

DE PALMA

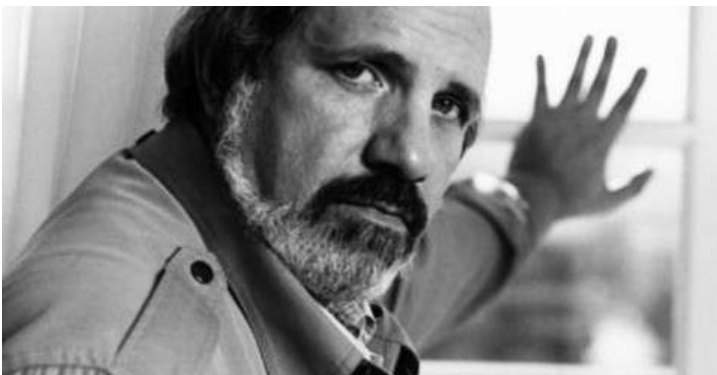
Monday, October 3, 7:30 pm

Reviewed by Ty Burr / Boston Globe PG-13 111 Mins.

Brian De Palma is the demon imp in Hollywood's basement. Of all the storied directors of the 1970s — those who broke the rules and made up new ones — he's the outcast, the id. Spielberg and Scorsese are respectable legends who these days collect accolades and direct slightly dull films; Francis Ford Coppola's an artisan who makes wines everyone drinks and movies no one sees.

But De Palma? He's recalled less for his hits — "Carrie," "Scarface," "The Untouchables," the first "Mission: Impossible" — than his cultural transgressions. The misogynistic kink and cinematic catharsis of cult objects like "Dressed to Kill," "Body Double," "Sisters," and "Femme Fatale." The Hitchcock worship — or is it plagiarism? — of "Obsession" and "Blow Out." The almost surgical way in which his movies play on our nerves.

And the artistry — there's that, too. In the two-hour documentary "De Palma," co-directors Noah Baumbach and Jake Paltrow set out to rehabilitate their subject's vaguely gamey cultural reputation and remind us that here is one of the great pure filmmakers, still alive and not working as much as he should.



The film's made consciously in the shadow of the 1966 book "Hitchcock/Truffaut," in which Francois Truffaut gently grilled Alfred Hitchcock about each of the latter's 50-odd movies. (Their collaboration was itself the subject of a fine 2015 documentary.) Again, filmmakers interview a filmmaker: Paltrow, son of director Bruce Paltrow (and brother of Gwyneth), has worked in film and episodic TV while Baumbach is an established Manhattan auteur ("The Squid and the Whale," "Mistress America").

Again, each item in the filmography is discussed in chronological order. Again, there's no one else in the room. "De Palma" consists of nothing but film clips and Brian De Palma chatting amiably in medium close-up for 111 minutes. If you have any love of movies at all, it's riveting.

One of the documentary's strongest aspects is the way it reminds you of out-of-the-way pockets in this director's career. De Palma's first feature, "The Wedding Party" — filmed in 1963 but only released six years later — stars a baby-faced actor named Robert

De Niro, already gifted at commandeering a scene. The ratty counterculture farces that followed, "Greetings" in 1968 and "Hi Mom!" in 1970, established De Palma as a fresh, anarchic voice, and the racial politics of the "Be Black, Baby" sequence in the latter film still sting.

There's also the excellent combat morality play "Casualties of War" (1989), overshadowed by the following year's "The Bonfire of the Vanities," the bomb that nearly ate the director's career. And there's the aching New York crime drama "Carlito's Way" (1993), which De Palma singles out as his personal favorite. This critic reserves the honor for 1981's "Blow Out," which mashes up Hitchcock, Antonioni's "Blow-Up," Watergate, and Chappaquiddick and somehow emerges as one of the most bleakly powerful meta-tragedies of a famously bleak era.

But it's the suspense films, gory and controlled, for which this director is best known, and "De Palma" lets him discourse on their making at length, telling tales and dishing dirt. Like all storytellers, he's a born raconteur, pointing out his personal triumphs, copping to his mistakes — yes, Tom Hanks was a terrible choice to play Sherman McCoy in "Bonfire" — and breaking down his use of film techniques. De Palma has used split screen probably more than any other director, and here he discusses how handy the device is both for directing the audience itself and for playing with its head.

But that's the distrust that has always dogged this filmmaker: that he manipulates moviegoers into shameful complicities for no other reason than that he can. (The charge was long applied to Hitchcock, too.) "De Palma" peers into a little of the man's psychology, while understanding that even a little can be taken too far. Still, growing up with a surgeon for a father (and every day seemed to be Take Your Son to Work Day) may explain young Brian's clinical approach to movie bloodletting.

And when De Palma recalls going undercover to follow his father as the latter cheated on his wife, suddenly all those endless tracking shots start to make sense. "In my movies," he says, "the run-up goes on forever." He knows we're afraid of what we'll find at the end.

Among other things, "De Palma" testifies to the difficulty, if not insanity, of making worthwhile work in a craven film industry, even as it recalls an era in which a director still had the freedom to follow his most wayward impulses. Why are today's movies so boring? "Because they're pre-visualized," scoffs De Palma, and here are the clips to remind you of how shocking an original eye was and still can be. "De Palma" is a cinematic sampler that makes you want to gorge on the whole unholy buffet.

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STUDENT FILM FESTIVAL



Monday, October 17, 5:00 pm

Please join us as we feature the winning entries of the 14th Annual Student Film Festival. Participants were required to submit a completed film with a running time of 8 minutes or less. Over 90 submissions from around the world were received and evaluated our panel of accomplished judges, Bob Fritz, John Mostacci and Tony Venezia. These individuals were selected based on their solid background in the world of film. Between them, they possess over 100 years of experience working in film production and education.

The festival's top selections will be screened and awards will be distributed at this special program.

LITTLE MEN

Monday, October 17, 7:30 pm

Reviewed by A. O. Scott / NYT *Rated PG* *85 Mins.*

There is hardly a shortage of buddy movies about mismatched men bonding under duress, but films that chart the emotional weather of everyday male friendship are rare. Literature has more to offer, at least as far as boys are concerned. Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn have a rich and renewable legacy. And it may be that association that imparts a novelistic vibe to Ira Sachs's "Little Men," beyond the Louisa May Alcott echo in the title. It's a subtle movie, alert to the almost imperceptible currents of feeling that pass between its title characters.

They are Jake Jardine (Theo Taplitz) and Tony Calvelli (Michael Barbieri), two middle schoolers who cross paths in Brooklyn. I almost ended that sentence "and fall in love," a possibly misleading but not at all inaccurate account of what happens. The childhood bond that the psychologist Harry Stack Sullivan called "chumship" can be as intense and mysterious as romantic love, and can be sparked by the kind of intuitive connection that arises between Jake and Tony when they first meet.

Jake, pale and reserved, is an exile from Manhattan, flung across the East River by the tides of family fortune. His father, Brian (Greg Kinnear), might be described as a struggling actor if it didn't seem that the fight had mostly gone out of him. He works, but he mostly worries, tries to be a nice guy and feels guilty when he fails at it. Jake's mother, Kathy (Jennifer Ehle), who is a bit more decisive, is a therapist, and her smiling demeanor acts as a shield against the

unspoken tensions hovering in the air whenever she and her husband are together.

The family moves into an apartment that used to belong to Brian's father, whose death is the movie's precipitating catastrophe. The old man also owned the building where Tony's mother, Leonor (Paulina Garcia) runs a dress shop, and if "Little Men" is a love story it is also a tale of economic conflict in a rapidly changing city, a fable about the insidious, toxic power of money and real estate.

Jake's grandfather is recalled as a big-hearted bohemian of the kind that used to be more plentiful in New York. "He loved me," Leonor says, perhaps hinting that they were lovers but more pointedly explaining why he charged her so little rent. Brian, urged on by his sister, wants to raise it. As the dispute between them escalates, it casts a shadow over Jake's relationship with Tony.

All the grown-ups think they are being perfectly reasonable as they dig in their heels and allow a business matter to turn into a personal grudge. None of them can help it; everyone needs money. Their behavior — the politesse that grows increasingly cold, the contempt that seethes among people who believe themselves to be not only right but righteous — is dismaying, but hardly surprising.

It's also not really the point. Mr. Sachs holds the adults at arm's length, declining either to judge them too harshly for their selfishness or to extend them more than minimal sympathy for their difficulties. In other words, "Little Men" is on the side of Jake and Tony, as both a narrative strategy and a moral choice. Their temperaments and backgrounds are different, as are their interests. Jake is a hothouse flower, his artistic talents and sensitivities carefully cultivated by his parents. Tony, whose father travels for work and is almost never at home, is more of a free-range kid. He's gregarious and easygoing and dreams of being an actor. The two boys conceive a plan to apply to a specialized arts high school together.

When parents are around, "Little Men" feels like a modest, precise drama of urban life, but when it follows Tony and Jake, absorbing the loose rhythms of their companionship, the film becomes something richer and harder to classify. It's a boys adventure story edged with unspoken risks, and the young actors take the kind of chances that their more careful and disciplined elders have been trained to avoid. There are inklings of sexual desire between the boys and implications of homophobia in the world around them, but mostly there is a sense of discovery and change, of all the unruly and enigmatic experiences often collapsed into the phrase "coming-of-age."

There is also a protest against the banal imperatives of maturity, and above all against the ways that adults ignore and discount the emotional lives of the young. Kathy, Brian and Leonor would do anything for their sons except take their relationship seriously, and the possibility that something as precious and real as friendship could be sacrificed because of money registers as a profound insult.

And also as a fact of life. Mr. Sachs, in his last three features — this one, "Love Is Strange" and "Keep the Lights On" — has refined a style of emotional realism that stands out against both the mumbly diffidence and the sociological scorekeeping of too much independent American cinema. "Little Men" only looks like a small movie.



EIGHT DAYS A WEEK

THE TOURING YEARS

Monday, November 7, 7:30 pm

Reviewed by Ty Burr / Boston Globe Rated PG 128 Mins.

What do you get the Beatlemaniac who has everything? I've always thought it would be Tim Riley's absurdly readable 1988 book, "Tell Me Why," which breaks down every single song the band ever recorded. But that's changed now that we have "The Beatles: Eight Days a Week — The Touring Years," a documentary labor of love about the Fab Four that comes from Ron Howard, of all people.

The movie will seem as much a marvel to the casual Beatle fan, of course. And, now that I think of it, "Eight Days a Week" may be best for younger viewers who know the group only as a rumor on the receding horizon. Take the kids and watch their minds get blown.

It's a long, jangling, melodious soak, rich with backstage incident and wall-to-wall hits, and it gives us a front-row seat at the most important pop explosion of the 20th century while showing how that explosion changed the four men at its center. "We just wanted to play; playing was the important thing," says John Lennon in an archival interview at the film's start. "Eight Days a Week" reminds us that global adoration made touring impossible and forced the Beatles into the studio full time, where they created both their best and most self-indulgent work, the two sometimes indistinguishable.

Because it's Ron Howard directing we have Paul McCartney and Ringo Starr pulling up easy chairs and telling the camera how it happened, and the late Lennon and George Harrison are present in older interviews as well. Making "Eight Days a Week" clearly involved tactful negotiations among various parties and estates and historical agendas, so what you don't get from the movie is dirt. It's rock 'n' roll without the sex and hardly any drugs. But it's also true that only four men ever knew what it was like to be a Beatle, and this may be the closest we'll get to hearing from all of them at once.

Howard skips the early days and starts with the initial chart detonations in England in early 1963, looping back to remind us that the Beatles had been gigging for years and only seemed to have arrived fully formed, able to synthesize at will multiple aspects of rock and pop. From there, the movie moves forward on a timeline that will be familiar to anyone who knows the history: The landing at New York's John F. Kennedy International Airport, the press conferences, the "Ed Sullivan" appearances, the two movies, and so on, into the middle 1960s.

What makes "Eight Days a Week" such a blast is the focus on live performance, including TV broadcasts and touring footage many of us have never seen before. The movie captures, or freshly recaptures, the cultural madness surrounding the Beatles in those early days — how they suddenly mattered more than anything in

the culture had ever mattered, and on a global scale. Howard puts us back at the center of the noise, and the sheer intensity of the release is stunning all over again.

Psychologically, that release meant a generation was free from parental notions of who to be and how to behave. "Eight Days a Week" features some truly odd talking heads, but the oddest and most affecting may be Whoopi Goldberg, who talks of hearing the Beatles as a child during the era of the Kennedy assassination and the civil rights struggle. "The whole world lit up," she recalls. "I felt I could be friends with them, and I'm black. . . . The idea was that everybody was welcome."

The physical side of the release, of course, was the screaming. "Eight Days a Week" reminds us with gale force what 20,000 teenage girls sound like when they're having an out-of-body experience. This and the general dehumanization of world touring is what soured the Beatles on live performance: They simply could not hear themselves. Ringo talks of playing drums during the Shea Stadium concert of Aug. 15, 1965, and only being able to keep time by following the wagging of Lennon's behind.

(And yet: After the end credits, "Eight Days a Week" tacks on a 30-minute cut of the 50-minute Shea concert with the screams mixed down and the sound cleaned up, and it sounds fantastic. The band is tight as hell, the harmonies are sharp and in tune, and Lennon howls the early hits as if they were talismans from his youth. There were no stage monitors and the sound system was the stadium's tinny PA speakers, yet the group plays without a hint of uncertainty. That's how good they were.)

By the following year, darkness was descending. The 1966 tours were dogged by aggressive journalists and protests over Lennon's "We're more popular than Jesus" comment. There were record burnings and death threats; youth culture was growing out in different directions. The group wanted to make music it couldn't play live, like Lennon's mind-bending "Tomorrow Never Knows," the capstone of what may be their finest album, "Revolver," and still one of the goddamnedest things I've ever heard.

The final show, on Aug. 29, 1966, in San Francisco's Candlestick Park, was a bust; less than two-thirds of the tickets were sold (a fact the film doesn't tell us), and the group was taken back to their hotel in a meat wagon. George spoke for all of them that night when he said Enough.

"Eight Days a Week" is brilliantly edited (by Paul Crowder), and at this point it leads us up to the edge of "Sgt. Pepper" — "I got the idea for us all to be someone else," McCartney recalls of the group's general exhaustion — and then jumps ahead three full years to the next and final Beatles concert, on the roof of the Apple offices in London, in January 1969.

It's a diplomatic but moving transition, banishing a period of increasingly bad vibes in the culture and among the Beatles while bringing John and Paul together one last time to sing "I've Got a Feeling." A cutaway to the streets lets us glimpse a band far above the heads of the crowd, happy and unreachable. Howard's movie reminds us that it was us who put them there.

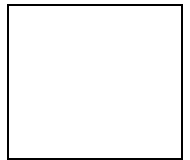
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LITTLE MEN

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Monday, October 17 at 7:30 pm

"A thoroughly delightful, crisply edited film."

Paul de Barros / Seattle Times

Monday, November 7 at 7:30 pm

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