

Angels of Evil

Vallanzasca - Gli Angeli Del Male

Dir: Michele Placido **Italy** **2010** **125 mins** **Cert: 16**

Starring: Kim Rossi Stuart, Filippo Timi, Moritz Bleibtreu, Valeria Solarino, Paz Vega, Francesco Scianna

Language: Italian

Available to Programme: Jan 2012

Trailer: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9fHwv1cKktI>

Renato Vallanzasca, born in Milan in 1950, once freed a tiger from captivity in a local circus. He was sent to a juvenile correction centre for his pains and thereafter became "boss of the Comasina", committing murder after murder during robberies and kidnappings.

He spent much of his life in prison, and that is where Michele Placido's film begins. Vallanzasca was something of a legend, eventually fighting a bloody battle with Sardinian criminals even more violent than himself, and Placido and Kim Rossi Stuart, who plays him brilliantly, paint him in this long film as a man with charm and the audacity to give his guards as good as he gets.

What we don't get is any more than a hint of how criminal activity changed for the worse during Vallanzasca's reign as the Sardinian and Calabrian mafia replaced the local gangs of robbers. Nor do we get a more general history of the period. It's a movie not an investigation, Placido maintains.

If it falls short of either *Gomorrah* or *A Prophet*, it is an above average prison thriller, telling us of a strange man who fought most of his enemies to a standstill until he died.
– *Derek Malcolm, The Evening Standard*

Ballymun Lullaby

Dir: Frank Berry **Ireland** **2010** **75 mins** **Cert: CLUB**

Language: English

Available to Programme: Jan 2012

Trailer: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pQHhDoySMg0>

Ballymun Lullaby is the stirring and inspiring account of how one man single-handedly brought children from Ballymun in North Dublin together to collaborate on the Ballymun Music Programme, a children's music education programme based in the area.

Ron Cooney is a professional music teacher who had a simple aim: to provide an introduction to music through free music lessons in a community that had almost no access to free education. Frank Berry's documentary follows Ron and some of the youngsters participating in his music choir as his effortless enthusiasm and charm turns his aim into reality, as composer Daragh O'Toole creates a original suite for the orchestra and works with local teenagers (Tara, Wanye and Darren), who contribute to the lyrics and composition.

Ballymun Lullaby is the ultimate realisation of fifteen years hard work from Ron Cooney and the residents of Ballymun; a programme that began with Ron simply teaching the recorder in one school has blossomed into including the full line-up of orchestral instrumentation and the recording of an album and its nationwide release. - *Colm McAuliffe, Jameson Dublin International Film Festival 2011*

Beautiful Lies

De Vrais Mensonges

Dir: Pierre Salvadori **France** **2010** **105 mins** **Cert: 12A**
Starring: Audrey Tautou, Nathalie Baye, Sami Bouajila, Stephani Lagarde, Judith Chemla

Language: French

Available to Programme: Jan 2012

Trailer: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mh79BDHECig>

After the success of *Priceless*, Pierre Salvadori reunites with Audrey Tautou in *Beautiful Lies*, a fresh and funny romantic comedy about a chatty hairdresser who concocts a plan to cheer up her mother who is suffering from a serious case of the blues after having been left by her husband.

30-year-old Emilie (Tautou) runs a hairdressing salon where she provides an endless stream of well-meaning advice to her clients and friends, but the only person she cannot seem to help is her own mother. Jean, a young man who works for Emilie, is secretly in love with her but a pathological shyness prevents him from declaring his feelings. Finally, unable to contain himself, he opens his heart in a passionate anonymous letter, but Emilie has other plans...

Audrey Tautou is utterly captivating playing cupid in this intelligently written and tenderly directed delight. - *Alliance Francais French Film Festival 2011, Australia*

Big Picture, The

L'homme Qui Voulait Vivre Sa Vie

Dir: Eric Lartigau **France** **2010** **114 mins** **Cert: 15A**
Starring: Romain Duris, Marina Fois, Niels Arestrup, Branka Katic, Eric Ruf, Catherine Deneuve

Language: French

Available to programme: Jan 2012

Trailer: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=izlQcj5KnU8>

A successful lawyer and happy father uncovers his wife's infidelity and accidentally kills her lover, but rather than face the consequences he opts for another strategy: assume the other man's identity. That intriguing premise sets the gears in motion for *The Big Picture*, a character-driven drama with the soul of an existential thriller. A French adaptation of an American novelist's work, director Eric Lartigau's film suffers from a few plot holes, which are compensated for by Romain Duris' understated performance and a script that asks more questions than it answers about the nature of identity and the possibility of second chances.

High-powered attorney Paul (Duris) is married with two children whom he adores. But his seemingly enviable life starts to unravel when he discovers that his wife Sarah

(Marina Fois) has been sleeping with Gregoire (Eric Ruf), an aspiring photojournalist – a profession Paul had considered in his youth. After Sarah demands a divorce, Paul confronts Gregoire at his home, and a heated argument leads to Gregoire accidentally being killed in the punch-up. Frightened, Paul hides the body but soon latches onto the idea of faking his own death and assuming Gregoire's identity, venturing to Eastern Europe to become the other man.

Vaguely reminiscent of Michelangelo Antonioni's *The Passenger*, another film about a character who assumes a dead man's identity and goes on a journey of personal exploration, *The Big Picture* grows increasingly more mysterious and satisfying as it moves past Paul's angst over his failing marriage and into his intricate plan to become Gregoire.

Part of the film's pleasure is that the script, written by Lartigau and Laurent de Bartillat, takes its time laying out Paul's strategy, resisting easy explanations for why he makes the choice that he does or exactly how he plans on carrying it out. Admittedly, after strongly establishing Paul's life of bourgeois privilege, some of the particulars of his plan, which includes a fake passport and explosives, seem far removed from the comfy world that Paul knows. And yet, *The Big Picture*'s matter-of-fact presentation of Paul's transformation helps bring credibility to these scenes, hinting at the deep commitment he's made to shedding his old life.

Before his death, Gregoire informs Paul that the affair occurred partly because Sarah admired Gregoire's willingness to chase his dreams but also because she became weary of her husband's constant self-loathing. And while Paul decides to start a new life in order to have a fresh start, the filmmakers cleverly imply that he is still exhibiting that same self-loathing, not just assuming Gregoire's life as a photographer but also adopting the man's disdain for Paul. It's a nice, slow turn of the knife that as Paul unexpectedly begins to find success (and maybe love) as a photographer, it's actually at the expense of his old self, which he must keep running from lest his ruse be exposed.

As he demonstrated in *The Beat That My Heart Skipped*, Duris is a stunningly handsome actor with real grit who's well equipped to handle darker, more nuanced material. *The Big Picture* affords him another such opportunity, and he superbly sells Paul's metamorphosis, particularly the sense that the man is making it up as he goes along, quietly amazed that his scam might just work. The supporting cast are all top-notch, especially Niels Arestrup as an unlikely ally in Paul's new life.

Those expecting a white-knuckle thriller will be disappointed, as Paul's journey is more of an internal struggle than anything resembling a chase picture. At the same time, though, the filmmakers make Paul's subterfuge a little too easy on occasion, allowing room for certain narrative conveniences to keep the story moving forward. But while these plot issues are unfortunate, in a way they do play into the movie's off-kilter form of suspense, as if teasing the audience with the possibility that Paul's luck could run out at any moment. - *Tim Grierson, Screen International*

Cell 211*Celda 211*

Dir: Daniel Monzon **Spain** **2009** **112 mins** **Cert:** CLUB
Starring: Carlos Bardem, Luis Tosar, Alberto Ammann, Marta Etura, Felix Cubero, Antonio Resines, Luis Zahera, Monolo Solo, Joxean Bengoetxea
Language: Spanish
Available to Programme: Feb 2012
Trailer: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZH4jRRAtQCA>

Cell 211 is a thriller about a man's attempt to save his life by thinking quickly. It never explains. It simply sets out the situation and shows us what he does and what the results are. You might be surprised by how much more exciting this is than conventional action.

The film won eight Goya Awards, the Spanish Oscars. It deserves them. In addition to its effectiveness as a thriller, it is also a film showing a man in the agonizing process of changing his values. And it is a critique of a cruel penal system. It doesn't preach, it doesn't end with a message, but it makes us think.

The story involves Juan Oliver (Alberto Ammann), a serious young man who reports a day early for his new job as a prison guard. We spend a little time with him at home with his wife, Elena (Marta Etura). She is pregnant. They are head over heels in love. They don't have much money, but his new job will be a big help.

As other guards are taking him on a tour of the prison, he is knocked unconscious in an accident. They carry him to a bunk in an empty cell, Cell 211, and are calling for help when a violent prison riot breaks out. Their lives are in danger, and they must leave him behind when they flee. He regains consciousness and hears what is going on outside. He doesn't know why he's been left behind — he probably doesn't recall the falling debris that knocked him unconscious — but he knows his shoes, shoelaces and belt are fatal giveaways that he's not a prisoner.

And now we enter into real time with him, as he boldly walks into a public area and passes himself off as a new prisoner who was admitted only shortly before. The rioting prisoners are desperate. They're led by a brutal strongman, a lifer with nothing to lose, named Malamadre (Luis Tosar). Juan reads the situation immediately and improvises. Instinctively, he takes the role of a man siding with his fellow prisoners. When he makes canny strategic suggestions, he seems to prove his worth.

I don't want to describe any more than that in specific terms. Those really would be spoilers, because in *Cell 211*, it is actually impossible to anticipate what will happen. The story follows no established formula. It discourages attempts at anticipation. It unfolds convincingly at every stage, but unpredictably. As Juan faces more stringent tests, he continues to improvise, sometimes devising masterstrokes.

The events in the cellblock are paralleled by two other stories: In the prison office, the warden and security staff monitor the security cameras. And in the city, Elena does some shopping and then learns of the riot in the prison where she knows her husband went that morning. Another strand consists of flashbacks to their loving moments together, which are much more effectively dropped in like this than coming before everything.

The dynamic in the film happens between Juan and Malamadre. In a subtle way, director

Daniel Monzon shows an understanding developing. Malamadre is relentless and unforgiving, resentful when Juan takes the lead in making suggestions, but admiring of the new man's courage. Very gradually, in the midst of the chaos, they exchange personal information.

As Malamadre's understanding of the full situation changes, his interpretation of it keeps pace. He isn't a stupid man. Given his information, he makes logical decisions. When his information changes, he responds sanely and not without reason.

The term "mounting tension" is an overused cliché. To use it here would be appropriate. Little by little, one development at a time, the situation becomes more critical, and the options for Juan and Malamadre grow more limited. And Juan's life always hangs in the balance. There is a moment, indeed, when he says something on a walkie-talkie that would have betrayed him if anyone had been listening.

The actors are well chosen. Luis Tosar, as Malamadre, is a powerful man, shorter than Juan but more muscular, his head shaved, his mustache and beard somehow ominous. As Juan, Alberto Ammann is of medium build, not aggressive, a convincing mimic in the role he adopts. He is not too heroic, and Tosar is not too villainous. They are trapped in this situation and unwittingly they come to share it. - *Roger Ebert, Chicago Sun-Times*

Winner - Eight Spanish Goya Awards 2010 including Best Film, Best Director and Best Actor

First Grader, The

Dir: Justin Chadwick **Kenya/UK** **2010** **98 mins** **Cert: 12A**

Starring: Naomie Harris, Oliver Litondo, Vusi Kunene, Tony Kgoroge, Israel Makoe, Alfred Munyua

Language: English/Kyukuyu

Available to programme: Jan 2012

Trailer: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VeWYqcRsjoU>

This inspiring story of the power of education and the right to equality is something of a change of direction - and location - for Justin Chadwick, best known for tackling British period dramas such as *Bleak House* and *The Other Boleyn Girl*.

Set in Kenya in 2003, *The First Grader* is the story of Maruge (Oliver Litondo), an 84-year-old village elder who uses a government initiative to introduce free primary schooling to claim the education he has always craved. A former Mau-Mau fighter, Maruge's desire to learn to read and write has been sparked by the arrival of an important letter from the government. However, when he presents himself at the local school gates, he finds head teacher Jane (Naomie Harris) alone in being sympathetic to his cause: her colleagues are unenthusiastic and her superiors appalled. Facing discrimination and downright hostility, Jane advocates on Maruge's behalf, but the battle is not so easily won...

Shooting in the stunning Kenyan Rift Valley, and using a real school and its pupils, gives the film an authentic sense of place and community, and the children's uninhibited, natural performances are a joy to watch. There is humour woven throughout, and a heartwarming affection and mutual respect between the dignified old man and his

passionately progressive young teacher. - *Sandra Hebron, BFI London Film Festival 2010*

First Movie, The

Dir: Mark Cousins **UK** **2009** **76 mins** **Cert: CLUB**

Language: English

Available to programme: Jan 2012

Trailer: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oANgNfBilxU>

An innovative 'magic realist' documentary set in Iraq. Despite Iraqi children's regular appearances in the media, they are, understandably, nearly always portrayed as being victims of war. Director Mark Cousins, however, as a native of Belfast who grew up during the troubles felt there was more to the story and wondered if Iraqi children played or led imaginative lives. Inspired by Charles Laughton's movie, *Night of the Hunter*, Cousins went to the small village of Goptapa, which has a population of 700 inhabitants and is located on a tributary of the Tigris in the Kurdish North of Iraq.

He took a projector, some great films and 3 small cameras with him to distribute to the local children and, as he filmed them at play, he thought about his native Belfast and what it was like to grow up there. The Iraqi children make little movies about war, love, a fish that goes to a magical place and a chicken who debates justice. Despite the production being stopped twice by the Iraqi secret police, *The First Movie* is wonderful film that ably demonstrates the power of the imagination. - *Jason O'Mahony, Jameson Dublin International Film Festival 2011*

Hedgehog, The

Le Hérisson

Dir: Mona Achache **France** **2009** **99 mins** **Cert: CLUB**

Starring: Josiane Balasko, Garance Le Guillemic, Igawa Togo, Anne Brochet, Ariane Ascoride, Wladimir Yordanoff, Sarah Le Picard, Jean-Luc Porraz

Language: French

Available to programme: Jan 2012

Trailer: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oQFTEv_41HY

With a magical blend of gravity and levity, director Mona Achache deftly brings Muriel Barbery's widely-loved novel and its two intriguing and delightfully complicated characters to life.

Lover of art and philosophy, 11-year-old Paloma (a precocious Garance Le Guillemic) is disenchanted with the hypocrisy she perceives in her immediate world and pledges to end her life before she herself falls victim to it—and by the date of her next birthday. With 165 days to go she commits to documenting her environment with her father's High-8 camera. Through this unique lens, and with Paloma's caustic, and often hilarious commentary as the soundtrack, we enter the cosmos of her upper-crust Parisian apartment building and, as third-party sleuths, glimpse the interior lives of the characters who inhabit it—in particular, grumpy, frumpy concierge, Renée Michel (the marvelous comedienne, Josiane Balasko).

When Paloma's camera reveals an extensive secret library in Renée's back room, and that the usually gruff matron reads Tolstoy to her cat, Paloma begins to understand that there are allies to be found beneath the prickliest of exteriors. And, when she notices that the new tenant, elegant widower Kakuro (Togo Igawa, *Memoirs of a Geisha*), is paying courtly attention to Reneé, Paloma sees a new mission ahead of her. As the unlikely friendship between this disparate trio deepens, Paloma's own coming of age becomes a much less pessimistic prospect. – *Seattle International Film Festival 2010*

Winner – Best Film Audience Award, Seattle International Film Festival 2010
Winner – Audience Award, Karlovy Vary International Film Festival 2010

Honey

Bal

Dir: Semih Kaplanoglu Germany/Turkey 2010 103 mins Cert: CLUB

Starring: Bora Altas, Erdal Besikcioglu, Tülin Özen, Alev Ucarer, Ayse Altay

Language: Turkish

Available to programme: Jan 2011

Trailer: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=juWZXOaMiWI>

Six-year-old Yusuf has just begun attending primary school where he is learning how to read and write. His father, Yakup, is a beekeeper. He goes about his trade deep inside the woods where he hangs up his bee hives in the treetops of the highest trees. The mountain forest is a place of deep mystery to Yusuf and he derives great pleasure from accompanying his father there.

One morning Yusuf tells his father about a dream he had the night before. Yakup turns on him curtly telling him never to share his dreams with others. The same day, Yusuf is asked to read out a text in front of the class. He suddenly begins to stutter and he is laughed at by the rest of the class.

One day the bees suddenly disappear, throwing into question the family's means of earning a living. Yakup decides to set off for the remote mountains. But no sooner has he left, than Yusuf stops speaking. His mother Zehra, who works on a tea plantation, suffers a great deal on account of her son's sudden loss of speech, but is unable to persuade him to speak.

The days pass – and still Yakup does not return. Mother and son begin to worry. Yusuf goes to his grandmother's place in a neighbouring village where he spends the magical night during which the prophet's arrival is celebrated. When he hears the story of the prophet he is convinced that his father, with whom he identifies the holy man, will come home again.

Yusuf and his mother set off on a fruitless search for signs of his father's whereabouts after which Yusuf decides to continue the search for his father on his own. His is a journey into the unknown. Will the dream he had become reality? – *Berlin Film Festival 2010*

Winner - Golden Bear, Berlin Film Festival 2010

Green Wave, The

Dir: Ali Samadi Ahadi Germany/Iran 2010 80 mins Cert: CLUB

Language: English, Farsi

Available to programme: January 2012

Trailer: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gs8X4Tv5zDo>

This documentary charting events surrounding the 2009 elections and subsequent protests and government crackdown in Iran uses the words from internet blogs and social networking sites to paint a picture of what happened from the people's perspective. Like 2009's *Iran: Voices of the Unheard*, the tale that unfolds is one of shocking oppression which, in turn, leads to violence wreaked by a government willing to do anything to cling to power - including torture and slay its own people.

While the testimony of those brave bloggers, who risked imprisonment, torture and death to tell their stories to the world, is read out, it is accompanied by snatched mobile phone footage of what happened during the run up to and aftermath of the election. Where that isn't possible, animated sequences illustrating events. The animation has a sickly colour palette, murky with browns and bruised purples, and depicts people, for the most part, with their faces in fixed states of anguish. While the colours recall the desert landscapes of *Waltz With Bashir*, this is a simpler affair, showing the characters as frozen in a moment - a decision which could stand as a metaphor for these Iranians in general, trapped in a situation they are powerless to change.

These snippets from 'within Iraq' are bookended by talking heads' testimony from those who have now fled and whose words are contained in this film.

It all could have been so different. Initial blogs talk of the excitement of the run up to the elections, of a spirit of debate that hadn't been seen for some time and of crowds taking to the streets to rally behind the opposition lead by Mir-Hossein Mousavi. He himself, is far from a radical revolutionary and was not looking to fundamentally alter the state but he did offer a more moderate alternative to Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's rule. There is a prevailing air of joy at a rare opportunity for freedom of speech, although, as we all now know, it was short lived.

"Many people thought the elections could not be manipulated," says one contributor. How wrong they were and as the light dawned on people that freedom from the corrupt regime was not on the cards, many took to the streets to peacefully protest in a sort of societal solidarity. Sporting green clothing and carrying green cloth - the colour both a symbol of hope and Islam - they became known as the Green Revolution. "Endurance is the only option," says one of the contributors. The result was not the green wave of peaceful revolution they had hoped for but of mass carnage at the hands of government militia, including the shocking death of Neda Soltan - a young female student - whose murder reverberated around the world.

Ali Samadi Ahadi paints a poetic and heartfelt portrait of a nation oppressed, a place where, as woman says: "The blood of our young people is shed and later prayed on." The voice-overs are of variable quality in terms of delivery, but the sentiments uttered are no less striking. This is on the one hand a primer of events in Iran, which it could be argued have had a profound effect on the region, culminating in the ongoing Arab Spring uprisings. But it is much more than a simple history lesson, it is a *cri de coeur* of many

voices, hoping that their government and we in the West will not just hear, but actually listen. – *Amber Wilkinson, Eye For Film*

In A Better World

Hævnen

Dir: Susanna Bier **Denmark** **2010** **119 mins** **Cert: 15A**
Starring: Mikael Persbrandt, Trine Dyrholm, Ulrich Thomsen, William Jøhnk Juels Nielsen, Markus Rygaard
Language: Danish, English
Available to programme: March 2012
Trailer: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cn09_pS7AzE

In A Better World is another strong entry in the cannon of intense human dramas from director Susanne Bier and screenwriter Anders Thomas Jensen. A gripping meditation on the choices between pacifism and violence that are faced in so-called civilised society as well as extreme Third World situations, the film weaves the same tapestry of excruciating quandaries and crises for which the two collaborators have become celebrated in *Open Hearts*, *Brothers* and *After The Wedding*.

Bier always presents us with the most acute, out-of-the-ordinary human dilemmas and dramatises them with such keen verite realism that the audience is immediately locked into the (melo)drama with no time for doubt or skepticism.

Here the set-up is characteristically agonising. Mikael Persbrandt plays Anton, a doctor who spends many months of the year working at a refugee camp in Africa when he is not living with his wife Marianne (Dyrholm) and two sons in a beautiful house in a small Danish coastal town. But the couple are teetering on divorce as a result of his infidelity and the oldest son Elias (Rygaard) is suffering at school from relentless bullying.

In the same town, newly moved from London, Claus (Thomsen) is coming to terms with his wife's death from cancer and struggling to comfort his son Christian (Nielsen) who has become estranged and enraged at the loss of his mother.

The two families become connected when Christian defends Elias from the bullies at school and the boys become friends.

Anton is a pacifist and even treats a monstrous warlord in Africa who cuts open the bellies of pregnant women for fun. So when he is struck in the face by a belligerent man in Denmark in front of the two boys, he does not strike back and walks away.

The boys however, led by Christian, determine to wreak their own revenge on the man, a mechanic called Lars (Kim Bodnia). Their plot has horrifying consequences.

If the contrivance of the plotting is more transparent than in previous Bier/Jensen films, the conviction of the performances carries the film through its clunkier machinations.

The charismatic Persbrandt is a strong anchor for the drama, moving between the beauty of the rural Danish countryside and the stark horrors of the African refugee camp but facing the same injustice in both. Bier also elicits two natural performances from the boys as well as stalwarts Dyrholm and Thomsen. - *Mike Goodridge, Screen International*

Winner - Academy Award, Best Foreign Language Film 2011

Incendies

Dir: Denis Villeneuve **Canada, France** **2010** **130 mins** **Cert: CLUB**

Starring: Lubna Azabal, Melissa Desormeaux-Poulin, Maxim Gaudette, Remy Girard

Language: French, Arabic

Available to programme: Jan 2012

Trailer: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KMkwoLGXnnI>

Based on an acclaimed stage play by Wajdi Mouawad, Denis Villeneuve's film tells a complex story with admirable lucidity. Villeneuve effectively intercuts two parallel stories: At the start, an attorney in Montreal meets with two adult twins, Jeanne (Melissa Desormeaux-Poulin) and Simon (Maxim Gaudette), to read them their mother's will. He startles them by presenting two letters -- one to a father they thought was dead and another to a brother they never knew existed -- that their mother would like them to deliver. Simon initially is irritated by this request, but Jeanne is intrigued, and she travels to Lebanon to try to locate her father and brother.

The rest of the film intercuts the twins' adventures in Lebanon with scenes from the early life of their mother, Nawal (Lubna Azabal), as she lives through the civil war between Christians and Muslims in her country during the 1970s. Nawal is a Christian, but her life is intimately intertwined with the Muslim community in Lebanon until she finally immigrates to Canada. The picture unfolds like a complex puzzle; only gradually do all the pieces fall into place as we discover the secrets that Nawal kept from her children during her lifetime.

The deepest theme of the film is quite riveting -- the idea that children have only the vaguest idea about their parents' lives before they were born. We imagine that we must know how our parents' early lives unfolded, but it requires a huge leap of imagination to enter into the worlds that formed them. That is the odyssey that Jeanne undertakes, and she finally entices Simon to join her. The surprise that awaits them at the end of their journey drew audible gasps from the Telluride audience.

Incendies occasionally reveals its theatrical origins but on the whole is re-imagined through vivid cinematic sequences. One of the flashbacks in which Christian troops attack a bus filled with Muslims is one of the most powerful depictions of a wartime atrocity seen in any recent film. Villeneuve exhibits impressive control over the logistics of this ambitious production. - *Stephen Farber, The Hollywood Reporter*

Jack Goes Boating

Dir: Philip Seymour Hoffman USA 2010 90 mins Cert: CLUB

Starring: Philip Seymour Hoffman, Amy Ryan, John Ortiz, Daphne Rubin-Vega, Tom McCarthy

Language: English

Available to programme: Feb 2012

Trailer: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2sl4sOa8e_w

With his round, bulky middle and stubby limbs, his pink face and soft features, Jack (Philip Seymour Hoffman) resembles nothing so much as a giant baby. This impression is reinforced by his apparent inability to tackle some simple tasks of urban adult life.

A livery-car driver for his uncle's limousine company, Jack depends on his friend and co-worker Clyde (John Ortiz) to teach him everything. How to swim, how to dress, how to talk to Connie (Amy Ryan), the pretty, slightly strange woman Clyde and his wife, Lucy (Daphne Rubin-Vega), have arranged for Jack to meet.

But Jack is not entirely helpless or clueless. He likes reggae, the Melodians' version of "Rivers of Babylon" in particular. He wants to "be positive" and eventually land a job working for the Metropolitan Transportation Authority. He is a deliberate study, if not a quick one, and he masters his fear of water and his ignorance of cooking in the interest of self-improvement and in the hope of finding some respite from the loneliness that afflicts him. But his melancholy pervades *Jack Goes Boating* (the title designates another skill he dreams of mastering), which Mr. Hoffman directed from a script by Bob Glaudini.

Shot in a New York that looks convincingly drab but not oppressively so, *Jack Goes Boating* — Mr. Glaudini's play was originally performed by the Labyrinth Theater Company, with Mr. Hoffman, Mr. Ortiz and Ms. Rubin-Vega in the same roles they take here — traffics in the disappointment and cautious optimism of ordinary people. That last phrase is both alarming and unavoidable, since the film, forswearing any hint of glamour or fantasy, walks a fine line between empathy and condescension. Jack, shy and shambling and fundamentally decent, is a descendant of Ernest Borgnine's *Marty*, the Bronx butcher in Delbert Mann's 1955 film of that name (with a script by Paddy Chayefsky), whose fumbblings and yearnings earned him a permanent place in American movie memory. Jack is more diffident and less emphatically representative. He is not presented as someone just like us, but rather as someone we should pity and wonder about.

To his credit, Mr. Hoffman — more in his capacity as director than in his portrayal of Jack — fights against this impulse. For every scene of heavily telegraphed mopiness, there is at least one that finds delicacy and humanity in the give-and-take of daily life. The swimming pool sequences, in which Clyde patiently and good-humoredly coaxes his friend toward mastery, are beautiful and real, more interested in observing behavior than in making a point about the characters. And the awkward dates between Jack and Connie have a similarly relaxed, patient quality.

You know that some kind of drama is brewing, if not within Jack himself (whose volatility may be a holdover from other, more seriously damaged characters Mr. Hoffman has played) then perhaps between Lucy and Clyde. Though Jack sees them as paragons of domestic happiness, they have some bad history behind them, and a silent reservoir of

mistrust and bitterness that leaks through the surface of their relationship, threatening Jack's happiness as well as their own.

But very little in this film is overdone, which is both a virtue and something of a limitation. A few situations are too quirkily played — Connie and Lucy work in a funeral-related business, with Tom McCarthy as their pointlessly creepy boss — and others try to find the sweet spot between ickiness and charm. As is so often the case in modest, aimless little movies like this one, it is the acting that saves *Jack Goes Boating* from triviality or worse. Mr. Hoffman has an imposing body and a large reputation, but he is a seasoned enough ensemble player to give the others some room. Ms. Rubin-Vega, with anger and defeat lurking behind her mask of competence and resilience, is stealthily heartbreaking, as is Mr. Ortiz, whose perpetual good cheer is both sincere and painfully forced.

Jack Goes Boating, which aims for the improvisational, tender-and-abrasive mood of a Mike Leigh movie, does not quite hold together. Mr. Leigh's oddballs and loners live in a society whose customs and cruelties provide ballast for their personal dramas. Jack and Connie, in contrast, mostly occupy an abstract, literary space that owes more to ideas about realism than to the real world. Clyde and Lucy are a little different. They might be people you know, and you might even wish for another movie that would allow you to know them better. - A. O. Scott, *New York Times*

Knuckle

Dir: Ian Palmer **Ireland** **2011** **90 mins** **Cert: 15A**

Language: English

Available to programme: Jan 2012

Trailer: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=flEgKSvIGWk>

An epic 12-year journey into the world of an Irish Traveller community, *Knuckle* takes us inside their secretive and exhilarating bare-knuckle-fighting lives. The rules are no biting, head-butting or below-the-belt punches. There are no rounds or breaks and the fight goes on until one man gives up or is knocked out.

Chronicling a history of violent feuding between families, the film follows James Quinn McDonagh and his younger brother Michael as they fight for their reputations and the honour of their family name.

Shot in an observational style, *Knuckle* gives a hard-edged portrait of Traveller male culture and explores the bonds of loyalty, the need for revenge and the pressure to fight. Vivid, violent and funny, *Knuckle* gains unique access into the fighting culture of a hidden, contemporary community. - *Galway Film Fleadh, 2011*

Light Thief, The

Svet-Ake

Dir: Aktan Arym Kubat Kyrgyzstan 2010 80 mins Cert: CLUB

Starring: Aktan Arym Kubat, Taalaikan Abazova, Askat Sulaimanov, Asan Amanov, Stanbek Toichubaev

Language: Kyrgyz

Available to programme: Jan 2012

Trailer: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SE_FvVDFRzo

A pastoral tale of technological advancement, *The Light Thief* blends a simple man's inner vibrancy with his burning passion for wind-generated electricity. Glowing from within, Svet-Ake – which literally translates to “Mr. Light” – is the local electrician in an isolated village perched high on the Kyrgyz Mountains. It's not the most profitable profession; electricity only reaches this remote corner of the earth sporadically and never sticks around for long.

Constantly plagued by short circuits, the locals exist in a dream-like state of intermittent darkness, infusing their daily lives with a strange, sombre poetry. Armed with a bicycle and an emergency toolkit, Svet-Ake thrusts himself on the scene as an enthusiastic Mister Fix-It. It's never entirely clear whether the affable electrician is actually improving the light supply or, in fact, disabling it. Regardless, people appreciate his knack for making electric bills go away, and tampering with the meters is just the beginning. His greatest aspiration is to harness the wind, offering locals a fair chance at cheap electricity.

Hope arrives in the form of local magnate Bezkat, who promises to make Svet-Ake's dreams come true in return for his professional services. Little does the electrician know, Bezkat's goodwill disguises his own scheming agenda. Stranded in the middle of Kyrgyzstan's Tulip Revolution, the unassuming denizens of this hill-perched village have no idea how to defend their land.

Director Aktan Arym Kubat casts himself in the lead, yet skillfully maintains a rich directorial focus. Finding a powerful motif in electricity, he has made a profoundly human film that goes beyond political allegory to explore man's belief in what he cannot see, be it God or electrical currents. - *Dimitri Eipides, Toronto International Film Festival 2010*

Mammuth

Dir: Benoît Delépine & Gustave Kervern France 2010 87 mins Cert: 15A

Starring: Gerard Depardieu, Yolande Moreau, Isabelle Adjani, Benoit Poelvoorde, Miss Ming, Blutch, Philippe Nahon, Bouli Lanners, Anna Mouglalis, Albert Delpy, Bruno Lochet

Language: French

Available to programme: Jan 2012

Trailer: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ozHHV5UjIRE>

Gérard Depardieu teams up with subversive farceurs Delépine and de Kervern for a trouble-making road comedy about an old biker heading back to his past.

Festival-goers will be familiar with the no-holds-barred comedies of provocateurs Delépine and Kervern - including wheelchair road movie *Aaltra* and proletarian revenge

tale *Louise-Michel*. The duo are up to their usual tricks - and in vivid colour - in *Mammuth*, the story of a man, a mission and a motorbike.

Serge (Gérard Depardieu) is an abattoir worker who retires only to find that he doesn't have a pension and needs to track down paperwork from his former employers. Hitting the road on his Mammuth bike, he has a series of variously humiliating and inspiring encounters - including a reunion with a long-lost cousin, the cue for one of the most outrageous sight gags in recent cinema. Isabelle Adjani makes an eerie appearance as a woman from the past, while outsider artist Miss Ming makes her distinctly oddball mark.

Above all, the screen is filled - and then some - by Depardieu, casting vanity, long hair and often clothes to the winds. Reconnecting with the spirit of Bertrand Blier's *Les Valseuses*, Depardieu clearly hits it off a treat with the directors, whose anarchic cheek and up-yours radicalism are, despite a new-found lyricism, here in full force. - *Jonathan Romney, BFI London Film Festival 2010*

Nader And Simin - A Separation

Jodaeiye Nader az Simin

Dir: Asghar Farhadi **Iran** **2010** **123 mins** **Cert: CLUB**

Starring: Leila Hatami, Peyman Moadi, Shahab Hosseini, Sareh Bayat, Sarina Farhadi, Babak Karimi, Merila Zarei

Language: Farsi

Available to programme: Feb 2012

Trailer: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B2Sswx_vrWk

Just when it seemed impossible for Iranian filmmakers to express themselves meaningfully outside the bounds of censorship, Asghar Farhadi's *Nader and Simin-A Separation* comes along to prove the contrary. Apparently simple on a narrative level yet morally, psychologically and socially complex, it succeeds in bringing Iranian society into focus in a way few other films have done. Like *About Elly*, which won Farhadi the best director award at Berlin two years ago and which went on to find release in many territories, it has the potential to engage Western audiences with the right handling.

Politics are ostensibly out of the picture, though the whole premise is based on a middle-class couple's divorce because the wife Simin (Iranian star Leila Hatami) wants to move abroad to find a better future for their 11-year-old daughter Termeh (Sarina Farhadi). But that may not be the real reason for the separation.

Nader (Peyman Moadi, seen in *About Elly*) is a decent man but a stubborn one, and he neglects his wife. Too proud to ask her to stay with him, he lets her move back to her mother's place while he and Termeh are left to look after his aged father with Alzheimer's disease. He hastily hires a poor woman named Razieh (Sareh Bayat) as a daytime caretaker, who signs on without telling him she's pregnant (or does she?). A few days later he fires her and shoves her out the door; she falls on the stairs (perhaps) and has a miscarriage. The rest of the film is a crescendo of tension as Razieh's hot-headed, debt-ridden husband Hodjat (Shahab Hosseini) takes Nader to court for manslaughter.

Scene after scene, new details are added that changes the moral perspective. Rather remarkably, Farhadi's screenplay doesn't take sides with any of the characters; on the contrary, everyone seems equally right and wrong at the same time. They are all caught

in a web of pride and ego, morality and religion, money and honor.

As in his impressive third feature *Fireworks Wednesday*, which viewed a middle-class marriage through the eyes of a young housemaid, Farhadi attentively points out Iran's huge class divide, colorfully referred to as the difference between "royalty and the regular people." Simin, Nader and Termeh have middle-class jobs, apartments, cars, school and world view; they don't raise their voice even when they fight and can easily influence the judge (played sympathetically by Babak Karimi). Razieh and Hodjat are dirt poor, live on the outskirts of the city and are much more vulnerable members of society.

And Razieh is very religious. At one point she phones an Islamic hot-line to ask whether it's a sin for her to change the soiled pyjamas of a senile man of 80. Her refusal to swear on the Quran provides a turning point in the film.

The other ethical character is young Termeh, a gravely serious girl who learns she must downgrade her principles in a society that can only function on lying. When her moment of truth comes, she makes a choice very different from the uneducated Razieh's.

As in all the director's work, the cast is given top consideration and their realistic acting results in unusual depth of characterization. All five main actors stand out sharply in Mahmood Kalari's intimate cinematography. Though the film lasts over two hours, Hayedeh Safiyari's fast-moving editing keeps the action tensely involving from start to finish. - *Deborah Young, The Hollywood Reporter*

Winner - Golden Bear, Berlin Film Festival 2011

Page One: Inside The New York Times

Dir: Andrew Rossi **USA** **2011** **88 mins** **Cert: CLUB**

Language: English

Available to programme: Jan 2012

Trailer: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BCdsSezvACw>

At time of writing, it still seemed likely that you will be able to read this review on flattened sheets of wood pulp. How bizarre.

The main concern of this engaging, if scattershot, documentary on the *New York Times* is, it hardly needs to be said, the continuing assault on print media by the those unstoppable digital upstarts. *Page One* could be seen — drawing analogies from history — as a report from Berlin in mid 1943. Things look bad for the Reich, but, if total collapse does come, then this will surely be the last bastion to fall.

Though the documentary touches on many bubbling news stories, the state of the medium itself is continually a matter of concern. The fact that the editorial staff are, at the time of the film, chewing over the WikiLeaks controversy makes it harder than ever to push aside digital anxiety. Is this a source? Or is it a rival organ? One senses creaky paradigms straining to accommodate themselves to new information streams.

Shooting with a stable camera, pulling in only a few veteran talking heads, director Andrew Rossi wallows in *the Times*'s new Renzo Piano building and finds time to detail some of the journalists' personal eccentricities. The hero, straight out of a latter-day

Damon Runyon story, turns out to be the irascible, eccentric David Carr. A former junkie, now the paper's media correspondent, Carr seems all too human for this digital age.

If the film focused solely on Carr, it might have told a more easily digestible story. Unfortunately, the film-makers seem distracted by every little incident in every shadowy corner. News stories appear. They are briefly sketched out. Then they slip away in a half-formed state. We get just a few seconds on notorious *Times* scandals involving Jayson Blair and Judith Miller. There is perhaps a great TV series bursting to get out of a slightly over-busy film.

Still, Page One does teach us one surprising fact about American journalists. Unusually for middle-class professionals, many of them still smoke. Who'd blame them? See you on the front steps in five. - *Donald Clarke, The Irish Times*

Parked

Dir: Darragh Byrne **Ireland** **2010** **90 mins** **Cert: 15A**

Starring: Colm Meaney, Colin Morgan, Milka Ahlroth

Language: English

Available to programme: Jan 2012

Trailer: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m_ftqL3Szo0

Documentary director Darragh Byrne turns to fiction with this beautifully shot film. Set in Dublin, with the powerful Colm Meaney as Fred, *Parked* tells the story of a man down on his luck, who absolutely wants to blend in. Problem is, he lives in his car.

People who no longer have a house but live permanently in their car: in America there are now so many of them that a term has been invented, the 'mobile homeless'. It is also apparently an increasingly common phenomenon in Europe, even though there are no official figures. The Irish feature debut *Parked* is about one such homeless man.

Fred Daly (a rare leading role for supporting actor Colm Meaney) lives in his nondescript car in a car park by the coast. He is shut off from the world, until the ever-positive drug addict Cathal parks his little yellow car beside Fred's.

Under the influence of Cathal, Fred slowly emerges from his shell: he decorates his car like a real house and cautiously makes overtures to the attractive music teacher Juliana. But Cathal is speedily overtaken by his drug use. Finally, both men get stuck in their lives without being able to go into forward or reverse gear. - *Rotterdam International Film Festival 2011*

Poetry

Shi

Dir: Lee Chang-dong **South Korea** **2010** **139 mins** **Cert: CLUB**

Starring: Yun Jung-hee, Lee David, Kim Hira

Language: Korean

Available to programme: Feb 2012

Trailer: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R20bDHcgOGM>

A woman takes up writing poems as a means of coping with her difficult grandson and the onset of Alzheimer's -- a description that conveys little hint of the subtle intelligence

at work in Lee Chang-dong's quietly haunting new picture. Calmer and less shattering than his masterly psychodrama *Secret Sunshine* (2007), *Poetry* is a deceptively gentle tale with a tender ache at its center, as well as a performance from Yun Jung-hee that lingers long in the memory.

After a prologue of unsettling stillness in which we see a body floating down the Han River, the film introduces Yang Mija (Yun), a beautiful woman in her 60s whose warm, open demeanor finds expression in the bright-colored floral prints and cute white hat she likes to wear. D.p. Kim Hyun-seok's mobile camera follows Mija through a series of routines and errands around her suburban town: cleaning house for an elderly man whom she also bathes, to his evident pleasure; visiting a doctor who's concerned by her recent memory lapses; taking care of her sullen, unresponsive grandson, Wook (Lee David); and, on a whim, signing up for a poetry class at the local community center.

As in *Secret Sunshine*, all this leisurely scene-setting lulls the viewer into a sense of security that's ruptured by a sudden twist, one that explains the meaning of that earlier corpse. With Wook and five of his friends implicated in a monstrous crime, Mija is in desperate need of cash for a legal settlement -- a mission she undertakes with no particular urgency, instead spending most of her time in search of the poetic inspiration that, she freely and touchingly admits, doesn't come naturally to her.

Given the abundant potential for missteps into sappiness with this sort of premise, what's notable here is the lack of sentimentality in Lee's approach. At no point does *Poetry* devolve into a terminal-illness melodrama or a tale of intergenerational bonding; Wook remains a wretchedly ungrateful cipher, and his horrific actions are left chillingly unexplained. Mija looks and looks intently for the everyday beauty that will unlock her hidden talents, but Lee won't let her or the viewer escape the ugliness that's all around.

In his past films, including *Peppermint Candy* and *Oasis*, Lee has established himself as a fearless social critic and sympathetic observer of characters who, due to mental/physical disabilities or emotional/spiritual trauma, find themselves on the margins. *Poetry* presents a patriarchal society that, under a smiling veneer of concern, tries to contain its problems by throwing money at them. Mija -- who has no money to give, only compassion -- has no place in this culture. Repeatedly, she behaves in ways that inspire one's embarrassed pity: opening her mouth at the wrong moment to ask an ignorant question, or abandoning a conversation to look at some nearby flowers. By film's end, it's clear she's the sanest, healthiest person in town.

The use of poetry as both text and subtext makes the film feel a bit more prosaic and less cinematic than some of Lee's recent efforts, somewhat betraying the novelist-turned-filmmaker's literary origins. There are longueurs here -- particularly the direct-address interviews with Mija's poetry classmates -- that could be trimmed, though overall this absorbing film feels considerably shorter than its 139 minutes.

Looking fabulous in her flamboyant wardrobe (designed by Lee Choong-yeon), Yun winningly embodies that pleasant, loopy, slightly-too-talkative grandmother everyone's either encountered or been related to, imbuing the old woman with an uncloying joie de vivre and simple desire for human connection that cuts to the heart; in sadder moments, she does most of her acting with her eyes, which can make her look terribly vulnerable and alone. The graceful final passage, which comes close to fulfilling the promise of the

title, is all the more poignant for the fact that the central character is heard but not seen.
- *Justin Chang, Variety*

Winner - Best Screenplay, Cannes Film Festival 2010

Point Blank *À Bout Portant*

Dir: Fred Cavayé **France** **2010** **84 mins** **Cert: 15A**
Starring: Gilles Lellouche, Roschdy Zem, Gérard Lanvin, Elena Anaya
Language: French
Available to programme: Jan 2012
Trailer: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ha2O-LdNoqE>

French director Fred Cavayé's debut *Anything For Her* was hailed as a thrilling and pulsating feature and immediately announced Cavayé's arrival on the cinematic screen (the film has since been remade for American audiences as *The Next Three Days*, with Paul Haggis at the helm). His second feature, *Point Blank*, is another gripping account of dubious morals, criminal activity – a typically taut and visceral French thriller.

Things couldn't be better for Samuel and Nadia: he will soon be a nurse and she is expecting her first child. But their world is tipped upside down when Nadia is kidnapped in front of Samuel's very eyes and he's incapable of doing anything about it. When he comes to, his cellphone rings: he has three hours to get a man, under police surveillance, out of the hospital where he works. Samuel's destiny is henceforth linked to that of Sartet, a gangster figure actively wanted by every branch of the police. If Samuel ever wants to see his wife alive again, he must act quickly...

- *Colm McAuliffe, Jameson Dublin International Film Festival 2011*

Potiche

Dir: François Ozon **France** **2010** **103 mins** **Cert: 15A**
Starring: Catherine Deneuve, Gerard Depardieu, Fabrice Luchini, Karin Viard, Jeremie Renier, Judith Godreche
Language: French
Available to programme: Jan 2012
Trailer: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SZazD_ddQ9Y

François Ozon has a quicksilver touch, shifting easily from stark drama to frothy comedy with each new film. This one looks to be a frothy affair but there's a radical streak running through *Potiche*. With Catherine Deneuve in one of her finest comic roles and Gérard Depardieu as her foil, this is a French farce with a lot on its mind.

In 1977, in the small town of Sainte-Guenole, Suzanne Pujol (Catherine Deneuve) lives the life of a traditional housewife, doting on her grumpy husband, Robert (Fabrice Luchini), who spends his days running her family's umbrella business into the ground. To her husband and her two grown children, Madame Pujol is a trophy housewife with no real power; in other words, une potiche.

But when the workers of the umbrella factory go on strike to protest draconian working conditions, all hell breaks loose. Robert suffers a heart attack and is ordered to take time off to recover and Suzanne is left to run the company with the help of her former beau,

the town mayor, Maurice Babin (Gérard Depardieu). At first, she is the laughing stock of all the employees, but when she saves the faltering business and fosters the best working conditions in years, opinions quickly change. In fact, no one wants her husband to take back the reins once he's recovered. But Mr Pujol will not go down without a fight; using blackmail and forming secret alliances, he's determined to win back his role as head of the company and head of his household. However, once this veritable Pandora's box of deception has been opened, Monsieur Pujol will find out that Madame Pujol has more than one trick up her sleeve.

Deneuve is positively luminous as the matriarch learning to flex her muscles and Depardieu is wonderfully endearing as the passionately Marxist mayor, who still holds a flame for his old petite amie. Delightful, empowering and charming, *Potiche* is filled with a stylish and charismatic je ne sais quoi. - Cameron Bailey, *Toronto International Film Festival 2010*

Princess of Montpensier, The *La Princesse de Montpensier*
Dir: Bertrand Tavernier France 2010 139 mins Cert: CLUB
Starring: Melanie Thierry, Lambert Wilson, Gaspard Ulliel, Gregoire Leprince-Ringuet, Raphael Personnaz, Michel Vuillermoz
Language: French
Available to programme: Jan 2012
Trailer: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FfYkKDVcGeY>

Even if it had no other virtues, Bertrand Tavernier's film of Madame de la Fayette's novel should be applauded for showing up the cliché-ridden vacuity of Ridley Scott's *Robin of the Hood* (as the French title almost has it). No displays of CGI virtuosity here; no Pythonesque emphasis on muck; no resort to 'legendary' stereotypes or apeing of contemporary fashions; just a good story well told, with excellent performances, a properly researched but never flashy attention to historical detail, and a clear sense of what the film is actually meant to be about.

The Princess in question is Marie de Mézières, a beautiful young heiress in love with the Duc de Guise but promised to his brother. The film begins in 1562 when her father, receiving a better offer, reneges on the agreement and has her married to Philippe, Prince de Montpensier, whose friend and mentor the Comte de Chabannes – banished as a deserter after he gave up killing during the war between the Catholics and Huguenots – is enlisted to educate the young woman. It's awkward enough when this older man – not just a soldier, but a scientist, philosopher and aesthete – secretly falls for his charge; far more problematic, however, is the jealousy felt and angrily expressed by Philippe when it becomes clear that de Guise still wants Marie. And then there's the king's brother, the Duc d'Anjou...

It's a fairly complex story, then, but Tavernier handles it with the assurance characteristic of his finest work; he's as at home with the brutal battle sequences as he is with the more intimate scenes between Marie and her various admirers. He's helped no end by a cast of largely unknown young actors; for most of us, only Lambert Wilson, extremely effective as Chabannes, will be familiar, though one can't help feeling that the likes of Mélanie Thierry, Gaspard Ulliel and Raphaël Personnaz – all extremely good-looking and all very effective as Marie, de Guise and Anjou respectively – will be returning to our screens with some regularity. Philippe Sarde's music and Bruno de Keyzer's 'Scope

camerawork are also deserving of special mention. Old-fashioned it may be, but Tavernier's film impresses from start to finish. - *Geoff Andrew, Time Out London*

Project Nim

Dir: James Marsh **UK** **2011** **93 mins** **Cert: 12A**

Language: English

Available to programme: ???

Trailer: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yxQap9AAPOs>

In 1973, scientist Professor Herbert Terrace embarked on an experiment to try to find out if a chimpanzee could learn to communicate with humans through sign language. The chimp - taken from his mum at just two weeks old - was called Nim, and James Marsh's emotionally charged documentary charts his story.

Featuring surprisingly candid interviews with the scarily large number of people who looked after Nim through his life, this is a sometimes funny, sometimes harrowing watch. With the help of the testimony of these 'carers' and a wealth of archival video and still photography - plus a few slightly sensational 'acted' segments - Marsh shows how this baby animal not so far down the evolutionary ladder from us was initially brought up as though he was human. This meant he had no contact with his own species for the first few years of his life, was taught to dress himself and use the toilet and was even breastfed by his first surrogate mother Stephanie LaFarge - "It was the Seventies," she says, in reference to her decidedly free-range household of the time.

In many ways, however, these were golden years for Nim because, at age five, he was thrust out of this environment and back into a primitive, caged existence at a university research facility, with much worse still to come.

Ideas of communication are front and centre of Marsh's documentary - not just in terms of the footage of Nim interacting with his various carers. We're also invited to take a long hard look at the scientists and others who looked after him. Much of their interaction with Nim caught on camera in the Seventies says as much about the ways in which he altered their behaviour them as the other way around. Marsh also uses his camera to good effect as he captures their recollections, lingering unflinchingly on them as they talk and dollying sideways away from them after they'd finished, as though moving on to another specimen in this zoo of memory. Much of this testimony is highly emotional and what emerges is a picture of botched and latently cruel, if on the face of it, well-meaning science.

Initial placement of Nim seems to have been based more on the whims and lusts of Prof Terrace than from any hard scientific drivers. "Unconsciously, I took advantage," he says, rather disingenuously. Whether Nim had a proper 'vocabulary' as such is moot, but there is no doubt that he was frequently able to get those around him to do what he wanted - or, possibly, they simply projected human attributes on to him so much that they thought were giving in - and, as he passed through their lives, he left an indelible imprint.

Marsh's documentary is constrained somewhat by the narrowness of its subject matter - this is a chimp-opic, so the focus is firmly on Nim, meaning that issues of animal cruelty and testing are mentioned in passing but not explored in any in-depth way, although the

footage that is used is truly hard-hitting.

What Marsh does offer is a thorough and provocative portrait, which shies away from anthropomorphising Nim as much as possible - accentuating his animal nature as well as what might be considered more "human" attributes - and which invites us to consider our attitudes to this species so similar, yet different from our own.

- Amber Wilkinson, *Eye For Film*

In Search of Beethoven

Dir: Phil Grabsky UK 2009 138 mins Cert: CLUB

Language: English

Available to programme: Jan 2012

Trailer: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mx_ZEhhMM3M

After the monotonous guide through history that was *In Search of Mozart*, Phil Grabsky's follow-up *In Search of Beethoven* plays like a much-needed shot of adrenaline to the brain. Here, history isn't some dead thing to be dissected from a distance—it's alive, and gloriously so, like an animal bursting out of its cage. Like virtually any historical documentary crafted with educational purposes in mind, the mold is familiar: Present day footage of historically important locations, interviews, readings of preserved letters, and other choice documents are assembled into an audio/visual tapestry, here meant to illuminate the social context and personal experiences that led to the creation of some of the finest music yet made by man.

Chalk it up to sheer filmmaking experience that what was so largely synthetic in *Mozart* now seems an organic force that grows deeper and richer on screen; compared to snooze-worthy History Channel productions commonplace in grade school lectures, *Beethoven* is like the *Citizen Kane* of the genre. Recalling the more intriguing moments of *Mozart*, the new doc doesn't shy away from the messier details of Beethoven's life, from his hardships with love to the often hilarious difficulties he presented as an apartment tenant.

Punctuated by what seems like dozens of live performances of Beethoven's work, the film is arguably misguided in its decision to focus more on the musicians in these sequences than the music itself. Such is a flaw both relative in nature and one most easily fixed; one need only close their eyes during these sequences, and let the music take you where it may. - Rob Humanick, *Slant Magazine*

Pier, The

Dir: Gerard Hurley Ireland 2011 83 mins Cert: CLUB

Starring: Gerard Hurley, Lili Taylor, Karl Johnson

Language: English

Available to programme: Jan 2012

Trailer: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7SVLRIdQqW8>

Your father is dying.... Like every son, Jack McCarthy drops everything and hops on a flight to Ireland from the United States. But after jolting along to the remote village where he was born, the first thing he sees is his father Larry standing in a pasture driving golf balls. He's none too happy about it. Jack spent the last money he had on a one-way ticket and he doesn't appreciate his father's trick, especially since they haven't spoken for 20 years. Jack would take off immediately but financial straits force him to stay for at least a while and live under one roof with his father. Their stormy relationship is marked by an inability to talk about the past, which is painful for both of them and drove them apart years earlier. But the time has come when understanding becomes a necessity. And it's not easy dealing with pigheaded Larry....

The director returned to the land of his youth, and portrayed the uneasy process of coming to terms with the past and the approaching end of one's life with concision, exceptional personal conviction, and the help of the rugged beauty of the Irish countryside. - *Karlovy Vary International Film Festival 2011*

Round-Up, The

La Rafle

Dir: Rose Bosch France 2011 115 mins Cert: CLUB

Starring: Jean Reno, Melanie Laurent, Gad Elmaleh, Raphaëlle Agogue, Hugo Leverdez, Anne Brochet, Sylvie Testud

Language: French/German

Available to programme: Jan 2012

Trailer: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YXvQXQS3ahE>

In picturesque Montmartre, three children wearing a yellow star play in the streets, oblivious to the darkness spreading over Nazi-occupied France. Their parents do not seem too concerned either, somehow putting their trust in the Vichy Government. But beyond this view, much is going on. Hitler demands that the French government round up its Jews and put them on trains for the extermination camps in the East. The collaborators start to put the plan into effect and within a short time, 13,000 Parisian Jews, among them 4,000 children, will be rounded up and sent on a road with no return. The fateful date: July 16th, 1942, 68 years ago.

With a meticulously constructed script based on extensive research and first-hand accounts, writer/director Roselyne Bosch brings to the screen one of the most moving dramas of the year. Powered by fluid direction and a string of stars—from Jean Reno (*The Da Vinci Code*, *Leon*) to Mélanie Laurent (*Inglourious Basterds*, *The Concert*)—*La Rafle* became a big box-office hit in France in the first half of 2010, and its audiences included thousands of young people who came to learn about a dark chapter in their country's history. - *Seattle International Film Festival 2011*

Runway, The

Dir: Ian Power Ireland/Luxembourg 2010 95 mins Cert: PG

Starring: Demian Bichir, Kerry Condon, James Cosmo, Jamie Kierans, John Carpenter, Bruno Bichir, Pat Laffan, Donnacha Crowley

Language: English

Available to programme: Jan 2012

Trailer: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NJGuvzJ7U7g>

This is the story of Paco, an illegitimate nine-year-old, who, thanks to his imaginative mother Grace, is convinced that his absent father is a Spanish astronaut who works for N.A.S.A. They live in the depressed town of Kilpadder, Co. Cork. Once the double-glazing capital of Ireland, it is now crippled by factory closure. As his mother struggles with her busy job as a waitress, Paco is left to deal with the harsh reality of being an illegitimate child in a small Irish town.

When Ernesto Sanchez, a charismatic South American Pilot, crashes his cargo plane in the field, Paco confuses the wingless plane wreck for a N.A.S.A. rocket and contrives to keep the pilot secret. But it is not long before Ernesto and his plane are discovered and, having learned some Spanish for his father's return, Paco is the only person in the town who can translate.

Against all odds, Paco manages to convince the locals to repair the plane, build a runway and get Ernesto home. In doing so, the people unwittingly put Kilpadder on the map again as their struggle captures the imagination of the nation and the magnetic Ernesto wins over their hearts and minds and transforms the lives of Paco and Grace. But Ernesto has a secret of his own. He's on the run from the Columbian mafia with a mysterious cargo and it's only a matter of time before they catch up with him... - *Rome International Film Festival 2010*

Salt of Life, The

Dir: Gianni Di Gregorio Italy 2010 90mins Cert: CLUB

Starring: Gianni Di Gregorio, Valeria de Franciscis Bondoni, Alfonso Santagata, Elisabetta Piccolomini, Teresa Di Gregorio, Aylin Prandi, Kristina Ceperga, Michelangelo Criminale, Valeria Cavalli

Language: Italian

Available to programme: Feb 2012

Trailer: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mEVjONfqiTo>

Gianni Di Gregorio is a bit of a modern-day mystery: how could someone score an international hit with a gentle, honey-sweet film about a lugubrious middle-aged man cooking lunch for his old mum and a bunch of random elderly women? Added to which, his most notable prior credit was as co-writer of the lacerating *Gomorra*, arguably the most gruesome true-crime film of recent years.

However it happened, Di Gregorio did it; and the affection in which that film, *Mid-August Lunch*, is held, was demonstrated in the packed screening for a second helping of Di Gregorio's drooping eyelids and pained, obliging smile. His mum, played by the astonishing Valeria De Franciscis, is back too, but this is not exactly a sequel, more an expansion and follow-up. In *Mid-August Lunch*, Di Gregorio was single and lived with

Valeria; in *The Salt of Life* he is married, with a stropky daughter, and paranoid that his increasingly erratic mother is blowing all the family money on expensive food and extravagant gift giving. (Indeed, the opening scene sees Gianni attempt to foist a power-of-attorney on her, but is too sappy to actually pull it off).

But Di Gregorio's central concern here is the romantic life of his screen alter-ego: his feminised existence, as nursemaid to his mother and house-husband to a not-especially-sympathetic wife, is jolted out of its torpor when he notices the voluptuous home help employed by his mother. (Never is Di Gregorio's distinct resemblance to Robert Mitchum more ironic as he drunkenly tries to put his feeble moves on her.) Still, it awakens some long-buried desire to assert his masculinity, a desire only amplified by the sense that all the other ancient gents around him are snaring beautiful young things left, right and centre; and Gianni tries his polite, utterly gracious best to generate some kind of love life. He looks up old girlfriends, suffers the ambiguous attentions of his party-girl neighbour and, in one hilariously painful sequence, finds himself on a double-date with blonde identical twins.

This, of course, is material that in other hands could simply become toe-curling middle-aged leching, but Di Gregorio navigates his film with such a sense of delicacy that its tone is never coarsened. In some ways, *The Salt of Life* examines the other side of the coin, acting a comment on the sexualised nature of Berlusconi's Italy, where women are routinely encouraged to use their looks as a social bargaining chip. Be that as it may, Di Gregorio's film manages to be as charming as *Mid-August Lunch*; a tremendous achievement. - *Andrew Pulver, The Guardian*

Sarah's Key

Elle s'appelait Sarah

Dir: Gilles Paquet-Brenner **France** **2011** **111 mins** **Cert: CLUB**

Starring: Kristin Scott Thomas, Mélusine Mayance, Niels Arestrup, Frédéric Pierrot, Michel Duchaussoy, Aidan Quinn.

Language: French

Available to programme: Jan 2012

Trailer: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=37rMDd7Qtd4>

Moving gracefully across the decades and people's hidden histories, Gilles Paquet-Brenner's *Sarah's Key* relates a highly emotional yet unsentimental story about a Paris-based journalist digging into a Holocaust story that she discovers has a connection to her own family.

The movie gathers momentum with a steady, assured pace, accumulating incidents, characters, secrets and lies until the rush of events is absolutely transfixing. Cinema can sometimes rival the novel in compulsive intensity and *Sarah's Key* is one such example. Indeed the movie is based on a best-selling novel by journalist Tatiana de Rosney, which the director and Serge Joncour have beautifully adapted to the screen.

The story gets told in two time frames. In present day, the remarkable Kristin Scott Thomas plays American-born journalist Julia Jarmond, who is working on a magazine story about the 1942 Paris roundups and deportations of thousands of Jewish families. An equally remarkable 10-year-old actress, Melusine Mayance, plays Sarah, whose family was among those deported to the camps.

Julia's husband, Bertrand Tezac (Frederic Pierrot), a brusque and somewhat arrogant businessman, is renovating his family's Marais-district flat as a new home for himself, his wife and their 11-year-old daughter. In her research, Julia discovers that Bertrand's family first took over the apartment when its Jewish occupants were dispossessed in that roundup.

In the parallel story, little Sarah hides her 4-year-old brother Thomas in a bedroom closet when the French police arrive. She promises to return but instead finds herself first with her parents in the atrocious Velodrome d'Hiver detention facility in Paris, then transported to a countryside camp. Desperate to rescue her brother, she manages to escape.

Back and forth the movie swings between the two time periods. Julia searches with increasing determination for scrap of information that will tell her what happened to Sarah and her family. Her surprising discoveries throw a new light on her current situation as a wife and mother forced to make crucial decisions about her future. In uncovering the truths about the Tezac family, Julia uncovers ugly truths about her adopted country. But *Sarah's Key* puts human faces to tragedies that risk becoming abstractions when reduced to numbers of dead.

And the faces in this movie are remarkable. The most important one, of course, belongs to young Mayance. From innocence to terror and then sheer desperation, the youngster conveys all this with heartbreaking conviction. In her journey she encounters a gruff farmer (that superb veteran actor Niels Arestrup), who most reluctantly comes to her aid. There are others too from a French policeman who shows kindness to a young girl who escapes with Sarah.

In Julia's story, Scott Thomas puts her character in a road to discovery in an absorbing performance. No scene, not even a moment, gets overplayed for all the natural melodrama. If young Sarah represents the film's heartbreak, then Scott Thomas' Julia represents the film's conviction that the truth must always come first.

In the contemporary sequences, Michel Duchaussoy nicely underplays her father-in-law, who is forced into a confession. As for others, to relate whom they play may be plot spoilers but Aidan Quinn, George Birt and Charlotte Poutrel all have memorable roles.

Perhaps the movie closest to this is *Sophie's Choice*, where the ghosts of the Holocaust maintain haunt survivors long after the war and a woman must come to terms with unimaginable guilt. This is a poignant tale of two females confronted by the madness of history. - *Kirk Honeycutt, The Hollywood Reporter*

Sawako Decides*Kawa no soko kara konnichi wa***Dir: Yuya Ishii****2010****112 minutes Cert: CLUB****Starring: Hikari Mitsushima, Masahi Endo, Kira Aihara, Kotaro Shiga****Language: Japanese****Available to programme: Jan 2012****Trailer: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kwnJpZtGhYM>**

This Japanese comedy-drama's original title translates as "Hello From the Bottom of the River", echoing the sense that we're powerless against life's strong currents. And the

combination of black wit and warm emotion is surprisingly hopeful.

After five years, five jobs and five boyfriends in Tokyo, Sawako (Mitsushima) is tired of settling for second best. Constantly belittled at work, her nice-nerd boyfriend Kenichi (Endo) wants her to be a mother to his 4-year-old daughter Kayoko (Aihara) from a previous marriage. Then her father (Iwamatsu) falls ill and her uncle (Shiga) summons her home to run the family river clam-packing business. So she heads back home, accompanied by Kenichi and Kayoko. Can she tough it out and give it her best shot?

The film is dryly hilarious as Sawako acknowledges that she's nothing special but becomes increasingly tetchy about being pushed around. Writer-director Ishii continually catches us off-guard with hilarious interaction, usually a sharp glance or a silly gesture in a scene that otherwise should be darkly disturbing. And Sawako's matter-of-fact approach is extremely amusing, especially as she's forced to return to a life she ran away from five years earlier.

The cast is terrific, playing these relentlessly unexceptional people in realistic ways that are funny and sometimes surprisingly emotional. Endo's always-knitting Kenichi is often the butt of the joke, especially when he runs off with Sawako's former nemesis (Suzuki), but his journey is unexpectedly engaging. And Mitsushima holds the film together as a young woman who chooses to stand up for herself. And the black comedy is continually underscored by real human warmth.

Although slightly overlong, the film is shot in a straightforward way that underscores ordinariness, showing how outside pressures determine our fate unless we make difficult choices. Sawako's escape to Tokyo five years earlier was one of those, and now here she is again. On the other hand, maybe she can make something of this life and find herself in the process. Cleverly, there are no cathartic moments of self-discovery, as Ishii allows the characters to come of age by embracing their mediocrity. This might not be a revolutionary message, but it's helpful to be reminded that we can be happy even if we don't achieve some five-year plan. – *Rich Cline, Shadows on the Wall*

Skin I Live In, The

La Piel Que Habito

Dir: Pedro Almodovar **Spain** **2011** **117 mins** **Cert: 16**

Starring: Antonio Banderas, Elena Anaya, Marisa Paredes

Language: Spanish

Available to programme: Feb 2012

Trailer: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mlt1V3qP_mg

Pedro Almodóvar's macabre suspense thriller is about an obsession that, though not exactly magnificent, has a fanatical intensity.

Antonio Banderas plays a Madrid plastic surgeon, wealthy, cultured and respected; he gives brilliant lectures and research papers on advances in face-transplant surgery. Daringly, heretically, he advocates transgenic treatments from animals to toughen the skin.

In his palatial home, he has a private operating theatre where he carries out experimental work on Vera, a beautiful woman he keeps prisoner, who is dressed only in a clinging gauzy, flesh-toned material and whose skin has an unnaturally smooth,

flawless look. She appears to submit ecstatically to her imprisonment, but this is finally to be the cause of madness and violence.

The Skin I Live In is adapted from the 2003 novel *Mygale* (Tarantula) by Thierry Jonquet, but clearly Almodóvar has taken something from Georges Franju's 1960 film *Eyes Without a Face* and possibly also Alejandro Amenábar's *Open Your Eyes* from 1997. It is also conceivable that he wants us to think of Evelyn Waugh's story *Love Among the Ruins*.

But influences and allusions are almost beside the point, given the fact that almost every scene, every shot, must remind you of every other Almodóvar picture. As ever, it is sleek and stylishly furnished, sensually charged with richness and colour, and splashes and gashes of red. There is a surging Hitchcockian orchestral score and a breathless sense of imminent violence: handguns are coolly disclosed in desk-drawers and expensive ladies' handbags; crime scenes are established in stunning overhead shots.

As in many of his films, family secrets are revealed through lengthy flashbacks – something forbidden to contemporary Hollywood screenwriters. There is the doppelgänger motif, and the younger guy who likes partying and drugs; there are staircase scenes and scenes in which a middle-aged man watches the object of his desire, enraptured, on a large screen. And perhaps most startling, and most characteristic of all, there is Almodóvar's great theme of transsexual identity, which speaks of passion, fantasy and escape. The director himself, in various masks and guises, is present in all of this.

For those who would like Almodóvar to do something radical – and this was rather how this movie had been misleadingly billed here in Cannes – then *The Skin I Live In* might try the patience. But I can only say that it kept me gripped from first to last. The sheer muscular confidence of Almodóvar's film-making language gives it force, and co-exists with a dancer's elegance and grace. Without this, the story could look strained and farcical. Instead, its bizarre passions are compelling. Almodóvar brings something hypnotic to the surgery-porn aesthetic of his operating theatre of cruelty: the latex, the scrubs, the cold steel, the exquisite yet appalling contrast between wounds and young flesh. It is twisted and mad, and its choreography and self-possession are superb.
- Peter Bradshaw, *The Guardian*

Some Other Stories

Dir: Marija Dzidzeva, Ivona Juka, Ana Marija Rosi, Ines Tanovic, Hanna Antonina
Serbia, Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia And Herzegovina, Republic Of Macedonia,
Ireland 2010 114 minutes Cert: CLUB

Starring: Goran Bogdan, Nera Stipicevic, Mirela Brekalo, Anita Matic, Otokar Levaj, Marija Kohn, Mladen Kovacic, Ljubica Cuca, Ranko Cuca, Marko Sertic, Edvin Liveric, Matea Elezovic, Sanja Hrenar, Darko Janes, Maja Katic

Language: Various

Available to programme: Jan 2012

Trailer: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eeKc4PFLkH8> (not subtitled)

The brainchild of Serbian film critic and producer Nenad Dukic, *Some Other Stories* comprises five stories exploring the themes of motherhood and pregnancy, directed by women filmmakers from five former Yugoslav republics.

'Croatian Story' follows an anguished painter who must decide whether or not to keep one of her unborn twins, diagnosed with Down's syndrome. The suspenseful 'Serbian Story' finds an expectant mother in the same emergency room with a charming killer, while 'Bosnia-Herzegovina Story' focuses on a financially strapped Sarajevo family whose son's lover, a Dutch UN official, is pregnant. 'Macedonian Story' unfolds in a private clinic, where a drug addict struggles to keep her baby. The 'Slovenian Story', involving a resourceful nun who finds her own way to Immaculate Conception, ends the omnibus on a humorous note. – *Galway Film Fleadh 2011*

Taqwacores, The

Dir: Eyad Zahra **USA** **2009** **84 mins** **Cert: CLUB**
Starring: Bobby Naderi, Noreen DeWulf, Dominic Rains, Rasika Mathur, Tony Yalda, Nav Mann, Volkan Eryaman, Ian Tran
Language: English
Available to programme: Jan 2012
Trailer: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1DxDh2GXiZE>

Peering into a unique subculture with irreverence and thoughtfulness, *The Taqwacores* displays a lively gusto in its handling of potentially strident material. Director Eyad Zahra's light-hearted drama about a group of young Muslim men and women living together in Buffalo, New York is rough around the edges, but its warmth and sense of humour hold the slender story together.

The Taqwacores may have a no-name cast, but its selling point is its highly-distinct milieu: the Muslim punk movement in America. Targeting college audiences and punk aficionados should help lift this rambunctious film's chances in the marketplace.

Shy, sweet college student Yusef (Bobby Naderi) moves into a rundown house filled with fellow Muslims who are much more outgoing than he is. Over the course of a year, Yusef bonds with this diverse collection of personalities while immersing himself in Taqwacore, a Muslim variation of punk's anarchic power.

Based on the novel by Michael Muhammad Knight, *The Taqwacores* eschews a tight narrative for a rambling, invigorating examination of how Muslim-American youths form ad-hoc families which reflect both their own culture and the one into which they're tentatively trying to integrate.

On a basic level, the film's skill at populating its story with fresh, unconventional Muslim characters is a real treat. But more interestingly, Zahra's use of bawdy behaviour and loud Western music helps undercut the screenplay's occasionally didactic dialogue to humanise the constant tension that Muslims feel while living in a country that's still hostile to them in many ways.

Naderi is appealing, if a little milquetoast, as quiet Yusef, but Dominic Rains excels as Jehangir, the house's unspoken leader and a fervent music fan who, like the film itself, seeks to reconcile Islam's conservative bent with punk's anti-authoritarian stance. - *Tim Grierson, Screen Daily*

Tomboy

Dir Celine Sciamma France 2011 81 mins Cert: CLUB

Starring: Zoé Héran, Malonn Lévana, Jeanne Disson, Sophie Cattani and Mathieu Demy

Language: French

Available to programme: March 2012

Trailer: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=onYkjprd-t8>

The politics of gender get an unusual exploration in the world of pre-teen kids in Celine Sciamma's *Tomboy*, a simple conceit blessed by the same naturalistic performances and fluid camerawork that marked out her feature debut *Water Lilies*.

The story of a 10 year-old girl, a tomboy, pretending to be a boy in a new circle of friends is one built on deception and it could easily have travelled on a doom laden road towards discovery and tragedy. Instead Sciamma avoids the obvious and takes a more gentle route, honing in on the details of interactions between children, the joyful playtime, the rituals and the arrival of preconceptions which will shape their prejudices as they grow older.

One of Sciamma's achievements here, as in *Water Lilies*, is to cast brilliant young actors, namely Zoe Heran as the tomboy Laure and Malonn Levana as her six year-old sister Jeanne.

Laure, Jeanne and their parents (Cattani, Demy) move to a new neighbourhood in the summer holidays. Laure looks, dresses and acts like a boy and neither of her parents mind. Her mother is heavily pregnant with a third child, a boy this time, and her father is away working during the week.

She soon makes friends with a local girl called Lisa (Disson) and introduces herself as Michael, a boy. Lisa in turn introduces her to the gang of kids who roam around the neighbourhood in a pack and pretty soon Michael has blended in, playing football with the boys with his top off, responding to Lisa's advances with ???

Laure even constructs a fake penis out of modeling clay which she inserts in her trunks when the gang goes swimming one afternoon.

When Lisa comes to call one day and asks for Michael, Jeanne answers and plays along with the deception, swearing silence to their parents so long as Laure takes Jeanne out with the other kids.

Of course discovery by parents and friends isn't far away, but in the meantime, Sciamma depicts the ways children conform to gender stereotypes or at least to notions of masculinity and femininity they believe are correct. What's ironic is the fact that Laure/Michael is most aggressive in embracing those stereotypes in an effort to be what she thinks will be a convincing boy, whether gallantly fist-fighting over his sister's honour or scoring goals at football. You can see why Lisa falls for him.

Heran gets it just right. Not only is she/he piercingly photogenic, but she affects the self-conscious swagger of a boy with striking authenticity. It is sometimes hard to think you are looking at a girl, and you understand why Laure thinks it is unfair she is not a boy, especially when her newborn brother is born with his gender handed to him on a plate.

Levana is another natural, oozing wit and wisdom beyond her six years. The relationship between the two siblings is full of joy and tenderness, and Sciamma captures little moments between them that inform the film's world of children.

But even if it is a world of children, the rigid little community is also a microcosm of wider society. How Laure will evolve in a culture which wants to pigeonhole her is open to personal interpretation. Some audience members will think it's just a phase. Others that she will carry her gender frustrations into adulthood. - *Mike Goodridge, Screen International*

Tree, The

L'arbre

Dir: Julie Bertuccelli France/Australia 2010 100 mins Cert: CLUB

Starring: Charlotte Gainsbourg, Marton Csokas, Morgana Davies, Aden Young, Gillian Jones, Penne Hackforth-Jones, Christian Bayers, Tom Russell, Gabriel Gotting, Zoe Boe

Language: English

Available to programme: Jan 2012

Trailer: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hDcL3thApxQ>

Seven years after her successful debut, *Since Otar Left*, Julie Bertuccelli is finally back with her follow-up feature. She went all the way to Australia to shoot it and her heroine this time is not an octogenarian but only eight years-old, but otherwise the theme is strangely similar: dealing with a loss.

A sudden heart attack deprives Dawn (Gainsbourg) of her loving husband, Peter (Young). Devastated, she can hardly cope with his death, while each one of her four children reacts differently. The two older boys seem to be pretty much in control, though little things indicate they are deeply shaken. The three year-old toddler doesn't speak yet, while angelic looking Simone decides to live in a sort of denial.

Father hasn't departed, he has simply moved into the gigantic tree next to their home, and when she climbs into it she claims she can hear her dad talking to her, advising her, giving her pointers on her school chores. She even convinces Dawn there might be something to it, mother and daughter sharing a symbolic tie with the tree.

Eight months later, Dawn, who has never worked in her entire life, is hired by George (Csokas), the local plumber, to be his assistant and soon seems ready for more intimate relations. Simone naturally interprets this as a betrayal of her father's memory, and the tree seems to respond in a similar fashion and sends its mighty roots to shaking the house's foundations. When it seem the only option is to cut it down, Simone sets up house among its branches. George's attempt to do something about it is thwarted at the last moment and it is only the forces of nature that finally provide the ultimate solution.

Given the house's location and the landscape around it, nature is an essential component of the story, intervening every once in a while and with all due respect to little Morgana Davies and to Charlotte Gainsbourg - both touching in their respective parts - the real star of the movie, as the title indicates, is the huge fig tree which sends its branches and roots in every direction, looking for all purposes, like a giant octopus, to

quote one of Dawn's distraught neighbours. - *Dan Fainaru, Screen International*

Tree of Life, The

Dir: Terrence Malick USA 2011 138 mins Cert: 12A

Starring: Brad Pitt, Fiona Shaw, Jessica Chastain, Sean Penn

Language: English

Available to programme: Jan 2012

Trailer: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=luLXNYfeqIM>

Terrence Malick's mad and magnificent film descends slowly, like some sort of prototypical spaceship: it's a cosmic-interior epic of vainglorious proportions, a rebuke to realism, a disavowal of irony and comedy, a meditation on memory, and a gasp of horror and awe at the mysterious inevitability of loving, and losing those we love.

Sean Penn has a central but minor role as Jack, a careworn 21st-century corporate executive who is now disenchanted with his life. At the moment of crisis, he is carried back to an ecstatically remembered 1950s boyhood in smalltown America. He remembers his relationship with his demanding, disciplinarian father, played by Brad Pitt, and the brother who died at the age of 19: the news is brought to his distraught mother (Jessica Chastain) via an official communication – the telegraph delivery boy thrusts it into her hands and walks quickly away – so he appears to have died on military service.

Jack realises that time, far from healing the wounds of loss, only makes them more painful. Along with the dream-lit tableaux from his childhood, he is vouchsafed extraordinary visions of geological time and the unknowable reaches of the universe, in comparison with which his loss is meaningless. And yet meaning has to be found if the pain is not to be unendurable. In a sense, the purpose of these gigantic visions is to anaesthetise the pain of being alive and not understanding.

Brad Pitt dominates the bulk of the film as Mr O'Brien, who appears on the face of it to be a God-fearing family man with a button-down shirt and crewcut, brusquely but sincerely in harmony with his gentle, beautiful and profoundly religious wife. Chastain has a voiceover at the very beginning asking her sons to prefer God's grace to the beauties of nature, as the truer path. But O'Brien is far more complex than first appears: he is angry with his boys; he respects the severity of traditional churchgoing belief, but aspires to riches and worldliness, taking out patents in the aeronautics industry and dissipating the family's means in the process.

He challenges his boys to hit him, to toughen them up, and does not hesitate to hit them for disobedience and discourtesy. He plays the organ in church and is a disappointed musician; his frustration and rage simmer from every pore. His boys feel fear as well as love: Malick shows how they have fused into the same emotion. They are encouraged to respect his violence and secretly to feel contempt for their mother's gentleness, and yet their fascinated alienation expresses itself in one startling scene involving an incursion into the parental bedroom.

And there are the baffling and bizarre symphonic passages of non-narrative spectacle, prehistoric jungles, arid deserts, galaxies and spiral shapes – Kubrickian landscapes of wonder. Weirdest of all is the engorged river in which a wounded dinosaur lies prostrate; another dinosaur comes along, plants its great foot on the other's neck and then moves

heedlessly on. Is this the only message of the universe – pure survival? But then how is it we want something other than survival? What do we want to survive for? And Malick appears, through sheer crazy excess, to bring his movie closer to the ultimate question: why does anything exist at all?

This film is not for everyone, and I will admit I am agnostic about the final sequence, which suggests a closure and a redemption nothing else in the film has prepared us for. But this is visionary cinema on an unashamedly huge scale: cinema that's thinking big. Malick makes an awful lot of other film-makers look timid and negligible by comparison. - *Peter Bradshaw, The Guardian*

Winner - Palme D'or at 2011 Cannes Film Festival

Troll Hunter *Trolljegeren*
Dir: André Øvredal **Norway** **2011** **103mins** **Cert: 15A**
Starring: Otto Jespersen, Robert Stoltenberg, Knut Nærum, Glenn Erland Tosterud
Available to programme: Feb 2012
Trailer: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TLEo7H9tqSM>

September is that special time of year when movie studios launch campus-friendly comedies and found-footage horrors. Luckily, coming hot on the heels of last week's lacklustre *Apollo 18*, *Troll Hunter* is the genuine article.

Writer-director André Øvredal's breakthrough international hit takes the viewer right back to the original thrills and spills of *The Blair Witch Project*, with a cast of unknowns, mockumentary murk and neat digital approximations of Ray Harryhausen's old-school stop-motion monsters. And not a studio executive in sight.

Never mind the vampire vogue; *Troll Hunter* has an entirely fresh mythology in its armoury. Inspired by the Norwegian folktales of Asbjørnsen and Moe, a teacher and a minister who together chronicled 19th-century Norse fictions and traditions, the film proves an invaluable guide to the hunting and dispatching of underpass ogres. Did you know that trolls can smell the blood of Christians? Or that the existence of trolls is covered up by an agency working on behalf on the Norwegian government?

As this engaging fake opens, a group of film students think they have uncovered a hot story when they start following a man they believe to be a bear poacher. It soon transpires that their subject (essayed with flair by Nordic comedian Otto Jespersen) is a faithful civil servant in charge of troll population control across his nation's vast tracts of woodland.

Øvredal finds cunning ways to work ordinary power lines and landscapes into an increasingly elaborate tapestry of lies. He's similarly canny about the subgenre, with direct curtseys to Heather's to-camera meltdown in *Blair Witch* and fun, obscured shots.

Hell, we're even prepared to overlook the end credit that reads "No trolls were harmed in the making of this picture".

Former *Harry Potter* helmer Chris Columbus has already snapped up the remake rights. Please take time to see the original before Hollywood mucks it up. - *Tara Brady, The Irish Times*

Viva Riva!

Dir: Djo Tunda Wa Munga **Congo** **2011** **97 mins** **Cert: 18**

Starring: Patsha Bay, Manie Malone, Hoji Fortuna, Marlene Longange, Alex Herabo, Diplome Amekindra

Language: French, Lingala

Available to programme: Jan 2012

Trailer: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y0MG8QJge0k>

Viva Riva! is unprecedented: a story set in contemporary Democratic Republic of Congo full of intrigue, music and a surprisingly frank approach to sex.

Riva is an operator, a man with charm and ambition in equal measure. With petrol in short supply in DRC's capital, he and his sidekick pursue a plot to get hold of a secret cache – barrels of fuel they can sell for a huge profit. Of course they're not the only ones who want the stuff. Cesar is a ruthless, sharply dressed foreigner thriving in Kinshasa's lawless streets. A female military officer joins the fray. But Riva's main nemesis is Azor, a crime boss in the classic style: big, decadent and brutal. He's not a man to mess with, but his girlfriend, Nora, may just be the most seductive woman in all of DRC.

Shooting in high definition, Munga saturates the film with rich colour and movement. As the film roves from Azor's luxury lair, to lush scenes outside the city, to the dens where sin is for sale, *Viva Riva!* offers a contemporary portrait of urban Africa rarely seen on screen. - *Cameron Bailey, Toronto International Film Festival 2010*

Way, The

Dir: Emilio Estevez **USA** **2010** **128 mins** **Cert: 15A**

Starring: Martin Sheen, Deborah Kara Unger, Yorick Van Wageningen, James Nesbitt, Emilio Estevez

Available to programme: Jan 2012

Trailer: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0hy54CpKeqk>

Four years after his impressive ensemble biopic *Bobby*, actor-director Emilio Estevez returns with another ambitious drama that also features his father, Martin Sheen. *The Way* is a touching film about the testy yet unbreakable bond between father and son, as well as the supportive, familial connections that can form among strangers.

Tom (Sheen), an American ophthalmologist, is informed that his son (Estevez) has been killed in a freak accident on a pilgrimage along the Camino de Santiago, also known as The Way of Saint James, in the northwest of Spain. Upon arriving in France to collect his son's remains and return to the United States, Tom is hit with a profound sense of sadness and quickly changes his plans. Equipped with his deceased son's guidebook and backpack, he embarks on the 800km pilgrimage from the Pyrenees to Santiago de Compostela in an attempt to honour his son's memory by finishing what he had started.

Along the way, Tom encounters several eccentric travelers, each with their varied

motivations: a gregarious Dutchman (van Wageningen) wants to lose weight, a Canadian woman (Unger) hopes to quit her addiction to cigarettes, an Irish author (Nesbitt) struggling to write a travel book. Their apparent weaknesses frustrate the stoic and determined Tom, yet the farther they travel together the more they come to form a surrogate family unit and support each other through their various tribulations.

Set against gorgeous vistas of France and Spain, *The Way*, like all great road trip movies, depicts how travelling through an unknown land can lead to greater self-knowledge and understanding. A moving and potent character study buoyed by a great soundtrack and an immensely likable cast, this is a journey of self-discovery that follows four very different people as they learn to better love themselves and each other. - *Cameron Bailey, Toronto International Film Festival 2010*