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THE EVENING CLASS

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 28, 2007

2007 IIFF—*The Walker*



The Idaho International Film Festival (“IIFF”) launched its fifth year with the U.S. premiere of Paul Schrader’s *The Walker* at the historic [Egyptian Theatre](#) in downtown Boise, Idaho. Warm t-shirt weather and a handsome attendance marked an enthusiastic start to the festival’s four-day run, despite competition of a local Broncos game.

Dave Hudson and David D’Arcy at [The Greencine Daily](#) offered initial takes on Schrader’s *The Walker* when it premiered at this year’s Berlinale. Neither were particularly enamored with the piece. After a concise synopsis, D’Arcy concluded: “Schrader could have done a better job plotting this one, which is watchable, but lacks anything really chilling at its core, like the concrete consequence of corporate crooks walking in and out of the White House, or the ruthless tactics that they’ve been willing to use to stay there.” He’s quick to add, however, that Woody Harrelson plays the hero well. “The problem,” he reiterates, “is that the villains of the real scandals in Washington are far more dramatic, colorful and downright sinister.”



Hudson was significantly more “rankled” by the film’s one-note delivery of bon mots and snide asides, which he suggests lacks the necessary political sophistication and a certain “rhetorical flair” to make the script compelling, let alone genuine. Though conceding Harrelson’s performance was “probably” a good one, he complains that “the problem is, it really doesn’t look it.”

[The Guardian’s Ryan Gilbey](#), on the other hand, champions Harrelson’s characterization of Carter Page III as “the performance of a lifetime” if not the reinvention of a career. Bravely broaching the subject of a recent trend of straight actors playing gay characters, the ensuing commentary at Ryan’s blog deserves a canasta game all its own to host the bitchy innuendoes. It’s always entertaining to hear straights wince (and in some cases whine) reverse discrimination.

D’Arcy wonders if “walker” Carter Page III wasn’t patterned after real-life walker Jack Abramoff—“the guy who seems to have had carte blanche to walk anywhere where top Republicans were running things, the unelected fixer who walked corrupt politicians

ABOUT ME

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through legislation that they wanted passed”—but *Variety's* Leslie Felperin cites Jerry Zipkin—who “walked” Nancy Reagan and Betsy Bloomingdale among others—as the source for the term’s coinage. I catch whiffs of Gore Vidal myself though, as Dave Hudson insinuates, had Vidal been a stronger influence on Schrader’s film the black frogs spit out on the canasta table would have been much more poisonous. Despite the film’s scriptural and directorial weaknesses, Felperin likewise commends Harrelson’s ingenuity at finding “new ways of making smarm charm, his gestures and gait convincingly suggesting affected camp without slipping into caricature. His signature line, ‘I’m not naive, I’m superficial,’ nails the character beautifully.”



Perhaps it is performativity itself that is the saving grace of ***The Walker***. Though it might be true that some of the political commentary lacks bite, it rings familiar enough to prove amusing, as the laughter at last night’s audience indicated. True, we already know that voters don’t elect Presidents, but at least we’re past our disillusionment enough to laugh about it a little. Whatever warmth can be fanned from cynicism, ***The Walker's*** ensemble locates. Though I found Lauren Bacall’s character Natalie Van Miter impenetrable as to motives (which might have been the point), she is always a wonder to behold, a true “star” who rarely fails to illuminate the screen. Lily Tomlin as Abigail Delorean drips just enough venom to make you question the twinkling mirth of her eye. And Kristin Scott Thomas as woebegone Lynn Lockner does (as Felperin so wryly puts it) “that brittle, haute-bourgeois siren schtick she does so well.”

Not Schrader’s best, ***The Walker*** is nonetheless a welcome addition to his “Lonely Man” series of films. Woody Harrelson’s performance alone is worth the price of admission. Whatever one thinks about straight men playing gay characters and how liberating that might be, he does a respectful job and dodges no bullets. His onscreen kiss with his German-Turkish lover Emek (Moritz Bleibtreu) lasted just enough to bring it on home.

Cross-published on [Twitch](#).

POSTED BY MAYA AT 9/28/2007 09:47:00 AM

7 COMMENTS:

[Brian](#) said...

Sound like you're enjoying Idaho! I love the faux Egyptian-style theatre architecture.

I'm reminded of how I wish the Alexandria, which is still standing a few blocks from me while grass grows on the site of the former Coronet, could be restored and utilized for the occasional screening, instead of lying completely dormant as it is doing right now.

6:17 PM

[Maya](#) said...

Back at the Egyptian today I realized that right above the stage is a frieze of about ten barebreasted Egyptian women. And they call

Boise a conservative town. I've never had so many nipples foisted upon me in a movie theater in my life. Well, except for the time when ... no ... this is not the place to bring THAT up.

12:02 AM

HarryTuttle said...

Great job with the [Tarr interview](#)! Very interesting discussion. Thank you. I really like his answer to the question he didn't like. When he says he reject story, editing, details, all artificial and prefer to focus on the eyes, on humanity, on the body language, on the landscape, on the lighting, on long takes... I consider this typically "contemplative", but if he calls it something else, it's ok. We don't disagree it seems. :)

12:26 AM

Maya said...

Thank you, Harry. I'm glad you like his response even if he was a bit dodgy.

8:52 AM

Michael Hawley said...

I wasn't really planning to see **The Walker** until I read the last sentence of your review with the magic words...Moritz Bleibtreu! (in a screen kiss with Woody Harrelson, no less).

10:55 AM

Adam said...

Michael,

I hope Boise is taking some time out to honor their (should-be) favorite son and what he's added to the world of flim-blogging!

Adam

12:36 PM

Maya said...

Well, I can't help it. I love flims. Heh.

No complaints on my part about my Boise reception. Folks have been nothing but gracious and forthcoming. The local heroes especially have been delighted to get some coverage just as they have been delighted that Bruce Fletcher has provided them a festival format. I'll be posting about why it was important for me to cover this festival in an upcoming post; but, for now, suffice it to say that I look forward to cooperating with the Idaho Film Council and to returning home to Idaho on a more frequent basis to cover film.

2:06 PM

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