Festival Feature: The Films of the 2017 Tribeca Film Festival

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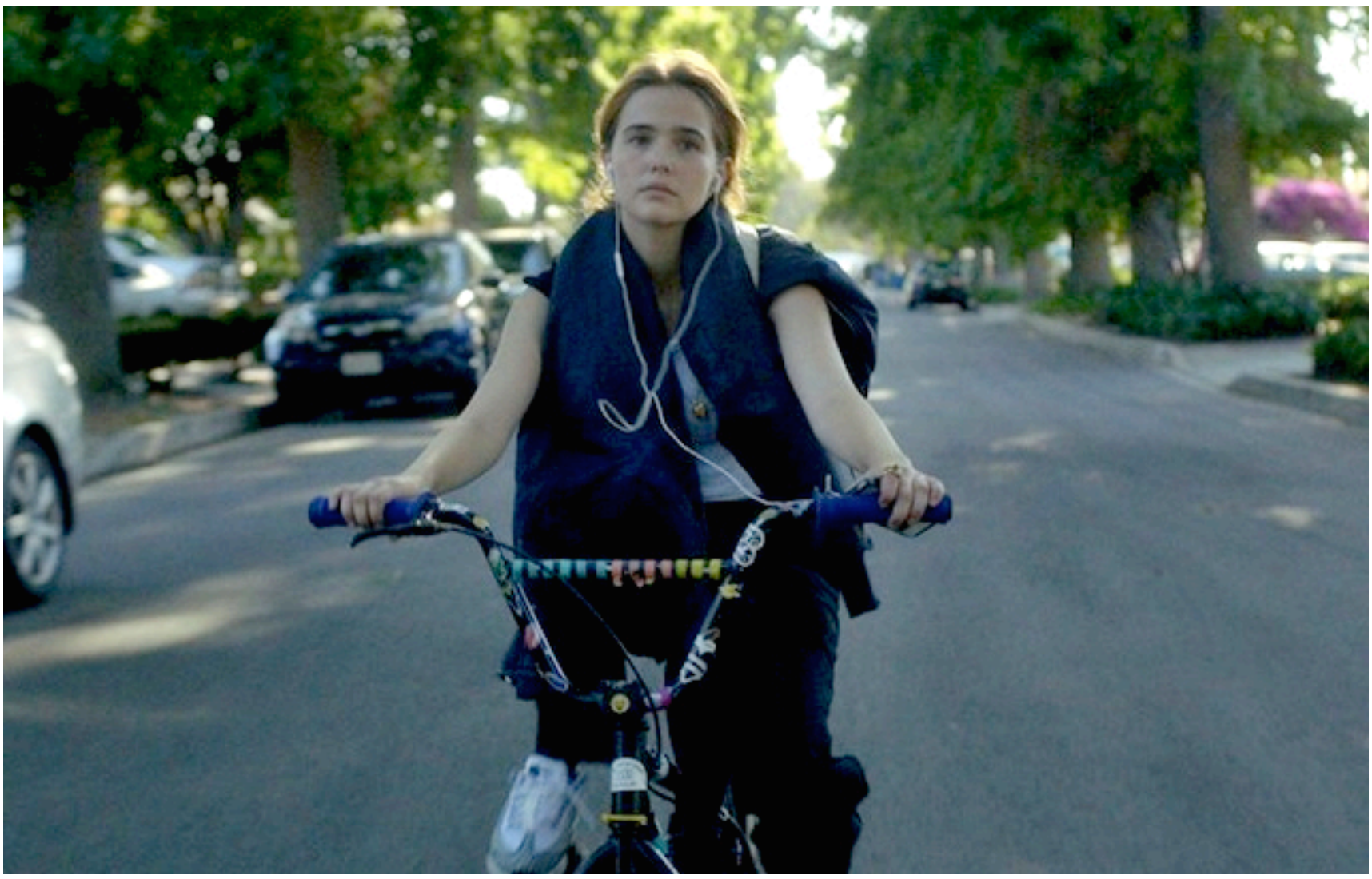
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CHICAGO – The 16th Tribeca Film Festival wrapped last Sunday (April 30, 2017) and the award-winning films of the festival [22] have been named. Patrick McDonald of HollywoodChicago.com was there for the first week of Tribeca and files his personal best of the films he experienced.

This is Patrick switching to first person, and I was able to see 13 media and film works, and took a turn in the “Immersive” or Virtual Reality arcade (there will a separate article on that experience). I sampled TV, short films, documentaries and narrative films, and rank them from first preferred on down, but honestly I didn’t see anything that I didn’t like, which is a testament to the programmers of this iconic film festival.

The following are the prime 13, and an indication of when they are scheduled to release…

“Flower”



’Flower,’ Directed by Max Winkler
Photo credit: Tribeca Film Festival

What seems like a “Juno” rip-off, suddenly takes a dark turn into a very strange and wild world. Zoey Deutsch is Erica, a teenager who scams

her male townsfolk by luring them into blackmail situations. She is Juno-like in the sense that she quips very easily, and seems like a cynical 35-year-old working girl. When her stepbrother Luke (Joey Morgan) comes back home from rehab, he points out a teacher (Adam Scott) that may have molested him. As Erica and Joey plan their revenge, the situation grows darker and darker. This film exposed the stark implication of accusation, and never went where it may have been expected to go.

World Premiere at Tribeca. Acquired by distributor The Orchard.

”Flames”



’Flames,’ Directed by Zefrey Throwell & Josephine Decker
Photo credit: Tribeca Film Festival

In one of the more intriguing film experiments at the Festival, director/performers Zefrey Throwell and Josephine Decker chronicle their relationship from white-hot passion to break up, of course not knowing that the relationship would sever by the end – the film actually has a debate within it as to if it will be finished. The performance art aspect of the journey… the couple had no problem filming their sex life, art installations and wacky travels … is both wildly creative and frustratingly annoying. There is a sense that Zefrey was in it for the art rather than the relationship, and Josephine gets a life lesson in Times Square, of all places. A film that can only take place in artsy New York City, baby!

No distributor yet. World Premiere at Tribeca.

”The Dinner”



'The Dinner,' Directed by Owen Moverman
Photo credit: The Orchard

Writer/director Owen Moverman adapts an incendiary Dutch novel by Herman Koch, and the results are one of the most audacious American stories put to film in awhile. The all-star cast includes Richard Gere, Laura Linney, Rebecca Hall and a surprising performance by British comic actor Steve Coogan. The foursome are playing two related couples that are meeting for dinner at the First Worldiest of First World restaurants. While all the courses come out, and the unctuous staff caters to their every whim, the story involves two brothers (Gere and Coogan) and their wives (Hall and Linney) trying to negotiate a horribly tragic circumstance involving their children. Richard Gere has turned his career towards one great character role after another, and his congressman-dealing-in-moralities is one of his best. Moverman is a director who never compromises, and as a bonus there is amazing sound and visual design… this is a real cinematic experience.

Opened in Chicago and nationwide on May 5th. CLICK HERE **[23] for a full review.**

"Shadowman"



'Shadowman,' Directed by Oren Jacoby
Photo credit: Tribeca Film Festival

When talking about the bad old days of New York City in the late 1970s and early 1980s, there are three legendary graffiti artists, who used the bombed out areas of Chelsea, Tribeca and other neighborhoods to apply their art. Two are famous beyond famous – Jean-Michel Basquiat and Keith Haring – and the third one, Richard Hambleton, is still alive. Hambleton was and is the “Shadowman,” who decorated the neighborhoods with his mysterious graffiti figures that provoked light and darkness. In articles back in the 1980s, his name was mentioned before Basquiat and Haring, but those two artists also made the career move of dying young. Hambleton is profiled, barely alive, using his survival means to still create. This document is unforgettable, both in nostalgia and artworld madness.

No distributor yet. World Premiere at Tribeca.

Animated Shorts



’Odd is An Egg,’ Directed by Kristin Ulseth
Photo credit: Tribeca Film Festival

This shorts program is curated by none other than Whoopi Goldberg, a longtime collaborator at the Tribeca Film Festival. She did a bang-up job, which included the Tribeca Award winning “Odd is An Egg” by Kristen Ulseth. The highlights were “CurPigeon” (Dmitry Milkin), about old men and their pigeon companions helping each other; “The Talk: True Stories About the Birds and the Bees” (Alain Delannoy), empathetic tales of how different people learned about sex; and “Dear Basketball” (Kobe Bryant & Glen Keane), one of the most heartfelt sport tributes ever, written by Bryant, about the game he helped to shape, and the contributions that basketball gave to his soul. It was frankly tear-inducing, and a perfect realization of that quarter of the American Dream.

Look for these films at Academy Awards time next year.

”Bombshell: The Hedy Lamarr Story”



’ Bombshell: The Hedy Lamarr Story,’ Directed by Alexandra Dean
Photo credit: Tribeca Film Festival

“That’s Hedley!” For many years, that reference in the comedy “Blazing Saddles” was the only knowledge of 1940s “B+” movie star Hedy Lamarr, who was little known outside old-timey film buffs. Lamarr was an immigrant film actor from Austria, who left there for Hollywood during the reign of Adolph Hitler, and was known for her impressive beauty. But what also was impressive in “Bombshell” was her gift for thoughtful invention, and how a radio signal method she developed during WWII became standard operating protocol for modern technology today. Produced by Susan Sarandon, written and directed by first-time feature filmmaker Alexandra Dean, “Bombshell” was notable as much for Ms. Lamarr’s decline as her triumphs. But at least it succinctly points out the ingenue’s genius, and how in a sense she will never be forgotten.

No distributor yet. World Premiere at Tribeca.

”Abundant Acreage Available”



’Abundant Acreage Available,’ Directed by Angus McLachlan
Photo credit: Tribeca Film Festival

The second feature film for director Angus McLachlan, best known as the writer of the notable independent “Junebug.” The story involves a brother (Terry Kinney) and sister (Amy Ryan), who own a semi-profitable farm in Indiana. Shortly after their patriarch father dies, three odd brothers (Max Gail, Steve Coulter and Francis Guinan) show up and start camping on their land. It turns out that their family sold the land to the siblings’ father for a closeout price, and the brothers are there to essentially reclaim what they think is still their property. The deliberate story has themes of family, redemption, ownership and death, and is expressed through the magnificent cast, anchored by Amy Ryan. The entire film is like a long prayer, with several amens to offer.

No distributor yet. World Premiere at Tribeca.

”Dog Years”



’Dog Years,’ Directed by Adam Rifkin
Photo credit: Tribeca Film Festival

The great Burt Reynolds is back, for most likely his last lap around the track. He portrays Vic Edwards, a less successful version of himself – as if he had made all the 1970s “good old boy” movies and nothing else. The eightysomething actor is frail and lonely, so he accepts an invitation to a Nashville Film Festival, that he believes will be a lifetime tribute weekend. When the festival reveals itself to be low end, Edwards/Burt forces his punk rock handler (Ariel Winter) to drive him to his hometown of Knoxville, where he proceeds to make amends. Not completely successful, but with a proper emotional resonance to give Mr. R the swan song he deserves. Director Adam Rifkin does add something immensely clever… he digitally inserts the old Burt talking to the young Burt in films like “Deliverance” and “Smokey and the Bandit.”

No distributor yet. World Premiere at Tribeca.

”Chuck”



’Chuck,’ Directed by Philippe Falardeau
Photo credit: IFC Films

He was known as the “Bayonne Bleeder,’ which combined his New Jersey hometown with his tendency to get cut while in the boxing ring. Chuck Wepner (Liev Schreiber) is the title subject of the new film “Chuck,” and it tells the story of the real life inspiration for the Oscar Best Picture “Rocky.” Wepner was a club fighter in New Jersey in 1975, when heavyweight champion Muhammad Ali (Pooch Hall) gave him a shot at the title. Wepner, characteristically bleeding, lasted 15 rounds with the champ, and a young Sylvester Stallone (Morgan Spector, in a remarkable and respectful portrayal) used the fight as a template for formulating “Rocky.” The film recreates the 1970s with artistic panache, even though the “downfall” of Wepner has no place to go as a story. The cast is top drawer (including Naomi Watts and Elizabeth Moss), and Liev Schreiber has a career defining performance. BONUS: The disco era shakes its groove thing again.

In limited nationwide release, opening in Chicago on May 12th.

”Genius”



’Genius,’ Pilot Directed by Ron Howard
Photo credit: National Geographic Channel

This TV Anthology premiered at the Tribeca Film Festival with a huge red carpet event, and the heavy hitters involved – director/producer Ron Howard, title performer Geoffrey Rush and character actor Emily Watson – all walked the carpet in honor of this National Geographic Channel production on the life of Albert Einstein. The pilot episode, directed by Howard, was a cinematic rendering of flashbacks to the physicist's early years, and a flight of fancy regarding how gifted and creative people think differently. Geoffrey Rush is marvelous as the middle-aged Einstein, who is considering his life on the eve of his escape from the Nazi regime. NatGeo just announced a second season for the miniseries, and the possibilities for the medium of television just keep evolving.

"Genius" premiered on the National Geographic Channel on Tuesday, April 25th, 2017, and the next "chapter" will air on Tuesday, May 9th. See local listings for channel location and times.

"The Lovers"



'The Lovers,' Directed by Azazel Jacobs
Photo credit: A24

The great Debra Winger makes a well-anticipated return to a lead film role as Mary, a bored and middle aged married woman having an affair. What is absurd about this well worn tale is that writer/director Azazel Jacobs has her husband Michael (Chicago actor Tracy Letts) ALSO in an affair. The confrontation regarding the affairs will come at the same time – in their minds – after a visit from their son. What transpires is original and intensely felt by the excellent cast. Again, the ending had nowhere to go, but the result is how love can be, unpredictable and untenable.

Currently in limited nationwide release, opening in Chicago May 12th, 2017.

"Clive Davis: The Soundtrack of Our Lives"



'Clive Davis: The Soundtrack of Our Lives,' Directed by Chris Perkel
Photo credit: Tribeca Film Festival

What do Janis Joplin, Aretha Franklin, Bruce Springsteen, Billy Joel, Simon & Garfunkel, Aerosmith, Earth Wind & Fire, Barry Manilow, Aretha Franklin, Carly Simon, the Grateful Dead and Whitney Houston have in common? They all came under the auspice and influence of music impresario Clive Davis. Davis has held virtually every top leadership post in popular music from 1967 to the present, and has had success in virtually every genre that has dominated the eras. This documentary of his life is comprehensive and absorbing, but features too much on his life with Whitney Houston – and her subsequent death. Best found moment for director Chris Perkel… Davis wearing a foppish tennis sweater in the midst of the 1967 Monterey Pop Festival, where he signed Janis Joplin. This was the opening night film of the Tribeca Fest, and featured a concert at Radio City Music Hall after the screening.

World Premiere at Tribeca. Acquired by Apple Music.

"The Reagan Show"



'The Reagan Show,' Directed by Sierra Pettengill and Pacho Velez
Photo credit: Tribeca Film Festival

No offense to the excellent filmmakers involved in this documentary, but it frankly depressed me. The “Saint Ronnie” that the Repubs hold up as the Second Coming of a Deity as a president (in office 1981-89) is proved to be yet another flawed individual, as exposed by his own White House TV, which his handlers invented to control the message. It was interesting to review the White House years of Ronald Reagan with no narration, only the miles of news footage both through White House TV and a different-but-emerging modern broadcast press. Familiar on-air news reporters blend in with the man himself, a B-movie actor who became Leader of the Free World (as Doc Brown in “Back to the Future” rightly observed in 1955, “Who is the Vice President? Jerry Lewis?”), and also invented a propaganda base that the Repubs use effectively to this day… FOX News and #45, anyone?

Will have a theatrical release on June 30th, 2017, with a VOD (July 4th) and CNN broadcast soon thereafter.

For an Opening Night Slideshow of the 2017 Tribeca Film Festival, CLICK HERE. **[24]**

For a Red Carpet overview of “Genius,” including a couple questions for director Ron Howard, CLICK HERE. **[25]**

For a Red Carpet Slideshow for “Dog Years,” CLICK HERE. **[26]**

For the 2017 Tribeca Film Festival Award Winners, CLICK HERE. **[22]**

The 2017 Tribeca Film Festival took place from April 19th through April 30th. For more general information on 2017 Tribeca, click here. *[27]*

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