



A scene from 'C.R.A.Z.Y.', selected as one of indieWIRE's Top 10 Undistributed Films of 2005.

## indieWIRE's Top 10 Undistributed Films of 2005

Compiled by Anthony Kaufman (January 2, 2006)

For the past eight years, indieWIRE's editors and contributors have put together a list of the best films we saw that didn't get U.S. distribution. For 2005, there were a number of strong contenders, which we have narrowed down to the top ten listed below (plus six honorable mentions). We didn't include films that were self-distributed this year, nor did we include 2004 films already acquired for release in 2005.

A handful of favorites tread somewhere in between: Andrew Bujalski's much-appreciated **"Mutual Appreciation"** will be released in 20 cities this spring by a new company; Natalia Almada's **"To The Other Side"** (Al Otro Lado) can be seen on POV later this year; and Kyle Henry's ambitious experimental debut **"Room"** will be announcing a distribution plan shortly.

With DVD, VOD and all manner of new distribution outlets for movies (including indieWIRE's own **Undiscovered Gems** film series), fewer worthy American indies fall through the cracks these days than ever before. But the economics of distribution is still a treacherous journey for filmmakers, and hopefully our list can make a difference for these worthy features.

This year's list was culled from the following indieWIRE staffers and writers: Eugene Hernandez (editor-in-chief), Brian Brooks (associate editor), James Israel (administration and marketing), and contributors Erica Abeel, Howard Feinstein, Anthony Kaufman, Michael Koresky, Jonny Leahan, Lily Oei and Steven Rosen.

### indieWIRE's Top 10 Films of 2005 Without U.S. Distribution:

(in alphabetical order, note that each film's track record indicates highlights, not every festival where a film has screened)

#### "Chain"

Directed by Jem Cohen

U.S., narrative

Track record: Berlin; Edinburgh; Vancouver; Vienna; Woodstock; Melbourne;

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Lowdown: New York original Jem Cohen showed "Chain" at the IFC Center in New York for two weeks in September, after topping undistributed best lists in 2004. The film played a handful of venues around the country, but lacked any organized distribution effort; broadcast and home video rights are still up in the air. The film follows two characters who never meet against backdrops of corporate urban sprawl. "'Chain' is a gorgeous film, both visually and structurally" wrote Jonny Leahan in indieWIRE. "Cohen has the ability to find striking beauty in an abandoned strip mall at twilight, and understands the power of simple juxtaposition. When he combines shots of empty stores and parking lots with answering machine messages from credit counselors, the effect is surprisingly stirring."

### "C.R.A.Z.Y."

Directed by Jean-Marc Vallee  
Canada, narrative

Track record: Venice; Toronto, Best Canadian Film; AFI Los Angeles International Film Festival, Audience Award

Lowdown: Canada's submission for the Best Foreign Language Oscar, Vallee's coming-out, coming-of-age opus about a French-Canadian family with five sons made its auspicious debut in Toronto, garnering good buzz, accolades, and further festival exposure. But with a killer soundtrack that includes such hits as the Rolling Stones' "Sympathy for the Devil" and David Bowie's "Space Oddity," U.S. distributors have run scared because of potentially high music clearance costs. From Toronto, Anthony Kaufman reported, "The film features one of the most stunning slo-mo sequences -- a dysfunctional family snapshot, par excellence, as drug-addicted older sibling goes for the throat of his younger fey brother during a Christmas celebration, toppling everyone and everything in his path."

### "Four Eyed Monsters"

Directed by Susan Buice & Arin Crumley  
U.S., narrative

Track record: Slamdance, SXSW, Gen Art

Lowdown: The subject of a recent New York Times feature ("Join a Revolution. Make Movies. Go Broke") about the perils of indie distribution and the lack thereof, "Four Eyed Monsters" has received rapturous praise at film festivals, but still remains overlooked by the industry. (The filmmakers arranged to release, via iTunes, a series of original video blog segments about trying to promote and distribute their movie). A clever exploration of how the two filmmakers found each other, the movie smartly wonders how two creative hipsters can find a meaningful relationship today. Blending narrative and non-fiction elements, the film has been hailed as an innovative and ambitious debut.

### "I Am a Sex Addict"

Directed by Caveh Zahedi  
U.S., narrative-documentary

Track record: Rotterdam; Tribeca; Chicago International; IFP Gotham Award's Best Film Not Playing at a Theater Near You

Lowdown: Longtime indie filmmaker (and scene-stealing animated character in "Waking Life"), Zahedi brought down the house at this year's Gotham Awards, when he called his undistributed award a back-handed complement and chastised the room for the state of indie-film distribution. Though Zahedi plans to self-distribute in 2006, it's never too late to get some professional help. A hilarious docu-fiction hybrid about the director's addiction to prostitutes, the film is a raw and revealing look at sexual dysfunction and the narcissistic creative soul.

### "John and Jane"

Directed by Ashim Ahluwalia  
India, narrative

Track record: Toronto International Film Festival

Lowdown: A critics' favorite at Toronto, "John and Jane" has the sales backing



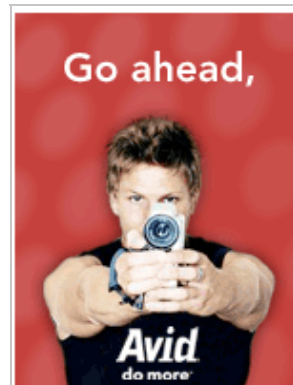
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of John Sloss's Cinetic Media, so a deal could come in 2006. But then again, this dreamy observational documentary about 1-800 customer service call workers in Bombay faces a tough road ahead in a nonfiction market that prefers penguins and easily digestible politics. "Without any direct comment," Anthony Kaufman reported from Toronto, "Ahluwalia's camera captures the workers' strange surreal lives as they leave their small cramped flats for the clean, immaculate hallways of their offices and take on fake American names to interact with their customers. . . . Utterly blind to the cultural imperialism overtaking their existence, the film's subjects are among globalization's most tragic offspring."

### **"The Puffy Chair"**

Directed by the Duplass Brothers

U.S., narrative

Track record: Sundance; SXSW; Edinburgh; Chicago International; Woodstock

Lowdown: "Sideways" for 30-somethings, "The Puffy Chair" is a funny, low-budget look at relationships starring Mark Duplass as a failed rocker turned booking agent determined to drive across the country to deliver his dad's birthday gift - a big, purple Lazy Boy recliner. "The Puffy Chair," wrote Eugene Hernandez, "is the sort of indie film that would have been quickly snapped up at Sundance ten years ago, but today without stars and an obvious marketing hook, buyers seem wary. But the film has certainly found a growing number of fans both in the business and among its festival audiences." At last year's Sundance, several young volunteers told indieWIRE staffers separately that "The Puffy Chair" was their favorite film at the fest.

### **"Romantico"**

Directed by Mark Becker

U.S./Mexico, documentary

Track record: Sundance; Los Angeles Film Festival; Silverdocs

Lowdown: A touching portrait of a mariachi musician who heads back to Mexico to be with his family, Becker's debut employs an old school verite approach a la the Maysles brothers. Originally about San Francisco street musicians, the project narrowed when Becker discovered Carmelo Muniz Sanchez and traveled with him to his hometown a thousand miles south of the border. "It was there that Becker discovered Carmelo as a whole human being, watching him as a father, a husband, and as a performer brimming with confidence, no longer the humble street musician," wrote Jonny Leahan in an indieWIRE report. "The trip also taught Becker something about the far-reaching implications of two intertwined economies in a post-NAFTA world."

### **"The Sun"**

Directed by Aleksandr Sukorov

Russia, narrative

Track record: Berlin; Toronto; New York

Lowdown: From Russian master Sukorov ("Russian Ark") comes the third in the director's power quartet (after "Moloch's" Hitler and "Taurus's" Lenin; next up Goethe). Set in the hours leading up to Japanese emperor Hirohito's surrender to General MacArthur, the film is confined almost entirely to the claustrophobic bunker beneath Hirohito's palace. From Toronto, indieWIRE contributor Peter Debruge described the film as "a rich and deeply philosophical look at the stunningly native motivations behind's Japan's ambitions in World War II." Earlier this year, the Moscow Times wrote that the film "may go down as the best Russian film not only of the year, but arguably of the decade."

### **"Three Times"**

Directed by Hou Hsiao-hsien

Taiwan, narrative

Track record: Cannes; Telluride; Toronto; New York

Lowdown: It's a rare occasion when audiences can catch the films of Taiwanese master Hou in movie houses, but his last two films "Millennium Mambo" and "Cafe Lumiere" enjoyed very limited runs along with DVD releases. So "Three Times," a beautifully lensed triptych of love stories set in 1911, 1966 and 2005, seems like a natural for distribution. But like all of the

master's movies, it takes time and lowered sales fees to make a deal. After the film's New York fest debut, critic Michael Koresky wrote in Reverse Shot, "All three stories become the tale of Taiwan, a palimpsest on which universal themes stand in for the reality of a single island as it's passed from one imperialist ruler to the next--the history of his country written as a triad of minimalist romances. . . . And for once, Hou made me not just understand it but feel it."

### **"The Wayward Cloud"**

Directed by Tsai Ming-liang

Taiwan, narrative

Track record: Berlin, Winner Silver Bear and FIPRESCI Prize; Toronto; Chicago International

Lowdown: Along with Hou and Sukorov, Tsai Ming-liang belongs to that category of rarefied auteurs that is much beloved by critics, and often totally oblique to the rest of the world. "The Wayward Cloud" may not change that reputation, but this surreal, pornographic musical paean to alienation -- set during a blistering heatwave, where watermelons are used as both sexual prop and source of water -- is a memorable entry in the director's oeuvre. And with a painful, even heart-rending climax, it's also one of the most shockingly emotional.

### HONORABLE MENTIONS:

#### **"Mary"**

Directed by Abel Ferrara

U.S./Italy, narrative

Track record: Venice, Special Jury Prize; Deauville; Toronto; San Sebastian

Lowdown: Bad-boy Ferrara shocked Venice with his surprisingly heartfelt contemplation of faith and faithlessness. In an indieWIRE wrap-up of Toronto, Howard Feinstein called "Mary" a masterpiece and Ferrera's "finest film in years."

#### **"Massacre"**

Directed by Monika Borgmann, Lokman Slim, Hermann Theissen

Germany/Lebanon, documentary

Track record: Berlin, FIPRESCI Prize; Cannes; Visions du Reel; IDFA; Denver International

Lowdown: In 1982, thousands of Palestinian civilians were murdered in Sabra and Shatila in just 48 hours. In this important documentary, Lebanese Christian militiamen -- who claim to have been trained by Israel - testify about their raids on Beirut's Palestinian refugee camps.

#### **"October 17, 1961"**

Directed by Alain Tasma

France, narrative

Track record: Toronto

Lowdown: If Michael Haneke's "Cache" piqued your interest in the events that lead to the murder of hundreds of Algerians in Paris, Tasma's French drama is a fast-moving human rights thriller following several characters that culminates with the massacre.

#### **"Red Doors"**

Directed by Georgia Lee

U.S., narrative

Track record: Tribeca, Best NY, NY Feature; CineVegas, Special Jury Prize; Pusan International

Lowdown: Lee's melodrama, about a suburban Chinese-American family facing generational challenges to traditional values, features a terrific cast and memorable characters. Even if the film doesn't get acquired, Lee can seek solace in the fact that CBS and Paramount Network Television are adapting the movie into a primetime soap opera.

#### **"Sir! No Sir!"**

Directed by David Ziegler

U.S., documentary

Track record: Los Angeles Film Festival; Denver International; Hamptons International

Lowdown: Ziegler's timely documentary examines the active duty soldiers and sailors who protested the Vietnam War. Reporting for indieWIRE from Denver, Mark Rabinowitz called the film an "important document and another chapter in the history of this war that is taking on even more importance in light of the current slide in popularity of the War in Iraq."

### "Tale of Cinema"

Directed by Hong Sang-soo

Korea, narrative

Track record: Cannes; New York; Vancouver

Lowdown: Called the South Korean auteur's most accessible film in years, the structurally clever love triangle focuses on a young man who believes his pathetic romantic life has been adapted into a film by another classmate.

*ABOUT THE WRITER:* **Anthony Kaufman** writes a world cinema column for indieWIRE and contributes regularly to Variety, the Village Voice, the Wall Street Journal Online, Time Out and Filmmaker Magazine.

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