

Film Clips

Martin Landau's last movie to screen at CAIFF

By Derek Zemrak

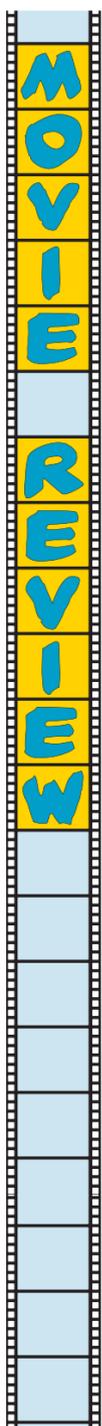


Image provided

With the slogan “Something for Everyone from Around the World,” the California Independent Film Festival is a wonderful experience where you will see films before they are shown in theaters nationwide.

“The Last Poker Game” is one of those movies and it also happens to be Academy Award winner Martin Landau’s last film. I had the opportunity to discuss the movie with Landau before he passed away. He was very proud of “The Last Poker Game,” which was written and directed by first-time filmmaker Howard Weiner. “When I first read it, I really enjoyed it. It was unusual, and it kept unfolding in unpredictable ways,” Landau said.

“The Last Poker Game” tells the story of Dr. Abe Mandelbaum (Landau) who just moved into a new nursing home in Newburyport, Mass., with his ailing wife. After forming an unlikely friendship with a womanizing gambler (Paul Sorvino), their relationship is tested when they each try to convince a mysterious nurse that they are her long-lost father.

Weiner will be in attendance at the Rheem

Theatre screening of “The Last Poker Game” at 8:30 p.m. Friday, Sept. 8. This will be the film’s California premiere.

Weiner is a professor of neurology at Harvard Medical School where he leads research into new ways to treat multiple sclerosis and other neurologic diseases. “The Last Poker Game” began as an unpublished novel, but after a discussion with his son, Ron, Weiner decided to turn the novel into a risqué movie script about two aging men, Sorvino and Landau, who meet in a brand new nursing home, become friends and get mixed up with a mysterious nurse, Maria Dizzia.

Landau said, “The script showed a doctor’s point of view of a nursing home, instead of a Hollywood point of view of a nursing home. It treated older folks with a little more dignity.”

“The Last Poker Game” received rave reviews at New York’s Tribeca Film Festival when it premiered this past spring.

It has a TRT (total running time) of 85 minutes.

‘The Teacher’ underscores the frailties of human decency

By Sophie Braccini



Photo provided

Set in 1983 in then still communist Czechoslovakia, “The Teacher” – which is being shown as part of the International Film Showcase this week at the Orinda Theatre – is a 2016 Slovak-Czech drama written by Petr Jarchovský and directed by Jan Hřebejk that focuses on human selfishness and cowardice, and how these are used by dictatorships to impose dominance.

The film shows how a teacher uses her position as a communist leader to remorselessly exploit her students and families. The thrill is wondering if parents will revolt or not when the situation becomes out of control and painful for some children.

Not without humor, this riveting film invites the audience to think about the role of bystanders. What would we do or tolerate for the perceived advancement of our children or ourselves? Would we be brave enough to stand up when our values are confronted with extreme social pressure?

The teacher comes in warm and assured, a good motherly but strict woman who will instruct seventh-grade students about history and Russian language. As she introduces herself, she also asks students to say who they are and indicate what their parents are doing, which she carefully jots down in her little notebook. As the film develops, nicely constructed between present and past events, segments of what

happened are revealed, layers are peeled away, and the manipulation of the woman who is protected by her status as a communist delegate emerges.

While the movie is about the teacher and how she abuses her power, it is also about the devastating impact on the tweens, their families, and about the reactions of the parents confronted with this abuse. A large majority of the parents go along with the teacher’s schemes and make excuses for her behavior and theirs. A few revolt – some willingly, others out of their inability to comply. In an interview with Variety, Hřebejk confirmed that the film is a universal metaphor, even if it is based on real facts, and that it is a reflection about the bravery that we have to find within ourselves in current times as well as in the past.

The movie shows the harsh reality of Czechoslovakia in the 1980s. A friend of this reporter who left the country around that time noted that all the little things rang true to her: the fact that the astrophysicist is only allowed to clean windows as a job, which she said was a typical punishment for dissidents; the fact that the teacher arranges installation of the telephone in the horrible apartment of the astrophysicist – a huge deal because people waited for many years, even decades to get the phone line; the scarcity of meat and bone marrow (for soup). But while the film de-

nounces communism, it mostly stigmatizes the compliant behaviors of people who go along with bullying and make it all possible. You see everyday pettiness and selfishness because people are either ignorant, afraid or find their own interest in what is happening. The few brave protesters are sometimes found in the most unexpected places.

Just like bullying where bystanders play such an important role, what is difficult to watch is that the first victims are children, or the more vulnerable among the adults. Some, of course, try to do something, like the school administrators who try to build a case against the teacher, but in the end, when everyone is in denial, the administrators do not want to be heroes and risk their future.

The movie takes place in 1983, six years before the 1989 Velvet Revolution that ended the reign of the Czechoslovak communist regime that started in 1948.

Zuzana Mauréry, who plays the teacher, received a Best Actress award at the Czech Republic International Film Festival. She is indeed terribly menacing with her mix of debonair demeanor and veiled threats. The young actors who play the students do so with emotions and determination.

The film is not without ironic humor, what Hřebejk calls the Czech way of fighting injustice. Attentive viewers will notice that at the end of the movie, after the Velvet Revolution and under the new democratic regime, the teacher is shown teaching English, ethics and religion, with a picture of Václav Havel, president of the Czech Republic adorning the wall. And she still has her same little notebook.

“The Teacher” will open in Orinda on Aug. 25 for one week as part of the International Film Showcase. More information, visit Lamorindatheatres.org.

TREE SCULPTURE

COMPLETE TREE CARE
Proudly serving the East Bay since 1965!
 Fully Insured ❖ Certified Arborists ❖ License #655977
(925) 254-7233 ❖ www.treesculpture.com

Bay Area UNDERPINNING
 GENERAL CONTRACTOR LIC. 067128
707 310-0602
www.bayareaunderpinning.org
 GENERAL CONTRACTOR LIC. 067128

Building Foundations

- Lifting
- Leveling
- Stabilizing

Service Clubs Announcements

We meet Friday mornings at 7:00 am at The Lafayette Park Hotel & Spa, Mt. Diablo Blvd, Lafayette. For more info, please email us at lamorindasunrise@gmail.com

August 25	September 1
Lamorinda Sunrise former Membership Chairman and Sergeant-at-Arms, Dennis Kurimai, will share some interesting stories of his life and how he came to be a member of Rotary.	What does it take to be a Successful Entrepreneur? Come join us and find out from our featured speaker Gigi Wang, a leader in global entrepreneurship and innovation at MG-Team, LLC consulting.

We Practice Community Service Locally and Globally

Please submit events:
calendar@lamorindaweekly.com

Lamorinda Weekly

is an independent publication, produced by and for the residents of Lafayette, Moraga and Orinda, CA
 26,600 printed copies, delivered to homes & businesses in Lamorinda.

Contact us:
 Letters to the editor (max 350 words): letters@lamorindaweekly.com
 Delivery issues: homedelivery@lamorindaweekly.com
 Event listings: calendar@lamorindaweekly.com
 Business press releases: storydesk@lamorindaweekly.com
 General interest stories/Community Service: storydesk@lamorindaweekly.com
 School stories/events: storydesk@lamorindaweekly.com
 Sport events/stories/pictures: sportsdesk@lamorindaweekly.com

Publishers/Owners: Andy and Wendy Scheck; andy@lamorindaweekly.com, wendy@lamorindaweekly.com
Editor: Jennifer Wake; jennifer@lamorindaweekly.com
Copy Editor: Nick Marnell; nick@lamorindaweekly.com
Sports Editor: sportsdesk@lamorindaweekly.com
Advertising: 925-377-0977, Wendy Scheck; wendy@lamorindaweekly.com
Staff Writers: Sophie Braccini; sophie@lamorindaweekly.com
 Cathy Dausman; cathy.d@lamorindaweekly.com
 Pippa Fisher; pippa@lamorindaweekly.com
 Nick Marnell; nick@lamorindaweekly.com
 John T. Miller; john@lamorindaweekly.com
 Sora O'Doherty; Sora@lamorindaweekly.com
 Digging Deep: Cynthia Brian; cynthia@lamorindaweekly.com
 Thoughtful Food: Susie Iventosch; suziventosch@gmail.com
Contributing Writers: Conrad Bassett, Amanda Kuehn Carroll, Diane Claytor, Michele Duffy, Amanda Eck, Paula King, B.B. Kaye, Ariel Keys, Michael Lupacchino, Mona Miller, Kara Navolio, Alexandra Reineke, Victor Ryerson, Moya Stone, Jon Kingdon, Derek Zemrak, Gerardo F. Recinos
Calendar Editor: Jaya Griggs; calendar@lamorindaweekly.com
Photos: Tod Fierner, Gint Federas
Layout/Graphics: Andy Scheck. Printed in CA.

Mailing address:
 Lamorinda Weekly, P.O. Box 6133,
 Moraga, CA 94570-6133
 Phone: 925-377-0977; Fax: 1-800-690-8136
 email: info@lamorindaweekly.com
 website: www.lamorindaweekly.com