## Zip! Looking Closely at a Strip Club

By TONI BENTLEY

**PARIS** 

OULD I have an almost-naked girl inside a letter?" Frenchmen really do say the darnedest things. A Laclos liaison? A Foucauldian fantasy? No, it is the very literal request of a rather tired and frustrated French choreographer, Philippe Decouflé, creating a new number on the stage of the historic Parisian nightclub the Crazy Horse Saloon.

The girl inside the letter proves a rather unstable arrangement and eventually the whole number is canned. But not before the documentarian Frederick Wiseman, who has stripped more institutions of their covers than any living filmmaker, has recorded every detail of its troubled birth and everything else involved in a new show. Mr. Wiseman shot 150 hours of footage in what he has called his "wobblyscope" style. Pared to just over two hours, his black comedy "Crazy Horse" tells the tale of what lies behind the famous strip club.

"Crazy Horse," which opens Wednesday in New York, is Mr. Wiseman's 39th film and completes a Parisian trilogy that includes "La Comédie-Française ou l'Amour Joué" (1996) and "La Danse: The Paris

Opera Ballet" (2009), standouts in an

oeuvre notable for rummaging around in

the dark, darker and darkest corners of

American institutions: insane asylums,

hospitals, high schools, welfare offices, po-

Wiseman's films. "My movies are not

available on Netflix," Mr. Wiseman ex-

plained, "because Netflix never answered

our letters to them. We must have written

seven or eight times, and they never re-

sponded." (His films are distributed by his

82, going one further by stripping the strip-

pers and their handlers, who, it turns out,

With "Crazy Horse" Mr. Wiseman is, at

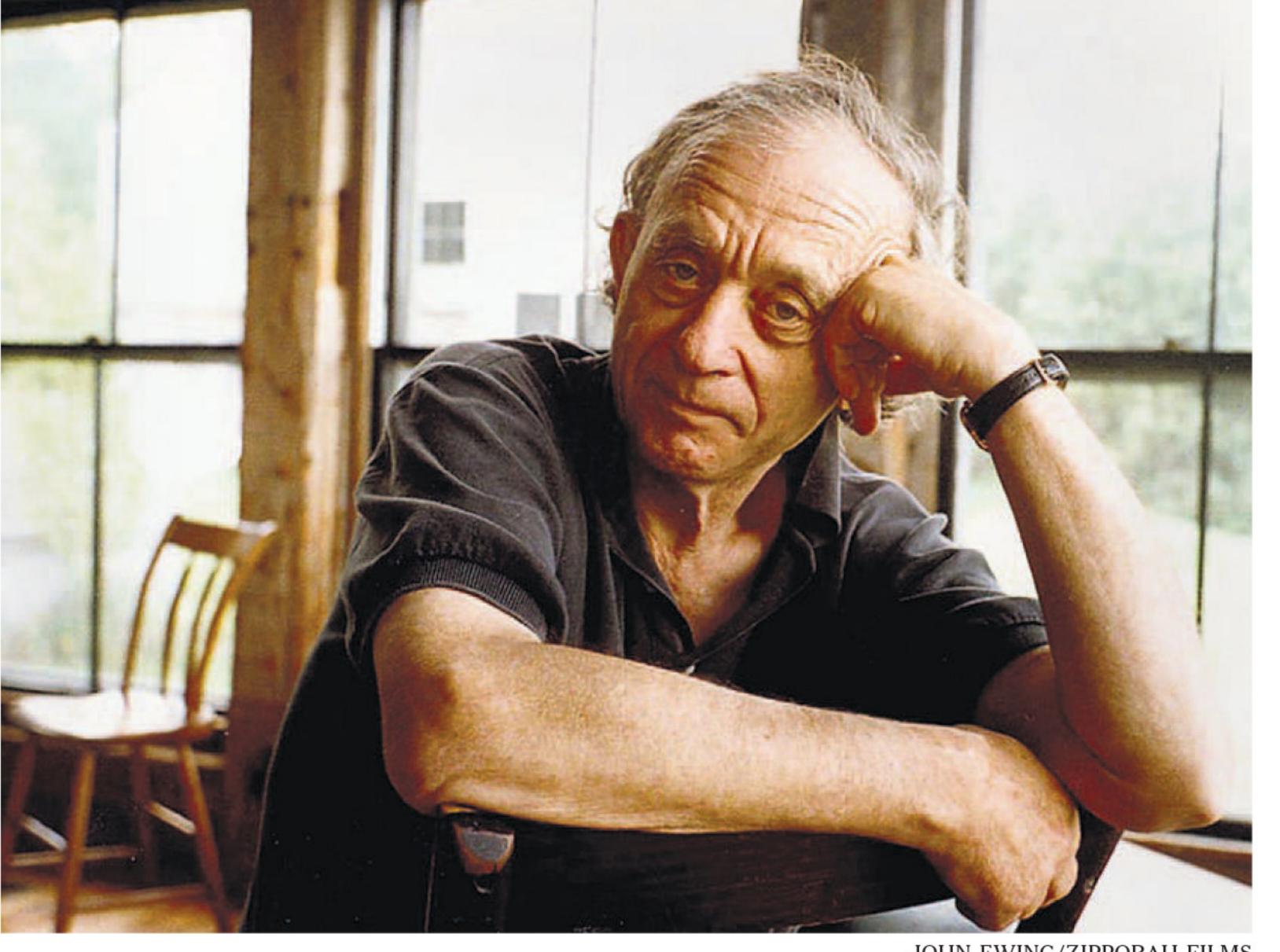
But don't rush to Netflix to stream Mr.

lice precincts, juvenile courts.

own company, Zipporah Films.)



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mostly naked dancers.

mant that his work was not simply about "the suffering of the downtrodden." "What I am doing," he said, "is showing many aspects of human behavior, which makes anything that interests me a pos-

have considerably more to reveal than the

oddity as a subject for Mr. Wiseman. But in

an interview in a cafe here he was ada-

A strip club may seem like a lightweight

sible subject." "I thought that the effort required," he continued, "to create erotic fantasies is interesting." Oh that. In which case Mr. Wiseman is rather late to documenting the gaming of desire. But in "Crazy Horse" he has devoted an entire film to the question

Top, Zula Zazou, a dancer at the Crazy Horse in Paris. Above right, Alain Bernardin, the Crazy Horse's founder, with dancing girls at the club in 1975. Left, Frederick Wiseman.

of how sexual yearning is translated into a three-dimensional show. Not easily is the short answer. "Crazy Horse" asks the eternal question: Does one really want to see the naked woman behind the nude one?

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"I always wanted to do a movie about a nightclub," Mr. Wiseman said. "So I went with a friend to the Moulin Rouge, and I fell asleep after five minutes, literally put my head down on the table — boom. That was the end of the Moulin Rouge. Then we went to Crazy Horse," where, apparently, he stayed awake.

So does he find the show at the Crazy Horse sexy? "No," he replied decisively. "I found the rehearsals where the girls are somewhat more clothed and don't have all

the wigs and makeup much sexier. They are more individual."

Individuality is not, however, a hallmark of the Crazy Horse as demonstrated by a sequence that must be the longest unbroken close-up in cinema history of a woman's barely moving bare derrière. The number is a pelvic-centric Crazy Horse classic called "Teasing" and it provides a rare meditation on the never-ending allure and mystery of a woman's lower anatomy and the legs that lead it. In typical Wiseman fashion "Crazy Horse" contains no narration, no identification of people and no back story about the club. The film just throws you onstage, curtain up, spotlight blazing. It is useful to know, however, that the Crazy Horse was founded in 1951 by Alain Bernardin, who at an early age looked at a beautiful naked woman and saw "my fortune," where most men see their ruin.

Over the course of 43 years he masterminded every detail of the small club on the Right Bank, turning it into the home of his most intimate visions of female beauty, thus rendering him the Balanchine of striptease. The two men were friends, and Balanchine could often be found at the Crazy Horse's late-night show when New York City Ballet was dancing in Paris.

In 1994 at 78 Mr. Bernardin committed suicide with a shotgun in his red velvet office backstage. His three children ran the club for 11 years but were forced, because of financial difficulties, to sell it to three Belgian businessmen.

"The halo is there and the reverence, but nobody talks about him much," Mr. Wiseman said of Mr. Bernardin. Since 2006 the

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# Perfectly Happy, Even Without Happy Endings

By CARRIE RICKEY

Los Angeles EEING Lindsay Doran on a midafternoon stroll near her office in Culver City, Calif., you might wonder about this woman with the flowing curls and contemplative smile. Art historian? Massage therapist? Micro-financier? A little of each.

Ms. Doran is in the movie business, and her résumé runs from production executive on "This Is Spinal Tap" and "Ferris Bueller's Day Off," to producer of "The Firm," "Sense and Sensibility" and "Stranger Than Fiction," to president of United Artists Pictures, and now an independent producer.

What's not on her résumé is just as intriguing: script doctor, for one, and antismoking advocate who helped lead the effort to eliminate on-screen puffing. But the biggest position missing from the official CV is her role as a missionary for moodelevating films. Terry Rossio, a writer whose credits include "Shrek" and the "Pirates of the Caribbean" movies, playfully describes her as a "Pied Piper, leading all those ratty, bleak and violent screenplays in town over a cliff."

Ms. Doran is an omnivore who likes movies light, dark and in between. But when she attended the Austin Film Festival last year, "something I found both terribly sad and terribly sympathetic," she recently recalled, "is that aspiring screenwriters ask again and again, 'What can I write that a financier wants to make?' Not, 'What can I write that fills me with joy?'"

After reading the book "Flourish," by Martin E. P. Seligman, a catalyst of the positive-psychology movement, she began rewatching films through the lens of what Dr. Seligman identifies as the five essential elements of well-being: positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning and accomplishment. (He refers to these elements collectively as perma.)

The results surprised her. And they inspired a stealth campaign to reverse the Hollywood superstitions that a "movie is only art if it ends badly, and that you'll only win an Academy Award if you write or direct a movie about misery or play

Right, the producer Lindsay Doran wants Hollywood to rethink what makes a joyful movie.

Sharing the joy of

accomplishment:

above left, Helena

Bonham Carter and

Colin Firth in "The

Jennifer Grey and

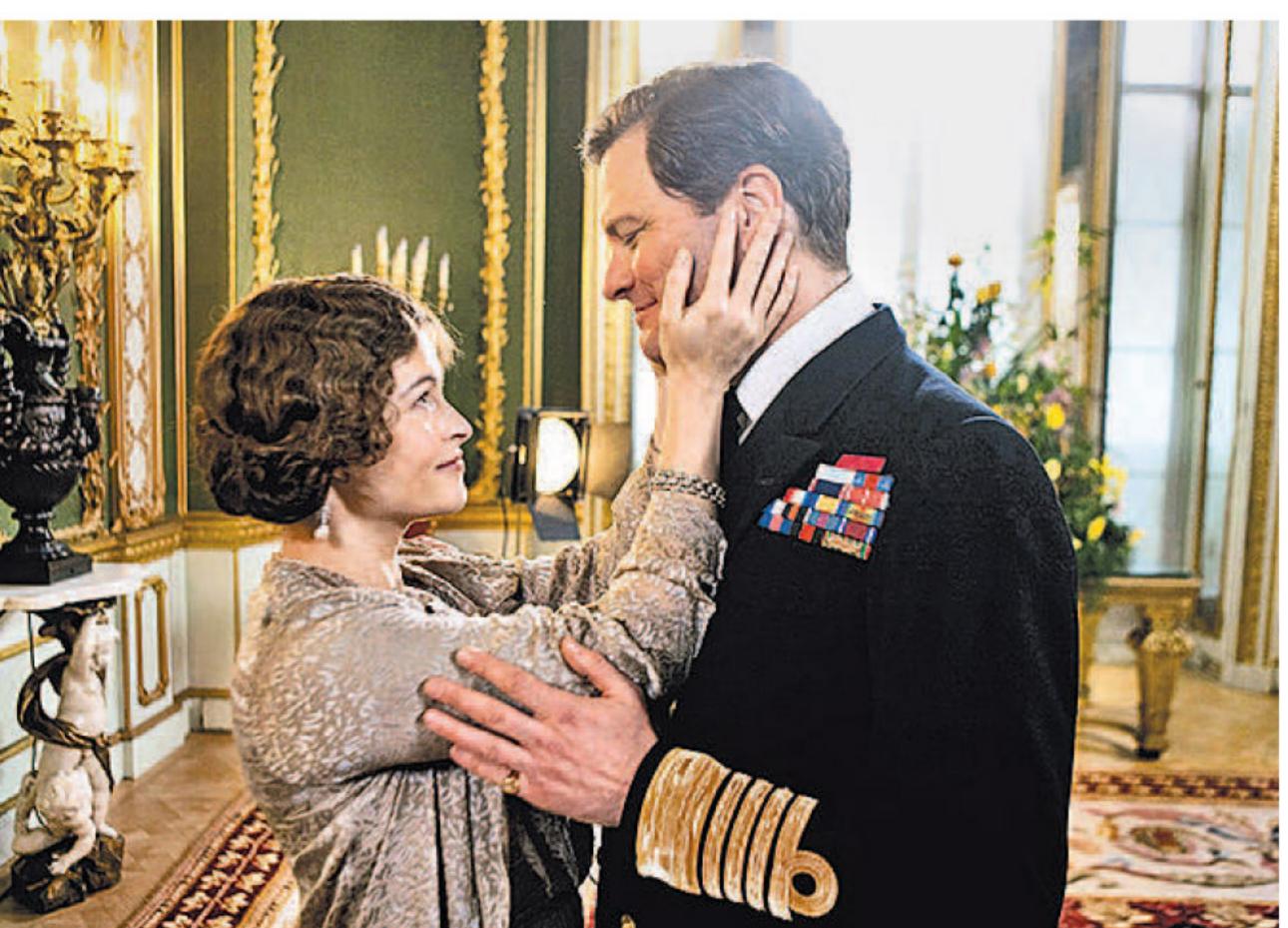
Patrick Swayze in

"Dirty Dancing."

King's Speech"; right,



VESTRON/EVERETT COLLECTION



LAURIE SPARHAM/WEINSTEIN COMPANY someone miserable," as she put it. During the past six months, at a symposium and in a series of presentations to filmmakers, she has strongly advocated the concept of cinematic Zoloft.

"What shocked us," said Dan Lin, a producer of the Sherlock Holmes films whose team recently watched a Doran presentation, "were Lindsay's points about what audiences care about most — relationships and the positive resolution of those relationships. We had previously thought what was most important was the lead character winning at the end of the movie."

Reflecting at her home here in December Ms. Doran said: "Some people say I'm just talking about formula filmmaking.

Ms. Doran had long been drawn to "funny dramas and comedies that make you cry," she said. Now she knew why.

In a July presentation before the Second World Congress of the International Positive Psychology Association in Philadelphia Ms. Doran recalled her first "aha!" moment, when she recognized that the perma elements of well-being that Dr. Seligman, a University of Pennsylvania professor, had identified were the basis of the movies that made her, and others, happy. She showed how these five factors were embedded in films as far-flung as "Ferris Bueller" (characters who displayed positive emotions throughout), "The Godfather" (characters fully engaged in what they're doing throughout) and "The Karate Kid" (a character completely focused on

accomplishment). "It's no surprise to say that American movies specialize in stories of accomplishment," she told her audience, adding later, "When Jennifer Grey finally dares to make the scary leap at the end of 'Dirty Dancing,' when the Karate Kid performs the impossible kick that wipes out his opponent, or when King George VI gets through his

### Avoiding dark scripts and applying the principles of positive psychology to filmmaking.

wartime speech without stammering those accomplishments are among the great pleasures of cinema."

Ms. Doran's second "aha!" moment came when she consulted a veteran market researcher who oversees hundreds of previews annually. "I listed the five elements of well-being, and he said, 'I can already tell you one thing: Audiences don't care about accomplishments." She was thunderstruck. Wasn't the Hollywood ending about accomplishment?

No, he said, adding: "Audiences don't care about an accomplishment unless it's shared with someone else. What makes an audience happy is not the moment of victory but the moment afterwards when the winners shares that victory with someone they love." So she mentally rewound the concluding scenes of these "accomplishment" films. Ms. Grey leaps into the arms of Patrick Swayze at the end of "Dirty Dancing," and after that she reconciles with her father. Jaden Smith performs that impossible kick at the end of "The Karate Kid," but afterward makes peace with his opponent and shares the moment with his mother and trainer. Colin Firth conquers his stammer at the end of "The King's Speech," and then shares his victory with his wife, daughters and the crowds cheering outside the palace. The film closes with a title card that reads that

What I wanted to know is: Why is the formula the formula?" She analyzed boxoffice hits and critically acclaimed movies on the American Film Institute's favorites lists. She broke down their emotional components, isolated the elements of mood elevation and tested her findings against those of market researchers. She concluded: Positive movies do not necessarily have happy endings; their characters' personal relationships trump personal achievements; and male and female viewers differ in how they define a character's

accomplishments.

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## Zip! A Documentarian Looks Closely at a StripS Club

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club has been managed by Andrée Deissenberg, a charming, fast-talking French-American woman who had worked in communications for Cirque du Soleil.

Business now clearly trumps art at the club, and "Crazy Horse" provides a nuts-and-bolts account of what happens to an institution after its founder and guiding force dies. The film shows Mr. Decouflé — who choreographed the opening and closing ceremonies for the 1992 Olympics in Albertville, France, and worked most recently with Cirque du Soleil — wrangling at length with management about its refusal to give him more time to prepare the new show.

"If we want a dazzling premiere that will impress the intellectuals," he insists in one scene (you can say this in France about a strip show, and no one summons even a postmodern grin), "a break is needed to ensure a classy premiere." But management won't budge. Nevertheless, reviewing the film, which opened



A scene from Frederick Wiseman's film "Crazy Horse," about the Parisian strip club.

in France last year, for The Hollywood Reporter, Todd McCarthy wrote that it "perceptively revealed the process and the result of an intricate group artistic enterprise."

While the Crazy Horse gave Mr. Wiseman and his small crew free rein in the club and dressing rooms, Ms. Deissenberg made a single request after an early

### Frederick Wiseman brings his fly-on-the-wall style to the Crazy Horse.

screening. "In a couple of shots," she said in an interview, "you could almost see a bit of cellulite, and we have no cellulite at the Crazy, so we asked Fred if he could take those frames out." The footage remains, but even the brutal Wiseman camera has trouble finding any bumps on the extensive layout of epidermal perfection.

Given Mr. Wiseman's fly-onthe-wall method of shooting — "I

don't want to be an insider," he said — none of the dancers are actually interviewed in the film ("most disappointingly," Mr. Mc-Carthy wrote in his review). But one, Zula Zazou (yes, a stage name — all the performers have them), who has been at the Crazy Horse for 11 years, is eloquent on the experience of being in Mr. Wiseman's film. "One of his great gifts," she said in an interview, "is that he makes himself forgettable." She continued with a delighted giggle: "He's like a mouse!" But she was, she said, skeptical that the film "is a true picture of the Crazy Horse for someone who has never seen it."

"It is his personal vision of it," she continued. "You cannot get the spirit of the Crazy Horse on film, the intimacy. You have to come and see it, that is the only way to have the theatrical experience yourself."

Despite his age and vast accomplishment — the Museum of Modern Art mounted a yearlong retrospective of his work in 2010

— Mr. Wiseman is not retiring anytime soon. He spent three months last year shooting at the University of California, Berkeley, and is now editing that film which, he said, should be completed late this summer, even though he has "225 hours of rushes, an all-time high." Even he seems impressed. (He said he has shot more than seven million feet of film in his career, a monumental archive of the human condition.)

A small plate of truffles arrived, but Mr. Wiseman declined, though there seemed to be a lingering look. "I can't have chocolate, or caffeine or alcohol," he explained. "Alcohol is the worst." What does the man whom a fellow documentarian, Errol Morris, calls "the undisputed king of misanthropic cinema," do for fun? He laughed, chuckled really, for the first time. "Make movies."

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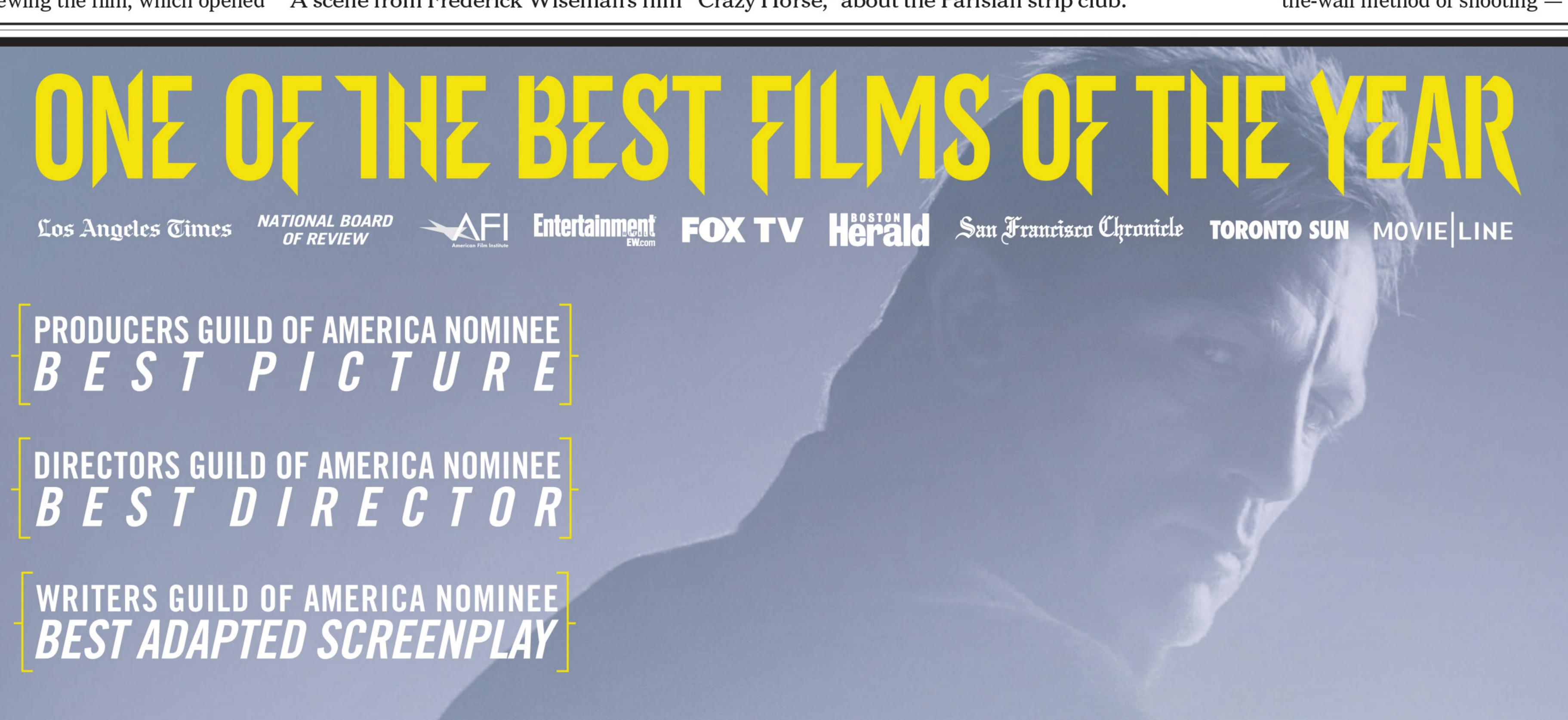
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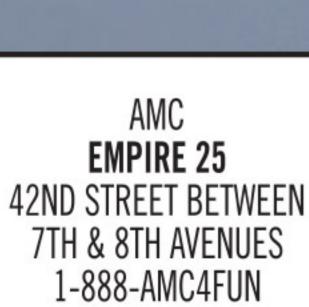
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