

The Review

The 66th Edinburgh International Film Festival

BACK FROM THE DEAD?

After a couple of mediocre years that saw the Film Festival move from its traditional home at the heart of Edinburgh Festival season in August to the dreich wasteland that's Scotland in June, last year's 65th Festival looked like it may be the last.

After doing away with the glitz and glam of the red carpets, ditching the awards, axeing crowd-pleasing events and stands, and offering up a scaled back programme that, well, not to put too fine a point on it, sucked like Electrolux, the Edinburgh International Film Festival didn't just look like it was ready for its pensioner's bus pass, it looked like it was ready for a swift trip to Dignitas.

As the curtain closes on 2012's 66th Festival, new Artistic Director Chris Fujiwara's first, the sense of relief among the industry, filmmakers, audiences, and film-buffs was almost palpable. By reinstituting the awards, the red carpets, in fact, everything that was cut from the 2011 Festival, all Fujiwara had to do was show up in Edinburgh and not say anything derogatory about Irn-Bru, the Castle and pipers, or urinate on Greyfriars Bobby's grave and he'd be hailed as the Second Coming. The fact that the Festival has been a critical and commercial success is a bonus. But has it been any good?

While Fujiwara's programme was relatively safe and surprise free, featuring the usual grab bag of quality World Cinema and American Indies, it lacked the obvious

breakout films of previous years (*Little Miss Sunshine*, *Moon*, *The Hurt Locker*). However, opening with 70s wunderkind William Friedkin's delightfully sleazy, trailer trash, American Gothic *Killer Joe* was an undeniably bold and audacious move for Fujiwara, securing headlines, stoking controversy, and triumphantly announcing the Festival's resurrection.

Already slapped with a restrictive NC-17 certificate by the American ratings board, Friedkin's second collaboration with playwright Tracey Letts (after 2006's bonkers *Bug* which gave the world Michael Shannon) is a blackly funny, white trash noir that'll change the way you look at KFC. In fact, once you see the use Matthew McConaughey's cop-turned-hitman finds for Gina Gershon and one of the Colonel's drumsticks, you may never eat chicken again. Or you'll rush out and buy a family bucket. With game-changing performances from McConaughey, Gershon, and the luminous Juno Temple, *Killer Joe* is a sick, twisted, darkly funny piece of hick-sploitation cinema that proves that at 76, William Friedkin is still one of America's most exciting directors. If nothing else, McConaughey's oily, reptilian performance almost banishes memories of the decade of bad chick flicks he's made with the likes of Kate Hudson and Sarah Jessica Parker.

There was more controversy with *Police Academy* veteran and stand-up comic Bobcat Goldthwait's fourth film as a director,

the pitch-black comedy *God Bless America* in which a middle-aged wage slave and a sociopathic teenage girl go on a cross-country murder spree, killing homophobic ministers, right-wing talk show hosts, reality TV stars, people who talk during movies ... their rampage finally culminating in their invasion of the live final of an American Idol-style talent show. But if you're a new parent or are particularly squeamish, maybe you might want to give it a miss. In the opening scenes, as a combination of blinding headaches, insomnia, reality television, and next door's squealing baby causes the protagonist, Frank's (Bill Murray's brother Joel) sanity to unravel, he does something so jaw-dropping, so transgressive, so downright wrong you'll either storm from the cinema in disgust or you'll be left gasping and weak, snorting with shocked, guilty laughter.

Its riffs on popular culture and the state of our society may feel a little like disjointed stand up routines (in fact, director Goldthwait has used some of this material in his stand up gigs) but *God Bless America* is a scabrously funny, raging howl of despair at what we're becoming. Frank may be watching fictional shows like *Tuff Girls* where two arguing reality TV stars remove and throw their used tampons at each other or talent shows like *American Superstarz* where the judges exploit the vulnerable and disabled, but take a look at shows like *The Only Way Is Essex* or *The X Factor* and ask yourself: just how wide of the mark is Goldthwait? A dancing dog named Pudsey won this year's *Britain's Got Talent*. More people voted for him than for our current Prime Minister. A dancing dog! What more proof do you need that Rome is burning and the barbarians are at the gates?

Fans of Scandinavian noir were well served by the darkly comic Norwegian *Jackpot* (*Arme Riddere*) and Icelandic gangster movie *Black's Game* (*Svartur á leik*). Based on an original story by *Headhunters* author Jo Nesbø, *Jackpot*'s Coen Brothers-esque plot saw three dangerous ex-cons and their supervisor at the Christmas tree factory where they work win a fortune on the football pools. But after the initial elation fades, it isn't long before the group fall out and turn on each other leading to murder, dismemberment, a novel use for the factory shredding machine, and a bloody shootout at a strip bar. Slick, sick, and

God Bless America, written and directed by Bobcat Goldthwait.





Jackpot, screenplay and directed Magnus Martens, story by Jo Nesbø.

ultra-violent, with more twists than a corkscrew, *Jackpot* will make you take a long, hard look at the other members of your work lottery syndicate.

Proclaiming itself to be based 'on sh*t that actually happened,' Icelandic crime thriller *Black's Game* was a cheerfully nasty romp, with added male rape, through the usual clichés of the gangster movie: novice joins gang, gang takes over underworld, drugs, whores, party, party, party, gang falls out, ends in tears. Also from Iceland came the gently funny, glacially paced *Either Way* (*Á annan veg*), an episodic and sporadically *Leave It On The Track*, directed by Benjamin Pascoe.

hilarious comedy road movie that's literally about the road and the mismatched pair of doofuses [doofi?] who paint the dividing lines.

It's debatable how much crossover appeal the strands focusing on the Philippine New Wave or Danish documentaries or the retrospectives of the work of Japanese director Shinji Somai or forgotten screwball comedy director of the 30s and 40s Gregory La Cava held for most audiences and the *Looking South* strand focusing on the films of Chile, Argentina, and Uruguay were just too, well, unfocused, but as ever Edinburgh

ADDRESS FOR CORRESPONDENCE

David Watson
E-mail: funny_linguist@hotmail.com

gave us some great documentaries with the likes of *Fukushima: Memories Of The Lost Landscape*, *The Life And times Of Paul The Psychic Octopus*, and critical favourite *The Imposter*, a fascinating portrait of a con artist and the family who welcomed him believing him to be their long-lost son. However if, like me, you enjoy watching big, sexy, Goth gals on roller skates beat hell out of each other, then Benjamin Pascoe's roller derby documentary *Leave It On The Track* is one to watch out for. Fast, violent, visceral, and thrilling, it shows you just why roller derby is the fastest growing women's sport in the world.

The closing night film, Pixar's *Brave* also featured strong female protagonists in the shape of Kelly Macdonald's headstrong, flame-haired Merida and Emma Thompson's Queen Elinor, battling a demonic bear and each other. A grand fairytale adventure on a par with the best of Pixar's back catalogue (well, maybe not as good as *Wall•E*) it marked a triumphant and charming end to a Film Festival that's happily showing healthy signs of recovery.

David Watson,
Cinema Editor at Filmjuice.
<http://www.filmjuice.com>

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