

REEL WORLD



What's that sound?

Memoria—an 'adventure in watching and listening'

A few days ago, I went to the movies—in a theater. First time in more than two years, and it was also a special occasion in that it involved seeing *Memoria*, a new film by a major director that is currently only available for viewing in one-week runs in select theaters. (I saw it in Portland; it's scheduled to arrive at the Pageant Theatre in Chico the first week in June).

by
Juan-Carlos Selznick

Memoria is the work of Apichatpong Weerasethakul (aka "Joe"), the masterful Thai director whose previous achievements include *Mysterious Object at Noon* (2000) and the marvelous *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives* (2010). The new film has the mystical, meditative style of his previous films, but this time the setting is modern-day Colombia, and the central character is a Scottish woman played by Tilda Swinton.

The story is both simple and bizarre: Swinton's character, an embassy official who lives alone, is suddenly awakened one night by a very loud sound that is almost explosive, yet mysteriously resonant as well. We hear it, too, but no one else in the movie seems to have noticed, and so the Scottish woman begins a serious and very personal

inquiry into what's happening to her, and why, as the sound randomly recurs.

Her search takes her into the company of two different men—a young technician who works at a sound board in a recording studio and, later on, a rural artisan and musician who is casually philosophical and who claims to have never left his native countryside. It's one of the film's deadpan puzzles that both men have the same name—and that both take unexpected, and offbeat, romantic interest in the Swinton character.

The movie begins with a request for 10 minutes of silence while the director's notes and sketches are projected on the screen. Brief opening credits follow immediately, and the first instance of that big, mysterious noise comes soon after. The unpredictable recurrence of that sound brings an element of auditory suspense to the gently rendered silences that prevail in *Memoria*.

The peculiarities of the film's opening minutes encourage a meditative kind of attentiveness to what we're hearing as well as seeing in *Memoria*. It's the story of one woman's rather mystical adventure, but it's also an adventure in watching and listening, with the possibility of recognitions beckoning in each moment. □



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