



Hero-worship

taken to a whole new level

Diego Armando Maradona's eventful life receives sympathetic treatment in a film that offers little appeal to non-soccer fans

BY TONY PHILLIPS
STAFF REPORTER



Director Emir Kusturica, left, and soccer great Diego Maradona struck up a warm relationship in *Maradona* by Kusturica.
PHOTOS COURTESY OF ATOM CINEMA

Film Notes

MARADONA BY KUSTURICA

DIRECTED BY: EMIR KUSTURICA

FEATURING: DIEGO MARADONA AND EMIR KUSTURICA

RUNNING TIME: 90 MINUTES

TAIWAN RELEASE: TODAY

LANGUAGE: ENGLISH AND SPANISH WITH ENGLISH AND CHINESE SUBTITLES

For soccer fans, Diego Armando Maradona needs no introduction. For the uninitiated, the hero-worship that the short, barrel-chested, now portly, 40-something Argentine generates is amply demonstrated in *Maradona* by Emir Kusturica.

Not only is the eponymous Serbian-Bosnian director Kusturica clearly under his spell, but some of the Argentine's compatriots are shown to have gone so far as establishing a Church of Maradona, albeit tongue in cheek.

In this documentary film we see a shrine to the great man, a "disciple" initiated into the church by reenacting the former Argentina captain's "Hand of God" goal (when England's nemesis punched the ball into the net in the 1986 World Cup quarterfinal) and a couple marrying on a soccer field. The bride subsequently hitches up her wedding dress to punt a ball goalward before the groom scores into an empty net and embarks on a wild celebration. A child is seen reciting the Lord's Prayer, but with the words changed to pay homage to Maradona.

It's not all laughs though, as we see Maradona rail against US President George W. Bush, "a piece of human garbage," and revisit the Buenos Aires slum where he grew up. In one of the interviews interspersed throughout the film, he talks about how his addiction to cocaine almost cost him his life.

Kusturica pins his colors to the mast at the beginning of the film, when he is described as the "Maradona of cinema" and recounts how for gods all is forgiven.

The film makes little attempt at even-handed treatment of its subject as we see Maradona "the revolutionary" meeting then Cuban leader Fidel Castro and sharing a platform with Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez; Diego the family man with his parents, wife and daughters (but not his shunned illegitimate son); and sympathizing with the director at the sight of a bombed-out building in Belgrade.

Still, it's not all rose-tinted, as Kusturica has difficulty pinning the Argentine down despite the film being two years in the making, and a guilt-ridden Maradona painfully

recounts how cocaine blighted his recollection of important moments of his daughters' childhoods.

It's difficult to see how the film would have great appeal beyond soccer fans as the "revolutionary" status Diego is accorded seems to extend no further than attending some rallies, sporting tattoos of Castro and Che Guevara and spouting anti-US rhetoric.

Still, no matter what you feel about Maradona the man, if nothing else the film shows why he is widely regarded as one of the best, if not the best soccer player of all time.

We are treated to repeated clips of the "Goal of the Century" (from the same World Cup match in which he scored his most infamous goal) where he runs half the length of the pitch, breezing past England players as if they weren't there, before waltzing past goalkeeper Peter Shilton to score.

Throughout the film, defenders are bamboozled and goalkeepers left looking like mugs as Maradona finds ever more outrageous ways of putting the ball in the net for Argentinos Juniors, Boca Juniors, Barcelona, Napoli and, of course, Argentina.

After a clip of one particularly audacious goal we cut to Maradona talking to Kusturica in the Belgrade stadium where he scored it. He describes how, having beaten a number of players, he noticed the keeper had advanced far off his line. So, after feigning to unleash a powerful shot, he scooped his foot under the ball to send it in a high arc over the keepers head and into the net before recounting with glee the expression of bemused amazement on his opponent's face.

At one point in the film Maradona recounts an unusual way in which he honed his extraordinary skills. He recalls playing soccer as a child at every possible opportunity, even in the dark, which made playing in daylight a breeze.

Toward the end of the film, Maradona expresses regret about the devastating effects of his cocaine addiction on himself and his family.

"Imagine what a player I'd have been if I hadn't taken cocaine," he says. "What a player we lost," he says with a laugh.

OTHER RELEASES

► COMPILED BY MARTIN WILLIAMS

Nights in Rodanthe

Diane Lane and Richard Gere team up again after their marital troubles in *Unfaithful*. This time, their characters intertwine in a story with a message that is more optimistic. The pair, gorgeous but emotionally wounded, meet while staying on the east coast of the US and forge a relationship that challenges their perspectives on what lies ahead. Lane seems to be playing the kinds of roles that Diane Keaton was playing a decade ago, though with less slapstick, and her faithful fans will surely be lining up for this one, as will Gere's. This film is opening wide in the US in tandem with Taiwan.



Rogue

Next up from the director of the brutal Aussie horror opus *Wolf Creek* is this critically applauded mutant-croc-on-the-loose sub-species of the monster movie. The good news for less adventurous audiences is that it goes for the scares and the thrills without shoving violence or gore down their throats. Instead, *Rogue* opts for atmosphere, scenery, unconventional elements and just plain fun. An American tourist visits Australia's deep north and before too long he and his tour group are marked for dinner. Released in Australian cinemas, where it should be seen, but it more or less went straight to DVD in the US. So much for casting an American.



Genova

A car accident starts this film and leaves two girls without their mother. The father (Colin Firth) then takes the stricken pair to Italy, where he has an academic job in the city of the title and ... maybe things can get better for everyone. But the younger daughter starts to see visions of her mother, the older daughter becomes rather less obedient and Firth samples the local ladies as tensions build to a climax. Director Michael Winterbottom's latest movie has passionate supporters, unlike his last film released here, the sexually explicit *9 Songs*, which was censored (the sex, not the songs). No such fate for *Genova*, thankfully.



Chocolate

A step up from *Shaolin Girl*, this is a Thai carnival of kickboxing mayhem; this time the hero is female — and autistic. Snacking on chocolate will get her in the mood for violence, especially when a friend sets her up with victims who owe her ailing mother a lot of money. The trailer features a relentless series of matchups, which are intense enough to conclude that the heroine should stay away from dark chocolate if possible. From the director of *Ong-Bak*. The Chinese-language title is "Fatal Chocolate"; perhaps the local distributor is trying to cash in on the fear of imports from China with complimentary toxins.



Le Rayon Vert

And now for the winner of this month's Weird Release Award. Legendary French director Eric Rohmer made this drama way back in 1986. As with most of his work, multiplex audiences will be left scratching their heads over this tale of a Parisian woman (Marie Riviere) who splits up with her beau, then spends the rest of the film struggling to communicate with almost everyone as she recoils from social agendas she would rather not satisfy. Showing exclusively at the Changchun theater in Taipei — an art-house multiplex. Also known as *Summer*.



TAIPEI'S TOP FIVE

City cinema weekend box office takings

(Sept. 20 and Sept. 21)

Source: Group Power Entertainment Corp.



■ **Cape No. 7**
(海角七號)
NT\$19,915,934



■ **Righteous Kill**
(世紀交鋒)
NT\$3,685,907



■ **Hellboy II: The Golden Army**
(地獄怪客II:金甲軍團)
NT\$2,777,272



■ **4bia**
(鬼4處)
NT\$1,714,489



■ **Orz Boyz**
(囧男孖)
NT\$1,688,777

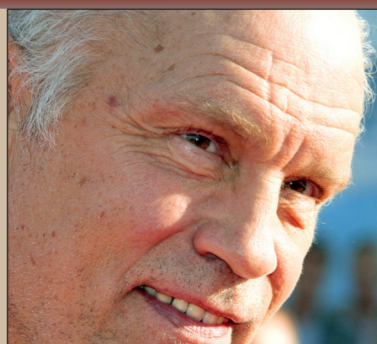
The New York Film Festival defines itself as an annual chance to take account of the state of film as art.

Last year's story line was obvious enough: American filmmakers, from Julian Schnabel to Wes Anderson, were making — and finding ways to distribute — some excellent movies.

What a difference a year makes. This year's festival — which opens today with the US premiere of the Cannes Palm d'Or winner *The Class* — still boasts a number of high-profile American films. But the stronger energy — as it often is at the NYFF — is from abroad.

Clint Eastwood's *Changeling*, which stars Angelina Jolie and John Malkovich, will make its US premiere, as will Steven Soderbergh's four-hour epic *Che*, the festival's centerpiece. Closing the festival will be Darren Aronofsky's *The Wrestler*, which features an already much acclaimed performance from Mickey Rourke.

Throughout this year, much of the dialogue in the art film community has been about the declining state of independent film as independent. This year's slate of American films at the NYFF is down to six (at least one of



which was financed outside of the country) out of 28 films in total.

The New York Film Festival's purview has never been constrained by borders. In its nearly five decades of existence (this is the 46th NYFF), it has specialized in introducing audiences to new filmmaking talent from around the globe.

The NYFF, which will run from today until Oct. 12, doesn't give awards like most festivals but simply exhibits a curated batch of highly selective movies — many of which have played at earlier festivals.

Jean-Luc Godard, Francois Truffaut and Pedro Almodovar are just a handful of the filmmakers the festival supported early in their careers and watched as their international regard and fame grew.

As of yet, American filmgoers have been reluctant to explore contemporary foreign filmmakers — even those who have amassed a large body of work, helped along by festival support and critical acclaim.

It's an "improbable story" about a simple man who somehow becomes the most powerful leader in the world, says director Oliver Stone about his new movie *W* a biopic of the current US president.

And always the provocateur, Stone is due to release the movie on Oct. 17, fewer than three weeks before the nation votes to decide who should collect the keys of the White House from US President George W. Bush.

But Stone, who at 62 is the same age as Bush, insisted the biopic was "not a hatchet job," contrary to expectations that it will depict the US leader, whose approval ratings have plummeted to historic lows, in a negative light.

W is a "fair" portrait, argued Stone, who went to Yale University at the same time as Bush in the mid-1960s, before dropping out to serve in Vietnam.

Instead the director, whose previous films include the political biography

Nixon and the satire on American violence *Natural Born Killers*, said he wanted to shed some light on Bush's true character and his story.

"Fifty million people voted for him on two occasions," Stone said. "He was in the same league for a long time as [former US president] Ronald Reagan, until he became so offensive."

In the much anticipated movie, Stone revisits the tumultuous youth of a man who came from a wealthy, oil family and whose father, George H. Bush, was also president.

When news broke that *W* was in production, Stone told the movie industry newspaper *Variety* that he wanted to get behind the man, to paint a personal portrait, and to answer the central question: "How did Bush go from an alcoholic bum to the most powerful figure in the world?"

Actor Josh Brolin portrays the 43rd president with a realism that he brought to 2007's acclaimed Coen brothers thriller *No Country For Old Men*, and actress Elizabeth Banks fills the role of first lady Laura Bush.

Veteran screen action hero Bruce Willis is to make his directorial debut with a psychological drama about a woman grappling with family tragedy,

it was reported on Wednesday.

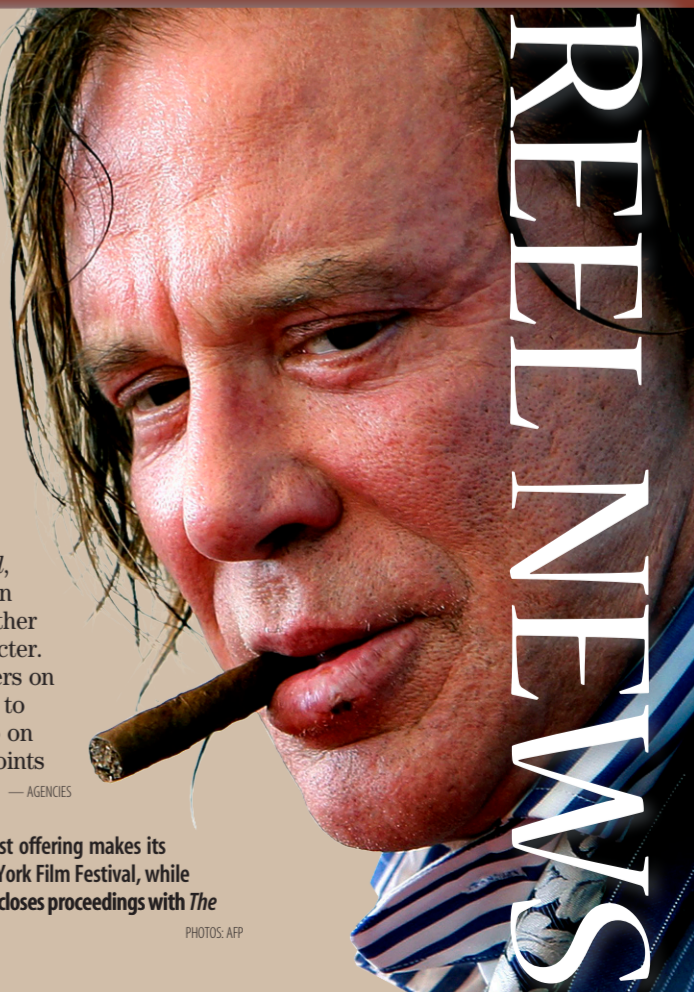
Willis, best known as the gun-toting star of the *Die Hard* films, is to begin filming on *Three Stories About Joan* next month, entertainment industry daily *Variety* reported.

Willis, 53, whose last film was 2007's *Live Free or Die Hard*, will also appear in the film as the father of the lead character.

The film centers on a woman's battle to maintain her grip on reality at three points in her life.

—AGENCIES

John Malkovich's latest offering makes its premiere at the New York Film Festival, while Mickey Rourke, right, closes proceedings with *The Wrestler*.



REEL NEWS

PHOTOS: AFP