

Variety Critics' Choice – Europe Now!

Reviewers' sidebar offers delicious slice of contemporary European cinema

Laura McGinnis

"It's an important part of the creative process to have your work recognized," says Steven Gaydos, executive editor of *Variety*. Recognizing extraordinary works of European cinema is at the heart of the *Variety Critics' Choice – Europe Now!* sidebar, now in its eleventh year at KVIFF. The sidebar – organized by KVIFF, *Variety* and European Film Promotion (EFP) – is showcasing 10 films from European helmers, seven of which are directorial debuts. Each of the films will be presented by its director or a cast member.

Derek Elley, *Variety* Senior International Film Critic, coordinates the program by conferring with reviewers and gathering a list of promising films. Often these are first-time efforts, or films the reviewer felt were overlooked by audiences or the press.

"Elley makes sure that every year there's a mix of extremely austere and vigorous art films, side by side with wonderful comedy and genre films," Gaydos says.

Striking that balance is an important part of the selection process. Some members of the film community have a tendency to focus on arthouse films that are dark, experimental and intellectual, Gaydos says, but that attitude overlooks a lot of quality films. Critically – and commercially – successful dramas don't always stand the test of time. And lighter fare, such as Hollywood's screwball comedies of the 1930s, can turn out to be enduring classics.

"I don't agree with the idea that something has to be a rigorous hard slog for it to be good, or that something effervescent and fun is not as good," he says. "I love the idea of really celebrating genre films and



Mind-bending and spine-chilling Spanish thriller *Fermat's Room*.

comedies that sometimes the snootier film effects maybe look past."

The films represent a variety of countries, genres, production styles and themes.

Little goes *According to the Plan* as the family at the heart of this German feature prepares a birthday party for their mother. The film examines how family members can both hurt and protect one another – and how easily habits and intentions can be derailed by the twists of fate.

Obsession and deception beat at the heart of *Arabian Nights*, a multinational production about a Luxembourg man's growing fascination with an Algerian woman he meets on the train.

The Swedish romantic comedy *Ciao Bella* is director Mani Maserrat-Agah's directorial debut, dealing with the univer-

sal themes of young love, personal identity and football.

Don't Waste Your Time, Johnny! is set in mid-1970s Italy, as a recent graduate attempts to dodge military service and support his mother as a guitarist.

Dunya & Desie is a multinational road trip pic. It's bubbly and bright, but this is no brainless chick flick. As the girls travel from Amsterdam to Casablanca, they deal with some serious issues, including abandonment and unplanned pregnancy.

Fermat's Room is a mind-bending thriller in which four mathematicians find themselves trapped in a locked room by a stranger with an agenda, with only their wits to protect them as the walls begin to close in.

Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon's *Xian*

Gao choreographs the vigorous martial arts scenes in *Fighter*, the story of a girl whose family loyalties are tested by her passion for kung fu. This is a charming tale, with a strong heroine struggling to balance her obligations to herself and those around her.

From the Slovak Republic, *Half-life* tells the story of a middle-aged business man in crisis – only part of which is related to his wife and three girlfriends...

The Homecoming explores the long-standing tension between Greeks and their Albanian migrant population in this story of love, loneliness and betrayal.

And *The Killer* investigates the disturbing relationship between an assassin and his target. Striking cinematography and dramatic character development make this film a fascinating watch.

Despite the accolades they've received, the films face tough distribution prospects.

"There was a time when terrific films from Europe would probably get seen in America," Gaydos says, but today that's less likely. The American market for foreign films is less welcoming, and it can be difficult to distribute a European film to other countries on the continent. Recognition and positive press aren't always enough to ensure that a film gets the distribution it deserves, Gaydos says, but they can't hurt.

"I don't have any illusions that this sidebar is going to completely change this grim environment, but recognition can only help," he says. "I think it's terribly important for people to be celebrated. They make a small film and maybe this [recognition] tells them 'you're on the right track, keep plugging on, because the quality of your work is special.'" ■

FACES

Today at KVIFF you may spot director Veit Helmer, actress Kristýna Maléřová, and actor Radomil Uhlíř (*Absurdistan*).



Veit Helmer

Director/producer Marek Jícha, producer Thomas Hasler, screenwriter Arnošt Lustig and director Josef Lustig are here with *The Immortal Balladeer of Prague*. Director James Marsh (*Man on Wire*) is in town, and director Alice Nellis and director/producer Jan Svěrák (*Little Girl Blue*). Director Andrea Molaioli and producer Nicola Giuliano are here with *The Girl by the Lake*.

The *Tribute to Arturo Ripstein* will be attended by the director himself and audiences will have a chance to see examples of his work such as *Castle of Purity*, *Lecumberri (The Black Palace)* and *The Virgin of Lust*. The *Tribute to Nicholas Roeg* sidebar has also brought the director himself, along with screenwriter Dan Weldon, actor William Houston and actress Rita Tushingham (*Puffball*).

You may also spot director and producer Thomas Thurman (*Nick Nolte: No Exit*), or director Christophe van Rompaey (*Moscow, Belgium*). ■



Christophe van Rompaey

Vote for your favorite flick



Last year's Audience Award winners Jan and Zdeněk Svěrák (for *Empties*). Photo: KVIFF archive

Laura McGinnis

Everybody leaves the cinema with an opinion. You laughed, you cried, you felt a bit queasy. You liked it, loved it, hated it. Every year, KVIFF gives festival attendants an opportunity to share their opinions and recognize their favorite films by ranking the movies they've viewed and choosing the recipient of the annual Audience Award.

■ What is the Audience Award?

Every year the Audience Award is conferred to the film that receives the most favorable ranking from audience members. The voting process gives festival attendants a chance to rate the films they've seen. All films that receive 50 or more votes will be shortlisted for the award.

■ What happens to the winner?

The highest rated film will be recognized at the festival's closing ceremonies.

Many of the films that screen at festivals like KVIFF hope to catch the eye of a film distributor or production company. The Audience Award results help film producers and distributors estimate how well the films resonate with an international audience – so if you liked the film you just saw, give it a boost with a high rating.

■ What films have won in the past?

Recent winners include *Empties* (2007), *Other Worlds* (2006) and *Life with My Father* (2005).

■ How do I vote?

There are two ways to cast your vote. For ticket voting, simply grab a ticket at the cinema entrance and rate the movie by punching the right box. Drop it in the ballot box on your way out and you're set.

If you'd rather vote online, visit <http://www.kviff.com/en/program>. Select the appropriate program (Official Selection, Forum of Independents, Horizons, etc.) and a list of movies will appear on the screen, each of which will have the numbers one through four listed beneath it. Scroll down to the movie of your choice and click on the rating (1 – excellent, 2 – good, 3 – average, 4 – poor). Keep your festival pass handy; your vote won't count unless you enter your accreditation or pass number.

■ How can I check the results?

Polls close on July 12 around 2am. Results will be published online, in the official KVIFF journal and on the festival's closed-circuit television. The winner will be recognized at the closing ceremony on July 12.

For more info go to: www.kviff.com/en/audience-award



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