

Vancouver's Hot Chocolate Festival

Bringing warmth to winter

By Allie Davison, Staff Writer

Need to escape that blustery wind? Why not do yourself a favour and step into one of the 15 cafés and chocolate shops participating in this year's Vancouver Hot Chocolate Festival? As I'm personally not much of a coffee drinker, the chance to embrace everybody's favourite wintertime beverage in festival form was right up my alley.

The festival started on January 14, and will run until February 14—with each venue offering two to four unique and delicious varieties of the tasty treat. I got to check out two of the featured shops, and

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was pleasantly surprised by the different flavours offered.

My first stop was Leonidas Chocolates, located at the Vancouver Convention Centre; they had four options to choose from: Raspberry (dark chocolate), Tosca (dark chocolate and rum), Frozen Noisette (milk chocolate), and Raspberry Cheesecake (white chocolate). With each drink, customers received either a piece of Leonidas' delicious Belgian chocolate (a personal pick) or a liege waffle sample. I chose the Raspberry Cheesecake-flavoured hot chocolate; upon my first sip, I thought, "this is the best drink ever." The drink tasted exactly like cheesecake and raspberries! As I neared the end though, the sweetness gave me a bit of a stomachache, but I still managed to enjoy my drink.

Next, I hit up Mink A Chocolate Café, located on the corner of Hornby and Hastings, just a few blocks away from Waterfront SkyTrain. They had two drinks to offer: the Sheba—milk or dark chocolate ganache hot chocolate with pistachio—and the Mermaid's Choice—milk or dark chocolate ganache hot chocolate with salted caramel and a hint of rosemary. Whichever drink you chose, you also received a 72 per cent dark chocolate wafer.

I went for the Mermaid's Choice, in part due to my love of mermaids, and also because

it sounded less sweet than my previous drink. While I initially thought the Raspberry Cheesecake drink was, "the best thing ever," it was here that I found myself mistaken. The Mermaid's Choice was excellent; it was the perfect combination of sweet and salty. I'd never had salted caramel before, so I didn't really know what to expect, but I was delighted, to say the least. If I hadn't already been on my second hot chocolate of the day (more accurately, of the hour), I probably would have gotten a refill.

The Hot Chocolate Festival is hosted by CityFood Magazine, a West Coast-based magazine that focuses on food, beverage,

hospitality, and agro-tourism industries. Some of the proceeds from each drink go to the Downtown Eastside Women's Centre, so not only are you getting a great beverage, but you're also donating to a good cause!

My first two experiences with Vancouver's Hot Chocolate Festival were immensely successful, and I'm excited to say that I'll be sure to check out some of the other host shops. For a full list of venues (and their respective hot chocolate drinks), check out their website at: www.cityfood.com/events/hotchocolate. You won't be disappointed!



● Leonidas Chocolates

The recurring movie trends of January

By Angela Espinoza, Arts Editor

January has to be the worst month of the year. The season of giving has since passed, resolutions are being failed left and right, and the nearest holiday is Valentine's Day—the anti-Christmas (Succumas, if you will). Naturally, you'd like to do something to take your mind off all these gloomy realizations, like see a movie. But with the cut-off date for Oscar consideration being December 31, that means all the garbage films held over from last year need to be released... sigh.

To be fair, it's not just January that gets the crème of the crap; generally, from January to March, decent films tend to be far and few between. That said though, January really does get the worst of it. I looked around the Internets for all the information I could get on January film releases from 2008 to 2012, and several patterns within the crap film realm checked out.

Didn't we just have Halloween?

This trend is without question the one everyone has noticed by now. Every January within my five-year timeline has averaged no less than two horror and/or supernatural film releases. Twelve horror movies in total saw wide releases in the span of five January's, and if that wasn't baffling enough, the number of horror films released around Halloween has been uneven, if not steadily declining in that amount of time. Almost all of them are awful, of course, and in the cases of *Legion* (2010) and *The Devil Inside* (2012), it's to the point where they're hilarious. While certainly not great though, two gems have popped up in following this trend: *My Bloody Valentine 3D* (2009) is a great time just waiting to happen, and *Daybreakers* (2010) succeeded in its goal to portray vampires seriously (thank God).

So, like, girls are kind of... you know?

I'm not going to start a whole "the portrayal of women in film" thing here, but I find it necessary to mention this particular trend. Each January there's one big film with one or two female leads, and both the film and lead(s) tend to come off as completely and unabashedly idiotic. In watching them, you can practically see the lack of a thought process in the eyes of the actors on screen—and half the time, they're legitimately good actors. *Bride*



● The Devil Inside

Wars (2009), arguably the worst of them all, featured Anne Hathaway as one of the two leads, and even last year's *No Strings Attached* had Natalie Portman... granted, that thought alone was intended to fulfill how many fantasies? Without going into an essay-long tirade, these films simply portray women as one-note stereotypes; stubbornness is used to insinuate self-respect, and even then their characters have to flip flop on everything they believe in to obtain their forced happy ending. These movies are stupid and the women in them are stupid, let's move on.

The acceptations

The "good ones" so-to-speak are usually either re-releases or wide releases of excellent English-language foreign films from the year prior. This year for example sees *Beauty and the Beast* (1991) re-released in 3-D; it's so well-loved it's often forgotten how groundbreaking the film was for animation standards back then. Then there was *The Dark Knight* (2008) re-release back in 2009; the reason for this being Warner Bros. wanted to hit the billion-dollar mark in ticket sales (which they did). Eventual wide releases include the ridiculously underrated Canadian film *Barney's Version* (2010) and the British film *Fish Tank* (2009), both winning multiple awards in their limited release runs, but not seen by many until the next year. The only year that breaks this pattern though is 2008, which saw a January release for *Cloverfield*; people either hate or love the film, but regardless, its release proves there are surprises from time to time, such as with *Haywire* this year.

I'll end this piece with the hope that some of you will check out *Haywire* or *Beauty and the Beast 3D* as opposed to *The Devil Inside* or *Joyful Noise* before the month ends.