



Juliette Binoche and Kristen Stewart are high wattage stars in 'Clouds of Sils Maria,' one of the featured films at the Portland International Film Festival, and one of the pictures expected to get a theatrical release.

World in Focus

continued ▲ from page

stakes that didn't always seem to add up, and the filmmaker employs some flashy touches that fell flat for me. Still, the story never lacks for interest. (Plays again on Wednesday Feb. 18)

"Belle and Sebastian," based on a beloved French novel and adapted from a popular 1965 television series, is built around the friendship between a motherless six-year-old boy and a mountain dog who his village treats as a threat. Set in the Alps during the German occupation in 1943, the film intends some obvious parallels between the threats experienced by the dog and those experienced by the villagers at the hands of the Nazis, and the storytelling all around is pretty clumsy and over-simplified, even allowing for its intention to be a family film. That said, the boy and dog are immensely likeable, and the scenery of the Alps is gorgeous. It was a huge hit in France and has the potential to please audiences here as well. (Plays again on Friday, Feb. 13 and Monday, Feb. 16)

And now for a couple to watch for in theaters soon:

The festival run for "71" is past, but it will be released theatrically in mid-March and is worth watching for. It stars Jack O'Connell, recognizable from the less-arresting recent film "Unbroken," as an English army recruit sent over to Belfast in 1971 at the height of the northern Ireland conflict termed "the

Troubles." More honestly than most war movies, it depicts a tangle of betrayal, divided loyalties, lies, and double-crosses that certainly characterized that conflict but is actually the very stuff of war. But you don't need a lesson in Northern Ireland politics to follow what is happening when this young soldier gets left behind, unarmed, in hostile territory. While focusing on depicting this particular story with tension and immediacy, director Yann DeMange also manages to illuminate some things that are true of all such conflicts. It's auspicious work for a first feature film.

I expect that "Clouds of Sils Maria" will also get a theatrical run, if only because of its high wattage stars, Kristen Stewart and Juliette Binoche. Though mostly in English, the film feels very French—that is, the story is very mannered and frequently solipsistic, concerned more with subtle shifts in perspective than with plot dramatics. Binoche plays an international star (not unlike herself) who is at a personal and career crossroads, and Stewart plays her very capable personal assistant. Both women are excellent and the film provides a credible window into what that kind of life might be like, including the insecurities and self-doubt that plague particularly women in film industry. In the end, though, it is a lot of talking and it's not clear that anything satisfying ever happens.

There is still a week and a half

to go, so don't miss the opportunity to see more films from all over the world. Films will play all over the city and you can buy advance tickets on the festival's website, festivals.nwfilm.org/piff38, by

phone at 503-276-4310 or at the box office at the Mark Building, Portland Art Museum, 1119 S.W. Park Ave.

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