

Film

October 28, 2021

Pig MA ****

Written and directed by Michael Sarnoski, *Pig* is a rather curious beast. It is divided into three “chapters”, each of which is named for the dish(es) featured therein. Thus Part 1: Rustic Mushroom Tart features the mushroom tart that reclusive Rob (Nicolas Cage) cooks and shares with his beloved truffle-hunting pig.

Clearly eschewing any form of personal hygiene or grooming, and wearing the same filthy clothes throughout the film, Rob nevertheless proves to be a deft hand in the “kitchen” of his dusty log cabin deep in the Oregon forest.

This odd couple would appear to be leading the good life, supplied with groceries by Rob’s truffle dealer Amir (Alex Wolff) but their bucolic bliss is shattered by a violent midnight invasion in which Rob is assaulted and his porcine companion is pignapped.

After he coerces a reluctant Amir to help him retrieve the pig, Rob’s past is gradually revealed. Their quest leads them to Portland, where they infiltrate the underbelly of the city’s hospitality world in Part 2: Mom’s French Toast and deconstructed scallops. Although Rob’s pugilistic skills prove as handy as his culinary skills, his true forte lies in his astute ability to analyse and empathise with people, using food as a psychological tool to break down people’s defences, as he does most effectively in Part 3: A Bird, a bottle and a salted baguette.

Cage totally inhabits the role, giving what is arguably his best ever performance. Thanks to Patrick Scola’s inspired cinematography, the overall art direction and production design, *Pig* is truly a sensory feast: a cascade of beautifully framed and lit images, deftly edited by Brett W. Bachman and subtly underscored by Alexis Grapsas and Philip Klein.

The supporting cast is uniformly impressive, each actor really owning their role. Interestingly, most male characters are macho and mercenary, putting profit before people, whereas the females are caring and empathetic. Food for thought, perchance?

There are some curious directorial decisions such as having Rob remain unwashed and bloody-faced throughout, even in a swish restaurant, whose patrons must surely be visually and olfactorily impaired. Yet, such surreal details somehow make *Pig* an even more engaging experience to savour.

A most impressive feature debut by Michael Sarnoski.



Cousins **M ******

After her acclaimed novel *Cousins* was published in 1992, author Patricia Grace and the late film-maker Merata Mita tinkered intermittently with developing it into a screenplay, a task eventually completed by the author's daughter Briar Grace Smith, who, with Ainsley Gardiner, has co-directed this immensely moving film about New Zealand's stolen generation. Central to the narrative are the bonds of friendship and family ties that keep cousins Makareta and Missy searching for their cousin Mata decades after she has been taken into care by the authorities.

Although the film cuts back and forth between three periods, careful casting and design ensure that these temporal transitions are clear. Each of the cousins is played by three actors: as a child, as a teenager and as an older adult. They and the rest of the cast give utterly convincing performances.

We first encounter Mata as an older woman (Tanea Heke), wandering the streets of Wellington, her mind and spirit well-nigh destroyed by decades of abuse at the hands of state and church authorities.

As happened in Australia, Indigenous children in New Zealand could be made a ward of the state, despite having close relatives willing and able to care for them. In Mata's case she is dumped at the ironically named Mercy Orphanage, by her Pakeha (white) father after the break-up of his relationship with Mata's mother. A miserable childhood ensues. The child is told that her mother is dead, she is re-named Mae Parker and indoctrinated in the fear of a cruelly punitive Christian god. As a teenager, she is treated as a servant by a state-appointed guardian. When she finds love, Mata is too naive and God-fearing to handle it.

Her cousins' lives have also deviated from the paths their families had envisaged for them. Makareta (Briar Grace Smith), "the spoilt one", has become a lawyer so that she can challenge the laws allowing state removal of Maori children and appropriation of Maori land, despite the Treaty of Waitangi. Missy (the inimitable Rachel House), once the family's wild child, has become Kaitiaki, guardian of the Land, a role she embraces, as the "dickhead Road rip-off-the-bloody-Maori-again Authority", surveyors soon learn.

Although the core subject matter of *Cousins* is confronting, and Mata's story tragic, the film is nevertheless a celebration of kinship, laced throughout with humour and compassion. The parallels with the Australian experience are obvious.

Filmed in Rotoiti at Te Waiiti Marae with the local people involved as cultural advisors, actors and crew, *Cousins* provides detailed insight into the Maori culture and the integral custodial relationship with their land, the spectacular beauty of which Raymond Edwards' cinematography celebrates throughout the film.

Cousins is dedicated to these brave Indigenous women. It is an important film, indeed.

Herself **MA ******

"If youse [sic] are havin' a row, get inside," his father advises Gary Mullens (Ian Lloyd Anderson) midway through *Herself*, when Gary is angrily blaming his estranged wife, Sandra (Clare Dunne), for their daughter Molly's (Molly McCann) reluctance to spend time with him, as per their custody arrangement. No wonder the child wants to stay with her mother, considering what she has witnessed. Her grandfather's comment indicates what very likely went on behind the Mullens' closed door when Gary was a child.

Gary's shocking, unprovoked physical attack early into the film is clearly not Sandra's first such beating. Director Phyllida Lloyd ensures that her actors portray this brutal act utterly convincingly, while Molly cowers in her cubby house and her older sister, Emma (Ruby Rose O'Hara), goes for help.

Sandra may have escaped with her life and her daughters, but can she trust Gary to adhere to the AVO conditions imposed upon him? Each time she drops them off to stay with Gary at his parents' house, she fears the worst.

The screenplay, co-written by writeractor Dunne with Malcolm Campbell, economically illustrates the numerous social, financial and emotional difficulties women such as Sandra encounter as they endeavour to rebuild a life for themselves and their children. It seems that bureaucracy would penalise the victim of domestic violence, rather than the perpetrator.

Resolute to keep life as normal as possible for Emma and Molly, Sandra remains determined to be self-sufficient even after Dublin Social Services rejects her proposal to build herself a house with a fraction of the funds they will be paying out for her ongoing accommodation.

Her resilience and honesty garner her enough local community support to begin her ambitious project. But hot on the heels of the highs in Sandra's fortunes come some devastating lows, which keep the narrative engaging, believable and eminently accessible. The whole cast, including the children, give completely believable performances.

Lloyd's direction, Tom Comerford's cinematography, Tamara Conboy's production design and Natalie Holt's score present Sandra's story in a straightforward style, reminiscent of Ken Loach.

A tough, yet uplifting film.

The Toll MA ****

This revenge comedy thriller, set in the wilds of Wales was written by Matt Redd and directed by Ryan Andrew Hooper, with nods to the work of both Tarantino and the Coen Brothers.

The first scenes introduce the few inhabitants of an isolated village in Pembrokeshire, where nothing much ever really happens, except for a fatal hit and run accident precisely a year ago. The victim was the father of fresh-faced police officer Catrin (Annes Elwy). Still grieving, she drives around with his ashes in an urn beside her in her jeep, unable to lay him to rest until she's brought his killer to justice.

On her daily patrol of the village and its environs, Catrin chats with the locals, notably the lone toll collector known simply as 'Toll Booth' (Michael Smiley), ambulance driver Cliff (Paul Kaye) and biker Dom (Iwan Rheon), a leather-clad misogynist, so amoral that he even cheats at cards with his blind grandad.

The bucolic boredom is shattered when the Morgan triplets (all played by Gwyneth Keyworth) embark on a crime spree in their Morris Minor coupe. This is followed by the arrival of a flash London gangster Elton (Gary Beadle), a former acquaintance of Toll Booth. The blast from Toll Booth's past coincides with the convergence upon his booth of the criminal underbelly of Pembrokeshire. Chaos ensues as the idiosyncratic local crims and the professional gangsters become thoroughly entangled and utterly confused. The Toll definitely does not make a criminal career look enticing! While the triplets' father blames his daughters' career choice on the Welsh education system, their desire for Instagram notoriety would seem to be a contributing factor.

By the film's end, the toll road's death toll has increased tenfold. (Try saying that quickly!) Various characters have got their just desserts, accidentally or otherwise, in a bloody "western" shootout. Adrian Peckitt's cinematographic style neatly captures the darkly comic action, one frame in particular giving a whole new dimension to the word "shot". Similarly, Rael Jones' music is perfectly attuned to the genre.

Escapist enjoyment par excellence.

Tricia Youlden is a retired teacher. During the past lockdown, she rediscovered many great films on ABC iView, SBS On Demand and YouTube. Her DVD player has also been working overtime. Nevertheless, she is very much looking forward to finally seeing No Time To Die.

Why women are angry ABC News-In Depth, YouTube 7.30 series

Over four nights in late August, ahead of the national domestic violence summit, Leigh Sales presented a series described as "stitching together the threads that explain why women are angry". The series sets out to examine various inequalities women face on a daily basis such as economic insecurity, the division of unpaid labour, sexual harassment and domestic violence. Each episode runs for approximately 15 minutes and was produced for ABC 7.30 program by Laura Francis and Kirsten Robb.

Amy Haddad points out in her Broad Agenda review that the title "Why Women are Angry doesn't even get close, really. It could be more accurately titled 'Why Women are Seething Infernos of Incandescent Rage' or 'Why Women Aren't Shoving Those Who Don't Believe Them Down a Well' — this would at least recognise the restraint we are collectively showing." She points out that anger, however, is not a bad thing, anger is

energising, and the discomfort caused by women's anger is necessary to bring about change.

This series is definitely worth viewing.

Leeanda Smith is the Women's Coordinator