

# Review Special

## Edinburgh International Film Festival 2007



### Note from the editor

This August BFFS Scotland were delighted to be able to send three reviewers, all keen film fans, along to the Edinburgh International Film Festival 2007 to scope out the very best of the next 12+ months of films

for you. Now we're on a mission to bring you the very best selections which we hope might fit into your next programme. To whet your appetite we've put a taster of our reviewers together for this supplement but longer form pieces and reviews of the films that were not quite as fabulous are all on the BFFS Scotland Website. We also hope to add more features, reviews from YOU and a distributor contact list to the BFFS Scotland Wiki very soon. If you'd be interested in contributing - or reviewing EIFF 2008 for us - I would be delighted to hear from you. Email: [info@bffsscotland.co.uk](mailto:info@bffsscotland.co.uk), join the BFFS Scotland Facebook Group or start posting to the BFFS Scotland Wiki.

- Nicola Osborne, Editor [bffsscotland.co.uk](http://bffsscotland.co.uk)

### In the Shadow of the Moon

*David Singleton / UK / 2006 / 100 mins*

When John F. Kennedy challenged America to send a man across the vast, empty void between Earth and the Moon, to land him on the surface and return him safely home, he set the stage for what remains the most ambitious venture ever undertaken by the human race. Books are full of political motivations, technology, speeches, photographs and conspiracy theories but rarely, if ever, do we hear from the men who actually went there.

In The Shadow Of The Moon tells the story of America's Apollo programme through recent interviews with the astronauts and rich archive footage. It begins with their origin as air force test pilots and their contributions to the design of the lunar craft. The narrative inexorably leads to the immense Saturn V rocket, fuelled and standing ready on a lonely launch pad, and three guys in white suits approaching in a van. The astronauts themselves are shot in an uncompromising close-up which reveals every expressive detail. Neil Armstrong is notable by his absence, and this may actually be what elevates the documentary to the highest level; his "small step for man" is de-emphasized and a wealth of experiences recounted instead. Most compelling are the feelings of the astronauts, the physical and emotional sensations: the overpowering vibration of launch, confrontation with an unwelcoming lunar surface, the awareness that certain death lay outside the spacecraft windows. Left to orbit the Moon alone while Armstrong and Aldrin made the landing, Mike Collins (Apollo 11) speaks of his exultation on being out of radio contact on the far side, further away from Earth than any human being had ever been.

The musical score is stirring without becoming sentimental. Even to a generation raised on Moon documentaries, the footage is vivid and fresh on the big screen. In The Shadow Of The Moon leaves us with a distinct sense of awe at the achievement of the astronauts. They leave us with a gift from the Moon's dusty, airless surface: a new appreciation for life on Earth.

- Al Chambers

### Control

*Anton Corbijn / UK (England) / 2006 / 122 min*

Already thoroughly lauded Anton Corbijn's feature debut is an astonishing film led by an intense performance from Sam Ripley who has clearly studied, in some detail, Ian Curtis' physical and emotional bearing but evokes



rather than mimics this icon of outsider chic. It is undeniably difficult to make a good biopic, particularly of a notoriously enigmatic man whose short life has been so romanticised since his death. Control is a superb if imperfect attempt to make a man of the legend and to put some of the realities of pop stardom on record.

- Nicola Osborne

### Top 5 Documentaries

#### 1. We Are Together

Uplifting tale of South African Aids orphans who have formed a choir.

#### 2. In the Shadow of the Moon

Spacemen send shivers down your spine - see review, left.

#### 3. What Would Jesus Buy?

Reverend Billy's passionate call to convert consumers to sanity.

#### 4. I Want To Tell You Something

Inspiring and brutally honest account of a young boy's deafness and how his family cope.

#### 5. Traders' Dreams

Everything you ever wanted to know about selling on eBay!

# Run Granny Run

Marlo Poras / USA / 2007 / 77 min

At the age of 89, newly widowed Doris “Granny D” Haddock was concerned about the financing of election campaigns in the United States, and in particular, the use of unregulated, “soft money” from special interest groups. Most octogenarians would have composed a stiffly worded letter to a local newspaper, or simply complained to their cronies over the click of knitting needles. Not Granny D. She embarked on a fourteen-month, 3200-mile walk across the nation, making speeches along the way. As she approached Washington, D.C. an unprecedented snowfall made roadside walking impossible. Granny D did the last hundred miles on skis.

One might have expected this to satisfy her. But when nobody would run against Republican Judd Gregg for the US Senate, Granny D got right up there and aged 94, became the official Democratic candidate in the key state of New Hampshire. This documentary follows an extraordinary and inspiring election campaign. “The professional politicians have just not worked out. We thank them for trying their best under the constraints of a corrupt system ... You want something done right today, you have to run for Congress yourself ... or at least send your grandmother.”

Packed full of insight into the US electoral system and a perfect tonic to any feeling of being ‘past it’, Run Granny Run is a joy to watch. In the words of Granny D: “Democracy is not something we have, but something we do.” Go, Granny, go.

- Al Chambers



## Breach

Billy Ray / USA / 2006 / 110 min

“Tell me five things about yourself ... four of them true.”

Eric O’Neill (Ryan Phillippe) is a rookie trying to make agent and assigned as a clerk to Robert Hanssen (Chris Cooper), the brilliant former head of the Soviet analytical unit and the best computer guy the Bureau has. Unwilling to play the Bureau’s political games Hanssen believes atheism caused the fall of the Soviet Union, loves his grandchildren, and disapproves of women in trouser suits. O’Neill is undercover investigating Hanssen for sexual misconduct but as his respect for new boss increases, so do his suspicions about the mission he’s engaged on. Based on a true story, Breach is a brisk espionage movie in the classic tradition. Cooper is compelling and Laura Linney provides convincing support in the form of O’Neill’s need-to-know controller. The psychology of bureau personnel is the heart of the film: Hanssen’s motivations are the primary question, but O’Neill is also forced to reevaluate his reasons for wanting to make agent. As he visits Linney’s character at home, to ask whether the investigation is worth disrupting his family, he finds her doing laundry alone. “I’d offer you advice,” she says, “but I don’t even have a cat.”

- Al Chambers



## Weirdsville

Allan Moyle / Canada / 2007 / 90 min

When Allan Moyle directed Pump Up the Volume and Empire Records he captured a teenage world so perfectly that both films have been cult and film society favourite ever since. He may now be a good few years older but his perception for young quirky subject matter has, thankfully, matured with him. In his latest film, Weirdsville, we follow Royce (Wes Bentley) and Dexter (Scott Speedman) whose smalltime slacker life of drugs and timewasting accidentally lands them on an all night mission to deal with a dead body, the local drug dealer, satanists and angry dwarfs.

If this sounds like a teen comedy then you’re not too far wrong but there’s an added element that notches Weirdsville so far above American Pie, Spun and the like: it’s Canadian. Which is to say that even the hookers have good winter coats, the satanists are preppy young yuppies, the slackers are still well educated and the tiny town is so boring you know exactly why you might want to be in one of the many weird little dysfunctional cliques we meet in this pacey and very enjoyable romp.

Bentley and Speedman are genuinely interesting leads and handle the Buffy-esque script with just the right balance of only slightly surprised credulity. Perhaps this is not the film for a Rotary Club event then but it is a great fun return to form for Moyle and most certainly cult viewing in the making.

- Nicola Osborne





## Phantom Love

*Nina Menkes / USA / 2007/ 87 mins*

The opening scenes of mechanical lovemaking go on longer than is necessary. Shot close on Lulu's distracted face, the casual viewer could be forgiven for expecting a story of one woman's search for passion. But this is not that story. Or is it? Phantom Love is a rich, brooding experience, with fantastical black and white visuals. Lulu finds an immense jewel in the street. She crosses a river in a spectacular Himalayan town. Each time, we return to dull scenes from her everyday life as a roulette croupier. The enigmatic visuals leave room for a rich soundscape: lingering traffic, ringing phones, twittering birds, arguing neighbours, and distant saxophone scales played at leisure while an abandoned baby gurgles happily in an alleyway. Sumptuous and disturbing in equal measure, Phantom Love is a film for those who like to search for their own meanings in pictures.

- Al Chambers



## Made In Scotland

Every year EIFF showcases some of the best new Scottish films, highlights this year included documentary A Massacre Foretold, experimental feature My Life As Bus Stop and both films reviewed below.

## Hallam Foe

*David Mackenzie / UK (Scotland) / 2007 / 95 min*

Mackenzie's fourth feature is a wonderfully thoughtful film exploring the creeping insanity of living in an extreme state of paranoia and disconnection. Jamie Bell is extraordinary as Hallam making an essentially likable character out of a depressed, distant, increasingly feral part-time stalker. That Bell combines all elements into an essentially likable character is a huge achievement. This very enjoyable, unsettling and intelligent take on grief, voyeurism and truth makes Hallam Foe a refreshing and gratifyingly original treat.

- Nicola Osborne



## Blame it on Fidel (La Faute à Fidel)

*Julie Gavras / France / 2006 / 99 min*

In 1970's Paris Anna is having the kind of comfortable childhood that any sane bourgeoisie child would dream of. Surrounded by beautiful things in a rambling house in the

nicest of suburbs with a traditional nanny and gorgeously attired professional parents. So it's not surprising that Anna is thoroughly appalled when her parents become leftist radicals and turn her life upside down. This incredibly well-acted and politically informed debut feature from Julie Gavras manages to remain enjoyable whilst intelligently taking apart the learned ritual of the class system. Nina Kerval is absolutely stunning as Anna, her delicious stubbornness raising questions of her parents and exposing the contractions of their choices. Subtly constructed, beautifully acted and strikingly shot this is a disarmingly enjoyable and enlightening cinematic experience.

- Nicola Osborne



## Les Chansons d'Amour

*Christophe Honoré / France / 2007 / 95 min*

Julie (Ludivine Sagnier) and Ismael (Louis Garrel) are a loving couple but after years together their love life is starting to get a little dull. To spice things up a bit they enrol Alice (Clotilde Hesme) into their bed. Such things are never simple and, as tensions begin to show, a tragedy leaves Ismael struggling to cope with life. The cast boast both superb acting and musical abilities so that, particularly impressively given it's unusual structure and musical format, the performances are thoroughly naturalistic and believable. It wouldn't be appropriate to give any more of the plot away but this excellent three act musical does run the full range of love, lust, loss, depression, happiness, guilt and family and whilst there is slightly more varied sexual adventure than your average love story Les Chansons d'Amour never aims to shock or judge.

- Nicola Osborne



## Seachd: the Inaccessible Pinnacle

*Simon Miller / UK (Scotland) / 2007 / 90 min*

This first imaginative feature-length Gaelic cinema records the culture and quirkiness of traditional Scottish life and folk legend as it follows the relationship between troubled orphan Angus (Còlla Dòmhnallach) and his folk story obsessed grandfather. This enjoyable and quietly sentimental film is led by strong acting and fantastically fun legend sequences and is well worth a look.

- Nicola Osborne

# Anita Loos Retrospective

This year the film festival decided to dedicate its retrospective to Anita Loos, best known as the writer of the best selling book on which the fabulous 1950's version of *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* was based. Whilst that book allowed Loos to live a well healed life it was only a small - albeit iconic - part of her contribution to cinema. At the beginning of her Hollywood career Loos worked on D.W. Griffiths films as an intertittler before the main body of her cinema work in the late 1920's and 1930's writing sassy scripts for the likes of Jean Harlow, Joan Crawford and Clark Gable. There was thus a wealth of fantastic films to include in this retrospective which showed Loos development along with the evolution of early cinema.

Loos is often credited, because of the cynicism of Dorothy and Lorelei in *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (the film is, if anything, substantially less cynical than its source material), as a feminist writer and it was therefore fascinating to see that whilst Loos certainly had a fantastic talent for writing complex, intelligent and very witty roles for women it is impossible to class her as a feminist in the modern sense as her characters exist in their own time. As the retrospective's resident expert Cari Beauchamp reenforced the point in her introduction to *Susan and God* in saying that "Loos wasn't ahead of her time. No-one is ahead of their time, they are always of their time". *Susan and God* certainly reflects this as it is a wonderfully strange blend of cynical parody and impossibly hopeful romance. Joan Crawford, cold-hearted uber bitch of her chattering class friends, finds god in a toe curlingly enthusiastic way. However her attempts to judge her friends seem empty when her own husband is a frustrated alcoholic in need of support rather than judgement. As this fabulously cynical drawing room comic drama unfolds however we find that ideas about marriage and romance must all be tied up in unsettlingly conventional ways. This same strange mix of tones appears in one of the most famous films of this era and another of Loos's scriptwriting triumphs, *The Women*.

Such moralising is found in a much more intriguing way in Loos' writing for Jean Harlow. In an era of the Hays Production Code and prohibitive censorship Loos created a fantastic array of bad-girl-makes-good movies for Harlow. The genius in them is the pure enjoyment of Harlow's trashily sexy allure and, despite awesome acting from Harlow, the total unlikelihood that she has actually totally reformed by the end of the movie. This is an enormously strong branch of Loos' work as the sparring of Harlow with her male co-stars (very often Clark Gable) is utterly delicious and the soap opera nature of Harlow's inevitable comuppence hits all the right emotional notes. The best of these is surely *Hold Your Man* where Gable and Harlow's romance mixes just the right level of believability and it's seedy origins are revealed as Harlow finds, midway through a prison spell, that she's pregnant with the apparently long since gone Gable. A film with real heart and a real zing it stands out amongst the strong Loos/Harlow canon.

The silent films in the season offered quite a unique change of pace. Silent movies clearly require just as much attention from their script writers but more in scene, inter-titling and subtle elements of characterisation rather than witty banter. Loos' work on *Intolerance* certainly helped to adhere the four independent strands of D W Griffiths sprawling morality tale but it was the exceptional photography and beautifully nuanced acting - as well as Forrester Pike's live accompaniment - made the film the highlight of this excellent retrospective. - *Nicola Osborne*



## Best of the Rest of the Fest...

We loved the lauding of international projectionists in **Comrades in Dreams**; marvelled at the eco-credentials of **Garbage Warrior**; fantasy epic **Stardust** delighted us; **Ratatouille** tickled our tastebuds; eccentric thriller **Komma** intrigued us; **John Waters: This Filthy World** seduced us with tales of inspiring film societies and lots of behind the camera gossip; **Skills Like This** was the fun marketing sensation of EIFF and **Razzle Dazzle** charmed us with Jazz Hands!

**Hot Enough for June...** You may have heard that big changes are afoot at the Edinburgh International Film Festival which next year moves to 18th - 29th June 2008. Submissions are already open for films, shorts and music videos and recruitment has also begun in case you fancy a little 24/7 film glitz in your summer...

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