



Movies and Culture Report

Welcome to Modern Hollywood

A BEAVER PUPPET - NORSE POLYTHEISM - BELCHING BRIDESMAIDS



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THEATRICAL RELEASES

May 6



The Beaver (PG-13 for mature thematic material, some disturbing content, sexuality, and language) An executive deals with an emotional breakdown by speaking through a grubby hand puppet. ([Watch the trailer.](#)) Mel Gibson, Jodie Foster, Anton Yelchin.

Of any film released in 2011, this is the one to keep an eye on. The challenge for this production will be to outshine the severely tarnished Mel Gibson—and this one may have the strength to overcome that baggage. Gibson is getting rave reviews; so is director Jodie Foster.

If the public is not willing to extend forgiveness to Gibson, we need to reflect on why not. When rapists (Mike Tyson, Roman Polanski), accused pedophiles (Woody Allen, R&B singer R Kelly, or Michael Jackson) and—well, heck even Larry Flynt gets a pass—what is it about Gibson that would keep him from public redemption?



Thor (PG-13 for intense violence and language) Powerful but arrogant warrior is cast out of Asgard and sent to live among humans, where he soon becomes one of their finest defenders. ([Watch the trailer.](#)) Chris Hemsworth, Anthony Hopkins, Natalie Portman.

Most people will know Hemsworth from his short appearance as Captain Kirk's dad, George, in the reboot of *Star Trek*. While that was a plumb role, this may be the film to make him a household name.

Is the movie-going public clamoring for a film adaptation of old *Thor* comic books? No. Not at all. Then why make the movie and take the risk? Another film coming out this summer has your answer.

The new *Captain America* movie is titled *Captain America: The First Avenger* for a reason. The movie **Avengers** is currently in the works; the characters Thor (Hemsworth), The Incredible Hulk (Lou Ferrigno), Iron Man (Robert





THEATRICAL RELEASES, continued

Downey Jr.), Nick Fury (Samuel L. Jackson), the Black Widow (Scarlett Johansson), and Hawkeye (Jeremy Renner) will join forces.

With the recent success of everything superhero, what could be better than to set up a full cadre of movies that interrelate and expand like the actual comics? *Thor*, then, is little more than a spoke in a large studio wheel.

Also

There Be Dragons the Spanish Civil War and the timeless power of forgiveness; an Argentine production

Daydream Nation love triangle between a high school teacher, a big-city girl, and a stoner; filled with drug use and sexuality

Jumping the Broom “Two very different families converge on Martha’s Vineyard one weekend for a wedding”; comedy

An Invisible Sign illness, math, and loneliness, and how a 20-year-old teacher helps her students through their personal crises





THEATRICAL RELEASES, continued

May 13



Bridesmaids (R for strong sexuality, continual strong language) Lonely, broke maid-of-honor bluffs her way through the rituals of her best friend's wedding. ([Watch the trailer.](#)) Kristen Wiig, Maya Rudolph, Jon Hamm, Rose Byrne, Chris O'Dowd.

It's the 21st Century. Women want to be coarse, too! Women love chick flicks, so why not make a chick flick

with belching and vomit?

Kristen Wiig is a talented comedic actress; this is her most prominent role to date and places her as the face of the marketing campaign and will test her marketability. The trailer contains low-brow but still humorous moments—which should help opening weekend numbers since a disturbing percentage of the female viewing audience is completely fine with scatological jokes.

What I find interesting is the fact that this movie deals with marriage. Generally, when women are main characters in film—whether chick flick, drama, or offbeat comedy—the storyline almost never pertains to those women living independently; rather, they always display women dealing with relationships on some level and usually with men—fighting over or trying to win a man, trying to get one back, invariably getting married or divorced. The unstated premise in these productions defines women solely by their relationship status.

Regardless of how deeply some women wrap themselves in the feminist ideal of independence, Hollywood continually churns out productions which identify women with a quite different vision.





THEATRICAL RELEASES, continued



Heshher (R for disturbing, violent behavior, sexual content including graphic dialogue, pervasive language, and drug content, some in the presence of a child) Here is [the plot summary from IMDb](#): “Heshher is a loner. He hates the world and everyone in it. He has long greasy hair and homemade tattoos. He is malnourished and smokes a lot of cigarettes. He likes fire and blowing things up. He lives in his van, until he meets TJ.” Joseph Gordon-Levitt, Devin Brochu, Natalie Portman.

What a fun-sounding film. Obviously, we can be comfortable assuming this production wasn't intended to be on the level of *Schindler's List*. Joseph Gordon-Levitt (*Brick*, *Inception*) is a sharp actor who usually has solid taste when it comes to projects, but given the description above I strongly recommend waiting for reviews before seeing this one. There is not much worse than being stuck in a theater watching a brutal, needless film about low-lives dragging around in the gutter.

Also

The First Grader British/Kenyan bio-drama about a former freedom fighter who now fights for his right to get an education

The Big Bang private detective hired to find a missing stripper





DVD RELEASES

May 3



The Green Hornet (PG-13 for sequences of violent action, language, sensuality, and drug content) The slob as superhero. ([Watch the trailer.](#)) Seth Rogen, Jay Chou, Christoph Waltz.

Rogen plays a trust fund baby who, after his father's death, takes on the persona of The Green Hornet to fight crime. Think of him as Iron Man without the brains, charm, physique, focus, or dialog.

Hollywood has just about expended all of the known superheroes. By the end of this summer they will have gone through the entire pantheon—unless they want to attempt making an Aquaman movie. This superhero trend has made millions, but what has it given our culture? We now overflow with mindless action flicks and toys.

There was a time when, rather than scraping the bottom of the barrel, creative forces in our culture attempted to create something new. Perhaps when all this crud is over, we'll finally experience a renaissance in American creativity in entertainment.



Mao's Last Dancer (PG for a brief violent image, some sensuality and language) Dramatic story of Li Cunxin, a Chinese ballet dancer who falls in love with an American woman while on a cultural exchange in Texas. Based on his autobiography, we follow his strained relationship, his defection to the states, and his life as a dancer. ([Watch the trailer.](#)) Chi Cao, Bruce Greenwood, Kyle MacLachlan.

Ultimately, this is a conventional biopic that avoids the many thorny issues you might expect given the race and political subtexts in the story. What this film has going for it is a strong display of ballet. If you are into dance, this is a good pick.

We do have to wonder, though, if the political aspects of the tale were watered down to satisfy the growing Chinese influence on the world entertainment market.





DVD RELEASES, continued

Also

A Somewhat Gentle Man Norweign comedy; a released convict must reintegrate into his former life

Sync or Swim first-ever behind the scenes documentary about the making of the U.S. Olympic Synchronized Swimming Team

The Dilemma man discovers his best friend's wife is having an affair





DVD RELEASES, continued

May 10



Blue Valentine (R for strong graphic sexual content, language and a beating) This film follows the growth of a married couple over a number of years. Ryan Gosling, Michelle Williams, John Doman.

NOTE: Before you rent this film please note that it was originally rated NC-17 for a scene of explicit sexuality. [This was rated R only on appeal.](#)

WARNING: I am about to discuss sexual content, so those who are averse to such discussions may want to move to the next item.

The rating reversal mentioned above reveals a persistent double standard. The scene which scored NC-17 was one where a husband performs fellatio on his wife. We can debate whether or not this content needs to be included at all, but the truth is there are numerous films Rated-R that contain oral sex. In most of those films, the sexual recipient is generally a male, however—not the other way around.

The MPAA has shown an inconsistent standard: oral sex is acceptable for broader audiences if it is performed on a man but not if on a woman.

Personally, I think the frank display of oral sex should automatically be NC-17 since it is a sexual act that should be kept to adults. Knowing that the MPAA would probably agree, the least they can do is try to be more consistent in their decisions.





DVD RELEASES, continued



Bhutto (Not rated) Aseefa Bhutto Zardari, Bakhtawar Bhutto Zardari, and Bilawal Bhutto Zardari. ([Watch the trailer.](#))

Benazir Bhutto was the first woman to lead a Muslim country. She was twice Prime Minister of Pakistan—removed both times under the cloud of charges of corruption. She returned to Pakistan in 2007 to again run for the country's highest office, and during that campaign was assassinated.

This documentary is a thoughtful look at this interesting woman, but it also explores the volatile world of politics in Pakistan. One has to wonder if this film, or one like it, would have ever been considered if she survived the bomb blast that took her life. Sometimes figures become larger than life only after they die.

Also

Justin Bieber: Never Say Never his 2010 concert tour

Black Death German mystery/adventure; Sean Bean is tasked with discovering the truth regarding the bubonic plague

How I Ended This Summer Russian drama; conflict in a polar station on a desolate island in the Arctic Ocean

No Strings Attached Successful man and woman choose to have meaningless sex with the promise neither would develop feelings for the other.





Culture Links

Want resources in your battle for healthy sexuality for you and your teen? Check out [these resources and information from Focus on the Family](#). Here are two *Talking Points* to get you started:

- The morality of sex is defined by God's holiness and His standards rather than by human desire, experience, personal preference, culture or opinion.
- Sex is not an entitlement, nor is it needed for personal wholeness or emotional maturity.



Salon.com's Andrew O'Hehir [asks the all too common question](#): Why are Christian movies so awful?

and [Amy Sullivan on the CBS Business Network thinks that When Hollywood Stopped Making Bible Movies, Right-Wing Christians Took Over](#).

In response, I offer [this excerpt from Berit Kjos' 1990 book Your Child in the New Age: Movies and the Power of Suggestion](#).

Kjos' overly cautious approach to digesting entertainment exemplifies the type of thinking that has hobbled Christians in the entertainment industry. If our audiences are so self-restricting that they cannot handle any but the mildest of content, how do we expect to talk about our world with any truth? And if we're not speaking the full and unadulterated truth, others *will* step into the void and we will *not* like what they have to say.

"Right-wing Christians" have dominated Christian film since the 1970s. This has been both good and bad—good because they have held close fidelity to Scripture; bad because their conservative tastes and fear of pushing the envelope have consumed significant time, effort, and resources in the production of a considerable quantity of lackluster films.

Non-Christians (the Salon.com and CBS links, above) are becoming more vocal about the pathetic stance of their opposition—us! Christian media. When your opponents wonder why you're so weak, it's time to wake up and realize you have serious issues to resolve.





Culture Quote

I think that the action genre is a very interesting one in terms of its place in a social context. I think that Paul Greengrass showed us with the Jason Bourne films that **it was possible to make an action movie with a social conscience**, a political-social context. **You know, it's not an accident that the journalist in the third film is writing for *The Guardian* newspaper.** And so, I was interested in making such a film, because most action films that I see are misogynistic and misanthropic, and kind of gun-loving, Republican bullsh*t—and **that concerns me because those are the films young people are going to see.**

– Director Joe Wright (*Hanna*, *The Soloist*, and *Atonement*)

from the interview ***Smashing the 'Gun-Loving, Republican Bullsh*t' Action Mold.***

MovieLine.com. April 2011.

As I've said a thousand times, even the stupid films you see can be made to intentionally deliver social marketing messages to you and your family.





Movie Watching Tip

Ratings Creep: The Hard PG-13

Ratings Creep describes the downward evaluation of movie content from what was automatically rated an R but now, more commonly, is found in PG-13 films; what was PG-13 is now PG; PG content is accepted as G.

In the old days—and I can't believe I'm referring to the 1980s as the old days—the PG-13 Rating did not exist. Back then, films were more likely to get an R-Rating, and these R-Rated films essentially came in two flavors: Hard and Soft. *Friday the 13th* with its brutal violence and disturbing images was a Hard-R; *An Officer and A Gentleman* was a Soft-R, its fare was lighter but still intended for adults.

The introduction of PG-13 in the mid-'80s demoted Soft-R films to the new rating and opened harsher entertainment to teens.

Just because the MPAA rates a film PG-13, that does not imply the film is appropriate for 13-year-olds. Never let the MPAA tell you what is acceptable for your child. Always pay attention to what is actually in a film—look beyond the sometimes-misleading ratings system.

To learn more about Ratings Creep, please check out the publications found at <http://www.medscape.com/viewarticle/480900>—studies performed by researchers from the Kids Risk Project at the Harvard School of Public Health in Medscape General Medicine. Their research reveals an increase in harsh content in films from 1992 to 2003.





SOUL SURFER

by Scott Nehring¹



Director: Sean McNamara

Written by: Sean McNamara, Deborah Schwartz, Douglas Schwartz and Michael Berk

Starring: AnnaSophia Robb, Dennis Quaid, Carrie Underwood, Kevin Sorbo and Helen Hunt

Rated: PG for an intense accident sequence and some thematic material

Bethany Hamilton (AnnaSophia Robb) is a focused, up-and-coming surfer. Her parents Tom (Dennis Quaid) and Cheri (Helen Hunt), both surfers, support

their daughter following her dream of becoming a professional. After a dramatic win at a tournament, Bethany lands a sponsor and can see her dream being realized.

Tragedy strikes when Bethany is attacked by a shark which rips off her left arm at the shoulder. A tenacious sort, Bethany recovers from the devastating loss and returns to the surf to claim her dream despite her disability.

This is a true story and it is an inspiring one on many levels. Bethany is a strong girl who overcomes tremendous odds. Her bravery and determination are nice to see. Robb displays a powerful female who is capable, talented and formidable while still being feminine. This is very uncommon to see on screen. All too often women in film are forced to drop their feminine sides when they are to be strong. They bulk up with sinewy muscles, pull their hair back and adopt masculine clothes (see any Michelle Rodriguez movie) and strut like they've shown up to kick butt. Fewer and fewer female characters display inner strength while maintaining their feminine stature. Let alone being allowed to act feminine without that behavior being shown as silly, frivolous or negative.





Another interesting point about this film is the display of the family's faith. The Hamiltons are Christians and their faith is a part of their daily lives. Often when the issue of faith is raised in a film such as this, it is an awkward exercise that swallows up the narrative. Here the displays of faith are mostly natural and rather subdued. Someone will say "we will pray for you" while another character leaves the room. Tom casually reads the bible. The family consistently says grace before meals. These unobtrusive moments are what is needed in film.

Christian filmmakers too often feel they need to hammer faith into their audiences in order to make the point. I argue that through subtle displays of faith, showing prayer and concern for morality in casual moments will do more to help our culture than all of the hysterical Christian films ever made. We learn our social mores from the Arts, in particular film. Why do you think homosexual activists specifically targeted the entertainment industry in the early seventies? They knew that the greater population learned what to think through what they watched on screens. Change the image, change their minds. Christians should learn from this. If we constantly see

prayer, charity and forgiveness in film, if we see the Christian lifestyle rather than get a Christian sermon, we will slowly begin to see the culture improve.

I'm on a tangent - back to the movie.

This is a pleasant film but it is flawed. The acting is very strong. AnnaSophia Robb has come into her own and easily carries the film. When I sat through her feature film debut *Because of Winn-Dixie* I found her to be grating. Then again, I loathe most child actors, so it may not be her fault. Robb has grown into a young woman and has found her voice. She is a strong lead and this production shows she is capable of handling much more.

In addition to Robb, Dennis Quaid, Heather Hunt and Kevin Sorbo also are notably good. While they aren't going to score Oscars, they do bring much to the production. Given the number of one-dimensional moments in the film, it would have been easy for these experienced actors to lay back and call it in. Each of these actors work with the material that is given to them and turn out some good performances. The problem with the film is in its script. Seven people are credited with the screenplay and story.





Seven. It takes less people to man the Space Shuttle than it did to write this movie.

The story is naturally interesting. People are fascinated by sharks (The Discovery Channel drags out Shark Week every year for a reason) and the idea of getting one's arm bitten off is an attention getter. The problem with the script is that after the incident there is barely any real conflict. Bethany's recuperation is quickly resolved. She doesn't appear to have much residual psychological issues. She's not scared of sharks. She's not scared of the water. At worst she gets frustrated by trying to open a bread bag with one hand and eventually cries about not understanding God's plan for her.

Without a vibrant conflict through which she can grow, there is very little to do until the final moments. She quickly heals, hops on the surfboard confidently

and is off chasing her dream once again. Everyone around her stops to tell her how brave, strong and amazing she is. It is as if the film's central question is "Is Bethany simply awesome or is she super fantastic to boot?"

The script would have been helped by focusing closer on her family's reported troubles with their faith or possibly her natural concerns about her appearance and ability to surf. All of these items are either ignored or glossed over.

Despite the flawed script, I found this to be a mostly enjoyable, light film. People of faith will enjoy the production the most, and appreciate being taken seriously on screen. I think this would also be a good pick for families with young girls. Bethany Hamilton is a good role model and AnnaSophia Robb has done a wonderful job bringing her to the screen. 🍿

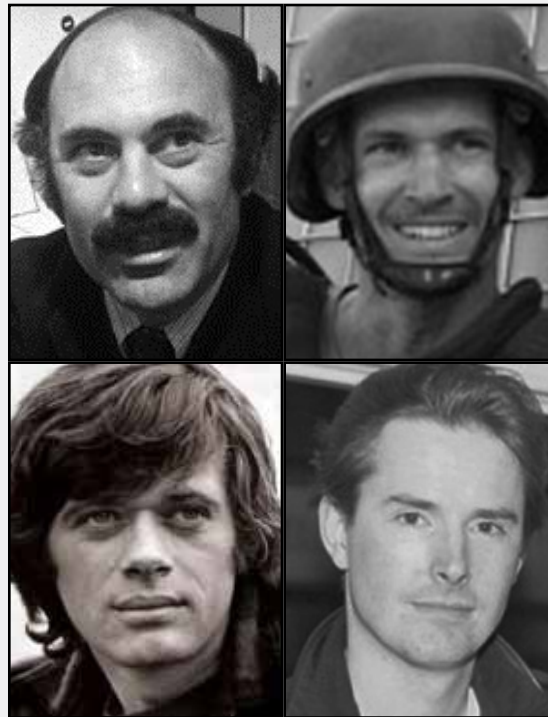
1. As originally published on [Good News Film Reviews](#).





At Rest [Daniel 12:13](#)

Cyrus Harvey (1925-2011) Film Distributor Co-founded Janus Films which brought the classics of world cinema to American shores, including the films of Akira Kurosawa and Federico Fellini, and helped establish their place in cinematic history. Janus Films still exists and is best known for the Criterion Collection, a line of high-quality DVD releases displaying the best in world cinema.



Michael Sarrazin (1940-2011) Actor His most notable performance came in 1969 in Sydney Pollack's *They Shoot Horses, Don't They?* That turn as Robert brought a BAFTA Film Award nomination for Most Promising Newcomer to Leading Film Roles in 1971. Following this success, Sarrazin enjoyed a long career on television.

Tim Hetherington (1970-2011) Documentarian Was killed while filming in Libya. Was co-director of the insightful documentary *Restrepo*, a frontline look at the war in Afghanistan, nominated for a Best Documentary Oscar in 2011. Hetherington was also known for his cinematography on the documentaries *The Devil Came on Horseback* and *Liberia: An Uncivil War*. He received a 2009 Alfred I. duPont Award in broadcast journalism.

Kevin Jarre (1954-2011) Screenwriter Wrote numerous scripts, including *The Mummy*, *Glory*, and *The Devil's Own*. Will be most remembered for his best work, *Tombstone*, a script I believe to be one of the best I've ever read. If you're studying scriptwriting for stage or screen, Jarre's use of language in *Tombstone* is a manual on how to heighten characterization during conflict.





Information

Learn more about Story. Buy the book: YouAreWhatYouSee.com.

Find Scott Nehring's latest film reviews: GoodNewsFilmReviews.com.

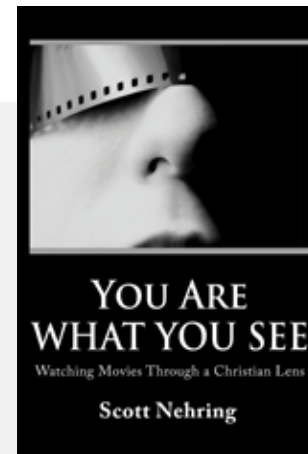
Scott is a film critic whose reviews have been published on a number of websites across the United States, Australia, and India including Reuters.com, USAToday.com, *The Chicago Times*, FoxNews.com, and a variety of local news stations across America.



As a former screenwriter, Scott is focused on balancing his love of story structure and cinema with his Christian faith. He loves to teach film studies to Christians, showing them how to read films and how to deal with the sometimes thorny subject of engaging modern culture.

Scott was a co-founder of the [Catholic Media Review](http://CatholicMediaReview.com). His current reviews can be found at [Good News Film Reviews](http://GoodNewsFilmReviews.com) and at ChristianCinema.com.

Good News Film Reviews (GNFR) was established in June 2007 to discuss film and culture from a Christian perspective. From the first post onward, Scott has called for Christians to change both the way they view film and how they engage in culture. GNFR fell quiet following a short sabbatical, was re-launched in January 2008, and has been going strong since. GNFR is also home site for the Carnival of Cinema, a bi-weekly collection of film-related posts submitted from around the world. The Carnival of Cinema has been in operation since September 2006.



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