

'Bisbee '17' mixes town's past and present

Film airing on PBS recalls city's dark deportation history

By Anita Snow

The darkest, most violent chapter in the history of Bisbee was an open secret for decades in the funky old Arizona copper town 7 miles (11 kilometers) north of the US-Mexico border.

But few residents knew the details of how about 1,200 miners, most of them immigrants, were pulled violently from their homes a century ago by a private police force and put on cattle cars for their deportation to a desolate area of New Mexico.

The filming of "Bisbee '17", a documentary about what happened July 12, 1917, was a history lesson for residents recruited to play historical figures in the production filmed exactly 100 years later that weds documentary and collective performance. It is, at turns, a Western, a musical and a ghost story.

The film mixes the town's past and present, the residents dressed in period clothing but moving through present-day Bisbee. Newly deputized strikebreakers with ancient guns stand in a classroom complete with an overhead projector and modern light figures. "Enjoy the AC while you've got it!" a man standing at the front of a modern bus tells residents dressed as miners as they travel to the rail cars for their deportation.

After premiering last year at the Sundance Film Festival, "Bisbee '17" will be nationally broadcast for the first time Monday night on the

PBS documentary series POV. In Arizona, it will be shown at 9 pm.

It's the sixth film for director Robert Greene, filmmaker-in-chief for the Murray Center for Documentary Journalism at the University of Missouri. A previous film "Kate Plays Christine" won a Jury Award for Writing at Sundance 2016. "Owning The Weather", his first documentary, was screened at the COP15 Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen.

Learned

Greene said he learned of the town of Bisbee around 15 years ago when he first visited southeastern Arizona to help his then-future mother-in-law fix up an old cabin.

"I completely fell in love with the town," Greene said of the quirky community of old hippies, immigrants, biker mechanics and descendants of miners and company executives. The town today leans to the political left and has an active cultural scene that includes live theatre. It features Victorian-style houses built on hilly terrain, along with other architectural gems. The gaping hole at Bisbee's edge that was once the Lavender Pit copper mine is a constant reminder the area's mining history.

Greene said he started thinking of ways to make a film about the Bisbee deportation shortly after learning about it. As the 100th anniversary approached two years ago, he said, "we knew it was time."

The documentary tells how the bosses at the Phelps Dodge copper mining operation feared a strike by miners who sympathized with the "Wobblies", members of the radical Industrial Workers of the World.

The US had just entered World War I, and company executives worried that foreign-born miners would try to hamper the war effort.

Working with mining bosses, the local sheriff hastily deputized about 2,000 strikebreakers to round up about 1,200 miners, mostly immigrants from Mexico and eastern Europe. They were led by gunpoint to the baseball field in the nearby community of Warren, locked inside train cars and shipped off to Hermanas, New Mexico.

The narrative emerges through the residents' personal stories: a woman whose grandfather deported his brother; a former mining company boss who remains convinced the deportation was justified; and Fernando Serrano, 23, whose mother had been deported back to her native Mexico and jailed on drug charges.

Viewers watch Serrano undergo a political awakening as he plays the role of a Mexican miner, singing the Spanish-language version of the union anthem "Solidarity Forever" to the tune of the "Battle Hymn of the Republic".

While exorcising the demons of Bisbee's past, the townspeople make a statement about today's treatment of marginalized people, the filmmaker said. (AP)

Variety



This image released by Sony Pictures shows Jake Gyllenhaal (left), and Tom Holland in a scene from 'Spider-Man: Far From Home'. (AP)

Film

Mozaffari's film captures plight of fed-up teens

'Firecrackers', a movie about freedom

By Peter Debruge

If you go to film festivals long enough, you end up getting cynical about a few things. For example, it becomes clear that for political reasons, programmers are often pressured to support filmmakers from the country where the fests take place. Instead of getting first dibs on the best of what's created in their own backyards, they wind up making room for local movies that got turned down by other festivals. That means, when in Berlin, you're better off skipping the Perspektive Deutsches Kino section. Venice is the wrong place to see Italian films. And when it comes to Toronto, don't waste your time on Canadian fare.

Now, if you're not a film-festival burnout, you might (rightly) ask: But isn't that a little harsh? Surely there are some treasures stashed away among all those homemade movies? And to that, I would offer up Jasmín Mozaffari's "Firecrackers", which is the kind of discovery I'm kicking myself for overlooking nearly a year earlier, when it premiered at the Toronto Int'l Film Festival. Mozaffari is a major talent — and one whom her fellow Canadians had been tracking for some time — and in this case, TIFF deserves credit for championing a voice who's sure to be recognized by the international film community soon enough. Like a young Andrea Arnold, Mozaffari has an incredible eye for the details that bring a situation or place to life, working with inexperienced actors to create electrifying characters and a sense of edgy unpredictability.

"Firecrackers" is a good word to describe Mozaffari's two teenage leads: There's Lou (Michaela Kurimsky, wildly alive in every frame), whose red hair billows and flames about her shoulders like the glowing tail of a passing comet, and her combustible best friend Chantal (Karina Evans), both itching to escape the black-hole small Ontario town that seems to have sucked the life force from all the adults around them. It's not clear what talents or prospects either of these young ladies have to make it in the world beyond, but that's not the point: They can't

stand the prospect of becoming like their parents, and the thought of spending even one more day there leaves them agitated and angry.

The story itself isn't so original. Every year, four or five — heck, more like 15 — indie attempts to capture the plight of fed-up teenagers, stuck in repressed dead-end communities, yearning to break free. "Firecrackers" doesn't diverge from this formula, but it feels radical in its characterization of Lou and Chantal. From her opening scene, Mozaffari plunges us into their rowdy, restless state of mind, as the camera hovers on the periphery of a brutal girl fight — any closer, and Lou might grab audiences by the hair and pull them into the fracas.

Aggression

As it is, she's a fiery-haired tornado of aggression, throwing her foul-mouthed adversary to the ground and punching her till her knuckles bleed. Lou's peers gather around, goading her on as they film the spectacle on their iPhones, but apart from Chantal, she has no friends. One boy, Josh (Scott Cleland), treats them better than the others, but when it matters, he doesn't have their back. In fact, he wants the same thing as all the guys. The sooner they can ditch this town, the better.

Whether or not people realize it, movies tend to have a conditioning effect on audiences, reinforcing class and gender roles. By example, they serve to show young women how they're "supposed" to behave. "Firecrackers" torches those paradigms, openly defying the idea that anyone gets to tell Lou and Chantal how to think or act. They drink, they smoke, they grind their moms' prescription drugs and snort the powder for a cheap high. While not as extreme as the eff-ups that we see in Harmony Korine movies, they're allowed to be impatient, impolite and above all imperfect.

"Firecrackers" is a movie about freedom, and the oppressive way that concept — spoken about like the right of every Westerner — can feel so out-of-reach to even relatively privileged young people. Aided by DP Catherine Lutes' restless handless cinematogra-

phy, Mozaffari presents their situation in a way that feels like having your head forced underwater, where we share the characters' difficulty to breathe. Lou and Chantal are young enough that they shouldn't be obliged to have their entire lives figured out, but the moments of bliss are short-lived, interrupted by parents and thuggish teenage boys. A scene of revelry down by the lake takes a dark turn, the worst of it occurring off-camera, left to our imaginations when Lou finds Chantal in the shower, trying to erase the traces of what the guys did to her in the sand.

Because she's fiercely loyal — and because she never backs down from a fight — Lou confronts the perpetrator the next day, destroying his car with a steel pipe. It's an exhilarating scene, echoing the short film of the same name that Mozaffari made as her thesis film at Ryerson U., but one can already anticipate there being consequences. This is not the way society deals with such situations. (In fact, society does not deal with such situations, essentially obliging young women to accept being mistreated.) Lou's mother (Tamara LeClair) doesn't ask why her daughter acted out, doesn't care that Chantal may have been raped, but instantly steps in to manage the incident, taking the money they've saved to skip town and giving it to the boy whose car they damaged.

With their escape kitty depleted and the screws tightening around them, the two girls find their plans foiled and their friendship tested. Because "Firecrackers" belongs to a familiar genre of small-town indies, we can anticipate how things will work out, and yet Mozaffari manages to surprise with the details. Occasionally, moments are so elliptical as to be unclear, but even then, they make an impression. There are tender scenes — as when Johnny (David Kingston), the sensitive new guy Lou's mom is dating, convinces Lou's possibly closeted kid brother (Callum Thompson) to cut his hair — and there are terrifying ones as well, like the time a circle of drunken guys pressures Johnny to put the barrel of his BB gun in Chantal's mouth. No wonder these two are primed to explode. (RTRS)

LOS ANGELES: "Avengers: Endgame" has broken just about every box office record this year, but there's at least one film that has managed to surpass a benchmark set by the superhero blockbuster: A24's "The Farewell" now holds the best per-screen-average of 2019.

The comedic drama, directed by Lulu Wang and starring Awkwafina, generated \$351,330 when it opened in four venues: AMC Lincoln Square and the Angelika in New York and ArcLight Cinemas and The Landmark in Los Angeles. Despite a power outage in New York City Saturday night that caused AMC Lincoln Square to temporarily close, "The Farewell" averaged a huge \$87,833 from each location.

Prior to "The Farewell", the biggest screen average of 2019 belonged to "Avengers: Endgame" with \$76,601 per location. However, the Disney-Marvel blockbuster got its start in slightly more venues, kicking off in a record 4,662 North American theaters.

Upon learning about the New York City blackout, Wang jokingly offered to host a watch party at her place. (RTRS)

LOS ANGELES: Jack Reynor, who recently starred in A24's "Midsummer", makes his directorial debut with the short film "Bainne".

The film's trailer, which debuted recently, shares a brief glimpse into Reynor's vision, featuring black and white footage of actor Will Poulter in ominous conditions, set in the Irish countryside during the great famine.

"I'm really proud of it, you know. It was my first opportunity to really get on the camera and to design my own shot list, to think about the composition of a frame and everything that I could use within it to say something," Reynor recently told Variety's Marc Malkin on the "The Big Ticket" podcast.

"Right off the back of 'Midsummer', I came home and then went into production," the actor recalled, saying that the film was a "personal one" for him. Reynor also wrote the film,

which was inspired by his love of Japanese cinema, particularly Masaki Kobayashi's film "Kwaidan", an anthology of four ghost stories. (RTRS)

LOS ANGELES: "Rocketman" filmmaker Dexter Fletcher has come on board to direct the latest "Sherlock Holmes" film, with



Downey Jr



Reynor

second bringing in \$545.4 million worldwide.

Sources say Warner Bros had always planned on making a third film. However, Downey's busy schedule as Iron Man prevented any new filming for the series. The forthcoming entry of the mystery series is expected to hit theaters on Dec 21, 2021.

Jude Law is also expected to return as Professor Watson.

Chris Brancato is penning the script, while Susan Downey, Joel Silver, Dan Lin and Lionel Wigram are producing. The studio had originally announced that the film would open on Christmas Day of 2020 but pushed back the date last March. (RTRS)