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Listening at Latinbeat, Looking In on Ol' Blue Eyes

By STEVE DOLLAR

2011 Latinbeat Festival

Film Society of Lincoln Center

165 65th St., (212) 875-5601

Through Aug. 24

New currents in Latin American cinema have their showcase at this annual festival, which this year features 23 new films from 15 countries, with many directors on hand for Q&A discussions. The selections include documentary appraisals of political figures ("Che: A New Man," "The Death of Pinochet"), offbeat comedies (Argentina's "Sidewalls" and "Querida Voy a Comprar Cigarrillos y Vuelvo"), socially aware dramas and even some music titles that live up to the rhythmic theme implicit in the program's name. "Marimbas From Hell" blends fiction and documentary as a homeless marimba player connects with a Guatemalan heavy-metal musician, "Country Music" follows a luckless Chilean C&W fan on a pilgrimage to Nashville. Another, real-life journey, from Buenos Aires to New York, is the topic of "The Stoessel Expedition," a restored 1928 film shot by brothers Adán and Andrés Stoessel during their travels. Composer Donald Sosin will provide accompaniment on piano.

The Films of Frank Sinatra

Museum of the Moving Image

36-01 35th Ave., Queens

(718) 777-6888

Friday-Sept. 12

Today's tween idols with sights set on the movie marquee could learn a lot by studying the career of Frank Sinatra. Ol' Blue Eyes translated his pop stardom into some gigs in frothy MGM musicals, but he took charge of his movie career and made himself formidable. This 12-film survey hits some of the high points: "From Here to Eternity" (which won the singer an Oscar for Best Supporting Actor), "The Manchurian Candidate," and the controversial-in-its-day "The Man with the Golden Arm," with Sinatra as a skin-and-bones junkie in Otto Preminger's adaptation of the Nelson Algren novel. The great musicals are



Everett Collection

Frank Sinatra in Fred Zinnemann's 'From Here to Eternity' (1953).

here, too, showing off the performer's shark-smooth style, including "Guys and Dolls," "On the Town" and "High Society." Even the Rat Pack shtick of "Ocean's Eleven" has proven an enduring template, which says a lot for those baby blues.

'Over Your Cities Grass Will Grow'

Film Forum

209 W. Houston St., (212) 727-8100

Through Aug. 23

This isn't the typical documentary about artistic process. A protégé of Peter Greenaway and sister of actors Ralph and Joseph, British filmmaker Sophie Fiennes shows rather than tells for most of this film's 105 minutes. Layering the soundtrack with austere contemporary chamber music by Jörg Widmann and György Ligeti, she fashions a dreamlike visual statement from German artist Anselm Kiefer's grand and desolate architectural compound in Barjac, France—once an abandoned silk factory. In an interview that can only be called abstract, Mr. Kiefer philosophizes about the nature of boredom (it's a good thing) but is mostly seen at work as the camera swoops, tracks and hovers above the ambitious project, treating it as a kind of enigmatic avant-garde Xanadu.

'The Big Uneasy'

BAMcinematek

30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718) 636-4100

Wednesday

Actor and humorist Harry Shearer comes to town with a sneak preview of his new film about New Orleans, which, as he explains in a note posted to the BAM website, is not a "Katrina documentary." It's also not "an examination of the Bob Dylan song 'Hurricane' nor the boxer who inspired it." Instead, Mr. Shearer consults scientists and a whistle blower from the Army Corps of Engineers to investigate the unreported causes behind the flood that in 2005 decimated the city he calls home. He gets an assist from actor John Goodman, who hosts interview segments with New Orleans residents discussing the flood and its consequences—and why the city must continue to exist.

15th Annual DocuWeeks

IFC Center

323 Sixth Ave., (212) 924-7771

Friday-Sept. 1

It's a sign that documentaries have achieved a new cache when the most interesting races at the Academy Awards are in the nonfiction categories. That was the case this year, as the nominees reflected a much keener sense of social relevance than in many ceremonies past. The categories themselves even loosened up. The British street artist Banksy got nominated for



International Center of Photography

'The Mexican Suitcase' recounts the recovery of a case belonging to Robert Capa.

investigations. Art mysteries also are explored. The discovery of a missing cache of 4,500 images made by Robert Capa and his colleagues during the Spanish Civil War is explicated in "The Mexican Suitcase." Directed by Trisha Ziff, the film details the find's significance to Mr. Capa's legacy, particularly in how it amplifies the efforts of Gerda Taro and David "Chim" Seymour, anti-fascist Eastern Europeans who joined the Hungarian photographer at the front lines and, in Ms. Taro's case, died there. The stately history lesson serves also to investigate the power of images and the circuitous routes by which that power flows.

The charismatic afterlife of an avant-garde filmmaker is the theme of "Maya Deren's Sink," Barbara Hammer's lively short that honors Ms. Deren's larger-than-life persona through the memories of those close to her—including her 1940s Morton Street neighbors who were kept awake by her dusk-til-dawn parties.



Nick Brandestini

An aerial view in the documentary 'Darwin.'

"Exit Through the Gift Shop," a movie many viewers were uncertain even qualified as a documentary.

There's no question that the selections in DocuWeeks are docs, through and through. No meta shenanigans here. If that makes for a surplus of overtly meaningful exposés, sagas of false justice, war stories and passionately felt real-life human dramas, well, that's the sort of material that provokes otherwise sensible filmmakers to commit everything in the cause of art (and their concept of truth). Each year, this series gives audiences a chance to check out some of the year's most promising independent documentaries, even as it gives the filmmakers the theatrical exposure necessary to qualify for an Academy Award nomination. It's been very successful, leading to 20 nominations and seven wins in the past 14 years.

This edition offers such festival circuit crowd-pleasers as "Being Elmo: A Puppeteer's Journey" and plenty of social and political

Ghosts of a different sort haunt the Cuba of "Unfinished Spaces," a fascinating tale of visionary aesthetics and how revolutionary ideals succumb to bureaucratic mandates. Filmmakers Alys Nahmias and Benjamin Murray tell the story of architects Ricardo Porro, Vittorio Garratti and Roberto Gottardi, who designed and then taught at the National Art Schools, created in Fidel Castro's regime. The dictator later sold out the artists to the Soviet Union's ideological bias against progressive architecture as a bourgeois conceit, and construction on the schools was left unfinished. Eventually, two of the three architects left for Europe and their sublime structures became modern ruins.

Ashes to ashes, right? The subjects of "Library of Dust" are thousands of former patients at the Oregon State Hospital—site of Ken Kesey's "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest"—whose cremated remains occupy copper cans slowly corroding in a forgotten storage room, undiscovered until 2004. Co-directors Ondi Timoner ("DIG!") and Robert James offer one of the more surprising stories at DocuWeeks, utilizing everything from Super-8 footage to interviews with the formerly institutionalized to create a contemporary gothic.

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