

This section features reviews of current and classic studio, independent, and foreign feature films. Each review includes pricing information, as well as running time, rating, subtitling information, and street dates for yet-to-be-released titles. Most titles reviewed here are widely available through most distributors.

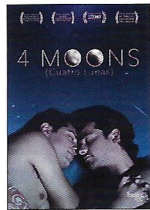
- ★★★★ = Excellent
- ★★★ = Good
- ★★ = Fair
- ★ = Poor

Current Films

4 Moons ★★★

Breaking Glass, 110 min., in Spanish w/English subtitles, not rated, DVD: \$21.99

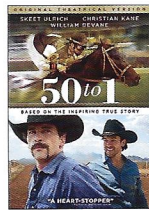
Mexican filmmaker Sergio Tovar Velarde's uneven drama divides its narrative among four separate sets of characters who are caught up in various complications within gay relationships. Of the quartet, the most interesting involves an aging, married poet (Alonso Echánove) who yearns for sex with a male prostitute shortly before receiving an honor for his lifetime of writing. Less compelling are stories about a longtime couple undergoing a brutal breakup; a pair of childhood friends who find one another again in college and begin exploring their true feelings; and a young boy who develops sexual curiosity over a male cousin. Velarde pours on the usual heartache and romantic conflict, but the material rises above formula in some moments, such as traditional-minded parents struggling to reconcile themselves to having a gay son. Optional. (T. Keogh)



50 to 1 ★★★

Sony, 111 min., PG-13, DVD: \$26.99

This fact-based story revolves around Mine That Bird, the unheralded gelding who pulled off a huge upset by winning the 2009 Kentucky Derby, and then followed up with a second place show in the Preakness and third in the Belmont Stakes. Although the script works hard trying to give the horse a rambunctious personality, the emphasis here is really on the human folk surrounding the animal, all of them (naturally) terribly colorful types, ranging from the rowdy New Mexico cowboy owners (Christian Kane, William Devane) to the hardscrabble trainer (Skeet Ulrich) to the last-minute-replacement

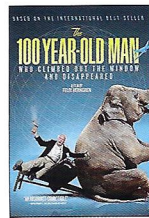


jockey (Calvin Borel, playing himself). The underlying message here is that Mine That Bird's seemingly miraculous win represented the victory of the "common man" over the arrogant elite of the horse-racing world, who were contemptuous of a horse that came to the Derby with an undistinguished record and was accompanied to Kentucky by a bunch of outsiders who were obviously out of place in such a tony environment. One can't blame *50 to 1* for its predictable ending, of course, but true or not, this earnest film feels cliché-ridden. Not a necessary purchase. (F. Swietek)

The 100 Year-Old Man Who Climbed Out of the Window and Disappeared ★★★

Music Box, 115 min., R, DVD or Blu-ray: \$29.95, Aug. 18

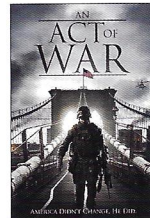
One of Sweden's highest-grossing films ever revolves around irrepressible, unflappable Allan Karlsson (Robert Gustafsson), who is about to celebrate his 100th birthday when he climbs out a window at the retirement home where he lives. Arriving at a nearby transit station, Allan boards a bus with someone else's suitcase, not realizing that it is stuffed with millions in stolen drug money belonging to a vicious biker dude (Simon Seppanen). As Allan ambles about, earlier events in his picaresque life are revealed in surreal flashbacks that illustrate how various fanciful misadventures placed him in the midst of some major historical occasions (an amusing plot device that makes Allan look like a Scandinavian cousin of *Zelig* or *Forrest Gump*). Working as an explosives expert, young Allan finds himself entangled in the Spanish Civil War, the Manhattan Project, and other definitive events of the 20th century, including ludicrous encounters with U.S. Presidents, Russian dictators, and an elephant named Sonya. Also on hand are Allan's geezer buddy Julius (Iwar Wiklander), their perpetual student/driver Benny (David Wiberg), and feisty Gunilla (Mia Skäringer). Based on Jonas Jonasson's international best-selling novel, director Felix Herngren's film is an irreverent and absurdist comic fable. Recommended. (S. Granger)



An Act of War ★★★1/2

Revolver, 99 min., not rated, DVD: \$19.98

Ryan M. Kennedy's feature directing debut (originally presented on the festival circuit as *The Projectionist*) is a fine psychological thriller about a young veteran whose untreated PTSD leads to physical and emotional self-destruction. Set in a crummy section of Brooklyn, *An Act of War* centers on isolated Jacob (Russ Russo), whose life—besides his poorly paid job in the

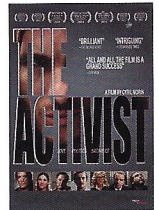


projection booth of a rundown theater, and his visits to an indifferent Russian prostitute—is dominated by flashbacks of his eight months as a prisoner of war, and the murder of a fellow soldier by enemy captors. In a rare instance of emotional interaction, Jacob generously buys a meal and a cup of coffee for a homeless man loitering at a diner, and the man returns the favor by introducing Jacob to heroin, creating a new spiral of anguish. Kennedy frames the film as a noir nightmare, complete with gritty black-and-white cinematography that mirrors the central character's monochromatic existence. But the real power here lies in Russo's performance, brilliantly capturing Jacob's pain and turmoil with tortured body language and a gaze that conveys endless suffering. Aside from a too-convenient denouement, this is an impressive indie film. Highly recommended. (P. Hall)

The Activist ★★★

Media in Sync, 90 min., not rated, DVD: \$19.99

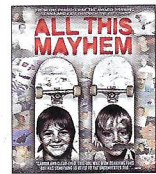
Juxtaposing a fictional mystery against a 1973 real-life crisis when 200 members of the American Indian Movement were involved in an armed standoff against state and federal officers at Wounded Knee, SD, *The Activist* employs archival news footage to establish historic context, but otherwise remains tightly focused on an imaginary sidebar to events. Writer-director Cyril Morin tells the story of two Native American men (Chadwick E. Brown and Michael Spears) who are unaccountably arrested and locked up in a sheriff's office, far from the tense occupation. The men naturally seek answers, and the plot thickens when both a senator and the head of the Bureau of Indian Affairs turn up and try to sway the prisoners into cooperating with an agenda that they won't fully reveal. Morin makes an asset of the movie's low-budget constraints, keeping the claustrophobic action within the sheriff's four walls while continuing to emphasize dramas in the world outside, including the occupation, a crusading attorney's attempts to learn the truth behind the protagonists' incarceration, and a subplot concerning the dying wife of a deputy. A smart and engaging film, this is recommended. (T. Keogh)



All This Mayhem ★★1/2

VSC, 104 min., not rated, Blu-ray: \$24.98

What starts out as *Dogtown and Z-Boys Down Under* quickly turns into a too-familiar tragedy of too much, too young, too soon, set against the background milieu of extreme-sports "thrash" culture. Growing up in an athletic (but often violently dysfunctional) household in Melbourne, Australia, brothers Tas and

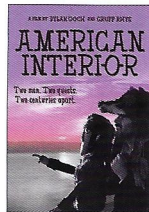


Ben Pappas became transfixed by America's burgeoning skateboarding scene. In the 1990s they started making their own impact, with amazing "vert" half-pipe stunts and routines, and eventually self-financed a trip to skateboarding mecca San Diego to compete, chiefly against their idol (and nemesis) Tony Hawk. By 1997, Tas and younger Ben were ranked first and second place worldwide in skateboarding. But financial betrayal coupled with poor choices—and lots of drugs—resulted in a fall steeper than any of the brothers' gravity-defying feats. A strong optional purchase. (C. Cassidy)

American Interior

★★★

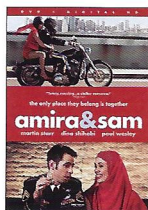
Revolvr, 92 min., not rated, DVD: \$19.98



Most Americans have probably never heard of 18th-century Welsh-born John Evans, the first white explorer to create a map of the Missouri River (his work was later used by Lewis and Clark during their highly publicized odyssey). But before that achievement, Evans embarked on an adventure to affirm the bizarre legend of Prince Madog, supposedly a 12th-century Welsh prince who arrived in the New World three centuries before Columbus and left the gift of the Welsh languages with an Indian tribe in the Midwest. In this documentary from filmmaker Dylan Goch and contemporary musician Gruff Rhys (who claims Evans as an ancestor), the latter follows the long-forgotten explorer's path to see if Evans's notion about Welsh-speaking Indians was correct. It's not much of a spoiler to affirm that Evans was wrong. Regardless, Rhys—who carries around a giant puppet to symbolize Evans—appears to have a grand time touring the American heartland and interacting with the locals. *American Interior* is a record of Rhys's expedition, a loose-limbed ramble that finds a slightly bewildered foreigner adrift in some of the more colorful regions of the country. While the joke eventually wears a bit thin, Rhys is a charming presence with deadpan wit. Recommended. (P. Hall)

Amira & Sam ★★★1/2

Cinedigm, 88 min., in English & Arabic w/English subtitles, not rated, DVD: \$24.99, Blu-ray: \$29.95

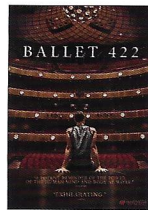


Fresh faces enhance a somewhat contrived opposites-attract dramedy with a timely Islamic cultural hook. Sam (Martin Starr) is a returned vet living in New York City, working menial jobs and more bemused than bitter towards a society in which his peers—who all talked big about going to fight after 9/11—instead stayed behind to become snotty mini-Wolves of Wall Street, exploiting Sam's military background for

their own gain. Keeping a promise to an old Iraqi ally, Sam offers his apartment as a refuge for Amira (Dina Shihabi), a liberal-minded, fiercely independent Muslim woman in danger of deportation by U.S. immigration authorities. Having lost her father in Iraq in a coalition "friendly fire" incident, Amira naturally hates easygoing vet Sam. And, of course, they fall for each other. While *Amira & Sam* is somewhat formulaic and occasionally head-shaking (how many unemployed guys in New York own a yacht?), this should be considered a strong optional purchase. (C. Cassidy)

Ballet 422 ★★★

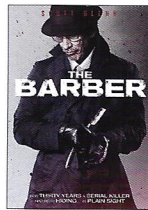
Magnolia, 75 min., PG, DVD: \$26.98, Blu-ray: \$29.98



In what might be called a pint-sized American cousin to *La Danse* (VL-3/11)—Frederick Wiseman's two-and-a-half-hour fly-on-the-wall documentary centering on the Paris Opera Ballet—director Jody Lee Lipes focuses his camera on the genesis of the New York City Ballet's 422nd production, *Paz de La Jolla*, during the last weeks of 2012 and into early 2013. The comparatively short piece, which is set to Bohuslav Martin's *Sinfonietta La Jolla*, was the third work choreographed by 25-year-old Justin Peck, a member of the company's corps de ballet, and was well-received at its premiere, but is not shown in its final form here. Instead, Lipes concentrates on the intricate creative effort in bringing it to the stage, with Peck the guiding spirit but always working collaboratively with dancers, designers, ballet master Albert Evans, the conductor, and musicians in the orchestra. Coverage of the first performance intercuts snippets of stage action with cutaways to Peck watching from the audience (and inserts of rehearsal footage). Following the ovation, the camera follows Peck as he repairs to the dressing room to get ready to dance as a member of the corps in the next item on the program. Balletomanes will especially enjoy *Ballet 422*, but anyone can appreciate Lipes's sensitive, fluent portrayal of a creative process that combines several distinct art forms into a pleasing whole. Recommended. (F. Swietek)

The Barber ★★★

Arc, 90 min., R, DVD or Blu-ray: \$20.99



Scott Glenn serves up a masterful performance as an elderly, mild-mannered serial killer in director Basel Owies' small indie gem of a psychological thriller. Decades after a Chicago killing spree that brutalized 17 young women, Eugene van Wingerdt (Glenn) lives a quiet life cutting hair in a midwest backwater town where no one knows he was a suspect. A police detective who was obsessed with the

case eventually killed himself in despair after a lack of evidence set van Wingerdt free. Now the policeman's grownup son (Chris Coy) arrives on the scene, seemingly in search of a mentor who will help him foster his own growing career as a murdering psychopath. The plot here is exceptionally twisty with quietly charged scenes of cat-and-mouse between a master and his young padawan. In addition to Glenn's compelling turn, *The Barber* also features a delightful appearance by veteran character actor Stephen Tololowsky as the wily local sheriff. A razor-sharp example of fine American independent cinema, this is recommended. (T. Fry)

Beloved Sisters ★★★1/2

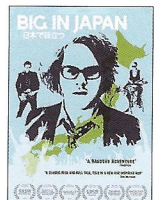
Music Box, 171 min., in German w/English subtitles, not rated, DVD: \$29.95, Blu-ray: \$34.95



History mixes with soap opera in Dominik Graf's highly speculative treatment of the love life of 19th-century German playwright/poet Friedrich Schiller, whose "Ode to Joy" became the basis for the famous finale to Beethoven's Ninth Symphony. Graf uses bits of contemporary correspondence to construct a "tell-all" tale about a *ménage à trois* involving Schiller, his wife Charlotte, and her older sister Caroline, who—in this account—was trapped in an unhappy marriage and encouraged Charlotte to wed the man they both loved so they could, in effect, share him. Scholars can argue about the truthiness of the tale, but Graf's presentation here is decidedly more cerebral than passionate, relying on numerous shots of characters scribbling letters to one another (and often reciting the contents for the audience's benefit), together with extensive narration that provides context but slows the story down to a crawl. While Hannah Herzsprung and Henriette Confurius deliver vivid performances as Caroline and Charlotte, Florian Stetter cuts a rather stiff, uncharismatic figure as Schiller. Running nearly three hours, *Beloved Sisters* is ultimately a rather turgid, pallid presentation of an intriguing, if also historically doubtful, chronicle of events. A strong optional purchase. (F. Swietek)

Big In Japan ★★★1/2

Strand, 100 min., not rated, DVD: \$24.99



A Seattle rock band called Tennis Pro, able to get no traction in its hometown, takes a leap of faith and follows a veteran grunge star to Japan. There the group navigates culture shock, stays in a hotel frequented by prostitutes, and plays to mystified audiences in tiny clubs. Written and directed by John Jeffcoat, who also stars as one of the musicians, *Big In*