

International Films to Enjoy at PIFF

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 16

ence in the life of a family in the Arctic who experiences a brutal attack and must fight back to survive. The conditions and lifestyle here will be utterly foreign to most American audiences, which is part of what makes it fascinating viewing; acquiring and eating food, building shelter, and sharing family intimacies demand full-body absorption, and perhaps as a result, dialogue does not drive this particular story. Impressively staged and filmed, this is a fascinating visit to what may feel like a different planet. It plays again on Thursday, Feb. 23.

“Apprentice” opened to good reviews at the Cannes Film Festival and is the second film of a young Singaporean director, Boo Junfeng. Its focus is Aiman, a stoic young prison guard who becomes

the protégée of the prison’s executioner, Rahim. The tight focus on Aiman, who lives with an older sister whose objection to his prison job gradually becomes apparent, and on the realities of working inside, opens space to contemplate the toll that such works takes on those who carry it out, and the little stories we tell ourselves in order to survive (or avoid) the larger impacts of our own actions and the actions of others which irrevocably alter us. It plays again on Thursday, Feb. 23.

“The Olive Tree” is a crowd-pleaser, with its story of Alma, a young farmer who is fiercely devoted to her gruff grandfather, who was fiercely devoted to a 2,000-year-old olive tree that Alma’s father and uncle sold against his wishes when she was a child. As her grandfather disappears further and further

into dementia, she vows to locate the tree and, against all logic, promises to bring it back to the family land. The film sounds appealing notes of respect for nature and one’s literal and metaphorical roots, and is well-acted and produced. The script, however, is predictable and doesn’t bear the ring of emotional truth; the family conflicts are too crudely presented, Alma’s love interest is under-developed, and there is a predictable corporate bad guy. Enjoyable only if you don’t think about it too hard. It plays again on Thursday, Feb. 23 and for an encore on Sunday Feb. 26.

“Old Stone” presents an exceedingly grim view of modern-day China. Told in a gritty, realistic style, the film follows the story of Lao Shi, a cab driver who comes to regret his decision to save the life of a person whom he

has accidentally hit with his taxi by taking the man to the hospital rather than waiting for an ambulance. His reward for doing so is to be treated with brutal coldness by the hospital who treats the man, the police, an insurance company, and the drunk passenger who caused the accident, and to be saddled with endless hospital bills for the man’s care.

The China that is relentlessly revealed by director Johnny Ma (born in Shanghai, raised in Canada, and educated in New York) is one where all incentives are to avoid helping anyone and, indeed, to finish off anyone who might have a claim to recompense or help of any kind. Strap yourself in for a bleak ride; this film plays on Wednesday and Thursday, Feb. 22 and 23.

“Sieranevada” will wear out all but the most alert and deter-

mined audience members. It takes place almost entirely in a labyrinthine apartment in Bucharest, where a family has gathered for an Eastern Orthodox traditional memorial gathering 40 days after the passing of its patriarch, Emil. Over nearly three hours, and perhaps from the viewpoint of Emil himself, we move from room to room and eavesdrop as the family members clash and talk around the family’s barely buried secrets and conflicts. The connections between them are mostly not explained and can only be discerned with the most focused attention -- which pays off to some extent, but perhaps not as much as the effort required would suggest. It plays again on Wednesday, Feb. 22.

Darleen Ortega is a judge on the Oregon Court of Appeals and the first woman of color to serve in that capacity. Her movie review column Opinionated Judge appears regularly in The Portland Observer.



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CALENDAR February 2017

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
12 <i>Judy Blume born, 1938</i> <i>Abraham Lincoln born, 1809 (16th President)</i>	13 Get a Different Name Day <i>First Public School established (1635)</i>	14 <i>George Washington Gale Ferris born, 1859</i> Ferris Wheel Day Valentine’s Day	15 <i>Norman Bridwell born, 1928</i> <i>Susan B. Anthony born, 1820</i>	16 <i>Nylon Patented By DuPont in 1937</i> <i>King Tut’s Burial Chamber opened in 1923</i>	17 Random Acts of Kindness Day National P.T.A. Founder’s Day (1897)	18 ☾ <i>Former planet, Pluto, Discovered By Clyde Tombaugh in 1930</i>
19 <i>Phonograph Patented, Thomas Edison in 1878</i>	20 President’s Day <i>John Glenn Orbits Earth in 1962</i> Love Your Pet Day	21 Malcom X Assassinated (1965) <i>Washington Monument dedicated (1885)</i>	22 <i>George Washington born, 1732</i> Be Humble Day World Thinking Day	23 International Dog Biscuit Appreciation Day <i>U.S. Flag raised at Iwo Jima (1945)</i>	24 <i>Steve Jobs born, 1955</i> <i>Wilhelm Carl Grimm born, 1786</i>	25 Quiet Day <i>Artist Pierre Auguste Renoir born, 1841</i>
26 ● <i>Levi Strauss born, 1829</i> <i>William F. Cody born, 1846 (Pony Express Rider)</i>	27 <i>Henry Wadsworth Longfellow born, 1807</i> International Polar Bear Day	28 Mardi Gras Public Sleeping Day <i>Gold Seekers arrived in San Francisco (1849)</i>				