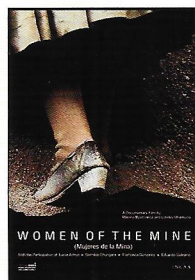


Women of the Mine ★★★

(2014) 63 min. In Spanish & Aymara w/English subtitles. DVD: \$100; public libraries; \$250; colleges & universities. EPF Media. PPR. Closed captioned. ISBN: 978-1-930545-32-8.

Filmed against the grey and chalk-white backdrop of Cerro Rico—a cold and forbidding mining community in Potosi, Bolivia—the harsh life of widows and other lone women trying to survive and care for their children is at the center of *Women of the Mine*. Filmmakers Malena Bystrowicz and Loreley Unamuno begin with a slow and deliberate orientation into a world in which young kids weave their way downhill and through narrow passages between boulders to get to school. Mothers are up before sunrise to take care of housework before spending their days seeking rocks that they can strip-mine for tin. About midway, the narrative expands to tell a history of the miners' labor union and its struggles during Bolivia's hellish years of military authoritarianism. It turns out that some of the women of Cerro Rico were deeply involved in keeping the union strong, and when it was time to lead a protest that helped topple the government, those same women were on the frontlines. Yet, as powerful and moving as that victory was, life isn't easier for the survivors living in perpetual chill and dust. The men still die in mining accidents or from lung disease, and their wives have no choice but to take up shovels and hammers. A tale of personal courage on the part of people who are trapped in a generational cycle of poverty, illness, and death, this is recommended. Aud: C, P. (T. Keogh)



mous distance, these images effectively reveal the scale in which life and activity play out: the mining vehicles look tiny, almost alien, while desert creatures parade through waves of rising heat. Above all are the minuscule human subjects, elderly members of the Aymara who walk the crooked dusty paths to find wood for burning or to watch the miners. The local Aymara are reportedly roughly 2,000 in number, living quite remotely while shepherding their llamas and barely surviving in stone and stucco huts. When an invitation comes for two Aymara to join an elder's council on New Year's Day in Putre, Chile, the subsequent effort to compensate a Bolivian boy for looking after their llamas adds a ripple of drama. *Surire* reminds us that there is so much otherworldliness in this world we think we know—it captures a haunting landscape filled with strange beauty and mystery. Recommended. Aud: C, P. (T. Keogh)

EDUCATION

Tested ★★★

(2016) 73 min. DVD: \$79; public libraries, \$299; colleges & universities. Bull and Monkey (avail. from www.testedfilm.com). PPR. Closed captioned.

New York City has over 400 public high schools, three of which are “world class” with graduates including a large number of famous achievers who’ve won loads of awards in their professional lives. It’s no wonder that parents clamor to get their bright children into these places, or at least into one of a secondary group of specialized schools that recognize a student’s emerging skill set. All of the other schools—the “ordinary” ones—are where everyone else goes. The navigation of

this educational food chain is at the center of filmmaker Curtis Chin’s *Tested*, a documentary about the brutal process of preparing thousands of potential enrollees in New York’s middle schools for tests to gain admittance to top-drawer high schools. While the film focuses on several families from a variety of neighborhoods reflecting racial, ethnic, economic, and cultural diversity, it also demonstrates how numerous factors come to bear on the prospect of earning a great education. For parents who were prevented from meeting their own educational goals as kids, the opportunities for their own children represent balance and redemption. For moms and dads who believe that one should simply choose the best school program for sons and daughters, testing forces them to recognize that competition leads to quality. Chin follows his subjects over months of preparing for the big exam, and catches up afterwards, when acceptance and rejection letters start to roll in. Although the issues of immigration, segregation, and economic inequality hang over the film, it also holds out hope that things will change for the better with a well-prepared next generation. Recommended. Aud: C, P. (T. Keogh)

LAW & CRIME

Murder Rap: Inside the Biggie and Tupac Murders ★★1/2

(2016) 114 min. DVD: \$19.99, Blu-ray: \$27.99. FilmRise (avail. from most distributors).

Since the murders of hip-hop stars Biggie Smalls and Tupac Shakur have already been explored extensively in films like Nick Broomfield’s 2002 *Biggie & Tupac* (VL Online-7/03),

Mike Dorsey’s documentary feels somewhat redundant. Still, armchair investigators are sure to find plenty of interesting evidence here, including emergency calls, surveillance footage, and interrogation recordings. Dorsey draws from retired LAPD homicide investigator Greg Kading’s 2011 book *Murder Rap: The Untold Story of the Biggie Smalls & Tupac Shakur Murder Investigations*, briefly sketching out the artists’ careers before proceeding through the events that exacerbated their rivalry, many involving Sean “Diddy” Combs (Bad Boy Entertainment), Suge Knight (Death Row Records), their bodyguards, and gang members who floated around the periphery. The artists also made defamatory statements about each other at awards shows and on studio tracks such as Biggie’s “Who Shot Ya?” and Tupac’s “Hit ‘Em Up.” Tupac attended the Mike Tyson fight at Las Vegas’s MGM Grand in 1996, and was murdered later that night. A year later, after the Vibe Awards, Biggie was killed. At the time, off-duty cops were implicated in both deaths, but Kading offers insights that contradict that theory, suggesting that Tupac was murdered by a member of the Crips and that Biggie was killed by a Knight associate. Other interviewees include author Cathy Scott (*The Murder of Tupac Shakur*) and Reggie Wright Jr., former head of security for Death Row. Since the cases remain unsolved, more books and documentaries seem likely to materialize in the future. A strong optional purchase. Aud: P. (K. Fennessy)

Southwest of Salem: The Story of the San Antonio Four ★★★

(2016) 91 min. DVD: \$19.95, Blu-ray: \$24.95. FilmRise (avail. from most distributors).

Deborah S. Esquenazi’s film about a miscarriage of justice tells the story of the so-called San Antonio Four: lesbian couple Anna Vasquez and Cassandra Rivera, along with their friends Elizabeth Ramirez and Kristie Mayhugh. After Ramirez babysat her young nieces, the children accused all four of sexually abusing them. Despite a complete lack of physical evidence, the quartet were convicted in a trial in which homophobia, as well as some highly dubious medical testimony and suspicions of Satanic practices, played a role. The women were incarcerated for years before an independent Canadian researcher took an interest in their case and referred his findings to the Innocence Project of Texas. New evidence, along with a recantation by one of the girls, led to their ultimate release, although they still had to go through a torturous legal process to be fully exonerated. Esquenazi has smoothly edited extensive interviews with the women, their supporters, and other experts—along with archival footage—to tell the story. Viewers might wish that Esquenazi had been more forceful in questioning Javier Limon—Ramirez’s former brother-in-law—who probably coached the girls into making the original accusations because Elizabeth