

Film Close-Up: Francis Ford Coppola

by Joey_Berlin

"Youth Without Youth" is an artistically and intellectually ambitious return for Francis Ford Coppola, after his 10-year absence from the director's chair. Based on a novel by Romanian author Mircea Eliade, Coppola's latest might strike casual moviegoers as a head scratcher, though in its own literate and lyrical way "Youth Without Youth" is as powerful as anything he has ever done.

FRANCIS FORD COPPOLA - Legendary film maker Francis Ford Coppola gives direction on the set of 'Youth Without Youth.' CNS Photo courtesy of Cos Aelenei. The fantasy drama stars Tim Roth as an aging professor in Romania who is contemplating suicide when he is struck by lightning. Suddenly he is regenerated, 40 years younger and with an even sharper mind. But he must choose between pursuing knowledge or the love of his life.

Coppola is not only the creator of the "Godfather" series and "Apocalypse Now," but the 68-year-old cinematic genius is also the reigning patriarch of an extended family that includes such film notables as Nicholas Cage, Sophia Coppola and Jason Schwartzman.

In 2009, Coppola will return to theaters with "Tetro," a film about a combative and artistic Italian family.

Q: "Youth Without Youth" poses a question about which is more important: love or knowledge. Looking at your life now, what is the answer for you?

A: Well you know the answer. We all know the answer. Love is more important.

Q: The film takes us into some deep intellectual waters and I am sure that I did not understand it all.

A: Well, but that's not really true. You totally understood it all. The difficulty is that movies, like life, are pretty simple. I mean you wake up in the morning, have your coffee, you've got a problem, whatever your life is. It's very simple and it's a narrative. But at the same time, once in a while, you might think, "God. What does this all mean?" Or, "What's going to happen? My father died, my grandfather died. What really happens with that?" Or, "I had this dream last night and is that really my reality, or is this more mundane life the reality?" I think the problem is that you've been sort of trained that a movie has to only be this simple narrative experience which you've really seen before, because you have to admit when you go to the movies today you've seen them all before.

Q: It is true that the basic storyline is easy enough to follow.

A: It's like a fairy tale and I'm sure you understood it when you watched it. What you didn't maybe understand is what all the implications were underneath it. But those are the implications that are underneath your own life. What does it all mean? What's going to happen when you go? Are you really going to be gone or are you going to have the pleasure of being part of your family, or at least when you die, are you going to see that your kids are well? So that's sort of the other level of "Youth Without Youth," that you didn't understand because you're used to conventional movies where you don't have that other level.

Q: You have described "Youth Without Youth" as a more personal film for you. What interested you most about it?

A: All the films now that I want to make are sort of like questions. And when I make the film, the film is the answer. And I learned a lot on this movie about our wonderful human consciousness which we all have, though it's hard to describe what it is because it's not like we have a little voice in our head saying, "I'm me. I'm Francis." It also has emotion and it has memory and it has all these other aspects. How would you explain your consciousness? But I was interested in consciousness and I came to the conclusion when I finished this movie that I understand more that our fantastic human consciousness comes not only from the complexity of our brain and bodies all wired up in all those ways, but the infusion of language. Language was the little flame that enables us to be, in the way we are. So that was just something I got out of working on this film, so that I feel it was worth the effort I made.

Q: Are you concerned that some of it could go over people's heads?

A: I tried very hard to make the film very classical and clear so it doesn't have all that weird cutting around, it's telling the story very straight-ahead. It's my intention that if you ever want to see the film again, you'll get more out of it and it'll be more enjoyable. It's fun to see it a second time. You know, look at "Apocalypse Now." When that came out everyone thought it was the weirdest thing on earth. And then they thought it was the greatest war film, up until Brando and then it fell apart. Then years later they said, "Wow, the part about Brando was the greatest existential thing but the war film before that was terrible." So movies change as time goes by and you see it over again. I think that's one of the jobs of literature, of film literature.

Â© Copley News Service

Film Close-Up: Francis Ford Coppola by Joey_Berlin