

Streaming

'A vibrant, loose-limbed street journey':
Angolan film *Air Conditioner*.



A left-field Dutch treat

Elevating voices from the fringes of film, Rotterdam festival's varied programme is a cinephile's tombola. Watch on Festival Scope while you can...

Guy Lodge



As the Oscars this weekend finally put the 2019 film season to bed, the new year is already bustling with cinematic discoveries from the festival circuit: with Sundance wrapped and Berlin kicking off later this month, there's much to look forward to. As usual, the Rotterdam film festival, which ran more or

less parallel to Sundance, has an identity distinct from either of these. Focused less on brand-name auteurs and stars than on more avant-garde newcomers and outsiders, it's a festival whose standouts often take a long time to reach non-festival audiences, if at all.

Happily, adventurous streamers can get an immediate taste of this year's Rotterdam programme via Festival Scope: a selection of 16 titles from the festival are available to stream on a pay-per-view basis until 23 February. Virtual "tickets" to each film cost the equivalent of four euros; if you buy a "festival pass" for five or more films, the cost is halved. You're unlikely to have heard of many, or any, of the films on offer. Approach it like a kind of cinephile's tombola, though, and you can't be disappointed.

I can offer a few tips, however. At just an hour in length, *Maya Kosa* and Sergio da Costa's *Bird Island* is

a luminous, bewitching miniature that resists tidy shaping or classification. Bridging documentary techniques with poetic fiction, it makes a semi-surreal Eden out of a real-life setting: the ornithological rehabilitation centre in Geneva, where wounded birds are brought for healing. In the course of the film, however, it becomes a sanctuary for damaged people, too – in particular, a withdrawn, exhausted young man who takes a job there and finds the peace that has long evaded him.

If the broken-wings metaphor sounds trite on the surface, *Kosa* and Da Costa explore it in surprising, graceful ways, while its story of human redemption is countered by an unsentimental ecological awareness. It's the kind of offbeat mid-length jewel that will never see a regular cinema release, so seek it out now.

First-time film-maker Wissam Taniou's documentary

We Are from There is more straightforward in form, but just as moving and rewarding, continuing the rich vein of nonfiction cinema to emerge from the destruction and trauma of the Syrian civil war. Following the divergent emigration arcs of two adult brothers from Damascus over the course of five years, as they attempt to plant new roots in less-than-welcoming European soil, it is a variation on a story we've now heard many times. But it doesn't get any less urgent or heart-punching with each new telling.

We get a rare shot of Angolan cinema in *Air Conditioner*, a vibrant, loose-limbed street journey from local film-making collective Geração 80, directed by the mononymous Fradique. Following a security guard on an ostensibly simple but circuitous mission to get an air conditioner for his boss, it morphs into a jazzy exploration of Luanda in all its scarred, busy beauty, soaked in sound, clashing musical sources and iridescent lights.

Upping the tension a little, Argentine director Martín Kraut's macabre hospital thriller *The Dose* has a clever premise that you could imagine Hollywood lifting, as a kindly nurse who secretly euthanises dying patients begins to suspect that a colleague is also killing on the ward, but with less merciful intentions.

Or hop over to the Himalayan foothills for *The Invitation*, a beguiling, leisurely portrait of a rural Darjeeling community that director Saurav Rai shot in his home village. Told through the eyes of an impoverished 10-year-old boy attempting to secure an invitation to a wealthy landowner's wedding, it's a winning social-realist fable shot through with class conflict. It's a film typical of Rotterdam's programming philosophy, which seeks to elevate voices and perspectives from the fringes of the industry. Get them in your living room while they last.



New to streaming & DVD this week

A Shaun the Sheep Movie: Farmageddon
(StudioCanal, U)

Aardman's woolly, wordless farmyard hero (above) explores the outer limits in another winningly daffy stop-motion adventure, where earthly and alien creatures have the same cosy, offbeat charm.

Ready Or Not
(Fox, 18)

Cult indie-horror directors Matt Bettinelli-Olpin and Tyler Gillett enter the mainstream with this raucously entertaining, lavishly booby-trapped survival romp, in which a newlywed bride faces inordinate in-law trouble on her wedding night.

So Long, My Son
(Curzon Artificial Eye, 12)

Hinging on China's one-child policy, Wang Xiaoshuai's three-hour family saga deftly covers a wealth of social and personal change across its 30-year timeline: it's richly absorbing and moving throughout.

The Host and Mother
(Mubi)

To celebrate *Parasite*'s long-awaited release in the UK (and hopefully some Oscar glory this weekend), Mubi has added a double bill of knotty, wildly plotted Bong Joon-ho genre pieces to its menu: a perfect primer for his latest.

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