

Only two years old, the Tribeca Film Festival is starting to find a happy medium between civic pride, celebrity flamboyance, and cinephile legitimacy. Crucially, this corporate-powered event has also figured out how to market its identity crisis as a selling point.

This outside festival's third annual edition (May 1 through 9)—the second under the judicious watch of executive director Peter Scarlet (formerly of the San Francisco Film Festival)—is, as advertised, populist and wide-ranging, to the extent that you sometimes wish the programming approach were less big-ten and more in keeping with the fest's own velvet-roped Bloomberg Hospitality Tent (you'll need a \$300 or \$1,200 pass to get in).

Still, inclusiveness has its advantages: Whether you're in search of arthouse exotica, topical docs, freshly restored



rarities, the movie you film-student neighbor made last year, or even if you just really need to catch that Olsen-twins opus a full 72 hours before it lands in your local multiplex, Tribeca has it covered. To help navigate the intimidating sprawl of a program (200-plus entries in nine days and a dozen venues; details at tribecafilmfestival.org), the Voice's critics—after weeks of press screenings and hours of preview tapes—assembled this suspenseful and handpickled, literally all-over-the-map short list of the festival's 25 best, or at least most noteworthy, films. Unless indicated, all titles are without U.S. distribution at press time.

Low Express

25 Movies to Catch at the Tribeca Film Festival



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1/2 PRICE A minor sensation in Paris after Chris Marker proclaimed it the Breathless of a new generation, rite-jagged, dreamy debut featurette from 21-year-old Ido Itz (awesome love interest in *Sofie and Roberto Sueno*) is actually more evocative of two Truffaut films: *The 400 Blows* and *The Wild Child*. Their parents as absent as in a Larry Clark movie, three under-10 siblings survive—even thrive—through a combination of hard-nosed secrecy, fatal incurability, and a rich imaginative life. The handheld DV camera hovers close and stays low, suggesting a sort of kid's p.o.v. and conferring an unfiltered documentary immediacy. **MOVIES LX**

ANOTHER ROAD HOME Beginning with a eulogy by New York-based Israeli filmmaker Danae Elon (daughter of author Amos Elon) to reconnect with her childhood caregiver (a Palestinian), this doc has the makings of diatribe dir. But when Elon meets the man's sons in Paterson, New Jersey, awkward exchanges reveal deep resentments: They recount the risks their father took to work in Israel and the pain of his long absences, Elon's longing for therapeutic catharsis is undercut by the realities of decorum, human frailty, and the inoperability of personal and political. **LAURA SHAGRA**

ARNA'S CHILDREN Acting is like throwing a Molotov cocktail: says one of the titular kids, a member of a theater group for child refugees in the occupied West Bank. A minute later, co-director Juliano Mer Khamis—whose Israeli activist mother began the group—informs us that the young thespian will perish in the Battle of Jenin. Loaded with casually devastating displays of omniscience, this measurable documentary turns to pure war correspondence after the theater has been bulldozed and the barely adult actors have taken their *place in the streets*. **ANDREW SCHW**

patiently awaiting his father's approval. A Sony Classics release, opens May 28. **RK**

CRYSTAL Though touted as documentary, this intriguing video-verité feels too perfectly magic realist to be true, telling the story of a young Kurdish woman who suffers from an ultra-rare medical condition that causes her to excrete bits of painfully gem-hard quartz-like substance from her eyes, womb, and throat. The ex-wife of an abusive older man, she produces more tumor-jewels each day. Director Mania Akbari, lead actress of Karavans's mock-doc *Iran*, skillfully believes-in-or-not take into a potentially *edible*. **ED WALTER**

DELANU Tian Zhuangzhuang, who Springtime in a Small Town opens in return to his ethnographic roots via beautiful, and somewhat opaque documentary on an isolated village on the spectacularly craggy border between China and Tibet. The location is remote and so too the filmmaker's point of view; this idyllic vision of working and hanging out is oddly new age in its flavor. And, as a world premier, it's a coup for Tribeca. **A. HORNBERGER**

EVERY MOTHER'S SON Anyone who has lost a loved one in an unexpected instant knows how incapacitating such loss can be. The three ordinary moms in this documentary (whose sons—Amadou Diallo, Anthony Baez, and Gideon Bush—died in headline encounters with the NYPD) not only endure but emerge as leaders of the city's police-brutality resistance. Resurrecting the furious tension of Giuliani's New York, directors Kelly Anderson and Tami Gold humanize the consequences of a flawed system. **CHISUN LEE**

GUN, GUN German director Peter Timmekauf's bleak

forthcoming *Free Radicals*), the movie features plenty of incidental eccentricity (one score combines night-vision goggles and Kim Jong Il) and a remarkable lead performance from Fabian Hinrichs, whose effervescent stare creates an impenetrable force field of existential radioactivity. **DAVID NG**

LAST LIFE IN THE UNIVERSE This director (and Pratt alum) Pen-ek Ratanasirang teams with Hong Kong-based cinematographer Chris Doyle and Japanese dreamboat Tadanobu Asano for this lovely, bruned rumination on chance, symmetry, and international relations. Asano's real-life book librarian, adult in Bangkok and compulsively concocting suicide scenarios, bonds with a mutually bereft local girl days before the leaves for Osaka. A minor-key ballad filled with delicate but haunting shifts in register, the film is best summed up by its original Thai title—literal translation: *Tiny Enormous Love Story*. A Palm release, opens August. **A.L.**

THE LAST TRAIN Alwey Alekseyevich German, same-named son of the Soviet-era master behind *My Friend Ivan Lapshin* and *Rhapsody*, My Car, co-opts his dad's wilderness mise-en-scène and wartime humanism for this breathtaking debut, a desolating visit to the Soviet front of WWII, wherein a comatose, frostbitten German surgeon wanders into the snowy forests and never comes out. Like a traumatized consciousness, German's movie whittolds claustrophobic and temporal fluidity. It's a smothering, tubercular nightmare of unseen deaths and Sisyphian action, all in startlingly eloquent black-and-white woodcut. **ANDREW**

LIPSTICK & DYNAMITE, **MISS & WINEGAR** Ruth Lehtinen's sleep at the world of female wrestling from the '60s to the '70s reveals a culture that ran the gamut between hard-won liberation and hard-knock abuse. Pioneers describe how they were photographed like glamour girls and trained like Olympians—expected to be ladies on the street, freaks in the bag, and monsters in the ring. Predictably, as these tough broads reveal their glory days, tales of off-hour exploitation by the men who held the purse strings seep through the rosy recollections. **L.S.**

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raped and beaten in her Johannesburg home in 1968—lands an extra layer of empathy to a story in which justice appears more easily attainable than in police. **RK**

THE MATHEW In this hold-over sequel from *East*