Slideshow: Portraits & Voices From Opening Night at 51st Chicago International Film Festival

Submitted by PatrickMcD [1] on November 1, 2015 - 10:20am

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Artist and filmmaker Agnés Varda

CHICAGO – With the 51st Chicago International Film Festival now history, photographer Joe Arce of HollywoodChicago.com has collected his portrait highlights. Opening Night – October 15th, 2015 – was a Red-Carpet Extravaganza, with many notable personalities of the Festival making their way through the gauntlet of press and photographers. HollywoodChicago.com was also there, to collect some voices behind the images.

FILMMAKER AGNÉS VARDA

Agnés Varda is a living legend, an influencer on the French New Wave of the late 1950s and early 1960s (“Cléo from 5 to 7”) and a social and feminist commentator through her film, photography and art installation.

HollywoodChicago.com: Where does the origin of film as an art form reside in your mind and perspective?

Agnés Varda: Look around you, it is a feast of cinema here. [Pointing to the Chicago International Film Festival logo] I would like to go back there and meet again the eyes of Theda Bara, because it made me come.

ARCHITECT HELMUT JAHN

The iconic Mr. Jahn is one of the most notable architects of the 20th Century. He was honored at the Festival with a Spotlight tribute. He recently made news again when a structure he designed, the Chicago-based State of Illinois Building, was placed on the market for sale by the governor’s office.

HollywoodChicago.com: What design style was the inspiration for the State of Illinois Building, and how does it reflect your state of creativity at the time it was rendered?

Helmut Jahn: First it was a building for the government and the state in Chicago. We didn't want a typical office building. The governor at the time, James Thompson, was smart enough to make a decision to utilize the building that he and I thought would best represent the state government – it was open and mixed the citizens with the governmental offices.

It was based on state capitols, with a big dome shape, but not following a traditional style. It was referred to at the time as 'post modern,' but it wasn't that, it was designed as modern. Unfortunately, the vision that Governor Thompson had was not followed through in other administrations, and that's why the building wasn't properly maintained.

SINGER TERISA GRIFFIN

Ms. Griffin is a singer, musician, songwriter, producer and entertainer, and recently competed on NBC-TV's "The Voice."

HollywoodChicago.com: What is one thing about 'The Voice' that people who watch the show probably don't understand.

Terisa Griffin: You don't actually work with the judges as your coaches. They pay someone to come in and work with you – but they do make it look good.

DIRECTOR ANDREW DAVIS

The films of Andrew Davis – "The Fugitive," "Chain Reaction" and "Collateral Damage" – continue to influence the cinema culture, and have had Oscar recognition. Mr. Davis was President of the International Features Competition jury, which determined the top film of the festival.

HollywoodChicago.com: When you first started out in filmmaking in the 1970s, what was the prevailing atmosphere of was it was, and what it was to become?

Andrew Davis: When I made my first independent film, 'Stony Island' [1978], there were only six independent films made that entire year. Now there are 4000 submissions to the Sundance Film Festival every year, so there is a big difference regarding the ability of filmmakers to actually make films. In many ways, you had to be stronger and tougher to get a film made back then, but now there is so much competition, it takes more money just to get a release.

CHAZ EBERT

Ms. Ebert is the CEO of RogerEbert.com, and is making her mark as a film producer.

HollywoodChicago.com: You are in the midst of producing a new film about civil rights icon Emmett Till. Why do you think that story still resonates in society?

Chaz Ebert: Unfortunately the story still resonates because there is evident inequality – especially this year with the incidences of young, unarmed black men being killed. And it's evident in organizations like Black Lives Matter, who you would think wouldn't be necessary in these times – 60 years after the murder of Emmett Till – you would think we would be in a new place. But I want to find some hopeful seeds, and help move society forward in our racial healing, and I hope that's what we can do with the Emmett Till story.

DIRECTOR JOSH MOND AND LEAD ACTOR CHRISTOPHER ABBOTT OF "JAMES WHITE"

Josh Mond, producer of films like "Martha Marcy May Marlene,' is making his directorial debut with "James White," with actor Christopher Abbott (HBO's "Girls") in the title role. Mond and Abbott were presented with the Emerging Artist Award at the 51st Chicago International Film Festival.

HollywoodChicago.com: You both wrote and directed 'James White.' Was it autobiographical or just impressions of your relationship with your mother?

Josh Mond: It's not entirely autobiographical, it came from a place regarding something I wanted to understand. I am from New York City, and I did lose my mother to cancer.

HollywoodChicago.com: What do you think the TV show 'Girls' gets most right about contemporary relationships, especially in New York City.

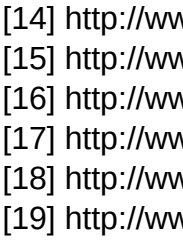
Christopher Abbott: Lena [Dunham] has a way of tapping into that world of relationships. In an urban setting, it all happens pretty quick.

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5. CIFF5 [25]: Producer Chaz Ebert

6. CIFF6 [26]: Director Josh Mond of ‘James White.’
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10. CIFF10 [30]: Actor/Producer Jossie Harris Thacker, International Features Jury.
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13. CIFF13 [33]: Director Ivan Trujillo, International Features Jury.
14. CIFF14 [34]: Hanna McEwen, CineYouth Best Documentary.
15. CIFF15 [20]: Jordan Blazak (Director) and Alan Dembeck (Director of Photography), CineYouth Best Feature.

The Chicago International Film Festival is presented by Cinema/Chicago, a year round advocate for local and international film. Check out all the 2015 Festival highlights by clicking here. [35]

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