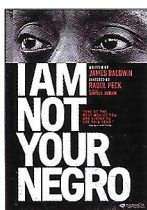


and antagonized many of his former friends, who were equally surprised by his decision to marry a girl he met while studying theology. *I Am Michael* tries to present Glatze's story in a balanced fashion, aided by the earnest performance of James Franco as Michael and equally committed turns by Zachary Quinto as Bennett, his former partner, and Emma Roberts as Rebekah, who Glatze falls in love with. It does not ignore aspects of Glatze's conversion that might raise eyebrows—for example, the medical problems (diagnosed as panic attacks) that led him to religion, or an uncomfortable stay at a Buddhist retreat where he was eventually asked to leave. But it is never cynical in dramatizing Glatze's transformation, and it refreshingly treats religious belief seriously rather than dismissing it as misguided. Unfortunately, Kelly's approach also often comes across as excessively cautious, making for a rather staid film. Still, *I Am Michael* deserves credit for its sympathetic portrait of a complex character. A strong optional purchase. (F. Swietek)

I Am Not Your Negro

★★★★1/2

Magnolia, 94 min., PG-13, DVD: \$26.99, Blu-ray: \$29.99, May 2

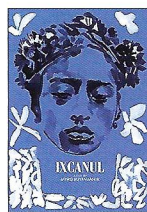


Although skirting over many details of James Baldwin's life, Raoul Peck's documentary serves up an engrossing intellectual biography of the great African-American writer that is set within a broader context of the black experience in America. The centerpiece is a highly personal prospectus that Baldwin wrote for a proposed book on Medgar Evers, Malcolm X, and Martin Luther King, Jr., who were all assassinated during the tumultuous 1960s. Excerpts read by Samuel L. Jackson detail Baldwin's personal connection to each man, but they also range widely, offering observations about the treatment that blacks endured from early slavery up through the '80s. Peck accompanies the words with beautifully-chosen collages of archival footage, as well as clips from movies, from *King Kong* to *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner*. He also periodically intercuts excerpts from the writer's appearances on TV talk shows, in which Baldwin challenges liberal voices that might appear supportive but come across as patronizing. Peck emphasizes the continuing relevance of Baldwin's stinging criticism concerning America's racial attitudes by adding visual references to Trayvon Martin and Ferguson, MO. *I Am Not Your Negro* makes it clear that Baldwin's brilliant critiques are not a thing of the past, but a continuing stain on the country's moral character. Passionate yet incisive, moving yet clear-sighted, this impressionistic documentary captures how Baldwin forced fellow Americans to confront racism in society, while also showing how deeply racism impacted his own personal ex-

periences. Highly recommended. (F. Swietek)

Ixcanul ★★★1/2

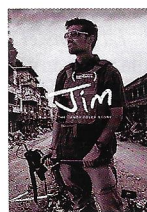
Kino Lorber, 91 min., in Spanish & Kaqchikel w/English subtitles, not rated, DVD: \$29.95, Blu-ray: \$34.99



The first film from Guatemala to be submitted in the Best Foreign Language Film category of the Academy Awards, *Ixcanul* serves up a mix of documentary realism and fable-like drama set in isolated mountains. At the base of a dormant volcano, inhabitants of an impoverished Mayan village eke out a living harvesting coffee beans at a nearby plantation and farming inhospitable fields hewn out of the jungle. The parents of Maria (María Mercedes Coroy)—a beautiful, hard-working young woman—have arranged a marriage with the plantation foreman, but she has made her own plans to run off to America with a cocky worker her own age who talks big and drinks his wages away at the local dive bar. She seduces him to seal the deal, which has consequences that change everything for her. The feature debut of filmmaker Jayro Bustamante, this is a powerful portrait of traditional Mayan culture, where peasants live in huts without electricity or running water and speak their native Kaqchikel, unable to communicate with the Spanish speakers from the nearby city without an interpreter. The ordeal of Maria and her parents is harrowing and Bustamante presents it without sentiment or melodramatic flourish, focusing on their strength as he shows their plight in this primal, powerful, and rare portrait of a hidden culture. Highly recommended. (S. Axmaker)

Jim ★★★1/2

FilmRise, 113 min., not rated, DVD: \$31, Blu-ray: \$37



A sad, painful, yet also inspiring portrait of one man's enormous courage in the face of monstrousness, filmmaker Brian Oakes's HBO-aired documentary *Jim* chronicles the events that led to the murder of American journalist James Foley, who was beheaded by ISIS in 2014. This film features a mix of wartime footage shot by or featuring Foley, along with interviews of his parents, siblings, colleagues, and former captives who were jailed with him in the months prior to his death. The aggregate vision of Foley that emerges from all of these shared perspectives is that of a young man too restless for the suburban life embraced by his family, compelled instead to seek out the frontlines of war-ravaged countries and report on the suffering. Against his family's wishes, Foley became a "combat journalist," one of a breed of freelancers writing about and shooting vid-

eo in Iraq (embedded with soldiers), and then on his own during Libya's descent into chaos following the toppling of Muammar Gaddafi. Foley was kidnapped by a Libyan militia and held for a period before returning to the U.S. After that, his family and friends were astonished when he chose to go to Syria just as Bashar al-Assad began to bomb his own people. Heartbreaking images from some of those atrocities are seen, accompanied by accounts of Foley's efforts to help people while reporting about the carnage. Foley's lengthy imprisonment, torture, and beheading by ISIS are also detailed (images of the gruesome execution are not shown here), and the film presents disturbing evidence that U.S. official policy of not negotiating with terrorists (unlike other nations that were able to get captives released) was short-sighted and inhumane. Highly recommended. (T. Keogh)

Julieta ★★★

Sony, 99 min., in Spanish w/English subtitles, R, DVD: \$26.99, Blu-ray: \$30.99



Celebrated writer-director Pedro Almodóvar serves up an opulently crafted soap opera in this adaptation of several stories by Alice Munro, transferring the American setting to Spain. The title character (Emma Suárez) is initially introduced as a woman in late middle age about to leave Madrid and move to Portugal with her boyfriend. But her plan is derailed after a chance encounter with Bea, a young woman who was once her daughter Antía's best friend. Bea tells her that she has recently seen Antía, who went missing years earlier after a religious retreat. So Julieta decides to remain in the city in hopes of tracking Antía down, and she recalls, during a lengthy flashback (in which she is now played by Adriana Ugarte), her meeting with her daughter's fisherman father during an eventful train ride, their marriage after the death of his ill wife, his accidental drowning, and the circumstances of Antía's still-unexplained disappearance. The final act returns to the present and Julieta's search for closure. Almodóvar tells this tale with his customary visual flair, and the performances of Suárez and Ugarte mesh nicely, even if the actresses do not especially resemble one another. While not quite as distinctive as some of the director's earlier films, this one is still a satisfying addition to an impressive oeuvre. Recommended. (F. Swietek)

Just a Sigh ★★★

Icarus, 105 min., in French w/English subtitles, not rated, DVD: \$26.99

Director Jérôme Bonnell's French feature film can't help but bring to mind David Lean's 1945 classic *Brief Encounter*. But its Gallic take on two strangers drawn to one another against a backdrop of trains, who find a temporary oasis of love in a world of anguish,