

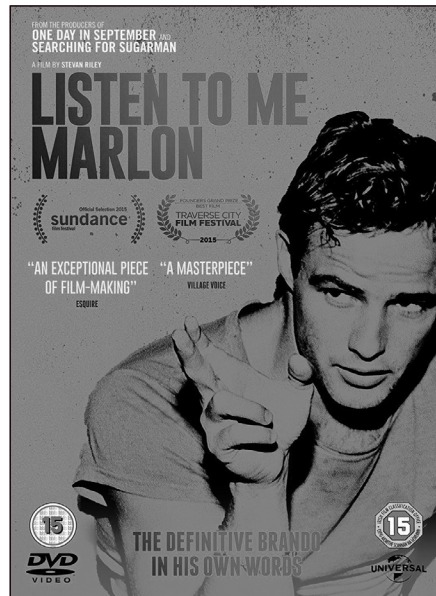
A Woman, a Part (2017), Strand Releasing, 2017, 97 mins, \$22.46 • A forty-something actress, Anna Baskin (Maggie Siff), rebels against her limited TV role. Once her character is diminished to the point of caring only about her man and inadvertently spilling coffee on herself again and again, she quits the popular series and returns to her experimental theater roots and life in NYC. There she discovers a second artistic betrayal: the other founding members of her alternative theatre troupe, Issac (John Ortiz) and Kate (Cara Seymour), have written a play, featuring a lead character based on Anna. She can't find happiness in either world and must find it in herself. Writer/director Elisabeth Subrin serves up a delectable feminist film about identity. Early highlight: Anna poring over scripts she's been asked to consider, reading aloud cornball dialogue, "Not on my watch," and crumpling up the pages, and tossing the chum bits of prose into her swimming pool. Siff delivers a tour de force performance full of presence, stillness, and a quirky, syncopated beat reminiscent of Gena Rowlands in an earlier film about identity and theater, John Cassavetes's *Opening Night*. Compelling, moving.

Maudie (2016), Sony, 2017, 116 mins, \$26.99 • Offbeat love story that at times is hard to watch. Fisherman Everett Lewis (Ethan Hawke) hires Maudie (Sally Hawkins) as a domestic to take care of him and his one-room house. When he first meets her, he labels her "a cripple" because of her severe rheumatoid arthritis and shortly thereafter defines her place: she ranks fourth behind him, the dogs, the chickens. But Maud, her body hunched with arthritis, her right leg warped, maintains her dignity, finding fulfillment through painting and becoming a much beloved Canadian folk artist. Prior to her success, Maud fills the walls around her with images of birds and flowers, making the home her own. Everett doesn't object. He's taken in by the quiet charm of her art. This wonderful moment of spoken stillness is echoed throughout the film as the two actors inhabit a shared space of feeling. Eventually, the couple marry and learn to love one another. Hawkins amazes with her emotional reserve, short laconic lines of

Crosscuts

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dialogue, that belie wisdom earned through suffering (after all, children threw rocks at her even up to the time she responded to Everett's ad). Hawke, gruff, self-centered and full of patriarchal entitlement, builds a wall between them because he fears that *he's* not good enough for *her*.

They Shoot Horses, Don't They? (1969), Kino-Lorber, 2017, 120 mins, \$18.89 • Desperate for dignity and self-worth in Depression-era America, a group of bygone lives collide in Sydney Pollack's mangled-up paean to the American Dream. All of the contestants of a grueling dance marathon want to seize whatever opportunity exists. Grand Prize: \$1500. However, the dehumanizing event, the commodifying of the marathon, reduces the dancers' lives to tawdry spectacle. Gloria (Jane Fonda), her body shaking with nervous angst, has reached a dead end: the marathon is her final stop, last chance; Robert (Michael Sarrazin), a drifter who dreams of directing Hollywood films, restlessly slips into the marathon's melodrama; Sailor (Red Buttons) seeks his lost youth, pushing his body beyond the possible; and Rocky (Gig

Young), in his Oscar-winning performance, emcees the event, feigning love for the "kids" while manipulating them for showy histrionics. Fierce, unforgiving. Best line: when asked if she wants something for her feet, Fonda replies, "How about a saw."

Indian Runner (1991), Kino-Lorber, 2017, 127 mins, \$18.99 • Based on the song "Highway Patrolman" by Bruce "The Boss" Springsteen, writer-director Sean Penn weaves a hard-rivets tale of two brothers: Joe Roberts (David Morse), a sheriff with a Mexican wife, a father, a member of officialdom; and the younger Frank (Viggo Mortensen), a Vietnam vet, an ex-con, a drifter full of rebellious anger. Joe tries to make a better life for Frank, but his brother pushes back, chillingly stating, don't you ever just want to kill a man just to do it, or punch out the lights of the kid in math class who answered all the questions? Penn pulls out bravura performances from his actors, pushing them to take emotional risks. Ultimately Frank won't slip into respectability, circa 1968, and Joe, in a double-voiced moment, has to admit, like the speaker in the song, if a "Man turns his back on his family, well he just ain't no good."

Listen to Me Marlon (2015), Universal, 2016, 102 mins, \$28.67 • This rare Italian import (yes, it will play on your Blu-ray players) collates revealing soundbites from hours of audio tapes Marlon Brando recorded over his lifetime. Brando discusses his alcoholic father, childhood in Nebraska, fame, civil rights, and the craft of acting. Compiled by British director Stevan Riley, Brando's story is an actor's primer. He compares acting to the deceptive punches of prizefighter Jersey Joe Wolcott: "Never let the audience know how it's going to come out"; "Get there on *your* time," and then "let it fly"; "Be surprising" and "figure a way to do it that's never been done before." Although Brando appeared later in life to disparage his own acting, he does acknowledge how actors "imbue with power and beauty and magnificence something beyond themselves, and we do need that." Amen. □