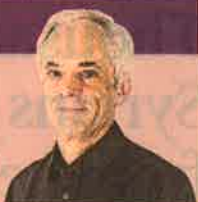


ARTS

FILM

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Andrews

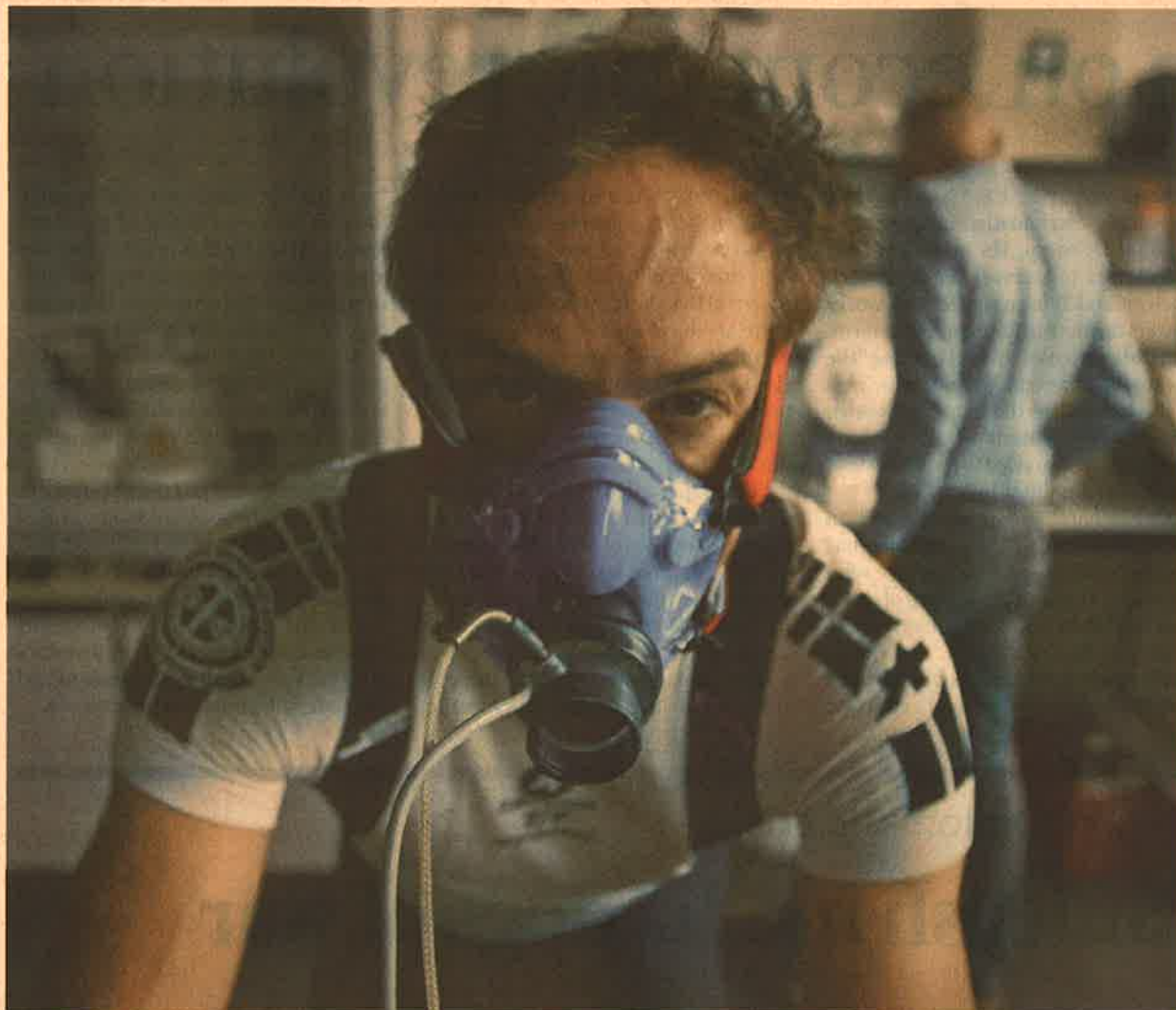
Icarus may be the best nonfiction movie of the year. Bryan Fogel's film about drug use in sport was praised at Sundance, then bought by Netflix in a record deal for a documentary. \$4m: easy to see why. The film is a corker. Or an un-corker — of chastising yet cathartic truths. Though it can't be seen in theatres, it should be sought and seen anyway. And anywhere.

As a Sundance reviewer rightly noted, the film starts like Morgan Spurlock and ends like Laura Poitras. At the beginning Fogel is filmmaker-as-guinea-pig, supersizing his athletic prowess to enter an international bike race under a performance-enhancing drugs regime (chronicled as it goes). By mid-movie he is in *CitizenFour* mode, sheltering and interviewing real-life defector Grigory Rodchenkov, the one-time anti-doping chief in Russian sport.

Holed up in Shakicam City — let's bestow that name on Bryan and Grigori's succession of secret apartments and hotel rooms, shot with handheld cameras — they blow the cover on a drug scandal that ascends to Putin. Rodchenkov is a showboating stick of nerves with a pot belly and greying Chaplin 'tache. In idiomatic English he says, "I could be tossed to the bus any time."

He could. Back in Russia he attempted suicide. He has now left behind his children and wife, fleetingly glimpsed on Skype. His and Fogel's account of the lengths to which a country went to "game the system" makes amazing viewing — and listening. Early summarisation by Rodchenkov: "The system in place to test athletes . . . was bullshit." By most of the evidence, *Icarus* makes clear, and God knows makes enthralling, is probably still is.

The Emoji Movie has been taken to the cleaners by American critics, but I'd have thought a light sponging quite enough. Sony's animated comedy about cyber-symbols is not *that* bad. Nor is it stained excessively with product placement, despite name-checks for some well-known apps. The hero is a young "Meh" emoji, born to be a blasé-expressed yellow face, with a jaded-fatigue



Clockwise, from above: Bryan Fogel in 'Icarus'; Ethan Hawke and Sally Hawkins in 'Maudie'; Jack Lowden as Morrissey in 'England Is Mine'

**Icarus**

Bryan Fogel
★★★★★

The Emoji Movie

Anthony Leondis
★★★★☆

Land of Mine

Martin Zandvliet
★★★★★

Maudie

Aisling Walsh
★★★★☆

England Is Mine

Mark Gill
★★★★☆

Williams

Morgan Matthews
★★★★★

justice. Leigh would find the hope, pathos and transcendence in this one-time wannabe of eloquent woe, who seems (even now in retrospect) the least likely candidate for chart success in rock history.

Mark Gill's film goes through the motions. It's a work of lifeless competence, which may be worse than incompetence. At least in an accident something can catch fire. Here we get Jack Lowden with a wig and accent; lots of brand-recognition 1970s hit tunes (the Morrissey/Smiths songs weren't released to the film); and much sub-Monty Python stuff, ponderously directed, about the aspiring young artist rebelling against the hard northern parents.

British genius, and its nature, can drive us up the wall. **Williams**, a documentary about the Formula 1 racing car constructor Frank Williams, is another Anglo-Saxon exuberance-free zone. But it's far more likeable in its miserabilism than *England Is Mine*. To the public, Williams has always been a dour mystery man. There seems to have been a charisma bypass in his history. But director Morgan Matthews, digging deep, finds something more: a family almost coming apart through the stress fractures of emotional repression; fractures barely less painful than those Williams sustained physically after a near-fatal car crash.

Williams didn't and doesn't "do" emotion. While the deaths rack up — of friends, racing drivers, a wife — Wil-

The dope on drugs in sport

sigh implied for all occasions. But he feels too many emotions. Joy, laughter, anger . . . He cannot function properly in his role. His mission accordingly: to fit in with others or else make them fit in with him.

If you're over 50, you may not know what an emoji is. I was in that club two days ago. If I can chuckle now, though, so can anyone as Meh (voice of T.J. Miller) goes on an adventure-journey through smartphone "levels", right up to the Cloud. He's accompanied by two fellow emojis, High-5 (James Corden), a talking hand, and the prettily burbl-

ing Jailbreak (Anna Faris), a hacker.

Some of the gags fizzle. A few set pieces go to pieces. Occasionally it's as if *The Lego Movie* is reaching out a long, friendly arm to *Inside Out* and falling into the chasm between. But the film is inventive too. There's a hilarious do-or-die password attempt scene (we've all been there), and watch out for Smiler (Maya Rudolph), the best character. She's an upbeat alpha female with a permanent smile and a laughter-toned "happy" voice. She's the kind of woman you've met as a PR greeter: the kind who will carry on smiling and spraying

charm while she tells you your hope of a meeting/appointment/deal/whatever is dead in the water and so are you.

Land of Mine is small but powerfully formed. On a loose-change budget, Danish filmmaker Martin Zandvliet constructs a chilling, moving drama about prisoners of war used as prisoners of work. After the second world war, German captives, many teenaged, were forced to clear mines from the west Jutland coast. 45,000 devices lurk on the beach where young PoWs hazard life and limb here, in a three-month labour sentence enforced by a Nazi-hating martinet (Roland Møller).

to have heard the word "movie". *Maudie* is cramped, talky, pedestrian even when venturing beyond the two-room house. When a script's first spoken word is "Sister" — a young brother apostrophising the young Maud — we know we're in Kindergarten Screenwriting Class. Gotta let the audience know they're siblings. Straight off.

Soon we're in stagy love-hate exchanges between the new cohabitants. (The pre-conjugal scenes play like Griffith's 1919 *Broken Blossoms* gone talkie and cod-realist.) Then it's, let's shunt the plot forward into "Maudie Gets Famous", "Maudie's Brother and