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WFF2008: Katjusa reflects on the Wisconsin Film Festival

Submitted by [Katjusa Cisar](#) on Tue, 2008-04-08 15:15. [Arts](#) | [Film](#) | [WisFilmFest2008](#)



It's taken me a while to digest the nine movies I saw this weekend at the Wisconsin Film Festival (all documentaries except one). When the schedule first came out, I made ambitious plans to see five per day, fully forgetting how exhausting it can be to sit in a dark theatre for hours on end absorbing images and information.

Although I enjoyed every single movie I saw, here's a rundown from least favorite to favorite film.

9. What's Your Point, Honey?

The more I think about this film, the more duped I feel. It documents the experiences of six college interns in a CosmoGirl program that prepares women for the Oval Office. Spliced between this is footage of 13-year-old girls and 10-year-old girls talking about women's rights. The 13-year-olds giggle and shop for thong underwear, while the 10-year-olds are sent on a mission to interview people on New York City streets about what it would be like to have a female president. It's entertaining and breezy, but in retrospect I realize how superficial the set-up is. "What's Your Point, Honey" takes on a noble topic – why aren't there more women in politics? – but its scope is narrow and unsatisfying. That tired statistic about wages gets dragged out: women make 77 cents for every dollar a man makes. But the film never addresses what this actually means. Everyone, from 10-year-olds to middle-aged women, chirps the same feminist platitudes we've all gotten drilled into our heads. When one 13-year-old girl questions the above wage statistic, her teacher shuts her up quickly. There doesn't seem to be a lot of real-world experience behind the idealism. Very few talk about facing actual personal discrimination. The college women didn't seem real to me – it was as if their whole lives were staged for the film. They were all just a little too perfect, a little too freshly-scrubbed, a little too well-dressed. Their earnest idealism was a little hard to swallow when I saw how privileged most of them were. I would be interested in hearing what anyone else who saw this thought – if nothing else, it could spark some discussion.

8. ¡Que Viva La Lucha!

A great 50-minute documentary about wrestling in Mexico – the masks, the myth, the wrestlers, the fans. Pretty straight-forward, but well-done. It was followed by another documentary, Lovestruck: Wrestling's No. 1 Fan, about a dumpy, middle-aged Australian woman who is obsessed with wrestling ("I love the solidly built men"). She's a total freak, and the filmmaker couldn't seem to get past the novelty of her quirkiness. I left in the middle of "Lovestruck," because, well, freak shows get old after a while if no pathos or human connection is involved. Quirkiness will take you only so far in a film. In all fairness, maybe something riveting happened after I left. But if it did, it should have happened sooner.

7. OSS 117: Cairo, Nest of Spies

A delightfully absurd spoof on James Bond. I list this as #7 only because I had to leave about an hour and 15 minutes into it, but I hope to catch the full movie on DVD.

6. British Advertising Awards

I love advertising. I almost never mute the TV during commercial breaks, much to the annoyance of everyone around. So a full hour of nothing but advertising was a treat. I didn't agree with the ranking system, however, which seemed to have no correlation to quality. The winning ad was unsettling. I don't remember what it was trying to sell, but it depicted hundreds of gallons of brightly colored paint shooting out of buildings, synchronized like fireworks. At one point, paint burst in descending order out from each floor of a high-rise apartment building. My gut reaction: this looks like the Twin Towers collapsing on 9/11. I would normally peg a reaction like this as over-thinking the situation, but this is advertising: every tiny subliminal message and gut reaction triggered makes the difference between consumer and non-consumer. Would a Brit react the same way? Would this ad fly in the United States?

5. Jerabek

I cried a lot during this movie. It documents the emotional turmoil a Green Bay family goes through after losing their son Ryan in 2004 in the Iraq War. At 18, Ryan Jerabek

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was the youngest soldier from Wisconsin to get killed. "Jerabek" doesn't get into politics at all, which I thought was a mistake, but it does a good job of showing how a family handles grief. The Jerabek family was sitting behind me, and I could hear them crying and comforting each other throughout the film. Everyone sat stunned in silence afterwards until Meg Hamel (film fest director) started a round of applause. She attempted to get a Question & Answer session going with the producer, but the audience wasn't ready. It didn't seem right to start asking questions with the family sitting there.

4. Garbage Warrior

You'll never look at a mayonnaise jar or beer can the same way after seeing this film. Filmmaker Oliver Hodge documents the battle a wild-haired hippie architect faces when he tries to experiment with radically sustainable housing in New Mexico. Mike Reynolds builds curvy, beautiful buildings out of the desert and rock, incorporating all kinds of garbage and "waste" into the structures. The New Mexico legislature comes down on him with a bunch of rules and regulations, but after a drawn-out battle he gets his right to experiment with housing in the end. The film mocks the legislature's befuddled and ineffective way of going about things. This contrasts sharply to the open and efficient way other countries embrace sustainable housing. With global warming such a pressing threat, I left wondering how long we can afford to blunder on with such bureaucracy.

3. The Planet

This movie would pair well back-to-back with "Garbage Warrior." Its take on global warming is depressing to the point of hopelessness, but it addresses some of the reasons why sustainable living is so vital today. Read my full review of it here (http://www.dane101.com/arts/2008/04/04/wff2008_reviews_the_planet)

2. The Linguists

"The Linguists" is a masterfully crafted documentary about two guys who travel the world to find dying languages. Not only does it have heart and humor, it challenges the viewer to question assumptions about language. The two linguists challenge you to think about language in a different way. For instance, why is the phrase "I'm going out to hunt bear" five separate words? In a language spoken in northern Siberia, this sentiment is expressed with one word. In Bolivia, a "secret" language is passed down from man to teenage boy and spoken only during medicine ceremonies. In India, the linguists find a dying tribal language that counts in 12s and 10s, so that the number 93 is expressed something like "four-twenty-twelve-one."

1. Song Sung Blue

By far the most riveting film I saw this weekend. I have a notoriously sketchy attention span, but not once during this film did I furtively reach for my cell phone to check texts. "Song Sung Blue" follows the lives of Lightning and Thunder, a husband-and-wife duo who sing Neil Diamond and Patsy Cline. The way they and their family opened up their lives to filming is astonishing. Nothing is held back. Lightning and Thunder weather through two freak gardening accidents, quintuple bypass surgery, death, teenage pregnancy, rejection, addiction and major money struggles. They walk around in their underwear, scream at each other and smoke incessantly, but you'll love them. Bottom line, "Song Sung Blue" is one of the most heartfelt love stories I've ever seen.

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