

# Santa Barbara International Film Festival

## Clint Eastwood Tribute

By **Alex Henteloff**  
Special to CASA

**THE EVENING WAS A GALA AFFAIR** without being a posh or ornate extravaganza. There was a large gathering of spirited fans outside the Arlington Theatre, there to see the honoree and he did not disappoint as he came through the crowd, smiled, and spoke to some without bright lights, easy, without major hype. Inside, the place was packed for the chance to see and hear this year's Modern Master, Clint Eastwood.

The 24th Santa Barbara International Film Festival's Modern Master Award is an obvious choice. Eastwood's career has spanned 50 years beginning as a fledgling studio contract player who learned his craft on the sound stages and on the studio back lot (he learned to ride horses there) armed only with curiosity, humility, and determination. He watched and learned the craft of acting, then cinematography, editing, and directing. Clint

always cared about the work, the story, and the character. Everyone involved had a role to do and he always appreciated the communal activity.

He seemed so gentle and so accessible, hardly what one might expect of a movie star, a titan in the film industry, and yet his quiet command of the situation is clearly present at all times. Not many people can live in two worlds at once, but Clint Eastwood seems to have conquered that feat. He can participate and observe at the same time. I hope he'll someday write about his observations of people and life. He'll focus on things and we'll all go "Oh, Yeah! Why didn't I see that?"

The evening was delightfully broken up, first with a montage of clips from 36 different films he'd done followed by an easy going Q & A with Leonard Maltin, at his cheerful best. Several scenes from Clint's body of work were shown including the Sergio Leone "spaghetti westerns" (made while on hiatus from TV's *Rawhide*), the "Dirty Harry" films, his first

directorial work, *Play Misty for Me*, (Lew Wasserman at Universal said o.k., but no salary), *Paint Your Wagon* (he winced recalling his singing in the musical) and finishing with recent works: *Million Dollar Baby*, *Letters from Iwo Jima*, *Mystic River*, *Changeling*, and *Gran Torino*.

His sculpted good looks and his affable charm haven't been dulled by time; they've been enhanced, I think. His work just gets better as this simple, good student of life continues to enrich ours as he continues to put all of himself into every project he touches. His best advice: surround yourself with good people, and it works out. Clint bought *The Unforgiven* in the '80's and



Clint Eastwood, 2009 SBIFF Modern Master interviewed by Leonard Maltin

Photo by John Palminteri

"put it in a drawer until I was old enough to play the part" ('98). Location is important, too, "it's another major character."

Asked if he'll make more movies, he's 78 now, he paused, then quipped "I still got a few rabbits in the hat. You can't get rid of me that easily." He smiled, winked, and then he went off to an adoring standing ovation. It was a memorable night!

## My Smorgasbord at the Festival

Reviewed by **Alex Henteloff**  
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**THE LIFE AND CAREER OF KIRAN BEDI**, India's first and highest ranking female police officer is the subject of a superb documentary *Yes Madam, Sir*.

Australian filmmaker Megan Doneman has produced a gem. It doesn't hurt that her central character is a charismatic symbol of almost Joan of Ark proportions. "Determination" and "focus" are two words that Bedi uses herself and they are so true.

The second of four daughters in her family, her father secretly schooled his girls, against the ancient traditions and taboos of India. Bedi, with a dazzling, infectious smile (an added secret weapon, at least for the film audience) and a warm and strong voice, became an instant celebrity when she stopped a mob single handedly while the rest of the police force retreated from the scene. Asked "Were you scared?" she replied "No" and "Why not?" was followed by "Because I am very focused."

We see her taking on an assignment of running a notorious prison with 9,000 inmates, built to house 1,000 and bring them meditation and learning as she decided this was not a place to house bad people, but a place to rehabilitate them so they could return to society successfully. Even winning the

Asian Nobel Peace Prize cannot get her the prize she covets most, Chief of Police.

Interwoven in her story are more successes and glimpses into her family life. She has a daughter whom we see, often with cream covering her face, in delightful, playful confrontations, an understanding husband whom she rarely sees, and her parents, who remain influential throughout their lives.

A stirring, inspirational film, I highly recommend it.

*Before Tomorrow* is a Canadian film exploring life on the frozen Arctic tundra. A small nurturing Inuit community sends an elder, a grandmother, and her very young grandson to forage for food. They return to a quiet horror. The entire group has been wiped out, victims of smallpox.

An opening narrative proclaims "The darkness is friend to the light," and this theme is played out in soft, meditative images as we almost participate in their survival education. Through caring stories and songs sung and told to the boy, the elder woman comforts and instructs the child and guides them both through several adventures to eventual safety. The scenery is stark and stunningly beautiful and the tensions hold firmly as the story unfolds. The lead actors, grandma and grandson in real life, together with fine cinematography and a firm, but gentle pacing, make this a fine film.

*On the Road to Tel Aviv* is a short, taught, emotional thriller, *On The Road To Tel Aviv* is a terrific surprise. Written and directed by Khen Shalem with excellent fluidity, this perfectly orchestrated 18 minute piece flushes out the heart and soul of terror: fear; and how fear changes people. Nothing can be the 'normal' that existed before terror. Normal now is mistrust, paranoia, desperate behavior scratching for survival. All this and love jockey for position as a bus readies to depart for Tel Aviv. A mesmerizing cast is led by lovely Orit Fisher (also producer), who is aglow and in love, not too concerned; Hanna Laszlow, a mother frightened for the safety of

her two daughters; and Amos Levi, the bus driver, trying to assure all that no terrorist in on his bus. The film shows the anguish pervading the Israel/Palestinian problems in a way that hits home for us in the aftermath of 9/11. Whatever happened to 'normal'?

*Pray The Devil Back To Hell* is a strong cry for peace and another tribute to the power and tenacity of women! Proving that getting together to conquer is better than to divide and conquer, this 72 minute documentary captures the powerful and surprising grassroots alliance during Liberia's civil war where Christian and Muslim women joined forces to bring government and the warlords to halt the violence by withholding sex from the men until a real peace process can be achieved. The remarkable women show, with strength and humor, that non-violence can still prevail.

My second wave of notable films included *Inventing L.A.: the Chandlers and the Times*, an excellent capsule look at the creation of a modern dynasty, a 'city-state' bought and developed by the Chandler family to their liking: very white, very Republican, very ultra conservative (supporting the John Birch Society). From a small sleepy town, the *Times* was the major force for growth, buying up real estate and water rights to ensure a lock on progress their way. All family, all business, and all private until the forth generation Publisher, Otis Chandler, took over and brought changes that turned the *Times* into a great paper, expanding bureaus around the world and winning ten Pulitzer Prizes. At its peak it had the largest daily readership in the country. But, family friction finally brought on the sale of the paper to Sam Zell and the *Chicago Tribune Co.*, and it's been down hill since.

*They Killed Sister Dorothy* is a searing documentary about the murder of a nun in the Amazon Rainforest because she and the indigenous people with whom she lived and worked dared to stand up to lumber and cattle interests who continued to decimate the



Back: **Catherine Gee**, PR Rep/Director Asst.; **Cass Warner**, Director/Producer/Writer; and **Sean Anderson**, Co-Founder/Curator of Rumble. Front: **Clinton K. Hollister**, Co-Founder of Rumble and **Ashley Woods**, Co-Founder and Director of Rumble

Photo by priscilla@santabarbaraseen.com

forest, against the law. The guilty were found, brought to trial, and the drama continues...

*The Brothers Warner* is as well made movie business doc as I've seen. It is more than that. It is a rich family portrait not only of a Hollywood success, but of that special American something that relies on freedom to create, to imagine, to inspire, and be inspired. These four immigrant brothers saw a nickelodeon show when they were kids, pooled their nickels to start their own showings, and went on to create a studio with a social conscience. Harry Warner said, "It's not the challenge of dollars, it's the challenge of ideals, and ideas... If the producers see only the dollar, I believe, those production efforts will fail." Cass Warner, Harry's granddaughter, has created a multi-layered gift to history and to her family.

**ALEX HENTELOFF**, a member of the Academy of Television Arts & Sciences with over 40 years experience in the theatre, has spent most of his professional career as an actor. Email him at [papaalex@verizon.net](mailto:papaalex@verizon.net).



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*Pray The Devil Back to Hell*: Liberian women demonstrate at the American Embassy in Monrovia at the height of the civil war in July 2003

Photo by Pewee Flomoku