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MOVIES

Critic's Picks: A June To-Do List for Film Buffs in L.A.

2:11 PM PDT 6/3/2019 by Jordan Cronk



Photofest

'Lola Montes' (1955)

Queer classics, Indian cinema masters, the Coen brothers and favorites of former New Yorker critic Pauline Kael are among highlights from the Los Angeles retrospective and revival scene this month.



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ramming and most stoned cinemas, is closing its doors at the end of June in anticipation of a year-long redevelopment project set to begin at the museum in the coming months. Appropriately, for its final month of programming the theater is screening a number of classics from across the annals of film history, movies of the sort that the theater built its reputation on. In addition to the regular Tuesday Matinee series — this month dedicated to three late-'60s/early-'70s crime films (*Super Fly*, June 4; *The French Connection*, June 11; and *The Godfather*, June 18) and the 1942 Ernst Lubitsch black comedy *To Be or Not to Be* (June 25) — and a special June 13 screening of Leo McCarey's seminal screwball comedy *The Awful Truth* (presented, full disclosure, as the opening night of Locarno in Los Angeles, a film festival I help organize), the calendar is highlighted by a quartet of final films by legendary directors. Titles include Max Ophuls' tragedy *Lola Montes* (June 7), Jean Vigo's pioneering *L'Atalante* (June 10), Krystof Kieslowski's seductive and mysterious *Three Colors: Red* (June 20; members-only screening) and, lastly, Yasujiro Ozu's elegiac *An Autumn Afternoon* (June 27), one of the greatest of all final films and, as such, a poignant way to say goodbye to the Bing Theater.

QUEER CINEMA CLASSICS AT THE NEW BEV | 7165 Beverly Blvd.

A typically packed month at the New Beverly Cinema brings with it no less than three notable series, including a week of pioneering queer cinema, a quartet of Wednesday matinees dedicated to Alfred Hitchcock's underappreciated '60s work and, in anticipation of Quentin Tarantino's 1969-set *Once Upon a Time in Hollywood*, a monthlong overview of films from that watershed year of American cinema. Beginning with a two-night stand (June 2 and 3) of the late Stanley Donen's "sad gay story" *Staircase* and John Huston's controversial *Reflections in a Golden Eye*, starring Marlon Brando and Elizabeth Taylor as an unhappily married couple, the queer cinema overview swerves across a spectrum of registers and styles, and includes double features of John Waters' *Pink Flamingoes* and *Female Trouble* (June 4); R.W. Fassbinder's *The Bitter Tears of Petra Von Kant* and *Fox and His Friends* (June 5 and 6); Bill Sherwood's *Parting Glances* and Gus Van Sant's *Mala Noche*; and, perhaps most enticingly, Robert Aldrich's lesbian drama *The Killing of Sister George* and John Flynn's *The Sergeant*, the story of a military official (played by Hollywood tough guy Rod Steiger) who begins to develop feelings for one of his soldiers (John Phillip Law). Highlights of the Hitchcock matinees, meanwhile, include the 1966 political thriller *Torn Curtain* (June 19), starring Paul Newman and Julie Andrews, and perhaps the greatest of the Master of Suspense's late films, the



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Pakula's offbeat romance *The Sterile Cuckoo*, featuring Liza Minnelli as a college freshman who begins to fall for a shy student at a neighboring school.

VERA CHYTILOVA AT THE EGYPTIAN | 6712 Hollywood Blvd.

A quick but crucial two-night series of films by the great Czech director Vera Chytilova highlights the June calendar at the Egyptian Theatre. On June 28, Chytilova's two most celebrated features, 1966's feminist landmark *Daisies* and 1970's hallucinatory spin on the Adam and Eve story *Fruit of Paradise*, will screen in digitally restored versions alongside *Ceiling* and *A Bagful of Fleas*, a pair of little-seen medium-length films from 1962 that presage the unruly personal and political force of the director's more recognized work. And following on June 30 is a second double feature of the rarely screened *Panelstory*, from 1980, a biting social satire set in a crumbling Czech housing block, and 1983's *The Very Late Afternoon of a Faun*, a visually sumptuous, penetrating portrait of an aging lothario that will screen on an archival 35mm print. Chytilova, who died in 2014 at the age of 85, directed dozens of films over her half-century career; these are a handful of the very best.

NINA MENKES AT THE BILLY WILDER | 10899 Wilshire Blvd.

A trio of enticing double features anchor the UCLA Film and Television Archive's June calendar: First, on June 15, the great independent filmmaker Nina Menkes will bring the new digital restoration of her 1991 feature *Queen of Diamonds* to the Billy Wilder Theater for a double bill that will also include a 35mm presentation of that film's 1996 follow-up *The Bloody Child*. Two of the era's most radical and affecting meditations on female identity and violence, *Queen of Diamonds* and *The Bloody Child*, each starring the director's sister Tinka and set in the deserts of the western United States, showcase the complexity of Menkes' approach to narrative and her unique and uncompromising sense of cinematic time and space. And later in the month, Sandi Tan, director of the recent documentary *Shirkers*, will present two curated double features centered on doomed young people: On June 21, Leos Carax's notorious 1999 Herman Melville adaptation *Pola X*, starring Catherine Deneuve and the late actors Guillaume Depardieu and Yekaterina Golubeva, will share a bill with Tim Hunter's harrowing 1986 coming-of-age drama *River's Edge*, featuring unforgettable performances from Crispin Glover, Keanu Reeves, Lone Skye and Dennis Hopper, followed on June 22 by the pairing of Jonathan Caouette's bracing 2004 autobiographical documentary *Tarnation*



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SATYAJIT RAY AND ISHU PATEL AT THE BOOTLEG | 2220 Beverly Blvd.

This month's Projections program at the Bootleg Theater, co-presented in association with Vidiots, is set for June 23 and will feature classics by Satyajit Ray and Ishu Patel, two giants of Indian cinema. Beginning the evening will be Patel's 1984 short *Paradise*, a lovingly detailed and richly animated work in which a lonely blackbird yearns to be as beautiful and adored as the local Emperor's Bird of Paradise. (Quentin Tarantino fans will no doubt recognize the film's music, which the director made memorable use of in *Kill Bill Vol. 1*.) Following in a restored 35mm print will be Ray's 1964 feature *Charulata*, a tale of tragic romance between the unsatisfied wife of a newspaper editor and her visiting cousin-in-law. The film, which Ray considered the best of his own work, brought the director's flair for feverish domestic drama and pointed sociopolitical commentary to new heights of allegorical enchantment.

COEN BROS. FAVORITES AND PAULINE KAEL PICKS AT THE AERO | 1328 Montana Ave.

This month at the Aero Theatre in Santa Monica, two short but sweet programs catch the eye. The first, dedicated to a handful of favorites of the critic Pauline Kael (who would've tuned 100 this year), runs from June 13-16 and features the digital restoration of Marcel Carne's epic romance from 1945, *Children of Paradise* (June 13), a June 14 double feature of Arthur Penn's 1967 landmark *Bonnie and Clyde* (screening digitally) and Robert Altman's underrated 1974 *Thieves Like Us* (35mm) and, on June 15, a 35mm double bill of two early-'80s American comedy classics, Barry Levinson's nostalgic coming-of-age fable *Diner*, starring Mickey Rourke, Ellen Barkin, and Kevin Bacon, and Jonathan Demme's *Melvin and Howard*, which tells the incredible true story of an oddball service station employee (Paul Le Mat) who improbably befriended billionaire businessman Howard Hughes (Jason Robards). Kael, as it happens, was no fan of Joel and Ethan Coen, whose 1984 debut *Blood Simple* the writer famously panned. Critic Adam Nayman, author of the new book *The Coen Brothers: This Book Really Ties the Films Together*, will lend a different perspective when he presents three Coen brothers double features at the Aero this month. On June 21, a digital restoration of *Blood Simple* will share a bill with a 35mm print of the Oscar-winning *No Country for Old Men*, followed on June 22 by the 1998 cult classic *The Big Lebowski* and 2001's *The Man Who Wasn't There* (both digital) and, on June 23, by 1996's iconic *Fargo* (screening on 35mm) and 2009's still under-

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Chinese Industry On Edge After "Depressing" Censorship of Shanghai Festival's Opening Film

10:00 AM PDT 6/15/2019 by Patrick Brzeski



Courtesy of the Shanghai Film Festival

'The Eight Hundred'

The suspected reason behind the shocking cancellation of the \$80 million Chinese epic 'The



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Underway Without Its Opening Movie.

The sudden cancellation of the Shanghai International Film Festival's opening film screening, Guan Hu's widely anticipated war epic *The Eight Hundred*, has sent a chill through the Chinese film business, with many local filmmakers and producers expressing dismay over what the decision might mean for the future of their industry.

News that *The Eight Hundred* was [being pulled](#) from the festival landed like a bombshell among the assembled Chinese film community in Shanghai on Friday, the eve of the big-budget movie's scheduled world premiere at the event's opening ceremony.

An official statement from the producers and the festival went out across social media saying that the screening had been suspended due to "technical reasons."

The citing of unexplained "technical" problems has begun to be interpreted in China as a euphemism for the censorship of content deemed politically inappropriate by the country's ruling Communist Party (CPC). The same rationale was deployed in February when celebrated Chinese filmmaker Zhang Yimou was [forced to withdraw](#) his much-anticipated latest work *One Second* from the Berlin International Film Festival.

The decision to pull *The Eight Hundred*, and the deliberately vague explanation that followed, was met with an outpouring of sadness, anger and derision from Chinese film professionals on social media. The mood at the Shanghai festival also was palpably downbeat on Saturday, as attendees discussed the news and implications on the sidelines of press conferences and industry gatherings.

"If China is catching up with developed countries, why is there always a problem with technology? You just can't tell the truth!" one Chinese film figure posted semi-privately on social media service WeChat.

Chinese auteur Jia Zhangke, arguably the country's most internationally recognized art house director, shot off his own simple but declarative post on Weibo, writing, "You can't do this to the film industry." The statement was widely retweeted, but China's internet regulators soon silenced



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Car Songming, CEO of influential Beijing-based distributor Road Pictures, summed up the feelings of many in his professional community by posting an image of *The Eight Hundred's* official poster and writing, "I fell terrible."

Produced by Huayi Brothers Media, one of China's longest running and most respected private film studios, *The Eight Hundred* was expected to be one of the biggest films of the summer in the Middle Kingdom, boasting a budget of over \$80 million — an enormous figure in China, where production spending tends to go twice as far than in high-cost Hollywood — and rave pre-release industry buzz.

Chinese president Xi Jinping's regime has tightened control over the content industries throughout 2019, in anticipation of the politically resonant 70th anniversary of the People's Republic in October. *The Eight Hundred's* patriotic theme and story were thought to be well timed to the patriotic moment though.

Based on real-life history, the film centers on a pivotal Shanghai battle in 1937 during the Sino-Japanese war. In an episode that's now legend, some 400 Chinese fighters — an unlikely mix of soldiers, deserters and civilians — staged a heroic, ultimately doomed, defense of an isolated warehouse against waves of Japanese soldiers, so that China's principal forces could escape to the west to protect the country's heartland during the next phase of aggression. Shot mostly on Imax cameras — a first for the Chinese industry — the film was said to recreate such history in grippingly realistic action sequences, with some help from a team of distinguished Hollywood technical professionals, including Oscar-nominated visual effects supervisor Tim Crosbie (*X-Men: Days of Future Past*) and veteran action coordinator Glenn Boswell (*The Matrix*, *The Hobbit*).

By Saturday, as the Shanghai festival was beginning to get into full swing, *The Eight Hundred's* true "technical problems" were beginning to emerge. According to reports carried by several state-affiliated news outlets, the film first came under fire on July 9 during a meeting of the Chinese Red Culture Research Association, a Communist Party propaganda organization endorsed by the CPC's Publicity Department, the propaganda bureau that ominously took over oversight of the film industry from a more independent government body last year.



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The Eight Hundred became a surprise focus of the forum because of the realities of the historical events it faithfully recreates. At the time of the Battle of Shanghai, the Chinese Nationalists (Kuomintang), led by Chiang Kai-shek, controlled the city and staged its heroic defense against the Japanese — not Mao Zedong's Communist Party. As such, Guan Hu's film accurately displays Chinese forces fighting under the Chinese Nationalist flag, now the flag of Taiwan. Although the Chinese lost the battle, historical consensus describes the warehouse episode as a vital morale booster to Chinese forces in the grinding war with Imperial Japan.

Among the participants of the July 9 propaganda meeting was Wang Lihua, a former general in the People's Liberation Army. "[This film] glorifies the fighting of the Nationalist Party, which seriously violates history," he reportedly said. "This deviates from historical materialism and should not be encouraged."

Guo Songmin, a former Chinese Air Force commander turned film critic, added: "They should not so enthusiastically promote the flag of the Nationalist Party in such a solemn and sacred way. If we do so, no matter what the intention, it will hurt the feelings of the soldiers who fought for establishing the new China, and it shows real disrespect for the People's Republic of China."

The forum reported concluded that *The Eight Hundred* was an inappropriate film for release during the 70th anniversary year of the PRC.

As is typical, Beijing's film regulators have provided no direct explanation for *The Eight Hundred's* glaring absence at the Shanghai festival (a huge poster for the film was still hanging over the event's main festival venue on Saturday); and the connection between the movie's retraction and the July 9 propaganda meeting remains a matter of conjecture. But much of the Chinese film industry took the emergence of the reports of the meeting as evidence enough— and the reaction on Saturday tended to be characterized by outrage and disgust.

"A gang of quitters who can't speak for themselves and cynically revise history is the real 'technical problem,'" said the CEO of a prominent Chinese movie theater chain in his private WeChat circle, composed mostly of entertainment industry people.



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It's an very depressing for many reasons, "one influential Beijing based producer told me *Hollywood Reporter* (requesting anonymity because of the risks of speaking out publicly).

"For one, I've seen the [The Eight Hundred], and it's really good," the producer said. "We should be taking pride in this kind of work, not repressing it."

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