

WISCONSIN FILM FESTIVAL

## Blogging the 2007 Wisconsin Film Festival: Postscript

*Kristian Knutsen on Sunday 05/06/2007 10:05:46,*

With three weeks passed since the final reel ended at the 2007 Wisconsin Film Festival, online coverage of the four day event has as well, with updates, reviews, and wrap-ups all now committed to the ether. In fact, the dates for next year's fest -- its tenth anniversary -- have already been selected. The 2008 Wisconsin Film Festival will run from Thursday, Apr. 3 through Sunday, Apr. 6.

Blogging about this year's festival follows below.

To begin, there are two discussions on TDPF, wherein film-goers share their favorite and not-so-favorite selections from the festival.

There is no shortage of reviews of festival programming. This final set covers screenings from throughout the weekend:

- One of the high points of the fest, as noted by many observers, was the impromptu dance following the screening of *It's Happiness: A Polka Documentary*. John Benninghouse notes the outbreak of singing and dancing (to the "Beer Barrel Polka") in his detailed review of the film about Wisconsin's homegrown music culture. He concludes:

The question is not why do all the happy people on the screen love polka, it's why the number of people like that is so small. The film touches on the issue mainly with comments from Prof. Leary when he describes polka as a form of ethnic identity and how it was booted from the hit parade by rock'n'roll.

The review is accompanied by an audio interview of the film's producer and director, Craig DiBiase.

- If *Cork n' Bottle String Band: The Ken's Bar Story* ever makes its way outside the friendly confines of Madison, begins Benninghouse in his second review of a music-themed festival offering, "the opening mock newsreel showing the band as USOers circa 1942 keeping American wartime spirits high will serve as a good introduction to folks unfamiliar with Madison's original slapstick bluegrass band." He goes on to detail the documentary's look at the origins, beer-drinking, and rise to the status of a Madison musical institution, complete with accompanying fan base:

There were countless regulars and some of them appear in the movie while even more were in the audience Saturday night. No doubt many viewers either saw themselves or at least someone they knew in the old photos or grainy footage from Ken's. The band members told many a story such as the time some hippies got their dreadlocks stuck on a newly varnished wall or when mandolinist Greg Dierks kicked a particularly annoying fan that was standing a bit too close. But from the occasional gasp or whispered comment it seemed like there were several audience members who had tales of their own to add to the story. They were an integral part of the Ken's experience too, after all.

- The final film Benninghouse reviews is *Radio On*, a revival offering from the U.K. that "wallows in the decaying landscape that birthed that bit of nihilism known as punk rock" and a road movie providing "enough universal ideas and feeling here for everyone to understand the ennui."
- Jeff Kuykendall offers two reviews from the fourth and final day of the festival. The first is *Made in USA*, which he describes as "a film that's bound to win over more admiration than outright love, if only because it intentionally distances the viewers from its characters." The other is *Red Road*, a thriller set amidst the panopticon of British CCTV. "I can only see so many of the films at the festival," concludes Kuykendall, "but I'd imagine this is one of the best, building Hitchcockian suspense without ever breaking its gritty realism or modest moments of humanity."
- A wealth of final festival coverage from Dane101 begins with a review of *The Spirit of the Beehive* by Sean Weitner, wherein he asks how much the early '70s Spanish film is a precursor to *Pan's Labyrinth*. Somewhat is his answer. "The Spain depicted is barren and impoverished, but the story doesn't reference Franco and the war except obliquely; this only enhances the movie's universality as a tale of a child learning what the world can be like," Weitner concludes.
- Dane101 editor Jesse Russell provides more than two handfuls of online commercials seen in a screening featuring winners of the *British Television Advertising Awards*. "Sure I could point out the ones that I felt were successful and the ones that I felt fell a little flat, but would it matter?" Watch for yourself.
- Jason Dean Zidane: A 21st Century Portrait at Dane101, writing: "One might think that a 90-minute soccer match focusing on one player might become boring, but the constant camera changes and music keep the viewer interested."
- "I'm happy to say that *Linda, Linda, Linda* is exactly what I thought it would be," writes Adam Schabow in his review of the Japanese film on Dane 101. "It's just a simple story about four girls who have a dream to play pop music for their high school talent show."

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- Schabow also provides his [thoughts](#) on three other screenings on the final day of the festival, namely *short.times.ten*, *Something Like Happiness*, and *The Life of Reilly*.
- Erik Weiss offers a [few comments](#) on *Poison Friends*, this French drama the penultimate screening of the festival in the main Orpheum theater.
- "I cried until I couldn't cry, and then I cried some more," notes John Wiedenhoef in his review of *The Cats of Mirikitani* for the *State Journal*.
- Another blogger for Capital Newspapers, Brendan McCauley, [reviews](#) two films seen over the course of the festival. He focuses on the post-screening question-and-answer session following *All the Days Before Tomorrow*, through which director Francois Dompierre "spoke about the difficulties of selling an independent film without a star and his struggle to get the film made." The other film, *The Boss of it All*, described by McCauley as "hilarious."
- One festivalgoer [describes](#) *Gypsy Caravan* as a film that "that left me with tears in my eyes, and a gypsy beat in my heart."
- Another [notes](#) several festival selections seen over the course of the weekend, but focuses upon the Hurricane Katrina documentary *Tim's Island*. "New Orleans is a city I love but don't know well enough; I had certainly never spent much time in parts of the city that weren't the French Quarter," she writes. "So it was eerie to realize, very early in the film, that yes, these were streets I had walked before."
- The final four [reviews](#) are provided by a self-described "film dork" who briefly describes *Chalk*, *Ten Canoes*, *Wristcutters: A Love Story*, and *Poison Friends*.

Through the week following the end of the festival, several attendees offered recaps, further film-viewing options, and other reflections on the four-day event, one that was roundly hailed as a success by attendees and organizers. These comments conclude the blogging about this year's fest:

- "We're very pleased about a [write-up in IndieWire](#), the daily report on all things related to film festivals and independent cinema," writes Wisconsin Film Festival director Meg Hamel in a post-event summary press release. This summary by Charlie Olsky includes a visitors' look at excitement in the city over the impending opening of Sundance 608, comments on 14 festival screenings, and concludes by noting that "practically every screening is sold out."
- "We know whom to thank," [write](#) Kristin Thompson and David Bordwell in their comments following the festival.

Festival director Meg Hamel, *The Boss of It All*, is pictured at the top, channeling Judy Garland's Palladium sessions. Technical supervisors Erik Gunneson and Jared Lewis are the calm and cheerful gents pictured below. We also owe a lot to Tom Yoshikami, Karin Kolb, Stew Fyfe, and a host of volunteers, as well as to several university agencies, notably the Department of Communication Arts and the International Institute.

- Another festivalgoer who saw seven movies over the course of two days focuses on the atmosphere pervading the event:

Unlike the experience of seeing movies at the local multiplex, where chitchat and cellphone conversations are common among the few audience members who have left the comfortable glow of their home TV screens, the audiences here are passionate about movies. Lines for unsold tickets often stretch far down the block, and volunteers remind viewers to move to the center of the rows to help seat everyone. Audience members are friendly, often asking total strangers what they have already seen ("Did you actually get into *King Corn*? It was sold out...") and what other films they are planning to see.

- What if there were films you missed at the fest, yet still have an interest in seeing? Dane101 provides a [thorough list](#) of upcoming theater and DVD release dates (or current availability) for festival programming, while a Capital Newspapers blogger [notes](#) the two dozen films currently available at Four Star Video Heaven.
- On of the first films to screen at Sundance 608 will be *Air Guitar Nation*, a hilarious documentary about the introduction of competitions featuring the imaginary instrument to the United States. One of the featured competitors is Gordon Hintz, a Democratic assemblyman from Oshkosh, who finished second in the U.S. national championships in 2003. "It's nice to see our elected representatives show a little sense of humor every now and then," writes Christian Schneider in a brief [commentary](#) praising the freshman state rep. "I think we should give people credit for showing a little personality, just to remind us that they're real people and not the sum of talking points."
- Finally, one festivalgoer [notes](#) the cinematic quality to spring in Wisconsin as the weekend ended. "With the end of the film festival, it was time to head back to reality," he concludes, "and go home to finish up the taxes."

More blogging about the 2007 Wisconsin Film Festival can be found in [Madison Miscellany](#).