

Are we blinded by the lights?

Lucy Newman ponders the virtues of star appearances



Photo: JOE TAYLOR

And so ends the 51st year of the London Film Festival. As Britain's most important film festival, the annual event shoulders the crucial responsibility of providing a space for some of the best films not just from England and America, but around the world, to be promoted to a large audience - a role not to be taken lightly.

This year, the LFF dedicated strands to new British, French, European, World, experimental, short and animated cinema, as well as reviving classic old movies. Nearly 2000 films from throughout time and space were on offer. But as always, the films causing the biggest stir with ticket buyers were the gala events; due in no small part to

the fact that many of their stars were in town to promote them.

Wes Anderson was one of the biggest names to attend, along with Adrian Brody and Jason Schwartzman, stars of his new film *The Darjeeling Limited*. Anderson explained that he was interested in the "deep Western influence" in India when making the film. Co-written by

Schwartzman and Roman Coppola, Anderson commented: "We wanted to make a very personal movie... it's very much all three of our experiences." Despite making a first time appearance in Anderson's close filmmaking circle, Brody asserted, "I never felt like an outsider... it was like being part of a theatre company."

"Are these big films the ones that need promoting?"

Talkies Jo Caird meets David Sington



In *In the Shadow of the Moon*, a documentary about the Apollo moon landings that combines never-before-seen NASA footage with interviews with 12 of the mission astronauts, is David Sington's first feature film.

What was it about the project that inspired you?

My initial thought was 'surely this has been done before' and I was a little bit resistant at first. But then we started

talking about the fact that neither I nor Duncan had seen a film which we really felt really explained who the astronauts were as people. We knew there was this large film archive which had really been sitting there undisturbed by film makers for 40 years. There was a sense that, actually we can do something new with this, even though in some respects it's something that everybody knows about. There's a story that hasn't been told.

That story is the human element of the Apollo missions. The 12 astronauts interviewed in the film speak candidly about how the landings affected them personally, as well as providing a strong guiding narrative to the story of the space programme.

Would it be true to say that this film has a political/environmental agenda?

There is no such thing as an

apolitical film... when we look at Apollo we can't help but see it through the lens of the present day. And obviously there are parallels between Vietnam and Iraq. Vietnam, like Iraq, was something that was terribly divisive and led to a lot of criticism of America and a lot of disillusionment about the things that it claimed for itself as a sort of beacon of humanity. But at the same time there was another thing going on with Apollo that redeemed that promise. When a society like America galvanises itself it can do extraordinary things... I think this is terribly important and made a number of films for television about climate change and global warming. This earth is very small, very finite and unique in this sterile, lifeless universe. We are playing a very dangerous game with our only possible home - if we screw this planet up there is nowhere else to go and that's it. Nobody really thought in

those terms before Apollo and that's really the most important legacy of the Apollo missions.

How does it feel to be showing the film on home territory?

Fantastic to play before the home crowd. It's really great.

Do you want to do more of this?

Once you've had the experience of 1600 people responding to your film, it's completely addictive, it's a sort of performance. So I'm already working on my next film.

If it is anything like as beautiful and thought-provoking as In the Shadow of the Moon, lets hope he's quick about it.

In the Shadow of the Moon is in cinemas now.

Festival Highlights

In the Shadow of the Moon

David Sington's documentary about the Apollo moon landings has swept through the international festival circuit, winning awards from Sundance to Se-dona. The BFI London Film Festival awards no prizes, but this film, with its beautiful editing and powerful narrative, will certainly be lauded both critically and popularly. Sington blends highly personal interviews with twelve of the surviving astronauts, with original footage - most of which has never been seen by the public - which has been digitally remastered to glorious clarity. The familiar story of man's first steps on the moon is retold in a way that will make you laugh out loud, gasp with wonder and think profoundly about the way we live.

Grace is Gone

Grace is Gone follows the story of Stanley (John Cusack), a man with two daughters, who is informed that his wife has been killed in Iraq. The beautifully played dynamic between the three central characters makes for a heart-wrenching watch as Stanley struggles to come to terms with both his own loss and how to tell his children the news. The film is admirable for abstaining from political polemic and instead focusing on the devastating personal cost of the conflict. The outstanding performances create a truly moving experience with rare emotional honesty.

I Just Didn't Do It

You wouldn't think that a film about the failures of the Japanese legal system would make for thrilling viewing, and often, it isn't. The audience is placed in the role of the jury following the trial of Teppi, a young man wrongly accused of groping a girl on a crowded train. The film's minimal style allows little relief from the seemingly endless prosecution process, but this intense scrutiny of the case allows flaws to be exposed at every level. The message - that we are all innocent until proven guilty, is universal - and provides a surprisingly uplifting slant to an otherwise concerning story.

You, The Living

Where do you find a teenage depressive, a vengeful barber, and a trombone player fornicating with a woman dressed as Kaiser Wilhelm II? The answer, of course, is a Norwegian experimental comedy! *You, The Living* has no clear narrative structure, or story for that matter, but manages that rare thing of both being extremely funny and genuinely touching. The film makes fun of the absurdities, insecurities and eccentricities which shape life, whilst encouraging us to embrace it nonetheless. Guaranteed to be the only film this year where a man gets the electric chair for a destroying a china table set.

By Jo Caird, Stuart Powell and Lucy Newman