

MIFF 2016: Age reviewers call the shots on what's worth seeing



Jerry Lewis in *The Ladies Man*. Photo: Supplied

THE LADIES MAN

The subject of a long-deserved MIFF retrospective, Jerry Lewis in his heyday was not just a brilliant clown, but an artist with a unique approach to colour, framing, sound, editing – in short, everything that makes a film a spectacle. His lavish 1961 second feature is one of his most mind-blowing: he plays a schmuck terrified of women who nonetheless takes a job in an all-female boarding house, with most of the film shot on one vast four-storey set (predating Jacques Tati's imaginary Paris in *Playtime*, and an inspiration for the cross-sectioned ship in Wes Anderson's *The Life Aquatic*). There's no plot, just a series of surrealist detours, including encounters with beatnik vamp "Miss Cartilege" (Sylvia Lewis) and ageing gangster-movie star George Raft (playing himself). To describe this as a personal film would be an understatement: the boarding house suggests a working model of Lewis' mind, always a dizzyingly strange place to be.

Hoyts Melbourne Central, Aug 9, 6.45pm. **JAKE WILSON**



The Family. Photo: Supplied

THE FAMILY

With its drone footage of the woodland properties where the secretive cult The Family carried out its activities from the 1960s to the late 1980s, its moody shots of dappled sunlight filtered through mist rising off Lake Eildon, and its Errol Morris-inspired talking head interviews with the child survivors, Rosie Jones' doco has plenty of style and lots of emotional heft. But even at feature length, there's a sense that there is more to say about the shady goings-on of Anne Hamilton-Byrne's strange sect. Why were 28 children inveigled away and brought up as her own? Who was protecting the well-connected cult? And if, as the film suggests, it is still active, to what end? *The Family* is a fascinating slice of recent Melbourne history even as it suggests there's more to come on this story yet.

Forum, July 30, 4pm, and Aug 11, 11am; ACMI, Aug3, 6.30pm. **KARL QUINN**



The Childhood of a Leader. Photo: Supplied

THE CHILDHOOD OF A LEADER

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As an actor, the American Brady Corbet has worked with some powerhouse European directors – Lars von Trier, Michael Haneke – and some critics felt their hands lying rather too heavily on this first feature, shot in Hungary, about the early stirrings of a future Fascist demagogue. No one, however, could fault his ambition, visual imagination and sense of narrative sweep. Growing up during World War I, a miserably privileged boy (the scarily stary Tom Sweet) is ignored by his American diplomat father (Liam Cunningham), detested by his German mother (Berenice Bejo) and disliked by townsfolk appalled by the temper that hints at his furious future: the film is divided into chapters named after successive tantrums. It's true that, as some have complained, Corbet's account contains no unforeseen insights into the emergence of Fascism, but the grandeur of his vision gives it a mythic power – helped in no small part by Scott Walker's even grander score, which swoops and groans around the story like a howling wind.

Hoyts Melbourne Central, July 31, 4pm, and Forum, Aug 8, 6.30pm. **STEPHANIE BUNBURY**



Christine. Photo: Supplied

CHRISTINE

On July 15, 1974, 29-year-old Florida TV news reporter Christine Chubbuck shot herself in the head, live on air; 14 hours later, she was pronounced dead. Antonio Campos' feature stars Rebecca Hall as Chubbuck, with a supporting cast that includes Michael C. Hall (*Dexter*, *Six Feet Under*) as the news anchor on whom she has a crush and Tracy Letts (*Homeland*) as the station boss who can't quite understand why he hired her. She's a flake, for sure, and she has a unique ability to see only the forest and never the tree (a house fire started by a man smoking in bed is not a story in itself, merely a springboard to a treatise on addiction), but there's something righteous in her earnest pursuit of the lofty. "We're supposed to know better than them," she says, speaking of the viewers' insatiable appetite for sensation. "It's on the job description." Hall is terrific, Campos wrings plenty of dark humour out of the events leading up to the shocking (even when you know it's coming) finale, and the film flirts with multiple explanations for her choice – a history of mental illness; feminist ambition butting up against a hidebound patriarchy; even sexual frustration. Whatever the answer, it's hard not to see the parallel in her frustrations with those of journalists 40-plus years later, as the "if it bleeds it leads" mantra spreads way beyond television into all aspects of the craft.

Hoyts Melbourne Central, Aug 6, 9.15pm; Comedy, Aug 12, 9pm. **KARL QUINN**



Shide Nyima in *Tharlo*. *Photo: Supplied*

THARLO

A middle-aged Tibetan sheep herder who carries an orphaned lamb wherever he goes, *Tharlo* (Shide Nyima) is an odd mix of shrewdness and naivety: he can recite whole sections of Quotations From Chairman Mao, but doesn't know when he was born. Even his name is uncertain: as he tells the local police chief, most people call him Ponytail, for exactly the reason you'd expect. The question of identity proves central to Pema Tseden's deadpan tragicomedy, which follows *Tharlo* as he leaves his mountain home to be photographed for official purposes, only to discover that there are wolves in the city as well. In style this is an orthodox 21st-century art movie, shot in black and white with a minimum of cutting or camera movement, and dwelling at agonising length on the characters' failure to communicate. But it's a character study above all, with Tseden's unsentimental affection for his hero at its moving core.

Kino, Aug 1, 6.45pm, and Aug 13, 6.30pm. **JAKE WILSON**