



## MARCH NEWSLETTER

Hello to all our members,

We held the Healesville Mini Film Festival on March 3. This Akira Kurosawa triple-feature had a solid turn-out, and while I didn't enjoy the full "trilogy" (I loved *Yojimbo*, thought *Sanjuro* was okay, and hated *Rashomon*), I still enjoyed this opportunity to celebrate three iconic films by one of the twentieth-century's greatest directors.

The Oscars, held on February 24, proved controversial as ever, in both their results and snubs.

*Green Book* caused the biggest upset in years, with some critics likening this win to *Driving Miss Daisy* and *Crash* (which also sanitised and misunderstood racism in America) winning Best Picture in previous years.

Some people argued that *Bohemian Rhapsody* should not have remained in contention for Best Picture due to director Bryan Singer's sexual assault allegations, while others were dismayed that *Bohemian Rhapsody* won the editing Oscars, given its hyperactive cuts and poor framing.

*Black Panther* became the first comic book movie to ever be nominated for Best Picture, but sadly had little chance of winning, due to the predominant old white man voter base in the Academy and their general disdain for "genre" pictures. For that matter, the brilliant *Blackkklansman* had little chance of winning either.

Olivia Colman won her first Oscar **on her first nomination** for playing Queen Anne in *The Favourite*, and her acceptance speech was wonderfully genuine, humble and grateful.

*Black Panther* and *First Man* won well-deserved Oscars for Production Design and Visual Effects (respectively), but I was hoping *Border* would win Best Makeup and Hairstyling.

As for snubs, Lynne Ramsay should have been nominated for Best Director for her taut, engrossing, darkly funny thriller *You Were Never Really Here*, and Toni Collette should have been nominated for Best Actress for her harrowing, career-best performance in *Hereditary*.

I look forward to seeing which films are recognised (and snubbed) in next year's Oscars, and I hope you enjoy our upcoming films and events in the Film Society program.

### REMINDER: MEMBERSHIP FEES:

These are the membership fees for 2019:

<b>Full:</b>	\$70.00
<b>Concession:</b>	\$65.00
<b>Youth (under 25):</b>	\$35.00

Please renew your membership if you haven't already.

If you haven't renewed your membership already, you can renew it at our March screenings (at both venues).

You can also renew your membership over the counter at the Healesville and Warburton halls before each month's screenings, with an additional \$2.50 surcharge.

### DVD LIBRARIES, HEALESVILLE AND WARBURTON

We have decided upon a catalogue system for the DVD libraries at Healesville and Warburton.

The curators will bring a list of available films for members to order from, and the curator will bring the selected film for the member at the venue's next screening (the following month).

## WARBURTON FILM FESTIVAL

June 14-16

I don't want to spoil the films the Committee chose for the Festival at our February 25 meeting (especially since we'll be finalising the selection at tomorrow's meeting), but I can tease you with some of the themes.

A couple of gripping Middle Eastern dramas.

A Japanese drama about a panic-inducing misunderstanding.

An Australian documentary about an esteemed but unfortunate musician.

An American drama about PTSD and unconventional parenting in the wilderness.

And a British psychological thriller about a charismatic possible killer for the Saturday late-night genre feature.

I hope these hints entice you to check out the full Festival in June.

## STAR RATINGS FOR THE HEALESVILLE MINI FILM FESTIVAL



4.1 for *Yojimbo*

3.9 for *Sanjuro*

3.8 for *Rashomon*

For me, at least, the Healesville Mini Film Festival was a triple-feature of diminishing returns.

*Yojimbo* is a deeply suspenseful but also very funny thriller.

It's amusing to watch the ronin play the rival gangs against each other, and the film highlights the egotism and cowardice of these gangs while still presenting them as a severe threat, once the ronin's games are discovered.

Toshiro Mifune is a stolid, formidable lead with a dry wit, and has fun chemistry with the quirky supporting characters, including an adversarial friendship with a restaurant manager.

*Sanjuro* didn't do much for me.

While it's tightly-paced and has evocative cinematography, clever humour and well-choreographed action scenes, and it's still fun to watch the ronin trick the villains, I wasn't so keen on the ronin's more clownish personality this time around.

Much of *Sanjuro*'s narrative concerns the rescue of an uncle character we never meet until after his rescue. It's hard to invest yourself in the liberation of a character we've never met, and so *Sanjuro* has less dramatic impetus than *Yojimbo*.

I really didn't like *Rashomon*.

Many of the scenes are compelling and powerfully acted, the fight scenes have an authentic messy quality to them, and I enjoyed the impression of the duelling narrators slowly extracting the truth of the disturbing events they witnessed.

However, the two separate narrative framing-devices felt unnecessary.

The film begins with a priest and a woodcutter talking about a disturbing case they witnessed, interspersed with flashbacks to the court case itself, which **then** leads into showing us differing versions of the events addressed by the court.

This structure has too many obfuscating layers. Having the court case as the sole

framing device would have streamlined the plot while still maintaining its intriguing ambiguity and unreliable narrators.

Also, *Rashomon*'s relentless misogyny (with the samurai's wife constantly shamed for being raped, then revealed as a sociopathic temptress, **then** losing her nerve and not even being allowed to own this twist) really dragged the film down for me.

I still enjoyed watching this Akira Kurosawa triple-feature, as it filled a rather glaring gap in my film-watching (the only two Kurosawa films I'd seen beforehand were *Seven Samurai* and *Throne of Blood*). *Yojimbo* was by far my favourite of the day, and *Rashomon* was the worst.

## STAR RATINGS AND REVIEW FOR *THE COUNTRY DOCTOR*



4.1 from Healesville

4.0 from Warburton's viewers

4.08 overall

*The Country Doctor* is a charming, well-acted little drama about an older doctor opening up his practice to new blood, but I found it somewhat lightweight and unengaging.

The cinematography is bright and warm, the sparse music is elegant, and Dr Werner (François Cluzet) and Dr Nathalie Delezia (Marianne Denicourt) have solid chemistry; Dr Werner sometimes teases Dr Delezia for her inexperience, but quickly comes to respect her for her knowledge and diligence, and Dr Delezia often looks out for Dr Werner, in something akin to a sibling dynamic. Dr Delezia treating a Roma woman serves as an on-site trial-by-fire to prove her ability as a doctor, in a subtle yet poignant sequence.

Unfortunately, few threads of conflict ever stick to provide any sense of jeopardy.

Dr Werner briefly rejects Dr Delezia after she sends an extremely infirm patient of his into institutional care, but they mend their broken relationship shortly after as they both treat an injured construction worker. Dr Delezia's initial discomfort in her new setting, and Dr Werner's resistance to her presence, are resolved far too quickly and easily to carry any tension.

It is genuinely great to see Dr Delezia settle so quickly into her new role as a country doctor, but the film fails to build much suspense from this character arc.

We see Dr Werner experience some negative symptoms from his brain tumour, such as smelling a burning odour, pain in his arm and reduced perception in the right side of his vision, but the film bafflingly fails to mine this for tension. You would think that not being able to properly see things on your right side would impair your driving ability; I was expecting Dr Werner to get into a car crash as a result of this perception imbalance, but this obvious consequence never comes up.

Dr Werner finally accepting chemotherapy for his cancer is supposed to be a gratifying, hopeful turning-point, but Werner had a fairly positive manner anyway, and the cancer's effects were too light within the narrative for the treatment to hold any

urgency.

The film also has some extremely jarring editing, skipping too much time and space from scene to scene. A couple of edits shift abruptly from a dark setting to blinding bright light, which was very uncomfortable.

*The Country Doctor* is a sweet, beautifully-produced film, but lacks any ongoing or serious sense of conflict.

## FRITZ'S POEM

*The Country Doctor*

Feb 2019

An elderly doctor in France  
Had the mission of lives to enhance.  
He continued when ill  
Of his own will  
But did not boot-scoot the barn dance.



F.R.

## MARCH'S SCREENING

*The Death of Stalin*

2017 British-French comedy      Rated MA15+      107 minutes (approx.)



Written and directed by Armando Iannucci (creator of *The Thick Of It* and *Veep*), *The Death of Stalin* is a brilliant dark comedy that uses humour, derived from witty dialogue and collisions between its petty, narcissistic characters, to expose the cruelty, manipulation and betrayal within the Soviet government shortly after Joseph Stalin's death.

**WARBURTON SCREENING:** Tuesday March 12

**HEALESVILLE SCREENING:** Tuesday March 19

## APRIL'S SCREENING

*Still Life*

2013 British comedy-drama      Rated M      92 minutes (approx.)

**WARBURTON SCREENING:** Tuesday April 9

**HEALESVILLE SCREENING:** Tuesday April 16



## THE RIVER FOLK FESTIVAL

Warburton will be holding the second River Folk Festival from the 15-17th of March. This event will feature a diverse selection of innovative folk performers from throughout Australia.

## ALTERNATIVE FILM SPOTLIGHT



### *Lemmings*

Commercial

Directed by Tony Scott

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F\\_9IT7gr8u4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F_9IT7gr8u4)

Apple's 1984 commercial, aired at the 1984 Super Bowl, is one of the most famous commercials of all time. Directed by Ridley Scott (of *Alien*, *Blade Runner* and *Thelma and Louise*), this commercial prompted instant interest in the Macintosh with its vivid symbolism and cinematic production. 1984 framed the Mac as a tool of individualism and creative expression (represented by an athletic Anya Major, wearing colourful clothes in contrast to the industrial greys around her) rebelling against the stifling conformity of a Big Brother-like IBM.

*Lemmings* is not that commercial.

*Lemmings*, directed by Ridley's brother Tony Scott, was aired at the 1985 Super Bowl, and received a far more negative response.

The commercial opens to an endless line of blindfolded office-workers in a stormy, grim setting. The workers march one-by-one off a cliff to a mournful dirge-like version of 'Hi-Ho, Hi-Ho, It's Off To Work We Go.' One worker stops at the edge, uncertain, with the sombre music cutting off as a narrator declares that Apple will soon introduce the Macintosh Office. 'You could look into it,' the narrator quips sardonically as the stopped office worker lifts his blindfold. The camera then cuts back to the doomed office-workers, to which the narrator says, 'or you could continue with business as usual,' followed by the office worker throwing away his blindfold.

While the closing shot and remark of *Lemmings* has similar themes to 1984, with the *Macintosh Office* framed as a "lifesaver" for businesses, audiences understandably found the commercial insulting. While 1984 inspired many people to try out the Macintosh, *Lemmings* portrayed IBM and competitor users as mindless drones stumbling to their death, and this rather condescending symbolism served only to push people away from the Macintosh platform.

As Chris Seibold of the Apple Matters blog wrote: 'Whereas the 1984 commercial had given viewers a sense of empowerment if they opted to use the Mac, the follow up Super Bowl ad left viewers with the feeling that they were inferior for not using the Mac.'

Despite its failure, I still love *Lemmings* as a short film. It has heavy, unnerving atmosphere, in part due to its strikingly disturbing background music, and it has a cool

juxtaposition of bleak tone with a colourful aesthetic in the clouds.

I admire *Lemmings* and Apple for promoting the Macintosh Office with such a downer commercial at the biggest sporting event of the year, and for subverting such a wholesome background tune and so directly yet surreally framing their product as the best, even if their approach was quite tactless.

*Lemmings* may have been a huge failure as a commercial, and arguably a product of immense hubris, but it's still a great work of artistic confidence and atmosphere.