

A Love Letter

Il Postino (The Postman) • Miramax

• Laserdisc & VHS



"Poetry doesn't belong to those who wrote it, but to those who need it." The emotional weight this line carries applies not only to the story, but also to the circumstances in which this film was made. The little Italian film that hit big is actually a tragic poem in itself; its noble star, Massimo Troisi, struggled with ill health during the making of his beloved movie, only to die the day after it was completed. From this sad irony comes a tale of true-life affirmation. It is a romance, not just about people, but about words. Troisi plays the bumbling, simple postman, Mario, who befriends the real-life erudite poet, Pablo Neruda (Phillipe Noiret), who had been exiled to an Italian isle in the 1950s. Neruda takes Mario under his eloquent wing to teach him how to speak, how to feel, and how to make others feel for him, particularly the bombshell of the town, Beatrice.

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While the love affair between Mario and Beatrice is tenuously based on a sensual game of foosball and some borrowed words, the friendship between the poet and the postman is rich and realistic. *Il Postino's* charm stems as much from its sentiments as from its flickering soundtrack. And it never drops to the contrived saccharine level that many Hollywood movies exploit. "Better than any explanation is the experience of feelings that poetry can reveal to a nature open enough to understand it," says Neruda in character. And the film succeeds by naturally exploring the emotions accessible through love, poetry, and finally, loss.

—Rebecca Kraus

I'M DANCING AS FAST AS I CAN!: A SUNDANCE DIARY

"Everybody is very angry and talking on cell phones!"—Anthony Barrile, star of Sundance Film Festival contender *Kiss Me Guido*.

Sunday, January 19, 3 p.m.: The quiet ski haven of Park City, Utah, is taken over every year by hundreds of cell phones, producers, filmmakers, publicists, and an array of stars big and small. They arrive here like so many carpet baggers to hawk their wares. Whether it's a film or a star or a cool Sundance T-shirt, commerce is in the crisp winter air.

There is no doubt about it; despite the somewhat comical faux Hollywood setting, Sundance determines what films will be hot up to a year before most of us even hear of them.

Monday, January 20, 3 p.m.: Getting a hotel is impossible, so I wind up staying with a group of folks who have a film at Sundance. Anthony Barrile, the star of *Kiss Me Guido*; manager/producer David Miller; their friend, Nicola Joss (who is a personal assistant to a legendary rock star); and I share a huge condo with a fireplace and jacuzzi. All the phones are tied up with calls to both coasts, faxes, and incoming cell phone calls to the jacuzzi. Sundance is Cannes on Snow. After covering the Cannes Film Festival for more than 10 years, I had to make the adjustment from croissants on the Croisette to pizza in Park City.

Tuesday, January 21, 8 a.m.: Last night, I dined with a journalist pal from France's *Le Monde*. Robert Redford himself (who heads up the fest) walked into Zoom (the restaurant he owns), and I swear it was like the E.F. Hutton commercial. The loud, boisterous eatery went silent as people looked on, gape-jawed.

Wednesday, January 22, 4:40 p.m.: The Sundance Channel is a must-hit spot. There is free Starbucks coffee, and since that's the drug of choice, everybody stops by. Barbra Streisand's kid, Jason Gould, after spending his life avoiding members of the press, is actually courting them for his short film called *Inside Out*.

Official Festival Greeting:

"How are you?" "Great [finger pointing], now that you're here!"—True Hollywood schmooz moment with PR agent on Main Street. He didn't stop to elaborate.

Thursday, January 23, 2 a.m.: *Kiss Me Guido* was shot in 26 days in May with a budget of around \$500,000. Most of the film's stars, the producers, and writer/director Tony Vitale have pounced on Park City with one



Photo: Michael Castner

Left to right: Anthony, Nicola, and David do the Sundance shuffle.

"OK, who ordered the cabaret?"

object in mind: sell the film. However, many in the group can't get tickets to their own premiere. They can't do any TV interviews at the press headquarters (The Claim Jumper Bar), because a TV crew unplugged the fridge to power their lights, and all the meat spoiled. Bet it was *Hard Copy*! Then there's the fact that Barrile's publicist was hit by a car and put out of commission. The *Guido* gang, however, is blessed by a buzz that was started by

the likes of director John Waters and critics Roger Ebert and Janet Maslin.

"Hey man, you'll have to excuse me. I've got a lot of Jack and Coke in me."—Producer at William Morris party after repeating, "I love you man" one too many times.

Saturday, January 25, 11:30 p.m.: Among the films that really stand out are *Myth of Fingerprints*, a tale of yet another dysfunctional family co-produced by and starring *ER* hunk Noah Wyle. It's like a fine wine. The film adaptation of Terence McNally's *Love! Valour! Compassion!* stars *Seinfeld's* Jason Alexander. It's about eight gay men who spend three weekends at a friend's country house and how their lives change forever. It's about love and the human spirit. It's also about Jason Alexander in a tutu, but enough of that!

"OK, who ordered the cabaret?"—Waitress who has not yet passed her sommelier exams.

Sunday, January 26, 6 p.m.: I learned several things at Sundance: never let your jacket clash with the color of your cell phone, never make a promise over drinks to screen a film at 7 a.m., and never say "God, that really sucked" in any language. Some people in Utah do speak French!

—Michael Castner