

My own private Rigoletto

Veteran editor finds fulfillment in directing



Bill Pullman in Rick

(Photo: KVIFF)

by Laura McGinnis

Curtiss Clayton is no stranger to the film industry. His 20 years of editing experience has included several projects directed by Gus Van Sant. After years of editing such films as

My Own Private Idaho, *Drugstore Cowboy* and *Buffalo '66*, Clayton makes his directorial debut with *Rick*, a film he calls a "wicked comedy", screening in the Forum of Independents. *Rick* presents a grotesque caricature of corporate

America. Title character and anti-hero Rick O'Lette (played by Bill Pullman) is an angry boil of a human being, who inhabits the über-corrupt world of big business. He works for the odious Duke, a suited weasel who prefers cyber-smut seduction to work. Pompous,

brutal and incapable of empathy, Rick loves nothing but his daughter Eve. His relationship with her, the film implies, is the last vestige of the sympathy he once possessed. His dwindling humanity is put to the test when he encounters an old classmate

with a nasty proposition. When Rick's ruthlessness leads him to injure the wrong person, he falls subject to a curse that will join all of their lives inextricably, and finds himself shuttling toward disaster at a pace he can't control.

Opera fans will recognize the plot of *Rigoletto* barely concealed within this summary. Verdi's opera was the inspiration for screenwriter Daniel Handler, better known as the author of the macabre and wickedly witty *Lemony Snicket* children's books. According to Clayton, Handler attended a performance of *Rigoletto* in the midst of "a rather unpleasant negotiation with his publisher" and was struck by the similarities between the behavior of the characters and "the executives who'd been tormenting him."

After 20 years of dealing with Hollywood film executives, Clayton felt he could relate to the script. "Human beings will apparently always struggle against the tendency to cruelty," he says, "and one of the essential functions of art is to depict this struggle and thereby to consider human nature in moral terms."

One of three projects Clayton is currently trying to get produced is a new Handler script. His goal, he says, is to make more films that offer the audience more than simple "wish fulfillment."

Rick lacks the cheer and Hollywood ending European audiences have come to associate with American cinema. The film is dark and cynical, with an intensely unsympathetic lead character.

"All of these qualities ... are considered unacceptable by the indie film establishment which still professes to be

"adventurous" and "edgy" even though it's long been co-opted by the Hollywood bottom-line mentality," Clayton says. He hopes Karlovy Vary audiences will see the film and realize it is still possible to make films like this in the United States. The film has been received enthusiastically at a number of film festivals, including Boston, Toronto, Moscow and Rotterdam.

Rick looks highly polished for a fledgling effort, likely owing to Clayton's editorial experience. "My experience as an editor has taught me that montage is the essence of cinema, and I believe that in order to be a good filmmaker it's crucial to understand editing," he says.

The director compares his first directorial effort to *Drugstore Cowboy* and *To Die For*, two films he worked on, adding that he hopes audiences' familiarity with those films will lead them "to certain expectations of me as a filmmaker."

Clayton says he sees little difference between directing and editing, although "in terms of the Hollywood labor hierarchy, there's an enormous difference. Editors in Hollywood have no authority in creative terms, even though the job requires great creativity and editors typically develop a strong proprietary sense toward the film they're working on."

As a director, Clayton has been able to enjoy different aspects of the filmmaking process. "Directing and editing *Rick* was really my first totally fulfilling experience as a filmmaker," he says, "and the period when I was editing the film was one of the happiest that I can remember."

Rick is playing today at 4:30 p.m. at Kino Cas.

food & drink

U Švejka

Stará louka 10
☎ 353 23 22 76
Open daily 11 a.m.-11 p.m.

Czech food is hearty and filling when it's well cooked. The only problem is that many a "Česká hospoda" claiming to dish out Bohemian fare tends to be a little slipshod in its approach. A quick

"goulash test" is perhaps the best way of judging the quality of a Czech eatery. If you're served a plate of gristle and tired dumplings swimming in a puddle of brown sludge, then you can be fairly sure that the traditional Czech pork and chicken dishes will be a greasy mess.

Luckily for KV festivalgoers, U Švejka passes the goulash test with flying colours. They offer a generous portion of prime beef chunks in a spicy sauce with some

tasty bacon dumplings for 135 CZK. An ample serving of fried rye bread is also provided to help you soak up those succulent goulash juices. Most of the meals on the menu cost around 130 - 250 CZK and there are other Czech classics such as pig's knuckle with horseradish and mustard. There's also a hefty "Old Bohemia Platter" consisting of pork and smoked meat with red and white cabbage, bread, potatoes, and dumplings. The whole thing can be washed

down with a nicely chilled Pilsner, although the beer is a bit pricey by Czech standards at 55 CZK. Although the neo-Czech pub décor is a little cheesy at U Švejka, the friendly and efficient staff greatly enhance the atmosphere. There is also plenty of seating, a big advantage during the buzzing festival weeks. Foreign visitors to KV who might be interested in trying out the local cuisine could do much worse than U Švejka.

Other downtown options worth considering:

Promenáda
☎ Tržiště 31
353 22 56 48
Open daily noon-11 p.m.

U Ondřejská kaple
Ul. Ondřejská 52
☎ 353 22 63 62
Open daily 11 a.m.-2 a.m.

Černý orel
Tržiště 5
☎ 353 22 14 59
Open daily 10 a.m.-10 p.m.

Thailand restaurant
Tržiště 34
Open daily 11a.m.-11p.m.

Galilea
T.G.Masaryka 3a
☎ 353 22 11 83
Open daily 10:30 a.m.-1 a.m.

Charlie
I.P.Pavlova 17
☎ 353 22 52 83
Open daily 11 a.m.-8 p.m.

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Today's program Czech Dream Rick and Rigoletto
One that didn't come true Tales of corporate evil

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Mining cultural identity and a writer's motives

Schreiber explores ancestry and character

by Veronika Bednářová

American actor Liev Schreiber took a break from a demanding shooting schedule on his directorial debut *Everything Is Illuminated* to attend KVIFF. Currently shooting in Prague, the film stars Elijah Wood and is based on Jonathan Safran Foer's best-selling novel of the same name, which Schreiber adapted. *Festival Daily* talked to Schreiber about his personal connections to *Illuminated*.

How did your family background influence your decision to make this film?

My mother is originally a Ukrainian-Polish-German and my father is ... Swiss, Austrian, Irish, Scottish ... the big male influence in my life was my grandfather. And he was sort of responsible for doing all the discipline, man stuff with me. He was very good at it. I loved him a lot. I didn't realize how much I loved him until he died and I think that was the beginning for me of wanting to understand culturally who he was and how he had become the man that he was. I truly admired who he was. So I looked at the list of ingredients, and there was Ukrainian and there was Jewish and there was artist, there were political affiliations, all these different things ... And I also think it was just time for me to do something else.

How did you come across Jonathan Safran Foer's work?

I work for *The New Yorker*

and [they] gave me Jonathan's short fiction, which was called "The Very Rigid Search." It was an excerpt from the novel, in a neat 30-page version ... I had been writing a script about a guy who goes to Ukraine to find his grandfather's town ... My script was kind of slow. I was acting non-stop. I wasn't particularly inspired by the writing. When I read Jonathan's book, it seemed like he had done everything I was trying to do, except it was really funny and perverse. And I thought, that's what I've got to do. I got to use my story and steal his jokes, because they were much better.

To what extent did you and Foer collaborate on the script?

I approached him for the rights and we talked about my script and he read some of my stuff and decided that he wanted to do it with me. And then I wrote it. We had a couple of meetings, though, where we talked about what kind of movie both of us would like to see. I think that was partially what made him decide to let me write the script and make the film.

How did you choose Elijah Wood for the lead role?

I think Elijah is an actor that has a tremendous amount of brain, certainly more than he's been able to demonstrate in the roles that he's been given. And I'd never seen eyes like Elijah's before. If you're looking for a character who is a subjective character in the sense that the world of the movie is



Actor-director Liev Schreiber

(Photo: Miloš Fikejz)

perceived through them, there is almost no one who could do it better. His eyes are so full and huge and open and constantly taking everything in.

How does your training as an actor inform your directing?

Obviously I am an amalgam of everything I've been through. My personal theory on how those things work is that you should educate yourself as much as possible in every facet of what you're doing. And I think that, in particular for me, classical theater is very useful as a background for contemporary material ... and motivation is also really important, and I don't mean motivation as an actor. I mean writers' motivation ... are you producing work purely for fame's sake, or are you producing work because of a tradition, or are you producing work for a sense of craft? Are you producing work for emotional or spiritual reasons?

Apart from shooting *Everything is Illuminated*, are you working on anything else?

Do you know the film *The Manchurian Candidate*, the Jonathan Demme film? I've got that coming out at the end of July. So that's the big press thing for me right now, because I'm playing the title role in that film with Meryl Streep and Denzel Washington.

the 39 steps

A minor fashion mystery surrounds festival guest **John Irvin**. The director has been often sighted sporting bright red socks. Speculation runs amok. Is Irvin hip to a new trend we knew nothing about? Is red the new orange? Is the director perhaps a member of a skull-and-bones cabal of filmmakers manipulating international film distribution from their secret lair somewhere under Sundance? Alas, Irvin's explanation is slightly more pedestrian: Native American folklore holds that red protects the wearer from evil spirits and from bullets. Furthermore, Irvin said his daughter is fond of stealing his gray socks.

Speaking of fashion, Forum of Independents director **Stefan Ulrich** is not to be parted from his sartorial signature, a Panama hat. Despite the absence of blazing tropical sun, Ulrich was sighted in company of said chapeau Monday night at the Sierra Tequila Film Lounge. The lounge is the nightspot of choice among those with no time for the Guantanamo Bay-level security surrounding most sponsored parties. *Bitter Coffee* producer **Vratislav Šlajer**, Czech music scene enfant terrible **Jan P. Muchow** and *Rex-Patriates* director **Nancy Bishop** were all in attendance recently. **Zdeněk Marek**, guitarist for the Czech band *Here* was also on hand, waxing political. Look out, **Bono**.

The 39 Steps cautions that clubbing all night is not the best way to spend one's time at KVIFF if you are one of those **film critics** who have not yet weighed in on *Festival Daily's* critics' poll. German contender **Napola** is emerging as an early favorite.

dailies



Svěrák father-son act

(Photo: Lukáš Táborský)



Ondřej Pýcha poses

(Photo: Michaela Řihová)



Jurors Bolkan and Nellis deliberate

(Photo: Miloš Fikejz)

the champions recommend

Milan Lasica

Actor

Good Morning, Night
Richmond Cinema,
1:30 p.m.

Having read the blurbs in the program brochure, I am interested in seeing the Italian movie *Good Morning, Night* by Marco Bellochio. It shows the last 55 days in the life of Aldo Moro, the chairman of the Italian Christian Democratic Party, who was executed by the Red Brigade in 1978. It's a very good chance to calculate the cost of fanaticism, which in all its forms presents a great threat to this world. I'm also going to see some Czech films today, for instance *Smart Philip*, because I think the sheer number of films made in the Czech Republic last year is a miracle.



(Photo: Miloš Fikejz)

explainer

Apparently this is a spa town, right?

Now behave or we'll have to turn the Scottish shower on you... Yes, indeed, my dyspeptic one, Karlovy Vary is home to the Czech Republic's largest spa. More than 6 million ailing folks from all over the world have been treated with its healing waters, and though only 12 of the natural hot springs in town are used for therapy, there are more than 60 in the immediate area, all gushing with mineral water, geothermally heated, at 34 to 73 degrees centigrade (or 93-163 Fahrenheit). You can drink the stuff, bathe in it, get swabbed down in peat grown with it, or have yourself, erm, irrigated with it. Most spa treatments focus on problems of the digestive system and metabolic disorders.

Some 85,000 pilgrims come for the spas each year from some 70 countries of the world, a pretty sizeable portion of the town's two million total annual visitors. The legend about King Charles IV's hunting dog accidentally discovering the healing powers of the wonder waters in the late 1300s is probably apocryphal but, be that as it may, the arthritic and jittery have been arriving in great numbers since the 18th century. Dr. David Becher introduced all kinds of new treatments and business was brisk during the Napoleonic Wars. Spa procedures these days are carried out in Spas III, V and VI and you can get some of them without a doctor's note: baths, heat treatments; massages;

hydrotherapy, physiatrics and therapeutic gymnastics. Baths are the least intimidating option. According to the town's website, www.karlovyvary.cz, the carbon dioxide bath lowers blood pressure and promotes mental relaxation; the bath with additives positively influences motor skills and frees muscle tension; with the dry carbon dioxide bath, definitely one for the hearty. "The patient's body is closed in a sealed bag filled with carbon dioxide." If you survive that, this one's said to increase blood circulation, lower blood pressure, improve the healing of wounds and rejuvenate tired muscles.