

# CULTURE

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[ THE WEEKENDER ]

## And they're off

Could Palme d'Or veteran Mike Leigh triumph again at the Cannes Film Festival with his delicate drama of ordinary lives?

BY JASON SOLOMONS  
THE GUARDIAN, CANNES

Even at this early stage, it wouldn't be too ambitious to trumpet Mike Leigh's *Another Year* as a leading contender for the 47th Palme d'Or. However, a fanfare seems slightly inappropriate for such a delicate film, a picture of everyday lives so achingly true and lovely and sad that one almost feels like an intruder for watching it, especially in an atmosphere as frenetic as Cannes, which ends on Sunday.

*Another Year* has an elegiac quality rare in this director's work, dealing with death, ageing, love and loneliness in the most tender of ways. It unfolds in four chapters, moving through spring, summer, fall and winter.

Jim Broadbent and Ruth Sheen play a loving, professional couple called Tom and Gerri in a lived-in north London home. He's a geologist, she's a counselor at a local health practice. They spend their time digging on their allotment and cooking. Their home is cozy and happy and a bit empty since their son Joe left years ago, although he does come to visit quite often.

In spring, Tom and Gerri invite Mary (Lesley Manville), a secretary at the health practice, for dinner. She's attractive but battling chronic loneliness and alcoholism. Mary gets hideously drunk and has to stay the night. In the summer section, Tom and Gerri hold a barbecue in their garden and some more unhappy friends are invited, including Ken, a hopeless childhood pal of Tom's, movingly etched by Peter Wight.

In the fall, Joe turns up with a surprise guest that delights the family but upsets the increasingly unwelcome Mary. In winter they attend a funeral, a superbly orchestrated episode, full of awkwardness, anger and uncomfortable silences.

So little happens in terms of tangible drama that Leigh seems to be saying, this is the way life is, small events accruing at the mercy of time.

Out of his body of work, it's probably nearest to *Secrets & Lies*. And, in 1996, that won the Palme d'Or.

Even further back, Michael Douglas won an Oscar for playing Gordon Gekko in *Wall Street*. He and Oliver Stone are very much the co-creators of an enjoyable sequel *Wall Street: Money Never Sleeps*, in which Gekko returns to prowling the markets once more. The prologue is great fun as Gekko receives

his possessions from a prison guard in the traditional movie manner: "One watch, one money clip [with no money], one ring, and ..." big pause as something large and heavy plunks down "... one mobile phone."

While Stone can't bring himself to actively mock his previous work, there is a strain of distancing irony to the action now.

Shia LaBeouf is a thrusting trader and the boyfriend of Gekko's estranged daughter Winnie. She is played by Carey Mulligan in a performance that gives a macho and incomprehensible plot a whole lot of soul.

Gekko uses a best-selling book called *Is Greed Good?* to get back into the public eye and then starts using everyone else — including his daughter — to muscle into the crashing, subprime world. Douglas has still got the big-screen chops and Josh Brolin makes an admirable foe from a rival bank.

I never understand films about the stock market. Still, I got this film's basic idea: money is bad but without it you can't get a nice apartment.

Stone's film was certainly lighter on its feet than the grumpy *Robin Hood* that opened the festival, with its beards and dubious accents. And where

Ridley Scott's film cravenly leaves itself open for the quick franchise treatment now endemic in Hollywood, *Wall Street* felt like a genuine, old-fashioned sequel, with characters worth revisiting because their world was worth re-examining.

*Robin Hood* and *Wall Street: Money Never Sleeps* were both shown out of competition. Of last week's other films competing for the Palme d'Or, all worlds away from Hollywood, China's *Chongqing Blues* (日照重庆) gripped me from the first *nihao*. The opening shot is of a rusty cable car, jammed with people, framed against a misty mess of skyscrapers. A taciturn sea captain returns to the city he left years ago to piece together the circumstances surrounding his son's death in a shooting in a supermarket. There is so much to admire in the story and the thumbnails of Chinese life — the trams, the dirty rivers, the women playing mahjong on the roof — that when the film begins to drift badly in the final half-hour, I felt a real pang of disappointment.

In *Tournee*, that master of neurotic smoking, French actor and Bond villain Mathieu Amalric, directs and plays a downtrodden impresario leading American burlesque dancers around French port towns such as Nantes and La Rochelle. The indulgent film has a

Felliniesque fascination for cleavage and the sadness of the circus, but a fatal lack of drama. I enjoyed *The Housemaid*, a sexy film from South Korea, and a remake of a renowned 1960s original. A rich family hires a young nanny and the cocky master of the (very flashy) house gets her pregnant. It's a blend of Hitchcockian gothic and cracked Korean psychodrama, with a climax you certainly don't see everyday.



Above: *Robin Hood* opened the Cannes Film Festival on Wednesday. PHOTO COURTESY OF UP  
Right: Mike Leigh's *Another Year* is one of 19 films competing for the prestigious Palme d'Or. PHOTO: REUTERS



## All things to all men

A last-minute program change failed to stymie the Novel Hall Dance 2010 series

BY DIANE BAKER  
STAFF REPORTER

The Novel Hall Dance 2010 series did not get off to an auspicious start. One of Emanuel Gat's dancers fell ill, so *Rite of Spring* had to be scrapped. When you are just a 10-member company, understudies don't exist.



Emanuel Gat's *Winter Voyage*. PHOTO COURTESY OF GADI DAGON

What Taipei audiences got in exchange was extraordinary — an expanded version of Gat's 2004 *Winter Voyage* duet with Roy Assaf, a 50-minute piece called *Winter Variations* that premiered in June last year.

The show opened with *Silent Dance*. It was a good introduction to the company and to Gat's minimalist style. The company was attired in T-shirts, pants and shorts, largely in shades of gray, which proved to be the color scheme for most of the program.

Gat is credited with the choreography, the lighting and the costumes for all his pieces, so he obviously sees a world that is less black-and-white and more an ever-shifting palette of gray that runs the gamut from ashy-white to almost black. It is a deceptive simplicity helps the audience to focus on the reason they're there: Gat's choreography.

The curtain rose on *Silent Dance* with the eight dancers lined up along the back of one-half of the stage. One woman strode forward, took a position and then began to move. At first the dancers stayed to one half of the stage, but they soon moved out across the floor, eyes always on one another, measuring pace, measuring space, even if they were just centimeters apart.

In *Silent Dance* the only sounds you hear are the squeaks of feet moving across the floor, the thumps of multiple feet landing at the same time, the dancers' breathing. The choreography is a swirl of kicking legs and arms, a solo here, a duet there, sometimes several dancers echoing or mirroring the moves of another — and then a sudden pause for a tableau.

Six men and two women, and the most amazing thing was how real they looked, like average people you might see on the street as opposed to, say, the sleek whippets of Wayne McGregor's *Random Dance* who appeared at Novel Hall last year.

When the stage went dark, the dancers moved off to a round of applause and you could just make out the figures of two dancers taking their marks on stage. When the lights went up, Gat and Assaf, garbed in long, sleeveless tunics over black pants, began the 14-minute *Winter Voyage*, set to three lieder by Franz Schubert.

The synchronicity between the two men was amazing to watch, the fluidity of their movements enhanced by the rippling skirts of their long tunics. They flowed seamlessly around the stage, sometimes doing a kind of hop, skip, jump and turn with their arms raised and fists held at chest level, graceful masculinity at its best.

*Winter Voyage* ended when the men walked to the back of the stage, now dark, stripped off their tunics and put on gray T-shirts and shoes. That was the first of just two breaks they got (the second was another T-shirt change and a sip of water) before launching into *Winter Variations*, a duet that builds in layers and soars into wonderful mix of playfulness and melancholy, set to music that segues from a menacing industrial drone to the Beatles *A Day in the Life*, to an Egyptian song by Riad al-Sunbati to a piece by Gustav Mahler.

Just as it is hard to imagine anyone combining just disparate musical genres into one work, it's hard to believe that just two men can hold an audience's attention for almost a full hour. But the pair of them did.

For the Beatles, the choreography was playful, with something of ballroom partnership to it. Then there was a dramatic shift to their knees, as the two men shuffle-walked across and around the stage, each imbuing the movement with their own style. Twice Gat "sat" on a half-bent Assaf, legs wrapped around his calves, as Assaf "walked" him to the back of the stage. The awkwardness of those segments served to enhance the grace of the others.

It was a virtuoso performance by two amazing dancers that left the audience stunned. Any disappointment in not seeing *Rite of Spring* was quickly forgotten — although Elaine Huang (黃麗宇), Novel Hall's public relations manager, said Cloud Gate Dance Theatre founder Lin Hwai-min (林懷民), the dance series' artistic director, has already invited Gat to come back and bring *Rite* with him.

That probably won't happen until 2012, but judging by Saturday night's show it will be well worth the wait.

### TOP FIVE MANDARIN ALBUMS

MAY 7 TO MAY 13



1 Show Luo (羅志祥) and *Dancing King Remix* (舞者之王 REMIX) with **22.38** percent of sales

2 AK and *WOW!!* with **8.97%**

3 Jaycee Chan (房祖名) and *Luan* (亂) with **7.21%**

4 S.H.E. and *SHERO* with **6%**

5 Rene Liu (劉若英) and *Together* (在一起) with **5.07%**

ALBUM CHART COMPILED FROM G-MUSIC (WWW.G-MUSIC.COM.TW), BASED ON RETAIL SALES

### PLANET POP

Actor **Russell Crowe** stormed out of a BBC radio interview on Thursday after suggestions that he had made the quintessentially British legend Robin Hood sound Irish in his latest movie. New Zealand-born Crowe, who was raised in Australia, has been the target of criticism in the British media for his accent in the *Robin Hood* action adventure movie, which opened last week with its world premiere held at the Cannes film festival.

Another actor who could do with some accent training is Oscar winner **Jennifer Hudson** as she is set to star in a biopic of former South African president **Nelson Mandela's** ex-wife **Winnie**, whose lawyers have already contacted the film's makers threatening to block it. *Winnie*, which also features **Terrence Howard** as Nelson Mandela and is based on a book by **Anne Marie du Preez Bezdrob**, starts shooting in South Africa on May 31 and could be ready for theaters by spring next year.

KISS bassist **Gene Simmons** on Friday denied brushing up against a make-up artist and "grinding" against her, saying his codpiece-style stage costume made that impossible. Simmons' legal team filed court papers in Los Angeles asking a judge to

declare that accuser Victoria Jackson has suffered no harm from the star of costume rock and reality television.

The Rolling Stones are revisiting their creative heights by releasing one of their greatest albums with 10 extra tracks, and reminiscing about their chaotic days in a grainy new documentary. The British rockers have remastered *Exile on Main Street*, a 1972 double album that boasts such concert favorites as *Tumbling Dice* and *Rocks Off*. It comes out tomorrow in the US, and today everywhere else.

The new documentary, *Stones in Exile*, released on June 22, offers snapshots and voice-overs of current and former band members and friends from the time when the group left Britain and its crippling income taxes for France, and recorded in the dank basement of **Keith Richards'** French villa.

The period was rich with old material that was easily salvaged and turned into new songs. **Mick Jagger** and Richards said in New York last week. "We forgot about them," Richards said, laughing about why the band had waited so long to dig up the material.

*Stones in Exile* is more than an hour long, using old black-and-white footage and photographs from French music

photographer **Dominique Tarle**, whose visit to the villa one afternoon turned into a six-month stay.

He, and others including Richards' old girlfriend **Anita Pallenberg**, former bassist **Bill Wyman** and producer **Marshall Chess**, recall the days where they drank whiskey and recorded in the basement with a mobile recording truck parked outside and parties raging above.

Richards and Jagger, both 66, downplayed legendary tales of drugs, sex and setting the house on fire.

"The first thing on your mind was the songs and the music, everything else was like gravy," said Richards, who was also consumed at the time with a heroin addiction. "Writing songs in the afternoon, recording them in the

evening, you had no time for debauchery, even me," he joked. "You had your breakfast, you had your dope."

Richards did recall some memorable moments. After an entire night of recording, "whoever was left standing" would often jump in his speedboat and "zoom" past Monte Carlo and "go to

Italy for breakfast, just for the fun of it," he said. "I don't know how we didn't sink."

Despite the recession, top models are raking in millions of US dollars, with **Brazilian Gisele Bundchen**, German **Heidi Klum** and Briton **Kate Moss**

the biggest earners. Bundchen, the 29-year-old beauty who is married to US football player **Tom Brady** is the world's highest-paid model, making US\$25 million last year, according to forbes.com.

Klum, the 36-year-old mother of four and host of the television show *Project Runway*, came in second with US\$16 million in earnings, followed by fashionista Moss, also 36, who made US\$9 million, through modeling campaigns and the launch of her own fashion line and a new fragrance.

It is the second year the same three models topped the list, which is largely because of a risk-averse fashion industry that was not looking for new faces in the unstable economic climate, said Steve Bertoni, of Forbes.

"These are the tried and true supermodels of the last decade ... the household names of the industry," Bertoni said.

The list represents earnings made from June 2009 to July 2010.

— AGENCIES

Gene Simmons is starring in his own costume drama.

PHOTO: BLOOMBERG

