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### LAFF! Psychedelic Weighs In On 15 Films From The Los Angeles Film Festival!

Hey, everyone. **"Moriarty"** here.

By now, you probably know our man Psychedelic, who lurks around the fringes of LA, eyes swirling like pinwheels, always ready to gobble down massive doses of movies whenever offered. Here's the first of two reports he'll be filing about the Los Angeles Film Festival:



## TOP TALKBACKS

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Some Not-So-Exciting Pics From The New X-FILES Movie's First Day Of Shooting Are Now Online!--85 total posts	85 posts
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**Hey Harry and Subterranean Brethren,**

**The Acid was good. A garden of flesh flowers greeted me. The nerves of each one quivered as I licked their folds; textures beneath my tongue tasted like exquisite rapture shimmering aurora borealis. Blossoming in the sun's moisture, fresh mucus flowed in the streets of Westwood Village. Starlets rubbed it on their breasts as I attended the 2007 Los Angeles Film Festival.**

***Talk To Me***

**This bright, happy, comforting, somewhat uplifting biography avoids the bog of many bio-pics' clichés with excellent performances and a fantastic snappin' soundtrack. Don Cheadle delivers yet another stellar performance as Petey Green. Green was a convict who rose to be one of the best DJs and comics in Washington D.C. from the mid-60s to late 70s. His relationship with his manager Dewey Hughes (Chiwetel Ejiofor) drives the story through this well-mined historical period. Director Kasi Lemmons (The Caveman's Valentine, the Ebert-hailed Eve's Bayou) imbues this excellently photographed bio with a soul that a) is missing from most big Hollywood biographies, and b) raises Green above what many would consider small time status. The first third takes way**

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too long getting Green behind the DJ mic; the histrionics getting in the booth ring false.

*Interview*

Steve Buscemi directs his fourth feature and stars with Sienna Miller. Buscemi is a downtrodden political reporter sent to interview a vapid starlet. They eventually blunder to her place and a verbal tug-of-war ensues with each prying for the other's secrets. The acting is good, but the characters are ultimately uninteresting. There isn't much point to their flirtatious game of "I'm gonna screw you over" one-upmanship. Their erratic behavior doesn't seem well motivated. For what I cared, they could be machine-gunned at the end. I admire Buscemi very much as a director. The decade old *Trees Lounge* is one of the best portrayals of alcoholism I've seen. But this one is mostly an air ball.

*Bajo Juarez, the city devouring its daughters*

A riveting three-hour documentary and/or feature could be done with this rich, explosive, disturbing material. I wonder what it'd be like in David Fincher's hands. But this documentary, directed by Alejandra Sanchez and Jose Antonio Cordero, falls well short. In Juarez, Mexico 432 young women have been kidnapped, raped, and murdered over the last twelve years. (I just

checked the program and it said 432 between 2003 and 2005. I could swear the doc presented a larger time frame or maybe I'm out to lunch.) Nefarious organizations are primarily responsible, but their operational nuts and bolts aren't illuminated. For instance, I imagine many girls know their initial kidnappers and these seducer guys are paid off. Political and police corruption also plays a hand, but not enough details are presented considering how widespread the corruption is. No probing is done into the psychology of a culture that treats women this way. The film's scatter-shot, wandering structure never pulls in the viewer. I'm glad the movie exists to spotlight the issues, but it could be so much more.

#### *The Last Winter*

A group of oil workers in the Alaskan arctic circle experience a far too warm winter. Weird things happen as the thousands of years old permafrost thaws. First two-thirds are very dull. Director Larry Fessenden (Wendigo) never attains the atmospheric mood for which he reaches. Ron Perlman's character becomes laughably hard-assed and single-minded. Near the end it becomes good for a little while then turns goofy. I know it's supposed to be warming up, but the sense of cold wasn't communicated in keenly observed detail. It never felt claustrophobic either. I wanted

to watch Carpenter's *The Thing*. The environmental message just comes off as lame, simplistic, and overwrought.

*Wizard of Gore (2007)*

This remake of Herschell Gordon Lewis' 1970 film has a great spirit; its heart is in the right place (ripped out and beating on the floor of course). But ultimately it's not up to the task. A magician kills people onstage; then they reappear alive and unhurt. However, the victims are killed for real after the show. Using the Suicide Girls as naked volunteers is a very hip touch. The actors' enthusiasm for the material is apparent. Crispin Glover is expectedly great as the wizard, but Kip Pardue and Bijou Phillips are not leading material. The first third is Joe Bob Briggs terrific with gallons of blood and lots-n-lots of nekkid breasts. But after this energy burst, steam and ideas leak away. Director Jeremy Kasten quickly reuses the same gags from his visual bag of tricks. The middle lingers. The end really drags with a convoluted plot. The final sum is a disappointment though it might be okay at an all-night horrorthon.

*Resolved*

I was tempted to walk out after two minutes. Remember high school debate teams? They've devolved into speed talking that sounds like an auctioneer at a cattle sale. At best, it's

intellectual masturbation. At worst, it's empty theatrics appropriate to courtrooms and Senate floors. Then some smart black kids from Los Angeles challenge the merits of debate conduct and content. It's a microcosm of how serious issues are argued in our government, society, and media. Director Greg Whiteley makes some wrong-headed choices in the first fourth of this documentary. Example: Illustrating how great debate is for high school kids by showing a clip of Carl Rove saying he debated in high school. Hisses came from the audience. Then it gets on track with the African Americans challenging the debate system; they should be introduced in the first five minutes. It's a good effort hitching on the success of Spellbound.

*Join Us*

Religious cults thrive in the United States. Director Ondi Timoner (director of the superb rock doc Dig!) begins her documentary at the only cult recovery camp in the country. The story of a recovering group of families unfolds as they come to terms with their brainwashing. Timoner's only errors are within these beginning passages. I wish the signs and symptoms of cult mentality were presented in a more linear, objective, and perhaps clinical fashion. Instead this section meanders somewhat. Then the families go back home

to South Carolina. The process of constructing a legal case against the "minister" ensues while re-learning to live life after traumatic mental and physical abuses. The egotistical aggrandizing "minister" even agrees to on-camera interviews. This is an excellent disturbing look into evil present here and now in our backyards.

*What We Do Is Secret*

Darby Crash was the mastermind of The Germs, a seminal Los Angeles punk band in the late 70s. Shane West gives a star-making performance in this excellent exploration of a chaotic exhilarating period. Every show is a delicious disaster while their songs rival The Sex Pistols in feedback frenzy. The concerts are staged realistically off-kilter and capture the chaos. Director Rodger Grossman's love of The Germs comes across in the production's every aspect. The musicians and fans' humanity is the central focus rather than sex, drugs, and violence—although those are presented as well. Crash's charisma and intelligence comes through with his poetic observations of a world that sweeps away outsiders who don't get with America's preprogramming. West, Rick Gonzalez, Bijou Phillips, and Noah Segan coalesce into believable band chemistry. This is probably as good as Sid & Nancy.

*The Paper Will Be Blue*



Communism's end approaches in 1989 Romania. One night a soldier decides to join the protest uprising and his unit searches for him because the commander will be reprimanded for the AWOL. Almost everything is shot in long static takes where often it's barely possible to see whose speaking. There is no compositional tension and it becomes quickly limp. However, there is plenty of black absurdist humor with odd situations and witty dialogue. A paraphrased example, "We'll give you a fair court marshal and then shoot you." It's a crying shame Radu Muntean's direction is so stilted, deliberately I guess, because Razvan Radulescu's script is very good. Radulescu is talented, shows much promise, and is already quite celebrated in Romania. I'm curious to see the widely hailed *The Death of Mr. Lazarescu* for which he wrote the script.

#### *Constantine's Sword*

The Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs experienced fundamentalist Christians forcing their beliefs on cadets. This included putting ads for *The Passion of The Christ* at all 4000 table settings in the mess hall as well as open harassment of Jewish cadets. Theocracy's shadow disturbs. From this beginning catalyst, a former priest named James Carroll goes on a world-wide journey searching for the Christian seeds

of anti-Semitism. Demonstrating the linear progression of anti-Semitism is superbly executed. Historical roots are clearly mapped out. Human faces make the past's connection to the present. Constantine's conversion, the 16th century's ghettoizing of Jews in Rome (forgive me if I have the wrong century), the Nazis, and much more are covered. Director Oren Jacoby is to be lauded for making connections clear. My only minor criticism: the tonal shifts of switching from history to present day holy rollers could be better performed.

#### *Love For Sale*

An attractive lower-class Brazilian woman gets pregnant and the guy splits. Hermila Guedes' central performance is good. She's charismatic, likable, and sexy. Unfortunately it's in service of a pedestrian story that's common place to say the least. There are no observant details making it interesting and unique. She's desperate to leave to hopefully get a fresh start elsewhere. She comes up with a scheme to get cash by selling whiskey raffle tickets with the prize being a night with her. She takes heavy pressurized criticism from the community and her family. I guess the unstated message is everyone would be more accepting if she was an outright whore. Then she wouldn't be leading men on with only the titillation of sex.

Brazilian Karim Ainoz's unremarkable direction sets a pace that plods and plods and plods. It's 88 minutes and feels like two hours.

*Severed Ways: The Norse Discovery of America*

Director Tony Stone badly wants to be Werner Herzog. It's too bad he doesn't have Herzog's dramatic story sense, inspired visual style, or other great virtues except perhaps the willingness to venture into deep nature for footage. Two Vikings are stranded in the woods and must survive. They run into some missionaries and a native, but that's really about it. They build a shelter. Kill animals for food. In one explicit shot, take a shit. They communicate like Neanderthals. Grunt, grunt, Odin, snort, grunt. Stone's heavy male role play neurosis is equal to Mel Gibson's martyrdom complex. He lays it on just as thick and as simplistically too. I appreciate his attempts at realism. Old Norse language is even used. But his pacing is so long-winded, and story so bereft of substance, that I was annoyed by the end.

*Kabluey*

This is the best comedy I've seen in a long time. Lisa Kudrow's husband is in Iraq. She has two very rambunctious boys (ages 1 1/2 and 3) who attack everything in sight. Her spaced out brother-in-law, writer-director Scott Prendergast, comes to

help, though how much he assists is questionable. He gets a job as a mascot handing out fliers and wears an extremely cumbersome blue cartoon costume. The struggling with the costume is hysterical. Forced to stand on a farm road in the middle of nowhere, the film's central imagery arises. It's the best expression of alienation and loneliness in America since Election when the lesbian sister sits by herself staring at an electrical sub-station. The setting is distinctly middle-class. Everyone is frayed down to their last nerve that's constantly yanked. Scenes of people freaking are very funny. Kudrow has an affair with her boss. The mix between the sad adultery story and funny mascot antics equals a truthful snapshot of our times. When wearing the costume, he's ignored as a person hears things he wouldn't otherwise. Rush to see this if it comes near you because it deserves as much attention as possible.

#### ***How To Rob A Bank***

Here's a reasonably fun bank heist flick. Nick Stahl and a very sexy Erika Christensen are stuck inside a bank vault. She's the computer hacker for the security system. He's an innocent bystander. In an actor driven piece, the twists, turns, feints and parries of the plot unwrap. Director Andrews Jenkins does a good job moving the pace

especially considering most the action takes place in one room. There's some commentary about how corporate America nickel and dimes people to death, but the feel of a well-worn genre effort is both comforting and too familiar. It begins slow but then holds attention for the rest. David Carradine does a nice turn as robber, speaking only on the phone, who is perfectly happy to stab people in the back.

### *Dead Daughters*

Dead Daughters is DOA. Dull, dull, dull. At one point I wished my computer was there so this review was finished by movie's end, a good book would have been nice too. The ghosts of three dead girls haunt a group of Russian twenty-somethings. The group spends the movie speaking in monotones and hanging around waiting to be killed. The characters aren't even one-dimensional; they're simply non-characters. Every shot is hand-held, no exaggeration, and the cinematography is either blue or yellow monochrome. Director Pavel Ruminov, could you vary your visual grammar just a tiny bit? The soundtrack blaring spooky noises is the cue to be scared. There's certainly no suspense to tell you. It's so disconnected I could barely follow the very little plot. There's maybe tension for three moments—maybe.

### *SHORTS*

### ***Everything Will Be OK***


The wonderfully demented Don Hertzfeldt scores another winner. An ordinary Joe's life becomes a bizarre frantic nightmare with Hertzfeldt's patented yummy black humor. Widescreen is effectively used with circular images popping from side to side. Hopefully, it'll be part of the next Animation Show. Hertzfeldt rocks!

### ***Dear Lemon Lima***

Alienated pre-teens are perfectly captured in director Suzi Yoonessi's remarkably observant script. She's expanding this to a feature length and I'm curious to see it.

The skins of the audience members melted into each other. Twisting, molting, struggling, groaning, a new amoeba of moaning lumps—each convinced they're the orgasmic climax Hollywood seeks, that indescribable itch that scratches the brain's roof sparking realizations of satisfaction in the endless kiss that's never attained. I walked out into daylight to lick another flesh flower.

-Psychedelic

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