

## Porto ★★

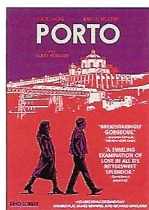
Kino Lorber, 76 min., in English, French & Portuguese w/English subtitles, not rated, DVD: \$29.95, Blu-ray: \$34.95

*Porto* could almost qualify as a remake of Richard Linklater's plotless 1995 romantic walk-a-thon *Before Sunrise*, the talky twentysomething drama featuring Ethan Hawke and Julie Delpy. Here, Hawke's conversationally indulgent character is replaced by the late Anton Yelchin's child-like vulnerability and quiet-guy bohemian brooding as Jake, a privileged 26-year-old drifter floating around Europe who happens to be in Porto when he has an improbable hook-up with Mati (Lucie Lucas), a gorgeous Sorbonne-educated archeologist, in a local cafe. Although Jake is a man of few words, all of his tentative patter directed at Mati seems impossibly cloying; still, thirtysomething Mati, who could have her pick of any man in Europe, chooses to sleep with the tiresome Jake. Of course, Jake falls in love immediately, while behind Mati's façade viewers know that she's just marking time until Mr. Right comes along. The true star of the movie is the cinematography, which beautifully captures Porto's neon-lit nighttime café culture as well as its broader scenic appeal. Unfortunately, the human element is sadly lacking. Optional. (M. Sandlin)

## The Post ★★★★★

Fox, 116 min., PG-13, DVD: \$29.98, Blu-ray/DVD Combo: \$34.99

Steven Spielberg's timely thriller celebrates journalistic independence and the courage of Katharine Graham, a woman who put free speech ahead of friendship and business, battling Richard Nixon's vindictive White House over the publication of what became known as the *Pentagon Papers*. When insecure Kay Graham (Meryl Streep) inherited the *Washington Post* following her husband's suicide, she became the first female publisher of a major American newspaper. In 1971, Defense Department whistleblower Daniel Ellsberg (Matthew Rhys) leaks top secret information to the *New York Times*, specifically a RAND Corporation study revealing a massive cover-up regarding the futility of the Vietnam War. Furious over being scooped, editor Ben Bradlee (Tom Hanks) seizes an opportunity to elevate the *Post's* position when one of his reporters obtains a copy of the controversial study. But Bradlee and his staff have only one day to sort out relevant information that the *Times* has had for months. Meanwhile, patrician Graham is taking her family's cash-poor company public, and she knows that potential investors might bolt due to the possibility of a

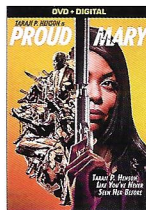


"catastrophic occurrence," since she could be arrested and imprisoned for treason. Plus, Graham has personal reservations, tied to her longtime bond with Defense Secretary Robert McNamara (Bruce Greenwood) from a time when she and Bradlee socialized with the Kennedys. Upon publication of the *Pentagon Papers*, Nixon's aides seek a court injunction, sparking a First Amendment battle that winds up in the Supreme Court. Streep and Hanks deliver powerhouse performances in this timely Best Picture-nominated film that reminds all Americans of the clear and present threat to democracy posed by an assault on the freedom of the press. Highly recommended. Editor's Choice. (S. Granger)

## Proud Mary ★★

Sony, 89 min., R, DVD: \$30.99, Blu-ray: \$34.99

In the spirit of '70s blaxploitation films—ethnic action thrillers that were originally aimed at urban audiences, but found wider appeal—*Proud Mary* stars Taraji P. Henson in the title role as a ruthless African American assassin who feels guilty about one particular hit for the Boston mob. After killing his father, Mary actually does little to keep orphaned Danny (Jahi Di'Allo Winston) out of trouble—until she discovers him unconscious in an alley, and then goes after the culprits. That search involves Mary's boss Benny (Danny Glover), Benny's feckless son Tom (Billy Brown) and, above all, Mary's desire to leave behind her badass lifestyle. Working from a simplistic script, director Babak Najafi's film suffers from poor pacing and lighting that is either too bright or too dark. On a side note: singer/songwriter John Fogerty is adamant that his 1969 hit song with Creedence Clearwater Revival and the title character have nothing in common, writing on Facebook: "I wrote the song about a mythical riverboat, cruising on a mythical river, in a mythical time.... It was obviously a metaphor about leaving painful, stressful things behind for a more tranquil and meaningful life. Far from a story about killing people for money." A disappointing thriller, this is an optional purchase at best. (S. Granger)



## Sami Blood ★★

MVD Visual, 109 min., in Swedish w/English subtitles, not rated, DVD: \$19.95, Blu-ray: \$24.99

Writer-director Amanda Kernell's *Sami Blood* is an understated but subtly powerful look at life in the Swedish rural Lapland of the 1930s, in particular the struggles of indigenous Sami people living agrarian lives. The film centers on precocious adolescent Elle Marja (Lene Cecilia Sparrok), who takes no pride



in her Lapp heritage, seeing it as nothing but a magnet for racial insults, dirty looks, and sometimes violent attacks from the local white populace. Elle, who proves to be highly intelligent and ambitious, dreams of casting off the stifling yoke of tradition and traveling to the nearest city, Uppsala, to start a new life. One night at a local dance, she meets a wealthy Uppsalan boy named Niklas (Julius Fleischanderl), who invites her to visit him someday. Soon, Elle gets up the gumption to jump on a train and show up at his doorstep unannounced, and before long she has hit the guy up for enough money to buy her way into a posh girls' school. Elle often proves to be a coarse and confounding character, but there is more nuance here than simply the story of an indigenous girl overcoming prejudice to make good: once Elle finally gets to the promised land, she's surprised that her sophisticated schoolmates have an anthropological interest in her ethnicity that is almost as discomfiting as the overt hatred she experienced back home. Recommended. (M. Sandlin)

## Santoalla ★★★

Oscilloscope, 82 min., in Gallegan & English w/English subtitles, not rated, DVD: \$34.99, Blu-ray: \$39.99

A real-life mystery lies at the center of this documentary about idealistic Dutch couple Martin and Margo Verfondern, modern day hippies who left their home in Amsterdam in the 1990s to live off the land in their own Eden in the mountains of Northern Spain. The locale was chosen for its isolation, wild beauty, and thriving forests, and this urban couple takes to farming with a passion. The Rodríguez family, their only neighbors, have been working their land for generations and now the two sons tend the fields for their elderly parents. All seem to co-exist well enough but keep to themselves. Then Martin disappears in 2010 and European immigrant Margo, who is unwilling to leave, becomes deeply suspicious of her Spanish neighbors. Using interviews and archival video footage (Martin started documenting his neighbors as tensions built), filmmakers Andrew Becker and Daniel Mehrer use the existential mystery here as a frame to examine how cultural mistrust is transformed into outright conflict (the mystery is ultimately solved in the final minutes, recasting the claims of its subjects in a new light). This is the kind of documentary that is less about the ostensible subject matter (what happened to Martin) and more about telling a unique story with many strands: the idealism of a couple embracing an old way of life, the failing economies of small villages, the mistrust of outsiders, and the complications of human nature. Beautifully shot and quite compelling, this is recommended. (S. Axmaker)

