

Weekly round-up

Naughty babysitters, rekindled romance, boring brutality and a superstar socialist

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The Babysitters

This unusual high school drama begins on a titillating note, with relative newcomer Katherine Waterston (who you might vaguely recognize from *Michael Clayton*) prowling through a debauched party clad in a moistened white t-shirt. In a flashback, we're introduced to a considerably more conservatively dressed Waterston as an obsessive-compulsive nerd trying to figure out how she'll pay for her college education.



TEEN TITILLATION: *The Babysitters*

On a babysitting job, she gets all a-flutter at the sight of Mike (John Leguizamo), the father of her young charges. After their mutual attraction is consummated, he guiltily slips her a wad of cash. Thus begins Waterston's career as a prostitute—and when Leguizamo's buddies start getting curious, she soon finds herself pimping out her friends.

Writer and first-time director David Ross strikes an odd tone throughout the film; ultimately, the fundamentally creepy nature of the plot is handled unsteadily. The girls gain self-confidence through



MARRIAGE AND MALTA: *A Previous Engagement*

their sexual power and newfound capitalist fervour, but by the laws of Hollywood, even in the *Girls Gone Wild* era, they need to suffer the consequences of their actions.

It's hard to tell if Ross is casting

a critical eye at the excesses of sex-positive feminism, or if, as in the days of the puritanical Hays Production Code, he just wants the audience to have it both ways—enjoy the titillation, and then receive the moral lesson of the characters' wrongdoing. The film has strong performances and a laudably unpredictable storyline, but its sexual politics may leave a bad taste in your mouth. (MF)

A Previous Engagement

A movie about marriage, romance and mid-life dissatisfaction set on a gorgeous Mediterranean island, *A Previous Engagement* owes a debt to *Shirley Valentine*. And although it plays the comedy a little too broad at times, the movie shares its presumed inspiration's sensitivity and good nature.

In this Canadian co-production, directed by Joan-Carr Wiggan, Juliet Stevenson (*Truly, Madly, Deeply*) plays Julia Reynolds, mother of two and wife to a shnookey Daniel Stern. As the family vacations in Malta, it becomes clear that Stevenson has another agenda: a meeting with Alex (Tchéky Karyo), a passionate French writer with whom she'd had an affair years prior—and at the conclusion of which they'd agreed to meet on the same island 25 years later.

The liaison leads to reignited feelings, and the romance plays out as a light but emotional farce in which not only Stern but their two daughters (played by Elizabeth Whitmere and Montreal's very own Claire Brosseau) are drawn in as well.

This is a spirited movie though certainly not for everyone; if you're a fan of *Shirley Valentine* and its ilk, it just might win you over. If you're the kind of moviegoer who's even considering taking in *Speed Racer* or *Iron Man* this week, I can tell you right now it's not for you. (MS)

Vice

In this low-budget (and Canadian-made) crime thriller, Michael Madsen plays an alco-

holic cop who becomes entangled in a web of corruption in his department. He transgresses one moral code after another, much to the chagrin of his colleague (Daryl Hannah).

The none-too-imaginative title is a clue to the avalanche of clichés that follows. The only things that distinguish this from an utterly generic cop flick are the profundity of its cynicism and the harshness of its misogyny. Although it recalls Tarantino minus the cleverness, it more closely resembles Abel Ferrara's *Bad Lieutenant*; as in that film, brutality becomes boring after wallowing in it for an hour and a half.

I was prepared to cut writer-director Raul Inglis a little slack for the awkward pacing, bland dialogue and lack of imagination, figuring it was his debut, but it turns out he's directed two other features and a bunch of TV, so no dice. The movie is only halfway watchable because of its two leads. Hannah completely disappears into the role, with a slouching walk and resentful gaze—I didn't recognize her at all, only cluing



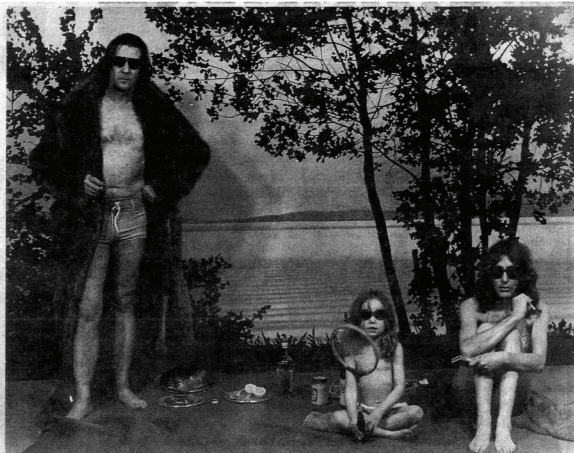
NOT NICE: *Vice* *My Father's Studio*,

in when the tail credits rolled.

As for Madsen, he does his particular *je ne sais quoi* very well. He has a weatherbeaten, world-weary look that suits the character perfectly, and a certain way with gestures—nonchalantly ripping off his belt and throwing it across the room in one motion is fairly impressive. But apart from small moments like this, there's not much to recommend this unpleasant experience. (MF)

My Father's Studio

The intensely personal *My Father's Studio* is Jennifer Alleyn's (who co-directed the award-winning *Cosmos*) au revoir to her famous father, Quebec painter Edmund Alleyn. The very private Mr. Alleyn



QUESTIONING CREATIVITY: *My Father's Studio*

agreed to be filmed by his daughter in 2001 and discuss not only his diverse collection of paintings and drawings, but also answer existential questions encompassing passion, creation and life.

Edmund died of cancer in December 2004, before his daughter could film him a second time. Instead, Ms. Alleyn interviews family members and friends attempting to shed light on what it was that made her father such a special creator.

Never playing up sentiment for dramatic value, the film leisurely saunters along at its own pace and the viewer is treated to a comprehensive look at both Alleyn's life story and his oeuvre, spanning some six decades. Ms. Alleyn narrates the film in the first person directly to her deceased father, a device which could threaten to come off as precious yet adds a tenderness—that of a loving daughter coming to terms with the loss of both a parent and a mentor.

which won the Best Canadian Work award at this year's FIFA festival here in Montreal, seems a furthering of the conscious awakening as an artist and filmmaker her father discusses in the film. Admittedly not for everyone, but a pleasure for art and documentary lovers. (CS)

Le Monde selon Lula

You wouldn't know it from mainstream media coverage, but two decades after the end of the Cold War, some socialists are still fighting the good fight and actually making headway. Local documentarian German Gutierrez has assembled a sort of beginner's

course in the ideas and actions of Brazilian president Luiz Inácio Lula de Silva, known to all in his native land by the nickname Lula.

The "world according to" in the title is more than just a handy cliché; the film actually concentrates on Lula's international policy, which aims at nothing less than changing the global order by putting pressure on institutions like the WTO and the UN. As the film demonstrates, Lula, a union organizer for decades before taking power, is not a radical idealist but a hard-nosed pragmatist, albeit one who doesn't dilute his fundamental ideals. Working with an emerging block of Latin American socialist governments, he intends to shift the balance of global power out of the hands of wealthy nations toward policies that will actually benefit the world's less fortunate.

The film occasionally gets bogged down in the nuts-and-bolts details of international trade and foreign policy, leaving the uninitiated scrambling to keep up. It's also an unabashed hagiography, trumpeting Lula's achievements while addressing only fleetingly the fact that his government is embroiled in multiple corruption



TIPPING THE BALANCE: *Le Monde selon Lula*

ALL FILMS OPEN THIS FRIDAY, MAY 9

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