

Cannes: don't be jealous, says Ruby, I am
suffering for you
by: Ruby Boukabou

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*It is mid festival frenzy and senses of reality
have now been clearly warped (paradox not
intended). Many of the circulating Australians
are well in the swirling bubble (except
evidentially myself, being a clear and lucid
journalist, avid for the truth on your behalf).*

Cannes Film Festival claims the second largest
media coverage in the world. It is mass delirium,
with celebrities streaming like the champagne, a
hubbub of high profile rendez-vous and constant,
enticing, impossible-to-say-no-to parties in
beach terraces and villas (croissants served at
sunrise at the Back Up films do last night).
This is from the senses of a Cannes virgin.

Some of it you see on cable television. The red
carpets ceremonies, the giant screens, screaming
mobs of tourists, passing Ferraris, teams of
cutely uniformed French policemen and thousands
of black ties and stilettos flicker with camera
flashes by professional and self appointing
local paparazzi.

Some of it amounts to the strangest way of doing
business in the world. For many of the
Australians, full days of dizzying amounts of
career altering meetings are punctuated with
races up and down beachside La Croisette between
the Screen Australia office, the zoo-like market
and the chic Palais, passing a circus of buskers
and promoters and pamphlet mafias and a big
shiny merry-go-round. Fortunately, as experts of
pounding the pavements in the heat, we Aussie's
have a head start on the Russians.

A break for 'micro douche' (quick shower) is
possible; then it's frocking up for dinner
meetings, rose shmoozing at the glitzy Majestic
and fine open terrace of the Grand. Mobile phone
companies smile as the evening party plans begin
and it's all about door lists and pass words and
secret codes. Chinese whispers and tactics;
strategizing and sheer boldness are utilized to
gain entry to 'The' party each night as much as
the actual invites; this is how it works.

A couple of nights ago (or was it last night? They are melding), I was with Elise McLeod (Australian film and theatre director in Paris doing French/ Australian co-production) and Catherine Jarvis (Australian film director in Berlin doing German/Australian co-prod) outside the Endeavour talent agent party and bumped into Julie Archer from Screen Australia. She groaned drily that the bunch of guys standing next to us were just walking past and overheard her relaying the secret entrance pass word to some Australians, so jumped in.

In any case, by now the Endeavour is no longer enough and Global has become the chant of the Croisette. But this is a mere speed bump for Catherine, a seasoned gatecrasher, who had prepared in advance and was equipped with the name of the very rich host. The crowd divides like the Red Sea and in seconds we are under the purple lights with blueberry vodkas and awakening hips.

For a moment, this all becomes an experiment in cultural anthropology. The French love their codes, the ins-and-outs between the different worlds, and it's a joy to watch the outsiders struggle. On top of this the players dive in and out of the universes of the actual films themselves, which is like being in CS Lewis's 'The Magician's Nephew'.

Once you crack the code and you are in and appropriately humoured (light, quick and on your feet), there is another dimension.

The parties themselves are surreal but many of us have also become surreal, sometimes a parody of ourselves (if you've enjoyed a Spiegel tent season, that's a sip of all this). There was a point a few days back when it seemed a few of us switched into sit com characters and in a whirl of writers, directors, producers and actors, the running gags, one liners and punch lines are good. The best moments are when there's a faux pas at a bar, you crack a joke (which falls out of your mouth suspiciously as if it has been written and you're just playing the role), it's returned, there is some verbal parrying and next minute they whip out a card, a micro business chat is had and a deal in the process. I have landed a role for a friend, seen someone asked on Jury for film festival on spur and hands are shaken to film-esque exclamations. Catherine

admits to having secured \$50 000 AUS from a UK distributor for a film project via a midnight dance floor whisper. "You get a sense that everything is possible and you don't want it to end," she tells me.

So what's with all the party talk? It's still business; but business in a networking, having fun way. Stuff happens when everything is out of context. The less you try, the easier it is and it is here that some of us get the film offers, leads, stories, subjects and roles we're looking for or didn't know we were. Smoke and mirrors? Yep but if smoke can make you cough and mirrors reflect the absurdities and the truths, then it's as real as well, you.

For the stars themselves it must be overwhelming; Tarantino's dance on the red carpet yesterday was a tension relief (or focus pull - didn't see Brad much; then again, it is not the first time I have photographed only his back so not surprised). Have been bumping into Warwick Thornton, Kath Shelper and crew out and about who are looking happy but dazy (been boated constantly between dinners and red carpet sessions and screenings and interviews and parties on jetlag).

This piece was written by Ruby on adrenalin between interviews, films, parties and an upsetting stalker experience.

[Editor: more from Ruby on her own behalf, with Australian cast on www.rubytv.net]

Ruby Boukabou

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