



By Margaret Evans, Editor

So, there's a discussion thread on my Facebook page that, as of this moment, has been alive and kicking for seven days. The subject? Clint Eastwood's controversial, Oscar-nominated film *American Sniper*.

The pro-

Sniper

folks are hanging tough, while the anti-

Sniper

contingent is also holding its own. I bowed out of the conversation days ago, and frankly, I'm starting to wish the others would "take it outside." But what's a gracious hostess to do? I started it. I invited them in, so it seems impolite to kick them out. Still, seven days?

Whenever a movie becomes a source of heated debate, there's always somebody who chimes in with some version of the following:

"Why are you guys arguing about a movie? It's *just entertainment*."

While I appreciate the peacemaking impulse, that's got to be one of the silliest remarks I've ever heard. Is a Bach Cello Suite just entertainment? Is *Hamlet* just entertainment? How about *Swan Lake*? A great movie, like a great musical composition – or a great play, or a great ballet – is far more than just entertainment. A great movie is a work of art. And art matters. With art, we must *contend*.

Don't get me wrong: Not all movies are great. Some really are "just entertainment." And that's fine, too. (I love entertainment!) But those movies don't typically inspire contentious week-long Facebook debates . . . or fiery discussions around the dinner table . . . or serious gut checks . . . or three viewings in one weekend . . . or uncontrollable sobbing.

Okay, they do for me, but I'm a special case. (Some would say *nut* case.) I tend to take movies – all movies – very seriously. Even the "just entertainment" kind. For people like me, film freaks, the Beaufort International Film Festival is more than just a "good time" with "interesting people" and plenty of "entertainment." It's a borderline religious experience. And to paraphrase the annual declaration of coordinator Ron Tucker, this year's BIFF looks like it's going to be the best festival yet.

For starters, it's been a while since we had a bona fide movie star in attendance. (I think the last was Blythe Danner, back in 2010?) Andie MacDowell will be here this year to receive the inaugural Carolina Pride and Spirit Award from Pat Conroy, and I can't wait. I'm a sucker for a movie star.

The first time I laid eyes on MacDowell was in a film you'd probably place in the "just entertainment" category. While not widely admired for its high philosophical aspirations, *St. Elmo's Fire*

was a favorite with my friends and me. It was the mid-80s, and we were just a few years younger than the movie's "brat pack" stars and the fresh-out-of-college characters they portrayed. In their messy relationships, confusing career choices, modified mullets and lace collars, we saw our once and future selves – struggling, muddling, messing up, wearing Laura Ashley. Oh, the humanity . . .

And then there was Andie MacDowell. Like some gossamer angel, her character, Dr. Dale Something-Or-Other, floated above the film, fluttering down to earth for only a few short scenes. Dr. Dale was an object of obsession and the movie's Perfect Woman: beautiful (in an ethereal, un-Allie Sheedy kind of way); smart (a doctor, for crying out loud); and totally together... unlike the rest of the *St. Elmo's* gang. She was unflappable and untouchable, but not entirely . . . and that was the best part. Near the end of the movie, when the hapless Kirby Keger (Emilio Estevez) finally kisses Dr. Dale, there's something in her eyes – a second guess, a "hmmmm . . . ?"

It was that dual nature – that earth angel thing – that put Andie MacDowell on my list of favorite actresses. But what pushed her toward the top – and it's really all of a piece – was her voice. By now, everybody knows the story of MacDowell's first film role in *Greystoke: The Legend of Tarzan, Lord of the Apes*.

She was cast in the part of Jane Porter, but ended up having all her lines dubbed by Glenn Close. Apparently, the South Carolina native's Southern accent was just too strong to make her a convincing Englishwoman.

It must have been disappointing and even humiliating at the time, but I sure hope she got over it, because I believe her Southern accent – and mind you, it's very slight now – is part of what makes Andie MacDowell an extraordinary screen presence. In so many terrific movies – *Sex, Lies, and Videotape*,

Green Card, *Groundhog Day*, *Four Weddings and a Funeral*, *Michael*

– she's this magical hybrid, both exotic and familiar . . . this otherworldly creature – cascading goddess hair, rose-petal skin – whose voice reminds you of your sorority sister from Carolina or that girl from your Sunday School class. She looks like Snow White or Gwinevere or Aphrodite, but sounds like a nice girl from home. It's an utterly winsome combo. I'm not even sure she sounds "Southern" so much as just . . . real? Like an actual person you might actually encounter. For all I know, MacDowell's accent has been the bane of her acting existence. But to me, it's made her ten times more relatable and a thousand times more lovable. All these decades later, she still seems like the fairy princess next door, and I'm excited she's coming to BIFF. (Don't miss Mark Shaffer's exclusive interview with her

[here.](#)

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I hadn't intended to segue from "movies matter and here's why" into a giddy fan-girl rhapsody, but that's the movies for ya. One minute, you're contemplating politics and provocative ideas, the next minute your mascara's streaming as the full weight of the human condition crash lands on your heart . . . and the minute after that, you're marveling at how somebody seems "larger than life" and perfectly, wonderfully life-sized. *At the same time!*

This is the magic of movies, people. High art or just entertainment, what's not to love?

The 9th Annual Beaufort International Film Festival is February 11 – 15 at the USCB Center for the Arts. Enjoy our extensive BIFF coverage starting on page 12, visit us at

www.lowcountryweekly.com

and on social media, or come see us at our BIFF blogging station. We'll be there through the

festival. See y'all at the movies.