

local capital building itself is not ADA compliant; in another, a motorist is captured in a filmed altercation calling a disabled person a “sue-happy motherfucker.” Offering an insightful look at a thorny subject, this is highly recommended. [Note: also available are two other films about disabilities by filmmaker Davenport—*A Cerebral Game* and *Wheelchair Diaries: One Step Up*.] Aud: C, P. (C. Block)

The Shelter ★★★

(2014) 82 min. In English, French, Romanian, Spanish & Wolof w/English subtitles. DVD: \$300. DRA. Film Platform (avail. from www.filmplatform.net). PPR.

The subjects of filmmaker Fernand Melgar’s *cinéma vérité* documentary congregate each night to try to gain entrance to a shelter (or *l’abri*) in Lausanne, Switzerland, that residents call a “bunker” because it appears to spring from the side of a hill. There is so much demand that staffers prioritize women and children since they can’t house everybody. The jostling for spots can lead to heated scuffles, and the watchmen double as bouncers, but when they say they can only admit 50 people, they mean it. After a Romanian family fails to gain admittance, they shuffle off to sleep in their car, and the following day head into town to panhandle. Others walk off forlornly into the rain-sodden dark, seeking whatever dry spots they can find. Amadou, who hails from Mauritania, complains that the city fines people who sleep in public, even when they have nowhere else to go. Amadou just wants to earn enough money to return home, while Spanish couple César and Rosa hope to find work at a ski resort. Like many, the latter came to Switzerland in hopes of a better life, only to face new hardships. As

César puts it, “stress and fatigue accumulate” after too many nights on the streets. The shelter does what it can: once it starts to snow, for instance, they increase the capacity to 60, and they also give blankets to a few who are left out in the cold. Melgar captures good times, as well, such as staffers joking around while fixing meals, and Roma people dancing with abandon. But overall this is a sobering profile since prospects for most of these immigrants don’t appear to be bright. Recommended. Aud: C, P. (K. Fennesy)

What Is Philanthropy? ★★★

(2016) 86 min. DVD: \$15.99, Blu-ray: \$22.99; individuals; DVD: \$139.99, Blu-ray: \$159.99; institutions. Indiana University Press. PPR. ISBN: 978-0-253-02916-5 (dvd).

Both a primer about the meaning of philanthropy and a general call to voluntary service for others, this documentary by Salvatore Alaïmo, who teaches at Michigan’s Grand Valley State University, seeks to move beyond the notion that philanthropy merely refers to donating money to particular causes, expanding the definition to broader terms suggested by the word’s Greek root of “love of mankind.” While not ignoring the role of large and small foundations in providing funding to artistic and social endeavors of special interest to their founders (interviewees appear here from the worlds of business, the arts, and sports), *What Is Philanthropy?* sees evidence of the philanthropic spirit in any activities where people give their time and energy, whether volunteer programs or activist movements such as the struggle for civil rights in the 1960s. While investigating the varied motives, religious or practical, that can lie behind philanthropic efforts,

the film not does ignore the potentially negative aspects of “doing good,” such as a sense of paternalism, a desire to promote one’s own reputation, and an unequal distribution of resources among many worthy causes—let alone the unethical practices of some nonprofits. Although technically rather homespun, *What Is Philanthropy?* could certainly be effectively employed in courses dealing with social responsibility (or nonprofit management), but also might well appeal to more casual viewers. Extras include an interview with Alaïmo, and featurettes on philanthropy’s impact, money-raising, and a tribute to Robert Payton, who was a pioneering professor of philanthropic studies at Indiana University. Recommended. Aud: C, P. (F. Swietek)

The World Awaits ★★1/2

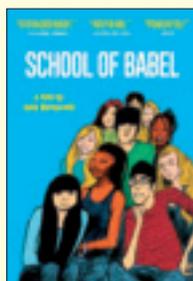
(2016) 99 min. DVD: \$24.99 (\$199 w/PPR). Dreamscape Media. Closed captioned.

Calling for greater international efforts to reduce our global nuclear threat, this documentary features interwoven interviews of three marquee-name critics of U.S. and international defense policies: physician and activist Helen Caldicott, philosopher-linguist Noam Chomsky, and David Krieger, founder of the Nuclear Age Peace Foundation. Filmmaker Don Haderlein unfortunately allows each to drone on and on (the low-key, monotone Chomsky and robotic Krieger are particularly hard to take for long stretches), interspersed only with archival footage of atomic bomb tests and historic speeches by past presidents. Most of the conversation here is fairly familiar, although Haderlein does address some historical mistakes that nearly launched Armageddon, and Caldicott’s discussion about the harmful effects from radiation on fetuses is certainly frightening. Overall, this well-intentioned and timely documentary is a strong optional purchase. Aud: H, C, P. (T. Keogh)

School of Babel ★★★1/2

(2013) 89 min. In French w/English subtitles. DVD: \$24.98 (\$348 w/PPR from www.icarusfilms.com). Icarus Films Home Video (available from most distributors).

Shot over the course of a year at a Paris secondary school where immigrant students in a special “reception class” experience French immersion and are taught other subjects to encourage assimilation—all in preparation to advance to regular classes—Julie Bertuccelli’s documentary serves up an affecting portrait of youngsters struggling with their new lives. Some are political refugees seeking asylum, such as a Jewish boy from Serbia whose family has fled neo-Nazi persecution. Others came to France for professional opportunities, including a young cellist from Venezuela who hopes to continue his musical education. Still others have emigrated to be with their mothers—a girl from Senegal had been mistreated by her father’s family back home, and another from China lived with her grandmother for a decade until her hardworking mother could save the funds for her fare. Regardless of their countries of origin or family circumstances, all face similar obstacles—with some reacting to setbacks better than others—as their compassionate teacher Brigitte Cervoni tries to deal with each student sensitively, including during parent-teacher conferences recorded here. *School of Babel* ends on a note of triumph, as the students enter a film they collaboratively made about their class into a local contest. Extras include a where-are-they-now follow-up featurette, and an interview with Bertuccelli. A revealing portrait of the immigrant experience, this is highly recommended. Aud: C, P. (F. Swietek)



LAW & CRIME

Life on Parole ★★★

(2017) 60 min. DVD: \$24.99 (\$54.99 w/PPR). PBS Video. SDH captioned. ISBN: 978-1-5317-0310-3.

Most who go to prison end up back on the street eventually. But before they can resume their life, reconnect with family, and get a job, former prisoners must undergo the parole process. Filmmaker Matthew O’Neill’s PBS-aired *Frontline* documentary (produced in collaboration with the *New York Times*) follows four individuals over a year and a half as they go through parole, which is not the same as freedom, but rather a “measure of freedom.” Always there are rules: no drug use, limited alcohol consumption, no contacts with crime victims or fellow defendants. In one case, a parolee can’t associate with his

girlfriend, because she reported him to the police when he stole her TV set. Ex-prisoners have to learn to deal with feelings of guilt, anger, and frustration over their inability to find a job or pay child support. All too many succumb to the lure of drugs and alcohol, falling into bad habits, and even unwisely texting and posting their drug and alcohol use on social media. They can even become a “return customer” to lock-up by making a forbidden visit to a convenience store to buy cigarettes. Parolees often become fed up with the rules of parole boards and halfway houses, resuming their old ways and angering parole officers (who say that they “make a living on second chances”). As the film comes to a close, most of these four prisoners are still hanging on, barely. And one parolee sums it up best by claiming that “parole is a noose that you tighten yourself.” Recommended. Aud: C, P. (S. Rees)

NATURE, MATH & SCIENCE

Big Pacific ★★½

(2017) 2 discs. 265 min. DVD: \$29.99 (\$59.99 w/ PPR), Blu-ray: \$34.99 (\$59.99 w/PPR). PBS Video. ISBN: 978-1-5317-0204-5 (dvd), 978-1-5317-0223-6 (blu-ray).

Gorgeous underwater photography is the primary draw for this five-part PBS-aired nature documentary miniseries, filmed in some 20 countries, and narrated by Daniel Dae Kim. But *Big Pacific*—made by Natural History New Zealand—also offers a wealth of information on various species found in and around the Pacific, which encompasses fully

a third of the planet and is surrounded by a “ring of fire” of volcanic activity. The opening episode “Mysterious” concentrates on Pacific mysteries, beginning with the annual migration of sea turtles to the beaches of Costa Rica to lay their eggs and continuing with other forms of sea life, some newly-discovered, such as the puffer fish that makes sand circles on the ocean floor. “Violent” centers on the struggle for survival in the ocean, and the relevant dangers posed both by and to humans. “Voracious” looks at how species satisfy their need for sustenance, and “Passionate” explores how they reproduce (the female octopus usually kills the male with whom she mates, and a species of seahorse actually changes gender for procreative purposes). Throughout, the human crew are occasionally glimpsed, but they take center stage in the final episode, which is essentially an extended “making-of” featurette. Filled with fascinating facts and breathtaking visuals, this is exemplary nature documentary filmmaking. Highly recommended. Aud: H, C, P. (F. Swietek)

The Real Story: Close Encounters of the Third Kind ★★★

(2011) 45 min. DVD: \$14.99. Smithsonian Channel (avail. from most distributors). SDH captioned. ISBN: 978-1-5317-0229-8.

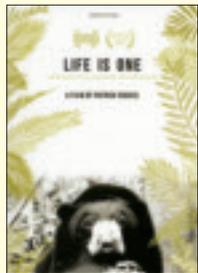
After World War II, reports of UFO sightings increased, culminating in the 1961 claim by New Hampshire couple Barney and Betty Hill that they were taken aboard an alien spacecraft and examined before being released. In 1952, “Project Blue Book” was launched to try to determine if there was intelligent life out there, and if aliens

were trying to contact us. Using Steven Spielberg’s classic 1977 film *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* as a touchstone, this Smithsonian Channel-aired documentary looks at scientific facts, wild theories, and sheer speculation regarding whether a case can be made for extraterrestrial visitations. Along the way, numerous theories are analyzed to explain claims of alien abduction—ranging from swamp gas to recovered memories. Alleged alien “encounters” are divided into types, with the third being actual contact with aliens. One question everyone wants to know is, if aliens are truly visiting us, are their intentions friendly or not? In Spielberg’s *E.T.* and *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, the aliens were friendly; in *War of the Worlds*, not so much. But with at least 100 billion planets in the Milky Way galaxy, chances are good that intelligent life exists elsewhere. Meanwhile, the SETI radar program (dramatized in the Jodi Foster film *Contact*) continues to scan the skies. Offering a solid mix of science and entertainment, this is recommended. [Note: *The Real Story: Scream* is also available.] Aud: P. (S. Rees)

Safe Harbor ★★★

(2016) 28 min. DVD: \$39: public libraries; \$59: high schools; \$99: colleges & universities. DRA. Green Planet Films. PPR. SDH captioned.

This short documentary centers on cooperation between researchers and oyster farmers who are working together to keep the Wellfleet Harbor off Cape Cod Bay healthy in biodiversity. The win-win arrangement ensures that the delicate synergy between various species and the health of the harbor and wetlands is managed properly. Director Richard Elson looks at various experiments and best practices for keeping oysters going, which also entails taking care of horseshoe crabs (a strange creature actually related to spiders), terrapins, and clams. Along the way, viewers learn about the processes by which the harbor helps itself through the critters that keep it clean. Enlivened by fine cinematography of the grassy wetlands and beautiful birds, as well as underwater shots of skittering animal life, this engaging environmental nature documentary is recommended. Aud: H, C, P. (T. Keogh)



Life Is One ★★★½

(2016) 52 min. DVD: \$25: public libraries & high schools; \$49: colleges & universities. DRA. Green Planet Films. PPR. SDH captioned.

This is a story about the re-introduction of three orphaned sun bear cubs (two females and one male) in Borneo, Indonesia, and their relationship with documentarian Patrick Rouxel. Inspired by Wendy (who he met as a tiny cub, but saw again five years later exhibiting symptoms of stress in zoo captivity), Rouxel decides to help save another orphaned cub named Boom Boom by acting *in loco parentis* to protect her from a fate like Wendy’s. He stays in Indonesia and lives with her in the wild in a national park until she is mature enough to care for herself. Seeing young Boom Boom take to the wild is remarkable—within minutes, she goes from taking her first tentative steps on an unfamiliar forest floor to scampering up high in the trees with monkeys, and burrowing in old logs below to find food. Rouxel’s self-appointed job was to act as Boom Boom’s parent: accompanying her daily during her explorations (and keeping her safe from predators in the process), bonding with her in the evening, and locking her safely in a large cage so both could sleep soundly at night. One day Rouxel went into town and left Boom Boom in the care of animal-loving neighbors, but she disappeared. With Boom Boom apparently lost (perhaps to predators), Rouxel met two other young cubs named Bernie and WaWan who he also aimed to rescue (this time using microchip transmitters that could help him find the animals if they became separated). These two have the benefit of discovering their forest world together. *Life Is One* offers a rare glimpse of the lives of animals given a second chance of life in the wild—opportunities that can lead to success or tragedy. Highly recommended. Aud: H, C, P. (C. Block)

HEALTH & FITNESS

Brainstorm ★★★

(2017) 55 min. DVD: \$29: public libraries & high schools; \$299: colleges & universities. DRA. Stacia Kalinoski (avail. from www.brainstormdocumentary.com). PPR.

Minneapolis filmmaker Stacia Kalinoski, who was diagnosed with epilepsy in college, here looks at seizures from a personal perspective. Describing a seizure as a “surge of electrical activity in the brain,” Kalinoski notes