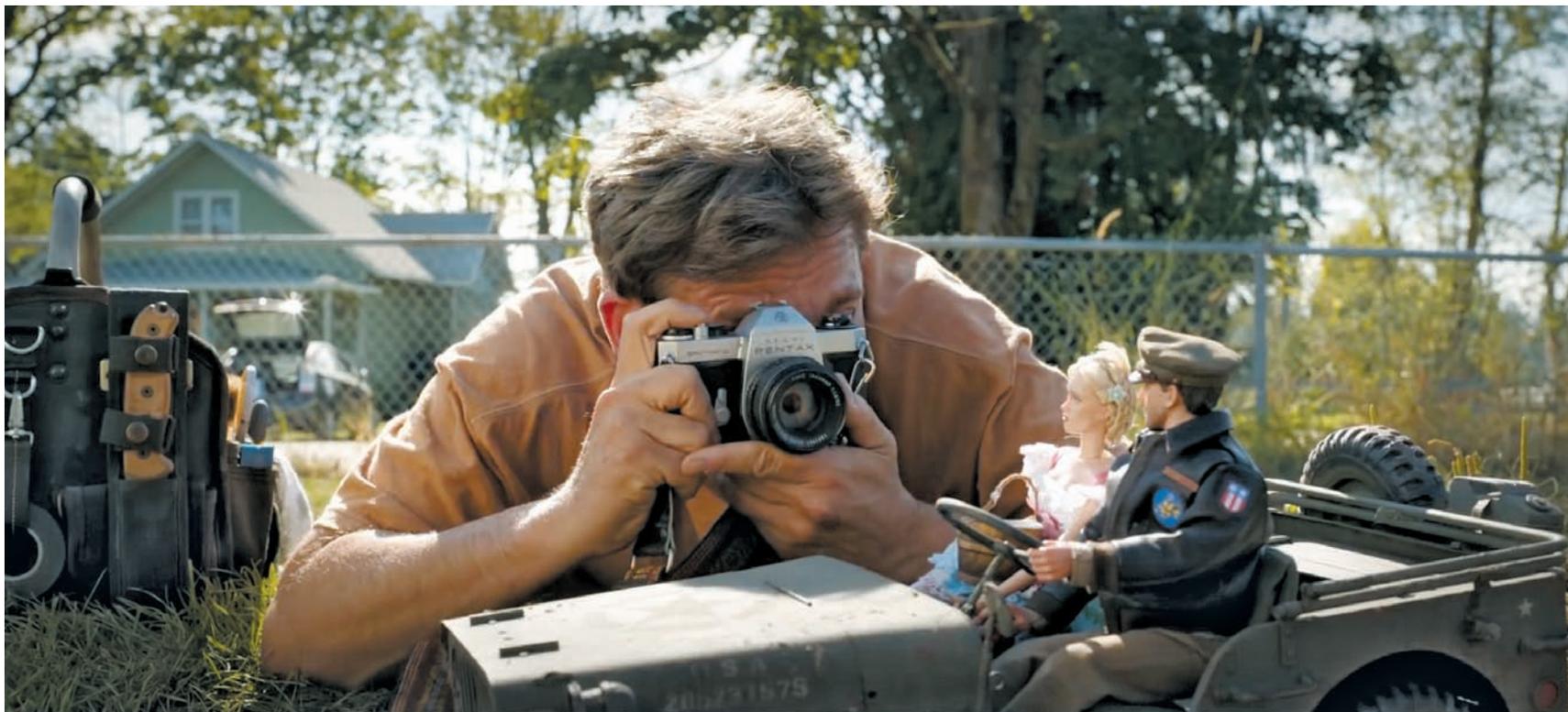


FILM ROUNDUP

REVIEWED BY KEITH UHLICH



Steve Carell in *Welcome to Marwen*.

Cold War (Dir. Pawel Pawlikowski). Starring: Joanna Kulig, Tomasz Kot, Borys Szyc. Polish writer-director Pawel Pawlikowski follows up his Academy Award-winning *Ida* (2013) with a decades-spanning love story that begins in 1949. Wiktor (Tomasz Kot) is a musical director who discovers Zula (Joanna Kulig) during his state-sponsored travels to the countryside where he is seeking out “authentic” musical and artistic styles. She becomes his muse and eventually his lover, though as the Cold War and Communism become more pervasive, the lure of living in exile becomes more pronounced. Loosely based on the lives of Pawlikowski’s own parents, the film skips through time with a weight and confidence that belies its 88-minute runtime. And the black-and-white photography by Lukasz Zal, shot, like *Ida*, in the square ratio of 1.37:1 is consistently stunning. Something feels like it’s missing at the core, however—an emotional undercurrent that would lift the movie above the level of a superbly executed arthouse exercise. [R] ★★★

Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse (Dirs. Bob Persichetti, Peter Ramsey,

Rodney Rothman). Starring: Shameik Moore, Jake Johnson, John Mulaney, Nicolas Cage. Well, at least it looks cool. The lowered expectations that one should bring to any Marvel Studios production may be temporarily elevated during the first few scenes of this new animated Spider-Man feature. Visually it’s leagues above any live-action superhero flick, with a comic-panel gloss and a mixed-race hero, Miles Morales (voiced by Shameik Moore), at its center. Miles becomes the new Spider-Man after archvillain Kingpin (Liev Schreiber) opens a dimensional port-hole and kills the old one. The rift in time also brings several other Spider-Men from alternate realities into Miles’s world. These include the Porky Pig-like Spider-Ham (voiced by John Mulaney) and the hardboiled Spider-Man Noir (Nicolas Cage, MVP of the ensemble). Unfortunately, the tedious, torturous plotting that afflicts many a Marvel movie soon takes over and nullifies most of the visual pleasure. This is the same corporate-produced gibberish, selling disingenuous homilies (all of us can be Spider-Man—feh) with slightly more style. [PG] ★★

Vice (Dir. Adam McKay). Starring:

Christian Bale, Amy Adams, Steve Carell. One could conceive of a film that would find some pointed, provocative humor in the George W. Bush presidency, but writer-director Adam McKay’s painfully bad *Vice* isn’t that movie. The focus is actually on Dubya’s second-in-command, Dick Cheney (Christian Bale), who history increasingly suggests was the real leader of the free world during those divisive years when terrorists targeted the U.S. of A and our leaders seized the opportunity to wage wasteful wars and line their pockets. Every single actor is either one-note (Bale gained 40+ pounds for this shallow caricature?) or wasted (for shame barely making use of Eddie Marsan as Paul Wolfowitz). As in his financial crisis satire *The Big Short* (2015), McKay tries for disruptive burlesque—casting Naomi Watts as a fourth-wall-breaking Fox news anchor, or running the end credits in the middle of the movie—and consistently falls flat. If the film isn’t quite the travesty that the Bush years were it’s because it’s over in a little over two hours as opposed to eight years. [R] ★

Welcome to Marwen (Dir. Robert Zemeckis). Starring: Steve Carell, Leslie

Mann, Diane Kruger. The advertising for Robert Zemeckis’s latest suggests we’re in for a treacly retelling of the real-life story, previously covered in Jeff Malmberg’s documentary *Marwencol* (2010), of Mark Hogancamp (Steve Carell). The upstate New York artist was attacked outside a bar after drunkenly confessing he enjoyed wearing women’s shoes. Brain damage was so severe that he lost all memory of his past. To cope, he created a scale model WWII-era Belgian village in his backyard that he populated with refurbished dolls and action figures. He then made up high-drama stories involving Nazis and an all-girl army and photographed the results. Admirably, Zemeckis and co-screenwriter Caroline Thompson do not dispense with Hogancamp’s gender expression. This is also a rare film made in a crowd-pleasing vein where the F/X—everything in the village is animated via eerie motion-capture, which contrasted with Hogancamp’s less-than-ideal (and live-action) reality—complement the story instead of overwhelming it. There’s a lot of thematic knottiness beneath the narrative’s inspirational bent, and it moves both mind and heart. [PG-13] ★★★ ■