

Film Festival's Focus Is on Quality of Work, Not National Diversity

From First Arts Page

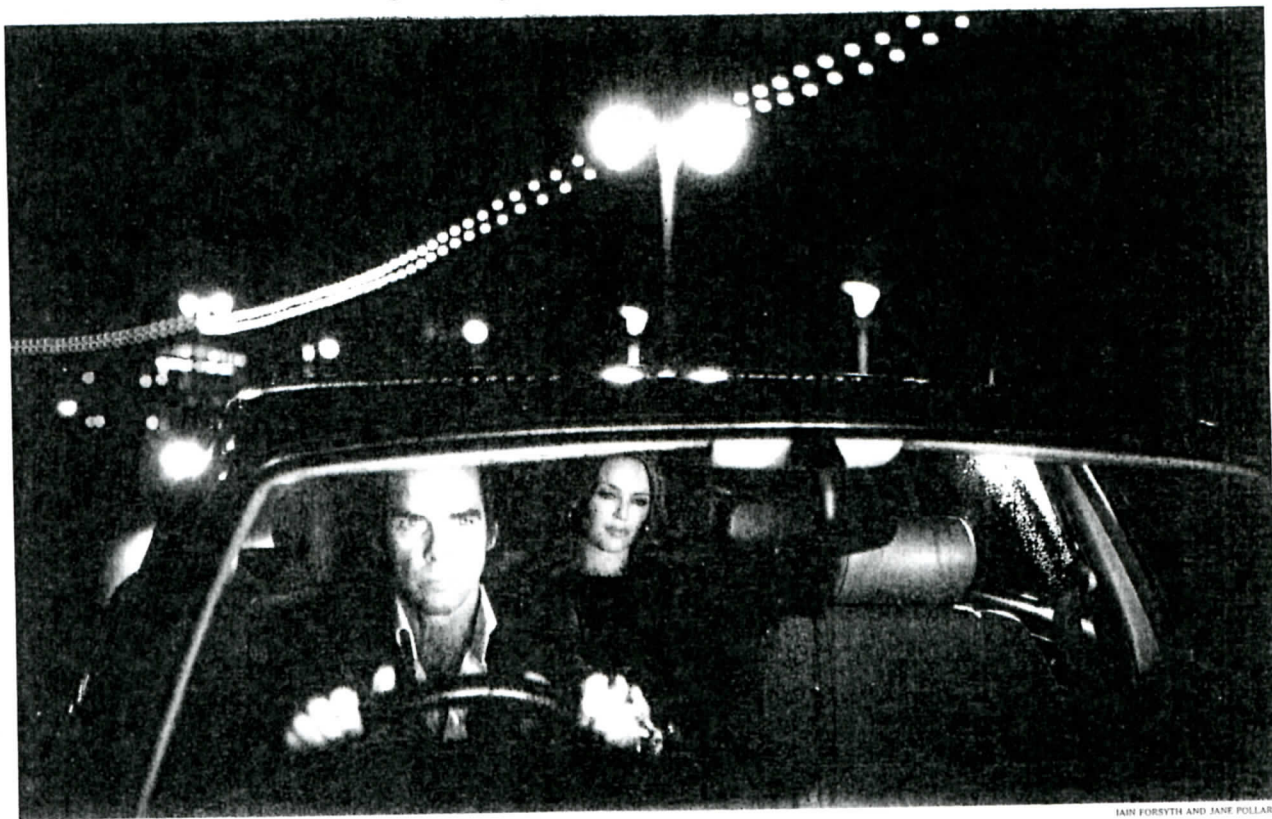
Cave, first seen waking in his light-flooded bed next to his wife, says that he's been alive. As he rises to then play subject and narrator, master of ceremonies and perhaps puppet master, the directors, Iain Forsyth and Jane Pollard, guide you back to many of those days using a handful of conceits, including a therapy session in which Mr. Cave discusses presumably intimate (if obviously not private), meaningful life-changing events, like his father reading aloud passages from "Lolita."

Mr. Cave himself isn't an especially reliable narrator, but he's a thoroughly diverting one, whether he's talking to his on-screen shrink or driving around Brighton, England, where much of the movie unfolds. Every so often, he chauffeurs a friend around the area: Ray Winstone rides shotgun whereas, on another trip, Kylie Minogue, as befits her pop star status, sits in the rear, while she and Mr. Cave discuss their chart-busting collaboration, "Where the Wild Roses Grow." At one point, Mr. Cave visits an archive where he and a handful of archivists pore over old mementos in a fanciful, quietly moving episode that — much like this entire movie — explores the concentric mysteries of memory.

FISH & CAT For its first 30 minutes or so, Shahram Mokri's one-shot Iranian wonder, "Fish & Cat," proceeds fairly straightforwardly, opening on a creepy, dilapidated restaurant where two scowling men are milling outside under a colorless sky. They soon walk into the woods — one carries a jerrycan, while the other hauls a white plastic bag that's turned pink from whatever is inside — where they meet a young man and his father. When the young man walks off, the camera follows him all the way to a lake, where a group of young people has gathered to fly kites, which is where the movie gets wonderfully weird. There, after the young man and another guy exchange looks, the camera begins tagging after this second guy and then it follows a woman he meets, as if the characters were passing the point of view like a baton.

For all their walking and talking, the characters don't go especially far. That's because about 15 minutes after the young man first enters the lake area and sees the other guy, the story jumps back in time to their initial encounter and you see everything again, only this time from a disquietingly different angle. Once again, the camera follows the second guy, only now everything looks a bit different, including the camera position and how the other characters move through the frame. The movie jumps back several times more and, as it leaps from character to character, from one point of view to the next, it adds a new piece of the puzzle (and, alas, a slaughtered bird). It's a tour de force — the cinematographer is Mahmoud Kalari, who shot "A Separation" — and as quietly political as it is brazenly cinematic.

The New Directors/New Films festival runs through Sunday. A full schedule is at newdirectors.org.



IAIN FORSYTH AND JANE POLLARD

The pop stars Nick Cave, driving, and Kylie Minogue, in back, in the experimental documentary "20,000 Days on Earth," part of New Directors/New Films.



KANDON IRAN NOVIN

A scene from the new Iranian film "Fish & Cat," which uses the cinematographer of the lauded film "A Separation."



BEGO ANTON AND ROMÁN YSIÁN

Vicenç Altaïó in the Catalan film "Story of My Death."



FILM MOVEMENT

Saleh Bakri and Sara Serraiocco in the mob film "Salvo," set in Sicily and directed by Fabio Grassadonia and Antonio Piazza.

ONLINE: SLIDE SHOW

More images of movies playing in New Directors/New Films: nytimes.com/movies

ematic.

SALVO A hit man, a blind girl and the Sicilian mob: "Salvo," the first feature from Fabio Grassadonia and Antonio Piazza, sounds as canned as Chef Boyardee. Yet nothing turns out as expected in this tense, beautifully acted movie, which is set against the stark, desolate beauty of Sicily in and around Palermo. It takes off shortly after its title character (Saleh Bakri, a magnetic slab) saves his Mafioso chieftain from several assassins in an abrupt, back alley shoot-'em-up, and

ends up chasing one of the would-be killers back to a house occupied by a blind woman, Rita (Sara Serraiocco), who's counting money. A kind of love story ensues as well as a moral awakening and even something of a miracle that adds some old-time religious mojo to the genre mix for a movie that's at once implausible, impossible, brutal and surprisingly tender.

STORY OF MY DEATH This is the fourth feature from the Catalan director Albert Serra, which makes its inclusion in this particular festival somewhat of a question mark. But Mr. Serra, who's racked up some passionate admirers ("Story of My Death" won top honors at the 2013 Locarno Film Festival), is a largely unknown quantity beyond the inter-

national festival circuit. Written by Mr. Serra, his latest turns on the powdered, bewigged and expiring Casanova (the eminently watchable Vicenç Altaïó), who, in between talking and reading in the penumbral light, indulges in coprophiliac sex and moves his bowels. These modest, meaningless shocks reverberate a little, of course, but are less notable than Mr. Serra's grave self-seriousness and his embrace of so many familiar art film strategies, from nonprofessional actors to long takes, cryptic aperçus and silences. The movie's high jinks, deadpan humor (inadvertent or not) and uneven production values suggest Ed Wood by way of Alexander Sokurov.

Also recommended is "Return to Homs," an unsettlingly inti-

mate, often grimly disturbing combat documentary directed by Talal Derki. Shot largely from inside rebel strongholds in Homs, the besieged Syrian city, during battles from 2011 to 2013, the movie doesn't explain much of anything, but it does put you in the center of the frightening chaos. This isn't for the fainthearted, and viewers should be prepared to see the worst, including the bloodied corpse of a child. On a different note entirely, there's "She's Lost Control," an improbably plotted story about a sex surrogate whose lonely New York life is unpredictably upended when she forms a relationship with a client. The director, Anja Marquardt, may not convince you narratively, but scene to scene, she and her star, Brooke

Bloom, keep you watching and wondering.

Vivian Qu's "Trap Street," set in an appropriately generic Chinese city, opens unpromisingly with lurching tone and broad acting, but flips midway when its protagonist accidentally stumbles on a secret government facility. The Israeli movie "Youth," from Tom Shoval, involves a kidnapping that goes almost predictably wrong, though for somewhat unusual reasons: Its two knuckleheaded criminals (the real-life brothers Eitan and David Cunio) snatch a girl whose family, it turns out, observes Shabbat and won't answer their would-be extortionist calls. It sounds funny, almost ludicrous, but Mr. Shoval isn't remotely playing this for laughs.

Paths That Crossed Cross Again

From First Arts Page

"Mothers and Sons," which opened on Monday night at the John Golden Theater in an impeccably acted production directed by Sheryl Kaller, is wrapped in a sense of urgency that paradoxically

tence: "First it will be a chapter in a history book, then a paragraph, then a footnote. . . . It's already started to happen. I can feel it happening. All the raw edges of pain dulled, deadened, drained away."

That Mr. McNally is doing his



Mothers and Sons

By Terrence McNally; directed by Sheryl Kaller; sets by John Lee Beatty; costumes by Jess Goldstein; lighting by Jeff Croiter; sound by Nevin Steinberg; production stage manager, James Harkner; technical supervisor, Hudson Theatrical Associates; company manager, Edward Nelson; general manager, Richards/Climax Inc. Presented by Tom Kirdashy, Roy Furman, Paula Wagner and Debbie Bisno; Barbara Freitag and Lorrain Alterman; Hunter Arnold, Paul Boskind, Ken Davenport, Lams Productions, Mark Lee and Ed Filipowski, Roberta Pereira/Brunish-Trinchero, Sanford Robinson, Tom Smedes and Peter Stern, and Jack Thomas/Susan Dietz. At the John Golden