

Three Minutes A Lengthening

Monday, September 19, 7:30 pm

Reviewed by Matt Zoller Seitz | RogerEbert.com | Rated PG | 69 Mins.

Bianca Stigter's documentary "Three Minutes: A Lengthening" is a great film about filmmaking and a quietly devastating memorial for lives long gone. The title tells you what it is: Stigter takes a three-minute reel of faded 16mm color home movie footage taken in 1938 in the Jewish quarter of Nasielsk, Poland, and scrutinizes it—not just to identify the people pictured in it, but to explore the town, the neighborhood, the community, and the little details of daily life that often get neglected.



There are no on-camera interviews, only the voices of people who were there, or who know people who were there, or who know things about Poland in the thirties, particularly about the Jewish experience. Sometimes Helena Bonham-Carter reads scholarly material that presumably is a distillation of things the director and her team learned during the course of the project but that aren't attributable to any specific interviewee. The footage is slowed down, freeze-framed, zoomed in on. Sometimes it is slowly run backwards and forwards (creating kind of a pendulum effect) as an interviewee talks about their personal knowledge of a particular face in a crowd. As that person speaks, we may wonder which of the faces they're talking about, though usually we have a pretty good idea; the arc of the back-and-forth pendulum shortens until we settle on the person and the image freeze-frames, catching a moment in time and holding it.

The word "granular" is typically used as a metaphor to suggest focus and thoroughness, but it applies literally in this case. When we hear a witness speaking about what happened to one of two Lions of Judah that used to be on the door of a synagogue, or when Carter reads observations about the social and economic aspects

of the colors seen in women's clothes, or when we learn about what the difference in boys' hats tells us about how much money their families probably had, we're examining clots of film grain in tiny sections of individual frames. We might as well be in a museum looking at an impressionist painting: blobs of celluloid instead of paint.

We know how this story ended, historically speaking. By the end of the war, there were only 100 Jews left in the neighborhood, the rest having been relocated and murdered en masse by Nazis and their enablers. The final section of the film deals with the deportation of the community in a manner consistent with the rest of the film.

There is a fundamental benevolence and generosity to the very idea of making a movie like this, although if such emotions were inherent to the production, we'd never know from the way the material is presented. It has been described as a forensic exercise but that adjective is loaded with associations from forensic science. "Three Minutes: A Lengthening" is showing us people and things that no longer exist, but the respectful and innovative approach to just three minutes of footage gives life, briefly, to a community on the cusp of obliteration.

The home movie was shot by a then-young David Kurtz, and then donated by his grandson Glenn to the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, which made the digital copy that is used for some of the more penetrating examinations of sections of footage and bits of individual frames. The Museum posted it online, and one of the people who saw it identified her grandfather in a crowd of boys.

Some questions go unanswered due to the dwindling number of witnesses and neighborhood survivors, the fuzziness of some parts of frames, and the condition of the print. Digital enhancements are attempted only briefly, to answer specific questions. The rest of the exercise tries to present the footage as we might experience it if we were watching the original reel of film run through a projector and cast upon a screen. The film's respect for the physical reality of its only visual source text translates into a feeling that we are in the hands of artists who have enough respect for the subject not to try to hype it, clean it up, or distort it. They are serving the material, not using it.

The movie is also attuned to the day-to-day practice of historical research. Even when the big picture is clear, some parts of it remain fuzzy, and the historian has to accept defeat and hope somebody else will figure out what they couldn't. Early in the film, Glenn Kurtz fixates on a sign over a business that has three lines of text. The middle one is legible because it's big. The ones above and below are too small, and digital enhancement is unsuccessful at intuiting what the words might have said. That mystery, like some others investigated by the movie, goes unsolved. There's a humility to including failures among the successes, of which there are many—so many, in fact, that "Three Minutes: A Lengthening" inadvertently also becomes a rebuke to storytellers who don't realize what treasures they have in hand because they haven't taken the time to really, really look at them.

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Monday, October 3, 7:30 pm

Reviewed by Robert Abele | Los Angeles Times | Not Rated | 101 Mins.

With all the flushed-cheeks goings-on in the Finnish film “Girl Picture” — a fleet, charged portrait of three adolescent females navigating flights of passion — you could front-load a week’s worth of message-heavy after-school specials.

But thankfully, we’re in the hands of a sensitive, nonjudgmental filmmaker in Alli Haapasalo, who’d rather spark our empathy observing almost-womanhood’s joys and sorrows than be one more moralist with raised eyebrows and ready lessons. In fact, the actual title, more accurately translated into English as “Girls Girls Girls,” better reflects the celebratory aims of Haapasalo’s third feature, reclaiming as it does a phrase typically used to admonish young women in Finland.



The Times is committed to reviewing theatrical film releases during the COVID-19 pandemic. Because moviegoing carries risks during this time, we remind readers to follow health and safety guidelines as outlined by the CDC and local health officials.

What she has keenly fashioned from a screenplay by Ilona Ahti and Daniela Hakulinen is an embracing, naturalistic triumph about the insights that come with expectations and desire at so tender, idealistic an age, when a moment can feel like an eternity (for good or bad) and every decision possibly the threshold of all that the

future holds. Until, that is, tomorrow promises another chance to feel normal, thwarted or excited all over again.

Tart-tongued cynic Mimmi (Aamu Milonoff) and her sweet-faced bestie, Rönkkö (Eleonoora Kauhanen), are co-employees at a mall smoothie stand selling drinks with ridiculous names like Just Breathe and It Takes Two to Mango. They’re merry outsiders with a tight bond, supporting each other’s neuroses about passion: intellectual Mimmi sees herself as above such concerns, while Ronkko — a romantic who’s no stranger to fumbling sex with boys — fears she can’t experience pleasure.

A clique away in their high school orbit of suburban parties, mall hangs and clubbing is Emma (Linnea Leino), a figure skating prodigy suffering a sudden, worrisome lack of focus, her dream possibly endangered because a Europe-wide competition is around the corner and suddenly, she can’t execute a triple Lutz.

When Mimmi and Emma lock eyes one day at the smoothie counter, there’s an awkward exchange tinged with hostility — the former’s armor of condescension crossing the latter’s open book vulnerability. But there’s an undeniable spark, and a momentous night ensues that reveals a whole new world of feelings, security and identity for both.

Witnessing the change in Mimmi — once baldly dismissive of sports, now head over heels for a training athlete — Rönkkö is spurred to find her own ecstasy and tackle the world of flirting and hookups with an eye toward the sensation she craves, rather than the gratification boys always seem to get. For Emma, meanwhile, the blush of first love is like a wonder drug attacking the pressures of the rink, and it might mean even more.

There are obstacles and setbacks in each girl’s quest, of course, but unlike how we’ve been primed since forever from teen dramas to expect a severe adult, cruel peer or societal rule to take that hindering form, Mimmi, Emma and Rönkkö are refreshingly both their own worst enemies and, in the context of a world that lets them be who they are, their only way forward. In other words, they’re gloriously human, and in this trio of vividly turned performances — especially Leino’s and Milonoff’s, whose eyes and postures convey so much — we feel each start and stop, every rush and ache.

Haapasalo finds the right balance between warmth and anxiety in using a boxy frame — sometimes tight, sometimes tall — for Jarmo Kiuru’s textured cinematography. She uses pop music and nondiegetic scoring confidently too to slide us into her protagonists’ moods or switch scenes to jarring effect.

“Girl Picture” is designed to feel as closely observed as a diary, but it’s also like being pulled along by a friend eager for you to experience what they go through, see things the way they do, to just get it and have a great time too. That’s a special kind of invitation, and “Girl Picture” is more than enough movie to make its compassion for the lives of teenage girls a swirling, swooning high. In Finnish with English subtitles.

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Monday, October 17, 7:30 pm

Reviewed by Chase Hutchinson | Collider | Rated PG | 83 Mins.

Documentaries that set out to tackle complex subjects and narratives in a single feature can be tricky to pull off. While there is often a necessity to condense potentially decades of context to fit within a bounded runtime, history is much broader and more expansive than that. What makes *The Territory* such a stunning and standout work is that it never loses sight of this history that is inexorably intertwined with those living with its repercussions now. A debut feature from director Alex Pritz that won multiple awards at the Sundance Film Festival, it is now getting a release from National Geographic in a moment where it remains as painfully and profoundly relevant as ever. It centers on the Uru-eu-wau-wau Indigenous people and the precarity they face in modern-day Brazil, where the Amazon they have lived in for generations is being decimated. Making matters worse was the election of the far-right nationalist Jair Bolsonaro who has eroded protections for the land and the people that are still living in it.

The documentary grounds itself in this ongoing crisis, revealing in precise detail how it poses an existential threat to both the Uru-eu-wau-wau and the world as a whole due to the devastating impacts this ongoing deforestation has on the climate. The opening text informs us of how this truly began back in the 1980s when the government first made contact with the Indigenous peoples who had remained isolated until that point. This moment had predictably immense consequences that are still being felt now all these decades later as the destruction of what was is continuing to ratchet up unabated. All of the many vibrant and lush details of what remains of this serene world are interwoven throughout all of this, visually communicating just what is being lost as deforestation continues. No one is more aware of this than twenty-year-old Bitatê who we see become a leader that forms a resistance movement to try to stem the tide of destruction. Against long odds and potential annihilation, the documentary becomes as much a portrait of him as it is of the struggle he is facing.

There are plenty of quiet moments where we see him grappling with this responsibility, such as an early discussion where he hears from an elder about how this immense intergenerational struggle for survival will now fall to him. Where the documentary becomes most interesting is when Pritz turns the camera over to the people themselves. While part of this is done out of concerns stemming from the pandemic, it makes for a riveting and quietly revolutionary late act. We get to see them on the ground as they work together to drive off those that want to take the land for themselves. While they can't be everywhere at once, the documentary places us in their hands and sees how they are doing everything they can to protect the future of their people. It is a battle against colonialism playing out in real-time that Pritz, smartly, makes himself as absent in as possible. He is merely there to bear witness and convey the story of the people themselves to us, showing the reality of their precarious existence. It is an overwhelmingly evocative and emotional experience, reverentially delving into this unseen world just as it continually teeters on the edge of irreversible annihilation.

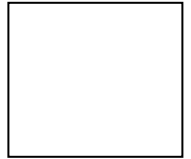
The key to understanding this comes when the documentary zooms out. It spends a large amount of its time with Neidinha, an activist

who has devoted her life to trying to protect the Indigenous groups being threatened. It is a frustrating and even dangerous existence, something Pritz gently unravels by shadowing her on every step of her day. She will go from having to deal with the employees at government agencies supposedly meant to offer support that generally brush her off to then grappling with a death threat made against her children. It fully uncovers the banality and brutality of the work, hitting you with blow after blow until you wonder how anyone could continue to do this. That is when you then realize this is precisely the point: to wear her down. Through stonewalling and intimidation, the hope is that she will eventually give up. The entire structure is built to oppose her and empowers those who will do whatever it takes to get their own piece of the pie. It creates a juxtaposition that shows when all her attempts to work within the system ultimately get shut down, it will fall to the people themselves to find a way to survive. Make no mistake, this is a life or death struggle as we soon see when one of the documentary subjects is murdered. This sends a shock through the film and Pritz doesn't shy away from it while capturing how the fight continues.

We also are shown rather extended interviews with the illegal invaders of the Amazon themselves, a reminder of just how little they believe they will be held accountable for their actions. Some even form collectives, something they anticipate will give them more credibility, while others just make excursions in and set up shop. Many of them speak about how they feel emboldened and backed by the current government, making the demolition they then take part in all the more horrifying. They do everything from cut down trees with growling chainsaws to set fires that become massive blazes. It is all about clearing a path for themselves and the land they believe they are entitled to. Every moment of this feels shocking, as the wanton destruction is done so openly that you realize just how normalized it is. Pritz does not offer any commentary or repeated cutaways in these moments, instead letting them linger so that we understand the scope of what is taking place. It becomes a work of investigative filmmaking that provides proof of just how widespread the destruction is becoming and how, like the fires being set, it has the capacity to consume everything unless something is done to stop it. All of these sequences are contrasted with both the wide landscape shots and quieter on-the-ground ones, ensuring that the film's more grand artistic vision remains simultaneously focused on what is being lost in each passing moment.

Much of this circles back to the way the documentary becomes a work of collaboration. The Uru-eu-wau-wau are not just subjects to be gawked at and scrutinized. Rather, they are documentarians right along with Pritz. They are taking part in the telling of their own story as it is unfolding, capturing evidence of not just what is happening, but of their resilience in the face of repression. All of this is played not to be falsely inspirational or to smooth over just how bad things are. Rather, it is about showing all the many facets of this story that might go overlooked or missed in a documentary that did not trust those at the center of it to help guide the vision. They are a part of this more than anyone, making it not just right that they are part of the creation of it, but essential to crafting the most comprehensive work possible. If anything, there ought to have been more of this collaboration than what we did get. By the time it all comes to a close, there aren't any easy answers to be offered because this is not an easy situation. The deck is stacked against the Uru-eu-wau-wau and they are doing everything they can to play the hand they are dealt for as long as they can, forced to be resourceful out of necessity. *The Territory* is visually magnificent in its construction as it beholds all of this while remaining resolute as it confronts the bleak future ahead. In Portuguese with English subtitles.

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Monday, September 19 at 7:30 pm

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Monday, October 3 at 7:30 pm



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Monday, October 17 at 7:30 pm