

FILM REVIEW

Biography, Documentary and Based on Real Events



Gordon Lightfoot, the subject of the eponymous documentary.

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By Tony Wohlfarth

This month, I am reviewing a retrospective which had its world premiere at the 2019 Hot Docs Film Festival, a biopic which was recently screening at the Mayfair, the latest film by Mike Leigh, and a must see screening in our community – also at the Mayfair. All four films are based on real life events.

This month, I am also highlighting Kanopy, a video streaming service which is available through the Ottawa Public Library (OPL).

Gordon Lightfoot: *If You Could Read My Mind*

Gordon Lightfoot is a musical icon. He entertained Canadians with original songs about the heart and soul of the country for decades. Classic songs like the *Railroad Trilogy*, *The Wreck of the Edmund Fitzgerald* and *Early Morning Rain* define what it means to be Canadian.

Gordon Lightfoot: If You Could Read My Mind features tributes by a who's who of entertainment – Anne Murray, Tom Cochrane and (yes) Alec Baldwin to name a few. It is a feel-good film. Who is not in the film? Individual fans, his children, nor his two exes. Lightfoot said following the film's

premiere at Hot Docs in Toronto, it's good the filmmakers did not go too deep.

Lightfoot visits clubs in Yorkville, returns to his hometown of Orillia, and is interviewed in his Toronto mansion. We don't learn anything about why Lightfoot is still touring at the age of 80. Fans who saw his last performance at the iconic Massey Hall in Toronto report that his voice is not what it used to be.

The film is directed and written by Martha Kehoe and Joan Tosoni. The duo made a biopic about Joni Mitchell in 1998.

Gordon Lightfoot: If You Could Read My Mind is screening at the Mayfair Theatre (1074 Bank Street) from June 7–10. The running time is 90 minutes.

Meeting Gorbachev

Mikael Gorbachev is an enigma. He was the last President of the USSR. He led his nation into perestroika, glasnost and ultimately a comprehensive arms treaty which dramatically reduced the risk of nuclear war. He is widely credited with the unification of East and West Germany – an event which most Germans were convinced would never happen.

Meeting Gorbachev is a biopic about his life and times. The film consists of lengthy excerpts from an interview

with the film's director, Werner Herzog, along with extensive archival footage, interviews with world figures like Lech Walesa and James Baker, and footage from his triumphant return to his home village of Privilnoye.

I knew very little about Mikael Gorbachev before seeing this film. The film contains extensive information about his life, particularly from a European perspective. At the same time, it is more of a tribute to Gorbachev and less of a complete appraisal of his historical role. For example, the film does not mention the fact that it was Gorbachev who exposed Stalin's misdeeds.



Venice Film Festival and is currently screening in Ottawa.

Peterloo recreates a key event in British political history. The staging, the costumes and the scenery are vintage Leigh. For students of British history, *Peterloo* is not to be missed.

Peterloo is screening at the By-Towne Cinema (325 Rideau Street) from June 14–17. The running time is over 2 hours and 30 minutes.



Former Soviet leader and reformer, Mikhail Gorbachev.

Curiously, Gorbachev was influenced early on in his career by international visits, including one to Canada.

Werner Herzog is a famous 77-year-old German film director. He co-directed *Meeting Gorbachev* with Andre Singer. *Meeting Gorbachev* was at the Mayfair Theater in May. The running time is 90 minutes.

Blue Roses

The One World Arts Film Festival (OWAFF) is holding a special screening on Wednesday, June 19 at 6:30 pm at the Mayfair Theatre.

Blue Roses is a compelling documentary, directed by OOS filmmakers Ed Kucerak and Danielle Rolfe, about the incredible work performed by Ottawa Inner City Health and the Somerset West Community Health Centre. Filmed in Ottawa from March to July 2018, *Blue Roses* deals with the difficult issues of end of life care, addiction and health care in marginalized communities. *Blue Roses* takes its audience inside rooming houses to meet those who rely on public health services. The film challenged everything I thought I knew about palliative care, addiction to drugs and alcohol, mental illness, housing and poverty.

Admission is free. The running time is 55 minutes. OSCAR readers should run to attend this special screening of this powerful film. Following the screening, there will be a discussion and a Q & A with frontline health workers, people with lived experience and Somerset Ward Councillor Catherine McKenney. For tickets, readers of The OSCAR can register at: www.eventbrite.ca/e/blue-roses-documentary-film-screening-discussion-tickets-60475678382

Introducing Kanopy

Video streaming is now offered by the Ottawa Public Library (OPL). The OPL Web site allows you to access films on your computer or handheld device. Kanopy allows you to screen up to four films per month. OSCAR readers can register for this free service with their OPL card at:

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