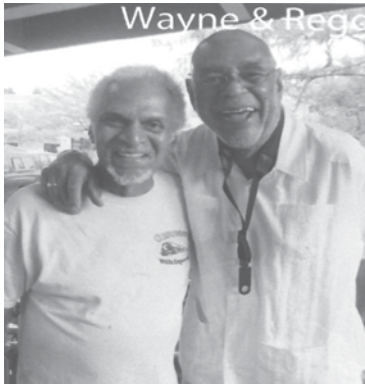




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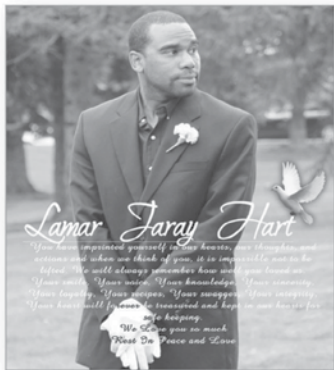
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World Cultures Resonate at PIFF

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a cartel. As she describes her ordeal in aching detail, director Tatiana Huezo presents images of other faces and scenes meant to suggest Miriam's inner life—fear, loneliness, recognition that she, too, could turn into someone like her brutalizers. She intersperses Miriam's story with that of Adela, a circus performer who bit by bit finds words to express the unthinkable reality that she is still looking for her daughter ten years after she was kidnapped, apparently by members of the federal police. Adela's story is told with images of her and her family members, and Huezo unfolds both stories with great patience. Each is almost unthinkably painful -- certainly for the women themselves -- and, given the corruption that underlies each, the imagery and the words themselves convey a sense of the women's vulnerability and also that their stories could randomly happen to anyone in Mexico. The film plays on Sunday, Feb. 25 and Thursday, March 1.

Four Acts, the work of Indonesian director Mouly Surya, puts the American western genre to satisfying feminist use. Though critics refer to this as a female revenge movie, it isn't really that; the murders in question occur when the protagonist, a widow living alone on the sparsely populated island of Sumba, is beset by seven men who steal all of her livestock and demand that she cook for them while they banter about past rapes in anticipation of their planned post-dinner entertainment. Marlina's response doesn't actually seem out of proportion to the circumstances -- and even less so as the film unfolds the intensity with which patriarchy functions in her world to render it every bit as lawless as the American west. In the tradition of many of Western heroes, Marlina's actions are revealed to be about what is available to refuse to submit to violence that would otherwise be treated as her due. Even the women and girls in the film don't seem very surprised or even curious about Mar-

provement efforts that western Europeans undertake in eastern Europe. This observant film plays again on Wednesday, Feb. 28.

"Vazante" tells a story set in the 1820s, shortly before Brazil gained its independence from Portugal, and six decades before slavery was abolished there. Its director, Daniela Thomas, set out to depict the time in a way that avoided the sensationalism and extreme violence of the few American films to depict slavery themes, but instead to portray the banality of evil, in Hannah Arendt's terms—the way that slavery and oppression of women actually felt normal, particularly to the oppressors, but even, to varying degrees to the oppressed. I read about her intentions after seeing the film—but actually acquired a sense of them while watching the film, which is less plot-driven and more sight, sound, and sense-driven. It doesn't sugar-coat the oppression it depicts, but makes it feel concrete and lived in, helping us to imagine how it could feel normal to a white man and slave owner to treat virtually everyone around him as though they all exist for his benefit. It's an art film, requiring some patience, but it left me with a lot to think about. It plays on Feb. 25 and 28.

"Zama" is based by a rather famous Argentine novel that most people in the U.S. likely haven't heard of, exploring the excesses, racism, and absurdity of colonial life through a functionary named Diego de Zama. Director Lucrecia Martel captures a sense in which power of this kind is all smoke and mirrors: Zama's power in a remote location seems pointless; he spends most of his time angling for a different post while being outmaneuvered by others; and even the black and indigenous people below him in the social hierarchy seem more to be stifling an eye roll rather than fear. The film isn't driven by plot so much as a languorous mood that suits the material; I wouldn't call this film entertaining but it is, in its way, enlightening. It plays a final time on Feb. 21.

Four additional films that have completed their PIFF runs will find their way to theaters soon. *"The Death of Stalin,"* which played on opening night, is a brilliant satire of the kind that fans of writer-director Armando Iannucci (*"In the Loop"* and *"Veep"*) have come to expect. Here, inspired by the depiction of these events in a graphic novel, Iannucci and his collaborators set out to capture the chaos that ensued as Stalin's various henchmen jockeyed for power after his sudden death. The stellar cast are all British and American



A poignant and truthful film about children and loving adults processing trauma is captured in the film *'Summer 1993,'* which plays again Saturday, Feb. 24 and Thursday, March 1 at the Portland International Film Festival.

"Summer 1993," inspired by director Carla Simón's own childhood experience, meditates on a pivotal time in the life of a six-year-old girl, Frida, who goes to live with her uncle and aunt in the Catalan countryside after her mother's death from AIDS-related complications. It's a very promising first feature; Simón avoids the sentimentality common to films about children and instead captures a very natural sense of how a child and loving adults process trauma, mostly without words. The relationship between Frida and her younger cousin (and now sister) feels especially authentic, as do the portrayal of extended family members still in shock themselves but doing the best they can, and the wobbly adjustment Frida and her new family unit make to each other. This poignant and truthful film has inspired awards notice (though not from the Academy, which passed on it for flashier films) and makes Simon a director to watch. It plays on Feb. 24 and March 1.

"Marlina the Murderer in

lina's actions; one senses it is not hard for them to imagine an occasion where violence would be necessary to survive. This smart (and violent) film plays again on Feb. 25.

"Western" follows a group of German construction workers on a job to build infrastructure in a remote part of Bulgaria. It's a slow burn of a film, and another in the tradition of American westerns, with a loner protagonist named Meinhard who stands apart from the other men, and ventures alone into the local village to make friends with some of the distrustful locals. Particular distrust builds between him and the crew boss, Vincent, who harasses one of the local women and functions like a colonizer. The film is not big on plot; rather, its female director, Valeska Griesbach, is interested in the winding power struggles of the men, and the ambiguities around what signifies goodness and what is really just a convoluted way of grasping influence and resources. There are also some interesting observations here about the im-

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