

Josh Becker DGA

Directing From The Edge



Q & A Archive
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Name: Gerry
E-mail: gerry@beckerfilms.com

Dear Josh:

I just got an email from a couple of film students here in Missouri that I sat with while watching "Enemy At The Gates". While chatting before the film they'd told me that they just bought "Running Time" on DVD and I thought I'd share what one of them had to say in his email after seeing it.

Dear Gerry,

Cory and I watched "Running Time" on DVD last night. Oh my God, this movie rocks! I mean, I was sure it would be cool, but this film blew me away... and I'm not just blowing smoke up your friend's a** either. Bruce was awesome, as always, but Jeremy and Anita were great, too. I had no idea Anita Barone would be as good as she turned out. The most amazing thing to me was the SteadiCam work. How the Hell did they pull some of that stuff off? We were sitting there trying to figure out how they could've maneuvered the camera to accomplish, what I think is some outstanding blocking and coverage. Anyhow, we were very pleased. There were a couple of edits that stuck out, but they work wonderfully for the most part. Sincerely Thanx,
Travis

Dear Travis:

Thanks for the very nice review. What do you mean, a couple of edits stuck out? I'm kidding, a couple do stick out.

Josh

Name: Jim
E-mail: Starion106@aol.com

Josh,

Any thoughts on the Oscars? While most of the movies up for awards sucked major dick this year, I still enjoyed the ceremony. I thought Steve Martin was funny, and the show felt a little classier than usual. No ridiculous tap-dance numbers this time, and for once the show came in well under 4 hours. The acceptance speeches were also a little classier I thought, excepting the Sally Field sequel (Julia Roberts), and the 'aren't we all so important to humanity' (Steven Soderbergh).

And on a completely unrelated note, I saw the other day that Bruce has written a sort-of autobiography "Confessions of a B-Movie Actor". I was wondering if you had ever been approached or considered writing such a book? Like "Confessions of a B-Movie director"? (Although forgive me if B-movie is the wrong term for your films). You've written alot of interesting essays on this site, and I figure you've got many more stories still untold. I could imagine the book being a combination of "Directing Anthony Quinn" and "Fear and Loathing on I-10". It seems like everyone and their uncle wants to get into hollywood these days, and you could offer a sort of cautionary tale. I think a book about a survivor, rather than a star, would be quite interesting.

Jim

Dear Jim:

I couple of years ago I collected a bunch of movie essays together into a book and sent it around, but found no takers. Apparently, no one knows who I am, from what I was told by publishers. I also did the same thing with a collection of short stories. Ah well.

Regarding the Oscars, Steve Martin did a good, sedate job and the show moved along, but nothing really stood out. I like it when things go wrong or someone makes a political speech or pisses everyone off. I thought Julia Roberts was an embarrassment, referring to film composer/conductor Bill Conti as "stick man." For me, though, it was very nice seeing the great cinematographer Jack Cardiff looking spry and the great writer Ernest Lehman, looking rather old and befuddled, but still up and around.

Josh

Name: Marcello
E-mail:

Dear Josh:

Hello. Just wondering if you could give me any help on the following trivia questions.

1. What was the first three-color Technicolor feature film to be commercially released?
2. Who was the first Asian woman to become a movie star in Hollywood?
3. What was the first sound film to be commercially distributed in the U.S.?
4. Who is the only comic-strip character -- not an actor in the role, but the character himself -- to be awarded a Best Actor Oscar?

Dear Marcello:

I'm not sure what this is about, nor will I look in any books.

1. "Becky Sharp" (1935)
2. Anna May Wong
3. The first feature film with a soundtrack, meaning music and sound effects, not dialog, was "Don Juan" (1926). The first film with some dialog was "The Jazz Singer" (1927).
4. No cartoon character has ever won in the category of "best actor."

Josh

Name: Chopped Nuts
E-mail: danjfox@hotmail.com

Dear Josh:

I just watched Running Time the other night and really enjoyed it. During editing did you find yourself hurting for say a reaction shot or a close-up? I realized after the movie that I hadn't missed these types of shots at all.

P.S. Miss Barone did a fantastic job.

Dear Chopped Nuts:

I didn't miss cutting to anything since that wasn't part of the scheme. The editor, Kaye, and I did noodle with every cut for hours, though.

Josh

Name: Erika
E-mail: eclancy@covad.com

Good morning, Mr. Becker!

I was enjoying your site when i noticed your "Favorite Films" section. I love perusing such lists so I can say to myself, "Yep, like that one too, that one, uh huh, what? that one sucked, oh I LOVE that one..." etc. etc.

One thing I noticed and thought was funny, is that the film "Lunatics: A Love Story" was not listed in your favorite films. I find that very amusing, since you created / directed that little celuloid fantasy.

Didn't you like the end product? I have to say it's one of my favorite films! The quiky-ness, the oddball characters ... it's a great story and I thought it was funny and entertaining.

I just wonder why it didn't make your list ... thanks for listening,

Erika Clancy

Dear Erika:

None of my own films have made my list. Perhaps "If I Had a Hammer" will, but I doubt it. I would need a whole lot of believable positive feedback to consider such a thing.

Josh

Name: Cynthia E. Jones
E-mail: cynthiaejones@hotmail.com

Dear Josh,

Maybe it's just my imagination, but I was under the impression that the entire film "Traffic" was an argument for legalization. Just by virtue of all the needless death (improbable though those scenes may have been), bullshit government jobs that don't do anything (played by the actual government lackeys!), and denial--the way those kids left their friend at the front steps of the hospital (although I don't know about the cops' immediate and swift response there)...Michael Douglas' character goes on about "treatment" and I think that Soderbergh was using that as an alias for "legalization." It's the Hollywood way.

Criminalization is the cause of 500,000 non-violent drug-related incarcerations as we speak! I wholeheartedly agree with you that drugs should be legalized. But since Soderbergh didn't come across with a message that you agree with, have you ever thought of touching upon that issue yourself in a film?

--cindy

Dear Cindy:

I don't buy that "treatment" is another way of saying "legalization." I agree that the film is aying the war on drugs is being poorly run, but I never got any sense that it was saying that there shouldn't be one. Reagrding making that point myself, if I had a good story that exemplified it, perhaps I would.

But the story is the point.

Josh

Name: David Pollison
E-mail: Daverat@aol.com

Josh,

I know I can always count on you to brighten my day by reading one of your reviews. Even if I completely disagree, they are more interesting and entertaining than all of those fart-in-a-windtunnel critics combined. I'm referring to Traffic, Eyes Wide Shut, & The Matrix. Now you know that of course I loved The Matrix. My only complaint was that it was they type of movie that Rob & Sam should have been making after Darkman & Hard Target. They are even friends with Geof Darrow. And Hong Kong action mixed with Sci-Fi? Instead they missed the ball and did a horrible half hour TV show rip off too late. Eyes Wide Shut: For me that movie was all about dangerous temptation and flirtation. Which, being a married man I can relate to. I've found that mostly married people love the movie and single people dont. TRAFFIC: the review that inspired me to write to you. I'll admit that since the very early 80's movies have been getting worse. And this year was the worst. My opinion of this years movies is so low that I wont be terribly upset by anyone who wins an oscar this year. though I really want Ellen Bursten to win. Like most movies this year I liked Traffic but I didn't love it. In fact REquiem for a Dream is the only movie I'll be picking up on DVD this year. Than's how I rate movies now. I ask the question will I buy it on DVD? Back to Traffic, I think part of the point of that movie was not to have a point of view. Let the audince make up their own minds. If Michael Douglas was the lead then the audience, like him, would be clueless about the problem. If Don Chealde was the lead, once again, the audience would have been clueless about the problem, and if Benicio was the lead, the audience would have been even more confused than with the other 2 combined. For me the message was: you can't win the war. only by winning small battles can there be any hope. Don get he bug in the house, Michael Douglas starts to take responsibility as a father to his daughter. & Benicio is able to build up his community. I do not believer that legalization would solve the problem. It would greatly reduce the violence between gangs. The govenment will be saving bilions and even making billions. Then the govenment could spend that money on, Education, rehabilitation & building strong families and communities. Underage kids will alwasy be able to get drugs. How many kinds in your lifetime have you known that wanted booze or cigarets that wen't able to get them? None. I know I'm probably rambling and further convincing you that I'm full of shit. But that's o'kay, there is something about the image of those fused vertebae in your neck that just brightens my whole day. Keep it up & good for you for smaking a big fat joint after the movie. These days I hardly ever feel the need to smoke pot anymore. PS: sorry for the spelling errors.

Dear David:

Hey, I've always enjoyed and respected your opinions, even when they

differ from mine, which is usually. You were frequently the only person I could get a straight answer from about scripts I'd written for Ren Pix. Thanks for writing in.

Josh

Name: Mary Lou
E-mail: llroclvr2000@yahoo.com

Hi Josh,

I don't have any questions for you just a few comments. I just finished (with amusement) reading your article on "[The End of an Era: Xena's Final Wrap](#)". I would like to say "thank you" for giving us a glimpse of behind-the-scenes. I've only been a Xena and Hercules fan a couple of years and in that short time those shows have really grown on me, especially Xena. I know the reasons for that is because Rob, Lucy, and Renee always seem so gracious when the media are around and they come across as genuinely caring about their fans. And so, on that note, thank you for being so gracious in sharing your experiences with us. I can see that is one of the reasons why you are a part of the Renaissance family.

Sincerely,
Mary Lou

Dear Mary Lou:

Once again, it's been my pleasure. Thanks for watching.

Josh

Name: Chad
E-mail:

Dear Josh:

I was checking out the site and I ran across [the peice that Bruce Campbell wrote about you](#). It made me wonder if the western that the two of you were going to make ever started to pan out. I'm very curious about it and I think that Bruce Campbell would do a great job in a Western setting, like we have already seen in BRISCO COUNTY. So any news about this? I know Bruce is quite busy at the moment and that the SAG strike is just around the bend, but I would love to see this film as soon as possible. Thanks for your time. Take it easy

Dear Chad:

We'd both love to do it, all we need is the financing. Oh, that!

Josh

Name: Elaine (Dev) Rugne
E-mail: ERugne@aol.com

Becker!

Lucky you to be that close to two gorgeous women like Lucy and Renee!
Hey, thanks for doing some of the best eps on Xena, it sucks BIG that this show is over!! Oh well, take it easy!
Dev

Name: Linda Crist
E-mail: texbard@earthlink.net

Josh -

Thank you so much for sharing this with us. It really hit home that the show is almost over. There will never be another Xena. Thanks for all the wonderful memories you've given us, both on-screen and here at your website.

Linda Crist
Dallas, Texas

Dear Linda & Dev:

It was entirely my pleasure.

Josh

Name: Chopped Nuts
E-mail: danjfox@hotmail.com

Dear Josh:

How do you approach setting up your shots? Do you work from content outward? Images that you get while writing? Storyboard to music? For myself I egt a touch worried that I might miss out on a small shot that says a lot, as opposed to just going for pretty shots.

Thanks.

Dear Chopped Nuts:

I work from the script. What do I want or need to see dramatically and I make a list. At the accelerated pace at which I usually shoot, it's hard enough just getting those shots. However, it's also a very good idea to keep your eyes open to really look at your location or your set and see if there aren't cool things lurking around. The art director on "Lunatics" put these really cool John & Jackie Kennedy bookends on the set without mentioning them. When I saw them I got a close-up that I ended up using. On basic level, though, it's what do you absolutely NEED.

Josh

Name: Gareth
E-mail: GAZZFC@aol.com

Dear Josh:

As a young, therefore new script writer, i would like to know the best way to get your work even looked at by the people who matter.

Thanks,
Gareth

Dear Gareth:

I have never managed to figure that out, because whoever they are are certainly not reading my scripts. I do wish you all the luck in the world, though.

Josh

Name: Cynthia E. Jones
E-mail: cynthiaejones@hotmail.com

Dear Josh,

Just watched "Almost Famous" last night. It was almost good. My theory is that movie critics are journalists, right? And it's a movie about a journalist, right? So it hit a soft spot with all the writers, who are probably about the age where they would have wanted to hang out with Led Zepplin, right? So, they thought it was great because it gave them a warm feeling inside.

As for Kate Hudson getting nominated for an Oscar, well, that's par for the course as I've not had faith in any Oscar nods for a while. Soderbergh's attention gave me pause, but I must remember it's one step away from the Grammys as far as actual merit goes. Damn! Are there no good, new movies left in the world?

I guess I'll just have to make them myself.

---cindy

Dear Cindy:

Not that I've seen. I watched the first half hour of "Magnolia" and it looks to be beyond horrible -- every scene is played up at a meaningless dramatic climax for no reason and is about nothing. It seemed almost breathtaking in its awfulness.

Josh

Name: Campbell
E-mail: shihtzuman@hotmail.com

Josh

Much to my shame, I just went to see TRAFFIC. I thought I could justify it since a friend was paying for the tickets but I only learned the hard way that nothing in life is free! That's two and a half hours of my life I'm NEVER getting back! If I'd cared about even ONE character I may have been less unforgiving but alas, no such character was to be found.

It's movies like these that make me wonder if I got into the right profession.

Campbell

Dear Campbell:

As my [review](#) attests, I'm right there with you, dude. 2 1/2 hours that can never be recovered. A frightful waste.

Josh

Name: Angela
E-mail: ent.exch@dial.pipex.com

Dear Josh:

Thanks for posting your [article about Xena Wraps The End of An Era](#). It was a great read and a very amusing one too, loved the vision of you and the Desi Arnez impressions, better luck next time Buddy. Would love to see you at Pasadena and if I do promise I will creep up and say hello quietly, I won't expose you to geekmania, seriously though it is good fun you will enjoy yourself even if you are determined not to. Thanks again Josh what

a sweet man you are.

Dear Angela:

Gosh, thanks. I am planning on going, we'll just see how bad my agorophobia kicks in that day.

Josh

Name: Barry Marshall
E-mail: xxlbadboy@aol.com

Hi Josh,

I read your recent post about your experiences on the Xena set. I found your anecdotes very interesting. Will you be posting more anecdotes, or even creating a special section on your site to regale us with stories of your experiences?

Thanks,
Barry

Dear Barry:

Nope, that's the extent of it. For the remainder of my New Zealand anecdotes, check out my essay, ["Directing Anthony Quinn."](#)

Josh

Name: Arin Sang-urai
E-mail: neorin@yahoo.com

Dear Josh:

I was wondering if you were planning on putting your screenplays on an html format. I am particularly interested in the script for "running time" but my winzip does not allow me to download it for some reason. Thank you for your time.

Dear Arin:

Perhaps the intrepid webmaster here, Shirley, would care to field this question?

Josh

Dear Arin,

I just tried downloading the "Running Time" script .zip file & opening it, and had no problems. It sounds like you're using WinZip's Internet Browser Support Add-on, do you have the latest version (4.0, build 3234, released September 2000)? If not, you should probably download the upgrade; WinZip's page for it is [here](#).

Shirley

Name: Jen

E-mail:

Dear Josh,

I read that you've directed another "Xena" episode--very cool news. I (surprisingly enough) have become a fan of the show, and I'm especially fond of the comedy episodes, many of which you directed. "In Sickness and in Hell," "Fins, Femmes, and Gems," and "If the Shoe Fits" were all quite funny.

Now that I've seen some of your television work, I'd be interested in checking out some of your films. Do you have a favorite you'd like to recommend, or should I just go over to IMDB and point blindly at the screen?

Take care,
Jen

P.S. I completely agreed with your assessment of "Gladiator"; I finally caught it on video recently--I haven't been that bored with a film since "Forrest Gump." No, wait. I'm forgetting "Jerry Maguire," debacle of 97.

Dear Jen:

Check out "Running Time," it's fairly easy to get and I think it turned out pretty well. I'm quite pleased with "If I Had a Hammer," but it's not available yet.

Josh

Name: karime selene rebollo santa ana

E-mail: emirak@hotmail.com

Dear Josh:

I HAVE A QUESTION:

WHO IS THE OLDEST PEOPLE THAT WON AN AWARD.

I HAVE THIS ANSWERS WHICH IS?

Warner
Wayne
Marx
Quinn
O?Neal

THANK♦S

EMIRAK

Dear Emirak:

I don't know what those last names mean, other than Wayne, which I assume is John Wayne, who was 62 when he won his Oscar. Ruth Gordon was 72 when she won for "Rosemary's Baby;" Don Ameche was 77 when he won for "Cocoon;" Helen Hayes was 70 when she won for "Airport" (she had previously won an Oscar 39 years earlier, as well); Michael Caine was just 66 when he won for "Cider House Rules." If you get into the honorary awards, then there are many older folks that have won.

Josh

Name: John
E-mail: jforde40@hotmail.com

Howdy-

What's the status of Hammer? Any chance of you entering it into the Chicago Underground Film Fest?

Thanks

Howdy, John:

"Hammer" is done and it's going out to distribution companies. It won't be in the Chicago Underground Film Festival, although Jay Bliznick, who runs the festival, is a friend of mine.

Josh

Name: Diana
E-mail: sdhawkes@penn.com

Dear Josh:

Curses you!

You got me, I was debating whether or not to qualify my question with: ...or, since you're a man, perhaps I should word it, "...the last film that stirred your emotions, stuck a cord with you, so that you think about the film exemplifying grief, beauty, the human spirit, etc...in a compelling way," since I know it is asking a lot of an American male to admit they are moved to the point of tears.

Heh, I was trying not to be wordy, maybe I should just ask, what's the last film that's given you the warm fuzzies? (and don't say "Bambi" when you were six!)

P.S. --Enjoyed your [reflections on the end of the RenPics era](#). Since I'm a gal, I freely admit to shedding a tear or two over Xena stories, and I am reserving quite a few for the final episodes and hopefully some behind the scenes footage of Lucy, Renee and Rob addressing the crew. (Entertainment Tonight aired footage from Herc's wrap party). Say, do you know if any entertainment news crews were there for the final days?

Dear Diana:

I'll bet there have been news crews there, but there weren't any when I was shooting. I must say, however, that "Bambi" really did move me when I was seven or eight. I was kind of moved by Harvey Kietel and his situation in "Shadrach" and the fact that he didn't have the words to express his frustration. Of course, William Wyler's pictures continue to work on me over and over again. I just watched the DVD of "Friendly Persuasion" and was moved. "The Best Years of Our Lives" and "Mrs. Miniver" never fail. Also, I just love "Marty," and when it cuts to Betsy Blair watching Ed Sullivan with her parents and waiting for Marty to call, I always want to cry. Also, when Marty calls the girl he met at the RKO Chester Theater and she blows him off always breaks my heart. Regarding new movies, they're mostly so goddamn awful and not hooking me on any emotional level, therefore nothing can possibly move me.

Josh

Name: Diana
E-mail: sdhawkes@penn.com

Dear Josh:

What was the last film that made you cry?

(For me:

A--cry in the really satisfying way, where you feel moved that you'd just been told a poignant story, and upon reflection, pleases you--"Billy Elliot".

B--cry in the cheesy, I've been pulled along by predictable cheap canned sentiment, but dammit, I cried anyway, way--"Titanic"!

Dear Diana:

I don't cry at movies. I don't cry at all, unless someone dear to me dies. I'm a boy. Girls are the ones crying all the time. The only tears I might have shed in "Titanic" were tears of extreme boredom, or perhaps the pain caused by Bruce Campbell's elbow as he repeatedly poked me in the ribs and kept whispering in my ear, "Is this the good part?" since it was my stupid idea to see the film. As for "Billy Elliot," I don't think you could get me into that one kicking and screaming.

Josh

Name: Rhana
E-mail: Starbase101@hotmail.com

Greetings, Josh.

I have a question about directing and editing. When you begin a project, (like a Xena episode) do you ultimately have control over the editing and wardrobe choices? Or is this out of your hands once filming is complete? Who gets the final say in what we see on the screen? And thanks for allowing yourself to be accessible to the fans.

Dear Rhana:

In regard to a "Xena" episode, the crew does everything they can to give the director what he or she envisions. I'd get two weeks of prep, meeting with all the department heads, including the costume designer, and relate to them what I have in mind -- if anything -- and they do what they can to give it to me. All of the costume designer sketches go to the producers, too, and if they don't like something I've chosen, including casting, they change it. About the editing, the editor assembles the show, then the director gets three days to change it however they'd like, then it goes to the producers and they do whatever they'd like. At least in my case, 99% of what you're seeing is my director's cut.

Josh

Name: Jason Keller
E-mail:

Dear Josh:

Just wanted to let you know that Eddie Wilson announced that Renee and Steve are expecting their first baby. I wasn't sure if you heard the news or not.

Dear Jason:

I don't know who Eddie Wilson is, but I had heard about Renee. I wish her and Steve all the very best.

Josh

Name: Alex Sanders
E-mail: lildof2001@aol.com

Dear Josh:

all i got to say is the scripts are awesome and i wanna become an actor when i grow up...that's what i'm majoring in ...so if u ever need a actor...i don't care what kind of part...just call me or email me....i'll do it all!

Dear Alex:

Yeah, well I won't grow up! So there!

Josh

Name: Thomas Hammel
E-mail: ttbomb21@cs.com

Josh,

I am a aspiring screenwriter and I have say I was inspired by you. Keep up with the good work. I have faith in you. I am currently writing a screenplay and have many other ideas. My goal is to write six great screenplays before I begin summiting them to production companies. Maybe, someday you will direct one of my stories.

Thomas-Mark Hammel

Dear Thomas-Mark:

As James Bond said, "Never say never," but I'm primarily interested in directing my own scripts. I wish you all the luck in the world, however. Perhaps instead of waiting until you've written six great scripts before submitting one, you simply wait until you've written one good one and submit that. Submit to whom, is yet a whole other can of worms.

Josh

Name: James
E-mail: whopper170@hotmail.com

Dear Josh:

I saw your painting for FXM, can you give me any contact info for FXM? Another thing, where are you located? My sister is an independent film maker. Just wanted to see if you guys could sometime cross connect, maybe help each other out with connections

Dear James:

What the hell are you talking about? What's FXM? What painting?

Josh

Name: Cynthia E. Jones
E-mail: cynthiaejones@hotmail.com

Dear Josh,

I just got through watching "It's All True," the "documentary" about Orson's film of the same name started in 1942. I read that you were disappointed with this film, and I'd just like to second that. It was a poorly constructed piece, and the music didn't seem to fit at all. I think that these filmmakers are imagining that just because Welles' name is attached to it, we'd be satisfied. The thing about Welles is, his name doesn't necessarily mean GREATNESS, it means the possibility of greatness--which seems to only occur when the studios leave him alone. Ah, well.

I also watched "Wonder Boys," and as far as that question: Why did they put the dog in Tobey MacGuire's bed? Because that's stoner logic. Also, I think Michael Douglas wanted to get caught in some way in order to stop--that was the decision he made. The film is all about people who let things happen instead of making decisions. Putting the dog in the trunk was not a decision--putting it in the bed was. That's my theory. A stupid act--yes--but one that guaranteed getting caught and therefore some sort of ACTION.

Otherwise, I'm having a lovely time in Sacramento, and I'm completely stoked because Bruce (Campbell, of course) agreed to let me interview him in May for my paper. So hooray! Will you be attending the Xena

convention festivities in Pasadena with Bruce and Ted, or will you be at home, avoiding the geeks?

have a lovely Monday.

--cindy

Dear Cindy:

I may actually go to that convention, since it's sort of the biggest and the last. But I wouldn't be surprised if I decide against going at the last minute.

Josh

Name: Chopped Nuts
E-mail: danjfox@hotmail.com

Dear Josh:

Buried somewhere in the archives you referred to Ang Lee as a literal director. I was wondering what you meant by this.

Dear Chopped Nuts:

If Federico Fellini and Luis Bunuel are surrealists; Ang Lee, William Wyler, and myself are literalists, meaning we're hooked to the literal word as well as the literal world. Our movies are, for the most part, not fantasies, surreal or hyper-real, they take place in the plain old real world and the rules of the real world apply. The only time Ang Lee has broken the rules of the real world in any of his movies is in the fights in "Crouching Tiger." If you watch "The Bride With White Hair," which was obviously an influence on CTHD, it's entirely a fantasy or a fable. CTHD is entirely in the real world, except for the fights, which is ridiculous as far as I'm concerned.

Josh

Name: marg
E-mail: olympia252001@hotmail

Dear Josh:

Will Kevin Smith be in the final episodes of Xena?

Dear Marg:

No, Kevin's final episode is my final episode, "Soul Possession."

Josh

Name: F. R.

E-mail: swanlandprods@yahoo.com

Howdy, Josh!

Boy, you get busy for a couple of days, don't take the time to visit Josh's posting board, and just look what happens to the "salon"! It is truly *fantastic* to read the diversity, and depth, of film discussions that have been taking place here lately. Or, as the kids say, *you rule*! ;)

Way back when, you made some very good points about the shortcomings in "Wonder Boys" and Albert Finney's performance in "Erin Brockovich." Maybe it was just because so many other films last year were so crappy that "WB" seemed better than it was, or maybe it was because the dialogue seemed wittier than most, but, yeah, you're right, the plot was just ridiculous. No one since 1980 has an important document that they haven't made a Xerox copy of, or just plain put on a disk. And why did they put the dead dog in the kid's bed? Why, because that was the *quirky* thing to do! ;) As for Finney's accent being distracting, maybe I *wanted* distraction from Julia Roberts' overrated (one-dimensional) performance. And the SAG gave both of them awards, esp. after they were so perceptive about naming Benicio Del Toro best actor? (OK, I know, you haven't seen "Traffic" yet, and I certainly don't claim it's one of the greatest films ever, but it certainly had some great elements, one of which was Del Toro's performance.) Sigh. Must stop trying to find logic in awards shows, because there simply is none.

I think it was Jim/Starion who brought up the topic of documentaries, but the ones he mentioned liking -- Crumb, Mr. Death, etc. -- were all pretty dark, stylistic and extreme. I've seen some documentaries that I would certainly recommend, but they were more traditional: examination of a situation & telling the story in the voices of the participants, mostly in on-camera interviews. I particularly liked "Into the Arms of Strangers," which I've mentioned here before, and "Sound and Fury," which starts out boringly (a bad idea, of course), but gets very emotionally involving after about 5 minutes. "Long Night's Journey into Day," about the Truth and Reconciliation trials in South Africa, is also pretty interesting, but, given the amazing subject matter, this is a film that could have been about 9000 more powerful; disappointing when a film doesn't make best use of its resources. "Legacy" is another interesting documentary, but I felt it doesn't prove its central premise: that the murder by drive-by violence of an African-American kid with a promising future motivated his surviving family members to take action to better their lives.

Among documentaries, I would most heartily recommend the winner of last year's Oscar for documentary short (one of the best choices by the entire Academy in recent years!), "King Gimp," which has aired on HBO and in

various film festivals. I do have a bias about this one; I've met the filmmakers, and I really respect their integrity and sense of storytelling. And the writer of the film, Dan Keplinger, who is also the subject of the film, is an amazingly courageous, talented, bright and determined guy. The lousy irony is, many people tend to dismiss him outright, treating Dan like he's stupid or helpless or useless just because he uses a wheelchair and has cerebral palsy, a physical ailment that doesn't impair his intelligence in the slightest. So he takes that and turns it around -- making himself a "king" among "gimps." Cool guy!

Josh, I wanted to ask you if you have any interest at all in animated films? I don't mean necessarily the big Disney-style, wants-to-be-a-Broadway-musical types (though I do admit a fondness for "Mulan"), but also the short, experimental types. I particularly like when animation is used for satirical purposes, like "South Park: Bigger, Longer & Uncut" (which, although it certainly gloried in its own overusage of colorful words and, ahem, sexual combinations, but was nonetheless a hysterical spoof of Broadway musicals and other animated films, and also took on censorship, media hype, etc.), or the short film "Rejected." by Don Hertzfeldt, which is in this year's pool of Oscar nominees. Have you ever seen any of the "Spike & Mike's Sick & Twisted Animated Film Festivals" (that's where both the South Park guys and Hertzfeldt, among others, first got national exposure)? If so, what did you think?

Well, back to the ol' grind. Hope all is well for you. Keep us posted on developments with "If I Had A Hammer," and all your other interesting writing & directing projects. I'm looking forward to reading the script of "Devil Dogs"...whenever I get time... :)

best wishes,
F. R.

Dear F.R.:

I liked "King Gimp," particularly for the way it compressed 14 years into 60 minutes. I used to be a big fan of animation as a kid and I really do love the Warners and the Fleischer cartoons, but I just can't stand the Disney stuff. Back when Walt was alive it was OK, but now it's entirely unbearable. Shit like "The Lion King," "Aladdin" or "Hercules" are purely excremental.

Josh

Name: Blake Eckard
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Josh,

You like Orson Welles?

I thought you said at one time or another that the only good movies he made as a director were "Citizen Kane", "The Magnificent Ambersons", and "Touch of Evil". I personally love "The Trial" and "Chimes at Midnight"

too.

At any rate, I'm curious as to what you think about his last movie. I've seen three or four clips over the years from his never released "The Other Side of the Wind". It's always been my feeling (just from the little I've seen) that it probably wouldn't have been a very good movie, and may stand best as the great, unknown last work by a masterful director, than what it may well could have been...A dreadfully photographed, horribly acted, incomprehensible blob.

What's your take? Or do you even long to see this picture since you don't really care for the majority of Welles' directorial work?

By the way, I saw "The Third Man" last night for the first time in my life. I thought it was ridiculous. Boring, overrated, poorly acted, hard to follow. The famous ending deserves to be famous. And the first shot of Welles in the door lit by the window was great. But these little moments don't make a movie. It was no where nearly as good as I was expecting.

Most of what I've said sounds very negative (it is) but I am a huge fan of Orson Welles. I just think he flickered out a few times.

The best,

Blake Eckard

Dear Blake:

Doesn't loving three of his films make me a fan? I also like "The Stranger," too. I do agree with you about "The Third Man," which I've never really cared for. I find the famous zither score particularly annoying. Regarding Mr. Carol Reed, if you get a chance check out "The Fallen Idol" or "Odd Man Out." About "The Other Side of the Wind," which I'd certainly like to see just to see it, I don't hold out any hope. It was like finally getting to see Welles' documentary, "It's All True," after all these years and it turns out to be a big nothing.

Josh

Name: Cynthia E. Jones
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Dear Josh,

I'm currently reading "Rosebud," the "story of Orson Welles" by David Thomson. So far, it's interesting, but he seems terrified of Welles, as though he was an imposing father figure of sorts to the author. While I'm glad to get the information, I don't know about the attitude..but that's the curse of biographies. Unabashed love or weird reverence.

Are there any other books about Welles that you could recommend? I'm a huge fan of his work, and a great admirer of the man... I like his ideas of

theatrical moments, not wanting to commit anything to film because that's how people would always remember you. To freeze a performance seemed to really bother him. But...that's filmmaking. It's hard for an actor to direct himself, I think.

Thanks as always for your continued support.

--cindy

Dear Cindy:

I am a great a fan of Welles. I think about "The Magnificent Ambersons" all the time. As I've said before, it was the initial inspiration for my film "If I Had a Hammer." I particularly like Peter Bogdanovich's book "This is Orson Welles," which is entirely made up of very good interviews, so you can clearly hear his voice. I also quite liked Barbara Leaming's biography.

Josh

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