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European Films Hit The Beach

By Sandy Mandelberger, North American Editor

Palm Beach is a jewel on Florida's glittering Atlantic Coast. For over 75 years, it has been synonymous with the excesses of the rich and famous who have made it a resort playground on the same level as Monte Carlo or the French Riviera. However, in the past 13 years, Palm Beach has been noted for another reason.....for presenting one of the most interesting film festivals on the international film circuit. This year, the Palm Beach International Film Festival (10-17 April) presented over 100 films from around the world.

Among the highlights of the Festival's program were several European films making their U.S. Premieres at the event. *Hotel Very Welcome*, by German director **Sonja Heiss**, is the intriguing dramatic story of western travelers who wander through India and Thailand in search of inner peace and, ultimately, themselves. The film makes a provocative statement about the beauty of travel and the fact that no matter where you go, you always end up finding yourself. The film was produced by Komplizen Film and premiered at the 2007 Berlin Film Festival, where it won a Dialogue Award, before traveling to other festivals, including Karlovy Vary, Copenhagen and Bird's Eye View (UK).

Film veteran **Claude Lelouch** directs the legendary **Fanny Ardant** in his latest film, *Roman de Gare*, which premiered at the Festival. In the still of the night, three lives are about to cross: a woman abandoned, a stranger awaiting his chance, and a best-selling author who imagines the thriller of the year. Deceptively layered and intriguingly misleading, this celebrated film from Oscar-winning director Claude Lelouch features an unlikely pair caught up in a game with high stakes - and deadly consequences. The film, which was produced by Les Films 13 with support from Canal Plus, premiered at last year's Cannes Film Festival. Its young actress **Audrey Dana** was nominated for a Cesar Award as Best Female Newcomer. The film is being released this month by Samuel Goldwyn Films.



One of the Festival's audience favorites was the coming-of-age film *Red Like The Sky* by Italian director **Cristiano Bartone**. The film is inspired by the true story of Mirco Mencacci, one of the most gifted Italian sound editors working today, who happens to be blind. The film chronicles the young boy's fascination with cinema at an early age. Following an accident, he loses his sight. Because Italian law at the time did not allow blind children to attend public schools, his parents are forced to put him into a special institution. When Mirco finds an old tape recorder, he discovers that he is able to create little fairy tales made only of sounds. The conservative institution tries to stop him, but he continues his hobby, slowly involving all of the other blind children. The film has won Best Film honors at the Durban, Flanders, Hamburg, Montreal and Sao Paulo film festivals, as well as a David di Donatello prize for director Cristiano Bartone.

UK production company ZZ Productions was represented at the Festival by the dramatic thriller *The Run*, by writer/director **Tania Meneguzzi**. The film tells the harrowing tale of two drug "mules" who risk their lives and their futures on smuggling illegal drugs inside their bodies. The film has become an indie cult hit in its native England and is currently being sold around the world by the film's sales agent, Transmedia International.

Another UK film, the audience pleasing documentary *Young@Heart*, by director **Stephen Walker**, closes the Festival tonight. Audiences around the world have been wowed by the inspiring senior citizens chorus that has delighted audiences worldwide with their covers of songs by everyone from The Clash to Coldplay. As the film begins, Stephen Walker's the retirees, led by their demanding musical director, are rehearsing their new show, struggling with Sonic Youth's dissonant rock anthem "Schizophrenia" and giving new meaning to James Brown's "I Feel Good." What ultimately emerges is a funny and unexpectedly moving testament to friendship, creative inspiration, and defying expectations. The film is being released in the United States this coming week by Fox Searchlight Pictures (the specialty arm of Twentieth Century Fox), the company behind this year's indie sensation *Juno*.

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