

2006 AFI FILM FESTIVAL OVERVIEW:



I had a great time at this year's 2006 AFI Film Festival because one again I saw some outstanding films. The AFI Festival is unique because it occurs after the glitz of Cannes in the Summer, the start of Fall at Toronto and before the Winter of Sundance. The Oscar buzz for many films starts to really heat up around late October and early November—exactly when the AFI happens. The AFI Fest is not a big sellers festival where you get huge Variety and Hollywood Reporter headlines like Cannes, Toronto and Sundance of what films got bought and who is announcing new distribution deals. No AFI just keeps doing what it does best and that is show some of the world's best films in one of the best theatrical environments. I have not been to Toronto, so I cannot comment from firsthand experience on how their films are screened. But I have been to Cannes and Sundance and they all have makeshift screening rooms or rented out theaters. Even Toronto does not have all of its screenings at a high tech multi-screen multiplex like AFI. The LA Film Festival uses a variety of theaters around Westwood, but nothing all in one place. The Pan African Film Festival does get to use several screens at Magic Johnson Theaters. PAFF is technically similar to what happens at AFI Fest in regards to screening films. But PAFF still has to worry about getting black audiences to even go see their films and not *Norbit*.

Now this year there were a few films shown at the Mann's Chinese a few miles away, but at least 99% of the films at AFI were shown and the Archlight Cinema on Sunset Boulevard. This is actually important to why the AFI is a great film festival from just a simplicity and logistics standpoint. There is a huge parking garage that can get filled up rather quickly at the height of screening times. But once you do park you don't have to leave to go another location to see another film like at Cannes, Toronto and Sundance. There are no busses or trams unless you are shuttling back and forth from the Loews Hotel to go to the AFM. Also, because you are in a top of the line film theater you know every screening will have stadium seating, Dolby stereo, a large professional screen, and no distractions from outside elements. I mean Sundance is trying to get better every year, but I know when I am freezing at the Raquet Club that I am sitting on a rented stadium arranged floor. I know my chairs are not theater chairs. I forget

get the distractions to focus on the film. But AFI you never really have any major distractions, so you always solely enjoy the films you came to see. Also, the filmmakers know that their films—which are their babies—are going to be shown exactly like they would have been released by a major studio. Everyone is happy and you pretty much know every filmmaker or anyone is at the Archlight. The parties are on the roof. I went to several good premiere parties this year at AFI. I liked the party hosted by Frank Nweke, Jr., Nigeria's Federal Minister of Information and Orientation for Nigerian-Brit filmmaker, Ngozi Onwurah's *Shoot The Messenger*. System of a Down also hosted a great premiere party for their Armenian genocide documentary *Screamers*. System of a Down is one of Ara K., my Hip-Hop Life editor's, favorite rock bands and it is one of my favorite as well.



Absolut and Audi are always the AFI Fest's main sponsors, so it is highly unlikely you will not walk into a Volvo or end up downing several vodka shots in-between film screening. I think after you hit too many Absolut shots, then you start bumping into the Audi parked on the roof and on the side of the theater entrance. The press office and clubroom is on the roof. I call it the clubroom because that is where everyone is checking their e-mails or posting blogs with the free Internet service. The atmosphere is again quite relaxed and there is even free music performances late at night. One time I walked in a women singing jazzy songs in French and then another a Cuban dance group was shaking their hips so hard that I thought the structure would collapse. If for some strange reason you cannot get a pass to get into the AFI sponsored parties a few away, then this clubroom is a more than suitable substitute. And it is also pretty easy to watch films you missed in the press room next door.

My only pet peeve or recommendation for AFI Fest and almost any film festival that I attend is to try more aggressively to widen the publicity for the films that are screening. AFI Fest's screenings are almost always sold out, so attendance is not the problem. I just wish there was more buzz around the town among normal non-Industry black and Latino folks at how many great films are being shown. Especially, black folks need to go to AFI because it is not a given that Babu, PAFF's Executive Director, will be able to take all of AFI's top African, Brazilian and African-American themed and show them at PAFF in February.



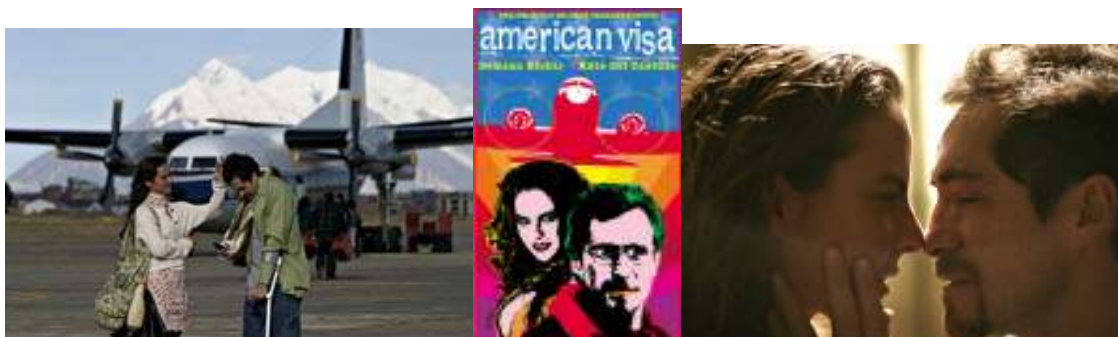
A year ago I saw Oscar Winner Tstoti at 2005 AFI and every screening you could count the minorities with one or two hands. Black filmmakers, writers and actors need to be more visible at AFI Fest because one needs to see great films if they want to make great films. To be honest on a final note when I was watching many of the black themed films at AFI this year Babu was allowed to openly solicit and entice audience members to come watch films at the upcoming PAFF. And not only that the AFI audience members were given PAFF postcards. I have never seen this type of promotional generosity from a major film festival toward a black film festival. This could only happen at the 2006 AFI Film Festival because they are more concerned about promoting the world's great than about protecting their bit of cinematic turf. All I can say is that I look forward to going to the 2007 AFI Los Angeles International Film Festival and continue seeing some of the world's best films, shorts and documentaries.





The 2006 AFI Fest Film Reviews:

These following reviews are for my favorite films at this year's AFI Fest.



AMERICAN VISA

Bolivia, Mexico, 2006, 100 min, 35 MM
In SPANISH with English subtitles
North American Premiere

DIR/SCR/PROD: Juan Carlos Valdivia

PROD: Alejandro Gonzalez - Padilla, Felipe Galdo, Oscar Quintela

EXEC PROD: Richard Ham, Nicolás Rubio

DP: Ernesto Fernandez Telleria

ED: Horacio Quiroz

MUS: Pepe Stephens

Cast: Demian Bichir, Kate Del Castillo, Jorge Ortiz, Claudio Lobo, Alberto Echeverry

Winner of Best Adapted Screenplay at Mexico's Ariel Awards, the drama of AMERICAN VISA plays out in a post-9/11 Bolivia where harsh new laws let authorities assume that all visa applicants want to immigrate to the US. That is exactly the hurdle that Mario Alvarez (Demian Bichir) faces at the beginning of the film. He plans on traveling to Miami to reunite with his son and start a new life in the US, but first he must secure a visa. Mario soon finds out that this is no small task, and he may have to resort to slightly unorthodox methods to get what he needs. Further complicating matters is Blanca (Kate del Castillo), a charming young woman who is looking for change in her life. She envisions leaving her job at a local strip club, and perhaps building a relationship with Mario in Bolivia.

Though life forces Mario to make questionable choices, Bichir creates a character that remains sympathetic. He and del Castillo deliver consistently compelling, authentic performances. Complete with strong dialogue and a contemporary visual and editorial style, it seems as if director Valdivia has set out not just to make a statement on our current political climate, but also to entertain. His timely narrative takes on love, family, crime, governmental policy and bureaucratic corruption. The combination is brutal, seedy, poignant, touching and ultimately satisfying.

- John Bernstein

My Rating:

***American Visa* is a well-written film that highlights the many complexities of the great lengths that foreigners will go to pursue the "American Dream". I also liked the fact Bolivia was portrayed well. And I especially enjoyed the performances by Demian Bichir as Mario and Kate Del Castillo as Blanca as some of the best acting and chemistry I saw in the Fest. I give *American Visa* four cheesecakes out of five.**



ANTONIA

Brazil, 2006, 90 min, 35 MM
In Portuguese with English subtitles
US Premiere

DIR: Tata Amaral

SCR: Roberto Moreira, Tata Amaral

PROD: Geórgia Costa Araújo, Tata Amaral

EXEC PROD: Andrea Barata Ribeiro, Bel Berlinck, Fernando Meirelles, Guel Arraes

DP: Jacob Sarmiento Solitrenick

ED: Idê Lacreta

PROD DES: Rafael Ronconi

MUS: Beto Villares, Parteum, Negra Li, Leilah Moreno, Cindy, Quelynah

Cast: Negra Li, Leilah Moreno, Cindy, Quelynah, Thaíde

Dynamic, vibrant and life-affirming, Tata Amaral's third feature, ANTONIA, describes the ups and downs of a group of female rappers living on the outskirts of São Paulo.

Preta (Negra Li), Barbarah (Leilah Moreno), Mayah (Quelynah) and Lena (Cindy) provide back-up vocals for a relatively successful male rap group, O Poder, and are anxious to put on their own shows. When O Poder holds a concert in the girls' neighborhood of Brasilândia, they are given the chance to sing as a group. Beautiful, feminine and talented, their performance is a hit with the crowd and the girls meet Marcelo Diamante (Thaíde), a promoter who offers to help guide them on the road to success.

Antonia's story is so attractive because it offers the promise of a way out through art, music and poetry. Amaral brings this side of São Paulo to the screen naturally and seamlessly by using real female rappers (who created the music for the film).



Film - Antônia (Brazil, 2007)

Jun 10th, 2007 by [Anne-Marie](#)

The compelling new Brazilian movie *Antônia* depicts the lives of four talented young women from a Sao Paulo favela as they try to find success and independence as rappers and singers. The four, childhood friends, struggle with obligations to husbands, family, and friends as well as music business treachery and maintaining creative control over their music. Obviously they also face extra resistance in the especially male dominated subculture of hip-hop, beyond the usual machismo of Brazilian society.

To maintain realism director Tata Amaral used a documentary style, filming with handheld cameras on location in real poverty stricken neighborhoods of the city. The realism is enhanced by the fresh cast, mostly acting for first time, of singers and rappers from Sao Paulo. Their experience as performers shows in the concert scenes, these are women (and some men) who can pump up the tough, skeptical audiences with real skills.

Also there are several quieter performances with Negra Li taking the lead singing. Negra Li as Preta and Leilah Moreno as Barbarah become the central characters of the film as the two other girls must leave the group. Preta leaves her cheating husband with their daughter but cannot face returning to her strict, religious parents. She moves in with Barbarah and her brother Duda. One night the pair returns from a show to find Duda and his boyfriend beaten and unconscious in the street. Barbarah's temper and martial arts skills get her serious trouble as one of the attackers comes after her. Both actresses beautifully show the emotion and strain as these women make difficult compromises to survive. Providing comic relief is Thaide as Marcelo Diamante, the group's goofy, slightly sleazy manager.

My Rating:

I very much liked *Antonia* and wish it could be placed on a platform like *8 Mile* or *Get Rich Or Die Tryin'* because it is one of the best pure Hip-Hop films in the last five years. And more so because it is telling the tale of becoming a rapper from the female perspective. All the actresses were top notch and gave *City of God* type memorable performances. I do wish that *Antonia's* director Tata Amaral could have attended the screenings. But Shaz Bennet, AFI Fest's #1 film programmer, told me that Tata was in Rio in production on the *Antonia* TV series. Just like how *City of God* inspired the *City of Men* Brazilian TV series. What I was amazed at the most about the film is not how good the lead actors rapped in Portuguese, but they gave an American Idol type finale performance of *Killing Me Softly*. You could really tell that these singer/rappers had talent, so you felt even greater empathy with them when they faced obstacles to fame and fortune. They women had to not only deal with their own personal demons of self-doubt, but also the Favela haters who wanted them to fail. I do hope *Antonia* can be shown to inner-city women. And it would also be good if some legitimate Hip-Hop mags or urban media even knew that this landmark Hip-Hop even exists. I give *Antonia* five cheesecakes out of five.



BACK HOME

Rwanda, USA, 2006, 73 min, Color, Digibeta
In English, Kinyarwanda with English subtitles
World Premiere

DIR: J.B. Rutagarama

PROD: Linda Vester

DP: J.B. Rutagarama, Daniel Elliott, Noelle Ingabire

ED: Todd Zelin, Gregory Bertrand

MUS: Rod Clemmons

Imagine surviving genocide, being rescued, and starting a new life in a new land without knowing what happened to the family you left behind. This is the true inspiring story of J.B. Rutagarama.

Escaping Rwanda alive was a miracle. After years of forced separation, J.B. takes the journey back to the place that changed his course and searches for his lost family. With devastating footage interspersed with his remembrances, a unique and intimate perspective of this world tragedy unfolds. As Rutagarama sets foot again in the land of his birth, a visit to old family friends in Rwanda leads him on an unexpected journey with dramatic twists and turns that will send your emotions soaring.

Shot with an eye for capturing the beauty of what was once a cherished homeland, Rutagarama's film is personal, but becomes the story of all Rwandans. It is about healing, hope, renewal, family, forgiveness and finding your own peace.

- Natalie McMenemy

My Rating:

***Back Home* is a particularly emotional rollercoaster ride of a film because anyone with a heart can sympathize with a young Rwanda man who survived a brutal and bloody genocide to then go back and find his mother. And what made the screening of *Back Home* truly special during the Q&A was that J.B.'s mother was there. Seeing the woman in the flesh that was the subject of the documentary was a pure joy. I mean it boggles most people's minds to say in present day that I survived a modern genocide. To think how many billions a month the U.S. spends to fight in Iraq to spread democracy in the Middle East. But that the great and mighty U.S. and other top Western countries allowed million or more of Rwandians to be killed. *Back Home* is a moving film that everyone should see and I give it five cheesecakes.**



BIG DREAMS LITTLE TOKYO

USA, 2006, 83 min, Color
World Premiere

DIR/SCR: David Boyle

PROD: Duane Andersen, Megan Boyle

DP: Bill Otto

ED: Duane Andersen, Scott Hurst

MUS: Mark Schulz

Cast: David Boyle, Jayson Watabe, Rachel Morihoro, Drew Knight, Pepe Serna, Michael Yama, James Kyson Lee, Sonny Saito, Bobby Suetsugu, Naohiro Takita, Yuta Kinjo, Kei Miyara, Hiroshi Watanabe, Michael Birkeland, Jonna Tamases

Writer/director David Boyle weaves together short vignettes about a young man living in Little Tokyo to create one of the year's most hilarious and original films.

BIG DREAMS LITTLE TOKYO is the story of Boyd, who aspires to succeed in the world of Japanese business, but finds himself mostly on the outside looking in. Meanwhile, his roommate Jerome is a Japanese-American who has always felt too American to be Japanese, but too Japanese to be American. He aspires to be a sumo wrestler but finds his weight and blood pressure thwarting his dreams. Together they struggle to find their place in a world where cultural identity is seldom what it seems.

This charming and quirky comedy paints vivid characters and conflicts while finding the humor and drama in the disconnects of language and culture in the modern global community.

- Lane Kneedler

My Rating:

***Big Dreams Little Tokyo* is a quirky little film. It tries hard to be an *Asian Napoleon Dynamite*. The pacing was noticeably slow even for an indie. I felt sort of trapped waiting for the obvious punchlines. I would have had more fun with this film if Boyd had actually taken more risks with his character. I know he could speak Japanese well and knew Japanese facts, but I never felt he was obsessed with being Japanese. Boyd acted like Japanese from the mid-90's and not the metro-hereto, Hip-Hop materialistic Japanese males of today. I give *Big Dreams* two cheesecakes out of five.**



OPENING NIGHT GALA: BOBBY

USA, 2006, 112 min, 35 MM
US Premiere

DIR/SCR: Emilio Estevez

PROD: Michel Litvak, Edward Bass, Holly Wiersma

EXEC PROD: Dan Grodnik, Gary Michael Walters, Sir Anthony Hopkins

DP: Michael Barrett

ED: Richard Chew

PROD DES: Patti Podesta

MUS: Mark Isham

Cast: Harry Belafonte, Joy Bryant, Nick Cannon, Emilio Estevez, Laurence Fishburne, Brian Geraghty, Heather Graham, Anthony Hopkins, Helen Hunt, Joshua Jackson, David Krumholtz, Ashton Kutcher, Shia LaBeouf, Lindsay Lohan, William H. Macy, Svetlana Metkina, Demi Moore, Freddy Rodriguez, Martin Sheen, Christian Slater, Sharon Stone, Jacob Vargas, Mary Elizabeth Winstead, Elijah Wood

Written and directed by Emilio Estevez, the epic and ambitiously conceived BOBBY revisits the night in 1968 that Robert F. Kennedy was assassinated at the Ambassador Hotel in Los Angeles.

With an incredible ensemble cast portraying fictionalized characters from a cross section of America, BOBBY follows 22 disparate guests and workers at the legendary hotel whose lives intersect as they anticipate Kennedy's arrival for the presidential primary election night party—an event that would change their lives forever. This historic night is set against the backdrop of the cultural issues gripping the country at the time: racism, sexual inequality and class differences.

Estevez has lined up a remarkable ensemble cast of mostly leading actors, who work together to crystallize a collective state-of-consciousness—one still reeling from the tumultuous violence of the sixties yet made hopeful by the promise of a future with this passionate leader.



My Rating:

I know *Bobby* is suppose to be an epic type film in regards to cameo appearances, but that does not change the fact that the film falls kinda flat. The importance of Robert Kennedy's life effecting each of the character's lives was missing as a central theme and quite necessary to the film's plot. Anthony Hopkins and Harry Belafonte play chess and never talk about the election. I give *Bobby* three cheesecakes out of five.



BUG

USA, 2006, 102 min, 35 MM

DIR: William Friedkin

SCR: Tracy Letts

PROD: Kimberly C. Anderson, Michael Burns, Gary Huckabay

EXEC PROD: Michael Ohoven, Jim Seibel

DP: Michael Grady

ED: Darrin Navarro

Master filmmaker William Friedkin has reinvented himself and the horror genre with this startling film. Ashley Judd stars as a woman whose life slowly begins to unravel when she gets involved with a new man. This story of paranoia and addiction slowly unfolds mostly in the space of a single hotel room. Michael Shannon stars as Peter, a paranoid, unhinged war veteran who sees insects everywhere. Seemingly normal at first, he connects to and eventually holes up with a lonely woman played by Judd in an Oklahoma motel room. The push and pull of two individuals in this confined space eats away at both of them until what remains of the real world is completely destroyed.

Writer Tracy Letts adapted the screenplay from his own original play. William Friedkin is the director of such films as THE EXORCIST, THE FRENCH CONNECTION and TO LIVE AND DIE IN LA. Together they have created possibly the most unique film of the year.

- Lane Kneedler

My Rating:

***Bug* really is a classic horror film like a Hammer classic. The film is old skool because the emphasis of being scary is squarely placed on the backs of its lead actors. We as an audience are not relying on special effects to show us the invisible bugs that Michael Shannon sees and that soon after Judd believes are real as well. Friedkin's *Bug* is what the X-Files movie failed to become almost a decade ago. I wish I had seen the play of *Bug*, but I still give *Bug* five cheesecakes out of five.**



BUNNY CHOW: KNOW THYSELF

South Africa, 2006, 90 min
US Premiere

DIR: John Barker

SCR: David Kibuuka, Salah Sabiti, Joey Rasdien, John Barker

PROD: John Barker, Kagiso Lediga

EXEC PROD: Jeremy Nathan, Joel Phiri

DP: Zeno Petersen

ED: Sakkie Berg

PROD DES: Kezia Eales, Christal Rees-Gibbs

MUS: Joel Assaizky

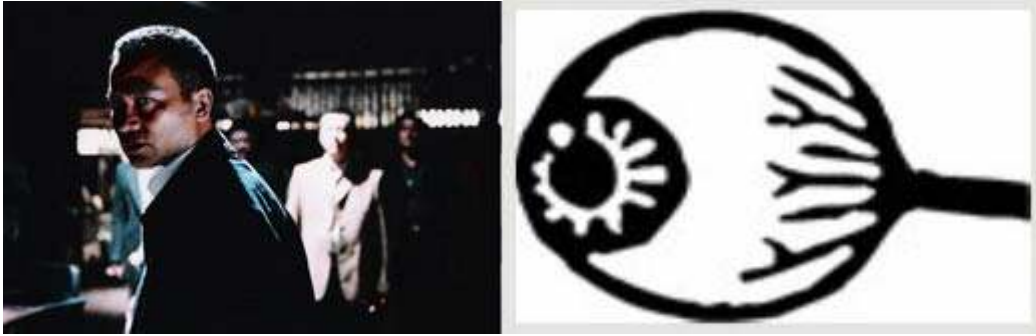
Cast: Kagiso Lediga, David Kibuuka, Kim Engelbrecht, Joey Rasdien, Keren Neumann, Angela Chow

Truth and reconciliation is over. The South Africa of today is all about sex and hanging out. Or hook-ups and ganja. Or maybe just sex. For those who have never been drinking in Johannesburg, a "bunny chow" is a huge mishmash of a sandwich, perfect for the end of the night. It is also a metaphor for South Africa's cultural *mélange*—and slang for a tasty sexual act. Kags, Dave and Joey are three Johannesburg friends who want to be stand-up comics but show more skill with beer-fueled trash talk. Joey (Joey Rasdien) is, by the South African definition, "colored." He mines his relationship with his Chinese girlfriend, Angela (Angela Chow), for material. Dave (David Kibuuka), whose black middle-class status is the source of his jokes, struggles to find his groove at the microphone. And Kags (Kagiso Lediga), the most natural comic of the group, simply cannot keep it in his pants. He and girlfriend Kim (Kim Engelbrecht) are in constant battles over his infidelity—followed by their own truth and reconciliation in the bedroom. Once the boys hit the road to attend an open-air music festival at Oppikoppi, the film becomes a series of extended riffs. Dave meets Carla (Keren Neumann) and falls prey to two kinds of performance anxiety. Joey buys some dubious drugs. Kags will be Kags. The plan is to take the stage at Oppikoppi and become instant comic rock stars, but plans change.

- Cameron Bailey

My Rating:

Bunny Chow is a film that has far more greater significance to black cinema than what it is trying to accomplish. It's importance is more in its existence of being a natural style film with real emotion and real characters. I especially loved the romantic chemistry between Kagiso and Kim. It is getting far harder every day to find witty black indies like *Bunny Chow*. I give *Bunny Chow* four cheesecakes.



ELECTION

China, Hong Kong, 2005, 92 min, 35 MM
In Cantonese with English subtitles
Los Angeles Premiere

DIR: Johnnie To
SCR: Yau Nai-hoi, Yip Tin-shing
PROD: Dennis Law, Johnnie To
DP: Cheng Siu-keung
ED: Patrick Tam
PROD DES: Tony Yu
MUS: Lo Tayu
Cast: Simon Yam, Tony Leung Ka-fai, Louis Koo, Nick Cheung, Cheung Siu-fai

An in-depth look at the selection process of the powerful Triad's new chairman, ELECTION is a modern, action-packed Hong Kong movie and also a fascinating tale about the importance of tradition in the age-old Chinese underworld.

When the current chief's term is about to expire, the elders ruling the venerable Wo Sing Triad clan are hesitating between two eligible candidates: Fiery and aggressive Big D (Tony Leung Kafai) and the wise and cautious Lok (Simon Yam). The two men engage in a bloodthirsty struggle when the ancestral symbol of the clan's power, a Dragon's Head Baton, disappears...

ELECTION is why Triad films from Hong Kong have become so popular: A compelling story, strong performances, and fast-paced, stylish camera work that will leave you on the edge of your seat!

- *Charles Chemery*

EYE POPPIN

USA, 2006, 2 min, Color
World Premiere

DIR/DP/ED: Jill Morley
MUS: Poboy
Cast: Jamie Johnson

A man tells an engaging eye poppin' story.

My Rating:

***Election* is one of those smooth Asian gangsta films that looks like a hidden camera docu drama than a film. No actor in *Election* will be accused of overacting. *Eye Poppin* is funny exactly what its called. This short feels more like a Youtube.com clip. I give *Eye Poppin*' two cheesecakes and *Election* three cheesecakes.**



FROZEN DAYS **YAMIN KFUIM**

Israel, 2006, 91 min, 35 MM
In Hebrew with English subtitles
North American Premiere

DIR/SCR: Danny Lerner

PROD: Alan Lerner, Danny Lerner, Assaf Rav

EXEC PROD: Ehud Bleiberg, Edouard Douek

DP: Ram Shweky

ED: Tal Keller

MUS: Tomer Ran

Cast: Anat Klausner, Uli Sternberg, Sandra Sade, Pini Tabger, Maor Cohen

Shot entirely at night on a DV Cam 570, for a budget of \$25,000, FROZEN DAYS is a striking black and white film that is a visually stimulating, and a hauntingly timely film, puncturing the surface of the compelling characters complex lives.

Meow (played by the magnetic newcomer Anat Klausner) is a young woman roaming the streets and nightclubs of Tel Aviv. She lives in empty apartments and surfs Internet chat rooms. When she decides to meet Alex, her email chat buddy, a suicide bombing prevents their meeting, putting him in the hospital in a coma and her in his empty apartment. When the other tenants start referring to her as Alex and she assumes his identity, she finds herself sinking into a dangerous deluded reality.

An incredibly accomplished debut film with polished production values steeped in the gorgeous photography of deep pools of darkness by DP Ram Shweky's carve out a profoundly resonant film that is steeped in the miasma of Tel Aviv after dark.

- Shaz Bennett

My Rating:

I really liked *Frozen Days* because it had a well-written twist that is never obvious in anyway. I gradually felt like I was watching an old *Twilight Zone* episode. The ones that start out going hard right all the way and then take a quick left turn. Shooting the film in B&W allows Tel Aviv to add to the mystery elements in the film. The DP was off the chain and no shot or scene was wasted. The only thing I would question is the sudden burst of color toward the end. I know what Danny Lerner is doing by trying to confuse the viewer before the shocking plot twist. But I think Lerner could have still accomplished it by staying in all B&W. One thing I like the most about *Frozen Days* is its compelling lead actress, Anat Klausner. From watching the film one would never suspect this is her first film and neither would one easily think it's Lerner's either. I give *Frozen Days* four cheesecakes out of five cheesecakes.



THE HISTORY BOYS

UK, 2006, 104 min, 35 MM
North American Premiere

DIR: Nicholas Hytner

SCR: Alan Bennett

PROD: Kevin Loader, Nicholas Hytner, Damian Jones

EXEC PROD: Andrew Macdonald, Allon Reich, David M. Thompson, Charles Moore, Miles Ketley

Cast: Richard Griffiths, Clive Merrison, Frances De La Tour

Based on the 2006 Tony Award winning play by Alan Bennett, THE HISTORY BOYS is a funny and moving look at eight bright young students trying to get into college.

An unruly class of gifted and charming teenage boys pursues sex, sport and higher education on their journey to becoming men. Bounced between their maverick English master (Richard Griffiths), a shrewd teacher hired to raise their test scores (Stephen Campbell Moore), a traditional history teacher (Frances de la Tour), and a headmaster obsessed with results (Clive Merrison), the boys attempt to sift through the chaos to pass the daunting university admissions process. Their journey becomes as much about how education works as it is about where education leads.

Directed by Nicholas Hynter, this winning film featuring the remarkable original cast from the Broadway play will captivate and leave you deeply satisfied.

My Rating:

I did not see the Broadway play of *The History Boys*, so I cannot assume how far off or dead on this adaptation is for a diehard fan. I was not feeling *The History Boys* because it felt more like a staged play than an actual film. There was no consistent narrative to follow other than which History Boy was going to end up shagging the new male teacher. I have to give *The History Boys* two cheesecakes out of five.



HOMECOMING

South Africa, 2006, 90 min, Color, Beta SP
In English, Sotho with English subtitles
North American Premiere

DIR: Norman Maake

PROD: Dumisani Dlamini, David Max Brown

DP: Merlin Van Staden

ED: Thaven Naidoo, Tongaii Ferusa

PROD DES: Mmamitse Thibedi

MUS: Benjamin Willem

Cast: Tony Kgoroge, Siyabonga Twala, Eric Miyeni, Ntathe Moshesh, Bonnie Henna

Based on the successful South African miniseries, HOMECOMING is centered on the lives of three veterans of the armed branch of the African National Congress (ANC). After years of exile, three friends return home to post-apartheid South Africa and are surprised to discover that "home" is not the same, and integrating back into South African society will not be easy. Determined to reclaim their lives, they pursue individual paths while maintaining their inseparable friendship. As they each make valiant attempts to regain a sense of normalcy, they are confronted with a shocking revelation that challenges the bonds of their relationship. The story is inspired by the real life experiences of acclaimed filmmaker and writer, Zola Maseko, who also wrote the film's screenplay.

- Sharifa Johka

I WANT TO BE A PILOT

Kenya, Mexico, Spain, 2006, 11 min, Color, 35mm

DIR/SCR/EXEC PROD/DP: Diego Quemada-Diez

ASSOC PROD: Martha Sosa, Christian Valdelievre

ED: Kim Bica

Cast: Collins Otieno

In the biggest slum of East Africa, a 12 year old has only one dream.

My Rating:

Homecoming confronts the ghosts of the ANC and shadowy figures of the South African death squads is directed quite well. The main problem is that one wants even more answers from all its lead characters. *Homecoming* is not as great as a South African drama as Tstsoi, but it is no less as important. What is so refreshing about *Homecoming* is that can cast a skeptical and critical light on the whole ANC movement without diminishing its historical significance. Norman Maake is on his way to making bigger and better films. And I really and truly must recommend the short *I Want To Be A Pilot*. After watching how the film's young hero and narrator struggles to survive in Third World poverty you will not question if you have a good life or not. I give *Homecoming* and *I Want To Be A Pilot* four cheesecakes out of five.

LUXURY CAR

China, France, 2006, 88 min, 35 MM
In French with English subtitles
North American Premiere

DIR/SCR: Wang Chao
PROD: Sylvain Bursztejn, Zhou Wei Si
DP: Liu Yong Hong
ED: Tao Wen
MUS: Xiao He
Cast: Tian Yuan, Wu You Cai, Li Yi Qing, Huang He

LUXURY CAR, a brilliantly executed poetic and stylish piece, owes less to Tsui Hark and John Woo's classic Triad films heritage than France's film noir tradition. No acrobatic kung fu action here, but instead a subdued, interiorized and sophisticated drama.

This dark, gritty story exposes the reality of rural exodus in modern day China. Yan Hong, interpreted by Tian Yuan, is a pretty young woman who has come to the big city from her native rural province. When her father, played by Wu You Cai, visits her to help find her brother, he slowly discovers that his daughter's apparently glamorous lifestyle is in fact supported by her work as an escort in a karaoke bar. The story gets darker as the girl's boyfriend (brilliantly interpreted by Huang He), a gangster king pin, is partly responsible for her brother's death. The sober script enables excellent actors to fully express themselves in inspiring, subtle performances. This powerful film shows the lengths a poor and beautiful young woman must resort to in order to survive in modern urban Chinese society, where gangsters still rule the nightlife industry.

- *Charles Chemery*



MELODRAMA / MELODRAMAT

USA, 2006, 14 min, Color, Sony HD Cam

DIR/SCR/ED/MUS: Peter Craig
PROD: Rachel Williams
DP: Ben Yother
Cast: Brian Boland, Kate Fry, John Ferrick

A supervisor at a consumer product testing lab interrogates two suspects of a devilish prank. Keep your eye on the kid in the corner.

My Rating:

***Luxury Car* is one of those suspend your disbelief type of flicks. I never truly bought that the dad was totally clueless about his daughter being a call girl and his son not being dead. If he was alive he would've called his family. The film is too naïve about the side of China. And *Melodrama* is kinda forgettable. It felt like I was watching a scene from a feature film than a short. I have to give both films two cheesecakes.**



NEVEL IS THE DEVIL

USA, 2006, 14 min, Color, Sony HD Cam

DIR/SCR/ED/MUS: Peter Craig

PROD: Rachel Williams

DP: Ben Youther

Cast: Brian Boland, Kate Fry, John Ferrick

A supervisor at a consumer product testing lab interrogates two suspects of a devilish prank. Keep your eye on the kid in the corner.

NEXT: A PRIMER ON URBAN PAINTING

Canada, France, 2006, 95 min, Digibeta

In English, Spanish, French, Portugese, Japanese with English subtitles

US Premiere

DIR/PROD: Pablo Aravena

PROD: Love Streams Production

EXEC PROD: agnès b, Pablo Aravena, Claude De Maisonneuve, Claude Girard, Nadja Romain

DP: John Barrett Ashmore, Duraid Munajim, Alain Julfayan, Peter Krieger

ED: Christopher Hills-Wright

Cast: FEATURING Lee Quiñones, Heavyweight, Delta, Banksy, Kami and Sasu, Os Gemeos, Swoon

Graffiti is often seen as a youthful, misunderstood art. It has proven itself as indestructible as a beautiful flowering weed—it spreads, regenerates, and fills the cracks, sometimes offering rare moments when you look past the thorns and see the beauty of the art left behind. In their own words, pioneers of the graffiti movement and the artists behind the great works describe what it means to create graffiti. Discover the variations from culture to culture, the diversity of expression and canvases, and the unique voices that have made graffiti a youth art subculture around the world. Whether or not you agree, you will be impressed by the rugged determination of the artists to display their visions on anything that can be painted and get a rare look into their creative process.

- *Natalie McMenemy*

My Rating:

With the success of *The Office* I felt that *Nevil Is The Devil* was fun. I like that type of sedate humor so I give it two cheesecakes. And I really liked *Next: A Primer On Urban Painting* which accurately and smartly shows how graffiti has evolved from simple personal expressions on New York subways to a thriving global artistic movement. Having traveled to Europe graffiti is seen everywhere while we in the U.S. criminalize the innovative work of street artists. I give *Next*: four cheesecakes.



SHOOT THE MESSENGER

UK, 2006, 100 min, Color, HD CAM
North American Premiere

DIR: Ngozi Onwurah

SCR: Sharon Foster

PROD: Anne Pivcevic

EXEC PROD: David Thompson, Hilary Salmon

CO PROD: Yvonne Isimeme Ibazebo

DP: David Katznelson

ED: Liz Webber

PROD DES: James Merifield

Cast: David Oyelowo, Charles Mnene, Nikki Amuka-Bird

MUS: Julian Nott

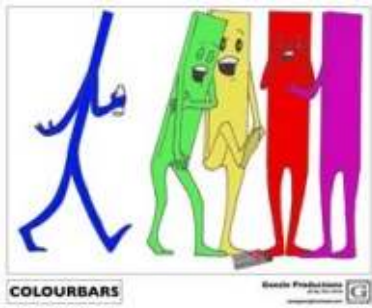
SHOOT THE MESSENGER is a bold, funny, and controversial film directed by the politically explosive Nigerian-Brit filmmaker, Ngozi Onwurah. The film's opening line "...everything bad that has ever happened to me has involved a Black person," rouses and prepares you for a critically insightful and intellectually charged confrontation of ideological and cultural perspectives that is candidly rendered in this remarkably thought-provoking film.

The story chronicles an idealistic Black professional who decides to become a teacher in order to enhance the lives of young Black students. In a twist of irony, the well-intentioned professor finds himself pitted against the students he initially pledged to help and soon becomes a target of the Black community. Feeling betrayed, the young teacher directs his feelings of resentment and rejection against all Black people and adopts the belief that Black people are essentially the root of all evil. This laugh-out-loud comedy brilliantly satirizes conceptions of racial identity and cultural norms. Cleverly written, with a spectacular performance from the film's leading actor, **SHOOT THE MESSENGER** is a refreshing contribution to an African film aesthetic that doesn't take itself too seriously.

- *Sharifa Johka*

My Rating:

Where should I begin with breaking down this mess of a film. What I hate most in a racial farce are characters that are so unbelievable I stopped caring about the important social issues they are trying to expose. One can go back to *Watermelon Man* or *Putney Swope* in the 70's, *Soul Man* in the 80's or *Hollywood Shuffle* in the 90's and most recently *Bamboozled*. And what *Shoot The Messenger* lacks that all those other great racial dramedys is a sympathetic lead character, a story that makes sense and funny ethnic jokes. I never bought *Messenger's* contrived, corny and predictable racist scenarios that made this UK brotha suddenly become a hater of black people. So I have to give *Shoot The Messenger* two cheesecakes out of five.



COLORBARS

Directed By: Timothy Moore
Canada, 2006, 2 min

Combining live action and traditional cell animation, this short film depicts a typical day near the end of the Colourbars' career.

SOMEBODIES

USA, 2006, 89 min, Color, HD-CAM

DIR/SCR: Hadjii

PROD: Pamela Kohn, Nathaniel Kohn

DP: Ousama Rawi

ED: Eric O. Schusterman

PROD DES: Andy Rusk

MUS: Paul Grabowsky

Cast: Hadjii, Kaira Whitehead, Tyler Craig, Patt Brown, Nick Lewis, Carlos Davis, Nard Holston, IronE Singleton

A laugh-out-loud send-up of life in the alternative hotbed of Athens, Georgia, SOMEBODIES is an outlandishly funny, edgy film. It is sure to be one of the most talked about films at the festival. SOMEBODIES takes a lighthearted comedic jab at what it is like to be young, carefree, and reckless in America today. Scottie, a 22-year-old African American college student and party boy, is living life as it comes. Surrounded by a wild group of friends, an eccentric love interest, off-the-wall family members, convicts, and a fire-and-brimstone preacher, Scottie's road to recovery turns into an hilarious journey of self-discovery.

Sophisticated camera work, along with fluid editing and direction, keeps the tempo lively as the characters' hi-jinks continue to careen into one another. With an articulate script filled with memorable one-liners and standout performances—SOMEBODIES is an insightful, unforgettable film.

- Shaz Bennett

My Rating:

Colorbars is a highly original and funny short that I give three cheesecakes. And I believe *Somebodies* is a great indie urban film that should be in Blockbuster not still doing the film festival circuit. "When I wrote the script for *Somebodies*, I wanted to make a movie that would truly take advantage of the creative freedom accessible in independent film, and use it to compose a work that depicted young blacks in a way that had not been done before in a comedy, which meant making a movie that unapologetically showed a side of Black life that often goes unnoticed and overlooked: the travails of the guy in the middle"...Hadjii...I do hope *Somebodies* gets proper distribution someday. And I still give *Somebodies* four cheesecakes.



TRANSYLVANIA

France, 2006, 103 min, Color, 35 MM
 In French, Romanian, English, Italian with English subtitles
 US Premiere

DIR/SCR: Tony Gatlif
DP: Celine Bozon
ED: Monique Dartonne
PROD DES: Brigitte Brassart
MUS: Tony Gatlif, Delphine Mantoulet
Cast: Asia Argento, Amira Casar, Birol Unel

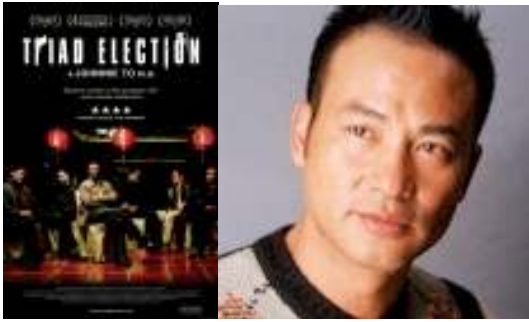
Tony Gatlif returns to Romania nine years after the shooting of his film *GADJO DILO* in Valachia, *TRANSYLVANIA* is his most fully realized film to date. The beautiful and haunting Asia Argento plays Zingarina, a rebellious young woman who leaves for Transylvania to find the man she loves. Accompanied by her protective soul mate, Marie (Amira Casar), Zingarina throws herself body and soul into this trip, venturing into the strange, forbidding foreignness of the legendary territory. At a popular music festival in Sighet, she finds him but also discovers he doesn't love her anymore. Zingarina parts with Maria and tries to start things all over again when she falls in love with Tchangalo played by Birol Ünel (*HEAD ON*), a mysterious character who has no home and no boundaries. They head off on the road across Romania.

Graceful filmmaking, strong seductive performances, vibrant musical numbers and gorgeous cinematography combine to create a profoundly sensual journey, visceral in its effect on the viewer. As Zingarina, Argento captures brilliantly this brutal battle within herself, forcing her to reexamine her very core. Director Tony Gatlif is firmly at the helm of this relentlessly exacting film that unfolds with sharp insight and dramatic flair. The film is immersed in the mythic qualities of Transylvania, revealing ultimately that even isolation is better when shared.

- *Shaz Bennett*

My Rating:

Watching *Transylvania* I was not really surprised at the story of someone falling in love with not only a foreigner, but also falls for a foreign country. There is sort of an undefined cinema genre called travel films. A viewer soaks in all that is weird, strange and unusual in this old fashioned Eastern European nation. Hollywood's *Transylvania* is so far from the real thing. I give *Transylvania* three cheesecakes.



TRIAD ELECTION

China, Hong Kong, 2006, 92 min, 35 MM

DIR: Johnnie To

SCR: Yau Nai-hoi, Yip Tin-shing

PROD: Dennis Law, Johnnie To

EXEC PROD: Charles Heung, Dennis Law

DP: Cheng Siu-keung

ED: Law Wing-cheong, Jeff Cheung

PROD DES: Tony Yu

MUS: Robert Ellis-Geiger

Cast: Louis Koo, Simon Yam, Nick Cheung, Cheung Siu-fai, Lam Ka-tung

TRIAD ELECTION, the follow-up to **ELECTION**, is the second installment of the **Wo Sing Triad** succession saga...as good if not better than the original.

In Johnnie To's follow-up, set two years later, the **Wo Sing Triad** leader's seat is once again up for grabs...Jimmy (played by Hong-Kong star Louis Koo) is a gangster for a new century. Humble yet incredibly shrewd, he is sitting atop a financial empire built with the help of the Triad. In order to consolidate his real estate deals in Mainland China, he needs the clout that only a chairman's title can bring him. Reluctantly embarking on a violent campaign, he realizes that leading the **Wo Sing** clan could yield him far greater power than he ever imagined.

Slower paced and less frantic than the original installment, **TRIAD ELECTION** focuses on the mechanics and rigid mores of the gangster's way of life. Although actual visceral action is not what **Triad Election** is about, intense negotiation scenes are carefully crafted and well balanced with slow-burning menace and sudden jolts of violence. Swift and creative, this Hong Kong gem is a riveting film.

- *Charles Chemery*

My Rating:

Triad Election is better than its predecessor *Election* because I sympathize with Jimmy the Gangster's plight of becoming the Triad Chairman. He has waited patiently to be put in the top position and should rightfully get his shot. The reason why it is so easy to get into *Triad Election* is because of the popularity of HBO's *The Sopranos*. Just like one understands all the rival criminal factions, deceptions and ego trips in the *Sopranos* one equally can follow them in *Triad Election*. It is no wonder why so many Asian gangsta films are be remade into U.S. gangsta films. *Triad* slows down the gunplay and violence to show how the toughest men in China would rather die than let the wrong man or the least deserving man run their Triad. And I loved the fact that Jimmy had to deal with his family and personal issues at the same time he has to fight his Triad rivals. I give *Triad Election* four cheesecakes.