Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Sundance 2014: So Many Films, So Little Time!

Sophia Stein · Wednesday, January 15th, 2014

Sundance Film Festival 2014 received 4,057 feature-length submissions during the past year, from which they selected 121 feature-length films to screen as part of their 30th festival, which begins today and runs for 11 consecutive days (Thursday, January 16 – Sunday, January 26).

Supposing that you were to watch five films a day (difficult, if not impossible), you would be lucky to screen 55 of the features from the complete festival line-up. So many films, so little time. How to choose …. ?

Five Narrative Feature Premieres — that I am really looking forward to seeing at Sundance Film Festival 2014:

Life After Beth – The Talent! – Dane DeHaan

When his girlfriend is mysteriously resurrected from the dead, Zach gets a second chance at love.

A rather wacky premise, for what I anticipate should be a black, black comedy. Ever since *Chronicle* (2012), Dane DeHaan has consistently been blowing it out of the water for me. He was mesmerizing as Lucien Carr in *Kill Your Darlings* last year. I just cannot get enough of Dane DeHaan! I am looking forward to seeing what director Jeff Baena and the star-studded ensemble (that includes Aubrey Plaza, John C. Reilly, Cheryl Hines, and Paul Reiser) have cooked up for us with this zombie love story. *Life After Beth* is one of sixteen films in the Sundance **U.S. Dramatic Competition**.

Locke – The Screenwriter Turned Director! – Seven Knight

A stunning portrait of a man struggling to keep his precious world from crumbling.

Screenwriter Steven Knight inspired my devotion with his Academy Award-nominated feature *Dirty Pretty Things*. I am curious to see his work behind the camera in the role of director of a screenplay that he has penned. Knight was awarded a 2013 British Independent Film Award for Best Screenplay for *Locke*, and the film generated some real heat at the Venice Film Festival. *Locke* is one of eight films in the Sundance **Spotlight** program.

The Girl from Nagasaki – The Spectacle! & New Technology

A 3-D feature film adaptation of the Puccini opera Madame Butterfly, in which Butterfly emerges from the ashes of the atomic bomb in Nagasaki.

The description of the opening image alone stirs my deepest emotion. I have never before seen an opera photographed in 3-D! – what a great idea. World-renowned photographer Michel Comte has composed the visuals for what sounds like a unique visual escapade. *The Girl from Nagasaki* is one of seven feature films in the Sundance **New Frontier** showcase.

Drunktown's Finest – The Story! – Privileged Access

Debut feature film from Sydney Freeland; the filmmaker's response to a news story that characterized her hometown of Gallup, New Mexico, as "Drunktown, USA."

Interested to enter into the Navajo Nation from this insider's perspective. I appreciate films that allow me to transcend my familiar surroundings, to explore more distant and often less accessible locales. *Drunktown's Finest* is one of eleven films in the Sundance **Next** program.

The Voices – The Director! – Marjane Satrapi

When Jerry takes a liking to the new English girl at work, he goes home and confides in Bosco and Mr. Whiskers (his dog and cat), who much to his surprise, weigh in!

Marjane Satrapi is the writer-director of the graphic novel, *Persepolis*, that she adapted into such a stirring film. Given her original visual sensibility and sensitive storytelling voice, I am curious to see where Satrapi's intuition has led her now. *The Voices* is one of eighteen films in the Sundance **Premieres** showcase.

Five Documentary Feature Premieres – from the line-up at Sundance Film Festival 2014 that caught my imagination:

Love Child – Theme! The Internet

In South Korea, a parents' gaming addiction leads to the death of their child …

As we all struggle to manage our time (and privacy) in the wake of the evolving internet, with its multitude of attractions and demands, this documentary seems right on the pulse of all things relevant. *Love Child* is one of twelve films in the Sundance **World Cinema Documentary Competition**.

Web Junkie – Theme! The Internet

Inside a Beijing rehab center where Chinese teenagers are deprogrammed from "Internet addiction."

China is the first country to label "Internet addiction" a clinical disorder. I wonder if other countries will follow suit? Or if the phenomenon and diagnosis is culturally specific? Again, a subject, quite specific to this particular time in history. *Web Junkie* is also part of the Sundance **World Cinema Documentary Competition**.

Mr leos caraX – Character! Cinematic Auteur

Portrait of a mad genius filmmaker.

"Lovers On the Bridge" was my breathtaking introduction to film director Leos Carax. His films continue to entrance, provoke, and infuriate me. He is one of the most original auteurs alive! I cannot wait to learn more about the man and the mystery. *Mr leos caraX* is also part of the **World Cinema Documentary Competition.**

Ivory Tower – Theme! Higher Education

Given the spiraling tuition costs, is college worth it, any longer?

Almost anyone with a child today or headed to college is concerned about the rising tuition costs and how to get the most bang for their buck. Given the expense, coupled with unemployment rates, this seems like a critical investigation. *Ivory Tower* is one of sixteen films in the Sundance **U.S. Documentary Film Competition**.

Life Itself – Character! Tribute to an Innovator Who Has Passed

Portrait of a beloved and influential movie critic, Roger Ebert.

How fitting that the man who had devoted his life to the films of others, upon his passing, would become the subject of a film. I wonder what Ebert would make of it? Or if prior to his passing, Ebert was aware of the documentary project in the works? I always appreciated his candor and his innovation in bringing film criticism (or reviews) to the small screen. I recently interviewed Ramin Bahrani who credited Ebert's interest in his own film directing, as making his career possible. As a film writer, myself, I look forward to saluting Ebert's passing with a tribute in just the right form. *Life Itself* is one of eleven films in the Sundance **Documentary Premieres** showcase.

Hopefully, the execution of the films mentioned above do justice to the content and vice-versa. But as they say, the proof is in the pudding.

Honestly, my preference is to walk into a screening room cold, with absolutely no expectations. The less I know about what I am going to see before the opening titles begin to roll, the happier I am. Story can deceptively disappoint, which is why I suppose that I put so much faith in those

directors and actors whose work I am already familiar with and enamored of. Competent and capable hands, in which one can invest their time with confidence.

But alas, nothing ventured, nothing gained. Which is why I find it so important to explore outside my comfort zone.

A film as a work of art will reach out and grab you, irrespective of expectations you've based on a capsule description or trailer. It has the power to inspire you to return, to watch again and again. It becomes the fabric of your sleeping and waking dreams.

If you are itching to partake in Sundance's abundant delights, but are unable to make it out to Park City, Utah, to brave the cold and snow this year — you are in luck! On Thursday, January 30, 2014, Sundance Film Festival U.S.A. may be making an appearance in a city near and dear to you. A single feature film title from the festival program is screening in each of nine cities. These include Ann Arbor, MI; Boston, MA; Chicago, IL; Houston, TX; Nashville, TN; Orlando, FL; San Francisco, CA; Seattle, WA; and Tucson, AZ. For details.

This entry was posted on Wednesday, January 15th, 2014 at 4:30 pm and is filed under Film
You can follow any responses to this entry through the Comments (RSS) feed. You can leave a response, or trackback from your own site.