

Me Too

★★★★★

Drs. Antonio Naharro and Álvaro Pastor. 2009. N/R. 103mins. In Spanish, with subtitles. Lola Dueñas, Pablo Pineda, Isabel García Lorca.



LOVE IS IN THE AIR
Dueñas, left, and Pineda share a romantic moment.

You'd rather not criticize this occasionally sweet, often cloying Spanish drama about the tentative romance between a Down syndrome-stricken social worker, Daniel (Pineda), and his emotionally damaged but otherwise ordinary colleague, Laura (Dueñas).

Everyone's heart is in the right place; to poke at the movie feels almost cruel. But the good intentions of cast and crew don't add up to much that's authentic. Daniel meets Laura on the first day at his new job. In her frazzled state, she thinks he's there for aid, not to work. Clearly there's a lot of myth-dispelling to do; indeed, the film often seems like a public-service announcement wrapped around a sketchy narrative skeleton.

Following the template of many a Sundance-sanctioned indie (it unsurprisingly competed for the 2010 Grand Jury Prize), *Me Too* feigns progressive empathy while carefully eliding anything that might challenge or upset audiences at large. A subplot in which two Down-afflicted dancers have their romance threatened by an overly distressed parent is wrapped up with sitcom-level ease. And when Daniel and Laura finally consummate their relationship, the filmmakers cut away before any real intimacy begins. All we get is a post-coital scene of the two having a "can-you-believe-we-just-did-that?!" laugh. It would be offensive if the whole endeavor were not so utterly forgettable. (Opens Fri.)—*Keith Uhlich*

Today's Special



CAREFUL WHAT YOU DISH FOR
Mandvi prepares his last suppers.

★★★★★

Dir. David Kaplan. 2009. N/R. 99mins. Aasif Mandvi, Jess Weixler, Naseeruddin Shah.

Food is everything in this admittedly generic culinary drama: a link to homeland and history, an aphrodisiac, an expression of one's head, heart and gut. The gastronomic facts of life come slowly but surely to Samir (Mandvi), a sous chef at an upscale Manhattan eatery who quits after being passed over for a prime promotion. This professional misfire leads him to managing his disapproving dad's run-down restaurant and—after hiring a worldly jack-of-all-trades cabbie (Shah) to help in the kitchen—learning how to cook with improvisatory soul.

Personal doubts, parental expectations and cultural tensions are, naturally, resolved through spicy masala dishes and a budding romance with a former coworker (Weixler). Director David Kaplan (*Year of the Fish*) doesn't stray from the story's follow-your-bliss formula, relying on lovey-dovey montages, convenient twists of fate and quirky supporting characters—like a plate-spinner played by Wes Anderson regular Kumar Pallana—to keep things pleasantly moving along. An overall lack of adventurousness negates any genuine sense of surprise, but credit this Indian-themed indie for spicing up a familiar and routine dish with reasonably tasty flavor. (Opens Fri; Landmark's Sunshine. See also "The Hot Seat," page 132.)—*Nick Schager*

William S. Burroughs: A Man Within



WILD BILL
Burroughs shares a crazy moment with Kathy Acker.

★★★★★

Dir. Yony Leyser. 2010. N/R. 88mins. Documentary.

A man within *what*, exactly? If anything, William Seward Burroughs was defined by the structures he stood apart from: the upper-class society of his birth; the cookie-cutter '50s, during which he first started dabbling in drugs and writing; the "straight" world (in both senses of the word). Even by the standards of the jive-talking hustlers and jazz-loving hipsters—code name: the Beats—with whom he'd alter the landscape of American letters, this gaunt, gravel-voiced junkie took rebellion to a new level. Outspoken about his sexuality long before queer chic, Burroughs didn't toe a gay-lib party line. Punks considered him their patron saint, yet

he never claimed affinity for them either. He ran in many circles, and pledged allegiance to none of them.

Yony Leyser's pop doc on "the pope of dope" portrays Burroughs as, per a biographer's label, the ultimate "literary outlaw"—but the emphasis is on the second word. There are precious few examples of the writing that made him an icon, and despite testimonies from former boyfriends and fellow mavericks, the Burroughs we see here is mostly a gun nut who poses for photos with everyone from Jean Genet to Kurt Cobain. Reducing an influential genius to a bohemian Zelig with a firearm fetish misses the forest for the flaming metal trees; in Leyser's biographical interzone, the superficial triumphs the truly subversive. (Opens Fri; IFC.)—*David Fear*

Heartless

★★★★★

Dir. Philip Ridley. 2009. N/R. 115mins. Jim Sturgess, Clémence Poésy, Joseph Mawle.

Cults figure twofold in Philip Ridley's story of a Londoner (Sturgess) who's self-consciously battling his demons. As in, he's fighting an actual epidemic of creatures from Hell, with lizardlike faces and a penchant for baggy hoodies. (Imagine a basilisk crossed with Banksy.) This gang of netherthugs who hail the Dark Lord is only the second-scariest group connected to this horror film, however. The first would be the rabid Ridley fanatics who worship the fantasy writer's prolific work and view his two features—1990's *The Reflecting Skin* and 1995's *The Passion of Darkly Noon*—as the ultimate in Southern Gothic-flavored spookiness. They, and only they, may lap up Ridley's notions about urban youth run amok, and forgive the way this movie clumsily switches gears into *Faust* territory.



THE RULES OF THE FLAME
Sturgess's trial by fire isn't metaphorical.

That's right: After being summoned to meet Satan via smartphone (memo to self: cancel my Beelzebub-friendly plan with Verizon), our hero makes a deal with the devil (Mawle) to erase his facial birthmark, in order to get it on with an Eastern European model (Poésy). We know how these bargains turn out, so all we're left to do is watch pretentious exchanges about grief pile up, laugh at the way the movie exploits its Indian-girl-as-innocence-personified notion and wish that Eddie Marsan's giddy cameo as Hell's personal weapons dealer were much, much longer. (Opens Fri; IFC.)—*David Fear*