

FEATURE DEADLINE:

Cannes 2018 Has Its First Genuine Sure-Fire Oscar Contender, And Maybe A Palme d'Or Winner Too

by Pete Hammond - May 18, 2018



Well it took awhile, but right near the end of the 71st Cannes Film Festival we finally have a sure-fire Oscar contender — and though Cannes juries can be fickle and unpredictable, I would venture to say a certain frontrunner for the Palme d'Or.

Before hitting the amFAR benefit at the Hotel du Cap last night, I attended the gala 7 PM premiere of Nadine Labaki's competition entry *Capernaum*, and it was memorable to say the least, earning an eight-minute wildly enthusiastic standing ovation. This is a movie centered almost entirely around a 12-year-old boy and a baby as they try to escape the harsh turn life has already given them. In fact, the boy is suing his parents for bringing him into this cruel world, and Labaki's film hangs the tale on those court proceedings and everything leading up to them.

Labaki, who also appears in the film as an attorney and has been to Cannes before with Directors' Fortnight title *Caramel* and Un Certain Regard's *Where Do We Go Now?*, is one of three women directors in this year's competition. Although much has been written especially this year about the fact that only one woman (Jane Campion in 1993) has ever won the Palme d'Or, this would not be a prize because of gender. If you think this female-led jury (Cate Blanchett is in charge) needs to make some kind of statement by picking a woman to win, think again.

Capernaum stands on its own as a stunning and emotionally devastating piece of cinema that can be favorably compared to everyone from De Sica to Truffaut to even Danny Boyle's *Slumdog Millionaire*. Sony Pictures Classics picked up the film and says they will release it in December in order to qualify for Oscars. It is certain to be Lebanon's entry for Oscar's Best Foreign Language Film and in my opinion is an instant frontrunner at this early stage of the contest .

But this film could garner much more than that. Labaki's direction and screenplay, along with the young lead Zane Al Rafeea, can be counted on to make a splash in a film that could, and should, go well beyond the Foreign Language category much like Sony Classics had most recently with *Amour*.

It has just taken one film to make this festival memorable beyond anything I expected when the lineup was announced. *Capernaum* is it.

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