



Monday 01 May at 6:30 pm

A Flickering Truth

New Zealand 2015

Director: Pietra Brettkelly
 Producer: Pietra Brettkelly
 Screenplay: Pietra Brettkelly
 Cinematography: Jacob Bryant
 Music: Benjamin Wallfisch

With: Ibrahim Arify, Mahmoud Ghafouri, Isaaq Yousif

91 mins, Blu-ray. Exempt
 In Dari with English subtitles

Here is an outstanding film from the New Zealand director Pietra Brettkelly that starts off slowly, but builds into a revelatory document about Afghanistan and its current travails. Its unlikely vehicle is the attempt to restore and rescue the Afghan film archive in Kabul, trashed by the Taliban in a religiously inspired frenzy. Afghan film-maker Ibrahim Arify, living in Germany, returns to take command of the project, exhibiting visible frustration at the backwoods ways of his compatriots – both the finagling day labourers and the ingenuous Isaaq, the aged caretaker who lives in the office.

As we delve into the shattered remains of the archive, Brettkelly builds a ghost-mosaic of Afghan history, from the monarchs who oversaw the gradual liberalisation of the country through most of the 20th century (and introduced cinema), to the successive revolutions and civil wars that left the country in chaos. Film, it becomes clear, has a special role here: as repository of history and culture that the Taliban's year-zero mentality aimed to abolish. Even as the political situation becomes more volatile in the run-up to elections – prompting Arify to hastily leave the country – the remaining archives head out into outlying provinces to enable screenings of old films for a population that has grown up largely in ignorance of such things. This is moving, powerful stuff. – Andrew Pulver, *The Guardian*

I am always attracted to personalities, to tell intimate stories that reflect bigger issues. And so initially I focused on who would be my main subjects. I found three very different characters and reflections on the archive and life in Afghanistan. Arify, the visionary, the returned son; Isaaq, the caretaker of the archives, had to adapt through the ages to different regimes to protect the films; and Mahmoud, the quiet gardener and unexpected hero who risked his life for the films.

I decided to use the films in three ways: as history telling, as reflections of my characters' memories often prompted by them watching films, and as a response to exactly what was happening in Afghanistan at that time. I especially love towards the end of the film when we follow Mahmoud to vote for the first time in Afghanistan's first democratic transfer of power, and Arify departs Afghanistan. I decided to use a clip from the first Afghanistan drama film, 1936's *Love and Friendship*, a beautiful black-and-white piece of tortured love. Our hero is pacing his room: "My mind is so mixed up, I should forget her, Did I love her too humbly in order to face such a moment?" I hope the scene feeds into the strength of purpose and hope that both Arify and Mahmoud have for their country, and for the importance the archive holds in the re-building of their homeland, that they will never forget her.

I hope audiences see the openness and trust that was gifted to me and the power of the story we were able to tell, one of a people just like us but caught in decades of conflict, a people who cherish their culture and history and the films that have captured that culture. – Pietra Brettkelly, *Moviemaker Magazine*



Monday 08 May at 6:30 pm

You, the Living

Du levande
 Sweden/Germany/France/Denmark/Norway/Japan 2007

Director: Roy Andersson
 Producer: Pernilla Sandström
 Screenplay: Roy Andersson
 Cinematography: Gustav Danielsson
 Editor: Anna Märta Waern
 Music: Benny Andersson

With: Elisabeth Helander (Mia), Jörgen Nohall (Uffe), Jan Wikbladh (The fan), Björn Englund (Tuba player), Birgitta Persson (Tuba player's wife), Lennart Eriksson (Man on the balcony)

95 mins, Blu-ray. M sex scenes
 In Swedish with English subtitles

Life is a puzzle without a solution, a series of bleak, frustrating moments shadowed by the guaranteed absurdity of death. This, more or less, is the lesson – or perhaps the premise – of *You, the Living*. The film is slow, rigorously morose and often painful in its blunt reckoning of disappointment and failure. It is also extremely funny. At first, or on a preliminary viewing (gourmand of masochism that I am, I've seen it twice), the friendly affirmation of the title seems ironic, almost to the point of cruelty. "You" – that is, We, sitting meekly in the audience, anxious mirror images of the sad characters on screen – are mired in misery and confusion and might as well give up. But then the irony redoubles and reverses, and by the end the generosity of Mr Andersson's vision is apparent. It becomes clear that we have been watching a deadpan but nonetheless heartfelt affirmation of human existence, which may be fragile and pointless but is still worth something.

You, the Living, only the fourth feature Mr Andersson has made in a career that began more than four decades ago, enfolded its considerable aesthetic and intellectual ambition in a plain, dry, beautifully made wrapper. The director, a prolific and inventive maker of television commercials, works in the comic tradition of Buster Keaton and Jacques Tati, constructing visual gags that are at once painstakingly elaborate and gratifyingly simple. Using a mostly stationary camera, he turns the frame into a kind of live-action newspaper cartoon panel. The jokes are sometimes broad, sometimes sublimely subtle and sometimes, somehow, both at once.

An example is the film's sex scene, in which a gaunt, gray marching band musician lies on his back, straddled by a much fleshier, red-haired companion, wearing nothing but her lover's Prussian-style headgear. The man rambles on about some trouble he's had with his bank, and his flat recitation, in counterpoint with the woman's nonverbal exclamations, turns the scene into an odd little symphony. And in most of the disjointed vignettes that make up the film – some linked in oblique narratives, others standing alone – Mr Andersson's use of sound is as deft and sly as his composition of images.

But while the film is abstract and elusive, it is never dull or inaccessible. The drab color scheme – muted blues and washed-out yellows – attains a delicate, painterly beauty, and the disconnected scenes have the force and coherence of short poems. His apartment buildings, bars, offices and barbershops are sets, but the emotions that circulate through this world – envy, desire, befuddlement, pity, impatience – could hardly be more recognizable, and the artifice of their setting only makes that familiarity more vivid. The sad-sack Swedes who populate this picture are a strange and curious lot, sometimes wantonly expressive, sometimes the opposite. But their exotically ordinary appearance is Mr Andersson's cleverest sleight of hand. The title of this movie is meant literally. It's about you. – AO Scott, *New York Times*