

Strong Start for International Film Fest

OPINIONATED JUDGE

BY JUDGE
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Normally by this point in my Portland International Film Festival itinerary, I would have seen something I didn't like! But so far this year's slate has been very strong. Of the films I've seen, here are the ones that will play again, in my order of preference:

"The Clan" tells the story of a notorious Argentine crime family whose patriarch, Arquimedes Puccio, worked for the police during the Videla regime in the 1970s, when kidnapping was used as a matter of state control. When the regime fell in 1981, Puccio continued the family business, switching targets to wealthy families who were often part of his own family's social set, holding his captives for ransoming and then killing them after receiving payment. As depicted here, he did so with a sense of entitlement -- he was above the law, and assumed democracy would never last. And indeed, he carried out these activities for several years before he apparently became expendable. With good psychological insight, the film depicts interlocking circles of cynical control; Puccio's control of his children and wife (who could not have missed what was going on in their own home--and who were even enlisted to help) operates under the guise of love and close family ties, yet leaves no room for question or negotiation. The day-to-day decisions of his wife and children (and especially his sports-hero son Alejandro) to alternately cooperate and participate and turn a blind eye are a curious combination of manipulated and chosen -- and the film offers little glimpses of the broader circles of manipulation and control necessary to enable the police corruption and wealth inequities that were Puccio's stock in trade. It's a fascinating window into a notorious part of Argentine history, with insights that go beyond its specific time and place. The film plays on Feb. 23 and Feb. 27.

Although **"The Judgment"** feels manipulative in spots, its two lead performances draw you into the father-son conflict at its center. Mityo is about to lose his house near the Greek-Bulgarian border that he once patrolled as a young soldier in the 1980s. Back then the Soviet agenda was to keep people in -- but now the border issues involve keeping people out. His desperate economic circumstances (the cause of which is revealed in bits and pieces over the course of the film) have fed the

growing resentment of his teenage son Vasko and drive Mityo to take on work with the same cruel colonel he served back in the Soviet era and who now cynically smuggles immigrants from Syria. The immigrants themselves don't figure much in the story; the focus, rather, is on Mityo's past, the idea of borders and debts that finally come due, and the fragility of life. The harsh landscape and the relationship between the father and son make this story compelling and, in moments, quite moving. The film plays again on Feb. 23.

Director Patricio Guzman's approach to documentary filmmaking is quite distinct--meditative, grounded in place, poetic, and willing to look deeply. His latest, **"The Pearl Button,"** carries through some of the themes addressed in **"Nostalgia for the Light,"** which was an examination of the search for meaning in the stars and the search for the disappeared in Chile. Using a similar ruminative approach, guided by his calm, deliberate narration, Guzman muses on how Chileans have become so disconnected



Egyptian actress Menna Shalabi stars in 'Nawara,' a feature film that offers a subversive window into post-Mubarak Egypt.

from the water that surrounds them (the country has 4,000 miles of coastline), and uses water as his vehicle for exploring the soul depths of the forgotten victims of Chile's dark colonial past and more recent brutal dictatorship. This isn't a search for answers as much as a search for questions, sitting with stories of the lost way of life of Chile's original inhabitants, listening to the experiences of native peoples in their languages, and also lingering on the sounds and sights of the water that connects past and present together. It plays again on Feb. 20.

"Rams" depicts two sheep-herding brothers in the mountains of Iceland, each lovingly tending the sheep in their legacy breed but living adjacent to each other without speaking for 40 years. It's a stark and lonely



'The Clan' tells the story of Argentina's notorious Puccio family, a hard-hitting crime saga where kidnapping is used as a matter of state control. The movie splays again on Feb. 23 and Feb. 27 as part of the Portland International Film Festival.

life, with all the humanity of the two men invested in their animal charges. We are never told of the dispute that separates them, but gradually see differences between the two; one is a hard drinker and a more volatile personality, but the animosity between them is clearly shared. When an infection is detected among sheep in the area that requires slaughter of all the local herds, the stubborn brothers continue to fight the crisis and each other until a shared objective moves them together. Observant, funny, and at times quite moving, it garnered a top prize at the

together, her daily trips to fill jugs from a communal faucet for her grandmother, and her regular trips to the hospital where Aly's father, sick with cancer, camps out in a

corridor for weeks awaiting a bed. These all contrast with her affable relationship with a family whose dog eats better than she does and whose matriarch eventually offers her enough money to live on for a year to guard the house and make it look lived in while the family flees abroad. The trajectory of this story finds subtle ways to underline how revolution doesn't necessarily unfreeze longstanding social inequities. The film plays again on Feb. 24.

"Heavenly Nomadic" offers a simple and atmospheric look into the life of a horse-herding family in the mountains of Kyrgyzstan. Three generations live under cover of the same yurt -- grandparents, mother, and a seven-year-old daughter -- and all feel the absence of the child's father, son to the grandparents, who drowned a few years before. The mother does

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Sat., Feb. 20th
2pm & 7pm

moda center

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