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March 25th, 2010 @ 12:15pm

Interview with Marc Meyers, director of "HARVEST"

With space limited in *The Daily*, it's often difficult to post a full interview with the filmmakers who visit the Festival, even when they're especially fascinating people. Marc Meyers, director of *Harvest*, did a wonderful interview with us, but we only had room for a small portion of it in the Day 1 edition. Here is the interview in full:

CIFF: What inspired you to make this film?

MM: When I was in my twenties, just starting out in New York, there was one summer when it was clear to everyone in my family that it was going to be my grandfather's last. He had been diagnosed with cancer in the spring and we all understood what was ahead. So when I could, I would head out of New York on the weekends to visit him at his house, and just be around. At the time, I was also just starting to form my own ideas as a young adult out of college and beginning to have, should I say, a compulsion to write. I wasn't yet writing screenplays or even thinking about a career in film, but I did recognize that something profound was happening that summer around my grandfather's house, and I spent a lot of time just journaling my observations. So then several years later, I revisited those journals and started to re-examine it all, having gained some distance. This became a kind of foundation for the fictional creation that is now HARVEST.

CIFF: Are there autobiographical elements in the film?

MM: Yes, on many levels. As I already mentioned. Some of the major themes in HARVEST are taken from personal experience. That being said, it's a fun challenge to create a story that is its own thing.

When my own grandfather, a WWII veteran, was diagnosed with cancer, he was given only several months to live. He did his best to enjoy his final summer, and our family collectively agreed to let him stay in his house where he raised his family, so he could enjoy what time he had left in an environment that meant a lot to him.

In HARVEST, I also play with the idea of young romance and how a summer fling is often unstable and unpredictable. Josh, the college kid through whom we see much of the story, is at a point in his life when real adult concerns are starting to take shape, and so in that way, there's some of my earlier personal experiences.

But really, often my work is in part a blend of both things I'm afraid of and things I wished happened in my life. So, in this way, the emotions are autobiographical.

CIFF: There is a clear significance to the dying patriarch in HARVEST being a WWII veteran. Can you speak to that?

MM: That aspect of the story fueled my passion for the project in many ways. Many families across America are saying goodbye to their elders, men and women from our "greatest generation," and so in part this film is an ode to an entire generation passing and paying respect to what they went through - children of the depression, fighting in WWII, raising families, building industries, leaving a legacy.

CIFF: On the film's blog, I noticed that you were inspired by the visual images of impressionist painting. Can you describe how this connection happens for you? Do you use other references in your conception of the film?


MM: I've always loved the impressionists and how they embrace natural light and everyday events. Their paintings feel very active and alive to me, and though they're designed and artfully controlled, there's also a feeling of spontaneity and movement that I get from them. Like the sunlight is actually flickering, leaves are moving in a light breeze, subjects often portrayed in conversation. And in this way, I see HARVEST as a kind of portrait of a family ...

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Some impressionist paintings served as a shared reference when preparing the shoot and talking about the film's look with my cinematographer Ruben O'Malley. Most importantly, we shot predominately with natural light – as much as possible.

With regard to other references, there are elements of some of my favorite foreign films like AFTER THE WEDDING, CARO DIARIO, BURNT BY THE SUN and LATE AUGUST, EARLY SEPTEMBER which were inspiration – sort of giving me evidence or permission to handle certain scenes in particular ways.

CIFF: Do you think that American culture has a particularly difficult time accepting death and dying? If so, how do you think HARVEST addresses this issue?

MM: Yes, I'm afraid so. It's also one of my greatest worries with the film. I hope people don't shy away from the movie, because it's actually more about life than about death. The film is very vibrant and captures a lot of familial activity around a beautiful home and shoreline town, and in the end the movie is uplifting. I think death is part of life, so people should handle it with courage and dignity. It's gonna happen to everyone, eventually. And, in some regards, HARVEST shows a healthy way for a man and his family to embrace a final summer, even though they know loss is on the horizon.

CIFF: "All great stories reference something that came before - be it a real experience, a tale, a text, a myth, a memory, a dream." I read this quotation on your company website and found it very interesting. Can you tell me more about how this applies specifically to HARVEST?


MM: Besides the autobiographical roots to the film, HARVEST is a straightforward classic story, a family drama, and there have been many great ones before. So HARVEST will feel familiar to audiences in some ways, and I take pride in that. In independent film, I don't believe we have to always uncover a story under an obscure rock or in a distant land; sometimes it's worthy to simply share a story set in a common, everyday backyard.

And when I'm writing any script or later working in the edit room to sculpt the story, I often turn to the basic elements of drama and classical mythic structure (i.e. Joseph Campbell) to help me design and mold it.

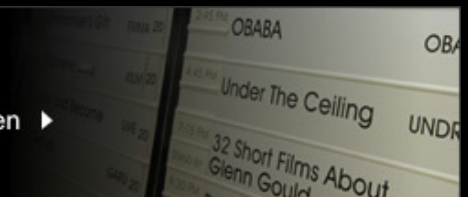
*An additional screening of HARVEST has been added to the Festival schedule. It will screen at **11:35 am** on Friday, March 26.*

Posted by Bridget Kriner

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