



REEL NEWS

The Quarterly Newsletter of
MACON FILM GUILD

VOLUME 4 ISSUE 3

DOG DAZE ISSUE

**UPCOMING SCREENINGS:
EACH SECOND SUNDAY**

VIEW FROM THE DIRECTOR'S CHAIR *CAMP BACON president*

FINDING AN AUDIENCE FOR FILM AT THE HEADWATERS OF THE RIVER NIGER ?

BREAKING REEL NEWS: This Fall the curtain will go up on MACON FILM GUILD's sister guild in Bamako, MALI! When and how did all this happen, you might well ask? Well, here's the scoop!

Mrs. Lucille Touré, while in Macon recently for an extended stay in the U.S., joined MFG and has been both an ardent supporter and regular attendee at our monthly screenings. She is returning in August to Bamako, MALI (WEST AFRICA) this Fall with a mission to create a film guild in Bamako.

Lucille approached MFG to help. She believes there exists real potential for an enthusiastic audience among a small population of educated professionals, the college faculty and students, and foreign aid workers living there, who are looking for quality cinema beyond the occasional American blockbusters that belatedly come through their local cinemas.

Lucille (Simmons) Touré was born in Macon and raised in Fort Hill neighborhood. Fresh out of college, Lucille's life was shaping up to be a somewhat conventional teaching job and home in Middle GA, but in 1969,

she met, and married Tuskegee-educated veterinarian, Dr Mody Touré of MALI, who was at the time "interning" as a veterinarian with Dr Eddie Hudspeth in his Pio Nono Ave clinic. Upon completion of his "internship", Dr Touré returned with Lucille to his MALI home town of Bamako, the nation's capital, located at the foot of the Sahara desert on the River Niger. Once there, he would first serve as Director of the Central Veterinary Laboratory, and now, continues to treat pets and the livestock.

THE REPUBLIC OF MALI is in West Africa, nestled amongst SUDAN, ALGERIA, MAURITANIA, SENEGAL, GUINEA, IVORY COAST and UPPER VOLTA. The people of MALI, after overthrowing a military dictator in 1991, started down the democratic road by holding free elections for a president that same year. Currently in their third presidency, life has regained a sense of normalcy and expectations of progress (growth rate: 5.5%). The Republic's official language is French, with a population of 12 million living on land area which is a 20% smaller than Alaska. Geographically more than half the country is desert or semi-desert. It has a university, museums and several archeological tourist sites. A solid domestic economy from the export of gold and cotton (mostly) providing annually \$400M of a \$12B GDP, makes MALI one of the most



politically and socially stable countries in today's AFRICA.

MFG has collaborated with Lucille to "design" a

guild suited to Bamako, and will coordinate the "nuts and bolts" of a guild organization and film library. Of course, we admit to knowing little about the film industry in MALI but do realize it would be impracticable for Lucille to start up with 35mm projection. Since DVD is the most sensible format for use in this situation, we will furnish a combination DVD player/projector (\$900) and a library of films on DVD (\$500).

Dr Touré has run down a couple venues, including the National Science Museum which has a screen and auditorium, and will accommodate a projection unit. A DVD projector of 1400 lumens will effectively display on any dark wall, thereby making use of a screen optional. Also, an initial library of 25 films is now being compiled and collected. For easiest acceptance, films must have a French dialogue soundtrack or at least, French subtitles. The subject matter is a bit sticky, but we think the list coming together will

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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR *BLAINE WHITTLE editor*

DIRECTOR'S CHOICE SERIES RECAP

Last Spring, on the strength of recommendation from Board member Walter Elliott, MFG inaugurated our new Director's Choice Series with a long forgotten feature from oddball auteur Ken Russell. Always having considered the film, SAVAGE MESSIAH ('72) as a guidepost to his misspent youth and major influence in his growing love of cinema, Walter admitted he primarily wished, "to see

it again and decide if it was as good as I think it was."

Well, notwithstanding that no one had ever even heard of this film before, our Board humored Walter's request, tasked him with locating a copy (he discovered only available on VHS) and rolled the dice; and boy howdy, a perfect choice it was.

The DIRECTOR'S CHOICE SERIES is designed to screen films which somehow fell through the cracks but deserve another look. Quality work

which somehow got lost in the shuffle due to mediocre box office, unfashionable subject matter, or just plain visionary excellence beyond the mass commercial audience grasp.

Applying a favorite theme of his, profiling lives of the tortured "creative genius" (THE MUSIC LOVERS ('70), MAHLER ('74), LISZTOMANIA ('75)), in SAVAGE MESSIAH, Russell conjures the brief but extremely productive life of sculptor Henri

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SYNOPSIS OF UPCOMING SCREENINGS...

for July 13...

WOMAN ON THE BEACH (HAEBYONUI YOIN) (2006) Sang-soo Hong

U.S. THEATRICAL RELEASE: 9/30/06 (NEW YORK FILM FESTIVAL)

NEW YORKER FILMS (USA) (100 minutes)

A wonderful, serious-minded romantic comedy, *WOMAN ON THE BEACH* is about a film director's uncertain relations with two successive women while trying to write a script at an off-season beach resort.

This is Korean buff favorite Hong Sang-soo's most accessible film, one that requires neither prior knowledge of his work, nor a specialist interest in Korean cinema.

Inexplicably turned down by the Venice fest but very well received in Toronto, the film possesses discreet charms that could put it over in international art-house release given shrewd handling by a motivated distributor.

With their quotidian settings populated by youngish characters gabbing the days and nights away with the undercurrent of sex never distant, Hong's films are often conveniently compared to those of Eric Rohmer. While there are significant differences, the superficial similarities are sufficient to suggest the upscale public that has periodically supported the prolific French cineaste's unfailingly intelligent stories of men and women getting their signals crossed would equally enjoy *WOMAN ON THE BEACH* if properly introduced to it.

At first, the story's set-up seems almost too simple, not to mention self-referential, to hold great promise. Unable to set pen to paper on a script he needs to finish, film director Kim Joong-rae (*Kim Seung-woo*) asks his production designer, Won Chang-wook (*Kim Tae-woo*), to join him at the west coast Shinduri beach resort in the hope of breaking the creative log-jam.

Chang-wook, who is married, agrees to go along provided he can bring along a girlfriend, composer Kim Moon-sook (*Ko Hyun-joong*). The cool overcast means the trio have the area largely to themselves. Soon, Joong-rae becomes distracted by the bracingly forthright Moon-sook, who clarifies she is not Chang-wook's girlfriend, just a friend, and that, if forced to choose between the two men, she'd take the moody, rough-around-the-edges director, whose work she admires.

Long walks and tactful circling ensue, and with them character revelation. The self-possessed but unfulfilled Moon-sook long entertained serious ambitions as a composer and studied music in Germany, but recently resigned herself to working in a more popular vein. For his part, the filmmaker's surging infatuation is undercut by a deep

insecurity he confesses to in relation to Western men, and Moon-sook's admission that she dated Europeans cuts him to the quick.

Although the sluglike Chang-wook proves difficult to shake, Joong-rae finds a vacant apartment and brings the willing young woman there for one night together. Next day, he abruptly announces it's too quiet at the beach for him to work and that he intends to return to Seoul, to the consternation of Moon-sook.

Second act sees the director returning, two days later, to Shinduri on his own. Leaving a message with Moon-sook as to his whereabouts, he interviews a young professional woman, Choi Sun-hee (*Song Sun-mi*), who reminds him of Moon-sook, and he soon gets her up to the same room from two nights before.

Moon-sook's unannounced arrival ups the ante. Here's a situation ripe with farcical potential but one from which Hong mines significant insight and melancholy; notably in regard to the way people can fixate on certain ideas they develop about others, and can react strongly to actions the perpetrators might well consider to be insignificant.

But perhaps the greatest achievement of *WOMAN ON THE BEACH* lies in its rhythms, the way it beautifully

captures the natural flow of ongoing conversation, with its inevitable pauses, quicksilver changes of direction and alterations of tone. This rare quality exists within individual scenes as well as across the entire sweep of the story, which, like Rohmer's work, is constructed with great care but disguises its formal elements behind a show of utter naturalism.

Visually, too, there is a deceptive simplicity. Compositions are arranged to serve character and dialogue, and Hong sometimes simply resorts to the common '60s technique of reframing by zooming in or out to create or lose a closeup. But this does not prevent Shinduri, with its undistinguished, modern beachside condos and inns, from becoming a major character unto itself, and the significant scenes that play out along the seashore gain by the misty, vague ambiance that matches the iffy motives of the characters.

The four main thespians work in an unforced, nontheatrical vein. Kim Seung-woo has just enough quiet, gruff charm to keep the director character from being too maddeningly self-absorbed, while Ko's allure and complexity keep growing throughout the film.

Todd McCarthy—*VARIETY.COM*



NOTES FROM N.H. JACK SAMMONS *vice-president*

For many years since our inception, MACON FILM GUILD has formed some of its ideas for film selection, and sought confirmation for films already chosen, in the good work of the DARTMOUTH FILM GUILD (DFG) of Hanover, N.H.

The diverse cinematic tastes of DFG, (not to be confused with THE DARTMOUTH FILM SOCIETY, of that College's film department), have matched up exceedingly well with our MFG audiences over the years. A rough estimate is that well over half of the films MFG has screened were also presented at some point by DFG.

This is more than a little surprising since each summer, the only time their schedule is presented, DFG sets a general theme for films screened on Thursdays, leaving the Saturday screening open to a wider variety of film genres. This year, the theme of their Thursday screening schedule is: AGING.

Due to our similar choices, your MFG Selection Committee thought it would be of interest for you to know what DFG offerings have already or will be screened this summer. (*all films are from 2007, unless noted*):

STARTING OUT IN THE EVENING, PRICELESS ('06), MRS. PETTIGREV LIVES FOR A DAY ('08), THE VISITOR, MY BROTHER IS AN ONLY CHILD, YOUNG@HEART, THE DUCHESS OF LANGEAIS, REDBELT ('08), JELLYFISH, THE YEAR MY PARENTS WENT ON VACATION ('06), THE SAVAGES, FLIGHT OF THE RED BALLOON, LOVES COMES LATELY, WHEN DID YOU LAST SEE YOUR FATHER? and MONGOL.

Unsurprisingly, six of these are films currently under consideration for MFG: STARTING OUT IN THE EVENING, THE VISITOR, THE RED BALLOON, YOUNG@HEART, WHEN DID YOU LAST SEE YOUR FATHER?

and MONGOL.

Each has been recommended either by members of the MFG Board, Selection Committee, or casual suggestion from members of our monthly screening audience.

Of these we can tell you that STARTING OUT IN THE EVENING and THE VISITOR are both exceptional films; however, MFG would like to know which of these you would recommend? Are there films on the DFG list with which you are familiar? If so, the simplest way to communicate your thoughts is to go to our web page and start a discussion at: www.maconfilmguild.org



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allow sampling the audiences for acceptability and interest.

How could any fan of cultural diplomacy through film possibly resist an opportunity to help in the realization of Lucille's exciting mission? MFG invites you to join us in supporting this undertaking; one which promises great potential to open many unseen avenues for positive exchange with the Malian people.

Please send your contribution to the film guild marked "MALI". We will keep our membership informed on the progress of this project.

FOR MORE INFORMATION
CONTACT CAMP BACON AT:
fcb2@bellsouth.net.

for August 10...

STILL LIFE (SANXIA HAOREN) (2006) Zhang Ke Jia

U.S. THEATRICAL RELEASE: 1/18/08 (NEW YORK CITY, NY)

NEW YORKER FILMS (USA) (111 minutes)

Jia Zhangke's STILL LIFE, a deeply felt and quietly impressive film, was the winner of the Golden Lion at last year's Venice film festival, and features the superb and elegant actress Zhao Tao, charismatic star of his previous films, UNKNOWN PLEASURES ('02) and PLATFORM ('00).

STILL LIFE is a palimpsest of ideas and intentions - a meditation on mortality, a contemporary drama-documentary about an entire city preparing to be drowned in the service of China's Three Gorges hydro-electric dam project, and a portrait of a vast nation preparing for turbo-capitalist superpower status, but retaining the autocratic political habits of communism: high-handedly ordering the displacement of a million-and-a-half people, and the abolition of thousands of years of history.

The gigantic engineering project has meant flooding huge areas. This alone has caused it to be condemned as an eco-calamity in the making. It has meant the entire evacuation of the city of Fengjie, which is where the film is set. Some of it has already been submerged; the upper reaches are due for demolition and their inhabitants given notice to quit in preparation of the next elevation of the water-line.

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Gaudier primarily through his largely platonic, yet pathologically passionate love affair with a muse 23 yrs his senior.

Both actor Dorothy Tutin's incendiary portrayal as Henri's beloved Sophie, and an eye-opening turn by a much younger, voluptuous Dame Helen Mirren as Gosh Boyle, the spoiled, sophisticate patron are reason enough to seek out this swirling, colorful, emotionally turbulent film.

The film's ending, featuring on-screen the actual Gaudier pieces, being used in a filmed version of the debut gallery show of his work Henri missed due to dying on the front line a few days earlier, was

brilliant, perfectly gut-wrenching dénouement.

Camp Bacon selected celebrated director Caroll Ballard's 1983 film NEVER CRY WOLF as the 2nd film for the DIRECTOR'S CHOICE SERIES.

This profound film arguably set a precedent for the many other "Extreme Nature" projects which have followed. Shot entirely on location inside true wilderness, full of overwhelming natural footage, the film's true star quickly becomes the soundtrack; or more precisely, sheer lack of any.

Ballard understands how the crunch of a human footprint in the snow under these conditions might become dramatically deafening. Of course, it never hurts to have the late sonic genius Alan Splet on your

team which is why I'm guessing NEVER CRY WOLF was nominated for the Oscar for Sound that year.

The idea behind the DIRECTOR'S CHOICE SERIES stems from the belief that in today's plethora of loud, bombastic releases, many films of quality and distinction are being constantly missed and resigned to distribution on DVD or cable TV without anyone ever knowing.

Also, almost daily comes the announcement of another "lost" masterpiece receiving a long overdue premier or distribution decades after being made; this is especially the case with documentary films.

If you have a favorite film you believe has not had the benefit of a proper audience, let us know so we might help to screen it.

The idea behind the DIRECTOR'S CHOICE SERIES stems from the belief that in today's plethora of loud, bombastic releases, many films of quality and distinction are being constantly missed without anyone ever knowing.

As the action unfolds, we see buildings being knocked down, rubble cleared, landscapes

altered. The director and crew appear to have got out and about as these things are happening; they have used history - real, actual history - as their backdrop.

Calmly, almost casually, with long, wandering takes, Jia tells the story of two visitors to Fengjie, both desperate to recover something of the past before it disappears into the water. Han (*Han Sanming*) is a miner, a poor man who has spent almost every cent he has to get to Fengjie, because this is where his wife fled when she left him almost 16 years previously. He has an address, and no more - an address that is now submerged - and wishes abjectly only to see his child one last time.

Shen Hong (*Zhao Tao*) is a nurse whose husband, a well-off engineer, was pressed into service to work on the Three Gorges Dam. He left his wife two years previously, making contact intermittently and then not



at all. Shen is in agony: has he found another woman?

As it happens, things are emotionally more complex with Han and Shen than they appear: they are not simply the passive victims. Their stories are played out in a world that is a living, dynamic exemplar of the great truth that all flesh is grass, that this world is a passing show, that everything around us is impermanent and temporary.

Han gets a job on a building site, and extra cash for construction workers can be earned by taking part in gangland beatings, an ugly sideline in the new competitive economy.

Shen sees the underside of the Three Gorges project at a slightly more elevated level: her husband's contacts disclose to her a world of bureaucratic acrimony and dismay, a world where people are promised

compensation but do not receive it.

A colleague of her errant husband is actually working on an archaeological site, ironically exposed by the project. They are digging up fragments of a 1,000-year-old civilisation: fragments that will be removed before the entire city becomes a new Atlantis.

Zhao Tao has such a commanding presence: willowy, restrained, dignified, and yet seething, and at one point almost bursting into tears - a rare, almost unique demonstration of emotion. Perhaps the whole place is about to drown in tears, like something in Lewis Carroll.

STILL LIFE is a poignant record of a hidden sorrow in modern, powerhouse China.

Peter Bradshaw—GUARDIAN

PLEASE HELP WITH OUR MONTHLY SCREENINGS BY VOLUNTEERING SOME OF YOUR VALUABLE TIME



The Quarterly Newsletter of
Macon Film Guild

REEL NEWS

for September 14...

THE SILENCE BEFORE BACH

(DIE STILLE VOR BACH) (2007) Pere Portabella

U.S. THEATRICAL RELEASE: 1/30/08 NEW YORK CITY, NY

SHERLOCK FILMS (SPAIN) (102 minutes)

Until his Museum of Modern Art retrospective last fall, the 78-year-old Catalan—at various times a commercial producer, anti-Franco activist, and avant-garde film artist—was known here mainly, if at all, for having facilitated Luis Buñuel's blasphemous *VIRIDIANA* ('62) and for making *VAMPIR CUADRECUC* ('71), a ghostly documentary shot on the set of a Christopher Lee cheapster, *THE NIGHTS OF DRACULA* ('70).

THE SILENCE BEFORE BACH is not quite as jocular as *VIRIDIANA* (although sometimes as surreal) and less obviously ethereal than *VAMPIR*; it's a high-toned experimental feature that eschews narrative and ponders the social history of music, creating a dialectic between sound and image, as well as between a costumed 18th-century and a contemporary post-national Europe.

Not that Portabella is a pedant. Immediately playful, he literalizes his

title by opening *THE SILENCE BEFORE BACH* in an empty white-box gallery.

The protagonist, or rather his music, arrives in the form of a robot player-piano that rolls, pivots, and pirouettes through the space; the first of the live recordings used throughout the movie.

The next act is an understated intellectual vaudeville: a blind piano tuner. For the most part, however, Portabella is droll and less programmatically raw in his audio-visual conundrums than a North American avant-gardist like Michael Snow, maker of not unrelated meditations on the nature of sound cinema.

THE SILENCE BEFORE BACH is not only very civilized—this cool, deliberate film suggests that Bach's music is the quintessence of European civilization.



The structure is anecdotal: A Spanish trucker (who is also an amateur bassoonist) has a Renaissance mural painted on his rig and talks music as he rolls through the characterless Euro-countryside. Meanwhile, down in the subway, serious young cellists occupy every seat, embracing their instruments in an unexpectedly erotic image.

The past inhabits the present. The picture lapses briefly into biopic, almost as a joke: A historic Leipzig church is filled with Bach's music and Bach himself (*Christian Brembeck*), the church's cantor, at the organ. Later, Bach plays his latest composition for a wealthy patron.

The drama of Herr Goldberg first hearing the Variations that will be named for him segues into a scene in

which an elderly fellow fastidiously dresses up in 18th-century drag, plants his wig on his head, then walks out into contemporary Leipzig—he's a tour guide.

Portabella next cuts to a "real" 18th-century interior wherein a bratty little boy is spying on big sister's toilette—it's the Bach family at home. Dad firmly sits his son down at the piano to practice. (Later in the movie, the kid will turn up in a showroom full of pianists that the truck driver happens to visit.) At once cerebral film essay and unsweetened ear candy, Pere Portabella's *THE SILENCE BEFORE BACH* is nearly as tough to categorize as its maker.

Before Bach, Portabella infers, Europe was essentially primitive. Indeed, Bach effectively redeemed this earlier stage of creation. The movie's title may then be interpreted as an expression of awe. Bach's music is "the only thing that reminds us the world is not a failure," someone says—and not as a joke.

J. Hoberman—*VILLAGE VOICE*

The **MISSION OF THE GUILD** is to screen recently released films typically not available to a Middle Georgia audience. These films are usually, but not limited to, award winning, critically recognized works of contemporary, independent American or foreign directors. The Guild is a non-profit organization of volunteers who research new films, develop the program schedule, then produce and distribute publicity materials.



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