Tuesday, July 3, 2012

Festival Daily

**I’m a walking IMDb**

Mark Cousins on film and the rapture of self-loss

**VERONIKA BEDNÁŘOVÁ**

Northern Irish director and cineaste Mark Cousins is at KVIFF with two films – The Story of Film: An Odyssey and What Is This Film Called Love?

**What did your unique love of films come from?**

It came from my childhood. I fell in love with cinema as soon as I could remember. I just loved it. In Belfast there was a war on and I was a nervous little boy but then I would go into the cinema and just feel so relaxed. It felt like cinema was taking you in its arms and making you feel safe and opening windows on the world. How could you resist? I was born in 1968 so I first went to the cinema in 1976-77. Cinema felt very safe. It still feels very safe. When you’re sitting in the dark you can imagine yourself as other people in other worlds and I love that. There’s a lovely phrase that Joseph Campbell has – “the rapture of self-loss.” And that’s what cinema is.

**There wasn’t any specific film life in the 1970s in Belfast was there?**

No, on the contrary. It was pretty tidy. But there was TV. There was the BBC. And I saw Alfred Hitchcock films on TV. I saw Orson Welles films on TV. And also there was a video black market so we watched horror movies on old videos. Before that I remember seeing The Exorcist. We were brought up very Catholic and my aunt got holy water and blessed the video recorder before she put it in the VCR. I remember thinking if you have to bless a machine this must be so powerful, this medium of cinema. It was great fun.

**Do you think your feeling of nervousness regarding reality at that time helped you to latch on to the medium of cinema?**

I think people who feel slightly like outsiders find themselves inside the cinema. I now work with Tilda Swinton, the great actor, and she says we’re all outsiders. All the movie lovers are from another planet, from the Planet Cinema, we’re all weirdos and let’s try not to be other than weirdos. So all of these people here, at KVIFF are weirdos. They’re from the Planet Cinema. You too.

**I don’t deny it at all. In your childhood one of the reasons you and Tilda Swinton got together to work with the 8½ Foundation?**

Yes, and I found that together. We didn’t know each other till we were grown-ups but we both fell in love with cinema around the age of 8½. So we thought it would be great to try and create a magic moment, a threshold moment in a child’s life halfway between their 8th and 90th birthdays. Because when a child is that age, they’re not yet trying to be cool, not yet teenagers. Their minds are still imaginatively open and they’re sucking in everything, so it’s a good time to get a child and say show me at this point, look at this extraordinary medium, this luminosity.

**It’s like a Fellini movie isn’t it?**

That’s totally like a Fellini movie. Why it’s like a Fellini movie is of course when you see films as a child there are lots of things you don’t understand like sex and mortality and all sorts of things, but you still have a sense that there’s an amazing world out there that you see in the movie.

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**THE LOWDOWN**

It’s a reliable sign of a poor Lowdown columnist (and countless bloggers, who are more than eager to lead with a weather report; people who read columns and even blogs – are generally aware of how hot, cold, wet or smoggy they feel). But it’s almost impossible not to mention the sweltering heat in KV this year, which has had Thermal audiences sweating buckets and nodding off. We just hope that fans remember to bring bottled water along to screenings until things cool off.

Some have, of course, solved the heat issue by heading for the pool. A grand party there Sunday evening saw a classic retro-rove-type moment, when world-famous DJ David Holmes told us that he would not be allowed in because the event was “too hot”. Eventually, someone was located to explain to the security guys that Holmes was quite likely the most V of the IPs at the event.

But never one for raging ego, the down-to-earth Holmes himself ended up getting on famously with the veteran DJ who was laying down vintage tracks, one Eva Pospíšil, founder of the Radost FX music shop who could be described as Prague’s answer to Terri Hooley, the subject of KVIFF opening film Good Vibrations, which Holmes soundtracked. The pair even swapped email addresses so they could later compare reissues. Tunés really do build bridges, folks!

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**SEE YOU THERE**

Dan Sallitt

Director, The Unspoken Act

One of the many films I’m looking forward to seeing is Holy Motors by Luc Besson who is obviously a very well-known French filmmaker. He hasn’t made any films for a few years other than a while back, when he made a short film in a portmanteau movie called Tokyo, which was extremely good. The buzz on Holy Motors ever since its screening at Cannes a few weeks ago has been very exciting. I don’t know what actually happens in the film but there was a rope-type moment, when world-famous DJ David Holmes was seen at the event.

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**EXPLAINER**

**KVs (sometimes surprising) film cameos**

When seen from the right angle, Karlovy Vary’s cinema certainly has, even when its trademark festival’s not up and running. That (and just possibly cheaper food and accommodation rates than those of Prague) have won it prominent roles in lots of films shot in the Czech Republic.

Just about everyone remembers the city’s promenade popping up in a fantasy version of Montenegro, where people like James Bond come to bluff and melt girls’ hearts with their card sharp acumen as he did in Casino Royale (pictured). The Grandhotel Pupp becomes the ridiculously opulent Hotel Splendide, a veritable den of intrigue and dodgy dealings. The role of the casino itself was performed with gusto by the Lázni 1 building, in reality a venerable 19th-century spa facility.

A few also recall Queen Latifah showing us that you can actually see the Alps from your Karlovy Vary hotel window, as she did in Wayne Wang’s Last Holiday while contemplating the life and secrets of Cajun cooking.

The city’s riverfront has even been spotted in movies as unlikely as the action-packed Jackie Chan feature Shanghai Knights (subbing for a slightly sunburnt 19th-century London).

And let us not forget Hostel Part II – even if audiences and distributors did pretty quickly – in which Karlovy Vary showed off its more sinister side. Who knew this city could pass itself off as an Italian town in which frisky American girls’ shower would be an exciting experience?

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I’m a walking IMDb

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It’s extraordinarily how you do it in an understandable way. It’s not overly academic.

Absolutely. The word author does not appear in 15 hours. It’s a hard phrase to put on a poster. You can’t make a poster for a film the way you used to. There are more financial difficulties. I think if you’re making an of-fbeat film there’s a way of thinking of them as films.

You know so many interesting people. If you know so many loads of people.

I think the reason is that people see that I’m so passionate about what I do. In the music world lots of music people are also fascinated by cinema and want to know about cinema and they see me as an authority on the subject. We can’t be bothered to go. Who directed this film in 1942? I think. And I think. Also, I teach and write a lot about creativity. The creative process is never ending. What musicians and filmmakers and actors all have in common is this idea of creativity and how to keep it going, how to keep the juices going, how not to lose it, how not to get distracted by movies or so on.

And after you see this film it’s a question of whether you take responsibility for it or if you think of it as... If you think of it as some sort of a lesser art than it is, but certainly making it available and accessible, I definitely think it is a mark of the time.

Is it easy to put an ordinary person off cinema?

Not compromising the ideas in the film is not easy. It’s kind of a reaction to that in my way of working.

All your films have neo-Nazi components. Some of the best music is with neo-Nazis in them and say, “This is not for you.” And your 15-hour film.

Yes, the Brooklyn deus ex Machina. It really contrasts with Love.

How do you foresee the future of European cinema?

It’s just awful. The NYFF. I think if it’s fair to say we’ve been a key platform for Chinese, Iranian, Korean, Argentinian, Israeli and other international cinemas. How do you foresee the future of European cinema?

We have a film this year from Uruguay by first-time director Alicia Campanini. It’s called The Red Thread and it will be pre-miere on July 2 as part of the documentary filmmakers competition. The director, Alicia, and the producer Thomas Mauch, whose work we know from Fire and Bone, are here with us today.

What else?

We also have here to attend the Drums Talents from the East, which is a platform for future directors from the region because that’s how we find new talent, and take their films on board to represent them. (COC)

WHAT AM I DOING HERE?

Igor Taskovský

What is your favorite documentary film

It’s called The Red Thread.

You are a fan of your films showing at the fest?

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REVIEWERS RECOMMEND

Stephen Farber

Film critic, The Hollywood Reporter

Beasts of the Southern Wild

Director: Benh Zeitlin

USA, 2011, 91 min

July 3, 7pm, Grand Hall – Thermal

This award-winner from Sundance and Cannes confirms the vitality of American independent cinema. It’s a unique exploration of a father-daughter relationship and a regional community often overlooked by mainstream film. In Louisiana at the time of a devastating storm, the film may make you think of the people forgotten in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. But it’s not a political message movie; it’s a sort of walking IMDb. The word author does not appear in 15 hours. It’s a hard phrase to put on a poster. You can’t make a poster for a film the way you used to. There are more financial difficulties. I think if you’re making an offbeat film there’s a way of thinking of them as films.

The Deep Blue Sea

Director: Terence Davies

UK, 2011, 98 min

July 3, 7pm, Richmond Cinema

To celebrate the centenary of the birth of noted British playwright and screenwriter Terence Davies, many critics rate his films as his on the strength of a couple of masterpieces and his deep understanding of the central theme. The film is a slow but pacey, it’s beautifully designed and undeniably affecting.

Terraferma

Director: Emmanuele Crialese

Italy, France, 2011, 88 min

July 3, 7pm, Congress Hall – Thermal

Many recent movies from all around the world have dealt with the subject of immigration, but this is one of the few that works so well in many places. Italy’s submission for the foreign language Oscar 2011 is an eloquent addition to this thriving new genre. An Italian fishing family struggles in an exotic country, many years after a tragedy that tears apart a loving couple. She’s the star of this film. But, they find a driver, they manage to set off on an adventure. Unusually funny as well as deeply poignant, Geoffrey Rush’s film may not be a prestige picture, but it represents the best in offbeat, audience-friendly entertainment.

KVIFF Grand Jury President Richard Peña.

What do you have a favorite Czech movie?

I think it’s fair to say we’ve been a key platform for Chinese, Iranian, Korean, Argentinian, Israeli and other international cinemas. How do you foresee the future of European cinema?

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What else?

We also have here to attend the Drums Talents from the East, which is a platform for future directors from the region because that’s how we find new talent, and take their films on board to represent them. (COC)

Czech, please!

Pobal zabloďuji Vášch, an you get lost in Karlovy Vary, some of these phrases might help you to get directions from the locals.

Kudy se jde na kolonádu? – How do I get to the collonade?

Jak se dostanu do...? – (Yeh to na opatchnem kontsee myesta) – It’s at the other end of town

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The Mexican entry in the Official Selection is Nos Vemos Papa (See You, Dad), a haunting and brooding study of grief, memory, and the light for resolution in the wake of a sudden tragedy. Director and screenwriter Lucía Carreras’s story hinges on the affec-
tion for one character and the psychological suspense story that follows takes us through a maze of lighter fare and audience films. Carreras, by contrast, “took inspiration from innovative trends in the Mexican film industry but still managed to find her own style,” adding that “the rhythm and the tone were important aspects.”

That feeling is quite apart from most movies coming out of Mexico these days, which tend toward lighter fare and audience films. Carreras, by contrast, “took inspiration from innovative trends in the Mexican film industry but still managed to find her own style,” in the words of KVIFF programmers.

But it’s a sojourn that surely transcends Latin American culture, the director believes. “The international appeal of the film, I think, will come from different aspects. For me, the film explores deep layers of emotions that are also appealing to audiences.”

The exploration of the darker palette is something that resonates in Central Europe, as well, says Carreras. “Connecting with the people of the land of Kafka, obviously, is a big deal for us and it will be amazing to see what they got from the movie.”

So far the film has only screened outside Mexico in Ventana Sur, Argentina, and the European Film Market at the Berlinale, but those were industry screenings. “In that sense, Karlovy Vary will be the city where audiences from outside Mexico will see, for the first time, Nos Vemos Papa — it is our international premiere,” says Carreras. According to Carreras, the film originated with her interest in exploring loss. “I thought that if this person had devoted his/her life to somebody, starting from a very early age, the absence would then make the character go to really interesting places. Those places will be a limbo where Pilat goes.”

The journey is a tricky, sometimes deceptive one, she adds. “I do not know if I will call this a love story,” Kolski says. “It’s a very intimate story,” adds Carreras. “I thought that if this person had devoted his/her life to somebody, starting from a very early age, the absence would then make the character go to really interesting places. Those places will be a limbo where Pilat goes.”

The sensitive film has a surprising ending. “I wanted to create a hero whose worlds are getting mixed up. It happens to people who are pushed to their limits,” Kolski adds. “I remembered those states of mind from the time when I was engaged in camping. I wrote the script two years ago on an impulse which eventually turned out to be secondary.”

During the shooting I discarded most of what I had prepared. “I surrendered to intuition and my inner voice, which allowed me to ‘hear’ Eryk’s mind. The lead character of Eryk arriving at an abandoned farm. At first it seems like a sassy girl floats into his life, until a savvy girl floats into his life on a raft. She has occupied Eryk’s house in his absence and has no intention of leaving, but she has no idea how insidious the human mind can be while processing serious trauma.”

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Panoptikum is a little off the beaten track, as overall we were very heavy, particularly as the portions of Czech fare at reasonable prices. The documentary Under African Skies follows the story of Paul Simon’s album Graceland, recorded during the worst years of Apartheid, on the occasion of its 25th anniversary. Simon travels back to South Africa to meet both the musicians who worked with him on the album and the African National Congress spokesperson he angered by breaking their international cultural boycott. This is a well-made look at a sensitive subject, with a wider relevance about the interaction of art and politics. Simon is adamant that he did not want to make a political record, that working with black African musicians was a musical decision, and that music does not need to be controlled by its political circumstances. As proof of this, he cites the content of the African pop songs he reworked; one is about how itce it was when women wore miniskirts. And one memorable verse on I Know What I Know can be translated something like, “Kill an owl because there’s no chicken, but don’t worry, if we cut the head off it’ll look just like a chicken. We can eat it on the train.” With luminaries like Maya Angelou, David Byrne, Whoopi Goldberg and Peter Gabriel on the cast list, this is definitely not to be missed.

Contentions boundaries feature heavily in the stand-out work this year for anyone interested in the African musical tradition, Rose pushed the boundaries between experimental music and activism. Steve Eriksen’s The Reach of Resonance. What starts off as a depiction of four otherwiscid avant-garde composers swiftly builds into an elegant demonstration of the links between cultural experimentation and radical political gestures. Bob Ostertag spent years in El Salvador campaigning for the freedom of two Slovakian Romany cousins who dream of living the life of the gods, in this case the luxurious land of Vanka, trapped by physical and cultural segregation and endemic poverty. Segregation and the question of music’s ability to transcend linear, political and cultural boundaries is a strong theme in the section 2012: A Musical Odyssey, whose title alone is suggestive of this kind of radical journey. The film must be relevant on both a filmic and musical level. And certainly has powerful relevance to what’s most important: there must be proof of national parks, and Jon Rose has become famous through-out the world for using cello bows to play fences. Starting in the classical tradition, Rose pushed the form of the violin, adding longer and longer strings, until he suddenly looked around and realized that Australia is strong with millions of kilometres of resonating wires. These fences are deeply embedded in Australia’s short and brutal history, absurd signs of Western culture’s insistence on imposing straight lines of division on places and peoples where they have no relevance. Drawing haunting music from these fences has led him around the world, to the artificial lines carved between Israel and Palestine, and Mexico and Arizona. Rose’s work is just one thread in this balanced, thoughtful piece, guaranteed to introduce you to new ideas, new directions, and may be even change how you think about sound.

Adam’s, who stood campaigning to focus on composing, asks especially relevant questions about the place of art in a time of so much conflict and destruction. For people like Adams in central Alaska, where rising temperatures mean winter often comes months late, and huge icebergs crash into the sea every day, the growing ecologial devastation is extremely evident. "What does meaning art have in a world that is literally melting?" he asks. But, as he recounts, Claude Monet was feeling the same pain, shuffling out to the garden to paint water lilies with the front lines of WWI only 35km away. And as Adams says, "we would all be so much poorer if Monet hadn’t shuffled out to the garden to paint those water lilies, even in the middle of a war...those spaces he created...were his last great gift to his fellow human beings."

On THE TOWN

Panoptikum
Biblioteka 3  728 520 822
Open "1am" around 2am?
With pleasant wood-lined walls displaying fascinating photos from Karlovy Vary’s rich and colorful past, Panoptikum is a cozy eatery specializing in traditional Czech fare at reasonable prices. As is typical for such dumpling-friendly cuisine, the food is a little heavy, particularly as the portions are almost ridiculously generous. That is just a little more than enough, though, as overall we were very impressed with the personable and relaxed service as well as the delicious draft beer on offer from the boutique Švajk brewery. Panoptikum is a little off the beaten track, but is definitely worth the trek if you fancy a less hectic and crowded dining experience than you’ll find in most restaurants on the main strip. (COC) and NYC electroponks LCD Soundsystem, and other, stranger areas of musical documentary work.

Peter Le Couteur
At first glance, this year’s music documentary selection seems to have little in the way of common themes. Pavel Klusák, head of the section, explains how they chose the eight films on offer. “It’s easy! The film must be relevant today, and runs through the traditional VHF “Behind the Music”, style work on iconic artists (Paul Simon, ambient pioneer Brian Eno, or free-jazz saxophonist Peter Brötzmann), the attempts to capture the style and surroundings of live performances (by translucent Icelanders Sigur Rós and LCD Soundsystem Shut Up and Play the Hits.

Panoptikum’s walls comprise a photographic guide to Karlovy Vary’s colorful past.

Foot-tapping Czech percussion maestros The Tap Tap are giving a drumming workshop today at 4pm in the beautiful Mlýnská kolonáda to get everyone in the swing of things before their Concert for the Jedlička Institute Foundation at 8pm at Panská dvůr (Střevcův 2). The Jedlička Institute was established in 1913 to help the Czech disabled community, running a school in Prague and organizing events. Many of the members of The Tap Tap are former students of the Prague school, and they’ve done amazing work raising awareness, playing in festivals around Europe and working with well-known Czech musicians like Dan Bátů. Entry to the concert is by voluntary contribution, and you can be sure whatever you give will be used wisely. Excellent music in support of an excellent cause. (PLC) and Czech beer on draft, like Gambrinus (25-35 CZK). Also, watch out for the special fast-festival menu.

Photograph: Milan Malíček

Panoptikum
1P Pilařská 25 608 701 341 www.panoptikum.cz
Open noon-9pm Mon-Sat, noon-6pm Sun
Long an oasis of convenient, affordable, colorful, and spicy cuisine, Tandoor is the family-run place that festival visitors have been slipping off to, and returning to, for years. It’s just two simple rooms secreted in the courtyard of an apartment block just around the corner from the Thermal, but it’s as welcoming and unpretentious a place as you’ll ever find. Starters include some mouth-watering Indian specialties such as dahl, onion bhaji and meat-stuffed paratha (30-60 CZK). Follow that up with the city’s most appealing vegetarian menu, which offers pakal, bhaji, veggie madras, vindalo, spinach, and jal frez (85-145 CZK). You can get chicken, beef, lamb, or prawn versions of these classes by adding 40 CZK or so. All the usual sides are here, including chapatis, garlic and cheese nans (25-45 CZK). Some swear they achieve enlightenment when combining the above with Czech beer on draft, like Gambrinus (25-35 CZK). Also, watch out for the special fast-festival menu.

Photograph: Milan Malíček

47th Karlovy Vary International Film Festival June 29 – July 7 2012
International Film Festival June 29 – July 7 2012 47th Karlovy Vary Film Festival June 29 – July 7 2012 Vy Var International Film

Variety’s Ten Euro Directors to Watch.

The Jedlička Institute collection.