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>> FILM : CAPSULES

New Releases

Interview

Directed by Steve Buscemi

C

Reviewed by Sean Burns

Opens Fri., Aug. 3

Boozy, battle-scarred former war correspondent Pierre Peters (Steve Buscemi) is disgusted with his latest assignment. Big-time indictments are coming down in D.C., and yet here he is, stuck in SoHo, pounding out a puff piece about a tabloid starlet named Katya, famous not for her undistinguished acting career, but rather for the men she's slept with. In a rather cheeky casting gambit, Katya is played by Sienna Miller, a tabloid starlet famous not for her undistinguished acting career, but for the men she's slept with.

Turns out Miller isn't such a bad actress after all—something I never would've guessed after suffering through *Factory Girl*—and her Katya is a bundle of coked-up nerves, raging diva entitlement and complete indifference to the world around her. Pierre doesn't even bother hiding his contempt, tossing back bourbons while passive-aggressively mocking her every vapid answer. You'd think the interview would be over once he calls her "Cuntya," but their night has only just begun.

Stretching the bounds of credibility, there's a fender bender, a mild concussion, and suddenly Pierre's hanging out in Katya's SoHo loft, where the booze, drugs and confessions all start pouring out in one of those stagy two-character showdowns that tend to feel more like acting school exercises than an actual movie.

Interview is Buscemi's remake of a 2003 film by the murdered Dutch director Theo van Gogh. The great-great-nephew of the celebrated painter was gunned down in 2004 by a Muslim extremist, apparently as a response to his TV movie *Submission: Part I*. Buscemi touchingly intends the film as tribute to a fallen comrade, and in addition to adapting the screenplay himself, he's also directed *Interview* using van Gogh's preferred method of running three simultaneous cameras. Such a well-intentioned project—too bad it's not very good.

For starters, Buscemi is woefully miscast. An enormous amount of the interplay between Pierre and Katya depends on sexual tension. She's one of the most beautiful women in the world, but he brings out her daddy issues. There's a masculine brutishness to his dialogue, and Pierre is constantly pushing closer and invading Katya's physical space. And yet—don't get me wrong, he's one of the best actors around—he's still *Steve Buscemi*. It's a role Harvey Keitel or Nick Nolte might've knocked out of the park. The movie needed Anthony Quinn, not Peter Lorre.

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Finally the artifice of the enterprise becomes too much to bear. We wander far off course into murder confessions and cancer revelations, and the movie tritely settles for blackmail plots, ditching *Interview's* infinitely more interesting initial premise of watching two people from different worlds actually sit down and talk to one another.

Arctic Tale

Directed by Adam Ravetch and Sarah Robertson

B+

Reviewed by Brook Midgley

Opens Fri., Aug. 3

The global warming cause has propagandists Adam Ravetch and Sarah Robertson on its side. And that's good, because the directors do a damn good job of documenting the slushy mess we've made of that cold crystal circle in the North.

Under the *National Geographic* umbrella, the husband-and-wife team spent more than a decade following wildlife in the Arctic. From their research they created the fable of polar cub Nanu and walrus pup Seela, following them from their births to the births of their own babies. Queen Latifah narrates the kid-friendly tale, and her first line is demonstrably prophetic: "They're children of the Arctic, their lives cradled by the ice around them." And that's just the problem—the cradle is melting.

It's one thing to hear global warming is killing walruses and polar bears. It's another to meet Seela and Nanu, and then watch them and their parents abandon the ancient rituals they've relied on for years in order to survive.

No longer can polar bears count on sufficient ice cover to provide shelter nooks for their food source, baby seals. And watching the polar bears' bewilderment as they fall through the ice will more than make you want to buy a hybrid and sign up for wind energy. These warmer conditions have also melted the sizable ice islands walruses use as refuge. Sadly, there's more than one scene where too many walruses climb onto a too-small island, only to capsize it and chuck everyone into the water. Eventually both the polar bears and walruses resort to swimming 200 miles to Rock Island, a rare feat that may now become routine.

Arctic Tale is painful to watch at times, but Latifah's narration sets a tone that doesn't leave you feeling completely suicidal. Just when you think the Arctic world is on its last legs, Ravetch and Robertson introduce walruses' communal flatulence, a perky little fox faithfully shadowing Nanu or Nanu's successful ploy for food when faced with a male challenger.

The film closes with the birth of Nanu and Seela's children. Ben Harper's "Happily Ever After in Your Eyes" plays as we see the clumsy first movements of the polar bear cubs and walrus pup. It's perhaps too pleasant a closing given the challenges those babies will have to overcome to survive.

Gypsy Caravan

Directed by Jasmine Dellal

B

Reviewed by Matt Prigge

Opens Fri., Aug. 3

Last year Borat made a mockery of anti-Gypsy sentiment. ("Gypsy, who is this woman you have shrunk?") Now comes director Jasmine Dellal to finish the job. Setting out to dismantle one of the more enduring

cultural stereotypes—that of gypsies as a nomadic race who'll steal your belongings the moment you blink—Dellal's film attacks by way of example, tagging along with the titular concert tour, which shlepped across the country back in 2001.

Like Wim Wenders' jaw-droppingly lazy *Buena Vista Social Club*, Dellal's doc is part bio, part music performance and quite a bit infomercial for an infectious brand of niche music. But *Gypsy Caravan* is an improvement over *Buena Vista Social Club* in every way, most notably in finding the right mix of tunes, factoids, mini-biographies and cultural corrections.

Major misconception No. 1: Gypsies, some of whom prefer the moniker *Roma*, have something remotely resembling a unified culture. The five bands going from New York to L.A. feature such a diverse sound, it's no shock to discover they count four different countries home among them—a sampling of a worldwide diaspora consisting of numerous languages, religions, cultures and musical styles.

Taraf de Haidouks, a manic string band from Romania, feature a conventional 12-person crew, and even inspire breathless testimony from Johnny Depp, with whom they shared a trailer on the set of *The Man Who Cried*.

Called "Queen of the Gypsies," Esma Redzepova is a one-woman show, a rotund, show-stopping diva who brags that she "never assimilated for anyone."

And then there's India's Maharaja, which boasts a cross-dressing male dancer who does an indescribable ditty called the "knee dance."

Partly shot by the ever-game Albert Maysles, Dellal's film features plenty of information, with the actual musical performances—jawdroppers, all of them—eating up only roughly a quarter of the running time.

But the music seeps into every pore, and the film comes off less like a doc than a fun romp—an extension of one of Serbian madman Emir Kusturica's Felliniesque Roma pictures (*Time of the Gypsies*; *Black Cat*, *White Cat*). Along the way, Dellal and subjects inform us of the prejudices Gypsies have faced for centuries (most notably catching the eye of Hitler). But Dellal understands that nothing expresses Gypsy life better than their music.

El Cantante

Directed by Leon Ichaso

B+

Reviewed by Emily Guendelsberger

Opens Fri., Aug. 3

Gigli is the obvious parallel to *El Cantante*, starring Marc Anthony as salsa king Hector Lavoe and Jennifer Lopez as his long-suffering wife Puchi. One of the most universally panned movies in history when it opened four years ago this week, *Gigli* drew critical wrath partly because it was a terrible movie, but also because Ben Affleck and Jennifer Lopez seemed to have made the film as a megalomaniacal attempt to show the world how adorable they were as a couple. The world's reaction was first to vomit a little, then to abruptly derail Affleck's career.

Four years and two days later, the term Bennifer has thankfully gone the way of the Macarena, and here's a new movie in which Lopez stars with real-life husband Anthony. It seems like a sure bet *El Cantante* will get the same punishment for vanity-project hubris.

But *El Cantante* isn't *Gigli*. In fact, it's not bad at all.

Dreamgirls provides a more apt comparison. Both movies follow musical careers from naive beginnings to downward spirals. Both overcome their predictable stories by never letting the music stop. But unlike *Dreamgirls*, where the first act's balls-out Motown numbers gradually melted into sappy mediocrity, Anthony's covers of Lavoe's songs remain top quality and exciting.

The scenes without music suffer. When it pops up, the framing device, supposedly a series of modern-day interviews with Puchi about the life of her recently deceased husband, stops the movie's momentum dead.

In these scenes it's also most apparent that though the movie spans 20 years of hard partying and drug use, the characters don't age—they just change their wardrobe. In scenes set in 2002, when Puchi would've been in her 50s, Lopez hasn't a wrinkle on her. Cheap lipstick seems to be the only concession to the fact that Puchi has aged 30 years.

Lopez and Anthony make the relationship between Puchi and Lavoe surprisingly real, given that the tale of the self-destructive star and his saintly/enabling/harpy wife has been told a thousand times. Even as Hector gets increasingly out of control, Lopez manages to show us why Puchi overlooked his drug abuse, cheating and odd resemblance to Steve Buscemi.

He's charming, has a good heart, and the music he makes outweighs his flaws—things that could apply to

both *El Cantante* the singer and *El Cantante* the movie.

The Simpsons Movie

Directed by David Silverman

C+

Reviewed by Matt Prigge

Now showing

Why, asks Homer as he watches what appears to be the second *Itchy and Scratchy* movie, would one pay for something you can see for free on TV? Because there's a better chance it won't suck as hard?

Having years ago been forced to stop planning my Sundays around the greatest show ever, it's a great relief to announce that the absurdly tardy *Simpsons Movie* doesn't suck as hard as the morass of fanboy in-jokes, self-serving star cameos and sporadic funniness the program spiraled into long ago. (I'd pinpoint the descent's start at 1997.)

In fact, it doesn't suck at all. Bigger, longer and not very uncut (save a long take of Bart's wee-wee), *The Simpsons Movie* doesn't have the *raison d'être* or ambition of the *South Park* movie. Nor is it nearly as cinematic as certain classic episodes, like those directed by future Pixar maven Brad Bird. Had it been made during the era of "Last Exit to Springfield" (i.e., the tightest half-hour of comedy ever), you could expect a satirical dadaist explosion. A decade-plus later, the best you can hope for is a couple of half-decent late-period episodes laid out over 87 minutes that never make you feel like your youth is being anally violated. Which, yippee, is exactly what you get.

And yet why do I still feel a bit jilted? Because the premise is actually kind of promising. *The Simpsons Movie* has Homer thoughtlessly causing an eco-disaster. To literally contain the menace, evil EPA director Albert Brooks (his sixth appearance) encases Springfield in an impenetrable transparent dome. With the town wiped off the map (or at least GPS) and left for dead, the film is primed for gags about its endless supporting cast.

Past writers (not Conan O'Brien, sadly) were even brought back to create a dense latticework of yuks. But once the Simpson fam miraculously escapes to Alaska to avoid being lynched, the movie sadly goes with them, leaving viewers with but one tiny bit with Moe, Mr. Burns, Professor Frink, et al. What, no lines for Duffman? Granted, Santa's Little Helper gets subtitled (finally!) and one great character gets hilariously offed. But Homer, as usual, is the only character given serious dotage, and he, like the show itself, is stuck in too-comfortable familiarity to be truly, deliriously inventive.

There's something I'd have never expected of a *Simpsons* movie in 2007: It actually makes you think it could've been great.

Not Reviewed

Becoming Jane

Anne Hathaway plays a young Jane Austen in the story of the writer's purported real-life romance with a charming law student (James McAvoy). (*Opens Fri., Aug. 3.*)

Bratz

Four best friends combat high school hierarchy in a movie based on the popular line of fashion dolls. (*Opens Fri., Aug. 3.*)

Hot Rod

Motorcycle stuntman Rod Kimble (Andy Samberg) plans to jump 15 buses to raise money for his asshole stepfather's heart operation. He plans to fight his stepdad once he regains his health. (*Opens Fri., Aug. 3.*)

The Ten

David Wain and Ken Marino—the *Wet Hot American Summer* wing of *The State* spill-over—unleash loopy, star-studded shorts on each of the Ten Commandments. (*Opens Fri., Aug. 3.*)

Underdog

Have no fear: After gaining superpowers and the ability to speak from a lab experiment gone wrong, the caped beagle (voiced by Jason Lee) swoops in to save Capitol City from mad scientist Simon Barsinister (Peter Dinklage) and his henchmen. (*Opens Fri., Aug. 3.*)

Ongoing

The Boss of It All

There are at least two major firsts in Lars Von Trier's latest, the most alarming one being that the sadist behind *Breaking the Waves* and *Dancer in the Dark* has gone and made an actual honest-to-God comedy. Even more shocking, it's genuinely funny, complete with a fairly kickass comic premise: To complete a

pending merger, company lawyer (and Von Trier stand-in) Peter Gantzler hires pretentious, unemployed actor Jens Albinus to pose as the business' nonexistent CEO. Not since *Adaptation* has a movie spiraled so deeply into the ether of cheeky postmodernism. Come the end Von Trier quips: "I'd like to apologize to those who wanted more and to those who wanted less." Still smarting from the cool reception to his unfinished *Dogville/Manderlay/Washington* trilogy, perhaps? **B+** (M.P.)

Broken English

Broken English opens up looking like it's going to be a light, bubbly New York romcom, with Parker Posey as a thirtysomething who's the last of her friends (and seemingly humankind) to pair off in the legal sense. Except Posey's out for even fewer laughs than Jack Nicholson's effectively drained turn in *About Schmidt*. Posey's Nora Wilder, who's stuck in a dead-end hotel job, is seriously depressed and lonely, and the actress reveals the very real insecurities under the Parker Posey we love and maybe see too much of. Director Zoe Cassavetes is right along with her star, keeping things straight-faced and subtly funny. Alas, the film slides ever so slightly off-track starting with the arrival of her destined-to-be—a Frenchman played by *Time to Leave*'s Melvil Poupaud, who sadly can't temper his rather blinding and ill-applied sense of self-regard. **B-** (M.P.)

Goya's Ghosts

This unwieldy, rocky ride takes on both the Spanish Inquisition *and* the Napoleonic Wars. Perched perilously on the edge of camp, *Goya's Ghosts* is a heedlessly overwrought melodrama boasting some of the most cheerfully insane casting blunders of recent years. The film's underlying concerns couldn't be more admirable. It's all about the interchangeable corruption of hard-line ideologues, and the responsibility of the artist to speak truth to power. Too bad it also happens to be plotted like a trashy romance novel, and the endless barrage of can-you-top-this twists and some overscaled performances make it unintentionally hilarious. **C** (S.B.)

Hairspray

If you can stomach two hours of John Travolta in drag, then by all means. (Not reviewed.)

Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix

The most exciting thing about David Yates' *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* is that, four sequels into this saga, it finally feels like we're watching a bona fide, honest-to-God *movie*. Slashing J.K. Rowling's almost 900-page opus down to a relatively trim 138 minutes, screenwriter Michael Goldenberg (new to the series; the previous pictures were penned by Steve Kloves) has shed countless subplots and fan favorites, at long last reconceiving *Harry Potter* in purely cinematic terms. It's a tight, thematically unified piece of work, and the moral of the story is: Adolescence sucks. **B+** (S.B.)

I Know Who Killed Me

Lindsay Lohan plays a stripper who may or may not have been tortured by a psychopath in this twist-laden thriller. Also starring Neal McDonough and Julia Ormond. (Not reviewed.)

I Now Pronounce You Chuck & Larry

Sandler and *The King of Queens*' Kevin James star as macho, uberstraight Brooklyn firefighters. When a bureaucratic snafu leaves widower James unable to reassign his insurance benefits to his children, the film bends over backward trying to convince us that the only logical choice is for these best friends to shack up together and fake a domestic partnership. Cue the skeeved-out snickers, as our manly men find themselves playing gay in a whole new world, one populated exclusively by mincing, flamboyant queenie stereotypes that were already stale back in the disco era. The flat visuals, slack pacing and mawkish sentimentality mark this as a Happy Madison production through and through. This movie is trying to tell you that gays are people too. Sure they're icky, embarrassing people, but you should still be nice to them. **D+** (S.B.)

My Best Friend

A light French comedy about a man who convinces a cab driver to teach him how to make friends, and to pose as his best friend in order to win a bet. (Not reviewed.) **No**

Reservations

Catherine Zeta-Jones plays an uptight master chef challenged by the laidback likes of Aaron Eckhart. She's also just taken in her young niece (Abigail Breslin), who along with Eckhart teaches her to loosen up. (Not reviewed.)

Rescue Dawn

In remaking his 1997 documentary *Little Dieter Needs to Fly*—about a German-American pilot's imprisonment in and escape from a Laos prison camp during the infancy of the Vietnam War—as a movie, Werner Herzog seems a little rusty when it comes to fiction. Never one to repeat himself, the director fumbles around for an interesting angle on *Rescue Dawn*, deciding to focus on a deeply felt but ultimately anonymous portrait of ritual, survival and nature. **B-** (M.P.)

Sicko

Anyone who's been to an emergency room lately will loudly concur that the U.S. healthcare system is pretty much fucked. This should've been the perfect subject for Michael Moore's peculiar brand of man-on-the-street muckracking. Instead *Sicko* turns out to be the same 30-minute movie repeated four times in a row. Moore sat down with dozens of Americans and asked them to tell their Kafkaesque tragedies of denied care,

bureaucratic red tape and crippling co-pays with catastrophic consequences. It's all seriously scary stuff, especially once you realize he's sticking with the lucky folks who actually *have* health insurance, instead of the millions who don't. Moore's trying to make a case for socialized medicine, but his methodology is so crude, simplistic and redundant that you'll walk out feeling like you know even less about the subject than when you walked in. **C-** (S.B.)

Sunshine

Set a scant 50 years in the future, *Sunshine* follows the rather cheekily named spaceship Icarus II during what sounds like a suicide mission aimed directly at the sun. It seems our star is faltering, and it's up to our selfless heroes to ride a gigantic multimegaton nuclear bomb straight into the sucker to give it a little jump-start. *Sunshine's* first hour is mesmerizing—and one might assume a crippled spaceship short on oxygen, loaded with fissile material and headed into the sun to save planet Earth might provide enough drama for a two-hour feature. Apparently not, as *Sunshine* eventually devolves into a dopey slasher flick, complete with a mad, stark-naked killer running between decks. **C+** (S.B.)

Talk to Me

Broad as a barn door but shamelessly entertaining, Kasi Lemmons' loud populist biopic chronicles the tumultuous career of legendary D.C. DJ Ralph Waldo "Petey" Greene Jr., a straight-shooting, shit-talking streetwise hustler played to the hilt by the great Don Cheadle. Heavily indebted to everything from *Good Morning, Vietnam* to *Private Parts*, screenwriters Michael Genet and Rick Famuyiwa paint their subject in gigantic folk-hero brushstrokes, structuring the saga around Petey's unlikely friendship with his uptight Johnny Carson-worshipping producer/manager Dewey Hughes (Chiwetel Ejiofor). The film serves as a rebuke to our iPod-happy, private-playlist-addicted pop culture, saluting that quickly eroding community of radio, and remembering the way we used to share our sadness over the airwaves together. One nation, under a groove. **B** (S.B.)

Vitus

The story of a child prodigy who possesses an exceptional talent for the piano. Switzerland's Best Foreign Film entry for the 2007 Academy Awards. (Not reviewed.)

Who's Your Caddy?

A rap mogul (Big Boi) and his crew take on the president of an elite Southern country club that doesn't want them for members. (Not reviewed.)

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