

TIFF DIARY

The thin line between art and pornography



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In 1978, the Festival of Festivals caught the ire of the nation's prudes after it announced plans to screen *In Praise of Older Women*, a drama about one man's sexual coming-of-age. The film, which starred Tom Berenger, had its fair share of nudity, but one 40-second blip proved too hot for the then-almighty Ontario Censor Board: A simulated sex scene between the film's leading man and actress Marilyn Lightstone, the latter still clad in her underwear. Thanks to a chaotic opening night overwhelmed by curious moviegoers, organizers managed to screen the uncut version of the film, though it's unlikely anyone, even members of the board, noticed the alleged indecency.

Still, if that tame bit of intimacy

TIFF.15

was enough to rile up the censors, they would drop dead on the spot were they to see this year's TIFF lineup. Across the festival's programming, sexual provocation is the norm. Just look at *High-Rise*, Ben Wheatley's exhilarating adaptation of J.G. Ballard's novel about societal decay, in which orgies occur on the regular. Or Eva Husson's French drama *Bang Gang* (*A Modern Love Story*), which follows a pack of teens who engage in group sex. Anne Sewitsky's graphic *Homesick*, meanwhile, focuses on a young woman who starts an affair with her half-brother. And, in TIFF's most explicit rebuke to its censored past, rascally troublemaker Gaspar Noé brings his new film *Love*, which features unsimulated sex, including penetration and ejaculation – all of it filmed in 3-D (yes, all of it).

None of this would have been possible before 1987, when the

provincial Liberal government finally protected TIFF from the censor board's wandering eyes (festival admittance is now restricted to those over the age of 18, while the board itself collapsed, turning into what is now the Ontario Film Review Board). But even though TIFF has never been in the business of playing it safe, are moviegoers ready for literally in-your-face sex? On the backs of the mainstream success of *Shame* and *Blue Is the Warmest Color*, has the line between art and pornography finally blurred? And should I be worried about those noises coming from the back row of the theatre?

"I couldn't make the movie I wanted to, about love addiction, without showing the carnal side," Mr. Noé says about his film, which focuses on a love triangle gone wrong, with heavy shades of autobiography (the lead character is a budding filmmaker who wants to make movies of "blood, cum, and tears" – subtle). "There is no act portrayed in the movie that should be shocking."

Mr. Noé is a special case, though, as he's long been push-

ing the limits. The Paris-based filmmaker's earlier works, including 2002's *Irréversible* and 2009's *Enter the Void*, tread heavily on themes of sex, abuse and power, with shocking imagery to match. (*Void* even concludes with a point-of-view shot of a baby emerging from his mother's womb. He's just that kind of wild-and-crazy provocateur!) Still, Mr. Noé says *Love* is less a chance to shove genitals in people's faces and more a conceit to get audiences wrapped into his tale of passion and regret: "My intention was to portray a love story."

Homesick's Ms. Sewitsky is of a similar mind, saying her film's plentiful sex scenes (albeit not nearly as X-rated as Mr. Noé's) act as necessary windows into the souls of her characters: two half-siblings in desperate need of emotional relief. "I needed the audience to relate to everything [lead character] Charlotte is going through – the explicit scenes are incorporated into a careful narrative," the Norwegian director says. "Sometimes you need to push the limits to find

the nuance."

Ine Wilmann, who plays the sister half of *Homesick*'s incestuous equation, was hesitant to take on the nudity-heavy role, but quickly learned to put her trust in Ms. Sewitsky. "I didn't find it extreme at all, it's a grounded story," says the actress, who is reteaming with her *Homesick* director on *Queen of Ice*, a biopic about the figure skater Sonja Henie. "There was nothing normal about the role – especially because I found out I was pregnant just before filming – but I really had to trust Anne, and knew she needed to tell her story, the way she wanted to."

And like *In Praise of Older Women*, and every supposedly "dirty" movie before and after it, this year's films can also be viewed as just another marketing exercise. "Some of the promotion for this movie created the impression you were going to get something much raunchier," says Karl Glusman, *Love*'s male lead. "But I think we turned in something that's tasteful, beautiful and honest. I like that, for once, expectations were not met."

DAY 7 ON THE RED CARPET

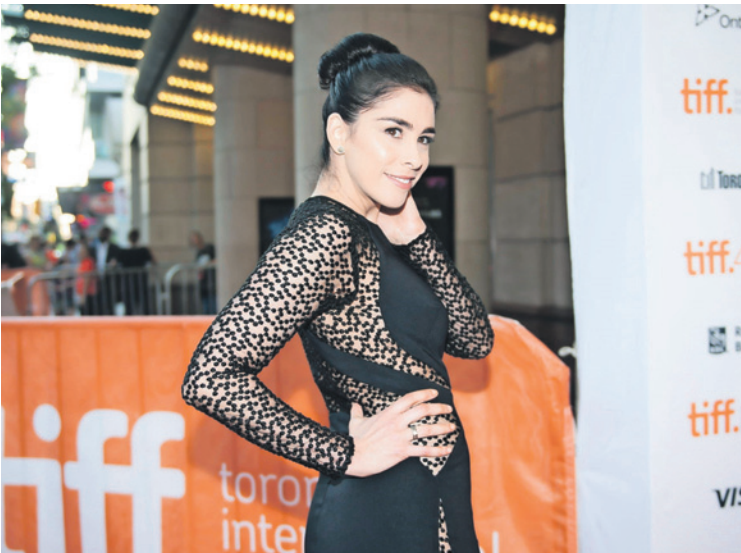
Wednesday saw premieres for Mississippi Grind, I Smile Back, Sky and Forsaken, and featured on the red carpet Sarah Silverman, Analeigh Tipton and Canadians Ryan Reynolds and Donald and Kiefer Sutherland at the 2015 Toronto International Film Festival



Father-and-son duo Donald, left, and Kiefer Sutherland pose on the red carpet for *Forsaken*, a western about an embittered gunslinger. DARREN CALABRESE/THE CANADIAN PRESS



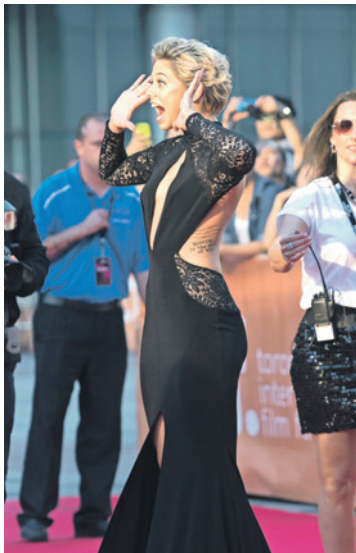
Diane Kruger greets fans as she arrives to promote *Sky*. MARK BLINCH/REUTERS



Comedian Sarah Silverman plays a suburban mother who is a drug addict in the drama *I Smile Back*. MARTA IWANEK/THE CANADIAN PRESS



Ryan Reynolds co-stars in the gambling film *Mississippi Grind* with Ben Mendelsohn. FRED THORNHILL/REUTERS



Analeigh Tipton is also in *Mississippi Grind*. DARREN CALABRESE/CP

WHAT TO WATCH TODAY

Selected reviews of films screening Thursday at TIFF 2015, rated on a four-star system.

Arabian Nights: Volume I, The Restless One
Miguel Gomes
Portugal/France/Germany/Switzerland
★★★

Director Miguel Gomes has a dilemma, amusingly illustrated in alternating passages at the start of his sprawling *Arabian Nights* project: Will he effectively render the pain of the Portuguese with a documentary set in a town where the shipyard has closed just as alien wasps are attacking local beehives? He turns to Scheherazade and the interlocking storytelling devices of *The Thousand and One Nights*, introducing a wizard, a mermaid, a talking rooster, an exploding whale and Eurocrats with permanent erections into a film that still interviews the unemployed and takes coffee with disaffected voters. The conceit is admirable and daring; the rambling results (judging only from this first part of a trilogy) are a series of shaggy-dog stories about the sometimes suffering citizens of Euro austerity. – Kate Taylor

Elevator Pitch: A bold Brechtian fantasy about Portugal's economic crisis.

Sept. 17, 1 p.m., Lightbox 4 (a screening of the entire trilogy); Sept. 19, 11:45 a.m., AGO

The Martian
Ridley Scott
USA
★★★★½

Alien director Ridley Scott returns to outer space with far less gloomy results in this rousing crowd-pleaser. It has a perfect cast (in addition to the stranded-on-Mars hero played by Matt Damon, there's a deep back roster of actors who could headline their own blockbusters), a riveting pace and a devotion to the science part of sci-fi that's damn near inspirational. If it lacks something deeper about the human condition – just one flick at what leads us to so eagerly explore the dark – well, no mission goes off without a hitch. – Barry Hertz

Elevator Pitch: Saving Astronaut Ryan.

Sept. 17, 3 p.m., Princess of Wales; Sept. 18, 6 p.m., Lightbox 2

Women He's Undressed
Gillian Armstrong
Australia
★★★★½

Though he did tell Marilyn Monroe that Tony Curtis had a better derrière, Orry-Kelly's talent as a leading Hollywood costume designer was otherwise as legendary as his discretion, which makes Gillian Armstrong's documentary about his brilliant career all the more welcome. Her inventive framing device is initially jarring, but it's high camp that the Australian-born Orry-Kelly would have appreciated: In colour-saturated, stylized monologue scenes, an actor plays the subject, who died in 1964, narrating from recently unearthed memoirs to piece together film clips, photographs and episodes of his life and Oscar-studded career (long-time work with Bette Davis, plus *Casablanca*, *Mame* et al.). Ann Roth, Catherine Martin, Scotty Bowers and an immensely entertaining Jane Fonda reminisce and make it no mere biodoc, with insight into the larger context and culture of closeted early Hollywood. Did he or didn't he have a long-time relationship with Hollywood's suavest, English-born style icon? He'll never tell, but Armstrong will. – Nathalie Atkinson

Elevator Pitch: *The Boy from Oz* meets *Pillow Talk*.

Sept. 17, 7 p.m., Scotiabank 13; Sept. 18, 12:15 p.m., Scotiabank 2



FRED LUM/THE GLOBE AND MAIL

TIFF Photo: Veteran volunteer > Kathleen Hill has been volunteering and seeing films at TIFF for the past 20 years. Her advice is not to judge a movie by the stars in the film but by the description of the movie.