

2005 AFI Film Festival Review:

The first film I saw at the AFI Film Festival 2005 was the gripping South African urban drama *Tsotsi* and the last I saw was the Bolivian documentary *the Devil's Miner*. The AFI Fest had a great diversity of films. Of the fifteen films I saw only one was not one that I could honestly recommend someone seeing. I was also impressed that the festival had a Q&A session with 95% of the screenings. I wonder if the high turnout was due to the fact that the screenings of most films were on back-to-back days or no more than two days apart. This probably meant that the film's directors, talent and producers could do Q&A more readily than if their film was showing on Sunday once and then not again until the following Sunday. The only drawback was that if one missed a screening of a film at 10:00 pm on a Friday, then the festival schedules that same film for an early afternoon screening on Saturday. It was easy to miss a film just because of there were only so many nighttime screenings to go around. The best attendance at the festival usually was at night, but certain highly rated films, like *Tsotsi* could pack them in. I had to stand during the screening of *Tsotsi* and it was so popular the festival added another date. This actually happened for several films and made me wonder if they should have a policy next year that if a film gets overwhelming positive audience response on its first screening that it automatically earns a place next week.

The only bad experience I had at the AFI Film Festival was the premiere of *Walk The Line*. I got there fifteen minutes late and I did not get in to see the film. I was covering the American Film Market and could not get away in time to do the Red Carpet. I did not have my AFI Press Pass either because the publicity office closed early for the premiere. Trying to cover both the AFM and AFI is still quite challenging. At the AFM there is an AFI booth handing out AFI film schedules, but there is no corresponding literature or AFM promotion. There was not much coordination between the LA's two mega media events. Going into the second year of the AFM and AFI merger, the AFI is getting far more out of this partnership in my opinion. Last year the AFM had brochures showing what AFM films were also being screened during AFI. This year I had no idea whatsoever if there was any overlap between AFM and AFI. I spoke to a producer of a film at the AFI Festival and he said he wanted his film shown during the first weekend of AFI and the last weekend of AFM. He was given the last weekend, so he was not guaranteed any of the AFM's international film buyers were still in town.

But despite a few scheduling beefs I was highly impressed with the number of film premieres and Red Carpet events at the AFI Film Festival. They had at least one or two premieres a day during the festival. Sometimes the Red Carpet was not long or highly star studded, but it was run efficiently. Also another positive aspect of the festival was the time breakdown of the films. The festival scheduler made sure that there was enough built in time after the film ended for proper Q&A sessions. And all the film's that I saw that did not have Q&A were the last screening at night or a bonus screening on the festival's last weekend. I can say that every film I could see or even walked by started on time. Furthermore, the AFI Film Festival staff and Q&A moderators were highly professional and courteous. This made the festival a pleasure to attend and I'd recommend it anyone I could.

A DIOS MOMO

[ADIOS] *Latin Cinema Series*

Uruguay, 2005, 100 min, Color, Digibeta
World Premiere

DIR: Leonardo Ricagni

SCR: Leonardo Ricagni

PROD: Raul Pochintesta

EXEC PROD: Sergio Aguero, Carlos Ricagni

DP: Pablo Vera

ED: Marcela Sáenz

PROD DES: Jose Pedro Giordano

MUS: Emilio Kauderer

CAST: Mathias AcuÒa, Jorge Esmoris, Canario Luna



Weaving together seamlessly a powerfully lyrical narrative, *A DIOS MOMO* is homage to the delicate rhythms of life in the Carnival.

A DIOS MOMO is the story of 11-year-old street kid Obdulio, who sells newspapers for a living but does not read or write. He befriends the night watchman of the newspaper, a magical "Maestro," who will not only introduce him to reading, but also teach him the real meaning of life, using the lyrics of the "Murgas" (Carnival Pierrots) under the spell of the God MoMo during the mythical nights of the Uruguayan Carnival.

With a poetic nod to Fellini, Leonardo Ricagni uses the carnival atmosphere to transport the viewer to a magical place where realism and surrealism live side by side in Uruguay—and what a wonderful place to be. With sweeping directorial vision and gorgeously shot with rich, vibrant colors, *A DIOS MOMO* achieves a rich visual and spiritual sensibility unparalleled today.

- *Shaz Bennett*

Highly Recommend

A DIOS MOMO

Q&A After Screening

What I liked the most about *A Dios Momo* was that here was a pro-education film that was not preachy or sappy. I mean too many times I go into a Hollywood family film like this get a lecture or predictable scenes stressing getting an education. *A Dios Momo* was a whimsical cinematic journey through a poor street kid's eyes. The filmmaker Leonardo Ricagni did not have a written script for the film, Lenardo said he knows it taboo in Hollywood to suggest making a film without a script, but he just knew what scenes he wanted with his film and just shot them day to day. The two wonderful lead kids were not trained actors and just cast off the street to play in the film. You would never know from watching *A Dios Momo* who was a trained actor and who was regular person acting for the first time because the performances were all that good and natural. *A Dios Momo* is dedicated to the missing children and the children that want their dreams to come true.

ALMOST HEAVEN

[ALMOS] *Made In Germany*

Germany, 2005, 95 min, Color, 35mm
In English, German with English subtitles
North American Premiere

DIR: Ed Herzog

SCR: Ed Herzog, Paul Herzberg

PROD: Judy Tossell

DP: Sebastian Edschmid

ED: Uta Schmidt

MUS: Charlie Gillett

CAST: Heike Makatsch, Nikki Amuka-Bird, Carl Bradshaw, Wotan Wilke Möhring, Michael Gwisdek Ivan Shvedoff



Set in the "locals only" world of Jamaica, *ALMOST HEAVEN* is an utterly charming fish-out-of-water story.

Helen dreams of traveling to Nashville to play country music at the Bluebird Cafe. When her life in Germany takes a dramatic turn, she sets off for Nashville decked out in a cowboy hat and boots—and lands in Jamaica. Wrong plane. Wrong place. Wrong music. A German woman crooning country ballads isn't exactly what American tourists want in Jamaica. Out of necessity, Helen hooks up with a saucy but selfish local girl, Rosie. With Rosie's "help," Helen makes it across the island, but not without losing all her money. Helen starts to let go of her dream when, uncharacteristically, Rosie reaches out and shows her a world where the small moments connect us to one another.

Set to an infectious soundtrack of country music with a reggae beat, director Ed Herzog's film is a charismatic story about friendship and finding your dreams wherever you are.

- *Shaz Bennett*

Highly Recommend

ALMOST HEAVEN

Q&A After Screening

The director Ed Herzog said he wanted to make *Almost Heaven* because he had been to Jamaica a few years ago doing another film project. Ed had to drive in a cab across Jamaica from one end to the other. The cab driver had only one cassette tape and it was Country Western. Herzog heard that Country Western tape for several hours and the irony of having done so inspired him to make *Almost Heaven*. Herzog said shooting in Jamaica was quite an undertaking. There was one scene in particular during an outside concert with reggae star Tanya Stevens that he had to just shoot freestyle. The music was so loud that the lead actors had no idea when they were shooting or not, so they had to just stay in character as the crew kept following them through the packed dancehall concert. Ed Herzog also chose Heike Makatsch to be his lead German actress even though Heike was a former German Viva Music channel VJ. It just so happened that Heike was a big fan of Country & Western. Heike sang her own songs in the film and had just enough talent to make her portrayal quite believable. I have to also give a big shot out to British actress Nikki Amuka-Bird who stole the film as the character Rose. Nikki definitely needs to be in more films. She has a lot of talent and would be considered a young Alfre Woodward if given the right material over time. *Almost Heaven* was a pleasure to watch because its premise was so enjoyable. I couldn't wait to see where the film was going to go and it never disappointed me from beginning to end.

THE ART OF FLIGHT

[ARTOF] *Int'l Doc Competition*

Egypt, Sudan, 2005, 88 min, Color, Digibeta
(In English)

World Premiere

DIR: Davin Anders Hutchins

SCR/DP/ED: Davin Anders Hutchins

EXEC PROD: Davin Anders Hutchins, Udy Epstein

MUS: Al Khafiyeen



This intimate and raw guerilla documentary, shot secretly in Egypt, tells the tales of refugees fleeing Sudan's bloody 20-year civil war. They hope that the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) will help them relocate to another country. Unfortunately, only 20 percent make it beyond Cairo. The rest languish in Egypt, where their illegal status does not permit them to work or send their children to school.

The story follows three people: our filmmaker and journalist Davin Hutchins, who we see overcoming the many obstacles he faces in telling the story; Jere Maluk, a refugee who has to find his way through bureaucratic red tape and mismanagement at UNHCR in hopes of getting resettled to America; and Magda, a human rights activist who elects not to apply for refugee status because she is convinced she will one day return to a peaceful Sudan. For very different reasons, the trio has found themselves struggling to survive in Egypt, which has reluctantly become their temporary home.

As we watch all of them struggle to carve out their path, this intense film keeps you immersed in the story while delving into questions about the nature of charity, the consequences of American empire, the price of transience, and, ultimately, freedom itself.

- *Tiffany Naiman*

Highly Recommend

ART OF FLIGHT

Q&A After Screening

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The filmmaker Davin Anders Hutchins made a lot of personal sacrifices and maybe even risked his life to make his important film. And many of his *Art Of Flight's* lead Sudanese refugee subjects are still waiting to get permission to leave Egypt. What I took away most from the film is the fact that the US government was hell-bent on overthrowing Saddam Hussein's Iraq suppressed people's rights, did not allow democratic elections, blocked free press, had unfair trials and tortured and killed innocent people. But all those same atrocities happened in Egypt and we the US do nothing to expose these offenses or do anything politically or economically to make Egypt clean up its ways. In fact, the CIA uses Egypt's secret police to torture our political prisoners, like Al Queda, that we cannot legally do so in America. The stories of what Egypt's secret police does to Sudanese refugees would make any be glad that they were not living over in the land of the Pharaohs and Sphinx.

THE DEVIL'S MINER

[DEVIL] *Latin Cinema Series*

USA, Germany, 2005, 82 min, Color, Digibeta
In Spanish with English subtitles

DIR: Kief Davidson,
Richard Ladkani

SCR/PROD: Kief Davidson, Richard Ladkani

DP: Richard Ladkani

ED: Kief Davidson

MUS: Leonardo Heiblum, Andres Solis



This powerful documentary follows 14-year-old Basilio as he risks his life to support his family in the mines of Cerro Rico, Bolivia. The mines, known as “the mountains that eat men,” have killed eight million people since the Spanish conquistadors began extracting silver. Through young Basilio's eyes, we meet a world of pious Catholic miners who sever their ties with God upon entering the mines and turn their worship to the Devil. Basilio and his younger brother, while chewing coca leaves to keep them alert, make sacrifices to a statue of the Devil in the mines, hoping it will bring them protection as well as let them earn enough money to continue the new school year. Basilio knows that without an education there is no hope to escape his fate at the mines where the average life expectancy is 35 to 40.

This claustrophobic but elegantly filmed documentary tells Basilos's dark abysmal tale without sentimentality, while clearly showing us his struggle to survive and find a better life.

- *Tiffany Naiman*

Highly Recommend

THE DEVIL'S MINER

Q&A After Screening

Kief Davidson, the director, said that a fund was started to make sure Basilio and his brother can go to school and now have to work in the mines. It is quite painful to realize that poor kids in Bolivia mountain towns have so little options in life. They either come from families that can afford to send them to school or they must risk injury and death to work in the mines to earn enough money to go to school. In fact, some of the other miner families wanted their son chosen because they knew the filmmaker was going to give money to the son's family. Kief raised enough money to move Basilio's family off the mountain and into the city, but Basilio's mother was still skeptical. Kief has set up a charitable fund that will guarantee that Basilio does not have to go back to work mines. Kief has shown *The Devil's Miner* to the UN and plans to create a global charitable fund to help hundreds of Bolivian kids avoid the fate of working in the grueling, dangerous and deadly mines of Bolivia.

DIRTY

[DIRTY] *American Directions*

USA, 2005, 95 min, 35mm
(In English)

World Premiere

DIR: Christopher Fisher

SCR: Eric Saks, Gil Reavill, Christopher Fisher

EXEC PROD: Ash Shah

PROD: David Hillary, Tim Peternel

DP: Eliot Rockett

ED: Miklos Wright, Tom Sanders

PROD DES: Anthony Rivero Stabley

MUS:

Ryan Beverage

CAST: Cuba Gooding Jr, Clifton Collins, Keith David, Cole Hauser, Judy Reyes, Chris Mulkey, Wyclef Jean, Khleo Thomas, Aimee Garcia, Wood Harris



We all have ghosts that follow us. If you are a dirty undercover cop in Los Angeles, you probably have plenty haunting you. Cuba Gooding Jr. and Clifton Collins Jr. star as two undercover cops battling demons on the street, along with their own personal ones. After watching this bleak and disturbing depiction of life in Los Angeles, you will probably never ask a cop for directions again.

After a suspicious shooting, these two street cops get hauled in for questioning by Internal Affairs. If they stick together and stay smart, no one can touch them. Unfortunately, the psychological repercussions of their actions begin to take their toll. As they pass through the dens of the city's most notorious gangsters, faces of the dead lurk in every shadow.

Set in a sadistically violent world, *DIRTY* is full of stellar performances, especially the two lead actors. Their desperation is palpable as they journey down an exceedingly dark path to a violent and unexpected conclusion.

- Lane Kneeder

Highly Recommend

DIRTY

Q&A After Screening

Director Christopher Fisher did Q& A and said *Dirty* was inspired by the LAPD Rampart scandal. He said at times LAPD members were around the sets of *Dirty* and read the script. The cops thought the portrayal of the 'dirty' police officers were realistic scenes. Christopher Fisher said that he was considering *Dirty* the third in a trilogy of his films about Los Angeles. I asked Christopher if he felt in danger at any time shooting in real gang areas. Christopher said he was never in danger shooting *Dirty* on location in certain gang neighborhoods because he at times hired a few gang members as extras. Christopher also worked with Suspect Entertainment to help out with the casting of many of the Latin actors. I thought Cuba Gooding took this role in *Dirty* to try and regain some macho cinema cred that he has lost playing the lead in *Snow Dogs*, *Boat Trip* and *Radio*. Cuba must have either tied or set a new record for a character saying "nigga" in an urban film. My only criticism with *Dirty* is that the ending was predictable and nice and neat and should have been much more challenging and "dirtier" to stay true to the film's main theme.

THE KID & I

[KIDAN] *Special Screenings*

USA, 2005, 93 min, Color, 35 MM

(In English)

World Premiere

DIR: Penelope Spheeris

SCR: Tom Arnold

PROD: Penelope Spheeris, Tom Arnold, Brad Wyman

EXEC PROD: Marie L. Fyhrie, Jordan Katz

DP: Robert E. Seaman

ED: Jan Northrop, John Wesley Whitton

PROD DES: Linda Spheeris

CAST: Tom Arnold, Eric Gores, Linda Hamilton, Henry Winkler, Richard Edson, Brenda Strong, Arielle Kebbel, Shannon Elizabeth and Joe Mantegna



Acclaimed, versatile filmmaker Penelope Spheeris is best known for straddling two careers—directing commercial Hollywood comedies (*WAYNE’S WORLD*, *THE BEVERLY HILLBILLIES*, *BLACK SHEEP*) while lovingly documenting the emergence and trajectory of punk and heavy metal (*THE DECLINE OF WESTERN CIVILIZATION*, *PARTS I, II and III*). In a departure for Spheeris, here she teams up with comedian Tom Arnold who penned the script after being inspired by his next-door neighbor Eric Gores, who plays Aaron Roman in *THE KID & I*. On the brink of committing suicide, washed-up actor/writer Bill Williams (Arnold) is hired by a wealthy businessman (Joe Mantegna) to write and act in a film to star his son Aaron, a boy with cerebral palsy who wants nothing more than to live out his dream as an action hero. An unlikely pair, Bill and Aaron embark on a journey of outrageous misadventures.

Drawing wryly on real events—the film that made Arnold famous over a decade ago was *TRUE LIES*—*THE KID & I* is peppered with inspired casting choices (Linda Hamilton and Henry Winkler play key characters in Williams’ life) while Jamie Lee Curtis, Arnold Schwarzenegger, Shaquille O’Neal and Spheeris all play themselves in delightful cameos. But the real star of the movie is the irrepressible Eric Gores, who triumphs over his disability with determination, humor and panache.

Highly Recommend

THE KID & I

Q&A After Screening

Stars Tom Arnold and Eric Gores and director Penelope Spheeris too questions. Tom is always quite excitable, energetic and funny and he was no exception after the screening. I asked Tom what was his biggest challenge as a producer on the film and he said he did not have a lot of big challenges because everyone wanted to help out on the film. The subject matter and Eric's extremely positive and optimistic nature could win anyone over. Most of the actors, crew and Penelope in *The Kid & I* worked for either scale or at severely reduced rates. Penelope said that every studio passed on making the film because it was not a big "tentpole" type of blockbuster film. They had to raise private money and make the film with or without Hollywood. Eric Gore was quite good in the film and you wish that *The Kid & I* would get a proper distribution to show millions of folks with disabilities that they can make their dreams come true and be in a great and inspiring film.

LA FABRIK / THE CUBAN HIP-HOP FACTORY

[LAFAB] *Latin Cinema Series*

Cuba, USA, 2005, 64 min, Color, Digibeta
In Spanish, English with English subtitles

DIR: Lisandro Perez-Rey

SCR/DP/ED: Lisandro Perez-Rey

PROD: Pamela Cohn, Cynthia Barrera, Lisandro Perez-Rey

EXEC PROD: Elizabeth Boone

MUS: Obsesion and Doble-Filo



Blasting the screen with red-hot beats, intense musicality and sure-footed confidence, director Lisandro Pérez-Rey has crafted a slamming documentary about the talented hip-hop artists emerging from Cuba's rising cultural vibrancy.

Two of Cuba's leading hip-hop groups, Obsesion and Doble Filo, have formed the collective La Fabri-K in an effort to showcase their art and to raise political consciousness. Live musicianship is central to their art, showcasing a burgeoning hip-hop scene in which traditional percussion, guitar, violin, cello, sax and piano are layered under rhymes. In the documentary, La Fabri-K travels from run-down Cuban apartments to the legendary Apollo Theatre in Harlem to open for the Roots and Kanye West. Creating myth and poetry from music and politics, La Fabri-K hypnotizes the audience with the rhythm's pull. The film demonstrates that hip-hop is a universal language, and the marginalized and oppressed will always find their voice.

Lisandro Pérez-Rey follows the subjects with a seamless flow of kinetic energy—weaving together interviews, performances and day-in-the-life verité footage—creating a vibrant and infectious documentary. With a nod to LIFE AND DEBT, LA FABRI-K /THE CUBAN HIP HOP FACTORY is an evocative and riveting mosaic of Cuba and a group of friends, mentors and musicians.

- Shaz Bennett

Highly Recommend

LA FABRIK-K /THE CUBAN HIP HOP FACTORY

Q&A After Screening

The producer Pamela Cohen did the Q&A and most of the questions in the audience were about whether the Cuban rappers featured in La Fabrik-K were truly free to criticize Fidel Castro. In the film I felt that the filmmakers avoided any serious discussion about living under a dictatorship. The rappers do talk about living in poverty and having shortcomings in Cuba, but I began to wonder if they really went off on Fidel would their underground rap careers be over with in a blink of an eye. The irony is that now that La Fabrik has been made it could allow the rappers to be more critical of the Cuban government because it would much harder to censor them without creating and media uproar around the world. I would like to rate La Fabrik higher, but one of the biggest shortfalls of the film is the lack of interviews with the Cuban or American audience at the concerts of Obsesion and Doble Filo. The film's audiences should not have guess what the real audiences at the La Frabrik's concerts liked and disliked about the rappers performances and there place as being pioneers and leaders of the important and influential Cuban hip-hop movement.

THE MOST BEAUTIFUL OF MY VERY BEST YEARS

Lo más bonito y mis mejores años
[MOSTB] *Latin Cinema Series*

Bolivia, 2005, 93 min, 35mm
In Spanish with English subtitles
World Premiere

DIR: Martin Boulocq

SCR/DP: Martin Boulocq

PROD: Ara Katz, Sam Englehardt, Alva Balderrama, Kevin Ragsdale, Ryan Johnson

ED: Guillermina Zabla

PROD DES: Alba Balderrama

MUS: Diego Boulocq and Rich Ragsdale

CAST: Juan-Pablo Milan, Roberto Guilhon, Alejandra Lanza, Alicia Saavedra



THE MOST BEAUTIFUL OF MY VERY BEST YEARS is a thoughtful, evocative portrayal of friendship, love, longing and the static nature of life sometimes. Combining the powers of observance and understatement, director Martin Boulocq is able to render an emotional tale of three friends who struggle to find meaning in their lives.

Berto is an introverted and lonely young man living in a small city in Bolivia. In order to buy a ticket out of the country, Berto tries to sell his most prized possession—a '65 Volkswagen he inherited from his grandfather. He spends his days cruising around the city with his know-it-all best friend, Victor, thinking up new ways to sell the car until Camila, Victor's girlfriend, joins them, shaking up the monotony of their lives. The film is an urban Bolivian fable, a visually moving story that has at its center a love square—two men, a woman and their car.

Skillfully told by Boulocq, with a cleverly fractured story structure contrasting the static lives of the three friends, the film is energized by the spirit of its creators and the potency of its storytelling. This is independent filmmaking in its truest form.

- *Shaz Bennett*

Do Not Recommend

THE MOST BEAUTIFUL OF MY VERY BEST YEARS

Q&A After Screening

I have nothing really great or good to say about this Bolivian film. The director Martin Boulocq said proudly that he did not let his actors rehearse their scenes or memorize the script until they showed up to shoot scenes.

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Martin's rational was that his actors would be more natural and honest with their emotions and reactions. The film's main actors were at the Q&A and they said also they drew from personal experiences and their friend's lives to improve their roles. I thought this was a huge mistake because the actors were good, but not that good they could wing it for 90 minutes without real direction. Some scenes dragged on to long. Some cut off for no reason. And some just made no sense at all. And the camera work was so shaky and out of focus *The Most Beautiful* should be renamed the Bolivian *Blair Witch*. Filmmakers have to understand that making a film look like watching real life is sometimes much harder to accomplish than if one is trying to show a made-up fantasy world. Bad camera shots, rushed acting and no sense of direction is what I expect from a first time high school director. But this the AFI Film Festival and Martin should've known his game has to be tighter when he entered you enter a first class festival—and have Hollywood

ROSARIO TIJERAS

[ROSAR] *Latin Cinema Series*

Colombia, Mexico, 2005, 120 min, Color, 35mm

In Spanish with English subtitles

North American Premiere

DIR: Emilio Maille

SCR: Marcelo Figueras, based on the novel by Jorge Franco Ramos

PROD: Matthias Ehrenberg, Gustavo Angel, Antonio Perez

DP: Pascal Marti

ED: Irene Blecua

PROD DES: Salvador Parra

MUS: Roque Banos, Juanes

CAST: Flora Martinez, Manolo Cardona, Unax Ugalde, Rodrigo Oviedo, Alonso Arias



They say she kisses her victims right before killing them. They say she has killed more than 200 people. She is the queen of all assassins. This is the legend of the woman known as Rosario Tijeras, the sexy and brutal killer for the Columbian drug cartels.

Antonio and Emilio live in a world of pounding music and copious amounts of cocaine. When the two friends both fall for Rosario, it sets them down a path that will be strewn with bodies in their wake. All the while, Rosario is struggling to maintain her identity—she is a tool of the cartels, not the property of them.

Eventually, the fast world of drugs and murder for hire will spin out of control for these three, and only then will they realize what is truly important and what has forever been lost. Like Rosario says, it is always harder to love someone than to kill them.

- Lane Kneedler

Rosario Tijeras

Highly Recommend

ROSARIO TIJERAS

Q&A After Screening

I truly loved Rosario Tijeras because it was basically Kill Bill meets City of God. Flora Martinez is one of those rare new actresses that you can actually see her career blowing up as you watch the film. I mean Flora managed to capture the pain and pathos of a woman that survived a harsh and painful childhood to become a sexy, smart and seductive cold-blooded killer. Rosario Tijeras never tries to justify Rosario's actions as a killer, but more or show that she accepts her fate as an angel of death. The consequence of her actions only become real to Rosario when her brother is killed in a botched hit. At the Q&A Flora and the director Emilo Maille were there. Emilo talks about how he translated the essence of the Rosario Tijeras novel into his brilliant film. The book has been translated into nine languages and has come to represent an international escapist fantasy for many women who have survived traumatic physical and emotional abuse. Flora also added she really identified with playing Rosario. After the screening we were talking and I described a role of in a film that she might be good for the lead. Flora asked me why she had to play the bad girl in the film. She could play the good girl in the film, but after seeing her powerful performance in *Rosario Tijeras* she is going the first choice for many bad girls as well as the good girl parts in Hollywood for years and years.

SHORTS PROGRAM TWO

[SHTWO]

Intl. Shorts Competition



Program Running Time is 89 min

11:59

DIR: Johan Kramer

Netherlands , 2005 , 10 min

11:59 brings to life nine nervous minutes in the life of Khalid, a young Dutch-Moroccan man living in Amsterdam, who makes a decision at 11:50 a.m. one day to go back to school one more time for an encounter that will change his life forever. The film is inspired by all the recent negative media-attention for young Arabic people in the Dutch, European and US media.

CLARA

DIR: Van Sowerwine

Australia , 2005 , 7 min

A beautiful and haunting portrait of a little girl alone. This film uses meticulous stop motion animation to create an eerie and otherworldly scenario.

CLOSING TIME

DIR: Chris Brandt

USA , 2005 , 4 min

A surreal fast-food robbery goes awry. Burgers, tigers, and guns. Oh my!

GREEN BUSH

DIR: Warwick Thornton

Australia , 2005 , 26 min

Over one heartbreaking but empowering night, radio DJ Kenny realizes that his job at an Aboriginal community radio station is about more than just playing music.

LEAGUE OF LEGENDS

DIR: Jeffrey Elmont

Netherlands , 2005 , 12 min

The world's best soccer players had to start at the bottom. The competition to rise to the top is sometimes as dramatic as a gangland standoff.

THE MCCOMBIE WAY

DIR: Nick Higgins,

Kristina Higgins

USA , 2005 , 7 min

She's 81, gardens 15 acres, built the road to her house and clears the Mojave Desert one rusty tin can at a time. From the middle of the Mojave Desert, a gentle reminder about making the most of your time on the planet.

MEMORY OF THE SEA

DIR: Max Zunino

Mexico , 2005 , 4 min

As a young boy's eyes take in the ocean for the very first time, the rest of the world seemingly falls away.

RISE UP

DIR: Jason Gileno

Canada , 2005 , 9 min

A woman attempts to revive her comatose husband by taking him back to the cabaret—the place where they first met.

UNITED NATIONS OF HIP HOP

DIR: Christina Choe

Senegal , 2005 , 10 min

Jay-Z posters adorn bedroom walls, youth sport Adidas, MCs battle on street corners in Senegal, West Africa where MC's talk about African debt dependency, Islam, and poverty over powerful beats. Explore the far reaches of hip hop, capitalism and the global economy.

Highly Recommend

SHORTS PROGRAM TWO

Q&A After Screening

The Shorts Program Two directors, who showed up for Q&A at this session, were from *Closing Time*, *League Of Legends*, *The McCombie Way*, *Rise Up* and *United Nations of Hip-Hop*. The director of *United Nations*, Christina Choe, said that Senegal has around 3,000 hip-hop groups and there are not many ways for the rappers to find success. There were two Senegal rappers featured in Christina's film who were fortunate to tour France with Youssou Ndour. But overall the Senegal rap scene is chaotic and unfocused. There is a great need for a US label to come down and help establish some recording studios and collaborations with US hip-hop stars. This would elevate the profiles of Senegal rappers whom would hopefully not have to change their proud and positive African and Muslim lyrics and afro-centric beats.

The other shorts I thought really stood out from the pack were *11:59*, which puts a new twist on the fears of Arab militant terrorists. *Closing Time*, who had a final scene that was not predicted and highly funny. *League Of Legends*, which is a must see for soccer fans. And *Rise Up* had an extremely entertaining musical performance by the film's lead actress Lyne Tremblay.

SPL

[SPLXX] *Asian New Classics*

China, Hong Kong, 2005, 100 min, Color, 35mm

In Cantonese with English subtitles

US Premiere

DIR: Wilson Yip

ACTION DIR: Donnie Yen

SCR: Szeto Kam Yuen, Ng Wai Lun

EXEC PROD: Chan Tat Chee

PROD: Carl Chang

DP: Lam Wah Chuen

MUS: Chan Kwong Wing, Ken Chan

CAST: Donnie Yen, Sammo Hung, Simon Yam, Jing Wu



International action stars Donnie Yen and Sammo Hung have come together to make one of the most visually intense and psychologically tricky police thrillers to come along in recent years. In *SPL*, themes of vengeance and justice play out over a sumptuous backdrop of neon lights and urban sprawl in a story told with unusual style and flair.

Yam plays a detective who is trying to capture the enigmatic crime boss Po, played by Hung. Eventually it's time to hand the case over to a younger replacement, but as undercover police officers turn up dead, tensions rise and soon old grudges demand to be resolved. Action fans will be amazed when they see Yen and Hung's first ever onscreen fight. It's as if they have waited for a project as visually striking and thematically appropriate as this for them to team up on. What superficially sounds like another film about two police officers in pursuit of a vicious killer, quickly reveals itself to be something much more fantastic.

- Lane Kneedler

Highly Recommend

SPL

No Q&A After Screening

I loved this film flat out. It was the perfect blend of Hong Kong action and kung fu with the Western sensibility of a urban detective film like *Narc*. Sammo Hung gives an excellent performance as a Hong Kong crime lord. Even *SPL*'s film score was non-Asian in a sense and had a big budget Hollywood flair. This was a huge shock seeing Sammo play bad and also playing bad so damn well. Since Sammo survives at the end of *SPL*, I sincerely hope there are a *SPL 2* and *SPL 3*.

SUMMER IN BERLIN

[SUMME] *Made In Germany*

Germany, 2005, 105 min, 35mm
In German with English subtitles

DIR: Andreas Dresen

SCR: Wolfgang Kohlhaase

EXEC PROD: Jutta Frech

PROD: Peter Rommel

DP: Andreas Höfer

ED: Jörg Hauschild

PROD DES: Susanne Hopf

MUS: Pascal Comelade

CAST: Nadja Uhl, Inka Friedrich, Andreas Schmidt, Stefanie Schönfeld, Vincent Redetzki



There is an artistry to the narrative vision of Andreas Dresen's (GRILL POINT, NIGHT SHAPES) films that enables him to infuse his simple morality tales with a breadth of sensibility and understanding turning them into something so much more.

SUMMER IN BERLIN captures a short period in the lives of two women, best friends living in contemporary Berlin. Nike is in a doomed relationship with a trucker, and Katrin is suffering a breakdown after a thwarted rape. But it's Katrin's adolescent son Max who acts as both the glue between them and the narrative's driving force: his failed seduction of a school friend sets in motion this moment for both the women. With a keen eye and incredible love for his characters, director Andreas Dresen has crafted the story of two girlfriends, who, from their balcony—overlook their turbulent world, where the right men are all too often exactly wrong.

Fueled by an outstanding ensemble cast and screenwriter Wolfgang Kohlhaase's light touch to tell a deep story, SUMMER IN BERLIN is a film of immense richness, it's everything we've come to expect from a Dresen film about life.

- *Shaz Bennett*

Lightly Recommend

SUMMER IN BERLIN

No Q&A After Screening

This was an average female bonding European film, but I liked it anyway. Another example of how one can watch these non-Western films and have no idea where the story is going. What happens is what happens with no expectation of a big build up and pay off in the end for an audience. Its almost like Americans have to rewire our brains to accept the non-linear and non-TV predictable plots that are the staple of so many foreign films like *Summer In Berlin*.

THROUGH THE FIRE

[THROU] *Int'l Doc Competition*

USA, 2005, 103 min, Color, Digi Beta
(In English)

DIR: Jonathan Hock,
Alastair Christopher

CO PROD: Philip Aromando

EXEC PROD: Diane Houslin

DP: Alastair Christopher

ED: Steven Pilgrim, Sam Citron

CAST: FEATURING Sebastian Telfair, Daniel Turner, Jamel Thomas, Dwayne Tiny Morton, Rick Pitino



A basketball journey that rivals the heart of the fictional film 8 MILE, **THROUGH THE FIRE** follows the most publicized high school athlete to come out of New York City's public schools in recent memory—Sebastian Telfair.

Eighteen years of living in the projects of Coney Island has taken its toll on Sebastian and his family. With brother Jamel passed over by the NBA and two men gunned down in the hall outside his family's apartment, the weight of his family is on his shoulders. As Sebastian navigates the waters between college scholarships, the NBA draft and his all-important next step, the 6', 160 pounder powers through his senior year amidst city championships, media speculation, sneaker deals and the cover of Sports Illustrated.

With riveting basketball footage and deeply personal interviews, **THROUGH THE FIRE** follows the smiling, charismatic rising star as he proves to himself and the rest of the world that dreams can come true and he's got what it takes to make it happen.

- *Natalie McMenemy*

Highly Recommend

THROUGH THE FIRE

Q&A After Screening

This is a well made commercial documentary that clearly documents the rise of a teenage basketball star. The filmmakers could not have chosen a more likeable kid than Sebastian Telfair. He has a great smile and upbeat personality that is fused with an intense competitive desire. You could see in Sebastian's eyes a fierceness of a champion and primetime player. But taking all those compliments aside I found the story of Sebastian's senior year incomplete when one realizes that the filmmakers spent hardly anytime showing Sebastian's academic progress during that same time. I asked Jonathan Hack this same point during the Q&A. Jonathan said the New York school board limited him filming on inside Sebastian's high school. But when they needed to show Sebastian's principal showing his teammates the blown up Sports Illustrated cover with Sebastian they had no problem shooting in the school. I even followed up and asked Jonathan did he risk spoiling the greatness of Through The Fire by not even posing the question to Sebastian about any career goals--if god forbid--he could not play basketball. Jonathan said he did not ask Sebastian that question because it was to Sebastian an unthinkable scenario that he would not play in the NBA. Or at worst play professionally overseas. Jonathan casually said that Sebastian was a "B" student, but that fact needs to be in the film.

Many impressionable urban kids who will look up to Sebastian after seeing this film deserve a few scenes showing him doing homework, reading a book, or studying for a test. Jonathan said he did not have time to put those scenes in his film. But I know if they had plenty of time to show Adidas giving Sebastian a \$10 million shoe deal in high school, then they had thirty seconds to show Sebastian studying for school. No matter what Jonathan said the focus of his film initially was about the whether the Sebastian's whole team could win the NYC City high school championship three years in a row. This had never been done before even with a city that seems to create a national basketball star every year. The filmmakers quickly turned their attention and Through The Fire into "Will Sebastian Telfair Go Pro" show. A smart decision for the Through The Fire filmmakers even though nothing in the film shows young impressionable kids that they can be smart and be a great basketball player.

TSOTSI

[TSOTI] *Int'l Feature Competition*

South Africa, UK, 2005, 96 min, Color, 35mm

In Tsotsitaal with English subtitles

US Premiere

DIR: Gavin Hood

SCR: Gavin Hood Based on the novel by Athol Fugard

PROD: Peter Fudakowski

CO PROD: Paul Raleigh

EXEC PROD: Sam Behmbe, Robbie Little, Doug Mankoff, Basil Ford, Joseph D'Morais, Alan Howden, Rupert Lywood

DP: Lance Gewer

ED: Megan Gill

PROD DES: Emelia Weavind

MUS: Mark Kilian, Paul Hepker

CAST: Presley Chweneyagae, Terry Pheto, Kenneth Nkosi, Mothusi Magano, Zenzo Ngqobe, Zola



Winner of the People's Choice Award at the 2005 Toronto International Film Festival, TSOTSI is based on the novel by renowned South African playwright Athol Fugard, tracing six days in the violent life of a young thug in the Johannesburg ghettos.

The name and nature of the main character is Tsotsi, which means "thug" in the street language of South Africa's townships. One evening, after a bloody bar fight, Tsotsi (Presley Chweneyagae) carjacks a woman in a BMW. He hears a noise from the backseat causing him to careen off the side of the road. He turns to find a baby, and abandons the vehicle and its cargo. But, for some reason, he stops and is compelled to go back and take the baby home with him. With no skills to take care of the child, Tsotsi forces a young mother (Terry Pheto) at gunpoint into caring for "his" baby.

As Tsotsi, Chweneyagae captures beautifully this brutal battle with his own nature and the luminescent Pheto forces him to reexamine his very core. Director Gavin Hood is firmly at the helm of this relentlessly exacting film that unfolds with sharp insight and dramatic flair. South Africa's Oscar nomination for Best Foreign Language Film. Director Hood is definitely someone to watch.

- *Shaz Bennett*

Highly Recommend

TSOTSI

Q&A After Screening

Tsotsi is an outstanding film that without a doubt in my mind was the best film I saw at the 2005 AFI Film Festival. I believe this was the best film because the film never lets the viewer relax and guess what was going to happen scene-to-scene. The film's director Garvin Hood, was on hand for the Q&A. Garvin talked mostly about the challenges of adapting Athol Fugard's novel of 1950 Apartheid South Africa into a film about modern post Apartheid South Africa. Garvin said his male lead Tsotsi, Presley Chweneyagae and his female lead, Miriam, Terry Pheto actually grew up in the same type of gritty, poverty stricken townships that are depicted in Tsotsi. Both Presly and Terry managed to have parents that got them into a township performing arts program. That decision for Presly and Terry to enter the arts turned out well because both are promising actors with bright futures.

ZOZO

[ZOZOX] *European Film Showcase*

Sweden, 2005, 103 min, Color, 35mm
In Arabic, Swedish with English subtitles
US Premiere

DIR: Josef Fares

SCR: Josef Fares

PROD: Anna Anthony

EXEC PROD: Lars Jönsson

DP: Aril Wretblad

ED: Michal Leszczykowski, Kristin Grundström

PROD DES: Anna Asp

MUS: Adam Nordén

CAST: Imad Creidi, Antoinette Turk, Elias Gergi, Carmen Lebbos, Viktor Axelsson



Director Josef Fares (JALLA JALLA, KOPS) is an innovative storyteller with an extraordinary sense of humor and visual flare. His new film ZOZO is more dramatic and emotionally charged, yet still steeped in Fares' unique style.

Zozo is a young boy growing up in Beirut. In spite of the Lebanese civil war outside his door, he leads a normal life with family, friends and school. But one day tragedy strikes, and Zozo is left orphaned. He sets off to the only other place he knows—Sweden—where his grandparents immigrated years before. Not entirely autobiographical, ZOZO is obviously a very personal film for Fares, as he was also born in Beirut and immigrated to Sweden as a child. The shooting of ZOZO marked his first return to Lebanon in 17 years, and many scenes were shot in his family's former apartment, which is now abandoned.

The captivating young lead, Imad Creidi, gives a rich performance with layers of emotional range rarely seen in such a young man. ZOZO artfully combines the surreal, the comic, the poignant and the tragic, creating a potent film about war and growing up, brilliantly executed by Fares. ZOZO is Sweden's official Oscar submission.

- Shaz Bennett

Highly Recommend

ZOZO

Q&A After Screening

Oh, I have to say that no matter how good Zozo was played by first time actor Imad Creidi, I was totally captivated by Elias Gergi, who played the grandfather of Zozo. I cannot imagine seeing a more livelier film character. He stole the film plain and simple and if he had not been there Zozo would still be an exceptional foreign film, but his magnetic and boisterous presence makes a tragic story of a boy losing his parents and growing up in a strange country highly enjoyable. Zozo's laid back and soft-spoken director Josef Fares told the audience that he modeled Zozo's grandfather after his own Lebanese grandfather. And the stunner was that Elias was not an actor, but just a real person living in Sweden. There is no possible way anyone watching Zozo would say he was not a veteran actor.

Furthermore, the lead of Zozo played brilliantly by Imad Creidi. Josef said he looked at many Lebanese kids in Sweden, but they were not authentic enough in their mannerisms and dialogue. Joseph went to Lebanon and found Imad on the streets and the kid was so naturally gifted that he learned Swedish in less than ten days. I put Zozo as a definite must see with a new wave of highly well made, well acted and beautifully shot Middle East dramas like Eran Riklis's *Syrian Bride* and Raphael Nadjari *Avanim*.