

TELLURIDE REVIEWS

CINERAMA ADVENTURE ★★★

Directed and written by David Strohmaier. Produced by Randy Gitsch. No distributor set. Documentary. Not yet rated. Running time: 99 min.

"Cinerama Adventure" is a well-researched documentary on Cinerama, the motion picture process filmed with three cameras and exhibited with three projectors. The wide screen, curved like the eye retina, gave the sense of peripheral vision. Extensive interviews describe different aspects of the Cinerama productions as well as the effect of the new process on the film industry.

The first feature was "This is Cinerama," a 1952 travelogue. Wide-screen sequences like a roller-coaster ride gave the audience a heightened sense of reality. While playing at only one New York theatre, the film became the year's top grosser.

Debbie Reynolds and Carroll Baker talk about the unique challenge of acting for the three-camera process in "How the West Was Won" (1962), the last feature in the three-screen Cinerama format. Scenes from Cinerama films were digitally altered and curved to simulate the Cinerama viewing experience in the documentary. This "Adventure" is an entertaining and informative look at a special motion picture experience. —Ed Scheid

ONLY THE STRONG SURVIVE

★★★★1/2

Directed by Chris Hegedus and D. A. Pennebaker. Produced by Roger Friedman and Frazer Pennebaker. A Miramax release. Documentary. Not yet rated. Running time: 97 min.

D. A. Pennebaker was one of the pioneers of the cinema vérité filmmaking style, which used a portable camera with synchronized sound for a sense of intimacy with the documentary subject. Since 1977, Pennebaker has been collaborating with Chris Hegedus on a wide range of documentaries, including "The War Room" and "Down From the Mountain." "Only the Strong Survive," another of their films on musicians, investigates the stars of rhythm & blues and soul music from the 1960s and early 1970s, following the artists who remain active today.

Clips and photos from the soul music era are followed by revealing interviews and performances filmed in 1999 and 2000. Rufus Thomas, known as Memphis' other "King" (besides Elvis) for his hit records, still had a weekly radio show at the time of filming, and is joined onstage by his daughter, Carla, who once had a stream of soul hits. Wilson Pickett, "The Wild Man of Soul," is shown doing his

first album in a decade, while providing some highly amusing anecdotes about the early days of his career. Mary Wilson, one of the original members of The Supremes, fought for the right to use the name Supremes in her current act. She describes herself as a "well-kept secret." The film's title is certainly appropriate for Sam Moore (from the duo Sam & Dave); Moore talks frankly about his past use of heroin and cocaine and of the time he sold drugs. Other artists who appear include Isaac Hayes (famous for "Shaft"), William Bell, Jerry Butler, Ann Peebles and the Chi Lites.

Shots from multiple camera angles are expertly edited (by a team that includes Hegedus and Pennebaker) to capture the excitement of the live stage performances. The artists remain charismatic presences. Cameras also capture the delight of the audiences as they see how the vitality and talent of the musicians has endured. —Ed Scheid

THE MAN WITHOUT A PAST

★★★★★

Starring Markku Peltola, Kati Outinen and Juhani Niemela. Directed, written and produced by Aki Kaurismäki. A Sony Pictures Classics release. Comedy/Drama. Finnish-language; subtitled. Not yet rated. Running time: 96 min.

In "Man Without a Past," which received the runner-up Grand Jury Prize at Cannes, the unique style of Finnish writer/director Aki Kaurismäki examines life on the margins of society. A man (Markku Peltola) is beaten and robbed. After being left for dead at a hospital, he wakes up, calmly twists his nose into shape and walks out. With no memory of his past, the man tries to build a life. He gets his own living space and some regular work from the Salvation Army, and also begins a tentative romance with co-worker Irma (Kaurismäki regular Kati Outinen). But his new life is continually frustrated by his inability to remember his name.

Kaurismäki's trademark combination of deadpan dialogue and the expressive faces of his cast is extremely effective in building empathy for his characters. Outinen, who won the Best Actress at Cannes, is remarkable in showing Irma's conflicting emotions as the new relationship changes her life, even making a brief scene preparing for a date memorable. The measured pace is enlivened by quirky humor as the script takes some unexpected directions. The amnesiac finds some hidden talent as an impresario as he gets the Salvation Army band to expand their repertoire and gets them some playing gigs. Even a bank robbery has a surprising consequence.

Unlike some of Kaurismäki's earlier black-and-white films, his latest uses bright colors for a strong sense of the setting where many live in makeshift areas. Homeless people and a Salvation Army choir were among the extras, which adds to the authenticity. Kaurismäki's originality makes his "Man" both extremely affecting and engaging. He shows sensitivity to his characters and their resilience without sentimentalizing them. —Ed Scheid

CUCKOO ★★★★★

Starring Anni-Kristiina Juuso, Ville Haapasalo and Viktor Bychkov. Directed and written by Alexander Rogozhkin. Produced by Sergei Selyanov. A Sony Pictures Classics release. Drama. Russian-, Finnish- and Lapp-language; subtitled. Not yet rated. Running time: 104 min.

"Cuckoo" is an unconventional film set during World War II in which the three main characters cannot understand each other's language. In 1944, Finland had been an ally of Nazi Germany. Veiko (Ville Haapasalo), a Finn, is distrusted and abandoned by German soldiers. After being forced wear a German uniform to further endanger him to Russian troops, he is chained to a rock. Before escaping, Veiko views Ivan (Viktor Bychkov), a Russian captain who is under arrest by Soviet military police. Russian planes accidentally bomb the military vehicle taking Ivan, killing his captors.

Anni (Anni-Kristiina Juuso) is a Lapp reindeer farmer. Her husband was drafted four years earlier and has never returned. Anni is burying the dead Russian soldiers when she finds that Ivan, though severely wounded, is still alive. She takes him back to her wooden hut to nurse him to health. Veiko arrives at Anni's farm looking for tools to remove his shackles. He wants to return home but stays at Anni's isolated farm for protection from approaching soldiers.

None of the three knows the others language, leading to a variety of complications. (Subtitles translate all the languages.) The screenplay ingeniously sets up the misunderstandings due to the language barriers, as when Anni tries to convince Ivan that the toadstools that he's proudly picked will make him ill. Writer/director Alexander Rogozhkin deftly combines humor, like Anni's sarcastic and sexual comments to the men that neither understands, with the underlying tension that Ivan mistakenly considers Veiko a Nazi enemy. Veiko is unaware of this hostility. Not being with a man in four years, Anni is attracted to the younger Veiko, making Ivan jealous.