

ALLIANCE FRANÇAISE DE DUPAGE

MOVIE REVIEWS BY CYNTHIA MCLAUGHLIN

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Décembre 2014

My Worst Nightmare – “Mon Pire Cauchemar” (2011)

A comedy set in Paris with Isabelle Huppert

Isabelle Huppert plays Agathe who is an uptight power house in the art world. She and her live-in lover have what seems like a perfect life in Paris. Their ordered lives are interrupted by an uncouth construction worker, Patrick, who is the father of their son's friend. Soon we learn that all is not perfect in paradise. As the kids become better friends, Patrick and Agathe's lover bond and team up to chase women, which further shakes up Agathe's world. Meanwhile, Patrick has very entertaining and destructive methods when he does construction work in their apartment. As Agathe develops feelings for Patrick and becomes more laid back, we see how contraire life often becomes to our plans and expectations.

Janvier 2015

Holy Motors directed by Leo Carax

Written and directed by Leo Carax, this complex and surreal film keeps one guessing long after the ending. The film is named Holy Motors for the limousine company which the car Oscar travels around Paris is from. The car is central to the movie along with its driver Celine who gives no indication as the story unfolds that her client, Oscar is keeping what most of us would consider very odd appointments and missions! Oscar's job involves using makeup, elaborate costumes, nudity and props to carry out a number of complex and unusual activities. Some make sense and others are designed to puzzle. One of Oscar's missions is picking up a teenaged daughter and you begin to wonder if this odd character could be a normal harried parent. I was fooled because at the end Oscar enters a house and child are not what one would expect! Be ready for the unconventional with this one.

Février 2015

The Big Picture – A thriller with Catherine Deneuve

This has all classic elements of the psychological thriller. Paul, a Paris lawyer becomes disenchanted when his wife has an affair with the neighbor and announces that she is leaving him. Sound familiar? He then accidentally kills the guy, fakes his own death and assumes his victim's identity making a fresh start on the Adriatic coast as a photographer. Still sound familiar? He encounters trouble with various people as he lives his secret life and becomes a very good and successful photographer. At the end, one is left wondering what is going to become of him or if he will come clean. For those who are Catherine Deneuve fans, please note that she has a small role in this film and only appears a handful of times. The clear, understandable French and scenery from the Adriatic coast provide an engaging backdrop for this movie.

Mars 2015

Poulet aux Prunes – A movie set in Iran directed by Marjane Satrapi

This is a love story that is filmed with just enough whimsy and exaggeration to be signature Marjane Satrapi. It personifies the challenges of living in a country like Iran where you can't always be with the one you love or even love the one you're with. The main character, Nasser Ali is in love with a beautiful girl named Irane whose father wouldn't let him marry her because he is a "lowly" violinist. Years later, he ends up with another woman who is crazy about him but also very frustrated because he cannot love her in the same way. After his wife takes out her anger by destroying his violin and he can't find an acceptable replacement, he stays in bed slowly awaiting death. Poulet aux Prunes is Nasser Ali's favorite dish but his wife can't earn the way to his heart through his stomach as he pines after Irane and his violin.

Avril 2015

Adieu au Langage - by Jean-Luc Godard

Fifty years after the release of Breathless, Jean-Luc Godard continues to confront feminism, capitalism, war and fidelity through film making. His latest, Adieu au Langage is a three-dimensional film that vividly and aggressively presents these ideas with surreal but disjointed clips of a man, a woman, the man and woman as a couple and a dog. Part of the film is seen solely through the perspective of the dog. It is my opinion that one will either relish this film which offers "familiar footing" for how Godard presents his world to or one will be somewhat confused and not really sure what they watched or what was real. I think the message Godard wants to disseminate is that all of these things mentioned previously are still relevant and need to be discussed and debated. Given the prominence and longevity of Godard, it is a film that film lovers and intellectuals alike should see. Grab some popcorn and beer and get ready for the unexpected!

Mai 2015

Two Days, One Night

In this Belgian film, Marion Cotillard plays Sandra, a working-class mother of two who has been on a medical leave from her factory job. She learns from her friend and colleague late on Friday afternoon that her peers have just voted to receive a bonus in lieu of her keeping her position. The two women locate the manager as he is leaving for the weekend and ask for another vote on Monday morning. He reluctantly agrees and the game is on! Over the next two days, Sandra locates and visits her colleagues asking them to vote to keep her position and not take the €1,000 bonus. I was riveted to my seat as she talks to each colleague and finds unexpected allies and adversaries. For me, the theme of this film is the struggle between doing what is best for yourself or making a sacrifice to help someone else. It is also about the power of money and how money can quickly change sentiments and test our allegiances. As I watched this film, I couldn't help wondering how my colleagues would vote if I were in this situation. We work well together, eat lunch together most days and I feel they respect me and my work but how well do I really know them and would they choose me over money? The ending is a bit of a surprise. After the vote is taken and announced, Sandra has a difficult decision to make which will give you even more to think about! Marion Cotillard fans will note that throughout the film, she manages to look both down to earth and gorgeous as she plays a woman who struggles to keep her job, be a good wife and mother and not unravel emotionally.

Juin 2015

Mood Indigo

Mood Indigo (*L'écume des jours*) commences as a whimsical love story with quirky characters and set to the backdrop of many Dr. Seuss-like gadgets and inventions. Colin (Romain Duris), an inventor falls in love with and marries Chloe (Audrey Tautou). During the couple's honeymoon, Chloe falls ill to a mysterious illness that causes a flower to grow in her lungs. Colin attempts everything to treat and cure Chloe. As Chloe's illness progresses, the film presents changes in her condition by altering the aesthetics from color to black and white. A frail Chloe rests in a bed piled high with flowers as rooms in the couple's apartment shrink and decay to dirt and a pet mouse becomes larger.

An amusing side plot exists between Colin's friend Chick and Chick's girlfriend Alise. Alise and Chick are both passionately obsessed with a writer named Jean-Sol-Partre. Yes, this name is a spoof on the icon Jean Paul Sartre. As Chloe's condition deteriorates, the obsession escalates and the relationship between Chick and Alise becomes more volatile ending in job loss and murder.

The storyline is undeniably serious and there is no happy ending. However, the surreal imaginative science fiction and fantasy themes make this film based on Boris Vian's 1947 novel *Froth on the Daydream* enjoyable. Clever viewers will appreciate the thoughtful use of metaphors and symbolism.

Juillet 2015

The Well Digger's Daughter (La Fille Du Puisatier)

The Well Digger's Daughter (*La Fille Du Puisatier*) delivers everything we love about a "feel good" romantic comedy. Daniel Auteuil does a fabulous job adapting, directing and starring in Marcel Pagnol's original 1940 tale of love, honor and the timeless conflict between economic classes.

Set in Provence on the brink of World War I, well digger Pascal Amoretti (Auteuil) has his hands full raising six daughters on his own. His eldest Patricia (Åstrid Bergès-Frisbey) is turning eighteen but refuses to accept the marriage invitation given by her father's colleague, Felipe (Kad Merad). Patricia is in love with French Air Force pilot and shop keeper's son, Jacques Mazel (Nicolas Duvauchelle). Jacques is unexpectedly called away and unable to say goodbye to Patricia who is now pregnant. Unable to get Jacques's parents to respond, Pascal teeters between showing Patricia love and shame. As the story continues to unfold, the characters look beyond themselves and find a common bond in being at war.

Uncomplicated, fun and under two hours, this film is easy to enjoy. A definite bonus is the scenery which will make you long for sunny days and a picnic in Provence.

Août 2015

Flyboys

I will start by stealing a quip from the film, "*The French put on a good war*". War is tragic and far from pretty but one can fall in love with the quirky and handsome characters who show bravery and empathy as they transform into elite fighter pilots.

This 2006 British-American film directed by Tony Bill is set during World War I. It is based on the experiences of a group of young Americans who volunteer in the Lafayette Escadrille before the US officially fights against what was known as the Central Powers. The film depicts one of the best examples of Franco-American team work and take us to a time when the airplane first becomes a war machine.

Filled with realistic aerial scenes and engaging insights into pilot training and preparation, there

is appeal for aviation enthusiasts and history buffs alike. The film does an outstanding job of showing us vulnerable characters and the victories and defeats of war without being overly grotesque or shocking. We get a close look at how the planes worked and how the pilots worked together during battles.

As much as it is a story about the war, it is also a story about the pilots and their relationships with each other. The pilots come from different backgrounds and have different reasons for wanting to succeed. One of the characters is black and the difficult topic of racism is broached - unconventionally for a WWI film - when he states "As long as I am up in the air, they don't know I'm black". This theme along with traditional war film ingredients of love, friendship and loss are woven into a display of brotherhood. There are many charming interactions between the Americans and their French counterparts and superior which humorously address typical cultural differences and language barriers.

Grab your bomber jackets. Very American and very French, Flyboys will rouse your curiosity leaving you thirsty for more on the Lafayette Escadrille.

Septembre 2015

My Best Friend (Mon Meilleur Ami)

Renowned French actor Daniel Auteuil is François, a brusque antiques dealer with no social skills or friends. His colleagues and business partner ridicule him for liking objects better than people. After ruthlessly winning a ridiculously high bid on an over priced Greek vase, his business partner bets him the vase that he has no best friend. Against a deadline, he immediately starts searching for people in an attempt to obtain a best friend. He meets cab driver and trivia maven Bruno (Dany Boon).

Boon becomes teacher and coach as François cycles through former business associates and classmates in his quest for friendship. Something awakens in François and like a dejected lover, he starts seeing people everywhere who are friends doing things that friends normally do. It seems like he actually may want a friend. In this process, a genuine relationship actually develops between Bruno and François but it is tried when François plays a cruel joke on Bruno. It appears the coveted friendship to win the bet is over.

After this disappointment, the comedy ends well. The two are brought together when Bruno is on a television program answering trivia questions and a "lifeline". Hilarious and touching while lending scenic views of Paris, viewers are reminded that friendship is fragile and there is no magic formula for making and keeping our friends.

Octobre 2015

No review for this month. Cynthia resumes reviews in November.

Novembre 2015

Le Joli Mai

A few weeks ago, I decided to learn more about a delicate part of French history with Le Joli Mai. Le Joli Mai is a black and white documentary by Chris Marker and Pierre L'Homme that explores the sentiment and expectations of Parisians in May 1962, the first May after signing of the Algerian War ceasefire in March. This was actually a time of considerable change and unease.

During this snapshot in time, the French people are becoming consumers and urbanization is sweeping Paris much like in other world-class cities. Parisians from different backgrounds are asked about topics such as happiness, love, politics, economics, religion, and the modernization or machination of society. One of the most intriguing interviews is that of a Catholic priest

turned communist. Algerians interviewed communicate their frustrations of living in shantytowns, and being victims of police brutality. One Algerian referred to France as a mother and the government as a father.

Hopefulness and hopelessness are both conveyed with the pronounced question of republic versus democracy. The role of individuals versus collective society comes to the forefront often. The Paris depicted looks a bit different than what we see today. As I watched, I couldn't help drawing parallels to problems we are facing today in the US. Although this is a very interesting film to watch, it is over two hours and can become tedious. The genius of Chris Marker is how he uses films to communicate his political views. I felt he portrayed Paris as both venerable and fragile while capturing the French reaction to the Algerian War.

My key takeaway from this film is that happiness is the secret to having a great society.

Décembre 2015

The Nun (La Religieuse)

As a reluctant nun, Suzanne (Pauline Etienne) must atone for her mother's sin of having her as an illegitimate child. Deposited into a convent by her family, Suzanne bounces between several convents and endures much punishment and hardship before landing at a convent where Isabelle Huppert plays the mother superior. Huppert favors Suzanne over other nuns in her charge but makes advances on her, thus putting Suzanne in a bad situation once again. This film sounds dark and it is with both the subject matter and stark lighting for many of the scenes, but it is also comedic and has an interesting ending to look forward to.

I found this film fascinating because the key to understanding it is to know that it is an adaptation of the 18th century novel by Denis Diderot. The novel was intended as a practical joke – a compilation of letters sent to a devout friend in the guise of a nun looking to leave sisterhood. Directed by Guillaume Nicloux, the 2013 version of the film received nominations for multiple awards at international competitions.