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**KLAUS AT
GUNPOINT 3**

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Middletons**

by Christopher J Garcia

So, this is issue three of Klaus At Gunpoint. Last issue was way late, but turned out OK, and now issue 3 is much more on time! It's always good to get back on a fast-ish schedule, but then again, if I was all into speed, I'd start a blog, no?

This issue has more of everything. Twitter Reviews? Yes. A look at a Mainstream Film via a lesser-known movie of the past? Got it. Festival view? Of course? A look at a GIANT in the field who has sadly passed and the film I consider to be his greatest work. We've got two reviews of Feature Documentaries, and Jason Wiener tells us the tale of viewing the Hitchcock 9: all the surviving Hitchcock Silent films that took place at the Castro Theatre in San Francisco.

Oh yeah, and a good bit more.

One thing that is coming is Kurt Kuenne is the feature section of the next issue. He's a star, and we've already delayed this issue twice. He's a stud director and I'm hoping that he'll break-through soon and be the star he deserves to be!

Now, you can find the writing of Regular Contributor Jason Wiener at <http://jasonwatchesmovies.blogspot.com/> and you can read the wonderful Tassoula's Movie Reviews at <http://tassoula.blogspot.com/> and as a part of Cinebanter at <http://cinebanter.blogspot.com/>. Also, I've launched a new Tea/James Bond-themed Podcast called Leaf and Let Die

See, we're all over the place!



Art by Mo Starkey

JUST;]PEACHY* @KeenKT

Star Trek Into Darkness. Ben Cumberbatch is soooo good. If you liked the first by J.J you love this :) -

Craig Gary Phillips @craigary

So anyway I did like Star Trek Into Darkness once i got past the idea that Benedict Cumberbatch becomes Ricardo Montalban.

[Jason Enos](#) @enosthecomposer

Just went to “Star Trek: Into Darkness” or as it’s also called “Never Bring a Bat’leth to a Phaser Fight”.

[Miggie Smalls](#) @Notorious_MIG

Star Trek Into Darkness was phenomenal. Especially if you’ve seen the original movies #khaaaaaaan

[Kevin Regan](#) @KevinRegan

Star Trek Into Darkness was entertaining and fun, but nothing groundbreaking and totally forgettable. In fact... what was it about again?

sarah walker @_sarahwalker

Star Trek into darkness was so good aaaand I’m a huge nerd.

[Happy Sad](#) @HappySadMovies

STAR TREK INTO DARKNESS: Sorta makes sense that the best Trek movie since Wrath of Khan would be a remake of Wrath of Khan :D



Adam Montoya @SeaNanners

Experienced World War Z in 4D tonight. Angry zombie baby in the front row was intense. I'd recommend reading the book. Still a fun movie :)

ToddInTheShadows @ShadowTodd

To be fair, I think "World War Z" wasn't actively TRYING to be boring, whereas "Deep Impact" was, because it equated boring with smart.

Clayton King @Clayton_king

Just saw World War Z. I'll be preaching all summer via video from a concrete bunker 900 feet deep in Mongolia #freakedout

[Michael Grant](#) @thefayz

Went to World War Z. Okay but damn, plot holes much? Hollywood writers get away with murder. Dumb script but still fun.

Greg Wyshynski @wyshynski

World War Z was pretty good for a movie about zombie chicken linebackers who sometimes act like ants.

Jelisa Castrodale @gordonshumway

Just saw World War Z. If zombies are attracted to loud noises, we should probably preemptively quarantine Stephen A. Smith.

Scott Weinberg @scottEweinberg

"Let's make a World War Z sequel! We already have a third act filmed! I'm fired, aren't I?" -- recently-fired Paramount executive

[Marie DiPinto](#) @reebers635

Monsters University was the most realistic college movie I've seen in a while [#MonstersU](#) [#weareok](#)

[Kelsey Burt](#) @ChestyLaR0u

Saw [#MonstersU](#). Moral of the movie: even if you study harder and are smarter than literally everyone else, your dreams still won't come true

[Mary Pat Smissen](#) @Mppunky

Cannot begin to express how tickled I was with [#MonstersU!!!](#) Just priceless... Disney killed it again! [#kidatheart](#)

[Chris Schlichting](#) @schlickcomedy

What's scarier than an university for monsters...the student loans those monsters will have to eventually pay off. [#MonstersU](#)

Ashley Holbert @AshweyTheHobbit

If the sight of little kid Mike from Monsters University doesn't warm your heart than you aren't even a human [#MonstersU](#)

[Azlyn Grace Damerval](#) @AzlynGrace

Pixar never fails to amaze me with how beautiful their animation is and how it improves between shorts and films. [#MonstersU](#)

[Ryan Sanderson](#) @steamboatbilljr

They were smart to make Mike a completely different character for this film, but that's also one big reason prequels rarely work [#MonstersU](#)

[Sam Barron](#) @sb_wreeldeal

I know @roadsidetweets had success with #Mud and #Emperor but I'm a traditionalist who likes the traditional rollout.

[Kevin McSpadden](#) @macspadwriting

#mud is slow, but worth it. Kids characters are incredible. Director didnt have balls for I decision. Wish he did. 4 me, B+. #moviereview

Isaac D. Sims @jetpacks_

Mud couldn't have been better. By far my favorite movie in theaters this year. #mud

Terri Ginn @TerriGinn

Saw #Mud with @McConaughey at @FrTheatreTweets yesterday - great movie, awesome theater!

Sasha @SashaWithLuv

@hannahbuch @akstanwyck @roadsidetweets What a fantastic movie. After seeing it in April, I still tell everyone I know to go see it. #MUD

brianhedrick @brianhedrick

Mud was the best film I've seen this year. A beautifully executed film. Mcconaughey's best role. #mud

Elisa Jeanne Heine @ElisajHeine

@Tye_Sheridan #mud was a fantastic cinematic experience! Thanks :)

Nathan Adams @TempleOfReviews

#MuchAdoAboutNothing was a DE-LIGHT. So glad to finally have seen it. Amy Acker and Alexis Denisof need to be huge stars yesterday.

Shira Lipkin @shadesong

Me: "I'm looking forward to Much Ado About Nothing."

My sister: "I haven't heard of that one - what's it about?"

#notkidding #adopted

Zac Bertschy @ANNZac

Joss Whedon's Much Ado About Nothing: "hang out with a bunch of drama majors who are really amused with their own antics: the movie"

John Kovalic @muskrat_john

"MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING from the writer of four episodes of Roseanne"

John Coxon @johncoxon

Simply an amazing film, thanks to Lianne for seeing it with me!

:D #MuchAdoAboutNothing

Jimmy Wong @jfwong

Can't wait to see the action packed lens flared EXPLOSION FEST that is Much Ado About Nothing. Thanks @josswhedon for Avengers Pt 2!

Life Pro Facts @BestProFacts

"Nothing" in the title of the Shakespearean play "Much Ado About Nothing" is Elizabethan slang for vagina



DC Women Kicking Ass @dcwomenkicknass

The Lone Ranger movie bombed. I guess that means that no one wants to see action movies with male leads. AM I DOING IT RIGHT?

[Lance Mannion](#) @LanceMannion

As Tonto Depp is Depp and that's ok. But as the Ranger Hammer IS the Ranger and that's great!

Zack Handlen @zhandlen

None of this would've happened if they'd just gone with the full title, The Lone Ranger Of Mars.

[Joshua Malina](#) @JoshMalina

Now Armie Hammer has to convince people that it was the other guy from The Social Network who played the Lone Ranger.

[vaudeville vamp](#) @curlymalloy

Every time I hear the Lone Ranger Theme... I wanna gallop around the house naked with my sleeping mask on!!!

RainnWilson @rainnwilson

I think Tonto in The Lone Ranger is actually being played by Bjork.

John Scalzi @scalzi

The good news is, there will never be another movie about The Lone Ranger. Unless it's "The Lone Ranger Vs. John Carter of Mars" on @syfy.

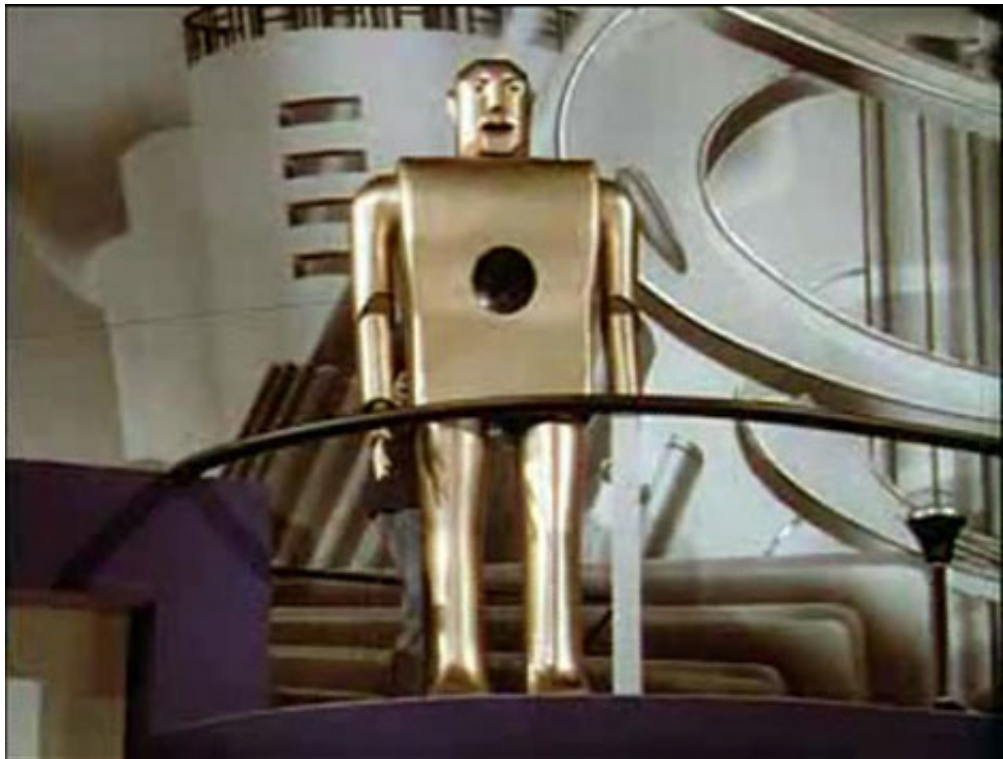
There are some films that are harmed by being a viewer too close to the subject matter. I've been hanging around Google from time-to-time since 2001 or so. I've lived with three Googlers over the years, work just down the street from the Campus, drive or walk by the Campus every other day or so, and have spent a fair amount of time hanging out with folks there, eating their free food and playing pinball.

Looking at the segments where they walk through the campus, it reminded me of anytime I'd see a movie about Harvard after I had spent time around the Quad and such. There are never that many people out and about the campus, and many many many of those that are usually walk from building to building with their laptops out, or heads staring at the passing pavement full-on Slowdive style. Even on the most festive of days, it doesn't feel like the greatest amusement park you ever went to as a kid, only a million times better, to paraphrase Owen Wilson's character, Nick. It's a place where folks work in a slightly less rigid environment, not a Wonka-esque land of pure technomagination.

The food is free and pretty damned good, too!

The Internship is more of a promotional video than anything else. It is exactly what companies like IBM and Westinghouse used to do back in the good old days. In fact, I'd say that it stacks up against the National Film Registry member film *The Middleton Family at the New York World's Fair*. In fact, re-watching it, the parallels are QUITE impressive.

First, let us consider the 1939 film. The Middletons were a family that was being used as an advertising group for Westinghouse. They were the faces of Westinghouse in a series of wonderful ads that ran in just about every top magazine. And of course, when you've got successful characters, you've gotta make a movie of 'em. *The Middleton Family at the New York World's Fair* was nothing more than an advertisement for two things: The American Way of Life and Westinghouse products. Well, maybe not products, but ideas. I don't think Westinghouse was selling television cameras yet, and I'm certain they weren't selling robots like Electro and Sparko, but they did appear in the



movie. They showed industrial machines that the people watching the film wouldn't be buying themselves, and automatic dishwashers that they would eventually buy in great numbers. Westinghouse is often credited as being the first company to release an industrial film as a commercial feature. It would make sense, because it is more of an entertainment piece than a promotional film.

The story is of a family visiting the New York World's Fair of 1939 who are facing a pair of difficult choices. The young Bud and his father are each on one side of a debate about whether or not there is any opportunity in the world of 1939. The young lady had been dating a wonderful man from Westinghouse who is a glorified World's Fair tour guide, but has fallen in with an artist with distinct Socialist leanings. It's a bit over the top, of course, with the artist only missing the mustache to twirl while holding an anarchist's bomb-shaped bomb to complete the look. The story rolls along with the inevitable victory of American Ingenuity and Westinghouse Progress over an Abstract Artist's Socialist rantings. It's a simple story, but it's a lot of fun. The acting ain't exactly Royal Shakespeare, but it's OK for the time. As a record of the World's Fair, it's incredible. These

are images that are important to the future because they show not only the items that Westinghouse displayed at the Faire, but also the family unit of the time.

The film was given to exhibitors to show as the second half of their double features. It almost certainly got shown around quite a bit, and likely for a long run as well. No idea how much it made, or how widely it was distributed, but it certainly made an impact and was included on the National Film Registry in 2012.

The Internship is better known as 'The Google Movie', and with good reason. It's not nearly as much a movie about characters as it is a movie promoting the World of Google. Just like Westinghouse's 1939 work, they show off various technologies which aren't available yet, including the driver-less cars I have to deal with when driving to work in the morning. Where Westinghouse hung the entire concept of American Progress on *The Middletons at the New York World's Fair*, *The Internship* is far more about the Future of American Workplace Culture than it is any other sort of film. We are constantly barraged with the things Google is known for providing their employees. We see the food, the nap-pods, the hammock, the volleyball court, and the dry-cleaning service. There's those colors everywhere, and the bikes, including that weird eight-person one that was in the Museum's parking lot one afternoon and freaked us all out. Where Father Middleton and Jim professed America's Greatness, Billy and Nick are professing what Google's Googliness.

Oh yeah, and they show a bunch of newbs around the Campus (called Nooglers) wearing beanies, which is entirely unbelievable to anyone who hasn't actually SEEN that weirdness in person.

The Internship is every bit as dedicated to the idea of Google as the paragon of Workplace Perfection and Google idealism that *The Middletons* is in its dedication to America. It makes everything else feel secondary, which is something that you could accuse of being true with the 1939 picture, only there's far more charm. The *Internship* is about a workplace, a whacky one, but still a place of business. *The Middletons at the New York World's Fair* is about a fair, as much as they're showing the innovations, they're still at a joyous event, and the happiness of the folks in attendance doesn't feel forced.

At least to an outside observer.

That's not to say that *The Internship* is without fun. It's not. In every way, the team seemed to be trying to re-capture the lightning that was *Wedding Crashers*, only at PG-13 instead of a Hard-R. They even had another glorified cameo from Will Ferrell as a ridiculously sexualized half-wit. Vince Vaughn and Owen Wilson have a chemistry that is infectious at times, especially when they're pitching off of each other, rapid-fire, off-the-wall delivery of two good comedic actors with an affinity for smart-ass delivery. The comedy of these two fish out of water doesn't carry the story too far, and it's actively hampered by a love sub-plot that serves to separate them somewhat. Like the twins in a Vonnegut novel, Vaughn and Wilson are only operating at full brain when they're together. Only a long scene where Vaughn's Billy keeps saying 'on-the-line' and being corrected 'on-line' is truly inspired and is the only time a group larger than just Vaughn and Wilson seems to pan out.

They get a decent cast to work with, though only Tiya Sircar and Tobit Raphael seem to be trying very hard. They're grouped onto a team that is exceptionally bland, though the team leader, Lyle, played by Josh Brener, seems rightfully embarrassed to be delivering some of the lamest faux street lines ever written (though I must admit, "so I'm going to ask her if she wants to join the Lyle High Club?" is a FANTASTIC piece of comedy.) Max Minghella, as the heavy among the other interns, seems to have taken notes from every Disney Channel Original Series villain. There is no subtlety to his performance whatsoever, and he really doesn't provide any tension, which is what a heavy in this kind of film needs to do. Rose Byrne, who is usually exceptionally good, is just flat bland. While she more than held her own in *Bridesmaids*, here, she's not giving us anything; partly because she's not given much to do.

And, of course, Google is a place of madcap hijinx, no? We get to see the slide used a lot, and there's a really annoying Quiddich segment included. I get it, this is supposed to make us think of *The Bad News Bears*, it's a lame portion of a film, and it feels more than a little like they're pandering to a younger demographic. It's only Vaughn's 'pep talks' that make the scene at all watchable. The idea of presenting Google as more than just another company

is annoying at best, at worst, it's downright brainwashing. This could be a recruiting film, but it's more than that. The company mantra 'Don't Be Evil' is never said in *The Internship*, but there are a great many people who have started to feel like it doesn't apply anymore, and this is a reaction to it. This is an attempt to make Google into Happy Fun Town in the eyes of the audience, maybe to make them forget about all the troubles they've had with their gMail account or the failure of Orkut or how cool Hangouts are but lame Google+ is. This is an attempt to wipe the slate clean and replace it with the image of Normal Guys being able to play with the Big Brains and becoming accepted by them. It doesn't manage to do it, but they're trying.

I don't know if there was any way this film could have worked at PG-13. A scene in a strip joint could have been as powerful as the infamous Weddings montage from *Wedding Crashers* with just a few expletives and perhaps a bit of nudity. When Vince Vaughn has half a restaurant of people rapt in laughter from telling a joke in Mandarin, imagine what sort of reaction that could have gotten if the script had the contextual wiggle-room for Vaughn to work his blue magic. If they had even given Sircar's Neha some ACTUAL sexual shennannigans to match with her innuendo, we may have not only opened up her character, but provided some real comedy in the latter half of the film, where things get both too serious and too thin. This is a film that I guess couldn't have gone much bluer than it did and still been an advertisement for Google.

Which is funny, because Google's where I find all my porn.



The SF Silent Film Festival presented all the (surviving) silent films Hitchcock made--all 9 of them--over the weekend at the beautiful Castro Theatre. I'm cheating on Docfest to see them. If you missed them, I'm sorry I didn't get this posted sooner. But there is a second chance, at the PFA in August.

Friday was one movie, Hitchcock's final silent, **BLACKMAIL** (1929.) Silent Film Festival Artistic Director Anita Monga assured us that when we see his first (credited) turn in the director's chair with **PLEASURE GARDEN** (1925) we'll see that he was a master from the beginning. For now, I can tell you that he was a master by 1929. Hitchcock, like many others, bemoaned how talkies led to a decline in visual storytelling, and **BLACKMAIL** visually is a master class on montage. From the very start with a sequence showing the cops tracking down and arresting a career criminal, we see a fluidity and inventiveness that's rare in cinema from any generation. Narrative-wise, that sequence serves to introduce our protagonist cop, who then goes out on the town with his best gal, where we learn (but he doesn't, in a very funny scene) that she has another fella on the side. Like in many Hitchcock films, the men are helpless in their desire for the female, and the masculine action is actually moved along by feminine wiles. I'll avoid spoiling too much by revealing who ends up blackmailing whom over what (in fact, it changes) but I will say it culminates in an exciting chase through the British Museum, which features



some pretty seamless trick shots (look up the Shufftan process for some delicious cine-geekitude.)

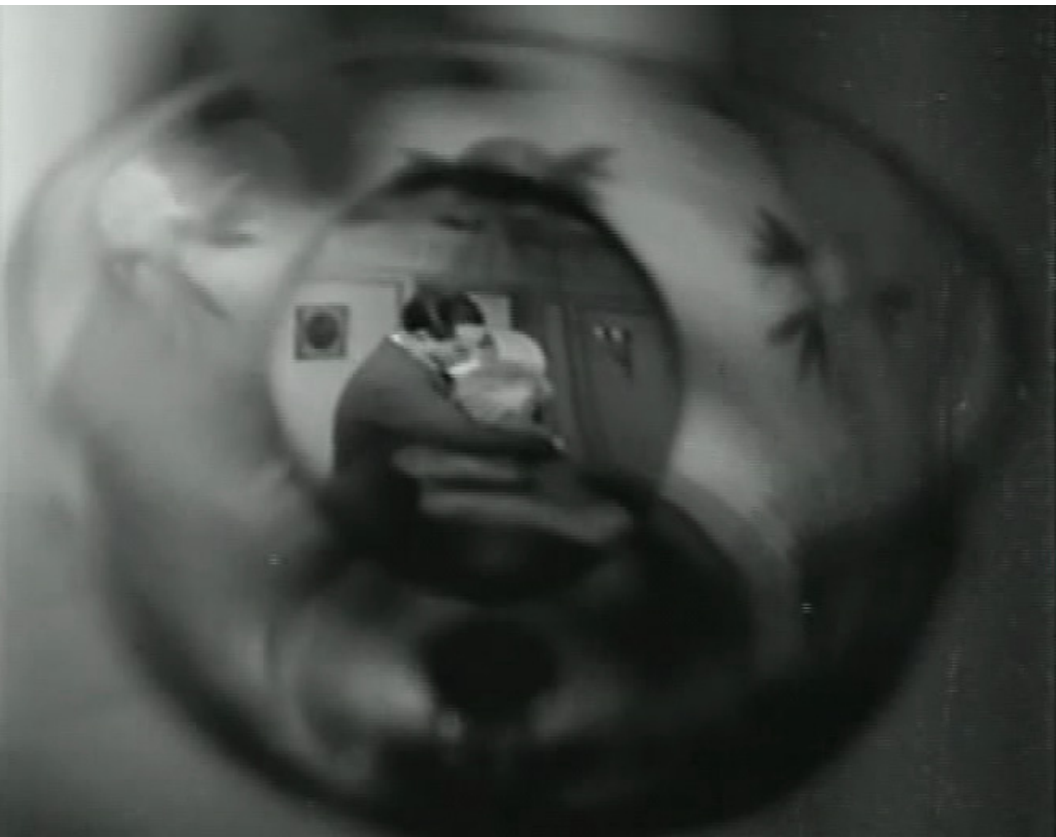
And oh yeah, if you play the spot-the-Hitchcock-cameo game, he makes it way too easy, he's on screen for several seconds as a passenger on a train being pestered by a kid. He made his cameos briefer in his later films.)

And finally, lest I forget, silent films rely on the work of their musical accompaniment, and the Mont Alto Orchestra did a perfect job of it. I don't know if it was their own composition or the original score, but there was something about it that just felt Hitchcockian.

And that was Friday. Now I'm looking forward to a full weekend of silent Hitchcock at the Castro.

Four more movies on Saturday, exploring the master's early years.

First up was CHAMPAGNE (1928). One of the most interesting things about this series is seeing Hitchcock working in genres other than suspense, particularly romantic comedy. I think Hitchcock always had an underrated sense of humor, and



it's refreshing to see him working in a more bubbly genre (pun definitely intended.) On a luxury cruise ship, the crew sees a plane go down in the water and quickly send out a lifeboat. They bring a pretty young lady (Betty Balfour) on board, and ask her if her plane had mechanical troubles. No, actually she made an intentional water landing to meet up with the ship. See, she's a frivolous heiress to a champagne fortune, and her fiance happens to be on this cruise. Well, her father is none too pleased, especially when Wall Street ruins him while he's off dealing with her flapper shenanigans. A wild, mostly light-hearted ride that I'd be hard-pressed to guess was Hitchcock's work if I hadn't seen the credits. But knowing it was Hitchcock made little details stand out--character points like the sinister edge to the mysterious man who takes an interest in her, or camera tricks like shooting through a glass to give the POV of a champagne drinker.

Good fun, and accompanied by the marvelous Judith Rosenberg making her SF Silent Film Fest debut! Judith is actually one of the regulars down at the Niles Film Museum, and I ran into her on Muni that morning. We chatted from Embarcadero to Castro, and she mentioned how nervous she was for her debut. I told her she would be great--and for the record I was right.

BTW, if you missed any of the Hitchcock 9 over the weekend, and plan to catch them when they come to the PFA, Judith will be accompanying all of them on the piano.

Then things went in a distinctly non-romantic, non-comedy direction with **DOWNHILL** (aka **WHEN BOYS LEAVE HOME**, 1927), starring the matinee idol Ivor Novello (he will return in the weekend's finale, **THE LODGER**). One thing that struck me while watching all these movies back-to-back is how misogynistic they are. In most of them, either awful things happen to women or they are the direct cause of awful things happening to men--and not always to men who deserve it. This film is the most glaring example of the latter, as Novello's character, Roddy Berwick is repeatedly taken advantage of by evil, scheming women. First he takes the rap for a friend who impregnates the local shopkeeper's daughter. He gets kicked out of school (just as he was becoming the captain of the football team.) He goes and becomes an actor (introduced



in a very clever way) and marries the beautiful starlet who takes a shine to him...right after his huge inheritance. After she fleeces him and tosses him aside, a madame in a dance hall pimps him out as a “dance partner” for the lonely ladies. Each further abuse and debasement leads to cleverly shot scenes of descent--on an escalator, an elevator, stairs, etc. as he descends to his next level of hell. Bleak, depressing, kinda shallow (oh, poor son of privilege has to get a god-damned job!) and very misogynistic. It’s actually based on a stage play co-written (anonymously) by Novello, and no doubt influenced by his own experiences of having women falling over themselves to have him...despite being gay himself. Which makes the end scene (SPOILER ALERT) of him finally having a happy ending where he can go back to the football field and run around while big, tough guys tackle him(END SPOILER) really interesting.

The magnificent one man band Stephen Horne accompanied on the grand piano...and flute...and accordion...and I don’t know what else. The man plays a lot of instruments, and he’s amazing at them all.

Next up was THE RING (1927), a boxing picture and--surprisingly enough--the only film in with Hitchcock has sole writing credit (although he could turn one hell of a phrase, he wasn’t a fan



of writing dialogue and left that to his writing partners.) A fairly simple boxing picture and love triangle. “One Round” Jack Sander (Carl Brisson) is engaged to Mabel (Lilian Hall Davis), who sells tickets to his show at the circus. It’s one of those shows where Jack takes on all comers, and is used to knocking them out immediately. But one day a stranger comes in, takes Jack into the 4th round, and actually knockshim out. It’s a little unfair, because that man, Bob Corby (Ian Hunter) is actually the Australian heavyweight champion. But it’s all good, Bob was actually there scouting Jack as a potential sparring partner. And when he gets the job, Jack quickly marries Mabel (in a very funny scene featuring all of the circus freaks in attendance.) But Bob has his eyes on Mabel, too, so as Jack works his way up the rankings, it looks like he won’t just be fighting for the championship, he’ll be fighting for his wife. The titular ring can refer to the boxing ring, the wedding ring, and the bracelet that Bob gives Mabel as a gift. Coiled around her arm like a snake (sinister, sexual, and Biblical allusions, there) it serves as a symbol of her infidelity--a very Hitchcockian element.

The excellent MontAlto Orchestra provided accompaniment, along with a Foley artist to provide the ringside bell. They were, of



course, magnificent as always.

Carl Brisson again competed with a friend for the affections of a woman in *THE MANXMAN* (1929). This time he plays Pete Quilliam a humble fisherman on the Isle of Man (Manxman is the term of a resident of the Isle. And I thought it was “Mannonite.”) His best friend is Philip Christian (Malcolm Keen,) a lawyer who is being groomed to be a Deemster (i.e., Judge.) Pete is in love with Kate (Anny Ondra from *BLACKMAIL*) but her father refuses because Pete is poor. So Pete sets off to find his fortune, and asks Philip to take care of Kate while he’s gone. Well, when word comes back that Pete has been killed, he does more than take care of her--he starts planning to marry her. But before he can get around to it, Pete returns. Not only was the news of his death greatly exaggerated, he’s now a very wealthy man and ready to marry Kate. So Kate and Philip just sort of keep their brief romance a secret, Kate marries Pete, they have a baby, and Philip starts his job as the new Deemster. But Kate is still in love with Philip and that all gets pretty awkward

and convoluted when she ends up in front of Philips' court for trying to run away and commit suicide with her baby (whom she reveals is not Pete's.) Beautiful and tragic, with great performances, stunning natural cinematography (the village of Polperro in Cornwall stood in for the Isle of Man,) and of course more than a little Hitchcockian misogyny, as this time the woman is not only the cause of suffering, but has a great deal of it heaped on her as well.

Stephen Horne accompanied, and was excellent as always. And he finally found an instrument he couldn't work into his one-man-band, so Diana Rowan helped him out on the Celtic harp.

And that was Saturday at the Hitchcock 9. Just over halfway through.

And the finale, 4 more Hitchcock silent films on Sunday.

We jumped right in at noon with *THE FARMER'S WIFE* (1928), probably the funniest romantic comedy of the weekend. A widowed farmer (Jameson Thomas) decides he wants to take on a new wife. So he turns to his faithful and lovely housekeeper (Lillian Hall-Davis) and...has her help him write up a list of all the eligible women in town. And then he goes a' courtin'...with hilarious and disastrous results. One rejects him, one is eager to do all the wifely work--except finding "comfort in a man's arms." One just goes loco with hysterics. And besides, none of them are much to look at. Each time he comes home more and more dejected and dispirited. He's almost ready to abandon the whole venture when he realizes what





the audience knew from the beginning--that his perfect wife was right there in front of him the whole time. Kinda silly, kinda sappy, but it actually works. And it features a hilarious supporting role by Gordon Harker as the handyman. Harker also showed up this weekend as the father in CHAMPAGNE and Jack's trainer in THE RING.

The amazing one-man-band Stephen Horne accompanied again, and did a great job.

While the misogyny in THE FARMER'S WIFE was funny and absurd (and there was a lovely paragon of womanly goodness in it all), the next feature, EASY VIRTUE (1928) was downright cruel. Based on a Noel Coward play, Hitchcock and scenario writer Eliot Stannard did a great job of visually telling a dialogue-heavy story. Note, I haven't seen the play, so I don't know the technical differences. I can only imagine how it would be different on stage. I do know they start with the courtroom scene that is actually the climactic finale of the play. In it we learn that Mrs. Filton (Isabel Jeans) is in a divorce case with her husband. Although he's a drunkard who beats her, the verdict is against her because she allegedly had an affair with an artist who was painting her portrait (the way it was portrayed, I believe she didn't actually do anything untoward, it was the artist who propositioned her, but his love letter dooms her.) So she runs off to the French Riviera to start a new life. And is successful...for a while. She meets and marries a handsome young man and maybe her life will turn around. Unfortunately, his parents don't like her, and start doing a little snooping. Like I said, downright cruel. And there were Hitchcockian flairs other than the mistreatment of a woman--most notably the opening scene shot through a monocle.

Judith Rosenberg once again did a fantastic job accompanying. She's already a regular at Niles and at the PFA, and I hope she becomes a regular for the Silent Film Festival, too.

Then for the penultimate show we went back to Hitchcock's very first film (at least, his very first finished feature film), THE PLEASURE GARDEN (1925.) And from the start females--particularly as the agents or victims of cruelty--are central to the story. Also, from the start he's a master of cinema. He had worked



pretty much all jobs on a movie set before sitting in the director's chair, and it's clear he not only soaked up all the knowledge about how to make a film, he also had a keen mind to invent new methods. Jill Cheyne (Carmelita Geraghty) is a naive young girl with an invitation to audition for the chorus at the titular nightclub, the Pleasure Garden. But before she even gets into the door, her letter and all her money are snatched by a pickpocket. So she stays with a kind, wiser chorus girl Patsy Brand (Virginia Valli.) The next day Jill pleads her way into an audition, and really wows them, so she's well on her way to being the new star. While she is becoming a star, her fiance Hugh (John Stuart) is sent off to Africa by his company. Hugh's friend Levett (Miles Mander, whom I assume got teased as being the "mild-mannered Miles Mander",) takes a bit of a shine to Patsy, and they get married before he leaves to Africa to join Hugh. While there he, of course, philanders around and has no intention of returning to his wife. Jill, meanwhile, is fooling around with her admirers, especially a prince. Low morals, high decadence, and a bit of the African fever. Hitchcock certainly started with both mastery and flair.

And speaking of mastery and flair, Stephen Horne accompanied again. I'm losing track of how many instruments he plays, but I'm sure at least piano, flute, and accordion were in there.

And finally, we ended the night--and the weekend--with THE



LODGER (1927): While this was his third finished feature (after the unfinished NUMBER 13, THE PLEASURE GARDEN, and the lost FEAR O' GOD aka THE MOUNTAIN EAGLE) this is the one that Hitchcock himself described as "the first 'Hitchcock' picture." A lot of the themes he would become famous for are developed here. Sinister men, murder, blonds, red herrings, mistaken suspicion, and of course high suspense. Ivor Novello stars as the titular lodger. We start with reports of a madman murdering blonds in London (the film was based on a book based on the Jack the Ripper murders.) The Avenger--as he calls himself by leaving his triangular note--is known to wear a scarf to cover his face. Soon enough, Ivor Novello shows up wearing a scarf over his face and asking to rent a room right in the middle of where all the murders have been taking place. Immediate suspicion ensues (going against type--another Hitchcock favorite--matinee idol Ivor looks downright creepy as the lodger.) It doesn't help that he hates to even look at portraits of blonds. Or that he's always pacing in his upstairs room (Hitchcock shows some special effects wizardry by having the ceiling dissolve so we can see the soles of his shoes pacing above.) Suspicion only gets worse when he actually becomes kind of friendly with the daughter of the house, Daisy (June Tripp, credited only as "June.") That's

especially bad because her boyfriend Joe Chandler (Malcolm Keen from THE MANXMAN) is a detective who is put on the Avenger case. Wonderfully suspenseful, and heavily influenced by German expressionism (particularly the fog and the shadows--like the iconic shadow cross over the lodger's face.)

You know, he had such a long career in talkies that some people forget Hitchcock did silents. And even if you see them, sometimes it's hard to see the hand of Hitchcock in his early works (particularly the romantic comedies.) But this one--even if you took away the credits you could see Hitchcock at work here. Even if you didn't know his career spanned that far back, you could watch THE LODGER and guess that if Hitchcock didn't make it, he was heavily influenced by it. In that way, it's the perfect ending to the Hitchcock 9 weekend. If you're not going to do them chronologically, at least end with the most Hitchcockian one.

And once again, the marvelous Mont Alto Motion Picture Orchestra provided the perfect accompaniment. Looking forward to seeing them again (and all the other accompanists) at the SF Silent Film Festival in July.



I first encountered the film of Les Blank while I was in high school. I'm not 100% sure where I was, but a 16mm projector was set up in the middle of the room, projecting a film. It was a series of shots of women with gaps in their front teeth. The projection was horrible, tons of light in the room, and the sound muddled, barely audible over the din of whatever mingling event I was at.

And yet I was still enthralled.

I later learned that the movie was *Gap-toothed Women* (1987), and I would get it on video tape while I was in college. I watched it dozens of times as I tried to come up with the reason such a poorly exhibited film, as it was the first time I saw it, could still pull me in so thoroughly. The camerawork wasn't particularly precise, the editing was not flashy, the subjects, at least somewhat misty to me, and yet it worked so very well. When a film can overcome the challenges of the space in which it is projected, that is a film that deserves attention.

This is a testament to the eye and perhaps the ears of Les Blank.

While a discussion of his life may well provide break-throughs in the area of influence and drive, he is a filmmaker who is best examined through his films. Documentaries of driven individuals and music and food and thought. Blank was one of the visual artists who best understood what a filmic conversation could, and perhaps should, deliver. His two works on the National Film Registry, *Garlic Is As Good As Ten Mothers* and *Chulas Fronteras*, are two of the most impressive documents of their arenas ever attempted. In fact, *Garlic as Good as Ten Mothers* might be the best document on any food item in history, influencing dozen of other documentarians and their works. From the beginning of his filmmaking career, Les Blank made movies that were expressions of the passions of others, though often coinciding with his own passions.

And those are not the only works of Les Blank that are likely to ever be included on the National Film Registry, the home of "culturally, historically or aesthetically" significant films. Blank's classic Werner Herzog *Eats His Shoe* is a likely addition, as is his other Herzog documentary which we'll be discussing later, *Burden of Dreams*. I would not be shocked to see his work *The Maestro: King of the Cowboy Artists* eventually make the list. In fact, I could name a half-dozen more of his films that were worthy of inclusion.

I really believe that the best to examine the impact and life of the filmmaker is through their films, and with Les Blank, this is doubly true. So, now we consider his masterpiece meditation on the darkest side of the filmmaking process: *Burden of Dreams*.

The trouble with talking about Les Blank's *Burden of Dreams* is that inevitably, it becomes the story of Werner Herzog and not of director Blank. If you can think of a subject of a documentary that is more pervasive than Herzog is in this masterpiece of cinematic inspection, I'm not sure who it is. What's strange is that Blank's camerawork is as fluid as any other shooter in history, and the editing sharp. The jungle setting for Herzog's Fitzcarraldo in South America and the boat itself are as visually appealing as possible at the same time as presenting the conflict... or at least the conflict that takes place outside of Herzog's own drive/hubris (take your pick).

Many comment that Blank is practicing a form of Cinema Verite in *Burden of Dreams*, though I disagree. He is practicing filmmaking, albeit in a slightly rawer form than most directors will tend towards. As has been pointed out by others as prominent as Richard Leacock, he used lights and tripods, had Herzog re-stage statements and conversations, all within a structure that was un-narrated save by interview statements with Herzog and captured conversation among the cast and crew.

A crew that included a large number of local jungle inhabitants who were used as labor for the film; a matter that Blank captures, but the film makes no overt commentary upon.

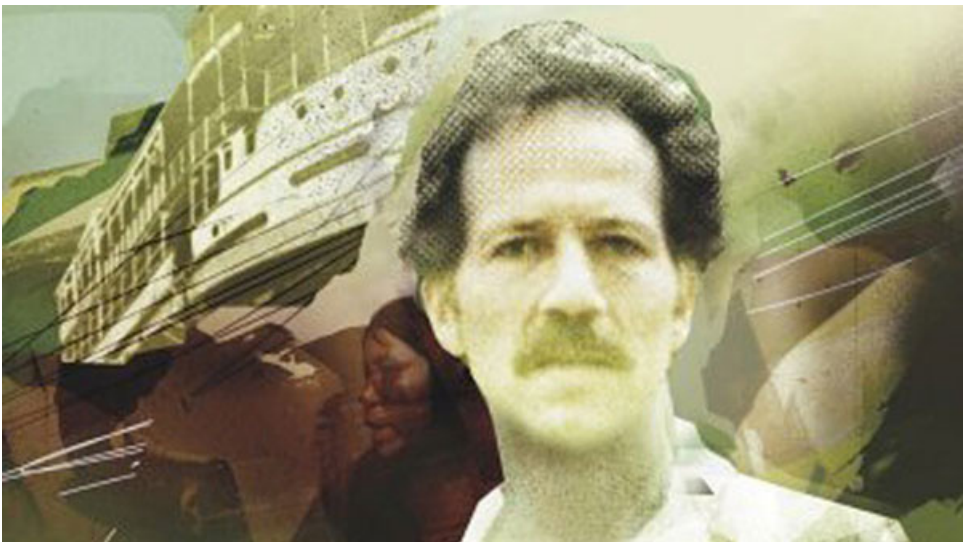
The *Burden of Dreams* is, perhaps, the most impressive documentary about the creation of a film ever made. The concept of Fitzcarraldo, a driven dreamer bringing European Culture in the form of Opera into the Heart of South America, is very much the same story of Herzog bringing his crew to Brazil to tell the story which Blank then records with every bit of attention that Herzog gives to his production.

Where *Burden of Dreams* goes so very right is in giving us the view of Herzog when he is NOT talking to us. When he is dealing with his situations. The long takes of Herzog discussing some matter or another with his crew or local chieftains. We become entangled in Herzog's drive, and often following those recorded interactions, we get to hear Werner try and explain them to us. At points, it feels as if he is attempting nothing more than to convince us that his actions are rational, his work far more im-

portantl than just a film getting made. Herzog is a director of great appetites, visual and emotional. Here, in the jungles of South America, he has bitten off more than any crew can collectively chew, and thus the reliance on the locals. We are shown that it is an uneasy alliance, and that there are further dangers than the natural world for the Crew. inter-tribal fighting and jealousies are a part of this cinematic equation. This adds an element of danger to the documentary that is more like that found in World War II docs like *The Battle of San Pietro*.

The story of *Fitzcarraldo*, which lost its original stars, Jason Robards and Mick Jagger, and then brought in Klaus Kinsky, is almost secondary to the idea of Herzog as main character in both the doc AND his own feature, and there lies the Herzog conundrum. If *Blank* were actually making a *Making-Of* film, why is Herzog's state of mind such a significant player. The workings of the crew are secondary to the words and actions of the German Director of Note. Those moments we spend with Herzog drive the film, and ultimately the message. We'd encountered Herzog so vividly in *Blanks* *Werner Herzog Eats His Shoe*, and we understand that this is not a director who speaks out of anything other than his Truth, and he follows through. In *Burden of Dreams*, he makes a minor masterpiece (flawed in ways which disguise their very existence) and then *Blank* magnifies the direction of Herzog's obsession.

And truly, *Fitzcarraldo*, *Burden of Dreams*, Herzog's life, and *Blank's* best work, all center on obsession.



Room 237

Dir. Rodney Ascher

102 Minutes

Tonight I saw the documentary *Room 237*, about Kubrick's legendary film, *The Shining*.

Although I've seen *The Shining* a few times, and I realize its significance in the history of film, I'll confess that it's never been a favorite of mine. I hoped that this documentary would perhaps convince me to love it as much as the passionate horror fans do, but alas, instead I found myself chuckling for nearly two hours—finding no additional meaning in any of it.

Basically, *Room 237* gives the microphone to a handful of obsessed fans who give film geeks a bad reputation. These individuals believe *The Shining* symbolizes everything from a faked landing-on-the-moon film to a metaphorical holocaust.

Their evidence? Well, they “see” paper-tray hard-ons and sexual intercourse in the pattern of the rugs, so it must be true, right?

Of course not, but as I laughed along with the rest of the audience hearing from these theorists, I started to cringe. Not only at how ridiculous these fans sound; but at the sound of our collective laughter in response.

Who among us hasn't held a belief or a passion that no one else shared? Who among us hasn't at some point been made fun of for something (or someone) that we sincerely love?

Though I enjoyed some of their far-fetched interpretations, and appreciated the comical visuals that accompanied their narrations, I felt bad when I thought about how they must have thought they'd be perceived (as film scholars) vs. how they're being portrayed (as nut cases).

If only the purpose of the film was really to hear from critics who approach this from a historical, academic perspective, I wouldn't have been left with such a bad taste in my mouth.

West of Memphis

Dir. Rodney Ascher

102 Minutes

This afternoon I saw *West of Memphis*, a documentary about the West Memphis Three.

I've been obsessed with this story since I first saw *Paradise Lost* and its sequel a few years ago. For those not in-the-know, the case went something like this in 1993: Three boys dead; three other boys wrongly accused of their murders; (presumably) one killer still roaming free. Thanks, Arkansas.

With support from stars like Eddie Vedder and Johnny Depp, and the relentless persistence of Damien Nichols' (the only accused on death row) wife Lorri, the three were finally released in the summer of 2011.

I'll confess that I didn't know what an Alford Plea was until the three wrongly accused entered theirs to gain freedom. I cried tears of joy upon seeing footage of their release, and cried some more today as I watched this chapter play out.

What's new in this film? The compelling evidence against one of the stepfathers who was never even interviewed at the time of the murders.

Also new? Footage of the WM3 outside of prison walls, carrying on with their lives as they should have been allowed to in 1993.

I'm still digesting all that I saw (many of the graphic crime scene photos were almost too much for me to handle), but I can safely say that anyone interested in the case or curious about the holes of our justice system that can let something like this happen should watch it.

It's nothing short of riveting.

