

# A FANTASTIC WOMAN

**Monday, April 23, 7:30 pm**

*Reviewed by A. O. Scott / New York Times* Rated PG 89 Mins.

The title of Sebastián Lelio's new film might seem a bit on the nose. It's a fantastic movie. Daniela Vega, the star, is fantastic in it. Quote me in the ads, with exclamation points if you must. My work here is done.

O.K., not really. "A Fantastic Woman" is at once a straightforward story of self-assertion and defiance and a complex study of the nuances of identity. The complications extend to the title. Marina (Ms. Vega), a waitress and sometime cabaret singer who lives in Santiago, Chile, seems at first to fulfill the romantic fantasies of her lover, Orlando (Francisco Reyes). Later, her daily routines — and Mr. Lelio's adherence to the conventions of realism — will be disrupted by moments of fantastical spectacle and surreality. And in the course of a series of ordeals that begins with Orlando's death, many of the people Marina encounters will question whether she's really a woman at all.



Like the heroine of Mr. Lelio's previous film, "Gloria" (2013), Marina insists on her own dignity — her basic rights to respect, safety and the pursuit of pleasure — in the face of condescension, indifference and contempt. Their situations are not identical: Gloria is a middle-aged, upper-middle-class, divorced mother; Marina is young, transgender and from a modest background. But they both rebel against a stubbornly patriarchal society that pushes them to the margins and expects them to be content with a half-invisible, second-class status.

Almost as soon as Marina arrives at the hospital with Orlando — who has suffered an aneurysm in the middle of the night — she is treated less as a person than as a problem. Doctors and security officers use the masculine pronoun to refer to her, and pepper her with prying, suspicious questions. She is visited at work by a detective (Amparo Noguera) whose due diligence slides into harassment and humiliation.

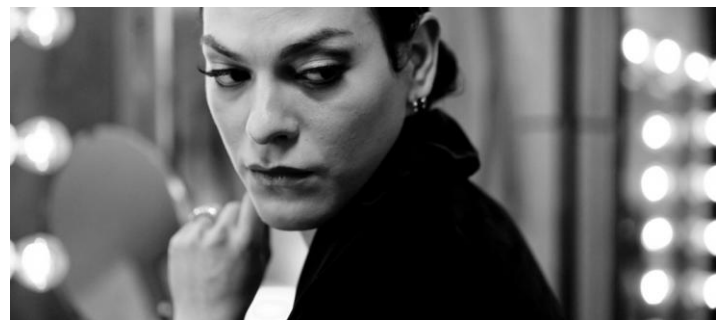
Orlando's former wife (Aline Kuppenheim) and adult son (Nicolás Saavedra) at first regard Marina with icy tolerance. They are still clearly baffled and appalled that Orlando was involved with her, and

the film is sympathetic to their anguish and confusion without excusing their hostility. Marina, too, tries to give them room to grieve, but the distraction they demand turns into something else: the denial of her love for Orlando and her right to mourn him. She is barred from his funeral and threatened with eviction from the apartment they shared. Orlando's son takes the dog. As things get uglier, Marina is increasingly unprotected and alone.



It would be absurd to minimize the political impulse and import of "A Fantastic Woman," or to universalize its specific, precisely observed depiction of injustice. Marina is, to some degree, a representative woman, whose experiences reveal a deeply held prejudice hardly limited to Chile. But Mr. Lelio and Ms. Vega are less invested in her symbolic status than in her living presence. She has a charisma that defies pity and a sense of poise that can be both intimidating and heartbreaking.

Psychologically astute and socially aware as the film is, it is also infused with mystery and melodrama, with bright colors and emotional shadows. Almodóvarian and Buñuelian grace notes adorn its matter-of-fact melody, and its surface modesty camouflages an unruly, extravagant spirit. You may not realize until the very end that you have been gazing at the portrait of an artist in the throes of self-creation.



In Spanish, with English subtitles.

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# LOVELESS

Monday, May 7, 7:30 pm

By Justin Chang / LA Times

Rated R

127 Mins.

Boris and Zhenya loathe each other, and chances are you will loathe them too. She spends every moment in his presence lashing him verbally; he absorbs every blow with a sluggard's indifference. They have a young son that neither wants or cares about.



Their ruin of a marriage is on cruel, unvarnished display in "Loveless," the fifth feature directed by the gifted Russian auteur Andrey Zvyagintsev, who examines their household in the manner of a pathologist performing an autopsy.

Pathologies of every sort abound in this corrosive and hypnotic movie, a story of domestic collapse that slowly develops into a withering snapshot of contemporary Russian malaise. That makes it of a piece with Zvyagintsev's earlier work, especially his Oscar-nominated 2014 film, "Leviathan," an intimate family drama that expanded into a seething, sweeping indictment of Vladimir Putin's regime, full of liquored outbursts, biblical allusions and satirical jabs at the unholy alliance of church and state.

"Loveless," Russia's entry in in this year's foreign-language film Oscar race, is a smaller, more self-contained picture, and both its human drama and its social critique feel more glancing, more thinly dispersed. If the proud, fallible characters in "Leviathan" largely held our sympathies, Zvyagintsev keeps Boris and Zhenya at a glassy remove, not inviting our commiseration so much as our contempt.

The two have already called it quits before the story opens, sometime in 2012. Zhenya, a beauty who runs a salon, is already dating a wealthy older businessman, Anton. Boris, bearded and brawny, has a desk job at an anonymous firm and a pregnant young girlfriend, Masha. All that remains is for the soon-to-be-exes to rid themselves of their suburban Moscow apartment and their 12-year-old son, Alyosha, whom they plan to ship off to boarding school until his inevitable military training.

Novikov is on screen for only a few minutes but that's all this young actor needs to make a devastating impression. Whether Alyosha is trudging home from school in the snow or glaring as his mother shows their apartment to potential tenants, his every glance and gesture bespeaks years of emotional damage. Few shots in any movie this year are more brutalizing than the one in Alyosha stands listening to every word of his parents' argument, his face frozen in the silent scream of the desperately unloved.

The next day Alyosha vanishes, though his parents are so busy and self-absorbed that another day passes before they even realize

the boy is missing. There is a measure of satisfaction in seeing Boris and Zhenya shocked at having their wish — that their son would, in effect, disappear — granted so swiftly. Did Alyosha run away, or was he kidnapped? "Loveless" poses a still more troubling question: Is this a world that, in any meaningful sense, deserves its children?

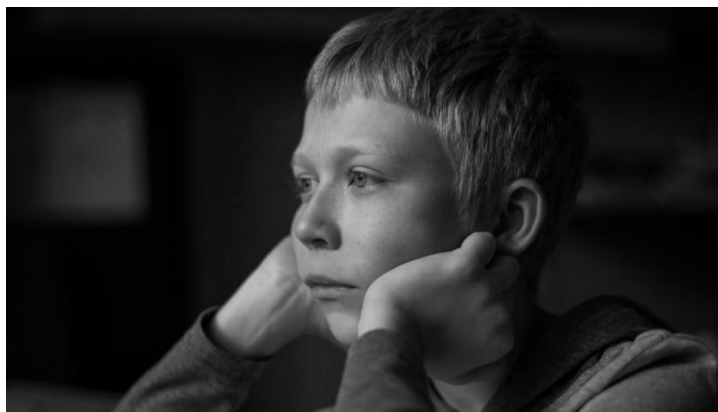
The answer may be no, but the movie, written by Zvyagintsev and his regular collaborator Oleg Negin, finds about a hundred different ways of saying it. A visit to Alyosha's estranged grandmother suggests that Zhenya, for all her failures as a mother, has made the best of a grim legacy.

Boris' office chatter reminds us that, in an ostensibly Christian culture that frowns on divorce, people often hold onto their spouses and children just to save face. Grim headlines about looming disasters in Ukraine and elsewhere blare from every radio and TV screen, drowned out by the vapid allure of Instagram feeds and other technological distractions.

Meanwhile, the police are too bogged down to do much more than cough up encouraging statistics about child runaways. Boris and Zhenya, their mutual hatred exacerbated rather than assuaged by this tragic turn, have no choice but to call on a dedicated volunteer squad to lead a search-and-rescue mission. The shots of the volunteers quietly at work yield some of the picture's most haunting and crystalline images, the camera slowly moving across gloomy wooded terrain and into squalid derelict buildings, tracing an arc from natural beauty to man-made entropy.

There is a grave majesty in these cold environs, brilliantly captured by Zvyagintsev's regular cinematographer, Mikhail Krichman. Since the director's arrival with his remarkable first feature, "The Return" (2003), his feel for the metaphysical power of landscape — distilled in compositions and camera movements that can take your breath away — has earned him comparisons to his countryman Andrei Tarkovsky, the auteur behind such cinematic monuments as "Solaris" and "Andrei Rublev."

Again and again, Zvyagintsev shoots his characters through car windshields, rain-flecked windows and other glass surfaces, as if he were trying not only to see through to their souls, but also to view them as projections — living representations of a society mired in cruelty, selfishness and apathy. Boris and Zhenya's marriage is both a symptom and a symbol of this problem, and their efforts to start their lives anew, casting off the child that binds them together, suggests a desire to plead ignorance of a bitter past and rush foolishly forward into an uncertain future.



Is Alyosha an emblem of lost promise, of a new generation doomed to be far worse off than the one before it? These questions may be rooted in Russian soil, but Zvyagintsev knows they are hardly unique to his country alone. Toward the end of this searing, finally overwhelming film, it's unclear which is the more disturbing realization: that Alyosha was lost long before he went missing, or that you don't really want him to be found. In Russian with English subtitles.

# LEANING INTO THE WIND

Monday, May 21, 7:30 pm

Reviewed by Ty Burr / Boston Globe Not Rated 93 Mins.

Plenty of us climb through hedges, but Andy Goldsworthy does it the hard way, from one end to the other. In one scene in "Leaning Into the Wind — Andy Goldsworthy," a new documentary by Thomas Riedelsheimer, there's what the British might politely call a bustle in a hedgerow along a busy urban street, and suddenly the artist emerges from the foliage, gray-haired and blinking, having crawled along the block through leaf and branch.

Over the course of a 40-year career, Goldsworthy has become celebrated around the world for the evanescent artworks he creates out of stone and water, leaf and ice. Some last until the day warms up and are memorialized only in photographs. Others, like the low stone wall that serpentine through the trees, under a river, and up a slope at Storm King in New York state, will be around long enough to baffle the aliens after we're gone.

Back in 2001, Riedelsheimer, a German filmmaker with an interest in the arts, brought Goldsworthy to filmgoers' attention with "Rivers and Tides," in which the British-born sculptor waxed thoughtful on his philosophies of life and spent long minutes creating his works, icicle by icicle, branch by branch, only to watch them be swept away.

It's a lovely film and it stands on its own, so why have another go 16 years later? Because artists change, age, and go through distinct periods, and because Goldsworthy, at 61, appears to be going through a period in which he seems to want to physically merge with his art.

Thus the hedge-climbing, a bit of performance art so buried in nature the camera sometimes can't even capture it. Riedelsheimer does film another tree-walk, along a skeletal line of branches in the countryside, Goldsworthy picking his way along their tops in horizontal silhouette. And one of the artist's long-established gambits — in which he lies down at the start of a light rain and reveals, upon getting up, a perfect human negative in dry pavement or gravel — seems to have become a late-life obsession.

Utilizing an angular soundtrack from British avant-rocker Fred Frith (with an assist from the deaf Scottish percussionist Evelyn Glennie, herself the subject of a wonderful Riedelsheimer film, 2004's "Touch the Sound"), "Leaning Into the Wind" hopscotches around the globe, visiting commissioned projects in Gabon, New Hampshire, the South of France, and San Francisco. The film loops continually back to Goldsworthy's home base in Dumfriesshire,

Scotland, and, in particular, to a narrow riverway surrounded by a copse of trees.

The site is his fountain of youth, and he repairs there to make art — aligning bright yellow elm leaves around cracks in fallen trees until they resemble found lightning bolts — and to disappear into the landscape. "Huge dramas occur in here," he says.

There's a lot of Goldsworthy talking in the film, in dreamily earthy abstractions that occasionally part to reveal a knottier man than he lets on. A passing reference to a past divorce and a past death is balanced by the appearance of the artist's daughter Holly, seen in childhood videos and in her current 20s, her father's assistant in the field and (although the movie doesn't mention it) an artist in her own right. She's his literal handmaiden, helping him coat his hands with red poppy leaves until they resemble bloody gloves and then letting a waterfall wash them away in seconds.



As with the simpler and stronger "Rivers and Tides," there are moments where you may want to stop the film to assure yourself you're seeing what you're seeing, so disordering to the senses are Goldsworthy's re-orderings of nature. A stone wall in New Hampshire is split perfectly down the middle — a wall for keeping people in rather than out. A bucket of cattle-feed set atop a white tarp in a country field results in an almost perfect Zen circle, created not by man but by sheep. A sunspot on a cabin floor becomes a sculpture in light with the addition of a handful of dust.

By the final scenes, Goldsworthy is pushing himself against a gale-force wind on a rocky slope, waving his arms and trying to sculpt the air itself. Or is the air sculpting him? The film leaves the artist hanging and the matter up to us.

Which is not to suggest that there is anything naïve or fantastical about this tale of struggle and resilience. On the contrary, it's at once honest and artful, a touching and clear-sighted declaration of faith in people and in movies.

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restorative...This movie is a knockout!"

*David Rooney, Hollywood Reporter*

Monday, April 23 at 7:30 pm



"Zvyagintsev once again demonstrates his  
remarkable gift!"

*Hollywood Reporter*

Monday, May 7 at 7:30 pm

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"This movie is a feast. Peel your obs and dig in!"

*Lisa Jensen, Good Times Santa Cruz*

Monday, May 21 at 7:30 pm

