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Screening Room

## Millennium-Themed Foreign Films Catch Characters at a Personal Crossroads

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The UCLA Film and Television Archive's "2000 Seen By . . ." is composed of seven films, two feature length, the others running 60 minutes plus, commissioned by the French TV companies Le Sept Arte and Haut et Court to mark the advent of the 21st century. The series opens tonight at 7:30 in UCLA's Melnitz Hall with the most conventional of the seven, Ildiko Enyedi's "Tamas and Juli," in which a shy, tongue-tied young Hungarian coal miner (David Janosi) and a pretty schoolteacher (Marta Angyal), long attracted to each other, finally agree to a New Year's Eve date only to have the miner find he must work that night and has no way of contacting her. Enyedi works up some suspense, sends an it's-always-later-than-you-think message, but her film, for all its skill, seems but a contrivance and not up to the level of her imaginative debut feature, "My 20th Century." It will be followed by Laurent Contet's taut and unsettling "The 'Sanguinaires,'" in which an uptight travel agent (Frederic Pierrot) persuades a large group of friends to join him on a remote Mediterranean island to avoid the millennial hoopla only to discover human nature is not so easily escaped. The provocative ending is a stunner.

Not surprisingly, Taiwan's Tsai Ming-Liang's 95-minute "The Hole" (Saturday at 7:30 p.m.) is the knockout of the group, for such films as "Rebels of the Neon Gods," "Vive l'Amour!" and "The River" have established him as one of the most provocative filmmakers in the world, an original and master delineator of contemporary alienation. In "The Hole" the rain never seems to stop, a mysterious viral epidemic looms, and in a drab, huge housing project a young woman (Yang Kuei-Mei) battles a bad case of water seepage. A plumber leaves a hole in her ceiling, allowing the grocer (Lee Kang-Sheng) who lives above her to peer into her apartment. With dark absurdist humor Tsai spins his increasingly erotic tale.

For "Life on Earth" (Sunday at 7 p.m.), filmmaker Abderrahmane Sissako returned to his native Mali village, where not much happens, yet he suggests this community of mud huts is in touch with the larger world. He worked without a script and, frankly, tedium results. Happily, it will be followed by Miguel Albaladejo's hearty 84-minute comedy "The First Night of My Life," set on the last day and evening of the 20th century. The multi-character story begins when a young married couple, Manuel (Juanjo Martinez) and the very expectant Paloma (Leonor Watling), take off to see her parents, not knowing that Paloma's father (Emilio Gutierrez Caba), who disapproves strongly of his social-worker son-in-law, is already on his way to pick them up. Their adventures take them across a lively cross-section of Madrid society; while Albaladejo, in a potent directorial debut, takes note of social ills and inequities, he ends on a note of hope. If his film is unapologetically sentimental, it is also highly entertaining.

Leave it to "Ma Vie en Rose's" Alain Berliner to come up with something venturesome and surreal, as he takes on the chronic enmity between Belgium's northern Flemings and southern, French-speaking Walloons in his caustic, timely prophecy "The Wall" (Tuesday at 7:30 p.m.). Berliner will appear at the screening of the film, in which his portly young hero, Albert (Daniel Hanssens), a Walloon, literally straddles the linguistic border with his chips van--when he hands his customers their order, along with a fortune cookie (for which he writes the messages), he is in Flanders, but when he plunges his potatoes in boiling oil he is on the Francophile side of Brussels. But then at the stroke of midnight on New Year's Eve. . . .

The series concludes Thursday at 7:30 with Hal Hartley's highly ambitious "The Book of Life," in which he envisions a Jesus (Martin Donovan, a Hartley favorite) in a suit and tie arriving by plane in New York, accompanied by Mary Magdalene (P.J. Harvey) to do battle with the devil for various human souls on the last day of the 20th century. Reworked from a Hartley play-in-progress, it's heavily, indeed wearily, allegorical. (310) 206-FILM.

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As part of USC's "Interactive Frictions" conference and exhibition--exploring interactive narrative through a gathering of cyber-culture theorists, critics and artists--"Doors to the Labyrinth," an experiment funded by the Annenberg Center of Communication, is composed of three CD-ROMS. Two were created by leading experimental filmmakers Nina Menkes and Pat O'Neill, and a third was inspired by the work and life of novelist John Rechy. These CD-ROMs will be projected on a wall at USC Fisher Gallery (832 Exposition Blvd.), with the viewer able to select a range of paths through the work. Previewed on a computer, "Doors to the Labyrinth" suggests infinite possibilities in exploring the psyche and imagination of artists working in a wide range of media.

With "The Crazy Bloody Female Center," Menkes invites you into the experience of a woman "haunted by circling images, trapped in violence," a theme that runs through all her work, which you may rearrange at will, discovering new connections within it and incorporating new sequences shot in war-ravaged Beirut. (Menkes' future film projects include "Heatstroke," to be produced by Gus Van Sant, a surreal drama about the broken relationship between two sisters.)

Pat O'Neill's "HO EL BASSA: Traces of Noir," explores in dreamlike, surreal fashion the long-closed Hotel Ambassador, famous for its rich history and its architecture as part of the Wilshire Corridor.

Written, directed and produced by USC professor Marsha Kinder, who is the director of the Labyrinth project, "Mysteries and Desires: Searching the Worlds of John Rechy" interweaves three parts, "Memories, Bodies and Cruising," which bring alive visually Rechy's

reflections upon his complex, impassioned life of a gay icon. (You can even move back and forth between the CD-ROMs of Menkes and Rechy.) For more information about "Interactive Frictions," contact Mary C. Carney at (213) 743-2524.

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No one epitomized the Roaring '20s on the screen more than Clara Bow, a dazzling, redheaded bundle of uninhibited energy with sparkling eyes, radiant smile and natural acting talent. Bow emerged from a poverty-stricken, unspeakably abusive Brooklyn childhood to become the definitive flapper. Yet she was a has-been by 25, crippled by movie fright and plagued by scandal. Exploited ruthlessly by her mentor, producer B.P. Schulberg, Bow, exhausted and demoralized, became increasingly vulnerable to the harm she suffered as a child.

Nonetheless, she rallied, married her handsome true love, cowboy star Rex Bell, and retired to a Nevada ranch where she raised two sons, emerging only to make two final films at Fox, "Call Her Savage" (1932) and "Hoopla" (1933), both successes.

Hugh Munro Neely and Elaina Archer's one-hour "Clara Bow: Discovering the 'It' Girl" is an incisive, insightful introduction to the tumultuous life and career of one of Hollywood's great, definitive stars that draws upon wonderful clips and reminiscences of those who knew her, including her eldest son, Rex Bell Jr. Serving as special consultant is TV writer-producer David Stenn, author of the illuminating and unforgettable "Clara Bow: Runnin' Wild." Courtney Love narrates.

It will screen Friday at 7:30 p.m. at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (5905 Wilshire Blvd.), prior to its initial airing June 14 at 5 p.m. on Turner Classic Movies. LACMA also will screen "The Plastic Age" (1925), which is fascinating not only as a terrific showcase for Bow but also as a social documentary of the flapper era. Wesley Ruggles directed from Eve Unsell and Frederica Sagor's adaptation of Percy Marks' story. In attendance will be Sagor, who brought the Marks novel to the attention of Schulberg, which proved pivotal in the careers of both Bow and Sagor. With live musical accompaniment by Robert Israel. (323) 857-6177.

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Rea Tajiri's impressive "Strawberry Fields," which opens a regular run Friday at the Grande 4-Plex (Figueroa Avenue at 3rd Street), and the University Cinema in Irvine, is a tough-minded, idiosyncratic coming-of-age story in which a 16-year-old Midwestern Japanese American girl (Suzy Nakamura) discovers how crucial it is for her to confront the heritage of the World War II internment camps, an experience her family would rather repress. On June 19, "Strawberry Fields" commences an open run at the Monica 4-Plex (1332 2nd St., Santa Monica) on Saturdays and Sundays at 11 a.m. University Cinema: (949) 854-8811.

Also opening Friday at the Grande 4-Plex is Shundo Ohkawa's "Nobody," a taut action thriller set in motion by a remark made in a bar by a Tokyo advertising executive criticizing the "tacky" appearance of a nearby trio of conservatively dressed men, who are enraged upon overhearing the put-down. Information: (213) 617-3084.