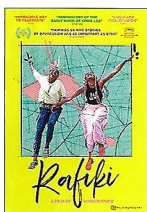


unveils this idea. *The Proposal* is less a work about Barragán than a piece of performance art in which Magid seeks to break through the wall of secrecy that Zanco's foundation has built around Barragán's archives. As such it represents an intriguing and often amusing example of Magid's idiosyncratic art in practice. Recommended. (F. Swietek)

Rafiki ★★★

Film Movement, 83 min., in English & Swahili w/English subtitles, not rated, DVD: \$24.99

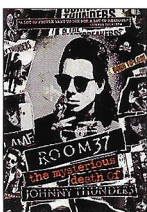
Rafiki drew international attention when it became the first Kenyan feature in an official Cannes Film Festival lineup and at the same moment was banned in Kenya for its sympathetic portrayal of a gay relationship (the African nation's High Court overturned the ban). In reality, this is a fairly chaste story about two teenage girls who fall in love—a socially forbidden and legally perilous situation in Kenya—depicted with low-key delicacy by co-writer and director Wanuri Kahiu. Kena (Samantha Mugatsia) is a grungy skateboarder given to wearing baseball caps backward and hanging out like a kid sister with the boys. Ziki (Sheila Munyiva) appears in an explosion of colors, like a tropical bird, and is both more daring and ambitious than Kena. The pair bond and become lovers, although their visibility as a couple shocks their community—not only on moral grounds but also because their fathers are competing against one another in an upcoming election. Kahiu presents this world as a tiny, thriving pool of crosscurrent energies, a provincial setting where a cheerful town stud, a malevolent gossip, petty jealousies, dashed dreams, festive nights, and underachievement all add up to normalcy. But that everyday-life-veneer is cracked in a horrifying manner when a mob mentality aroused by hatred of Ziki and Kena's relationship turns physically and emotionally violent. Mugatsia and Munyiva lead an excellent cast in a heartbreaking tale about trying to hold on in an often senseless world. Recommended. (T. Keogh)



Room 37: The Mysterious Death of Johnny Thunders ★★★1/2

MVD, 100 min., not rated, DVD: \$19.99, Blu-ray/DVD Combo: \$34.99

Most movies that blend horror with rock 'n' roll turn out to be regrettable camp-fests with guitar-playing zombies. In its better moments, this film by sibling directors Fernando Cordero Caballero and Vicente Cordero channel psychological phantasmagorias like *The Shining* and *Barton Fink* in what-if riffing on a real-life tragedy in the music world: the shadowy 1991 death in New Orleans of John

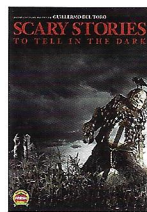


Anthony Genzale, aka Johnny Thunders of the New York Dolls. Battling addiction in a seedy French Quarter hotel in a bid to see his little daughter, the rocker (Leo B. Ramsey) finds his methadone missing—apparently stolen by an old invalid woman in the next room—and he subsequently succumbs to macabre paranoia and visions of a killer redneck pusher and the drowned ghost of Dolls drummer Billy Murcia (another drug casualty). A rational explanation for the weird events may disappoint viewers accustomed to kitschy paranormal activity, but this small-scale feature still casts an effective spell. A strong optional purchase. (C. Cassidy)

Scary Stories to Tell in the Dark ★★★

Lionsgate, 108 min., PG-13, DVD: \$29.99, Blu-ray/DVD Combo: \$39.99, Nov. 5

Guillermo del Toro produced this socially conscious, surprisingly grim, "gateway horror" anthology geared toward younger viewers that is based on Alvin Schwartz's titular trilogy (grotesquely illustrated by Stephen Gammell) and revolves around teenagers in 1968. The film opens with aspiring writer Stella (Zoe Colletti) noting: "Stories hurt and stories heal." In the shadow of the Vietnam War, a group of friends, led by Stella, whose mother abandoned her and her father several years ago, investigates a haunted house on Halloween. In the small town of Mill Valley, PA, the Bellows family mansion has cast a spooky shadow for years. It was here that young Sarah Bellows (Kathleen Pollard), now a vengeful ghost, turned her imprisoned life into scary stories about memorable monsters, which Stella and her friends now discover. Stella's buddies include Ramon Morales (Michael Garza), the target of Hispanic racism, Augie (Gabriel Rush), Chuck (Austin Zajur), and Ruth (Natalie Ganzhorn). Directed by Norway's André Øvredal, the ensuing tales interweave lies with truth, encouraging youngsters to face and learn from their fears. In "The Red Spot," a girl pops a pimple on her cheek, releasing hundreds of baby spiders incubating inside her. "The Pale Lady" features a fleshy figure with a smiling, misshapen face relentlessly plodding down a red-lit hallway. "Jangly Man," a figure who disassembles and reassembles, pursues his prey. And the cockroach-oozing scarecrow "Harold" seeks revenge. Recommended. (S. Granger)

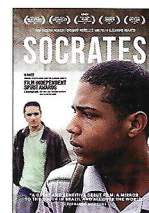


Socrates★★

Breaking Glass, 71 min., in Portuguese w/English subtitles, not rated, DVD: \$24.99

Fifteen-year-old Socrates (Christian Malheiros), who lives in the slums of São Paulo, loses his mother and suddenly finds himself trying to navigate an adult world of job interviews, paying rent, and ridiculous bureau-

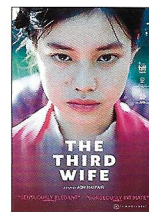
cracies, all while fending off child welfare officials. Fighting for his independence, Socrates's anxiety grows as he enters into his first relationship—with an enigmatic character (Tales Ordakji) who tries unsuccessfully to keep Socrates out of certain corners of his own sketchy existence. When Socrates's long-lost, abusive father shows up to claim the boy, Socrates runs and hides deeper underground, eating from garbage to stay alive. Everything leads to a predictable moment of despair, but there is no resolution, making this little more than an obvious story about a kid with nothing but the worst possible luck. Which is a shame, since filmmaker Alexandre Moratto and his teenage actors do a fine job of keeping the action moving briskly and knowing how to ratchet up the sometimes explosive energy. Optional. (T. Keogh)



The Third Wife ★★★1/2

Film Movement, 96 min., in Vietnamese w/English subtitles, R, DVD: \$24.99

Writer-director Ash Mayfair's debut feature, set in 19th-century Vietnam, focuses on May (Nguyen Phuong Tra My), a 14-year-old whose family has arranged for a marriage between her and a wealthy landowner named Hung (Le Vu Long). The film's title refers to May's status as the polygamist Hung's third wife, following Xuan (Mai Thu Huong Maya) and Ha (Tran Nu Yên-Khê). The young May quickly realizes that her role in the household is to produce another son for Hung, whose only other male child—named Son (Nguyen Thanh Tam)—is being prepared for his own marriage. But Son bitterly rejects the woman chosen for him and May finds herself increasingly attracted to the free-spirited Xuan—who, in turn, is infatuated with Son, the child of Hung and Ha. *The Third Wife* is not lacking in melodrama, but Mayfair mercifully keeps the tale from veering into soapy territory thanks to a mature script and a remarkable ensemble cast. And while the women are front and center, the male characters are not treated as caricatures, but rather figures also trapped in the rigid societal demands enforced by Vietnamese culture. Highly recommended. (P. Hall)



Wild Rose★★★

Universal, 86 min., R, DVD: \$22.99

At its root, filmmaker Tom Harper's *Wild Rose* is a formulaic story about a young singer with a dream, but it throws in enough narrative curveballs to avoid becoming a cookie-cutter tale. In a star-making turn, Jessie Buckley plays Rose-Lynn Harlan, a wannabe

