



CLOSE UP

AUCKLAND FILM SOCIETY Vol 79 March – November 2024



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Auckland Film Society is a non-profit incorporated society and a registered charitable organisation. AFS is run by volunteers elected at our AGM (next AGM is 29 April 2024). Visit us at aucklandfilmsociety.org.nz

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Many thanks to programmer Michael McDonnell at Aotearoa New Zealand Federation of Film Societies, nzfilmsociety.org.nz

AUCKLAND FILM SOCIETY

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This issue of *Close Up* was edited by Andrew Lockett and Jane McKenzie. Picture research by Jane McKenzie and Michael McDonnell, NZ Federation of Film Societies

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Monday 04 March at 6:15 pm

AFS thanks Time Out Bookstore

After Hours USA 1985

Director: Martin Scorsese
Producers: Amy Robinson, Griffin Dunne, Robert F Colesberry
Production co: The Geffen Company, Double Play Productions
Screenplay: Joseph Minion
Photography: Michael Ballhaus
Editor: Thelma Schoonmaker
Music: Howard Shore

With: Griffin Dunne (Paul Hackett), Rosanna Arquette (Marcy Franklin), Verna Bloom (June), Thomas Chong (Pepe), Linda Fiorentino (Kiki Bridges), Teri Garr (Julie), John Heard (Tom Schorr), Richard 'Cheech' Marin (Neil), Catherine O'Hara (Gail)

97 mins, Blu-ray. M adult themes

After Hours takes place during one long night as an amiably dorky computer operator, Paul Hackett (Griffin Dunne), ventures from his predictable turf on the Upper East Side into SoHo. The lure is Marcy (Rosanna Arquette), who makes any impulsive behavior completely understandable. She picks him up (over his copy of *Tropic of Cancer*, a quaintly old-fashioned touch); he returns the overture with a phone call and the night's catastrophes begin.

Within a few hours he's lost the \$20 he began with, he has been treated to a kamikaze taxi ride (like a good New Yorker, Paul can't admit his terror; his only reaction is a pleasant, 'No hurry'), he's been given a primer of SoHo sadomasochism and the tightening feeling that if there is a target for tonight, he may be it.

After Hours is dazzling movie making; you could get a giddy kick just from cinematographer Michael Ballhaus' shot as a set of house keys floats down toward the camera, tossed from a top-floor apartment. (Ballhaus' glittering authority with color was honed during his many films for RW Fassbinder; more recently he shot *Baby, It's You* and *Heartbreakers*.) But the film's bedrock is its pungently well-observed screenplay by 26-year-old Joseph Minion, whose debut this is.

You realize how good Minion is early on, during the carefully nuanced pauses and spurts of Paul's call to Marcy. As Paul tries to be casual, roguish, man-of-the-world and off-handed, all at once, Minion characterizes with deadly affection. Listen a few scenes later, as Marcy tosses out a few dozen details of her personal life that might electrify Krafft-Ebing. This is a writer deliciously attuned to big-city instant intimacy.

Scorsese revels in all this. *After Hours* is less dark psychologically than most of his other New York-based films, and he whips it into a fast-moving froth with editing (Thelma Schoonmaker) and production design (Jeffrey Townsend) as elegant as the Bach-and-Mozart sound track... As the film escalates, so do its surreal qualities. We begin to see SoHo not as a colony of flaky 'artists', virtually unapproachable by the non-artist (clowns like Paul – or us), but as a pack of sharks, both male and female (hinted at in a bit of bathroom graffiti.)

The natives begin to roam in hunting packs. Instead of the civilized Mozart Symphony in D Major, which accompanies the opening scenes, you half expect the frenzy of 'A Night on Bald Mountain' and its final, exhausted calm at the approach of dawn and the retreat of the demons. Then, suddenly it's over. Not as scary as we thought it would be – really quite funny. Until you think it over afterward. – Sheila Benson, *Los Angeles Times*

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Ω Open to the public, all tickets \$10/\$20 (double bill), AFS members free

DATES AND TIMES – EARLY STARTS & TUESDAY SCREENINGS

Monday 25 March at 6:00 pm Memories of Murder
Monday 06 May at 6:00 pm Burning
Monday 20 May at 6:00 pm The Unknown & Freaks (double bill)
Monday 27 May at 6:00 pm Solaris
Monday 10 June at 6:00 pm An Angel at My Table

No screenings on public holidays. We screen on the following Tuesdays.
Tuesday 02 April at 6:15 pm Hit the Road
Tuesday 04 June at 6:15 pm Valley Girl
Tuesday 29 October at 6:15 pm Ashkal

QUIET PLEASE!

Please be considerate of others in the audience during film screenings.



Monday 11 March at 6:15 pm

Odd Man Out

UK 1947

Director/Producer: Carol Reed
Production co: Two Cities Films
Screenplay: R C Sherriff, based on the novel by F L Green
Photography: Robert Krasker
Editor: Fergus McDowell
Music: William Alwyn

With: James Mason (Johnny McQueen), Kathleen Ryan (Kathleen Sullivan), Robert Newton (Lukey), Cyril Cusack (Pat), F J McCormick (Shell), William Hartnell (Fencie), Fay Compton (Rosie), Denis O'Dea (Inspector), W G Fay (Father Tom)

116 mins, Blu-ray, B&W. PG

Set in an unnamed city in Northern Ireland, *Odd Man Out* casts Mason as Johnny McQueen, a leader of a militant political organization just as clearly modeled after the IRA as his city is modeled after Belfast – a source of inspiration some location shooting and the incorporation of famous landmarks does little to obscure. Hiding from the law, Johnny has spent months confined to a spare bedroom in the family home of Kathleen (Kathleen Ryan), a sympathizer who does little to hide her feelings for him. Addressing his cell as they prepare to rob a mill to raise money for their cause, Johnny shares his wish that they could achieve their goals without violence – then commits to the robbery anyway, even though those around him suspect he's grown weak as a result of his isolation. The robbery itself seems to prove them right. Exiting the mill, Johnny hesitates, then gets drawn into a fight with a security guard that leaves the guard dead and Johnny shot and grievously injured, forced to take refuge in an air-raid shelter, then to seek safety as he grows increasingly weaker from the injury. The journey takes him from one end of the city to the other, doubling as a tour of his home's diverse citizenry – and providing repeated reminders that he may no longer have a place in it...

It's a film about The Troubles that is, in a larger sense, not really about them at all, making Johnny a sort of everyman forced to navigate a morally murky post-war urban space defined by its shadows.

If that makes it sound like *Odd Man Out*'s unnamed city overlaps with the territory of film noir, there's good reason. Working with cinematographer Robert Krasker – with whom he re-teamed two years later for *The Third Man* – Reed uses the language of noir to define Johnny's journey. He finds the city at night a place of stark brickwork, rain-slicked streets that reflect back the light of the street lamps, and in the film's final third, gentle, insistent, ominous snow. What begins as an exercise in realism that includes an exceedingly quiet, civil robbery sequence, become increasingly expressionistic as it goes along. The mood shifts with the characters Johnny encounters as well, turning hallucinatory as he falls into the company of the mad artist Lukey... who wants to paint him while his face holds the special qualities of a man on the verge of death.

That's ultimately the other journey Johnny is on, one announced from the beginning by William Alwyn's somber score. Reed's film is about a man stumbling across a particular city at a particular time and place, but it never tries to hide its symbolic significance. Johnny loses his certainty even before he becomes injured. He weakens as he walks through a darkening cityscape, unsure of whether can trust what he's seeing, and increasingly unable to make sense of it all. And though he has little coherent dialogue after a certain point, Mason is ideal as the embodiment of unsteadiness, physical and moral. Wandering the streets that made him, he struggles to steer away from the dead end he knows he'll eventually hit. – Keith Phipps, *The Dissolve*



Monday 18 March at 6:15 pm

First Cow

USA 2019

Director: Kelly Reichardt
Producers: Neil Kopp, Vincent Savino, Anish Savjani
Production co: FilmScience, IAC Films
Screenplay: Jonathan Raymond, Kelly Reichardt, based on Raymond's novel *The Half Life*
Photography: Christopher Blauvelt
Editor: Kelly Reichardt
Music: William Tyler

With: John Magaro (Otis 'Cookie' Figowitz), Orion Lee (King-Lu), René Auberjonois (Man with Raven), Toby Jones (Chief Factor), Ewen Bremner (Lloyd), Scott Shepherd (Captain), Gary Farmer (Totillicum), Lily Gladstone (Chief Factor's Wife), Alia Shawkat (Woman with Dog), Stephen Malkmus (Fiddler)

117 mins, Blu-ray. PG violence & coarse language

'The bird a nest, the spider a web, man friendship,' reads the William Blake quotation that opens Kelly Reichardt's *First Cow*, setting the tone for a deceptively simple tale of man's natural home – companionship – and the ongoing struggles of commerce verses comradeship.

Reichardt's intimate explorations of Oregon range from the modern drama *Old Joy* to the frontier western *Meek's Cutoff*. Yet there's still a profound element of discovery in this latest Oregon-based gem, a fable of land and freedom that serves as an up-close-and-personal portrait of friendship and a wider snapshot of America, rooted in the rich soil of the Pacific Northwest.

We open in the present day, as a huge tanker floats slowly across the film's 4x3 frame. Later, this shot will be echoed by the eerie arrival of the titular cow, the beast standing upon a barge, miles from home. In between is a period of 200 years, with Reichardt seamlessly transporting us from the present day back to the 1820s, gradually unearthing the origin of two skeletons found in the prologue. Crucially, these disparate time periods, with their connecting threads of international commerce and local interaction, seem to coexist in the same liminal space.

John Magaro is Otis 'Cookie' Figowitz, who abandons his trapping party to team up with King-Lu (Orion Lee), a Chinese man whom he first encounters crouching naked in the ferns. Both men are outsiders, and together they dream of making their fortune – setting themselves up in business selling the delicious buttermilk biscuits or 'oily cakes' that Cookie could prepare... if only he had some milk.

Sneaking into the meadow of the top-hatted Chief Factor (Toby Jones, in magnificently pompous form), they steal a few pints from the dairy cow he has recently imported, the first of its kind in this corner of the world. Soon their tasty wares are the stuff of local legend; prices rising, demand outstripping supply. Perhaps they can make enough to set up an establishment – an affordable hotel. (What a thought!)

Freely adapted from the novel *The Half-Life* by Reichardt's regular co-writer Jon Raymond, *First Cow* places us right in the heart of its story, thanks in no small part to the director's collaboration with the cinematographer Christopher Blauvelt. Rather than the widescreen vistas that have come to define America on screen, Reichardt and Blauvelt once again find piercing beauty in more personal framings, wherein human features are at times almost indistinguishable from the interlacing fronds of shadowy foliage – characters passing through the half-light of history. – Mark Kermode, *Observer*



Monday 25 March at 6:00 pm

Early start – long run time

Memories of Murder Salinui chueok

South Korea 2003

Director: Bong Joon-ho
Producer: Cha Seung-jae
Production co: CJ Entertainment, Sidus Pictures
Screenplay: Bong Joon-ho, Shim Sung-bo, based on the play *Come to See Me* by Kim Kwang-rim
Photography: Kim Hyung-koo
Editor: Kim Sun-min
Music: Iwashiro Tarō

With: Song Kang-ho (Park Doo-man), Kim Sang-kyung (Seo Tae-yoon), Kim Roi-ha (Cho Yong-koo), Song Jae-ho (Sergeant Shin Dong-chul), Byun Hee-bong (Sergeant Koo Hee-bong), Go Seo-hee (Officer Kwon Kwi-ok), Ryu Tae-Ho (Jo Byeong-Sun), Park No-shik (Baek Kwang-ho), Park Hae-il (Hyeon-gyu)

130 mins, Blu-ray. R16 violence, offensive language & sex scenes
In Korean with English subtitles

The story follows three cops – inept provincial detective Park (Song Kang-ho), his hotheaded and violent partner Cho (Kim Roi-ha), and Seoul-trained, levelheaded pro Seo (Kim Sang-kyung) – as they investigate the grisly rapes and ritualistic killings of local women in small-town South Korea in 1986...

As the cops' differing methods and attitudes clash, Bong shifts strikingly between tones, whipsawing the viewer. Initially, Park is a buffoon with an outsized sense of self-regard; he foolishly claims he can take one look at a suspect and determine if they're guilty, an ability that is disproved over and over again. He and Cho abuse their suspects to a degree that's almost comical; Bong is a master of showing us something awful and then daring us to laugh. Seo, meanwhile, does things the 'right' way, via careful analysis and reason. 'Documents never lie,' he's fond of saying. These approaches will change over the course of the film, sometimes in tragic ways.

The movie itself transforms, too: As the loose ends and the innocent suspects pile up, the comedy of errors becomes a drama of terrors. At the end of each failure, after all, is another dead woman. And while Bong shoots his suspense scenes with disturbing precision – on a big screen, you'll be better able to appreciate his use of deep focus and shadow – he is not without compassion. He makes you feel the characters' fear – both the sharp dread of what's next and the blunt, uncontrollable pain of memory.

But he's also got his eye on a broader, harder-to-define trauma: TV screens show turmoil on the streets; the cops get reports of protests being suppressed; at one point, they're unable to go after the murderer because all their backup is off beating up pro-democracy activists. Civil defense drills are commonplace. In the film's most striking, heartbreaking shot, we see a murder being committed in a forest while, in the background, nearby houses' lights go off one by one, blacking out as part of a crisis preparation exercise. It's as if a nation in fear is turning its back on those who are most vulnerable...

Slowly, Bong makes the critical connection between these people and the repressive society they live in – one where violence is commonplace and where the very nature of reality is constantly in dispute. Toward the end, the questions being asked of witnesses and suspects start to feel more existential than specific – as if, as the cops get closer and closer to the facts, the less certain everything becomes. By the time the spellbinding and mysterious final shot rolls around, we're left with this thought, the sad, mad truth of an authoritarian world: Nobody's innocent, and everybody's a victim. – Bilge Ebiri, *Village Voice*



Tuesday 02 April at 6:15 pm

Hit the Road Jaddeh khaki

Iran 2021

Director: Panah Panahi
Producers: Panah Panahi, Mastaneh Mohajer
Screenplay: Panah Panahi
Photography: Amin Jafari
Editors: Ashkan Mehri, Amir Etminan
Music: Peyman Yazdani

With: Pantea Panahiha (Mother), Mohammad Hassan Madjooi (Father), Rayan Sarlak (Little Brother), Amin Simiar (Big Brother)

93 mins, Blu-ray. M offensive language
In Farsi with English subtitles

With a touch on the pedal so light you don't even feel the woosh, Panah Panahi, son of Iranian auteur Jafar Panahi, goes instantaneously from zero to 60 with his debut feature, *Hit the Road*. Doubly surprising, he does it repeatedly within the film too, from scene to scene – and within scenes, from moment to moment – accelerating and decelerating so abruptly, switching moods like gears, like radio stations, that by the end we should be rattling around inside, carsick, dying to get out. Instead, its 93 minutes whip by so airily, it's possible not to realize how much you've learned to love the family whose road trip you've shared in, until the credits roll and you immediately start to miss them.

Hit the Road, again like its director, works from a standing start. The car... has pulled in by the side of the road while its occupants rest and its driver stretches. We can't know it yet, but there is subtle foreshadowing in who is inside the car, dozing or drowsing, and who is outside, looking in, drumming fingers on the rear window at the family dog, watching the others with an unreadable but notably tender expression. Arranged and observed like this, it feels like the kind of nothing moment that springs to mind in times of homesickness, as opposed to any more considered or rehearsed farewell, such as the one in which, as we presently learn, this journey is meant to end.

We don't get to know these characters by name so much as by their relative positions within the family constellation, and within the car. Up front, we have Mom (Pantea Panahiha), perhaps the clan's pole star, though also the most demonstrative and expressive character, with moods that pass across her lovely face like changing landscapes. Beside her sits her elder son (Amin Simiar), pensive and quiet, except in one beautifully observed conversation with his shaggy, bearlike Dad (Hassan Madjooi), who sits in the back with his right leg in a tatty cast sticking through the gap between the front seats. Ostensibly beside him, but really ping-ponging around the car like a pinball is the younger son (instant superstar Rayan Sarlak), nicknamed 'Monkey the Second' by Dad, whose irrepressible, bendy, explosive energy gives the film its anarchic spirit. And right in the back, there's Jessy, the family dog, whose late-stage illness is one of the secrets being kept from the little boy.

Another secret, only ever partially revealed, is the actual reason for the journey, which is a melancholy and perhaps even dangerous one, that justifies Mom's fear at one point that they are being followed – paranoia further borne out when the messenger they've arranged to meet turns out to be a horror-movie-style motorcyclist wearing a crudely fashioned burlap sack as a mask. But the younger boy punctures the fearfulness of the encounter by cheerily observing how he looks like The Scarecrow from the *Batman* films, just as later, at a moment of maximal potential sorrow, he will look up at us directly and with absurdly perfect rhythm, lip sync to the crooning strains of an old Iranian pop song. – Jessica Kiang, *Variety*



Monday 08 April at 6:15 pm

Joint Security Area Gongdong gyeongbi guyeok JSA South Korea 2000

Director: Park Chan-wook
Producers: Shim Jae-myung, Lee Eun
Production co: Myung Films
Screenplay: Kim Hyun-seok, Jeong Seong-san, Lee Moo-yeong, Park Chan-wook
Photography: Kim Seung-bok
Editor: Kim Sang-bum
Music: Jo Yeong-wook, Bang Jun-seok

With: Song Kang-ho (Sergeant Oh Kyeong-pil), Lee Byung-hun (Sergeant Lee Soo-hyuk), Lee Young-ae (Major Sophie E Jean), Kim Tae-woo (Private Nam Sung-sik), Shin Ha-kyun (Private Jung Woo-jin), Christoph Hofrichter (Major General Bruno Botta)

109 mins, Blu-ray. M violence
In Korean with English subtitles

The movie that put Park Chan-wook on the map – right on the border between South Korea and North Korea – *Joint Security Area* is a bold genre film that's not quite in any genre, changing gears between action thriller, murder mystery, courtroom drama, and army buddy movie... Song's tough, endearing performance shows him in full command as an actor twenty years before the West caught up to him as the chauffeur father in *Parasite*.
A S Hamrah, *The Baffler*

The South Korean director Park Chan-wook is enjoying a somewhat belated moment of American recognition. *Oldboy*, his grisly, extravagantly stylish revenge thriller, a prize-winner at Cannes last year, thrilled aficionados of Asian genre filmmaking when it opened here in March. A newer film, *Three Extremes*, will be screened as part of the New York Asian Film Festival. Meanwhile, an earlier one, *Joint Security Area*, which won a handful of Grand Bell awards (South Korea's equivalent of the Oscar) in 2001, opens in Manhattan today.

Joint Security Area is neither as convoluted nor as violent as *Oldboy*, though plenty of blood is shed. Set in a particularly tense area of the demilitarized zone between the Koreas, it is a fairly straightforward whodunit with a pointedly political theme and an unapologetically humanist message. Major Jean (Lee Yeong-ae), who grew up in Switzerland, comes to South Korea, her father's homeland, to investigate an incident that took place inside the Joint Security Area, administered by Swedish and Swiss peacekeepers.

Collecting depositions from both sides, she encounters two predictably opposed accounts of the shooting, which left two North Korean soldiers dead... With the specter of nuclear hostilities hovering, Major Jean's investigation is a lot more than routine police work.

And *Joint Security Area* itself departs from routine as the real story behind the skirmish emerges in a series of long, cleanly filmed flashbacks. Inside this thriller about geopolitical hostility is a story of friendship...

That their camaraderie comes to a bad end is ordained, both by the film's structure and by its intractable real-world context, and in narrative terms, Major Jean's discovery of the truth may feel anticlimactically simple. But that could also be the point of this warm, sorrowful film, which plays like a downbeat variation on an old World War II picture from Hollywood. The logic of political conflict works itself out in stark, brutal ways that ordinary people, however brave or decent they might be, are often powerless to oppose.
A O Scott, *New York Times*



Monday 15 April at 6:15 pm

Mishima: A Life in Four Chapters Japan/USA 1985

Director: Paul Schrader
Producers: Yamamoto Mataichirō, Tom Luddy
Production co: Zoetrope Studios, FilmLink International, Lucasfilm Ltd
Screenplay: Leonard Schrader, Paul Schrader, Chieko Schrader
Photography: John Bailey
Editors: Michael Chandler, Oshima Tomoyo
Music: Philip Glass

With: Ken Ogata (Yukio Mishima), Yasosuke Bandō (Mizoguchi), Kōichi Satō (Kashiwagi), Hisako Manda (Mariko), Kenji Sawada (Osamu), Reisen Lee (Kiyomi), Setsuko Karasuma (Mitsuko), Toshiyuki Nagashima (Isao), Hiroshi Katsuno (Lieutenant Hori)

121 mins, Blu-ray. M nudity, sexual references, suicide theme & content that may disturb
In Japanese with English subtitles

A daringly original biopic, which flashes back from the famous novelist-movie star-traditionalist-gay bizarro's suicidal assault on a Japanese army camp. Between minimal black-and-white episodes of Mishima's earlier life and colourful dramatisations of scenes from three of his novels, this attempts to come to grips with the public and private faces of a real-life character, and finally reflects more upon the neuroses and drives of its creator than its subject. Schrader's obsessive-puritanical philosophising is at its purest here, as he channels his usual concerns into a meditation on Mishima's tussles with love, death, honour and the spirit. – Neil Young, *Empire*

Plenty of writers live their art, but few died their art as ambitiously or publicly as Yukio Mishima – imperialist, bodybuilder, actor, director, best-selling author, homosexual, commander of his own private army, icon, and the subject of Paul Schrader's 1985 magnum opus *Mishima: A Life In Four Chapters*... Calling Schrader's masterpiece a mere biopic doesn't do it justice. It's more a dreamy, hypnotic meditation on the tragic intersection of Mishima's oeuvre and existence that takes place as much in its subject's fevered imagination as the outside world. For Mishima, life was essentially an extravagant prelude to death, a race toward poetic oblivion that finds a glorious musical analogue in Philip Glass' fearlessly kinetic score. From an early age, Mishima was fixated on the erotic possibilities of dying young and beautiful. That obsession found frequent expression in his writing.

Schrader's four-chapter film elegantly juxtaposes scenes from Mishima's life with dramatizations of three of his novels, all of which act as funhouse mirrors reflecting and distorting their creator's fetishization of death. The 'Beauty' chapter dramatizes *The Temple Of The Golden Pavilion*, in which a stuttering, awkward young man becomes consumed with the destruction of the title monument. 'Art' follows with excerpts from *Kyoko's House*, a morbid drama about a callow young stud who becomes the kept man of a rich woman. As Mishima's fascination with seppuku and restoring Japan to its emperor-worshipping past heads into a horrifying endgame stage, the film segues to *Runaway Horses*, a novel whose plot mirrors Mishima's very public suicide.

The film's final chapter, 'Harmony Of Pen And Sword', documents how Mishima tried to live his art by taking a general hostage as a pretext for committing seppuku in front of soldiers and the press... John Bailey's cinematography alternates between stylized black and white in flashback scenes, muted color realism in the scenes documenting Mishima's last day, and lush abstraction in fiction scenes, dominated by gorgeous, theatrical, lurid pinks and sunburst golds. Just as his subject sought to reconcile intellect and action, words and deeds, Schrader finds a perfect union between sound and image, weighty ideas, and giddy sensual rapture. – Nathan Rabin, *AV Club*



Monday 22 April at 6:15 pm

A Tale of Two Sisters

Janghwa, Hongryeon
South Korea 2003

Director: Kim Jee-woon
Producers: Oh Jeong-wan, Oh Ki-min
Production co: BOM Film Productions
Screenplay: Kim Jee-woon
Photography: Lee Mo-gae
Editor: Ko Im-pyo
Music: Lee Byung-woo

With: Im Soo-jung (Bae Su-mi), Moon Geun-young (Bae Su-yeon), Yum Jung-ah (Heo Eun-joo), Kim Kap-soo (Bae Moo-hyeon), Lee Seung-bi (Mi-hee), Lee Dae-yeon (Su-mi's doctor), Park Mi-hyun (Mrs Bae), Woo Ki-hong (Sun-kyu)

115 mins, Blu-ray. M violence & horror. In Korean with English subtitles

This is filmmaking as tactile exercise, and the atmosphere in which Kim houses his debauched delights is something like smothering beneath the tender insistence of a satin glove. *A Tale of Two Sisters* is based on an old Korean folktale of two sisters so abused by the capriciousness of the world that they're forced to take refuge in one another and within themselves. In tone and execution, it feels like *Heavenly Creatures*; in its tale of an evil stepmother and a haunted castle by the lake in the woods, it has the heft of classic German fairytales. Walter Chaw, *Film Freak Central*

Small floral prints can never be the same again after you have seen *A Tale of Two Sisters*. Korean director Kim Ji-woon's story of a damaged family takes place in a house that is haunted not only by unresolved memories and terrible events, and perhaps by ghosts, but also by Laura Ashley-style fabrics. These repetitive patterns of flowers, on walls and curtains and clothes, start to take on a sinister, controlling quality...

They are part of the decor and design in a remote house in the country, to which Su-mi (Im Soo-jung) and her sister Su-yeon (Moon Geun-young) are brought by their father (Kim Kap-su) for respite after some kind of illness: what it was, and what we are to make of it, is elaborated on as the film progresses. Waiting to greet them is Eun-joo (Yeom Jeong-Ah), their stepmother, smiling and brittle, simmering with scarcely concealed hostility.

Su-mi is the stronger personality of the two sisters, while Su-yeon is more passive and apparently accommodating, but our understanding of the terms of the relationship alters significantly in the course of the movie. The film is filled with an atmosphere of dread: apart from a brief, idyllic scene at the beginning, on a sunny day, where the two sisters go down to a lake near the house, sit on a jetty and dangle their feet in the water, there's scarcely a moment free of tension or apprehension.

It is clear that something terrible happened in the house, something that cannot be talked about. And strange, unpleasant, inexplicable things continue to take place. Some have a supernatural element, some could have arisen from malice or psychotic behaviour... The father seems to be a numb presence, unaware of what is going on around him, oblivious to or unprepared to tackle the tension between his daughters and his new wife, although he makes a phone call to an unknown person, asking for some help.

There are, towards the end, revelations that, at one level, clarify what has gone before, explain the nature of some of the horrors and past events. They make it clear that this is a carefully structured film about grief and guilt, as well as horror. They don't resolve every disturbing moment or confusing element: they leave some questions hauntingly unanswered. – Philippa Hawker, *SMH*



Monday 29 April at 6:15 pm

AFS AGM follows screening

Rain

New Zealand 2001

Director: Christine Jeffs
Producer: Philippa Campbell
Production co: Communicado Productions, New Zealand Film Commission, Rain Film Productions, Rose Road
Screenplay: Christine Jeffs, based on the novel by Kirsty Gunn
Photography: John Toon
Editor: Paul Maxwell
Music: Neil Finn, Edmund McWilliams

With: Alicia Fulford-Wierzbicki (Janey), Sarah Peirse (Kate), Márton Csókás (Cady), Alistair Browning (Ed), Aaron Murphy (Jim), David Taylor (Sam), Chris Sherwood (Ron), Claire Dougan (Joy), Alison Routledge (Heather)

92 mins, Blu-ray. M

The images of water and sky through which Christine Jeffs, the writer and director, and John Toon, the cinematographer, filter this story of adolescent confusion and family collapse seem heavy with the ionic charge that electrifies the air just before a thunderstorm. Little happens – days unspool in the leisurely, drunken rhythms of summer – but an intimation of overwhelming dread is palpable in every scene...

Janey (Alicia Fulford-Wierzbicki) is 13. She spends her days with her younger brother, Jim (Aaron Murphy), swimming, playing and searching for minor mischief to get into. Their parents, especially their sorrowful mother, Kate (Sarah Peirse), pass the time sitting in lawn chairs next to an ice bucket, a whiskey bottle and a pile of lemons, drinking. In the evening, their friends come over and they drink some more – and also dance, argue and frolic naked in the surf.

Kate does some heavy flirting – which soon develops into something more – with Cady (Márton Csókás), a rugged photographer who lives on a fishing boat moored in the bay nearby. Her passive, kindly husband, Ed (Alistair Browning), sees what's happening, but seems too foggy and gloomy to react; his passivity may be what pushes Kate ever further toward Cady, but it's hard to say. Their marriage, which we see mostly from Janey's point of view, is as opaque as the ocean on an overcast day – a fact of nature that can't be opposed or explained.

The central story in *Rain*, based on a slender, lyrical novel by Kirsty Gunn, is of Janey's awakening perception, at once precocious and dangerously innocent, of the mysterious grown-up world...

She carries herself, more and more, with a sullen sangfroid that foretells a hurried, un sentimental abandonment of childhood. The poise that Ms Fulford-Wierzbicki demonstrates is uncanny, and a little frightening in its own way. Only a year older than the character she plays, the actress, in her first major film role, seems to understand every nuance of Janey's psychology, including the limits of her maturity. She is able to ebb back and forth between feckless girlishness and a steely self-assurance beyond anything the adults around her can manage.

The film is, in some ways, a furious indictment of those adults, whose self-absorption and neglect leave their children exposed to moral and physical peril. Ed and Kate are, to use a word Jim half-knowingly bandies about, failures, but they are judged compassionately as well as harshly. Their vulnerability seems, at times, even greater than Janey's or Jim's, as if they were in danger of being swallowed up by the natural sublimity that surrounds them.

A O Scott, *New York Times*



Monday 06 May at 6:00 pm

Early start – long run time

Burning Beoning South Korea 2018

AFS thanks Metropolitan Rentals Ltd

Director: Lee Chang-dong
Producers: Lee Joon-dong, Lee Chang-dong
Production co: Pinehouse Film, Now Film, NHK, Finecut
Screenplay: Oh Jung-mi, Lee Chang-dong, based on the story 'Barn Burning' by Haruki Murakami
Photography: Hong Kyung-pyo
Editor: Kim Hyeon, Kim Da-won
Music: Mowg

With: Yoo Ah-in (Lee Jong-su), Steven Yeun (Ben), Jeon Jong-seo (Shin Hae-mi), Kim Soo-Kyung (Yeon-ju), Choi Seung-ho (Lee Yong-seok), Lee Joong-ok (Patrolman), Moon Sung-keun (Lawyer), Min Bok-gi (Judge), Ban Hye-ra (Jong-su's mother)

148 mins, Blu-ray. M violence, sex scenes, nudity & drug use. In Korean with English subtitles

Not a lot actually burns in Lee Chang-dong's *Burning*. A barn, in a dream. A car. The tips of cigarettes. A joint. But the cumulative effect of all its perfect moments, all its perfectly true, unexpected and consequential scenes, is scorching. The embers are banked up so gradually and relentlessly that it's not until a few hours after the ending of this elusive, riveting masterpiece that you are far enough away to appreciate the scale of the conflagration. It has been eight years since Lee's last film, 2010's sublimely moving *Poetry*, and though it would be a great shame if it were to take him as long to return with his next project, it's likely the memory of *Burning* will still be hot to the touch.

It is based on a skeletal short story by Haruki Murakami in the same way a spreading oak is based on an acorn. Jong-su (Yoo Ah-in) is an isolated young man working a menial delivery job in Seoul, when he is accosted by Haemi (Yun Jong-seo), a childhood friend from his home village, so close to the North Korean border that when a southerly wind blows you can hear the propaganda broadcasts...

But it is Yoo Ah-in who must carry the full weight of the film on Jong-su's sullen shoulders, underplaying his colossal performance so consummately that nine-tenths of it remain underwater. And yet the mass of it is palpable and he is the one who breaks your heart. Witness his hopeful expression during a reunion with his long-estranged mother while she giggles into her phone; his acute awareness of Ben's rich friends' condescension to Haemi when even she doesn't notice it herself; the loneliness of him, stolidly preparing instant noodles in his father's squalid house in the village.

In a rare moment of terse eloquence, Jongsu admits to Ben, 'To me, the world is a mystery.' It is a plea for mercy from an enemy, a rebuke and a miserable confession of helplessness, and it contains in it the kernel of his later actions, though you can never see them coming...

The narrative is slippery as silk, eliding from romance to tragedy to mystery to something more unsettling, something dark as a cinder. But once it gets there you understand this was the only way it could have played out. This sense of surprise and inevitability is a hallmark of truly masterful writing (from Lee and co-writer Oh Jung-mi) and such skillful direction that it feels like you're suspended within the story in an invisible tangle of glances and exchanges, secrets and lies, tricks and cruelties and lucky shafts of reflected sunlight. Every new development seeds the one that comes after and changes your perspective on what went before, right up to a climax where those oscillating reversals take place across a single shocking moment, sending you out into the night with a gift: a story that is fully spent and wholly satisfying but eternally, burningly mysterious. – Jessica Kiang, *Sight and Sound*



Monday 13 May at 6:15 pm

Happening L'événement France 2021

Director: Audrey Diwan
Producers: Edouard Weil, Alice Girard
Production co: Rectangle Productions, France 3 Cinéma, SRAB Films
Screenplay: Audrey Diwan, Marcia Romano, Anne Berest, based on the novel by Annie Ernaux
Photography: Laurent Tangy
Editor: Géraldine Mangenot
Music: Evgueni Galperine, Sacha Galperine

With: Anamaria Vartolomei (Anne), Kacey Mottet Klein (Jean), Luàna Bajrami (Hélène), Louise Orry-Diquero (Brigitte), Louise Chevillotte (Olivia), Pio Marmai (Professeur Bornec), Sandrine Bonnaire (Gabrielle Duchesne), Leonor Oberson (Claire), Anna Mougialis (Mme Rivière)

99 mins, Blu-ray. R16 sex scenes, nudity, cruelty & content that may disturb
In French with English subtitles. Golden Lion, Venice

It's 1963 and Anna (Anamaria Vartolomei) is helping two of her friends to tighten their bras in a bid to achieve maximum effect at that night's university dance. It's the last carefree evening that she's going to enjoy for some time.

Happening may be looking back almost 60 years, but it's no period piece. Adapted from a novel-cum-memoir by the French author Annie Ernaux... it's all about intimacy and immediacy. Ernaux has said that she has tried... to revive her teenage self, along with all the torments that went with being young.

In transferring Ernaux's story to the screen, writer-director Audrey Diwan takes this aim with great seriousness, refusing to let us off the hook for a moment. There's no visual shorthand. Searching close-ups and long, reflective takes ensure that we're with Anna every step of the way, as she tries to work out what to do about the discovery that she's pregnant after a one-night stand with a boy she met in a bookshop.

The bit about the bookshop is crucial. Anna is a reader and a scholar who's at the top of her class. From a working-class family, she's also an outsider, patronised by the well-heeled snobs at the university college where she lives. Her mother (Sandrine Bonnaire) has great hopes for her future, as does her literature professor, and a baby would upset everything. As she sees it, an abortion is her only way out, but she has no idea where to go for help. As the weeks grind on, her world shrinks to a single question: what is she going to do about her pregnancy?

Up to this point, she has been stimulated by the waves of hostility emanating from the college rich kids, buoyed up by being smarter than they are and just as pretty. Now, however, she withdraws, telling no one about her predicament and lapsing into silence – a test for any actor. Yet Vartolomei makes every moment comprehensible. It's a beautifully judged performance.

When she can keep her secret no longer, those she should be able to trust let her down. No doctor will risk a gaol sentence and her friends are equally fearful. From this point on, there are plenty of harrowing moments and Diwan spares us none of them. – Sandra Hall, *Sydney Morning Herald*

Diwan's gaze remains clear, direct, fearless. She shows you a part of life that the movies rarely do. By which I mean: She shows you a woman who desires, desires to learn, have sex, bear children on her terms, be sovereign – a woman who, in choosing to live her life, risks becoming a criminal and dares to be free. Manohla Dargis, *New York Times*



Monday 20 May at 6:00 pm – Double Bill

Early start – long run time

The Unknown

USA 1927

Director: Tod Browning
 Producer: Irving G Thalberg
 Production co: MGM
 Screenplay: Joseph Farnham, Waldemar Young
 Photography: Merritt B Gerstad
 Editors: Harry Reynolds, Errol Taggart

With: Lon Chaney (Alonzo the Armless), Norman Kerry (Malabar the Mighty), Joan Crawford (Nanon Zanzi), Nick De Ruiz (Antonio Zanzi), John George (Cojo the dwarf), Frank Lanning (Costra)

68 mins, Blu-ray, B&W. Silent with intertitles. PG

The Unknown was Browning and Chaney's sixth collaboration, and it all came together in this one – the carnival background, the sociopathic criminals, the body horror, the sublimated sex. Set in Madrid for an extra touch of the exotic, the movie (originally titled *Alonzo the Armless*) concerns an armless carnival performer (Chaney) who has a knife-throwing and sharpshooting act done entirely with his feet. But like most Browning protagonists, Alonzo has a dark secret: he is wanted by the police, and is hiding out in the carnival, careful to conceal the physical secrets that could give him away.

Alonzo is passionately in love with the assistant in his act, Nanon, played by Joan Crawford at her most seductive. Nanon is in turn loved by Malabar (Norman Kerry), the strongman, but Alonzo figures he has an advantage: Nanon has a deep loathing of men's arms, declaring that she hates the very idea of being held by a man. As the law closes in, Alonzo makes an astonishingly terrible decision, one that, of course, goes very badly indeed.

Mordaunt Hall of the *New York Times* wrote, with lofty understatement, that *The Unknown* is 'anything but a pleasant story'. It is, however – and Browning doesn't always get enough credit for this – an incredible actors' showcase. Browning gets a marvelous performance out of the relatively inexperienced Crawford. She always spoke highly of Chaney, crediting him as the first costar who made her understand the fundamentals of screen acting. And close observation of her work shows that what is usually described by male critics as Nanon's 'phobia' is clearly more than that. Crawford is playing what we now call trauma, quite likely stemming from violence. (The way Nanon recoils from her father is another broad hint.) It's easy to understand why a young and beautiful woman in a rough-and-tumble carnival might be disgusted by men in general...

The George Eastman Museum recently restored *The Unknown* to something near its full length, adding back... fades and close-ups that distributors had trimmed because they thought that stuff just slowed the film down. They were doing a grave disservice to Lon Chaney and his director, since *The Unknown* contains some of the finest reaction shots of Chaney's career. Alonzo's thoughts are dark, demonic – and we can read them all when Chaney's face is turned toward the camera. – Farran Smith Nehme, *Criterion.com*

Able to express contradictory emotions at the same time, Chaney beautifully handles the uneasy balance between tears and laughter, remaining deeply moving in the most incongruous situations. As a result, even though Alonzo is a criminal, a frighteningly possessive lover and a man driven by the darkest impulses, he is the one that you root for. This is where Browning's heart clearly is – with the freaks, the loners and the misfits, with the anguished yearnings of troubled souls. – Virginie Sélavy, *Electric Sheep*



followed by

Freaks

USA 1932

Director/Producer: Tod Browning
 Production co: MGM
 Screenplay: Willis Goldbeck, Leon Gordon, based on the story 'Spurs' by Tod Robbins
 Photography: Merritt B Gerstad
 Editor: Basil Wrangell

With: Wallace Ford (Phroso), Leila Hyams (Venus), Olga Baclanova (Cleopatra), Roscoe Ates (Roscoe), Henry Victor (Hercules), Harry Earles (Hans), Daisy Earles (Frieda), Rose Dione (Madame Tetrallini), Daisy and Violet Hilton (Siamese twins)

62 mins, Blu-ray, B&W. R16

Of the many colorful reviews Tod Browning's *Freaks* prompted upon its 1932 release, few captured the film's unique quality as aptly as these lines from the *Boston Herald*: 'It is the sort of thing that, once seen, lurks in the dark places of the mind, cropping up every so often with a dourful persistence.' Oddly enough, the *Herald* didn't mean this as an endorsement. In fact, *Freaks* received little praise upon its release; it pleased neither critics nor audiences, virtually ended Browning's career, got banned in Britain, prompted MGM to remove its logo from the prints, and disappeared for decades. Then, with a dourful persistence, it cropped up as a cult item and midnight-movie fixture in the '60s and '70s, enjoying a second life in an era during which the term 'freak' had fewer negative connotations.

Had more people seen it in the '30s, that term might have lost its stigma earlier. Much of what makes *Freaks* so unsettling comes from its refusal to treat its stars as, well, freaks. A circus vet, having worked as a clown and a contortionist, Browning assembled a cast of real-life sideshow performers for his cast. Previously, he'd helped establish the American horror film by working with Lon Chaney and directing Bela Lugosi in *Dracula*. For *Freaks*, he decided to skip the illusion, and he filled the screen with a real-life bearded lady, a human skeleton, a bird lady, dwarfs, microcephalics (or, less charitably, 'pinheads'), and 'half boy' Johnny Eck, whose body had no lower half, but who walks gracefully on his hands.

Though Browning never ignores his subjects' potential for shock value, he also treats them as a big, functional family. He leaves the real ugliness for the 'normal' people, namely a statuesque acrobat (Olga Baclanova) and a strongman (Henry Victor) who conspire to seduce little person Harry Earles away from his tiny fiancée Daisy Earles (in real life, Harry's sister) in an effort to steal his fortune. When the freaks get wise to their scheme, however, Baclanova and Victor's own fortunes take a turn for the worse and the film starts burrowing into the mind's dark places. Never comfortable with talkies, Browning uses spare dialogue, nonsense chants, eerie whistles, and unforgettable visuals to portray Baclanova and Earles' wedding feast, the acrobat's rejection of her new family, and the dire consequences of that rejection. – Keith Phipps, *AV Club*

Browning ran away from home to join a circus, performing as clown and a contortionist, before becoming a stage actor and entering the movies. After assisting Griffith on *Intolerance*, he switched to direction himself. To the horror movie, a genre he helped create, he brought a taste for Victorian melodrama and an understanding, which he must have gained in the circus, for the isolated lives of weird and deformed outsiders... What shocked MGM, who removed the studio's logo from the film, and the British censors, who banned it for 30 years, was not the horror but the way Browning made the audience look directly at the maimed and deformed, contrasting their sense of honour and mutual respect with the inner corruption of Cleopatra, the beautiful trapeze artist, and Hercules, the handsome strongman. – Philip French, *Observer*



Monday 27 May at 6:00 pm

Early start – long run time

Solaris

USSR 1972

Director: Andrei Tarkovsky
Producer: Vyacheslav Tarasov
Production co: Mosfilm
Screenplay: Friedrich Gorenstein, Andrei Tarkovsky, based on the novel by Stanislav Lem
Photography: Vadim Yusov
Editor: Lyudmila Feiginova
Music: Eduard Artemyev

With: Donatas Banionis (Kris Kelvin), Raimundas Banionis (young Kelvin), Natalya Bondarchuk (Hari), Jüri Järvet (Dr Snaut), Vladislav Dvorzhetsky (Henri Burton), Nikolai Grinko (Kelvin's Father), Olga Barnet (Kelvin's Mother), Anatoly Solonitsyn (Dr Sartorius), Sos Sargsyan (Dr Gibarian)

166 mins, Blu-ray. PG. Grand Jury Prize, Cannes
In Russian with English subtitles. New digital restoration

In possibly the most emotionally devastating science-fiction film ever made, scientist Chris Kelvin (Donatas Banionis) is sent to a space station whose inhabitants have been attempting to make contact with the mysterious planet Solaris. He's convinced that the crew has gone mad, until he sees his own startling apparitions. Often described as a Soviet response to Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey*, *Solaris* is a monolithic, enigmatic work of startling beauty and depth. – Film at Lincoln Center

Unlike *2001*, however, *Solaris* is saturated with grief, which grips the film even before it leaves Earth. In the moody prelude, we see the protagonist, a space psychologist named Kris Kelvin, staring at underwater reeds as though they were a drowned woman's tresses... He is taking off the next day for a mission to the space station Solaris, a once thriving project that has gone amiss; it will be his job to determine whether or not to close down the research station...

Solaris helped initiate a genre that has become an art-house staple: the drama of grief and partial recovery. Watching this 166-minute work is like catching a fever, with night sweats and eventual cooling brow. Tarkovsky's experiments with pacing, to 'find Time within Time,' as he put it, have his camera track up to the sleeping Kris, dilating the moment, so that we enter his dream... The film that *Solaris* most resembles thematically is not *2001* but Hitchcock's *Vertigo* (1958): ...the multiple disguises or 'resurrections' of the loved one, the inevitability of repeating past mistakes.

The real power of the film comes from the anguish of Kris's reawakened love ... (Like Mizoguchi's 1953 *Ugetsu*, this is a story about falling in love with ghosts.) The alternation between color and monochromatic shots conveys something of this ontological instability, while the jittery camera explorations over shelves and walls suggest a seizure...

Meanwhile, Tarkovsky peppers the dialogue with heady arguments about reality, identity, humanity, and sympathy, buttressed by references to civilization's linchpins – Bach, Tolstoy, Dostoyevsky, Goethe, Brueghel, Luther, and Cervantes. The Soviet censors, who demanded that the filmmaker 'remove the concept of God,' may have been mollified by the absence of the G-word, but Tarkovsky took the standard science-fiction theme of spacemen establishing 'contact' with other forms of intelligence and elevated it implicitly to Contact with Divinity (the planet's ocean, granted sentient powers)... Philip Lopate, *Criterion.com*



Tuesday 04 June at 6:15 pm

Valley Girl

USA 1983

Director: Martha Coolidge
Producers: Wayne Crawford, Andrew Lane
Production co: Valley 9000, Atlantic Releasing
Screenplay: Wayne Crawford, Andrew Lane
Photography: Frederick Elmes
Editor: Éva Gárdos
Music: Marc Levinthal, Scott Wilk

With: Nicolas Cage (Randy), Deborah Foreman (Julie), Elizabeth Daily (Loryn), Michael Bowen (Tommy), Cameron Dye (Fred), Heidi Holicker (Stacey), Michelle Meyrink (Suzi), Tina Theberge (Samantha), Lee Purcell (Beth), Colleen Camp (Sarah Richman), Frederic Forrest (Steve Richman)

100 mins, Blu-ray. M

Disgruntled and weary after slogging through the last dozen Sex-Mad Teenager Movies, I came upon *Valley Girl* with low expectations. What can you expect from a genre inspired by *Porky's*? But this movie is a little treasure, a funny, sexy, appealing story of a Valley Girl's heartbreaking decision: Should she stick with her boring jock boyfriend, or take a chance on a punk from Hollywood?

Having recently seen several Sex-Mad Teenager Movies in which a typical slice of teenager life consisted of seducing your teacher, being seduced by your best friend's mom, or driving off to Tijuana in search of hookers, I found *Valley Girl* to be surprisingly convincing in its portrait of kids in love.

These are kids. They're uncertain about sex, their hearts send out confusing signals, and they're slaves to peer pressure. The teenagers in all those *Porky's* rip-offs seem to be the fantasies of Dirty Old Men, but the kids in *Valley Girl* could plausibly exist in the San Fernando Valley – or even, I suppose, in the Land Beyond O'Hare.

The movie stars Deborah Foreman as Julie, a bright, cute high school girl who is in the process of breaking up with her blond jock boyfriend (Michael Bowen). He's gorgeous to look at, but he's boring and conceited and he does the one thing that drives all teenage girls mad: He sits down next to them in a burger joint and casually helps himself to their lunch.

One night at a party, Julie meets Randy (Nicolas Cage). He's a lanky, kind of goofy-looking kid with an appealing, crooked smile. He's also a punk from across the hills in Hollywood. Julie likes him. He makes her laugh. He's tender. It's awesome. She falls in love. And then her friends start working her over with all sorts of dire predictions, such as she'll be 'totally dropped' if she goes out with this grotty punk...

One of the nicest things about this movie is that it allows its kids to be intelligent, thoughtful, and self-analytical. Another thing is that it allows the parents to be 1983 parents... In *Valley Girl* the parents (Frederic Forrest and Colleen Camp) are former hippies from the Woodstock generation, now running a health food restaurant and a little puzzled by their daughter's preppy friends. It's a perfect touch.

And here's one more nice thing about *Valley Girl*. Maybe because it was directed by a woman, Martha Coolidge, this is one of the rare Teenager Movies that doesn't try to get laughs by insulting and embarrassing teenage girls. Everybody's in the same boat in this movie – boys and girls – and they're all trying to do the right thing and still have a good time... the kids in this movie are human. – Roger Ebert, *Chicago Sun-Times*



Monday 10 June at 6:00 pm

Early start – long run time

An Angel at My Table

New Zealand/Australia 1990

Director: Jane Campion
Producer: Bridget Ikin
Production co: Hibiscus Films, ABC, Television New Zealand, Channel 4
Screenplay: Laura Jones, based on the autobiography by Janet Frame
Photography: Stuart Dryburgh
Editor: Veronika Jenet
Music: Don McGlashan

With: Kerry Fox (Janet Frame), Alexia Keogh (child Janet), Karen Fergusson (teenage Janet), Iris Churn (Mother), Kevin J Wilson (Father), Melina Bernecker (Myrtle), Glynis Angell (Isabel), Martyn Sanderson (Frank Sargeson), William Brandt (Bernhard)

154 mins, Blu-ray. PG coarse language. Special Jury Prize, Venice

The term 'mini-series' makes many people feel ill, so it is better to think of Jane Campion's prize-winning film as a trilogy. Its television origins are not obtrusive. Although it is three hours long I would have watched it for a whole day; Jane Campion has a mesmerising talent. Her recent *Sweetie* was a grotesque and tender minority report on family and suburban life in Australia. This is a very different film – gently comic, at times heartbreaking, always informed by the perception that absurdity creeps into our gravest moments. It is the same perception that Auden expresses in 'Musee des Beaux Arts': suffering takes place 'While someone else is eating or opening a window or just walking dully along'.

The film is based on the autobiographical writings of the celebrated and hypersensitive New Zealand author Janet Frame. We begin in her early childhood. Her family are poor, happy, gifted and dirty. With her shockingly red hair and fat freckled face, the small Janet presents an almost extraterrestrial appearance. Skilfully done, memoirs of childhood strike a chord with adults of the most diverse background and experience; here, Janet's schoolmistresses are works of art in themselves. Yet this part of the film is less a recounting of childhood terrors than an essay in the progress of the imagination. When Janet's eldest sister is drowned – in an episode rather too determinedly signalled – we feel not only the loss of happiness but the loss of innocence.

The child is odd, loving and vulnerable; as she grows up and leaves home for a teacher training college she becomes less and less able to cope with the world. She is pathologically shy, unable to admit to her own needs. But she is a perversely attractive figure – we are always on her side. At successive ages Janet is played by three actresses; it is their achievement to let us see the genius growing within the child, the child still flourishing inside the grown woman.

On teaching practice, Janet panics and runs from the school. She takes a job working in a canteen. She has already decided she wants to be a writer; her sister sensibly asks her, 'How will you earn money?' She is persuaded into hospital 'for a rest', and finds herself amongst the demented. She is diagnosed as schizophrenic. Her family look the term up; the book tells them it is 'a gradual deterioration of mind with no cure'. Janet's talent is already known, but – and this is an interesting point – she is surrounded by well-meaning people who entertain the notion that sanity is not especially necessary to an artist...

It is remarkable for its attention to detail, for its pure, striking and resonant images, and for its understanding of the full weight and value of human idiosyncrasy. I mean to go and see it again as soon as I can. When it was over I felt an almost overwhelming urge to stand in the street and pull passers-by into the next show by main force. Only thoughts of this journal's good name restrained me. – Hilary Mantel, *Spectator*



Monday 17 June at 6:15 pm

Shiva Baby

USA 2020

Director/Screenplay: Emma Seligman
Producers: Kieran Altmann, Katie Schiller, Lizzie Shapiro
Production co: Dimbo Pictures, Irving Harvey, It Doesn't Suck Productions, Neon Heart Productions, Thick Media Co
Photography: Maria Rusche
Editor: Hanna A Park
Music: Ariel Marx

With: Rachel Sennott (Danielle), Molly Gordon (Maya), Danny Deferrari (Max), Polly Draper (Debbie), Fred Melamed (Joel), Dianna Agron (Kim Beckett), Jackie Hoffman (Susan), Cilda Shaur (Sheila)

78 mins, Blu-ray. M sex scenes & offensive language

This slick, sly comedy of New York Jewish manners rests on a simple, claustrophobic premise: what if your whole precarious life, your carefully constructed, fatally fragile persona, fell publicly to pieces amid the ritual and solemnity of a stranger's funeral?

This is the predicament of a young woman, Danielle (Rachel Sennott), who has chosen to rebel against her wealthy and respectable parents by pursuing a parallel, secret life as a sex worker. Alongside some casual escorting, she has cultivated a long-term transactional relationship with Max (Danny Deferrari), who gives her cash and expensive presents in return for sex and happily accepts her lie that he is helping to pay her way through a non-existent law-school degree. The film opens with her hurried departure from his apartment: she doesn't mention being late for a funeral; then again, nor does he. So when they bump into each other over the shiva buffet and discover they are part of the same extended community, they both know they're in trouble – and that's even before Max's beautiful blonde wife Kim (Dianna Agron) and mewling baby arrive on the scene.

Writer-director Emma Seligman's decision to let the ensuing disaster unspool entirely within the confines of the shiva is more than a clever nod to the classical unities of time and place: it's a brilliant device for weaving together all the emotional and narrative tensions in play, and then winding each wire to an almost unbearable breaking-point...

Also in evidence, not unconnectedly, is Danielle's ex-girlfriend Maya (Molly Gordon), who really is going to law school and in many ways seems to have the life Danielle ought to want. But what Maya really wants is Danielle, or at least an explanation of why their relationship suddenly fizzled out.

Wanting and not wanting the various options available to a woman in Danielle's position is one of the film's key themes. On the one hand there's the mythical gilded-youth option (as one elderly relative puts it, 'You just study, and don't eat, and go out with your beautiful friends, is that your life? Lucky you!'). And then there's the having-it-all/hating-it-all adult option represented by the serenely miserable Kim, who runs three businesses, can't find a babysitter, and has unwittingly been bankrolling her husband's infidelity...

As writer, Seligman studs her intricately constructed screenplay with hilarious absurdity and scalpel-sharp one-liners; as director, she frames the mayhem expertly, with one eye always on the bigger picture. The result is an exhilarating and compassionate film about love, death, loneliness – and the life-affirming importance of dessert. – Lisa Mullen, *Sight and Sound*



Monday 24 June at 6:15 pm

AFS thanks The Surrey Hotel

Brief Encounters Korotkie vstrechi USSR [Ukraine] 1967

Director: Kira Muratova
Producer: A Serdykov
Production co: Odessa Film Co
Screenplay: Kira Muratova, Leonid Zhukhovitsky
Photography: Gennadi Karyuk
Editor: O Kharakova
Music: Oleg Karavaychuk

With: Nina Ruslanova (Nadia), Vladimir Vysotsky (Maxim), Kira Muratova (Valentina), Lydia Bazil'skaya (Lyubka), Olga Viklandt (Hairdresser), Alexey Glazyrin (Semyon Semenovich), Valery Isakov, (Styopa), Svetlana Nemolyaeva (Lelia), Lyudmila Ivanova (Lidia Sergeevna)

96 mins, Blu-ray, B&W. PG
In Russian with English subtitles

In *Brief Encounters*, an elegant single woman employed in the government's housing department takes in a live-in housekeeper, unaware that the same man has broken both their hearts: he is a roguish, commitment-phobe geologist who travels like a nomad and doesn't want to settle down...

Muratova's films are driftingly digressive, liable to linger almost perversely on ideas and images adjacent to the matter in hand; they are reluctant to maintain focus on the idea driving the storyline, and content to let dramatic tension and jeopardy leak away. Even the flashbacks, which you might expect to tell us more about what is happening in the present, sometimes seem triggered not by narrative necessity but a kind of loose, improvisatory stream of consciousness that meanders way back to the main motif in its own good time. Slightly menacing, ambient, experimental mood music appears throughout...

In *Brief Encounters*, Muratova plays Valya. She is stressed by her workload, having to manage new apartment blocks and persuade their prospective tenants they will have to wait if the flats are not ready. Flashbacks reveal her erstwhile unhappy relationship with the handsome Maxim (Vladimir Vysotsky) who, like a smug troubadour, strums a guitar once given to him by Nadia (Nina Ruslanova), a former waitress from out in the sticks who once had a fling with him, and is now Valya's housekeeper. That same guitar, its strings symbolically detuning and twangily snapping, now hangs on Valya's wall.

But wait – surely the two women are going to discover their awful shared secret? Surely Maxim is going to show up again, leading to all manner of painful (or farcical) revelations? Surely this disclosure will have dramatic implications for the all-important relationship the two women have with each other? Not quite. Everything is oblique and indirect, even (or especially) the ending.
Peter Bradshaw, *Guardian*

While *Brief Encounters* and *The Long Farewell* tell stories that transcend Soviet conditions even as they comment on them, it's how Muratova goes about telling them that really got her in trouble, and which sets her apart as a filmmaker. With each flashback in *Brief Encounters*, Muratova finds novel means of transitioning between past and present, as in a sequence that cuts from Nadya and Valya inspecting a newly built apartment, to a shot of Nadya in close-up as behind her two distant figures stroll along a road. She goes out of focus as the background comes into focus, revealing the figures to be Nadya and her friend Lubka (Lidiya Brazil'skaya) in the past, hitchhiking their way toward a new life. It's as if the camera movement, together with the inversion of background and foreground, has transferred us, gently, inside Nadya's memory.
William Repass, *Slant*



Monday 01 July at 6:15 pm

Silent Running USA 1972

Director: Douglas Trumbull
Producers: Michael Gruskoff, Marty Hornstein, Douglas Trumbull
Production co: Trumbull/Gruskoff Productions
Screenplay: Deric Washburn, Michael Cimino, Steven Bochco
Photography: Charles F Wheeler
Editor: Aaron Stell
Music: Peter Schickele

With: Bruce Dern (Freeman Lowell), Cliff Potts (Andy Wolf), Ron Rifkin (Marty Barker), Jesse Vint (John Keenan), Mark Persons (Dewey), Cheryl Sparks and Steven Brown (Huey), Larry Whisenhunt (Louie)

90 mins, Blu-ray. PG violence

Silent Running opens with an exquisite close-up of brightly coloured flora and slowly moving fauna. The forest is glistening wet – like it's covered in rainfall – but parts of the path are metal, and the starlit sky is framed by triangular bars. The camera slowly reveals this isn't untouched wilderness but a flourishing garden within a giant geodesic dome. A few moments later, the camera zooms out, spectacularly revealing the giant greenhouse is actually one of six located on a spacecraft gliding through space. Even in the darkest depths of the cosmos life persists, but the prominent branding emblazoned on the ship's exterior suggests this isn't a utopian project; far from it, this nature is the property of a freighter megacorporation.

Within the pantheon of great sci-fi from the 1960s and 1970s, *Silent Running* (1972) is often overlooked. Stanley Kubrick's totemic and philosophical *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968) arguably defines the period while Steven Spielberg's *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977), signaled a shift towards broader popcorn sensibilities. Douglas Trumbull provided visual effects for each of these big-budget classics but as a director, the comparably kitsch *Silent Running* was his own idiosyncratic take on the space movie. Its shoestring \$1 million budget makes its visionary first few minutes all the more remarkable while an emotional core brims with the big-hearted idealism of the era's countercultural politics. It's goofy, moving, and awe-inspiring – often within the same scene; nearly 50 years on, *Silent Running's* charms remain undimmed...

Silent Running's set-up is a model of efficiency; a mission control transmission relays that the freighter carries the last of Earth's precious plantlife. When orders arrive to detonate the forests using nuclear bombs – part of a corporate cost-cutting exercise communicated via another clinical transmission – Freeman Lowell (Bruce Dern), the film's plant-loving protagonist, sets in motion a series of events to save the arboreal cargo... The moral ambiguity Dern sustains – both an admirable and unsettling presence – is central to the film's intrigue.

Silent Running's ongoing appeal is owed, in part, to the prescience of this ecologically-inflected premise. In 1972, global warming was over 15 years away from entering popular discourse (that happened during a 1988 address to the US Senate) but a popular environmental campaign was already in full swing. In 1970, Santa Barbara celebrated Environmental Rights Day, a one-year commemoration for a devastating oil spill. A few months later, the first Earth Day took place across US colleges, universities, schools, and communities. These events, landmark awakenings of public consciousness, emerged in the path of Rachel Carson's watershed 1962 eco-treatise, *Silent Spring* (which shares an eerie resonance with the title of Trumbull's film)... – Lewis Gordon, *bbc.com*



Monday 08 July at 6:15 pm

The Long Farewell Dolgie provody
USSR [Ukraine] 1971

Director: Kira Muratova
Producer: Grigory Kogan
Production co: Odessa Film Studio
Screenplay: Natalya Ryazantseva
Photography: Gennadi Karyuk
Editor: Valentina Oleinik
Music: Oleg Karavaychuk

With: Zinaida Sharko (Yevgenia Vasilyevna Ustinova), Oleg Vladimirsky (Sasha Ustinov), Yuri Kayurov (Nikolai Sergeevich), Lidia Dranovskaya (Vykhodtseva), Viktor Ilchenko (Pavel Konstantinovich), Lidiya Brazilszkaya (Tonya), Svetlana Kabanova (Tatiana Kartseva)

97 mins, Blu-ray, B&W. PG coarse language & sexual references
In Russian with English subtitles

The Long Farewell also explores a marriage, this time already dissolved, but does so indirectly, through the strained relationship between a mother, Yevgenia (Zinaida Sharko), and her adolescent son, Sasha (Oleg Vladimirsky), who's considering leaving home to live with his father in the Caucasus. It's Sasha's interiority that Muratova emphasizes this time around...

The Long Farewell dispenses jolts of subjectivity even more daring in their break with cinematic convention... On a visit to the seaside, Sasha has a series of interactions with a girl his own age, Masha (Tatyana Mychko). In one sequence, we get a shot of Sasha leaning motionless against a bow and arrow, everything above his nose cropped by the frame (shades of Sergei Parajanov's ritualistic tableaux in *The Color of Pomegranates*). The shot is followed by a close up of Masha with a silk ribbon between her teeth. In a series of rapid cuts, we see the same shot, repeated but at slightly different intervals, of her turning away with a coy smile as Sasha approaches to hold her hair in place.

Throughout the sequence there's a total lack of sound effects or music. The discontinuous editing borrows from techniques developed by early Soviet avant-garde filmmakers, namely Sergei Eisenstein and Dziga Vertov, but Muratova puts them to other ends, as she reproduces a person's obsessive re-living and processing of a barrage of sensation.

As with *The Long Farewell's* editing, its camerawork draws attention to itself without becoming self-indulgent, always operating in the service of conveying and honoring subjectivity. The film's many close-ups and caressing movements evoke the pleasure of sensation in and of itself, with attention lavished on the textures of things (from dog fur to silk ribbons to crumbling plaster), experiences that are perpendicular to mere plot development.

Across her films, Muratova derives what can only be described as a synesthetic effect from an audiovisual medium. Her treatment of the camera recalls the cinécriture, or 'cinema writing,' of her French New Wave contemporaries... who sought to find a film equivalent to literary prose style. It's immediately recognizable and personal, turning narration itself into character...

Muratova's intransigent experimentalism should be viewed not just as a rebuke to the Soviet blinkeredness of her own time, but an impetus for today's filmmakers to reinvigorate cinematic language in ways of their own devising... If what we want is a culture that's vibrant and not anemic, forward-looking and not mired in nostalgia and cynicism, we can learn from the work of Muratova, who found ways to express herself in almost impossible conditions.
William Repass, *Slant*



Monday 19 August at 6:15 pm

Cairo Conspiracy aka **Boy from Heaven** Walad min al janna
Sweden/France/Finland/Denmark 2022

Director: Tarik Saleh
Producers: Kristina Åberg, Fredrik Zander
Production co: Atmo, Memento, Bufo
Screenplay: Tarik Saleh
Photography: Pierre Aim
Editor: Theis Schmidt
Music: Krister Linder

With: Tawfeek Barhom (Adam), Fares Fares (Ibrahim), Mohammad Bakri (General Al Sakran), Makram Khoury (Sheikh Negm), Mehdi Dehbi (Zizo), Moe Ayoub (Sobhy), Sherwan Haji (Soliman), Abduljabbar Alsuhili (Alasfour)

121 mins, Blu-ray. M violence

'Your soul is still pure. But every second in this place will corrupt it.' These words spoken to Adam (Tawfeek Barhom), a wide-eyed newly-arrived student at the Al-Azhar University in Cairo, turn out to be prophetic. The centre of power for Sunni Islam, presided over by the Grand Iman, Al-Azhar is a place of learning. But, in this labyrinthine but satisfying thriller by Tarik Saleh, it is also a hotbed of allegiances and intrigue. After the sudden death of the Grand Iman, Adam finds himself embroiled in the scenes machinations intended to influence the choice of the next incumbent. It's a precarious situation for Adam, requiring a steep learning curve, deft political manoeuvring and carrying the risk of a heavy price should he inadvertently cross the wrong person.

Saleh's follow up to *The Nile Hilton Incident* shares with that film a sinuous approach to plot and, in the reliably excellent Fares Fares, a lead actor. Although perhaps not quite as lean and efficient in its storytelling as *Nile Hilton*, *Boy From Heaven* is an ambitiously complex story of religious espionage. It was conceived as a *Name Of The Rose*-style mystery transposed to a Muslim world, but also has much in common with Jacques Audiard's *A Prophet* in its backdrop of factions and power plays and in the trajectory of its central character, from innocent greenhorn negotiating a web of alliances to jaded, compromised survivor...

Barhom is impressive throughout as Adam, the son of an overbearing fisherman who routinely beats all three of his sons for the misdemeanours of one. When Adam is accepted to Al-Azhar, he is initially fearful of his father's reaction, his eyes scanning the floor rather than meeting his father's scalding displeasure. But the older man grudgingly concedes that God's will trumps all else, even the wishes of a father.

Once at Al-Azhar, a bastion of tradition in the heart of Cairo's thronging, modern metropolis, Adam is a serious and conscientious student, who is nicknamed 'sardine' by his less reverent bunk-mate. It's his air of spotless moral probity which catches the eye of Zizo (Mehdi Dehbi), who has been working secretly as the eyes on the inside of the university for Colonel Ibrahim (Fares Fares). Fearful that his cover has been blown, Zizo is seeking his own replacement... Adam soon finds himself forced to infiltrate a group of hard line jihadists, led by the sour-faced Soliman (Sherwan Haji).

Cairo Conspiracy is a handsomely shot work, with Turkey doubling persuasively for Egypt (Saleh was placed on a list of undesirables in 2015 and risks arrest if he sets foot in Egypt). Widescreen shots capture the sober grandeur of the institution and the tumult of the streets outside; God's-eye camera positions offer glimpses of the covert meetings and calculated campaigns of a world which is driven by the schemes and whims of powerful men.
Wendy Ide, *Screen Daily*



Monday 26 August at 6:15 pm

Cow

UK 2021

Director: Andrea Arnold
Producer: Kat Mansoor
Production co: BBC Film, Halcyon Pictures, Doc Society, Submarine
Photography: Magda Kowalczyk, Ponvishal Chidambaranathan
Editors: Rebecca Lloyd, Jacob Schulsinger, Nicolas Chauderue

94 mins, Blu-ray. Exempt

When Luma, the bovine heroine of the documentary *Cow*, acts defensively with the wranglers who have come to feed her newborn with a plastic bottle, one of them explains that she wasn't always this way: 'old age, she's got protective.' As the film follows the dairy cow over the course of four years, it becomes clear (though not to the people exploiting her) that age has little to do with Luma's attitude. The cycle of birthing and losing her calves in an unfeeling environment has rendered her distrustful, anxious, and perpetually heartbroken.

Ascribing such feelings to a cow may seem like anthropomorphism, a lazy way of arguing for the rights of animals by projecting human emotions onto them. But director Andrea Arnold understands that such framing is ultimately ineffective, reducing animals to sub-humans. She and cinematographer Magda Kowalczyk try to share Luma's actual perspective, paying close attention to what she is watching or doing, allowing the facts of her everyday life to speak for themselves. When she doesn't touch her food after her fifth calf is taken from her, while all the other cows eat voraciously, the connection is obvious. The same goes for her endless mooing as she looks toward the boxes where the young are kept.

Arnold's cinema has always been tactile and alive to nature. Beyond relaying Luma's visual experience, the director focuses on her sensations in the harsh environment of the farm, centering the animal's manipulated body. There are close-ups of Luma's feet as she is pushed to perilously walk onto wooden planks to get tubes attached to her udders. The film also translates the calves' brutal awakening to the world through their senses, making evident how against nature and unintuitive their treatment is; once separated from her mother, Luma's calf struggles to suckle on a plastic teat.

The focus on both Luma and her progeny allows the film to tell a dairy cow's entire story, and to reveal how the end of that life is already present in its beginning. Luma and her calf's paths almost cross when the herd is taken to a field. As Luma and her baby try to find each other, they also experience the natural world. For the calf, it's a moment of reconnection and discovery as she learns to graze, and Arnold highlights how she feels the fresh grass with tight and colorful framing. But Luma seems detached from these pleasures, standing still and staring at the sky. She knows something the calf doesn't.

Through simple attention, *Cow* makes evident that animals feel everything inflicted upon them, and that human justifications for exploiting them are solely based on denial and convenience. Even more disturbingly, our detachment from other species has reached such a point that we need a film to remind us of this fact. Arnold seems to argue not only for the rights of dairy cows, but also for those of all creatures whom humans have denied interiority and freedom for so long. She asks us to recognize that what we have deemed 'human' characteristics are often just signs of being alive.

Manuela Lasic, *Hyperallergic*



Monday 02 September at 6:15 pm

India Song

France 1975

Director/Screenplay: Marguerite Duras
Producer: Stephane Tchalgadileff
Production co: Sunchild Productions, Les Films Armorial
Photography: Bruno Nuytten
Editor: Solange Leprince
Music: Carlos d'Alessio

With: Delphine Seyrig (Anne-Marie Stretter), Michael Lonsdale (Vice-consul in Lahore), Mathieu Carrière (Attaché to the German ambassador), Claude Mann (Michael Richardson), Vernon Dobtcheff (Georges Crawn), Didier Flamand (Young guest), Claude Juan (Servant)

120 mins, Blu-ray. PG. In French with English subtitles

Few writers demonstrated greater interest in film than Marguerite Duras, who was born in 1914 to French parents in what was then French Indochina. Duras was fiendishly prolific – her books include *The Sea Wall* (1950), *Moderato Cantabile* (1958), *The Ravishing of Lol Stein* (1964) and *The Lover* (1984) – but she involved herself in filmmaking early on: In 1959, Duras wrote the screenplay to Alain Resnais's classic *Hiroshima mon amour*, and, in the decade that followed, she continued scripting for film...

India Song stars Duras fixture Delphine Seyrig as Anne-Marie Stretter, the spouse of the French ambassador to India. She leads an indolent, dissipated life enlivened, just barely, by the company of gentlemen callers who float in and out of the vast, immaculately furnished embassy in Calcutta. The only discernible drama derives from the presence of the emotionally unstable French vice-consul (Michel Lonsdale) who carries a torch for the cool, distant Anne-Marie...

The story is simple enough, but Duras's way of telling it is anything but. Throughout the film, the actors adopt the gait of sleepwalkers as they meander through the embassy, which, at one point, becomes the setting for the world's most sedate reception. Cinematographer Bruno Nuytten uses long, extended takes notable for their precise angles and profound stasis; when the camera does move, it proceeds ever so slowly.

One would expect a writer's film to be wordy, but *India Song* uses language in a most original manner: Not a single actor is seen uttering a syllable. Instead, the soundtrack consists of the main characters conversing independent of the image or a series of nameless voices explaining, or speculating about, the characters. The actors engage in a form of controlled pantomime more extreme than that of silent film players; in silents, most performers mouthed words, but in *India Song*, the actors' lips remain closed. This is no trick, but a means to capture the essence of the actors...

The film's supremely unhurried pacing permits us to luxuriate in each image: of a deep-green forest at dusk, an eerily vacant tennis court, a nearly otherworldly full-length mirror. We are less watching a story unfold than inhabiting an environment. Because the actors 'do' so little, the crystal chandeliers, oriental rugs and vapors of incense take on outside importance, and since Duras's off-screen dialogue is so suggestive, when someone speaks of the heat, we imagine we can feel the temperature; when someone mentions the smell of the air, we think we can perceive the fragrance. More important, Duras's choice to defang the drama – the vice-consul's lone outburst, in which he expresses his ardor for Anne-Marie in screams and wails, is heard off-screen and engenders no response in kind – reflects the core theme: the interminable frustration and futility of unrequited love. – Peter Tonguetta, *Wall Street Journal*



Monday 09 September at 6:15 pm

Under the Fig Trees Taht alshajra
Tunisia/Switzerland/France/Qatar/Germany 2021

Director: Erige Sehiri
Producers: Erige Sehiri, Didar Domehri, Palmyre Badinier
Production co: Henia Productions, Maneki Films
Screenplay: Erige Sehiri, Ghalya Lacroix, Peggy Hamann
Photography: Frida Marzouk
Editors: Ghalya Lacroix, Hafedh Laaridhi, Malek Kamounn
Music: Armin Bouhafa

With: Fidé Fdhili (Fidé), Feten Fdhili (Melek), Ameni Fdhili (Sana), Samar Sifi (Mariem), Leila Ouhebi (Leila), Hneya Ben Elhedi Sbahi (Hneya), Gaith Mendassi (Gaith), Abdelhak Mrabti (Abdou), Fedi Ben Achour (Saber), Firas Amri (Firas)

92 mins, Blu-ray. PG violence & coarse language
In Arabic with English subtitles

Picking figs is a delicate business. Leaves are used to line the basket to stop the fragile fruit from bruising, and tree boughs need to be bent gently lest they break. Director Erige Sehiri – along with her co-writers Ghalya Lacroix and Peggy Hamann – shows similar care in the way she treats the interconnected relationships of fruit pickers and their boss in this low-key ensemble drama which unfolds during a single hot day in a Tunisian orchard...

The film's easy-going naturalism is evident right from the opening scenes, as we see teenage girls and older matriarchs chat by the roadside while they wait for their boss in the soft early light. They pack themselves onto his flatbed truck, the younger generation swapping shy smiles with the handful of boys who are also along for a ride, with the only exception being Fidé (Fidé Fdhili), who sits up front with the boss. Amin Bouhafa's score offers periodic additional movement and traditional songs also appear at key moments but, for the most part, it's the rustling of trees and birdsong that holds sway, thanks to immersive sound design from Aymen Laabidi, Yazid Chaabi and Jean-Guy Vêran.

Once the workers reach the orchard, Sehiri and her cinematographer Frida Marzouk stay close and watchful as the youngsters get to work picking the fruit while the older generation sits elsewhere, carefully packing it into crates. It's hard work but there's also freedom among the trees, where flirtation is possible in a way it might not be in the confines of their village...

There will also be other dramas as the day unfolds, but they are mostly of a modest sort that means the story stays believable. Less important than individual plot developments is the interplay between the characters, who are all attentively drawn, as they talk about their diverse views on marriage and romance.

Although the older generation is not the film's main focus, we see enough to know they remember their own youthful affairs. One woman, Leila (Leila Ouhebi), still wells with emotion as she recalls the love of her life, who she was unable to marry. There's a sense of playful fun to many of the interactions, too, from an agreement to a secret assignation in the yogurt section of the supermarket, to unusual burial arrangements. Darker themes about the abuse of power are allowed to emerge but nobody is painted as a pantomime villain. Opportunities for young women in this world may be few but they stand together and ready to take those that are offered and, as they leave the field for the day, the sweet warmth of shared experience and solidarity lingers.
Amber Wilkinson, *Screen Daily*



Monday 16 September at 6:15 pm

The Long Absence Une aussi longue absence
France/Italy 1961

Director: Henri Colpi
Producers: Alberto Barsanti, Claude Jaeger
Production co: Procinex, Societé Cinématographique Lyre, Galatea Film
Screenplay: Marguerite Duras, Gérard Jarlot
Photography: Marcel Weiss
Editors: Jasmine Chasney, Jacqueline Meppiel
Music: Georges Delerue

With: Alida Valli (Thérèse Langlois), Georges Wilson (The Tramp), Charles Blavette (Fernand), Amédée (Marcel Langlois), Paul Favre (Pensioner), Pierre Parel (Manager), Catherine Fonteney (Alice), Diane Lepvrier (Martine)

94 mins, Blu-ray, B&W. G
In French with English subtitles

Henri Colpi was already a noted film editor, particularly in his collaborations with Alain Resnais and, occasionally, Agnès Varda. He directed his first, and most memorable, feature film in 1961, based on a script by Marguerite Duras. The Palme d'Or crowned this stirring meditation on memory, and the way in which experiences, both real or imagined, and their emotional tenor, shape or reshape human relationships. – MoMA

In a village on the Seine a widow (Alida Valli) keeps a small cafe. Her husband, caught by the Gestapo during World War II, has been dead for 15 years, and she has long since made her peace with life, and found a lover, and stopped thinking about things that thinking cannot change.

One evening, while she muses on her doorstep, a tall old tramp (Georges Wilson) strides by. She staggers back, moves as if to cry out, hesitates, stares after him bewildered. Impossible! But for an instant she could have sworn the old tramp was her husband! Next day when he comes by again she asks him in. He has a kind mouth and sad eyes that light up wonderfully when she plays Rossini on the jukebox, but something in his face suggests a damaged and diminished man. 'I've lost my memory,' he explains shyly. She faints. She is sure it is he. But is it? ...

Director Henri Colpi, a 40-year-old film editor (*Last Year at Marienbad*) who had never before made a feature picture, has started strong. *The Long Absence* is notable for modesty, sincerity, genuine warmth. It is never impelled to seem larger than life; it is never felt to be less than human. – *Time*

'The simple but moving and lyrical story is exceptionally acted and gorgeously handled.' – Derek Winnert



Monday 23 September at 6:15 pm

Possession

France/West Germany 1981

Director: Andrzej Żuławski
 Producer: Marie-Laure Reyre
 Production co: Oliane Productions, Marianne Productions, Soma Film Produktion
 Screenplay: Andrzej Żuławski, Frederic Tuten
 Photography: Bruno Nuytten
 Editors: Marie-Sophie Dubus, Suzanne Lang-Willar
 Music: Andrzej Korzyński

With: Isabelle Adjani (Anna / Helen), Sam Neill (Mark), Margit Carstensen (Margit Gluckmeister), Heinz Bennent (Heinrich), Johanna Hofer (Heinrich's mother), Carl Duering (Detective), Shaun Lawton (Zimmermann), Michael Hogben (Bob)

124 mins, Blu-ray. R18 sex scenes

To watch *Possession* again is to realize that it remains one of the most grueling, powerful, and overwhelmingly intense cinematic experiences that you are likely to have in your lifetime...

Working in the English language for the only time in his career, Żuławski took inspiration from his 1976 divorce from actress Małgorzata Braunek, transforming the anger and depression that resulted from it into a cinematic primal scream of the likes that few moviegoers had experienced then or have since. This is a million times removed from the dated banalities of *Kramer vs Kramer* (1979) and the like – perhaps the only thing that comes close to it is David Cronenberg's *The Brood* (1979) another film that examined the emotional fallout from divorce through the prism of a grisly horror film and even that notably outre effort seems almost staid in comparison to this one. The scenes in which Mark and Anna tear into each other are done with such rage and ferocity that you almost feel as if you are intruding on something that you shouldn't be seeing, but they are so compelling and deeply felt that you cannot turn away.

One reason for that is the simply incredible performance by Adjani, whose work here is a high-wire act for the ages that starts off with her at 11 on the emotional scale and quickly goes even further without ever going off the rails. Considering that this is the kind of script that most stars, even the braver and bolder ones, pay people good money to keep as far away from them as possible, I can't say what attracted Adjani to the role but something about it clearly clicked, as she throws herself into it with the kind of intensity most could never dream of mustering. This is most evident during the centerpiece scene, a flashback in which she recounts a violent miscarriage that she suffered in a subway tunnel during Mark's absence and which she says resulted in a nervous breakdown. Recently, clips of this scene have been transformed into memes but to see the whole thing in full and in its proper context is equally horrifying and breathtaking – she brings such a feverish intensity to this scene that there are points where she barely seems human anymore.

From its hypnotic opening moments – aided in no small part by the contributions from cinematographer Bruno Nuytten (which now look better than ever, albeit in a largely grey and grimy manner) and composer Andrzej Korzyński – to its absolutely terrifying final moments, *Possession* is a singular work of art that, now seen in its intended form, deserves consideration as one of the supreme horror films of its era. That said, for all of its grisly goings-on (and there are a lot), this is more of an exercise of emotional horror and on that level, it's absolutely devastating. *Possession* is one of those films you will either love or hate, but which you will never ever forget, no matter how much some of you may wish that you could. – Peter Sobczynski, *RogerEbert.com*



Monday 30 September at 6:15 pm

We Nous

France 2021

Director/Screenplay: Alice Diop
 Producer: Sophie Salbot
 Production co: Athénaise, ARTE
 Photography: Clement Alline, Sarah Blum, Sylvain Verdet
 Editor: Amrita David

With: (as themselves) Marcel Balnoas, Ethan Balnoas, Florence Roche, Ismael Soumaïla Sissoko, Bamba Sibi, Ndeye Sighane Diop

115 mins, Blu-ray. Exempt. In French with English subtitles

The public, the private and the deeply personal run on parallel tracks in French director Alice Diop's documentary *We*, a series of vignettes of life along the RER B, a railway line running through the suburbs and exurbs of Paris out to the surrounding countryside. But as it gains momentum, this deceptively cunning documentary – which out of a lineup full of showier titles won the top prize in Berlin's Encounters section – sees those parallel tracks converge and criss-cross unexpectedly, throwing off fascinating intellectual sparks of insight at the switching points.

The lyrical prologue seems at first to belong to another world. At dusk, a father and son, clad in the countrified gentry's casual, tweedy uniform of quilted jackets and waterproof boots, are scouting for deer in a quiet, darkening field. Through binoculars, they spot a stag, but suddenly, all poetry drained from the flat digital-video image, we are instead in a drab suburban cafe watching a man drink coffee. This is Ismael Soumaïla Sissoko, who we learn is a migrant worker from Mali who has lived in France for 20 years but longs to return home. He talks on the phone to his mother as he tinkers under the hood of a beat-up car. 'They're mean to us when we only come here to work,' he tells her offhandedly, talking of the French locals and sniffing through a cold.

Almost as abruptly, we're in the film's most confessional segment as Diop's thoughtful, rueful voiceover narrates a little of her own story. Fragmentary home videos play alongside shots of the scrubby open spaces and blocks of flats near where she grew up, as she frets about how little footage there is of her mother, and considers her own filmmaking career in light of her angst about all the moments of life that go unrecorded...

We challenges traditional ideas about how a documentary should be organized. Normally, formal principles like point of view or 'angle' remain in place throughout; here the approach is scattered between third-person observation, offscreen intervention from the filmmaker, direct interviews and personal musings...The film becomes more than just a description of various lives from the same, blankly omniscient perspective. Instead, [Diop] places herself and us fitfully inside and outside the film's many points of view, complicating not only the notion of who the film is about, but who it is for. Why would we ever assume that we, the audience, should be treated as some monolithic entity, when the very point she's proving is that there is no 'we' that is?

[The film's] thrillingly ambitious project is to emphasize how the secular French ideals of diversity and multiculturalism are worthless if they do not come with an acknowledgement of their own internal complexity, sometimes even self-contradiction. Diop's small but potent act of subversion, in choosing disparate lives and moments that could seem linked by a railway line and nothing more, is not just to enlarge the idea of who is meant by the collective French 'We'. It is also to reclaim the selection process for inclusion within that tiny, divided pronoun. – Jessica Kiang, *Variety*



Monday 07 October at 6:15 pm

Casablanca Beats Haut et fort France/Morocco 2021

Director: Nabil Ayouch
Producers: Nabil Ayouch, Amine Benjelloun, Alexandra Henochsberg, Bruno Nahon
Production co: Ali n' Productions, Les Films du Nouveau Monde, Unite de Production
Screenplay: Nabil Ayouch, Maryam Touzani
Photography: Amine Messadi, Virginie Surdej
Editors: Marie-Hélène Dozo, Julia Gregory, Yassir Hammani
Music: Fabien Kourtzer, Mike Kourtzer

With: Anas Basbousi (Anas) Ismail Adouab (Ismail), Zineb Boujemaa (Zineb), Meryem Nekkach (Meryem), Nouhaila Arif (Nouhaila), Abdelilah Basbousi (Abdou), Mehdi Razzouk (Mehdi), Amina Kannan (Amina), Samah Barigou (Samah)

101 mins, Blu-ray. M offensive language & domestic abuse themes
In Arabic with English subtitles

Stories of young talents working their way to maturity and success via classes in music/dance/poetry etc have become their own genre, and a pretty dull one by now. But director Nabil Ayouch gets it right in *Casablanca Beats*, communicating the creative excitement of hip-hop from the Moroccan ghetto, where a dedicated former rapper teaches it with cool, focused passion. It's the first of Ayouch's features to land in Cannes competition (*Horses of God* played in Un Certain Regard, *Much Loved* in Directors' Fortnight) and its mix of political messaging and rousing songs should rally both critics and audiences.

Perhaps the news here is that the film is not about the individual talent and personal success of the cast members (who are terrific), but about the power of music and how that power works. The ending is not upbeat but a loud, angry work in progress...

Given the story's gritty realism, it comes as no surprise that the screenplay is based on Ayouch's own experiences opening a cultural center for young people on the outskirts of Casablanca. The neighborhood of Sidi Moumen was already infamous as a cradle of suicide bombers and terrorists, and his idea was to teach teens how they could use the Bronx-born rhythms of rap and hip-hop to turn their desperation into artistic self-expression. *Casablanca Beats* captures that dream, along with some tough realities. Ayouch's most personal feature film, it infects the audience with its passion and the unshakable belief that a person who has self-confidence and self-expression can really change society.

This fictionalized account of the Positive School of Hip Hop tackles subjects that were taboo in Morocco not long ago – politics, Islam, religious extremism, the role of women in Muslim society. The story begins when a well-known ex-rapper named Anas... arrives in Sidi Moumen to teach his first class. That he is an outsider is clear from the uncertainty with which he drives his car into the area, searching for a cultural center no one has heard of...

In a mini history lesson on rap, Anas cites African-American culture in the US and the changes that permitted the election of Barack Obama and fueled the Arab Spring movement in Tunisia. Soon he has the class working together. His stern, no-tears attitude shows he takes his subject seriously, but it may be too rigid an approach for kids who face huge struggles at home, parental opposition, even hunger. Their human problems emerge with a touching naturalness, rather than through scripted drama.

The camera often stays disturbingly close on faces, creating a nervous tension echoed in the editing. The tremendous energy that can be generated by hip-hop at full volume is on display in a climactic group dance on stage...
Deborah Young, *Hollywood Reporter*



Monday 14 October at 6:15 pm

We Were Once Kids Australia 2021

Director: Eddie Martin
Producers: Shannon Swan, Jessica Forsyth, Hamilton Harris, Caroline Rothstein
Production co: Resolution Media
Screenplay: Hamilton Harris, Eddie Martin
Photography: Hugh Miller
Editor: Shannon Swan
Music: Michael Yezerski

With: (as themselves) Jon Abrahams, Peter Bici, Priscilla Forsyth, Hamilton Harris, Michael Hayes, Javier Nunez, Tobin Yelland

88 mins, Blu-ray. R16 drug use, suicide, sex scenes & offensive language

Twenty-six years after the release of the cinematic cause célèbre *Kids*, three of its cast members – Hamilton Chango Harris, Peter Bici, Jessica Forsyth – have regrouped to reclaim their narratives and co-produce filmmaker Eddie Martin's unexpurgated version of the indie hit's history. (Harris also co-wrote with Martin.) ... Perhaps it goes without saying, but *Kids'* director Larry Clark and screenwriter, Harmony Korine, declined to face Martin's camera.

Loaded with sex, drugs and violence, the 1995 movie landed on the cover of *Newsweek* magazine for its sensational depiction of a teenage wasteland, and it grossed reportedly \$20 million – it had a production budget of approximately \$1 million. The bluntness of its sexual content stirred controversy that was expertly marketed to strong box office by its distributor, Harvey and Bob Weinstein. According to the documentary, the non-union cast was only paid a bonus of \$1000 and not further compensated after the movie's success.

Through its talking heads and an abundance of clips (often raw home video), Martin captures, in part, New York City in the early to mid-1990s, with Harris as the main guide into the not-so-distant past. This tell-all also serves as a tribute to two of the cast members who died young, Harold Hunter and Justin Pierce, who was a runaway when he joined the skateboarders. They were members of a self-made family of teenagers, many of them living on their own. Noticeably missing here are actresses Chloë Sevigny and Rosario Dawson, both of whom made their debut in *Kids*...

In the early 1990s, the 50-something Clark began hanging around the skateboarders – they called him 'grandpa' behind his back. (Hamilton remembers that the director brought along 'good weed.') One of the kids, Jamal Simmons, wondered, 'How can we make use of this motherfucker?' Little did they know Clark was having a similar thought, or so it seems.

NYU film student Harmony Korine became part of the skater group after he befriended Hunter. However, not all of the clique were on board when it came time to make Clark's movie. Highlyann Krasnow, who was 16 at the time... declined to participate: 'We all knew Larry was sketchy.'

Clips from the press conference at the Cannes Film Festival, where *Kids* had its world premiere, and where none of the cast members were invited to attend, produced answers from Clark and Korine that were evasive or at least inarticulate. Their responses support the cast members' impressions of the filmmakers. Clark comes across as perplexed and annoyed as he's challenged by journalists' questions... In many ways the documentary follows a cautionary tale of fickle fame. However, just when viewers think that it mirrors a rote *Behind the Music*-type of trajectory, the filmmakers have one more moving reveal, which we won't spoil here. – Kent Turner, *Film Forward*



Monday 21 October at 6:15 pm

Kids

USA 1995

Director: Larry Clark
Producer: Cary Woods
Production co: Independent Pictures, The Guys Upstairs, Killer Films, Shining Excalibur Films
Screenplay: Harmony Korine
Photography: Eric Edwards
Editor: Christopher Tellefsen
Music: Lou Barlow, John Davis

With: Leo Fitzpatrick (Telly), Justin Pierce (Casper), Chloë Sevigny (Jennie), Rosario Dawson (Ruby), Yakira Peguero (Darcy), Atabey Rodriguez (Misha), Jon Abrahams (Steven), Harold Hunter (Harold)

91 mins, Blu-ray, R18

Set in New York City during a single summer day, *Kids* follows Telly and his aimless gang as they swing their skateboards through the streets, toking, stealing, rocking to music, chasing girls, baiting gays, beating a man in a park, skinny-dipping in a pool, crashing a party and talking shit about their two overriding passions: skateboards and sex.

The street language, a poetic scramble of funny and fierce, is the handiwork of the gifted Harmony Korine, 19 when he wrote the screenplay. Clark met the young writer three years ago while doing a photo study of skateboarders in Washington Square Park, in New York. Their shared aversion to Hollywood slickness created an immediate rapport. Though rigorously crafted, Korine's script has the ripple of keen improvisation. Adding to the documentary effect is the stunning hand-held camera work of Eric Edwards (*My Own Private Idaho*)...

The young cast is dynamite. Fitzpatrick delivers an exceptional performance, making Telly a hypnotic figure of oddball charm and sudden malice. It was Korine's skate-kid friends, mostly amateurs ranging in age from 12 to 19, whom Clark recruited to act in the film. Even when grim reality bears down relentlessly, their faces hold you in thrall. Sevigny has the only developed female role in a film of virginal victims. It's the guy culture of hot tempers and hard-ons that fascinates Clark and Korine. Still, you can't miss Casper's longing for Telly, the master he follows like a puppy. Pierce is terrific in the role, finding the hurt that Casper hides behind his trash-mouth bravado. He calls himself Casper the Horny Ghost because he isn't getting any...

A glimpse is all we get of parents in *Kids*. Their absence is one of the darts tossed at parental neglect. The absence of love is more fully indicted. Telly can mouth the right words, but he uses his dick to wound, not to connect. In a scene of piercing sadness, Casper catches Telly and his latest virgin sacrifice naked and asleep in a bedroom. Her body clinging to his makes for a picture of innocent beauty. Casper wants that closeness. How to get it? His only model is Telly, which means tricks and cruelty. Outside the bedroom, a party is winding down. Jennie sits exhausted on a sofa...

'Jesus Christ, what happened?' says Casper.

Kids raises the same question. It does so with rare artistry but without glib, comforting answers. As a result, the film is already a target for censors who call it obscene and critics who call it pretentious. Ignore the scare and sneer tactics that greet anything fresh and ferocious. *Kids* matters.

Peter Travers, *Rolling Stone*



Tuesday 29 October at 6:15 pm

Ashkal

France/Tunisia/Qatar 2022

Director: Youssef Chebbi
Producers: Théo Gonzalez, Farès Ladjimi, Christophe Lafont, Ales Pavlin, Andrej Stritof
Production co: Supernova Films, Poetik Films, Blast Films
Screenplay: François-Michel Allegrini, Youssef Chebbi
Photography: Hazzem Berrabah
Editor: Valentin Féron
Music: Thomas Kuratli

With: Fatma Oussaifi (Fatma), Mohamed Houcine Grayaa (Batal), Rami Harrabi (Man in hoodie), Hichem Riahi (Lassaad), Nabil Trabelsi (Bouhlel Jilani), Bahri Rahali (Jilani), Oumaima Mehrzi (Lilia), Ghalia Jebali (Aya)

92 mins, Blu-ray, Rating tbc
In Arabic and French with English subtitles

'The Gardens of Carthage,' as text reveals at the beginning of Youssef Chebbi's *Ashkal*, 'is a neighbourhood in the north of Tunis. First built for dignitaries of the old regime, it was meant to become a modern, enterprising and rich city. In December 2010, an immolation set off the Tunisian revolution and the fall of Ben Ali. Construction of the neighbourhood ceased immediately. Now, construction works are resuming little by little...'.

Like the country around them, these ghostly towers exhibit a potential that as yet remains unrealised. And as though it were a spark not yet ready to be extinguished, the immolation which triggered the 2010 Revolution will spread further in the film, echoing a protest of national despair that is not quite over.

Experienced policeman Batal (Mohamed Houcine Grayaa) and his younger partner Fatma (Fatma Oussaifi) are called to the Gardens of Carthage to investigate a strange, lonely death: the charred remains of the building's watchman have been found there. Batal and Fatma are under pressure to wrap up quickly what appears to be a simple case of suicide, but neither is convinced that things are so open-and-shut – and then more bodies, similarly naked and burnt, start to appear.

Meanwhile, Batal and Fatma themselves play out between them some of the tensions that plague Tunisia. Fatma's father is leading a 'Truth and Dignity' Commission inquiring into police atrocities under the previous Ben Ali regime, ensuring that she is ostracised by all her colleagues save Batal – and Batal himself, a family man about to become a father yet again, was almost certainly complicit, if not an active participant, in previous police misconduct, and is still compromised and conflicted in other ways. For he is being forced to decide whether to help cover up the past, or to work with the Commission in exposing it, and is unsure which path is more treacherous. Here the future is always being built on the questionable foundations of recent history, and consequently everyone is destabilised...

Shot wide and distant by DP Hazem Berrabah, *Ashkal* is a chilly noir, and an alienating allegory of a state still being forged in the fires of its own destructive, dictatorial history. Here the revolution, far from being done, is serially being rekindled by the marginalised and the downtrodden, impatient for both change and justice that never seem really to come. Chebbi's film grows ever more surreal, even supernatural, in a police detective scenario that is really a metaphor for a national crime scene where the same old outrages are still being enacted, and where the watchmen need watching. So take in its bleakly compelling message of mistreatment, malice and martyrdom, and let it catch fire. – Anton Bitel, *Projected Figures*



Monday 04 November at 6:15 pm

Joyland

Pakistan 2022

Director: Saim Sadiq
Producers: Apoorva Guru Charan, Sarmad Sultan Khoosat, Sabiha Sumar, Lauren Mann
Production co: All Caps, Khoosat Films
Screenplay: Saim Sadiq, Maggie Briggs
Photography: Joe Saade
Editors: Saim Sadiq, Jasmin Tenucci
Music: Abdullah Siddiqui

With: Ali Junejo (Haider), Rasti Farooq (Mumtaz), Alina Khan (Biba), Sarwat Gilani (Nucchi), Salmaan Peerzada (Father Aman), Sohail Sameer (Saleem), Sania Saeed (Fayyaz)

126 mins, Blu-ray. M sexual material, suicide, offensive language & content that may disturb
In Urdu and Punjabi with English subtitles

This extraordinary debut feature from Saim Sadiq became the first Pakistani film selected for Cannes last year. It left the Croisette with the Jury Prize, the Queer Palm and hatfuls of swooning, richly deserved notices.

Set in bustling, inner-city Lahore, *Joyland* concerns a very traditional family headed up by stern patriarch Rana Amanullah (Peerzada), a widower who is put out by the fact that his older son Saleem (Sohail Sameer) and daughter-in-law Nucchi (Sarwat Gilani) have only produced daughters thus far.

His younger son, Haider (Ali Junejo) is intelligent, sensitive, and helps around the house. Haider's wife is a self-sufficient make-up artist, Mumtaz (Rasti Farooq). The younger couple is childless and the daydreaming Haider hasn't had a proper job in years until he improbably lands work as a backing dancer for trans woman performer Biba (Alina Khan) at a local variety club. Haider's unexpected attraction to Biba kick-starts a melodrama of Sirkian dimensions.

Khan blazes up the screen by elaborating on her performance in Sadiq's Venice-winning 2019 short film *Darling*. She makes for an electrifying presence even while sitting around. Khan driving down the street on a moped makes for an indelible image. Her alternately bitchy, tender and cynical Biba is well met by the quiet passion of newcomer Junejo.

The script, co-written by the director and Maggie Briggs, ensures that each supporting character is beautifully drawn in miniature strokes. A short exchange between Haider and Mumtaz in their crowded bed doubles as a masterclass in screenwriting. The visuals are as impressive as the cast, as cinematographer Joe Saade finds colour and luminescence in darkened interiors. Fairy lights and fake fireflies make dreary rooms as splendid as the fairground rides and Bollywood-style musical numbers found in the film's louder moments.

Mostly, *Joyland* is a film of huge heart and empathy. Mirroring the hapless hero's journey, it's an unexpected romance. – Tara Brady, *Irish Times*

... Women are this movie's greatest source of fascination, whether it's Biba, weaving her way through the margins of a society that refuses to make room for her, or Fayyaz (Sania Saeed), an emotionally neglected older neighbor who becomes, in her briefly seen interactions with the family, a figure of remarkable pathos. Most moving of all is the sister-in-law rapport between Nucchi and Mumtaz, terrifically played by Gilani and especially Farooq, as they come to understand each other in ways their husbands never will.

Justin Chang, *Los Angeles Times*



Monday 11 November at 6:15 pm

Night Train to Munich

UK 1940

Wayne Weston Memorial Screening

Director: Carol Reed
Producer: Edward Black
Production co: 20th Century Fox
Screenplay: Sidney Gilliat, Frank Launder, based on the story 'Report on a Fugitive' by Gordon Wellesley
Photography: Otto Kanturek
Editor: R E Dearing
Music: Louis Levy

With: Margaret Lockwood (Anna Bomasch), Rex Harrison (Dickie Randall / Gus Bennett / Ulrich Herzog), Paul Henreid (Captain Karl Marsen), Basil Radford (Charters), Naunton Wayne (Caldicott), James Harcourt (Axel Bomasch), Felix Aylmer (Dr John Fredericks), Wyndham Goldie (Charles Dryton)

90 mins, Blu-ray, B&W. M suicide references

Almost inevitably, since it shares its screenwriters (Frank Launder and Sidney Gilliat), its leading lady (Margaret Lockwood), two of its characters (the comic double act of Charters and Caldicott, played by Basil Radford and Naunton Wayne), and even its subgenre (espionage train thriller) with *The Lady Vanishes*, *Night Train to Munich* has often been dismissed as an imitation of Hitchcock's movie.

The comparison, though, does Reed's film less than justice. *Night Train to Munich* is an ingenious, tongue-in-cheek roller coaster of a thriller, neatly balancing its more serious moments (the concentration camp episode) with espionage intrigue, headlong chase sequences, a hint of sexual innuendo, and – not least of its delights – a generous helping of spiritedly played, Nazi-baiting comedy. For *Night Train to Munich* enjoyed one clear advantage over *The Lady Vanishes*: since it was released in May 1940, after Britain had entered the war, the baddies could be unequivocally identified – and mocked...

It was the 31-year-old Harrison's first lead in a major film, and he seized it with delight – not least because it allowed him to masquerade as a Nazi officer. 'Rex just loved that uniform,' Gilliat recalled. Harrison's screen persona – quizzical, witty, dandyish, with a hint of erotic cruelty – fitted him perfectly to play the Pimpernel-like part of Gus Bennett/Dicky Randall/Ulrich Herzog.

In *Night Train to Munich*, the shape-changing Dicky Randall even has a dark counterpart: Karl Marsen, who poses as an anti-Nazi German dissident to gain the confidence of Anna Bomasch (Lockwood), only to be revealed as a Nazi agent. He's played by Paul von Hernald (as he was then known), a genuine anti-Nazi dissident....

Reprising their roles from *The Lady Vanishes* as the pair of ineffably English buffoons Charters and Caldicott – who of course always turn up trumps in a crisis – Radford and Wayne are given even more scope for comedy in Reed's film... Irene Handl, then at the outset of a long career playing richly comic, idiosyncratic supporting roles in countless British movies, shows up unbilled in a ripe cameo, as a bustling, bossy stationmaster...

But ultimately, this is Harrison's film, even if Lockwood (in the fifth of her six films for Reed) is top-billed... his impudent underplaying is one of the film's chief pleasures, and his scenes with Lockwood are sparky and sharply scripted. 'You know, if a woman ever loved you like you love yourself,' she remarks at one point, 'it'd be one of the romances of history.' – Philip Kemp, *Criterion.com*

AUCKLAND FILM SOCIETY 2024 SEASON

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Please note, many screenings are members only. Screenings marked Ω open to the public, tickets \$10/\$20 (double bill). AFS members free.
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aucklandfilmsociety.org.nz

04 March 6:15 pm	AFTER HOURS Ω 97 mins, Blu-ray. M adult themes	24 June 6:15 pm	BRIEF ENCOUNTERS 96 mins, Blu-ray, B&W. PG
11 March 6:15 pm	ODD MAN OUT 116 mins, Blu-ray, B&W. PG	01 July 6:15 pm	SILENT RUNNING 90 mins, Blu-ray. PG
18 March 6:15 pm	FIRST COW 117 mins, Blu-ray. PG violence & coarse language	08 July 6:15 pm	THE LONG FAREWELL 97 mins, Blu-ray, B&W PG coarse language & sexual references
25 March 6:00 pm	Early start – long run time MEMORIES OF MURDER 130 mins, Blu-ray R16 violence, offensive language & sex scenes	07 August - 18 August	NEW ZEALAND INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL Discounts for AFS Premier Card Members
02 April 6:15 pm	Tuesday HIT THE ROAD 93 mins, Blu-ray. M offensive language	19 August 6:15 pm	CAIRO CONSPIRACY aka BOY FROM HEAVEN 121 mins, Blu-ray. M violence
08 April 6:15 pm	JOINT SECURITY AREA 109 mins, Blu-ray. M violence	26 August 6:15 pm	COW 94 mins, Blu-ray. Exempt
15 April 6:15 pm	MISHIMA: A LIFE IN FOUR CHAPTERS 121 mins, Blu-ray. M nudity, sexual references, suicide theme & content that may disturb	02 September 6:15 pm	INDIA SONG 120 mins, Blu-ray. PG
22 April 6:15 pm	A TALE OF TWO SISTERS 115 mins, Blu-ray M violence & horror	09 September 6:15 pm	UNDER THE FIG TREES 92 mins, Blu-ray. PG violence & coarse language
29 April 6:15 pm	AFS AGM follows RAIN Ω 92 mins, Blu-ray. M	16 September 6:15 pm	THE LONG ABSENCE 94 mins, Blu-ray, B&W. G
06 May 6:00 pm	Early start – long run time BURNING 148 mins, Blu-ray. M violence, sex scenes, nudity & drug use	23 September 6:15 pm	POSSESSION 124 mins, Blu-ray. R18 sex scenes
13 May 6:15 pm	HAPPENING 99 mins, Blu-ray R16 sex scenes, nudity, cruelty & content that may disturb	30 September 6:15 pm	WE 115 mins, Blu-ray. Exempt
20 May 6:00 pm	Double Bill Ω – Early start THE UNKNOWN 68 mins, Blu-ray, B&W. PG followed by FREAKS 62 mins, Blu-ray, B&W. R16	07 October 6:15 pm	CASABLANCA BEATS 101 mins, Blu-ray M offensive language & domestic abuse themes
27 May 6:00 pm	Early start – long run time SOLARIS 166 mins, Blu-ray. PG	14 October 6:15 pm	WE WERE ONCE KIDS 88 mins, Blu-ray R16 drug use, suicide, sex scenes & offensive language
04 June 6:15 pm	Tuesday VALLEY GIRL 100 mins, Blu-ray. M	21 October 6:15 pm	KIDS 91 mins, Blu-ray. R18
10 June 6:00 pm	Early start – long run time AN ANGEL AT MY TABLE Ω 154 mins, Blu-ray. PG coarse language	29 October Tuesday 6:15 pm	ASHKAL 92 mins, Blu-ray. Rating tbc
17 June 6:15 pm	SHIVA BABY 78 mins, Blu-ray. M sex scenes & offensive language	04 November 6:15 pm	JOYLAND 126 mins, Blu-ray M sexual material, suicide, offensive language & content that may disturb
		11 November Wayne Weston Memorial Screening 6:15 pm	NIGHT TRAIN TO MUNICH Ω 90 mins, Blu-ray. M suicide references