

Dusty's Trail ★★★1/2

(2015) 65 min. DVD: \$19.95. Cinema Libre Studio (avail. from most distributors).

Filmmaker Catherine Jayisuriya's impressionistic documentary centers on a terrible disease that affects one in every 3,500 males born: Duchenne muscular dystrophy, a muscle-weakening condition that eventually puts young men in wheelchairs and ends their lives in their 20s. The film is somewhat disappointing, however, when the focus shifts to a fundraising climb of Mt. Kinabalu in Borneo, a cooperative effort made by parents of Duchenne kids and experienced climbers. The subject of *Dusty's Trails* is 20-year-old Dusty, whose MD was diagnosed when he was quite young and whose parents are supportive of his desire to live as normally as possible. Dusty's mom—recalling a pre-diagnosis family goal to climb Kinabalu one day—puts together a large team to scale the mountain via established trails and ropes. Unfortunately, there isn't much actual footage of the climb, so this part of the film feels a little hollow. But *Dusty's Trail* does a fine job of presenting valuable information about Duchenne, drawing on the testimonies of young men with the disease, as well as parents and doctors. Extras include an interview with Dusty, a filmmaker Q&A, and behind-the-scenes featurettes. A strong optional purchase. Aud: C, P. (T. Keogh)

Joanna ★★★1/2

(2013) 40 min. In Polish w/English subtitles. DVD: \$99.95; public libraries; \$350: colleges & universities. The Cinema Guild. PPR. ISBN: 0-7815-1515-7.

Polish blogger Joanna Satyga was known for her chronicle of daily life as a wife and mother, a woman who focused on small moments while forming a legacy of questions and gentle admonitions for her young son, Jás. Aneta Kopacz's Academy Award-nominated documentary observes Joanna at home with her family in the months before her death at age 36 from cancer. Cinematographer Lukasz Zal often turns the camera on the woods and fields surrounding the Satygas' rural home—wind blows through the trees, birds sing as Jás and his mother lie outdoors on a blanket—ultimately framing Joanna's death as a natural occurrence. Joanna and the boy argue mildly about whether they will go to McDonalds, and joke when he accidentally sees her bra strap. She poses questions and expresses hopes for Jás—teaching by asking, rather than telling him what to think. Alone with her husband, Poitr, Joanna lies waiting for pain medications to take effect, muses over daily activities, and worries about leaving her family. During a brief interlude at the hospital, the camera remains on her face while she receives a prognosis; afterward, cameras peer through the windows from outside her house as Jás weeps over the news that his mother will die soon. Near film's end, he befriends a neighbor child and rides his bike away from his mom, who earlier had to hold

him steady—offering a picture of how life will go on. A beautiful, poetically filmed portrait, this is highly recommended. Aud: C, P. (M. Puffer-Rothenberg)

Perfect Strangers ★★★

(2013) 69 min. DVD: \$23.99 (\$39.99 w/PPR). Jan Krawitz. Closed captioned.

Jan Krawitz's informative and suspenseful documentary toggles between two women in different states. Organ donors (live ones anyway) don't often choose to help a stranger, but Bay Area massage therapist Ellie isn't a typical organ donor. Ellie decides to donate a kidney after discovering that demand consistently outstrips supply, registering with a website that connects donors and recipients. Ellie takes to Kathy, a hospice nurse living 500 miles away whose family has a history of kidney systolic disease. Kathy herself has been on dialysis for two years, and her brother received a transplant, but anti-rejection drugs weakened his immune system, and he later died of cancer. Before her diagnosis, Kathy and her husband, Jim, had been building a house, but they had to put that project on hold. When doctors ruled out Jim as a match, Kathy turned to the Internet. Ellie's son, Mark, is not surprised that his mother has offered to be an altruistic kidney donor, noting that it's in her nature. Unfortunately, her blood match with Kathy presents serious complications, so they end up calling off the transplant. After three years, Ellie finds an anonymous recipient, at which point Krawitz expands the narrative to include a third subject, while Kathy continues to wait another three years before she finally receives some good news. By focusing on these

unique relationships, *Perfect Strangers* not only underscores the need for more organ donors but also highlights the human capacity for beneficent selfless behavior. Recommended. Aud: C, P. (K. Fennessy)

Stroke: The Price of Rapid Evolution

★★★1/2

(2015) 45 min. DVD: \$150. DRA. Film Ideas. PPR. ISBN: 978-1-60572-897-1.

Part of a four-title series called *Origins of Disease*, exploring the evolutionary aspects of health disorders, this rather pedestrian effort does not add much to the discussion of the condition that affects 16 million individuals a year worldwide. With bleeding in the brain a major cause of stroke, this documentary argues that the structure of blood vessels in the brain didn't change quickly enough to keep up with the organ's rapid increase in size (over many thousands of year). The film acknowledges the positive effects of lifestyle and dietary changes, noting that people in less urban or "developed" communities tend to be afflicted at lower rates. Still, while the evolution of delicate capillaries prone to rupture may have some anthropological interest, for most viewers the more important information is about preventing or treating stroke. Unfortunately, interviews with survivors, including some from Japan—which has the highest incidence per capita of stroke in the world—are not particularly useful. Presented with the didactic overtones of an old-fashioned health class filmstrip, this is an optional purchase. Other titles include *Cancer: Evolution's Deadly Results* and *Heart Disease: Flaws in a High Performance Pump*. Aud: C, P. (F. Gardner)

PETS



Black Beauty Breed ★★★1/2

(2015) 56 min. DVD: \$22.99 (\$199 w/PPR from edu.passionriver.com). Passion River (avail. from most distributors).

Dog lovers will especially appreciate filmmaker Angie Ruiz's documentary about the noble Rottweiler breed, a loving, family-friendly dog that is also a determined worker and ideal for training in multiple areas. *Black Beauty Breed* begins with a look at the role Rottweiler rescue dogs played in the aftermath of attacks on the World Trade Center in 2001. "Rotties" were among the most important resources for finding victims within the toxic rubble, at the eventual cost of the dogs' lives. The film then traces the years-long training involved—from puppyhood to maturity—for a Rottweiler to become a search-and-find dog, a caretaker, a therapy dog, or a champion showdog exhibiting the discipline that is synonymous with their breed. It's interesting to watch how an off-leash Rottweiler is oriented, in stages, to seek people—lost children, adults with dementia—in a wide area, versus the kind of on-leash, pinpoint search following a hurricane or other disaster. There is some unintentionally funny footage of Rottweilers' pulling little carts while trotting through a "serpentine" path between trees, but there is also a lot of heart-warming material about how well the dogs do in classrooms or retirement homes. The documentary ends with fascinating research on why some dogs in this cancer-prone breed live to a ripe old age, and what can be learned from their bodies' chemistry. Highly recommended. Aud: P. (T. Keogh)

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