

Part 2 ends as Part 1 began, with Mesrine shot down in very cold blood without a hint of legal preliminaries.

As played by Amalric, Besse's compact intensity makes him an unlikely but interesting partner-in-crime for the flamboyant Mesrine. Gerard Lanvin as extreme left-wing activist Charlie Bauer exudes all-or-nothing conviction on a wavelength that seems almost quaint three decades later. Sagnier is fun-loving, game and vulnerable. After four hours in his presence it's difficult to imagine anyone but Cassel as the many faces of Mesrine. - *Lisa Nesselson, Screen International*

Winner - Best Actor, Cesar Awards 2008

Winner - Best Director, Cesar Awards 2008

Modern Life

La vie moderne

Dir: Raymond Depardon

France

2008 86 mins

Cert: PG

Language: French

Available: September

Formats: 35mm

John Ford is said to have claimed that the most compelling image in cinema is that of the human face. The old master would, I suspect, have relished the craggy, creviced physiognomical landscapes on display in this wonderful documentary.

Modern Life, the third film in a series following the struggles of dairy farmers in a mountainous, pebble-strewn area of southern France, does spend a little time examining what has happened to its subjects since 2005's *Le Quotidien*.

Marcel and Raymond Privat, two elderly brothers, are failing to make friends with their nephew's suspiciously metropolitan bride. Daniel Jean Roy, a man of indeterminate age with indescribable teeth, continues to work his family's farm, but freely admits – before smiling parents and an ill-tempered dog – that he would happily do almost anything else for a living. An amiable young couple discuss the death of the earlier films' oldest cast member.

There are stories worth attending to here, but nobody could mistake *Modern Life* for a vérité soap opera. Director Raymond Depardon, a distinguished still photographer, listens to his subjects, but his main concern is to gaze, gaze and gaze again. Each episode begins with a lengthy single take, in which, to the accompaniment of tunes by Gabriel Fauré, the camera moves along a country road towards the unprepossessing home of the next farmer.

The odd question is then asked. But, as often as not, Depardon will allow these eccentric folk to mutter their unaccompanied way from one silence to the next. In one bizarre sequence he points his camera at the hypnotically strange Paul Argaud – a hairy protestant with the features of a medieval hermit – as he, for no good reason, watches the televised funeral of a French cleric. Elsewhere, during his discussions with Marcel

and Germaine Challaye, a charming elderly couple, we smile as the old lady offers a biscuit to a crew member over the director's right shoulder.

If you were feeling mean-spirited, you might accuse Dapordon of exploiting the farmers' apparent strangeness for comic effect. It is certainly true that the older subjects of *Modern Life* have as much in common with the average urban filmgoer as they do with bacteria on the outer moons of Neptune.

But, to my mind, the static camera conveys a reverence for these brave folk – and an interest in their extraordinary faces – that repels any accusations of condescension. The film is a marvel. - *Donald Clarke, The Irish Times*

Paris 36

Faubourg 36

Dir: Christophe Barratier **France** **2008** **120 mins** **Cert: Cub**

Starring: Gérard Jugnot, Clovis Cornillac, Kad Merad, Nora Arnezeder, Pierre Richard, Bernard-Pierre Donnadiou and Maxence Perrin

Language: French

Available: September

Formats: 35mm

The proud sentimentality that made Christophe Barratier's first film, *Les Choristes*, a runaway hit in France is back with a vengeance in *Paris 36* a retro musical with all the period trappings of 1936 France, from accordion music to the left-wing Popular Front alliance.

Chock full of engaging narrative developments, with splendid sets, an appealing original score and gung-ho performances, there's still something perplexingly peculiar about the whole shiny package, a straight-faced throwback to the style and themes of the golden era of sound stage filmmaking.

Paris 36 is as French as snails in garlic sauce, reviving the look and feel of studio-set pre-New Wave filmmaking for a plucky tale of goodhearted folk joining forces to put on a show - both literally and in the broader sense of soldiering on against adversity. There is humour here, but no postmodern irony.

The proceedings start when mild-mannered stage manager Pigoil (Jugnot) explains how he came to be under arrest at a police station. Most of the story told in flashback, starting with the performers and stagehands at the Chansonnia music hall losing their jobs after fearsome thug Galapiat (Donnadiou) forecloses on New Year's Eve as 1935 gives way to 1936. Dependable Pigoil, with 35 years in the wings, learns that his beloved and vivacious wife, Viviane (Vitali) has shared her charms with his colleagues.

Four months later, Pigoil is hitting the bottle and only his valiant accordion-playing son Jojo (Perrin, from *Les Choristes*, son of veteran producer Jacques Perrin who is in turn Barratier's uncle) keeps up appearances. Bereft when authorities place the boy with his now re-settled mother, Pigoil summons uncharacteristic courage to announce that he and techie-turned-union organiser Milou (Cornillac) and charismatic but mediocre impressionist Jacky (Merad) will occupy and rebuild the boarded up theatre. Collective elbow grease works wonders as determined volunteers pitch in.

Pigoil's goal is to create steady enough work to win back his boy. But another character's aim is to extort and exploit as many people as possible. Meanwhile, a stone's throw from the theater, Monsieur TSF ("Mr Wireless") - a radiantly nimble Pierre Richard - hasn't left his apartment for 20 years, claiming he's content to listen to the radio. And tough guy Milou develops a crush when fresh-faced - and recently orphaned - warbler Douce (Arnezeder) arrives, eager to make her mark. One character is compromised by an extreme right wing organisation and the tale requires nearly everybody to make tough choices.

As much as *Moulin Rouge* tried to modernise the period musical, Barratier is happy simply to revisit and temporarily resuscitate it. There are next to no dance numbers, but the camera is marvellously fluid and the score carpets the proceedings. With crane shots galore, widescreen photography by Clint Eastwood's versatile DP Tom Stern beautifully captures Jean Rabasse's endearing sets.

While saluting a storybook Gaul of hard work and rich camaraderie in the face of class inequities, the story pays tribute to the era that gave birth to the generous benefits French workers enjoy today. - *Lisa Nisselson, Screen International*

Red Cliff

Chi bi

Dir: John Woo China 2008 147 mins Cert: 15A

Starring: Tony Leung Chiu-Wai, Takeshi Kaneshiro, Hu Jun, Chang Chen, Zhao Wei, Zhang Fengyi, Lin Chiling, Shidou Nakamura, You Yong and Hou Yong

Language: Mandarin

Available: September

Formats: 35mm

Violent and vast, *Red Cliff* yanks John Woo back from the career precipice of 2003's *Paycheck*, the last (and least) of his Hollywood forays. The Asian auteur's first native venture in over a decade and a half, it's no cap-in-hand homecoming; rather, the priciest Chinese-language picture ever, tackling an oft-retold (novels, comics, videogames) chunk of military history.

Amping the pressure further, Woo wades into an arena thronged with super-sized, CGI-assisted spat-taculars, from *Two Towers* to *Golden Flower*. Do we really need another set-to involving zillions of zinging arrows?

Yeah, we do. Woo takes all the tropes – armadas, ant-like extras and yes, arrows – and showers them with fresh blood. The action is stylised to the nth degree, without caving to shopworn floaty-fu or sheeny pixel-perfectionism. It's hyper and real.

Its long, too – albeit not as long as the original two-part, five-hour Chinese cut. Concertinaed into a relatively rangy 150 minutes, the story (rebel kingdoms unite against an aggressively ambitious Prime Minister, circa 208 AD) can't help but seem like a skipping record at times.

Whether it's the ruthlessness of the edit or a glitch in the script, the epic outweighs the intimate here. Save for a soft-centred epilogue, the starchy chemistry between Tony Leung's viceroy and tactician Takeshi Kaneshiro means this isn't a vintage workout for

Woo's male-friendship fetish.

Red Cliff is a monument to brawling, not bonding. It's also a strapping ode to giant-scale filmmaking, its widescreen wonders staged by land (horseback battle, fortress siege, soccer match), by sea (a 1,000-strong fleet of ships on fire) and by air (the camera taking extended flight on the wings of a dove over the entire human chessboard). And the arrows? Part of a fiendishly sly fake-out devised to nick the enemy's ammunition. Big and clever. - *Matthew Leyland, Total Film*

Rudo y Cursi

Dir: Carlos Cuarón **USA, Mexico 2009** **103 mins** **Cert: 16**
Starring: Gael García Bernal, Diego Luna, Guillermo Francella, Dolores Heredia, Jessica Mas and Adriana Paz.
Language: Spanish
Available: October
Formats: 35mm

Considering it is a Spanish-language film, *Rudo And Cursi* hasn't wanted for English-language hype. Helmed by Alfonso Cuaron's brother Carlos, it sees *Y Tu Mama Tambien*'s Gael Garcia Bernal and Diego Luna reunited and although Carlos co-wrote *Y Tu Mama* with Alfonso, *Rudo And Cursi* is in a different ball park altogether.

Where the former relied on a sultry and sexy subtext to move its narrative along, with moments of humour and something of a preoccupation with death, *Rudo And Cursi* is a much broadly comedic affair. Bernal and Luna are Tato and Beto - two football-playing working-class brothers, each constantly trying to put one over the other. Beto is nicknamed Rudo (Spanish slang for tough or loutish) thanks to his confrontational style both on and off the football pitch, while his softer sibling Tato has picked up the moniker Cursi (Spanish slang for cheesy or tacky) because of his over-the-top ball play and lack of social finesse.

The pair work side by side at a banana plantation, while playing for their local footy team. Tato dreams of a pop career every bit as cheesy as his nickname, while Beto has aspirations to become a top footballer. The pinnacle they are both aiming for, however, is to build their mum (Dolores Heredia) a big house on the beach. A chance encounter with a football scout further fuels their rivalry when they are told he will only select one of them for the big time. To Beto's consternation, it is wannabe Pop Idol Tato who is plucked from obscurity and who soon becomes the top scorer for his club. It isn't long, however, before fortune smiles on Beto, too, and he is catapulted to stardom as a goalkeeper who lets nothing past him. The cash that comes with the football fame threatens to derail them both, however, as Tato can't resist the call of the WAGs, while Beto has a love affair with something even more threatening to his family - gambling.

Bernal and Luna bring the same casual and endearing spontaneity they showed in *Y Tu Mama Tambien* to the fore again here. Even when at their most obnoxious or ridiculous - such as in a particularly hilarious music video segment which sees Bernal sing *I Want You To Want Me* - they are never less than human and their brotherly rough and tumble is also convincing. The action on the pitch is entertaining and convincing, and although you sense there will be an inevitable 'big game' showdown, Cuaron has plenty of tricks up his sleeve to stop this falling into a predictable rut.

Ultimately, it is the personal lives - and the actors - that really shine through. And it is the performances of Bernal and Luna that stick in the memory, even as the adrenaline rush of the romp begins to fade. - *Amber Wilkinson, Eye For Film*

Rumba

Dir: Dominique Abel & Fiona Gordon France, Belgium 2008 77 mins Cert: Club
Starring: Dominique Abel, Fiona Gordon, Philippe Martz, Clément Morel, Bruno Romy

Language: French

Available: October

Formats: 35mm

It's Jacques Tati meets Mr Bean in this wonderful Belgo-French slaptick comedy that has seduced film festival audiences around the world directed by and starring Dominique Abel, Fiona Gordon and Bruno Romy. The film opened in France in September 2008 and has had over 100,000 admissions in 4 weeks.

Fiona and Dom are teachers at a rural school. They share a passion for Latin dance and they're deeply in love. On weekends, they enter dance competitions around the country. Their house is crammed with trophies.

One night, as they are coming back from a competition, they encounter a man on a clumsy suicide mission, standing in the middle of the road. They swerve to avoid him, crash into a wall and their life is thrown into turmoil...

Far from being a bleak drama, *Rumba* has a resolutely optimistic feel, which has characterized this directorial trio since their first feature, *Iceberg*.

In keeping with the great silent comics, Abel, Gordon and Romy depict a stylized and colourful world – for this story of thwarted love punctuated by flashes of musical comedy.

Sleep Furiously

Dir: Gideon Koppel UK 2008 94 mins Cert: Club

Language: English, Welsh

Available: September

Formats: 35mm & digital

Strikingly assembled and charmingly offbeat, British verite documentary *Sleep Furiously*, a feature-length debut for commercials director Gideon Koppel, pays elegiac tribute to the fast-disappearing way of life of farmers in western Wales. Though the film's tone is far more poetic than polemical, its arty sensibility will endear it further to adventurous audiences.

Shot (originally on Super 16) in and around director Koppel's hometown, Trefeurig, the film unspools small vignettes of country life as the seasons pass. The director's mother, for instance, walks her dogs. A man drives a mobile library into town to bring books to the locals. The community gathers to discuss the imminent closure of the village school.

Glorious long-distance shots of people, sheep or farm vehicles moving through the rugged terrain make the landscape a character in its own right. Electronic score by Brit musician Aphex Twin and quirky editing by Mario Battistel keep the material from seeming too cutely pastoral, but also makes the film seem more rarefied and specialist. - *Leslie Felperin, Variety*

Soi Cowboy

Dir: Thomas Clay **Thailand, UK** **2008** **116 mins** **Cert: Club**
Starring: Nicolas Bro, Pimwalee Thampanyasan, Petch Mekoh, Natee Srimanta, Somluk Kuamsing, Art Supawatt
Language: English, Thai
Available: September
Formats: 35mm

British director Thomas Clay's second feature demonstrates a growing maturity. This slowburning, enigmatic drama, mostly about a Danish man and a Thai woman awkwardly living together in Bangkok, is deeper and more likeable than Clay's controversial debut, *The Great Ecstasy of Robert Carmichael*. Gone are the latter film's shock tactics, allowing Clay's cinematic sophistication to sparkle all the better.

Corpulent Tobias Christensen (Danish character actor Nicolas Bro), a filmmaker whose career seems roughly in the same place as Thomas Clay's, and his unnamed, pregnant girlfriend (newcomer Pimwalee Thampanyasan) are first met during a typical morning in their small, one-bedroom apartment. Not a word is spoken between them for at least 15 minutes of real time as each breakfasts on toast and fish, respectively.

Tobias then sets off to do some shopping, purchasing DVDs from a black-market stall, a couple of Viagra tablets at a pharmacy and a gold bracelet for his lady. In a later comic, but quietly revealing, scene that underscores the barely concealed economic underpinnings of their relationship, she expresses pleasure with her gift, but seems more interested in its resale value, "in case of trouble," than its sentimental significance.

For roughly 90 minutes, pic chugs along, loping beside Toby and his girlfriend as they putter around the house, and eventually decide to take a trip to Ayutthaya to stay at a hotel and see its legendary temples. A jaunt around one ruin pays particular homage to Michelangelo Antonioni's *L'Avventura* as the couple is lost from view amid slow tracking shots of near-empty spaces and grumbling soundtrack noise.

The film then shifts into lurid color and genre territory, as action now follows Cha on his trip to find his brother, ending with an eerie scene in a *Soi Cowboy* nightclub that tips its hat -- and probably a scarf and few pairs of gloves -- to David Lynch.

Although Clay manages, just about, to keep these references in service of his story, it not yet clear what his own directorial voice looks like, or what exactly it is he wants to say. Sneaking suspicion remains that the meat of movie is the relatively simple story of Tobias and his woman, and the gangster stuff is just tacked on to add exotic spice. - *Leslie Felperin, Variety*

Sounds Like Teen Spirit

Dir: Jamie J Johnson UK 2008 100 mins Cert: G
Language: English, Flemish, Bulgarian, Georgian, Greek
Available: September
Formats: 35mm

Jamie J Johnson's 'popumentary' about the Junior Eurovision Song Contest ought to pack the regurgitative effects of a reckless Buck's Fizz bender. Give it a shot though, because the tone isn't all about aggressive uplift: instead, Johnson's Euro-youth snapshot generates sweetness, sincerity and chuckles of a warm, genuine kind.

Sounds Like Teen Spirit is candy-coloured but it's candid too. After a brief (and faintly flimsy) dip into Euro history, Johnson introduces a gaggle of '07 Euro-hopefuls age-ranged 10 to 15. Each has their reasons for competing, many touching, all endearing.

Bulgaria's Marina wants to impress the dad who deserted her. Cyprus' Giorgos sings to forget the homophobic bile he weathers at school. Belgium's nicely deadpan Trust belt out songs about friends who steal boyfriends while raising wry eyebrows at the off-the-leash spectacle before them.

If you're looking for dark secrets though, look elsewhere. There are no pushy parents lurking, as in *Spellbound*; no Donnie 'Quiz Kid' Smith-style traumas brewing. Johnson persuades us that his film is about the kids' fortitude, not about adult projections on to them.

The humour is on-side rather than condescending: when one off-key tween realises that "singing wrong" consistently is better than "singing wrong" and then shifting to the right key, you laugh while admiring his smarts.

Granted, the plotting is wayward and the eye-bothering Eurogaudiness hits toxic levels. But the charm count is equally high. You might not buy the soundtrack, but you really do root for these pint-proportioned popstrels. - *Kevin Harley, Total Film*

Sugar

Dir: Anna Boden & Ryan Fleck USA 2008 114 mins Cert: TBC
Starring: Rayniel Rufino, Andre Holland, Michael Gaston, Jaime Tirelli, Jose Rijo, Ann Whitney, Richard Bull, Ellary Porterfield, Alina Vargas, Kelvin Leonardo Garcia, Joendy Pena.
Language: English, Spanish
Available: September
Formats: 35mm

Sporting dramas are two a penny, while sporting dramas about plucky, talented minority kids are arguably cheaper still. And yet *Sugar* is a revelation, not least in the way it ducks an onrush of cliché to expose the whole rags-to-riches mantra as a bright and shining lie.

Miguel "Sugar" Santos (a superb performance from Algenis Perez Soto) is a teenage Dominican baseball pitcher who finds himself courted by a gringo talent scout and set

down in the minor leagues of smalltown Iowa. He funnels his \$562 paycheque back home, while his Ivy League teammate is sitting pretty on a \$1m sweetener.

Written and directed by *Half Nelson* creators Anna Boden and Ryan Fleck, *Sugar* is that rarest of beasts: a baseball tale that does not hinge on home runs and top-of-the-ninth heroics. For all that, this remains a powerful tale of grace under fire; of triumph in the face of a wider, institutionalised adversity.

Santos is respectful and hard-working, and exploited top to tail. At one stage, the camera trails him as he wanders out of his hotel room and becomes lost in a garish, neon-bright America of bowling alleys and video arcades. His field of dreams looks a lot like purgatory. - *Xan Brooks, The Guardian*

Synecdoche, New York

Dir: Charlie Kaufman **USA** **2008** **123 mins** **Cert: 15A**
Starring: Philip Seymour Hoffman, Samantha Morton, Michelle Williams, Catherine Keener, Emily Watson, Dianne Wiest, Jennifer Jason Leigh, Hope Davis
Language: English
Available: September
Formats: 35mm

Unsung theatre director Caden Cotard (Philip Seymour Hoffman) is living his artistically unfulfilling life in Schenecdaty, New York when his wife Adele (Catherine Keener) leaves him to follow her flourishing painting career to Berlin. A rebound relationship with his comely receptionist Hazel (Samantha Morton) never seems to get off the ground, and he finds himself struck by a mysterious illness that is systematically shutting down his autonomic functions. Then, news of a MacArthur Grant allows Caden to happily abandon both regional theater and his personal woes to begin an epic production which he envisions will become a great American masterpiece. But in striving to achieve universality and timelessness, his work is instead at every turn brought back to the mundane details of his inescapable life. Bearing Kaufman's signature narrative and temporal acrobatics, Caden's project becomes an everexpanding replica of his real world, and he begins to disappear into his creation.

With this film, Kaufman brings his unique style to the big issues of life, love, death, and art, shedding contrivances and conventional metaphors in favor of a magical realism that only he could make feel so true. - *Jameson Dublin International Film Festival*

Tony Manero

Dir: Pablo Larrain **Chile** **2008** **98 mins** **Cert: 16**
Starring: Alfredo Castro, Amparo Noguera, Hector Morales, Paola Lattus, Elsa Poblete.
Language: Spanish
Available: September
Formats: 35mm

Santiago, Chile, 1978: with the country in the grip of Pinochet's oppressive dictatorship, Raúl Peralta (Alfredo Castro), a man in his 50s, indulges in the fantasy that he is disco

king Tony Manero, John Travolta's white-suited, fleet-footed ladies' man in *Saturday Night Fever*. Inspired by repeated viewing of the film at his local fleapit, he forms and choreographs a low-rent dance troupe, performing at a rundown bar on the outskirts of the city. His fantasy is already becoming a sinister fixation, as he seems incapable of keeping nefarious activities in check, when national television announces a Tony Manero impersonating competition.

Raúl cannot be distracted from the prize he feels pre-destined to win, even when the murderous secret police start to pay interest in the inhabitants of the bar and his fellow dancers. *Tony Manero* is at once an absurd black comedy; an unsettling thriller with surprising twists; a confrontation of dark days in Chile's recent history; and a horribly believable, realist portrait of obsession. Castro's brilliant, suitably dense lead performance as the misanthropic, misguided anti-hero and the inspired handheld filming ensure that director Pablo Larrain, with only his second feature, has created a multi-textured, striking work of some distinction. - *Light House Cinema programme*

Waveriders

Dir: Joel Conroy Ireland 2008 88 minutes Cert: G
Featuring: Richard Fitzgerald, Gabe Davies, Kelly Slater, Kevin Naughton, Chris, Keith & Dan Malloy, John McCarthy, Andy Hill, Easkey Britton
Language: English
Available: September
Formats: 35mm only

Joel Conroy's *Waveriders* is a superb and seamless Irish documentary about extreme surfing that won the audience award at the 2008 Dublin International Film Festival. Ostensibly, it's a history of the sport and the development of fringe 'soul surfing'. But Conroy, in a stupendous final reel, achieves something unexpected and transcendental: his images of surfers riding waves in the maw of a monstrous angry ocean will linger long in your mind.

Waveriders is narrated by Cillian Murphy and begins in the indigo climes of Hawaii. Here is a story not just about surfing but the unique role Ireland has had to play in it. Surfing was reportedly discovered by Captain Cook. He saw Hawaiian natives riding waves in the 1770s and was gobsmacked. (The New England missionaries that followed were harder to impress. The surfers, naked without the aid of wet suits, were quickly banned.) Surfing became what it is today thanks to the Hawaiian-Irishman George Freeth. His father, an emigrant from Ulster, married a Hawaiian woman of royalty who taught the young George to surf. Jack London watched the surfer on his travels and was mesmerised.

"He is a Mercury – a brown Mercury," London wrote. "His heels are winged, and in them is the swiftness of the sea." Freeth took surfing to California and with it began a modern phenomenon. Before he died of the Spanish flu in 1919 at the age of 35, he had also invented life-guarding as we know it today and so can be blamed entirely for that other worldwide phenomenon known as Pamela Anderson.

Much of *Waveriders* concerns itself with 'soul surfing'. The men who pursue it are like pioneers: bearded and gnarly faced, they travel the world for the most inaccessible and exciting waves.

We meet eight-times world champion Kelly Slater who goes to the west of Ireland for his holidays. Soul surfer stars, the Malloy brothers, a second-generation Irish family, head out with Donegal professional surfer Richard Fitzgerald to surf Aileen's. This enormous and now famous Irish wave is set in a spectacular theatre, buffeted by the Cliffs of Moher and accessible only by jet-ski. Fitzgerald, who hails from Bundoran, is the kind of guy who cheers when the weather forecast is bad. He looks like Jake Gyllenhaal, speaks with a soft Donegal twang and is made of titanium.

The last reel off the Atlantic seaboard takes you close into the minds of these frontiersmen. It begins with a forecast of storm warning and the sight of four men heading out to sea.

The ocean churns like Biblical end-days. It's the kind of weather that would sink ships. The waves tower over the men like foaming giants, about the size of a four-storey house. If you come off your board in these conditions, there's a good chance you will die. The tiny men in black look like ocean snackfood. They are whizzed in front of the waves by jet-ski and let go. You wait for them to be gorged but each surfer holds steady. Miraculously they emerge safe on the other side.

The footage was shot in December 2007 and the waves were the largest ever surfed off Ireland.

It's a very moving spectacle, and on a cinema screen it's staggering. It puts you back in touch with nature at its most elemental and exhilarating. Watching it, you experience what Captain Cook must have felt when he first discovered surfing.

- Paul Lynch, *The Sunday Tribune*

Winner - Audience Award, Jameson Dublin International Film Festival 2008

Wonderful Town

Dir: Aditya Assarat Thailand 2007 92 mins Cert: TBC
Starring: Anchalee Saisoontorn, Supphasit Kansen and Dul Yaambunying
Language: Thai
Available: September
Formats: 35mm only

An elegant combo of slow-burn romance and social realism set in a Thai village devastated by the 2004 tsunami, *Wonderful Town* reaches deeply into the hearts and minds of people struggling to rebuild themselves long after the physical shockwaves have subsided.

Filmed in the southern Thai town of Pakua Pak, which bore the tsunami's brunt at the cost of 8,000 lives, the film signals its gentle intentions with a long opening shot of small waves peacefully rolling into a shoreline. Meditative tone informs all that follows, beginning with the arrival of Ton (Supphasit Kansen), a Bangkok architect sent to oversee the building of a new resort. In a land where belief in spirits is high, construction is pointedly taking place adjacent to an apartment block left untouched since the disaster and rumored to be haunted.

The only guest at a spartan hotel, Ton is instantly attracted to its Thai-Chinese owner Na

(Anchalee Saisoontorn). A reserved woman with a city education, Na appears unresponsive to Ton's polite overtures at first. But via a beautiful series of snapshots showing Na touching Ton's clothing and listening to him sing in the shower, she is able to externalize her true feelings. Progression from hand-holding innocence to tender lovemaking is affecting and tastefully done.

Virtually a two-hander for the first half, the film expands its horizons by perfectly measured steps as the couple's flowering romance gets local tongues wagging. Leading the voices of disapproval is Na's brother Wit (Dul Yaambunying), who heads a gang of motorbike-riding no-goods and calmly tells his sister he's a hopeless case for reform. Maintaining firm tonal control, Assarat confidently streams in thriller elements as the relationship becomes an extremely dangerous one.

With minimal dialogue and assured performances from its well-matched leads, the film registers powerfully as a pure romance and as a haunting portrait of a place that has rid itself of the physical reminders of trauma, but where the population remains largely in a state of suspended animation, emotionally.

Subdued palette employed by cinematographer Umpornpol Yugala plays a crucial role in reflecting the drained spirits of Pakua Pak townsfolk. Classical compositions and subtle lighting enhance the reflective mood, with sudden bursts of color toward the finale bringing the promise of hope out of tragedy. - *Richard Kuipers, Variety*