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‘Holy Motors’ defies traditional logic and expectation, offering strange delights instead

PUBLISHED ON JUNE 19, 2012 BY [TOPE](#) IN [HEADLINES](#), [REVIEWS](#), [SPOTLIGHT](#)

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Holy Motors

Directed by Leos Carax
Written by Leos Carax
France, 2012

Holy Motors is one of those films one has to be very wary of. Trying to explain and rationalise it could end up seeming like a close-minded attempt at imposing undue limits on a progressive piece of art. Yet to eschew any hint of underlying theme or meaning, to take at face value the seeming randomness and ambiguity of each vignette and – yes – to cherish the movie *precisely* because it is *bonkers* and *wonderfully*

incoherent, this might bring the full wrath of Pauline Kael upon you; Ms Kael, who accused arthouse audiences of confusing clutter for complexity and lack of clarity for ambiguity. So it may be that the best course of action – the safest – is to embrace both approaches on the assumption that the random and the purposeful are not mutually exclusive, an assumption that might be crazy enough to be true. Which begs the question: exactly how random is *Holy Motors*?

After a quiet (and personally tragic) 10 years, Leos Carax returned to Cannes and feature filmmaking to suspiciously delirious acclaim from the critical community, so much so that the competition Jury was actually questioned at the post awards ceremony press conference on its failure to award *Holy Motors* a prize, as though this had always been a given. On seeing the film there is admittedly evidence of directorial finesse, and you wonder whether Carax had been in reasonable contention for the Prix de la mise en scène for best director, which ended up going to maverick Mexican Carlos Reygadas. Honestly, for a film of this ilk to feel like more than just a series of pranks is kind of a minor miracle. But whether the real miracle is in fact Denis Lavant’s extraordinary chameleonic performance is a very debatable point which shan’t be gotten into just yet if ever.



The uniquely-visaged Lavant plays a character known to us as Monsieur Oscar, a title used with fondness and care by his chauffeur Céline (played by the oddly sexy septuagenarian Edith Scob), who drives him around in a gleaming white stretch limousine that happens to not be the only one drifting through the streets of Paris at any given time. *Holy Motors* is essentially a day in the life of Monsieur Oscar who it seems works for (or is represented by) the titular entity Holy Motors, briefly revealed to be some sort of performance-oriented group/organisation/company about which little is said or explained. He is picked up in the morning by Céline and driven to numerous appointments, all of which involve Oscar donning elaborate guises and engaging in acts and activities so far removed in nature that at one point reality seems to creak under the weight of the madness. Interestingly, there is never any obvious or definable client, simply a service. In a cabin decked out like a miniature version of a backstage dressing room complete with lightbulb-lined mirror, Oscar reverently applies his makeup, solemnly even. Accredit hunchbacked beggarwoman. Leader of a truly rocking accordion-led band jamming in a cathedral. Underworld assassin. A beastly satyr-like creature with an indiscriminate appetite and some interesting ideas on beauty and sex. Lavant astonishes with his range, but mainly his *commitment*. Leos Carax throws absurdity after absurdity at him and he leaps into each scene with barely a hint of irony. He anchors the film, there is no doubt. Also solid is Edith Scob, who peppers Céline with an air of unhinged volatility kept well in check by her diligent professionalism. But her moment of weirdness arrives at the very end, before the much talked about final scene in the garage of the Holy Motors building. Think anthropomorphised automobiles. Yes, this film is odd and very playful and plenty entertaining, if one chooses to be entertained that is. Sadly, unless you are Leos Carax or one predisposed to a certain way of thinking, dragging logic and rationality into the theatre will only hinder your ability to be tickled, shocked and heartbroken by this exercise in no-holds-barred creativity and roguish depravity, one that cycles through cinematic genres which it manages to warp and blend at the same time.



So it is a touch romantic, the idea of approaching the film as nothing more than weirdly attractive creative chunder. Yet if you pay any decent amount of attention to the film there is the definite whiff or an underlying theme, however slight. And, if you had this feeling from the get-go, a crucial scene somewhere midway through the picture would set this feeling like cement. Monsieur Oscar is visited in his limo by a besuited gentleman with a nasty facial blemish, very reminiscent of a sadistically inflexible corporate gimp from a David Lynch film. There is an exchange of words, the gentleman questioning Oscar’s relentless pursuit of his craft, of his performances. “The beauty of the act,” Oscar replies. The gentleman references the Eye-of-the-Beholder Theory of beauty, only to cruelly question what place beauty has in the absence of a beholder. Absence. It’s a chilling moment in retrospect, for whatever reason; perhaps for many reasons.

Is *Holy Motors* a horror film about the death of cinema? Is it a film about the passing of a certain *type* of artistic expression? Are the fleet and crew of Holy Motors dedicated to the act of performance in a world where a willing audience is for whatever reason nowhere to be found, such that the performer and the audience become one and the same, performing for themselves? The pathos and longsuffering that quickly reveals itself in Oscar resembles the weary stoicism of a lonely sentry manning a desert fort fast becoming buried in the sands of obsolescence. In fact the few “colleagues” he encounters seem to be further gone than he is with regards to their waning resilience. Kylie Minogue is quite respectable as a colleague and an ex-flame of Oscar’s, and they wallow in each other’s company in a disused shopping mall prior to her next appointment, a very fateful appointment at that. And yes, she sings a song, and it’s kind of haunting. There is an earlier scene in which Oscar plays/is a father picking up his teenage daughter from a party. After she admits to having spent most of the night taking refuge in the bathroom Oscar lambasts her, decrying her wimpy inability to make herself known, rebuking her for her – *stage fright*. In retrospect, who is Oscar addressing? His daughter, the girl playing his daughter, or all those who have deserted the art that he day-in, day-out keeps alive? This is of course on the assumption that she is not a real girl to whom Oscar is a ‘real’ father. It is a fascinating uncertainty. But to hell with all this grand hyperbole and speculation. To these theories Leos Carax – I suspect – would probably give a taciturn reply and a drag on his cigarette. Which may very well be a deserved response. Perhaps *Holy Motors* is not an elegy or a requiem, but a celebration and a defiant middle finger to the haters. Maybe that is how it is best appreciated: as a celebratory fuck-you.



The presence of Leos Carax at the beginning of the film might be of interest to directorial cameo trivia buffs, in an otherwise inexplicable scene which only adds to the idea of *Holy Motors* being in some way a comment on cinema. Funnily this is possibly one of the most perplexing scenes in the film, maybe because it feels the most symbolic. Or does it only feel symbolic because of Leos Carax’s being there? Who knows. One scene that will go down in the annals of The Truly Bizarre for sure is the satyr sequence. Eva Mendes cameos as – Eva Mendes? In any case, she plays a stunning celebrity stolen from a photo shoot by Monsieur Oscar’s bearded creature and taken to its lair in the bowels of the Paris sewer system. What happens next is by turns creepy, embarrassing, funny and politically provocative in a completely unexpected way. What does it all mean? Is this even a valid question? All this will no doubt be much discussed in the days to come, as will the film as a whole. This is a near certainty. Love it or loathe it or somewhere in between, *Holy Motors* will dare you to forget it.

- Temitope Ogundare



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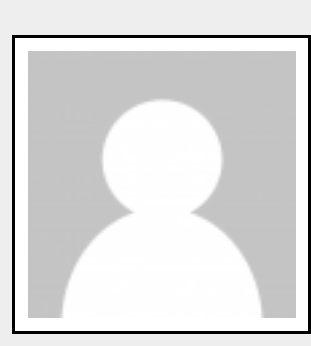
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Nigerian-Australian Sydney-based med student, film enthusiast and fledgling writer. Also a soccer fan and filmmaker in-utero.

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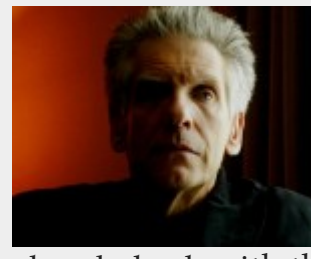
PUBLISHED ON JUNE 20, 2012 BY SIMON HOWELL



Kate’s off in distant places, so the ‘cast’s format gets shaken up a bit this week. In lieu of the usual Week in TV, Simon invites Adam Kempenaar of Filmspotting fame and Justine Smith of the Sound on Sight film ... [\[Read the Rest\]](#)

Sound on Sight Radio #324: David Cronenberg, Pt. 4 (‘Cosmopolis’ / ‘Spider’)

PUBLISHED ON JUNE 19, 2012 BY SIMON HOWELL



Our resident favorite filmmaker, Canada’s own David Cronenberg, has been busy lately. We got his Freud/Jung historical biopic A Dangerous Method less than 12 months ago, and he’s already back with the sure-to-be-divisive Cosmopolis, a very talky Don DeLillo adaptation ... [\[Read the Rest\]](#)

‘Abraham Lincoln: Vampire Hunter’ delivers what the title promises, and nothing more

PUBLISHED ON JUNE 21, 2012 BY JOSH SPIEGEL



Abraham Lincoln: Vampire Hunter Directed by Tim Bramekmetov Written by Seth Grahame-Smith USA, 2012 Abraham Lincoln: Vampire Hunter is a film whose ambitions stop at its admittedly forthright title—you will indeed see Honest Abe hunting down bloodsucking vampires before and ... [\[Read the Rest\]](#)

Sketchy Episode 20 – ‘Richard’s Back!... and other stuff’

PUBLISHED ON JUNE 21, 2012 BY RYAN CLAGG



Richard returns to the show this week through the internet. We all talk about what he’s been up to along with some discussion about the cartoon series “Ugly Americans” and some extended thoughts on “Marvel’s The Avengers.” Have fun! This ... [\[Read the Rest\]](#)

EIFF 2012: Remake of Refn’s ‘Pusher’ deviates little and adds nothing engaging

PUBLISHED ON JUNE 21, 2012 BY JOSH SLATER-WILLIAMS



Pusher Written by Mathew Read Directed by Luis Prieto UK, 2012 1996’s Pusher launched the career of director Nicolas Winding Refn, and was followed by two sequels in the early 2000s. With some recurring characters but differing leads in each ... [\[Read the Rest\]](#)

‘Union Square’ can sometimes feel like a short film stretched and contrived into a feature

PUBLISHED ON JUNE 20, 2012 BY JUSTIN LI



Union Square Directed by Nancy Savoca Written by Nancy Savoca USA, 2011 In New York City, a shamelessly flamboyant Lucy (Mira Sorvino) arrives in Manhattan from the Bronx, hoping to escape a cascade of emotional problems. In search of an ... [\[Read the Rest\]](#)

Trailer: Be kind, watch ‘V/H/S’

PUBLISHED ON JUNE 20, 2012 BY BILL ARCENEUAUX



V/H/S Written by Radio Silence, David Bruckner, Glenn McQuaid, Ti West, Joe Swanberg and Adam Wingard Directed by Radio Silence, David Bruckner, Glenn McQuaid, Nicholas Tecosky and Ti West USA, 2012 In the found footage genre, there are only a ... [\[Read the Rest\]](#)

‘The Loneliest Planet’ traverses through the sweeping green hills of estrangement

PUBLISHED ON JUNE 20, 2012 BY TOPE



The Loneliest Planet Directed by Julia Loktev Written by Julia Loktev 2011, USA, Germany Music can’t quite do it. Paintings can try. Literature can and often does, but it ends up being unwieldy and obsessive. Theatre? Yes, theoretically, but unless ... [\[Read the Rest\]](#)

Video-Cast: Comic Book Storytellers – Episode #7

PUBLISHED ON JUNE 19, 2012 BY RICKY



Host Frick Weber, author of The Field on the Edge of the Woods and Star & Stripes brings you the seventh episode of his video-cast featuring more good stuff from some very talented and successful artists and writers including J. ... [\[Read the Rest\]](#)

Hey Winnipeg: Win Tickets To The Advance Screening of ‘The Intouchables’

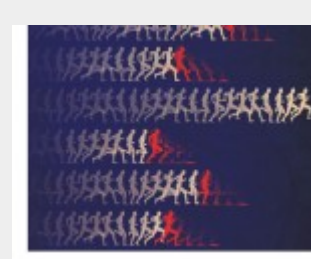
PUBLISHED ON JUNE 19, 2012 BY RICKY



Olivier Nakache and Eric Tedoiano’s fish-out-of-water-buddy-comedy Intouchables was released earlier this year in Quebec but will be released wide this week, and thanks to Alliance Films, we have ten doubles passes to give away to the advanced screening ... [\[Read the Rest\]](#)

Fan-Made Poster for ‘Logan’s Run’

PUBLISHED ON JUNE 19, 2012 BY RICKY



The Tumblr round-up is a compilation of images, links, posters, stories, videos and so on, taken from the Sound On Sight Tumblr account. We simply do not have the man power nor time to write articles on every interesting movie ... [\[Read the Rest\]](#)

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