

Open Eyes sidebar highlights best films from Cannes festival

Laura McGinnis

Antichrist, the latest film by veteran helmer Lars Von Trier, met with laughter, scorn and applause when it debuted at the Cannes Film Festival in May. Those present described a polarized audience in which viewer responses ranged from admiring to hostile – sparking a controversy that generated as much media attention as the film itself.

Missed the fun? Don't worry. *Antichrist* is one of 12 films in the KVIFF *Open Eyes* sidebar, now in its third year, which showcases highlights from the prestigious Cannes Film Festival.

"Just before Karlovy Vary, Cannes is the last big European festival and its program is usually so interesting that we try to offer our viewers a cross-section of its offerings," says KVIFF artistic director Eva Zaoralová.

Zaoralová works with program director Julietta Sichel and programmer Karel Och to make selections for this sidebar, with assistance from sales companies representing the films. The selected films come from many countries and cover a variety of topics, styles and Cannes sidebars.

This year the selection includes films by established directors like Pedro Almodóvar, whose *Broken Embraces* is a complex story that plumbs the depths of human experience with irony and flair.



Looking for Eric, a last-minute addition to the Open Eyes section.

The film follows an aging film director who's lost his sight, his devoted staff, a powerful businessman and his desperate secretary – and all the tangled threads that tie their lives together.

Also running in this section is *Thirst*, the latest effort from Korean director Park Chan-wook. In this film, a Catholic priest volunteers for a medical experiment and is the only volunteer to survive after being infected with a gruesome virus. Pustules are the least of his problems, however, as he realizes that the blood transfusion that saved his life has also left him with an aversion to sun-

light, superhuman strength and decidedly unholy appetites.

Thirst shared the Cannes Jury Prize this year with *Fish Tank*, a new film by British director Andrea Arnold. Mia, the film's protagonist, is 15 years old and aimless. Expelled from school and shunned by her classmates, Mia wastes her days wandering around her Essex neighborhood and the council estate where she lives with her mother. But things start to change when Mum brings home a friendly and slightly mysterious new beau.

Other 2009 Cannes prize-winners in this section include

Antichrist (Charlotte Gainsbourg, Best Actress), *La Pivellina* (Europa Cinemas Label Award for Best European Film in the Directors' Fortnight section), *Samson and Delilah* (Camera d'Or) and the festival's grand prize winner, *White Ribbon*.

"Cannes is the most important film festival in the world, so every year we put together a list of films from Cannes that we'd like to show at our festival," says Och. "This year, we are super-excited to have the 2009 Palme d'Or winner."

White Ribbon, the latest feature from director Michael Haneke

(*The Piano Teacher*, *Funny Games*) is set in a small German town plagued by strange and violent incidents in the days before World War I. With its focus on human cruelty and the anxiety it provokes, this film bears all the twisted hallmarks of a Haneke classic.

Homosexuality is a major theme in two of this year's films. From the United States, *Humpday* tells the story of two friends whose lives converge after years of following separate paths. When married Ben agrees to help his friend Andrew shoot an erotic film for a porn festival, their friendship and their sense of identity enters foreign territory. On the other side of the world, *Eyes Wide Open* examines the forbidden attraction between a kosher butcher and his young assistant in an ultra-orthodox Jewish community in Jerusalem.

A man's best friend is his *Mother* in Korean director Bong Joon-ho's latest film, which follows a woman's desperate efforts to clear her only son's name when the learning disabled young man is accused of murder. *Here*, another selection involving mental instability, ran earlier this week.

"These are high quality films," Och says. "And there is so much variety – in terms of geography, theme, style, and so on – we are confident that these films will connect with audiences in a special way."

WHAT AM I DOING HERE?

Álex de la Iglesia
Filmmaker



■ What brings you to KVIFF?

I'm the president of the Spanish Film Academy and we have a big meeting here with all the heads of the European academies.

■ What is this meeting in aid of?

First of all, we try and support the people who make movies and we try to share these movies. We try to work together and to make this group into a kind of big European family whose members support each other in promoting and protecting the cinema of this continent.

■ What do you think of KV?

This is my first time in Karlovy Vary. The city is amazing. The buildings are totally awesome.

■ And the festival?

It's big. From looking at the posters on the streets, there are a lot of films I want to see. I'd like to have my own films here. Maybe next year, I could even be a member of the jury...

PUBWATCH

F-Bar Thermal

Thermal Hotel
(beside the last-minute box office)
Open daily from 8:30am to 4am

Despite being located at KVIFF central, it took the Festival Daily scribes three years to even realize this place existed. Don't, like us, be misled by the "Box Offices" sign on the door. If you go past the ticket sellers, you'll find an establishment that is a firm favorite with KVIFF veterans. Admittedly the F-bar itself is pretty skanky, but its great selling point is its long, covered terrace overlooking the Teplá River. Day and night, this is a great place to hang out in the open air and watch the festival hordes go about their business. It's also one of the cheaper places to drink during the festival with a half-liter Pilsner costing 35 CZK and a standard range of shooters for around 40-60 CZK.

Ovo Bar

I. P. Pavlova 38
☎ 776 158 115
Open daily from 10am to 7pm
(opens 11am Sundays)

If you're feeling the heat and need a brief respite to peruse your festival program, nip out of the Thermal and head straight for Ovo Bar to the right of Charlie's (Really – keep on walking past Charlie's if you know what's good for you). Ovo Bar is a sedate little café and "milk bar" of the sort that seems to inspire violent fantasies in literary types (see *A Clockwork Orange*). But rest assured, drug-filled milkshakes and Vietcong violence aren't on the menu at this cozy little joint. Get an espresso for 32 CZK, or splurge on the Irish coffee or *café d'après* (espresso, vanilla liqueur, dark chocolate, cinnamon, milk and cognac) for 65 CZK. There's a wide range of custards,

ice-cream cups and sorbets (29, 59 and 49 CZK, respectively). Hot desserts such as *palačinky* (crepes) are available with a variety of fruit accompaniments, or appease your sweet tooth with hot raspberries with ice cream and whipped cream (49 CZK).

Kolonáda Restaurant and Cafe

Vřídelská 49
☎ 353 222 320
Open 10am to 11pm

When the sun is out, there are few spots nicer for outdoor dining than the restaurants that line the Teplá River between the Hotel Thermal and the Hotel Pupp. From the riverside tables of the Kolonáda Restaurant and Cafe, festival patrons can cast their film-blurred eyes on the cheery hubbub surrounding the Hotel Thermal or the picturesque spires of the Church of

St. Mary Magdalene. The Kolonáda menu deviates slightly from the standard Czech fare, including such non-standard appetizers as herring fillets (109 CZK) or, for the big spender, red caviar on toast (529 CZK). Main courses are what you'd expect. The restaurant makes a hearty goulash for 129 CZK. If you'd like to spend a few more minutes watching the crowd pass by along the promenade, order a coffee and a sundae or pancakes (which are really more like crepes) for 80 CZK.

Ristorante Pizzeria Capri

Stará Louka 42
☎ 353 236 090
Open daily from 11am until "at least 2am" during KVIFF

Situated in the salubrious environs of the Grandhotel Pupp, this gourmet pizza and pasta joint offers KVIFF diners a little sprin-

gling of stardust. The walls are adorned with photos of previous fest luminaries such as Morgan Freeman and Gérard Depardieu (who, judging by the number of photos, spent most of his time in Vary at the restaurant) so you know you're in good company. The pizzas are rather steeply priced at 260-350 CZK, but they are crisp and delicious. The wide selection of pasta dishes are also quite pricey, starting with Spaghetti Bolognese for 350 CZK and ending with Taglionini with lobster or Kamchatka crab for 1450 CZK. If you like good food well made, served by friendly and attentive staff, then you won't mind paying over the odds for these delicious offerings, which are served *al dente* along with freshly grated Parmesan on request (not always a matter of course in the Czech Republic).

SIDE EVENTS

If you fancy doing something cultural between films, as opposed to spending too much time in one of KV's several fine hostels, you might like to check out **Czech photographer Milan Šára's** stunning collection of **female nudes** at Galerie Na ochozu, Vřídelská kolonáda, (first floor). The exhibition is open daily from 10am to 6pm. You can also get a quick preview of Šára's work at www.milansara.com. Prague-based **British DJ Chris Sadler** has been a fixture on the Czech club scene for much of the past two decades. He is coming to KVIFF tonight to play a set at the **Pyramida Club** at Jugoslávská 3. The gig kicks off at 9pm. Another music event worth checking out is the funk combo **Těžko soudit motýla**, who are performing in the W Klub (Nákladní 13) at 9:30pm.

DAILIES



Crystal Globe awardee John Malkovich greets his public.



Producer Quincy Jones and model Helena Houdová work the crowd.



I could have sworn I left my tent here...!