

# New Films and World Insights

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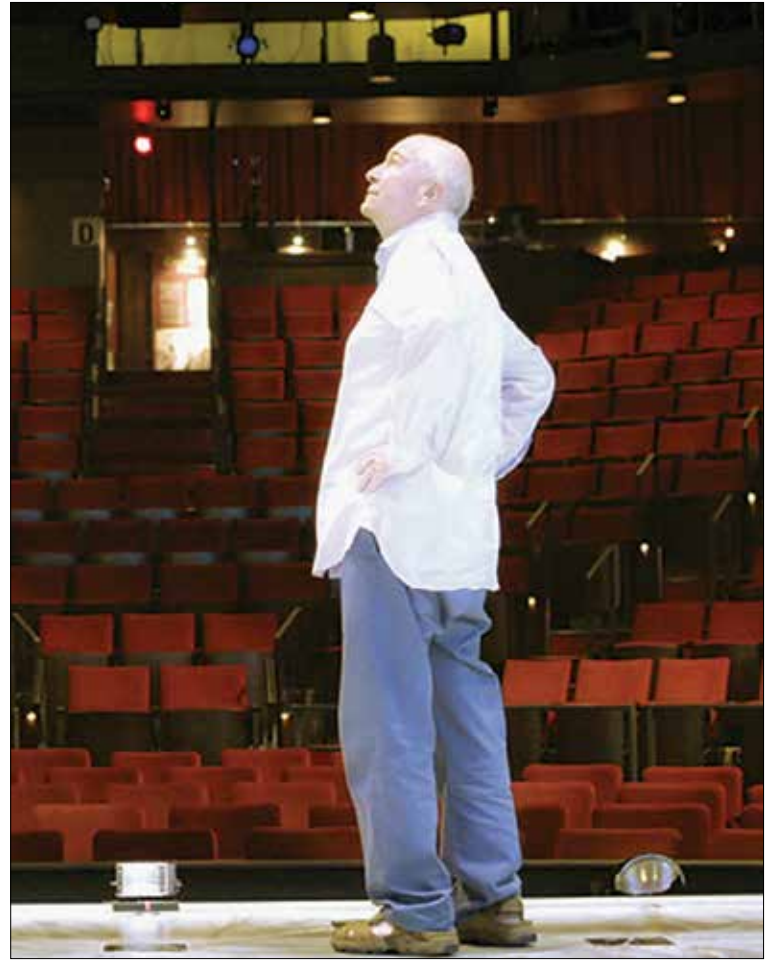
daily life. In this story, a young gaming program designer wakes to find that his life has been suddenly erased; everyone has forgotten him and someone else is living in his house. As he struggles for answers, he eventually encounters a mysterious woman who informs him that he has been conscripted into a job as a gatekeeper between multiple worlds, in part because of his potential to powerfully move between them.

As continual surprises unfold, he finds both limits and possibilities that surprise him. As with "Night Watch," the inventiveness and creativity here provides a riveting window into a distinctly Russian imagination, including a view of Russian history and present.

"Lemonade" is the first film of director Ioana Uricaru, and she co-wrote the screenplay based in part on her own experiences immigrating to the U.S. Though I didn't learn that until I read about the film later, I was

not surprised; the film reverberates with the truth of painful lived experience. It tells the story of Mara, a young Romanian woman who has married an older American man, Daniel, just before her temporary work visa was about to expire, and is now in the process of applying for a green card, anxious to offer a better life to her 10-year-old son. In the realistic tradition of the best Romanian directors, Uricaru's film offers a window into just how vulnerable immigrants—and particularly women—are to corruption at all levels, how this affects their calculation of risks and options, and the sheer skill and determination needed to make lemonade out of the most bitter lemons.

"Never Steady, Never Still," the first feature film of Canadian director Kathleen Hepburn, is as beautiful and heartbreaking as its setting on Stuart Lake in northern British Columbia. It spends a year-and-a-half with a stoic family living on a stretch of that lake—Judy (a devastating Shirley Henderson), who, in her mid-50s, has already struggled for two relentless decades with Parkinson's Disease; Ed, her husband and patient caregiver; and Jamie (Theodore Pellerin), their gently beloved son, newly out of high



A major presence in New York's theater scene and a champion for LGBTQ rights, Playwright Terrance McNally is depicted in "Every Act of Life," a new film about McNally's influential life and the world of the theater.



"Rust" a new film set in Brazil depicts the repercussions that follow when a teenage girl's homemade sex tape is released online.

school with no plan in sight, and alienated from himself in other ways as well. After Ed pushes Jamie to take a grueling job in the oil fields of Alberta, the family endures an unexpected loss, and responds in the way its members know how, pressing on with fortitude and few words. They have survived on movement, and yet both Judy and Jamie find movement excruciating, for quite different reasons. Henderson's performance here is right up there with the very best I have ever seen, capturing the ways in which everything from speaking to fastening a button can be like moving an actual mountain for a Parkinson's patient, and the tenderness and isolation and love that she shares with her son feels painful and very true, aided by an excellent performance by Pellerin, and by a very patient director. This film aims not so much to entertain as to invite presence, empathy, and stillness. For me, it succeeded profoundly.

"Rust," set amongst privileged white teenagers in Brazil, depicts a problem that could occur anywhere, though perhaps especially among privileged teens and perhaps especially in cultures where misogyny is especially pervasive. (Let's not kid ourselves; that doesn't narrow it down much.) The film begins with Tati's flirtatious interactions with sulky Renet. They and the other teenagers in this film are obsessed with their phones, constantly posting selfies and checking for comments. During an evening's flirtation with Renet, Tati's phone goes missing—and the next day a sexually provocative video of

Tati with an ex-boyfriend goes viral. Tati becomes the target of adolescent cruelty school-wide (and, to her mind, universe-wide) and, unable to imagine that her life will ever be the same and searching for a way to reclaim agency, Tati resorts to a desperate act with lasting reverberations for many, most especially Renet. There's not a lot of nuance here, but the film accurately plays out the potentially lethal consequences of the hyped up world of the internet on adolescents (and ill-equipped adults), particularly when our mixed-up values around sexuality are concerned.

The lazy title of "The Long Dumb Road" is somewhat telling; this film isn't trying to break new ground and isn't particularly original. It's a road movie with two mismatched travelers—Nathan (Tony Revolori), a 19-year-old heading to Los Angeles to begin art school, and Richard (Jason Mantzoukas), the 40ish loser who fixes Nathan's starter after getting fired from his job as a mechanic and then becomes the passenger that the naive Nathan can't shake. Richard appoints himself Nathan's life coach, and occasionally the tables turn and Nathan is leading Richard, as they encounter various opportunities and challenges on the road. It's pleasant enough, and occasionally quite funny, even though there's nothing new here.

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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