

## Breillat's 'Mistress,' Dance Marathon, Lang Lang: S.F. Picks

By Stephen West



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April 26 (Bloomberg) -- **Catherine Breillat's** "The Last Mistress," with a ferocious performance by wild woman Asia Argento, opened the **San Francisco International Film Festival** on Thursday night with that staple of the arthouse, a sexy French romance.

Argento steals every scene as a willful, lustful, frustrated mistress in 1835 who can't let go of her boyfriend of 10 years, even after he marries and moves away. Against a background of lush period costumes and grand Parisian and coastal locations, Argento bares all for her art, creating a portrait of a woman who's so passionate and obsessive that it's scary.

In an onstage discussion after the screening at the gilded Castro Theatre, Breillat had nothing but praise for her edgy star ("She is amazingly generous in front of a camera," she said through an interpreter).

Breillat identifies with the title character, she admitted.

"I was born a woman, and to do what I had to do I had to be provocative."

The festival will present 94 feature films and 83 shorts over its two-week run through May 8, at three principal theaters in San Francisco and one across the bay in Berkeley. For a complete schedule, see <http://www.siff.org>.

### Dance Fever

Whirling dervishes, sexy duets and '60s hippies gave the **San Francisco Ballet's** New Works Festival a rousing start this week. The two-week festival presents world premieres of 10 new works by major-league choreographers including **Mark Morris**, **Christopher Wheeldon** and **Paul Taylor**.

First up was "Fusion" by the company's resident choreographer and rising star Yuri Possokhov. Four men dressed in white Turkish costumes, with billowing pants, wide belts and pillbox hats, do a modern take on a folk dance, then face off against four other men dressed in tight blue-gray T-shirts and pants. When one of the blue team's four women is held hostage by the Turks, there's a whiff of tension in the piece -- Middle East tribesmen versus the Jets from "West Side Story."

Wheeldon's "Within the Golden Hour" dispenses with anything resembling a plot, celebrating instead the rapture of the duet. The sculptural forms created by groups of four to six dancers seem static, yet when three featured pairs get their duets, the work soars emotionally. The women drape themselves across their partners, and you believe these people are in love.

The finale, Taylor's "Changes," tries to revive San Francisco's 1960s hippie era and ends up just making an embarrassment of itself. With recorded music by the Mamas and the Papas and other pop groups of the period, the talented dancers are reduced to mimicking the Mashed Potato and other forgettable dances, and when "California Dreamin'" backs the final section, Taylor runs the risk of being arrested for pandering.

Program A and two others play in repertory through May 6 at the War Memorial Opera House, 301 Van Ness Ave.; +1-415-865-2000, <http://www.sfballet.org>.

Lang Lang

Next door, the San Francisco Symphony rolls out an all-Haydn program this weekend, while hotshot Chinese pianist **Lang Lang** appears for one night only next week on an all-Beethoven card.

**Bernard Labadie** will conduct the orchestra in Haydn's Te Deum for the Empress Maria Therese and the Mass in Time of War -- both choral works -- as well as the ``Military" Symphony No. 100.

The 25-year-old Lang Lang will bring his trademark theatrical style to Beethoven's ``Egmont" Overture and Piano Concertos Nos. 1 and 4.

``On stage, you need to show all your love and passion," he said earlier this month in an interview with Bloomberg News. ``It's not just playing the notes, but really feeling the action inside the music. You must have a conversation with the score."

The all-Haydn program runs through Sunday and Lang Lang plays April 29 at Davies Symphony Hall, 201 Van Ness Ave.; +1-415-864-6000; <http://www.sfsymphony.org>.

(**Stephen West** writes for Bloomberg News. The opinions expressed are his own.)

To contact the reporter on this story: Stephen West in San Francisco at [smwest@bloomberg.net](mailto:smwest@bloomberg.net).

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