

Nico Dekker, CEO of Cape Town Film Studios, was at the 62nd Festival de Cannes to introduce “Cape Town Film Studios – Africa’s New Home for Film” to the world’s largest gathering of filmmakers, armed with a new brochure that provided a wealth of arguments for filming in South Africa and working with the new studios. It was not his first visit to Cannes, but it was the first time that he discovered the real Cannes.

A Cannes 2009 diary



GLAM CLAN IN CANNES – Nico Dekker (centre) with actors Abbie Cornish and Ryan Phillippe

“I swear I saw him, I swear it’s Jim Carrey, it *is* him!” The crowd rushes forward, dragged by an electrical current of excitement, as a huge pink limousine pulls up in front of the Martinez Hotel. “Oh my God, it is Robert Pattinson.” The windows of the limo are completely dark; I don’t know if it was anybody at all. The crowds on La Croisette live off bits of rumour, film-adrenaline and star gossip. Cinema is still alive in France, carefully maintained by weaving a myth of glamour, glitter and expectation around the stars and events.

It is true that Brad Pitt, Angelina Jolie, Willem Dafoe, Jim Carrey, Rachael Weisz, Robert Pattinson, Penelope Cruz, Sharon Stone, Francis Ford Coppola, Sam Neill, Ang Lee, and many other ‘film gods’ are in town. They surface and vanish, at parties, press conferences, red carpet viewings and selected events, like sacred Koi fish that appear for a few scarce moments from underneath the rocks.

Cannes is a strange place this time of year. Thousands of producers, filmmakers and directors rush from meeting to meeting, fighting their way through mobs of film fanatics, in a desperate search to find the elusive few financiers able to help close their films at the biggest film market in the world.

“You know it’s so incredible, I have all my financing together, we are almost green lit, I just need you to come in with 20%, and we are there, baby,” are probably the most used phrases on

the film strip. Meetings on boats, meetings on the ocean, meetings in hotels, meetings at lunches that cost enough to buy you a small boat, dinner meetings, dinner parties, meetings at country pavilions, meetings at film premières, and film première parties, parties in tents, parties on boats, parties that go on until the day breaks. Finding partners, finding distribution partners, finding financing partners, finding buyers, finding films, is a tough job.

And then there are the screenings, hundreds of films screening for the first time to an elusive group of buyers from across the world. It starts at 8.30am in cinemas across Cannes and it lasts until the wee hours of the morning. The ultimate events are the red carpet screenings at the Grande Theatre Lumière, the 2 500-seater crown jewel of film première theatres in the world.

Players from the mecca of film, the US, are eager to know about the new studios in Africa. Everybody stretches their hands out. “It’s about time you guys in Africa get your act together – but where are you from?”

“South Africa”.

“No, but which country?”

“South Africa is the country, You know, the place where Nelson Mandela comes from, and where Clint Eastwood is filming with Matt Damon and Morgan Freeman.”

“Oh my God, I know where it is, you’re right, but isn’t it dangerous?”

“Do you think Clint Eastwood would go there as a 79-year-old man, with his team, if it was dangerous and

inconvenient? He doesn’t have to do that. Not at his age and with his career.”

“You are probably right... Hey, you’re probably right, you have a good point.”

I see horror movies, comedies, dramas, thrillers, action adventure, science fiction horror thriller adventures, cultural weapons, and films that should have been buried under the soft sands of Cannes beaches, rather than having been put onto the silver screen.

Charlotte Gainsbourg, in the end, gets awarded the top prize as best female actress for her role in Lars von Trier’s *Antichrist*. The main character embarks on an incredible journey of guilt after having been unable to stop herself from making love to her husband, while witnessing her little angel boy walking to a window of their home and falling to his death. Her self-loathing leads her, in the end, to cut off her private parts in public after she has tortured her husband by drilling a bolt attached to a millstone through both of his legs. He manages to escape and burns her body after he throttles her to death in a long and slow scene. Some of the films at Cannes are not for sissies.

And then there was the magical Penelope Cruz, with another strong performance in *Los Abrazos Rotos*, the latest film by Pedro Almodovar. Cruz has now grown into a formidable and captivating actress. *Coco Chanel and Igor Stravinsky*, a Jan Koenig film about the relationship between the designer and the composer has the taste of delicious, dark, bitter chocolate. This is a film that should be a hit with art-house audiences.

But it was Brad Pitt and Quentin Tarantino that the masses were waiting for. Tarantino did not disappoint and Brad Pitt proved to be an absolute gentleman on the red carpet. Although his famous girlfriend, Angelina Jolie, didn’t star in the movie, Pitt made sure she was never far from his side. The photographers, cameramen and the

thousands of film fanatics went berserk.

Afterwards we went to the exclusive party for *Inglourious Basterds*. Tarantino danced in the cinema but at the party he really let rip and danced until his black shirt was wet. Angelina and Brad looked relaxed and at ease with one another. I met Willem Dafoe, queuing with me for the toilet and introduced myself briefly to the director Ang Lee. The music was loud and prevented any business talk. Harvey Weinstein was very thankful for this, because the only way people could speak to him was via hand signals.

What is most memorable in the end, though, is a film of great poetic beauty that was carefully crafted by that master from New Zealand, Jane Campion. With a steady and sure hand, Campion stitches delicately composed images, words and music into our hearts. *Bright Star*, about the poet John Keats (played by Ben Whishaw) who died at the young age of 25 as an unknown and unsung poet, and his unfulfilled love and relationship with Fanny Brawne (played by the new bright star on the film horizon, Abbie Cornish) has engraved itself on my memory. Campion keeps the story simple and characters identifiable and so easily escapes the trappings of a costume period piece. She draws her viewers relentlessly into the world of John and Fanny, and helps us to fall in love with the poetry of John Keats through the eyes of the 18-year-old girl-next-door.

On the day after the première I met the star of the film, Abbie Cornish, and her boyfriend, Ryan Phillippe, who is starring in *Bang Bang Club*, shot in South Africa. Meeting her in real life makes you realise how hard Jane has worked to make her look like the plain girl-next-door. Abbie Cornish is a star of the future. She talked about Jane Campion making it easy to become Fanny, the Fanny for which Keats wrote his final poem:

“Bright Star, would I were steadfast as though art!

Pillowed upon my fair loves ripening breast,

To feel for ever it soft fall and swell,

Awake forever in a sweet unrest,

Still, still to hear her tender – taken breath,
And so live ever – or else swoon to death.”