

# BUTLER'S 10 TO WATCH

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No, I haven't seen every film at KIFF this year. But after several weekends holed up with the DVD player, these titles (in no particular order) stick in my memory as particularly watchable:

■ **"Begging for Billionaires"** (5:30 p.m. Saturday): Philip Klein's locally filmed muckraker uses the Power & Light District to make his claim that eminent domain — intended to allow governments to take private property for the public good (roadways, bridges, parks) — has been twisted by the rich and powerful.

Though the interviewees are generally calm and rational, you can sense filmmaker Klein trying not to explode. Some of his illustrations are iffy — a man talks of feeling violated after the city razed one of his houses, but he could have avoided that by bringing the building up to code.

Still, this one's aflame with righteous indignation.

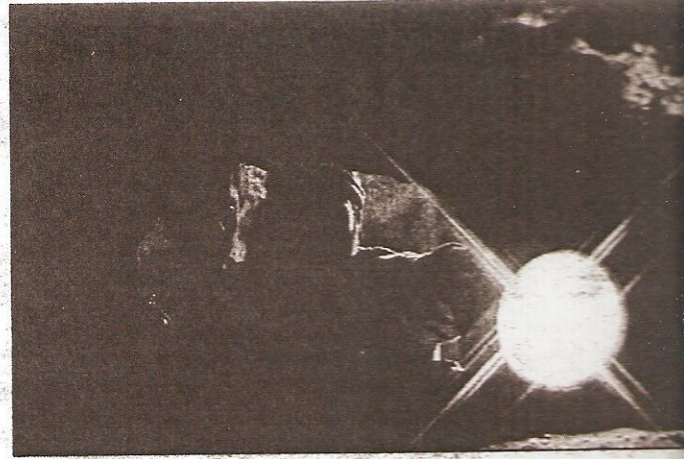
■ **"Living Dark: The Story of Ted the Caver"** (8:30 p.m. Friday): Yeah, it gets silly in the last reel. But for most of its running time this horror entry builds an atmosphere of nearly unbearable suspense and dread. Based on the internationally popular "Ted the Caver" Internet legend, this well-mounted effort follows two brothers who explore a long-hidden cave on their late father's wooded property. They discover ... well, have you seen "The Descent"? KIFF's guilty pleasure of 2009.

■ **"Out in the Silence"** (8:30 p.m. Saturday): When gay D.C. resident Joe Wilson exchanged vows with his longtime lover, he sent a wedding announcement to the paper in his working class Pennsylvania home town. The intolerant response prompted him to return to his old stomping grounds to confront homophobia, defend a persecuted gay teen and get the ACLU involved.

One of the film's most satisfying segments involves Wilson's growing friendship with a fundamentalist preacher who, once he actually knows a homosexual, realizes things aren't quite as black and white as he thought.

■ **"The Other Side of Paradise"** (5:30 p.m. Friday): In this quirky Texas road movie a young woman photographer (Arianne Martin), her writer fiancé (John Elliott) and her just-out-of-prison brother (Frank Mosley) go searching for her mother, who abandoned the children as infants. "Quirky" can sometimes mean "ridiculous," but here the direction and performances rarely stray from the plausible. As in a confrontation between our travelers and a rural redneck who catches them skinny-dipping in his above-ground pool, the film walks a fine line between the satiric and the serious. Offbeat and amusing.

■ **"The Good Soldier"** (7:20 p.m. Wednesday): This is one incendiary movie. When you turn somebody into a well-trained killer, how do you turn off the killer part of their personality? That's the question



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asked by Lexy Lovell and Michael Uys in their clear-eyed, heartbreaking documentary. Employing the experiences of veterans of several American wars, "Good Soldier" is implicitly anti-war, but not didactically so. At heart, it's a rueful acknowledgement that when you put young men in stressful, violent situations, they're not always going to behave according to the Geneva Convention.

■ **"Lefty"** (7:25 p.m. Sept. 24): My favorite drama of the fest, Todd Looby's coming-of-age film is about 30-something guys who have been slow to grow up. Danny (Thomas Madden), an artist from Colorado, and Fudd (Billy Phelan), who just returned from service in Iraq, are reunited in their old Chicago neighborhood with their high-school running buddies. There's much drinking, smoking and partying, but beneath the ribaldry is a serious look at lost boys finally forced to come to grips with their mortality. The acting — usually the soft spot in indie films — is excellent. The movie has a genuinely lived-in feel.

■ **"House of Numbers"** (3:10 p.m. Sunday): HIV causes AIDS, right? Not so fast, says Brent W. Leung's documentary, which, among other things, holds that

HIV diagnostic techniques don't work, that AIDS could be blamed on other things (like the once-common use of "popper" by gays) and that many of today's HIV-fighting drugs are more harm than good.

The film could use some streamlining — you practically need a flow chart to follow the ideas percolating here — but you'll come out with at least some skepticism about how the issue has been framed by the medical (and political) community. "House of Numbers" could be right, or it could be dangerous pseudo-science. Either way, it's thought-provoking watching.

■ **"Virtually a Virgin"** (5 p.m. Saturday): The main reason to see Péter Bacsó's Hungarian dramedy is for the lead performance of Julia Ubrankovics as an impoverished 18-year-old sent into prostitution by her no-good boyfriend. Sounds grim but weirdly isn't. That's because red-haired, funny-faced, feebly bodied Ubrankovics radiates good-natured innocence unmatched since Giulietta Masina in Fellini's "Nights of Cabiria."

■ **"Vincent: A Life in Color"** (12:30 p.m. Saturday): If you've taken one of those Chicago bus tours you may have seen V