MEMORIA

APICHATPONG WEERASETHAKUL (COLOMBIA/MEXICO/FRANCE/UK/THAILAND/GERMANY/CHINA/SWITZERLAND, 2021)

Apichatpong Weerasethakul’s first feature made outside of Thailand is an expansive exploration of the permeable border between the natural world and spirit realm, strange afflictions, and haunted landscapes. Troubled by a recurrent loud banging which only she can hear, Jessica (Tilda Swinton), a recently widowed botanist living in Colombia, embarks on a meandering journey to determine the source of the mysterious noise. Exquisitely photographed by cinematographer Sayombhu Mukdeeprom, the film follows Jessica through the modernist institutional environs of Ciudad Universitaria de Bogotá, including a hospital room where she visits her sister, a recording studio, an art gallery where lights flicker off as soon as she arrives, and an archeological laboratory. Her encounters manifest more mysteries than answers, and her quest eventually takes her into the verdant wilderness. Memoria becomes a gentle but insistent reminder that no matter how deeply they are buried, collective traumas continue to reemerge as memories and dreams.

(136 mins, In Spanish and English with English subtitles)

PETITE MAMAN

CÉLINE SCIAMMA (FRANCE, 2021)

“Secrets aren’t always things we try to hide, there’s just no one to tell them to,” says eight-year-old Nelly to her new best friend. Left alone for long stretches of time after the death of her beloved grandmother, Nelly discovers a makeshift hut in the woods behind the house where her mother was raised and encounters a girl her own age to whom this magical playhouse belongs. As the children share their hopes, dreams, and secrets with each other, their deepening bond reveals the extraordinary nature of their connection. Petite maman’s tender and delicate sequences of make-believe and play are rendered fully believable and relatable by gifted sibling actors Gabrielle and Joséphine Sanz. In Céline Sciamma’s achingly beautiful new film, the past and present magically merge to ease the sorrows of a grieving mother and daughter.

(72 mins, In French with English subtitles)
A HERO
Asgar Farhadi (Iran, 2021)

Iranian filmmaker Asghar Farhadi, whose intricate dramas A Separation and The Salesman both won Oscars, returns with another gripping, incisive study of human frailty. In this year’s Cannes Film Festival Grand Prix winner, Rahim (Amir Jadidi) languishes in prison for an unpaid debt but hopes that he can pay what he owes after his girlfriend stumbles on a bag of gold coins. When the found money proves far more complicated than expected, Rahim’s unusual response sends A Hero on an unpredictable journey. Farhadi methodically maps out a moral dilemma, astutely examining how folk heroes put on pedestals can be quickly knocked off them. Jadidi’s excellent performance is one of increasing anxiety and nicely modulated ambiguity, and Farhadi constantly shifts ourloyalties, resulting in a fascinating portrait of a world in which everyone owes something to someone.

(72 mins, In Farsi with English subtitles)

SUNDAY / 10.10.21

LINGUI, THE SACRED BONDS
Mahamat-Saleh Haroun (Chad/France/Germany/Belgium, 2021)

Pioneering Chadian auteur Mahamat-Saleh Haroun is in blistering form with his latest film, a feminist social realist drama exploring abortion rights in conservative Chadian society. Amina (Achouack Abakar Souleymane) is an independent woman, exiled by her family after becoming pregnant as a young girl, and now the single mother of a teenager. She finds herself in a race against time and the forces of patriarchy when her daughter Maria (Rihane Khalil Alio) is expelled from school after she gets pregnant. Determined to give her child opportunities that were denied her, Amina supports Maria’s effort to have an abortion, a procedure that is not merely frowned upon but also illegal. Impeccably shot and tenderly realized, Lingui adds to the abortion conversation not on preserving their bodily autonomy despite very real threats of violence. (87 mins, In Arabic and French with English subtitles)

FRIDAY / 10.15.21

BERGMAN ISLAND
Mia Hansen-Løve (France/Sweden/Germany/Belgium, 2021)

The iconic island of Fårö—the home of Ingmar Bergman and the setting of some of his greatest films—provides a vivid backdrop to this drama focused on Chris (Vicky Krieps), a writer/director who accompanies her more established filmmaker husband Tony (Tim Roth) there for a working vacation. Somewhat alienated from her partner, who’s preoccupied with his own projects and entranced by Bergman’s legacy, Chris struggles to find her voice. One of Mia Hansen-Løve’s most autobiographical films to date continues her compelling exploration of the existential dynamic between work and love, previously illustrated in films that include Things to Come. Denis Lenoir’s limpid cinematography foregrounds the beauty of Fårö’s white buildings, sparkling seashore, light-filled days, and soft summer nights. Structuring her tale to contain a film within a film (featuring Mia Wasikowska and Anders Danielsen Lie), Hansen-Løve layers elements of documentary and fiction, and past and present, allowing for resonant moments of humor, mystery, and self-realization.

(112 mins)

SUNDAY / 10.10.21

COURTROOM 3H
Antonio Méndez Esparza (Spain/US, 2020)

Raw and powerful, Courtroom 3H marks a confident documentary debut from director Antonio Méndez Esparza. Shot in a single courtroom over the course of a month, the film takes viewers inside Florida’s Tallahassee Unified Family Court, which focuses on parental rights, juvenile delinquency, and other issues relating to minors. A fly-on-the-wall approach provides a window into the many factors and frustrations for families embroiled in Florida’s legal system. Méndez Esparza’s camera bears silent witness as heart-wrenching cases play out with stakes that couldn’t be higher for the children, parents, and legal representatives involved. Shining a needed light on the economic disparities underlying so much of what occurs in our justice system, Courtroom 3H is a sometimes shocking, sometimes uncomfortable, but nuanced and necessary look into a world too few people know about.

(115 mins)

SATURDAY / 10.16.21

BAD ATTITUDE: THE ART OF SPAIN RODRIGUEZ
Susan Stern (US, 2021)

Described by R. Crumb as a “working-class Latino crossed with left-wing radical crossed with crazy artist,” Zap Comix mainstay Spain Rodriguez was among those who revolutionized a hitherto disrespected, even demonized art form in the underground comics wave of the late 1960s. Their work was transgressive, provocative, sometimes offensive—and in real life, this swaggering Buffalo, NY, biker-gang member turned San Francisco counterculture celebrity didn’t fall so far from the outrageous page. Though famed for Trashman comix and other cult faves, his beautifully rendered illustrations also encompassed everything from Sherlock Holmes stories to a Che Guevara biography. In this fond yet questioning documentary, Rodriguez’s filmmaker widow Susan Stern interviews ex-girlfriends, colleagues, and buddies to measure a life lived large, as well as an artistic legacy that remains dazzling if often wildly at odds with today’s cultural norms.

(71 mins)

SUNDAY / 10.17.21

DRIVE MY CAR
Ryuichi Hamaguchi (Japan, 2021)

Freely adapted from Haruki Murakami’s story of the same name, Ryuichi Hamaguchi’s (Happy Hour, Asako I & II) latest film weaves an enchanting narrative around the complexities of human relationships. Yusuke, a well-known actor and theater director reeling from a series of familial tragedies, is invited to Hiroshima to direct an international production of Uncle Vanya. Against his wishes, he’s assigned a driver, Misaki, a taciturn young woman, who comes from an abusive background. Through their time together in Yusuke’s red Saab, the two slowly unburden themselves of their personal traumas. Complicating matters further, a brash young actor connected to Yusuke’s past comes to audition for the play. Winner of the Best Screenplay Award at Cannes, Drive My Car is an exquisitely crafted mosaic, where Chekhov’s timeless play refracts the main characters’ attempts at connection amid their respective emotional circumstances and their aspirations to move beyond them.

(179 mins, In Japanese, Korean, English, Cantonese, Mandarin, Tagalog, Indonesian, German, and Malay with English subtitles)