



Monday 10 July at 6:30 pm

Mountains May Depart Shan he gu ren China/France/Japan 2015

Director/Screenplay: Jia Zhangke
Producers: Ren Zhonglun, Jia Zhangke, Nathanael Karmitz, Liu Shiyu, Ichiyama Shozo
Production co: Shanghai Film Group Corporation, Xstream Pictures, MK Productions, Beijing Runjin Investment, Office Kitano
Photography: Yu Lik-wai
Editor: Matthieu Laclau
Music: Hanno Yoshihiro

With: Zhao Tao (Tao), Zhang Yi (Zhang Jinsheng), Liang Jin Dong (Liangzi), Dong Zijian (Dollar), Sylvia Chang (Mia), Han Sanming (Liangzi's friend)

131 mins, Blu-ray. M low level offensive language
In Mandarin, Cantonese and English, with English subtitles

Jia Zhangke's flawed, but deeply compelling *Mountains May Depart* spans from the recent yet distant past to the near future, painting a quarter-century of changing fortunes and buried longing in strokes both graceful and eccentric, with shades of Charles Dickens and *Mildred Pierce*. *Mountains May Depart* pictures China's rapid changes as relationships, beginning with an allegorical love triangle (an electronics clerk, a coal miner, and a self-styled businessman) and ending with a pseudo-Oedipal affair between Chinese immigrants of different generations, one of whom has forgotten his native language...

Jia is the film poet of China's horizontal space, catching streets, post-industrial landscapes, and employee cafeterias in slow pans, and a filmmaker of broad conceptual theses. Besides creating clear breaks in the story, *Mountains*' change-ups of style also alter the way the movie visualizes space – and, by extension, possibility. The first and longest section is tightly framed in boxy Academy ratio, with the camera forced to move quickly to get more than one character into the same shot, as though there were always something just around the corner of the screen; celebratory fireworks are always being set off, whether at an apartment block during the opening credits, or by Zhang, Liangzi, and Tao at a secluded riverside. The frame gets wider with each subsequent section, but all it reveals is empty space; by the final and shortest chapter, set in Australia in 2025, characters are often framed alone, against interiors as impersonal as high-end real estate listings.

Jia is a filmmaker who has always been up front about his interests in such academic favorites as globalization, industry, and class, and they figure prominently here. It's important, then, to reiterate just how sensitive *Mountains May Depart* is, especially when it comes to the complex character of Tao, and how stubbornly strange it can be, from the unexpectedly touching use of the Pet Shop Boys's "Go West" as a musical motif to Jia and cinematographer Yu Lik-Wai's decision to shoot late '90s nightclub and festival scenes on muddled, ghostly analog video. But *Mountains May Depart*, which is nominally about the future and is partly set in it, is really about the past's left-behind places and roads not taken. There's no denying the effectiveness of the whole, which takes the standbys of melodrama ... and expands them into a complicated, bittersweet look at loneliness and disconnection in a world of flux. – Ignaty Vishnevetsky, *AV Club*

Wielding long takes that maintain a piercing focus on the misery of its characters, and putting escalating narrative emphasis on the role that technology (and language) plays in fostering sociocultural generational rifts, Jia's expertly composed and dramatized film – opening and closing with alternately hopeful and melancholy dance sequences – summons up the way that China, and indeed our global society, sacrifices its vital bonds with tradition and family by destroying the irreplaceable past in order to build the future. – Nick Schager, *Village Voice*



Monday 07 August at 6:30 pm

About Elly Darbareye Elly Iran/France 2009

Director/Screenplay: Asghar Farhadi
Producers: Asghar Farhadi, Mahmoud Razavi
Photography: Hossein Jafarian
Editor: Hayedeh Safiyari
Music: Andrea Bauer

With: Taraneh Alidousti (Elly), Golshifteh Farahani (Sepideh), Mani Haghighi (Amir), Shahab Hosseini (Ahmad), Merila Zarei (Shohreh), Peyman Moadi (Peyman), Rana Azadivar (Naazi), Ahmad Mehranfar (Manoochehr), Sabe Abar (Alireza)

119 mins, Blu-ray. PG violence & coarse language
In Farsi with English subtitles

When Iranian director Asghar Farhadi's *About Elly* premiered at the Tribeca Film Festival in 2009, it announced the arrival of a major international talent. A gripping and adventurous work of cinema, Farhadi's third feature combined the mounting tension of a psychological thriller with various levels of social allegory, including a barely veiled portrait of class and religious tensions inside Iran. Film-history buffs immediately spotted the influence of Michelangelo Antonioni's 1960 classic *L'Avventura* in this cunning ensemble drama about a group of friends on a seaside vacation torn apart by a woman's unexplained disappearance, but no degree in cinema studies was required to appreciate Farhadi's confident control of characters, image and story, or his complex and humane portrait of life inside the Islamic Republic. (In fact, if you have seen *L'Avventura*, don't be scared off: *About Elly* is a far more accessible work.)

Less than three years later, Farhadi would win the foreign-language Oscar for *A Separation*, his next film, which pursued the themes of *About Elly* – marriage, class conflict and religious hypocrisy – almost as far as any Iranian filmmaker could take them. That award, and Farhadi's carefully worded acceptance speech, which referred to the theocratic regime's persecution of other filmmakers without getting overly specific, were reported inside Iran both as a symbolic victory against Western cultural imperialism and a moment of national disgrace. That response, one could say, adroitly sums up many of the internal contradictions Farhadi's films address. A year after that, Farhadi had joined the ranks of Iranian expatriate artists: His 2013 film *The Past* was shot in Paris, and while it's a moving and intelligent film, its underlying sadness and sense of rootlessness are unmistakable...

During all this, *About Elly* simply got lost in the shuffle. After winning the best-film award at Tribeca and the directing prize in Berlin, it disappeared into a limbo that was partly created by the hostile relationship between Iran and the United States, and partly by the ordinary vicissitudes of indie-film distribution. It emerged at an especially problematic historical moment, midway through Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's presidency, and only a few months before his disputed 2009 re-election and the massive street protests that followed. While one can certainly read a political subtext in *About Elly* – indeed, I would say it's unavoidable – it's not a film about injustice or human rights or electoral fraud in any overt way...

I think it's even better and more relevant in 2015 than when it was made. With the "nuclear deal" between Iran, the US and the European Union hanging in the balance, Farhadi's scathing, compassionate and constantly surprising portrait of Iran's secular middle class goes far beyond the headlines and the hackneyed stereotypes. I would suggest that Bibi Netanyahu should watch this movie to convince himself that Iranians are not a slaving horde eager for nuclear Armageddon, but I suppose he'd simply dismiss it as diabolically clever propaganda. – Andrew O'Hehir, *salon.com*