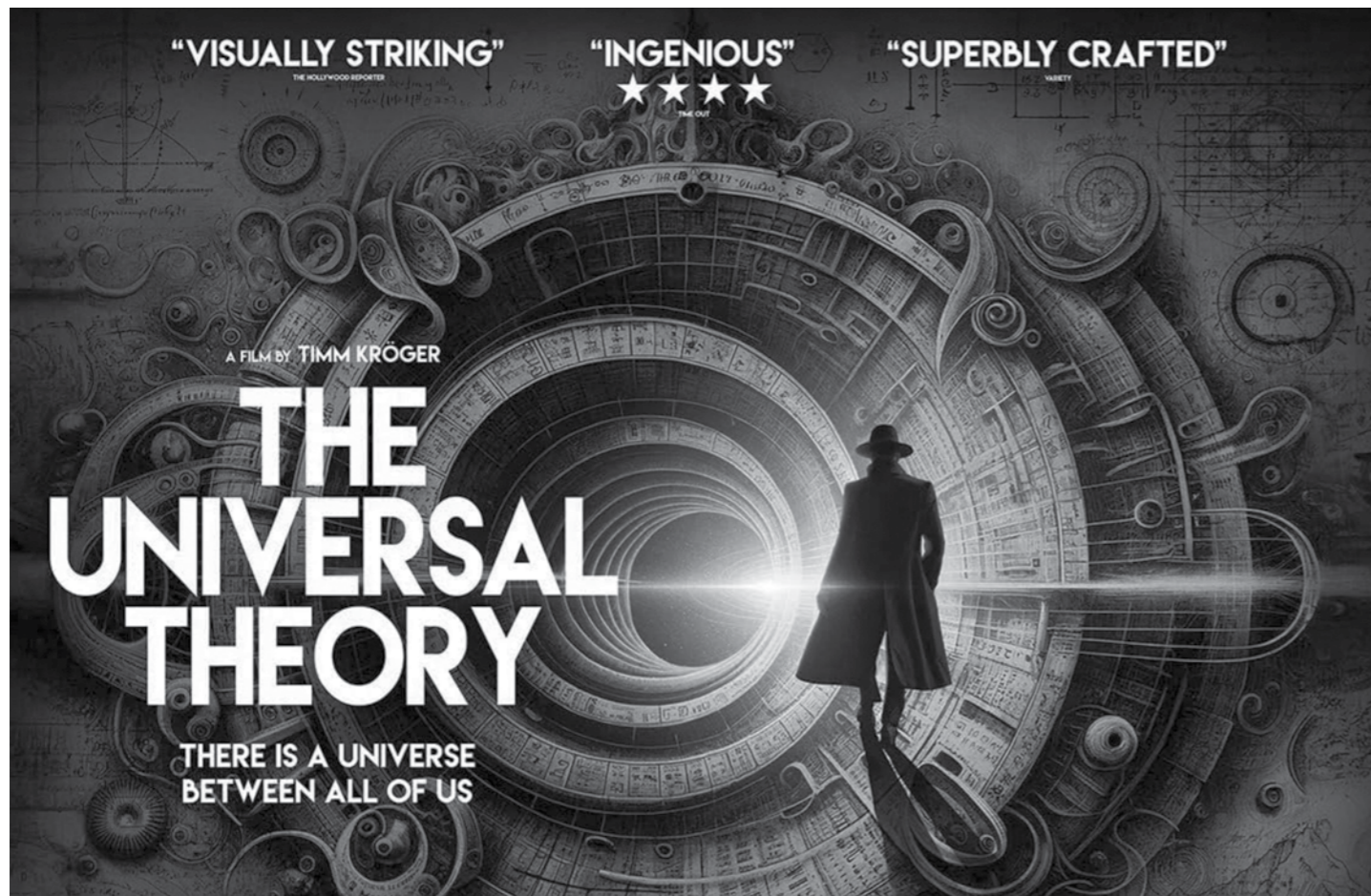




CLOSE UP

AUCKLAND FILM SOCIETY Vol 80 March – November 2025



WELCOME TO AUCKLAND FILM SOCIETY

Our 2025 season is a richly eclectic programme of special screenings, classic features, documentaries and contemporary cinema from around the world.

Auckland Film Society is a non-profit incorporated society and a registered charitable organisation. AFS is run by volunteers elected at our AGM (next AGM is 28 April 2025). Visit us at aucklandfilmsociety.org.nz

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AFS Committee members are Mark Andersen, Simon Erceg, Joshua Eyre, Andrew Lockett, Jane McKenzie, Craig Ranapia, Carmel Riordan, Kristina Siverson and Dave Watson.

Many thanks to programmer Michael McDonnell at Aotearoa New Zealand Federation of Film Societies, nzfilmsociety.org.nz



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All That Jazz • How Far is Heaven • Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid • Ninotchka

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This issue of *Close Up* was edited by Andrew Lockett and Jane McKenzie. Picture research by Jane McKenzie and Michael McDonnell, NZ Federation of Film Societies

Grateful thanks to the Institut Français and the Embassy of France, the Goethe-Institut and Te Tumu Whakaata Taonga New Zealand Film Commission; and to Time Out Bookstore, The Surrey Hotel, Metropolitan Rentals, Whānau Mārama New Zealand International Film Festival, Show Me Shorts Film Festival and Academy Cinemas

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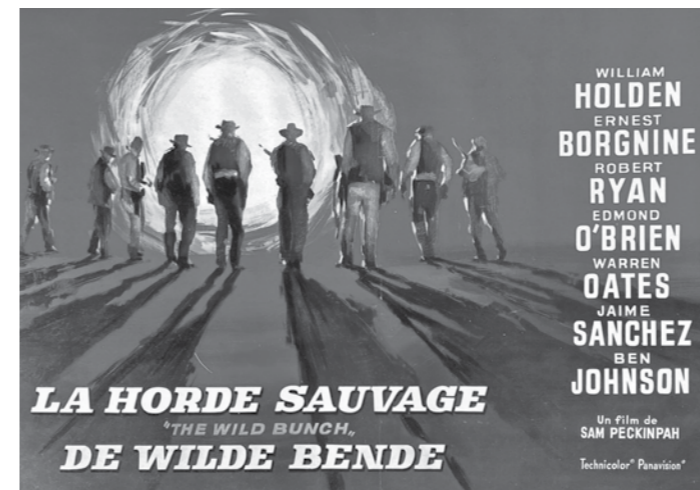
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QUIET PLEASE!

Please be considerate of others in the audience during film screenings.



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DATES AND TIMES – EARLY STARTS & TUESDAY SCREENINGS

Monday 10 March at 6:00 pm All That Jazz
 Monday 17 March at 6:00 pm The Blue Caftan
 Monday 14 April at 6:00 pm Here is Your Life
 Monday 26 May at 6:00 pm Beginning
 Monday 23 June at 6:00 pm The Wild Bunch
 Monday 28 July at 6:00 pm Ikiru
 Monday 01 September at 6:00 pm Pacification
 Monday 29 September at 6:00 pm Peppermint Candy
 Monday 20 October at 6:00 pm All the Beauty and the Bloodshed
 Monday 03 November at 6:00 pm High and Low
No screenings on public holidays. We screen on the following Tuesdays.
 Tuesday 22 April at 6:15 pm Brewster McCloud
 Tuesday 03 June at 6:15 pm Petite Maman
 Tuesday 28 October at 6:15 pm A Ghost Story



Monday 10 March at 6:00 pm

Early start – long run time

AFS thanks Time Out Bookstore

All That Jazz USA 1979

Director: Bob Fosse
 Producer: Robert Alan Aurthur
 Production Co: Columbia Pictures, 20th Century Fox
 Screenplay: Robert Alan Aurthur, Bob Fosse
 Photography: Giuseppe Rotunno
 Editor: Alan Heim
 Music: Ralph Burns

With: Roy Scheider (Joe Gideon), Jessica Lange (Angelique), Ann Reinking (Kate Jagger), Leland Palmer (Audrey Paris), Cliff Gorman (Davis Newman), Ben Vereen (O'Connor Flood)

123 mins, Blu-ray, M

Celebrated as an incisive, self-lacerating backstage spectacle and razzed as an indulgent and pretentious passion project, genius director-choreographer Bob Fosse's *All That Jazz* is one of the most ambitious American films of the 1970s. At this point in his career, Fosse had nothing to prove to the show-business establishment (in 1973, he won the Oscar, the Tony, and the Emmy, all for directing), but a 1974 brush with death – exhaustion, heart attack, life-saving surgery – put him in an introspective mood, and the results were spectacular. Not content with reaching a dazzling apotheosis in the on-screen presentation of song and dance, Fosse wove singing and dancing into a semi-autobiographical narrative chronicling the final days in the life of Joe Gideon, a genius director-choreographer whose non-stop work regimen is making him physically ill... Joe's work is his life, and the irony is that his work – along with the pills and smokes that keep him going – is what kills him...

Fosse never forgot the lessons he learned as a kid performing in burlesque clubs. Indeed, at his best, his creative vision is a startling mix of the sublime and the vulgar. It all comes to a head when Ben Vereen performs a lurid and nearly interminable version of "Bye Bye Love"... It's riotously, jaw-droppingly over-the-top. ("This must have cost a fortune!" someone exclaims, approvingly.)

An even more singular achievement is Fosse's cinematic approach to the musical numbers, which are never cut to the beat, but are instead cut to highlight performance and story. That is, they spotlight the dance, with moves, not edits, placed in sensitive counterpoint to the music. And with dancing and dancers like these, that's of primary importance. Fosse went a crucial step further, first staging his routines for the proscenium and then reworking them with the idea that the camera is not just recording but participating in the action as well – it's choreography for camera, and it makes a huge difference. Fosse understood that film editing would allow him to achieve a degree of precision in choreography on screen that was impossible on the stage. "Dancers' bones broke, but celluloid did not protest," writes biographer Sam Wasson in his book, *Fosse*...

You could accurately describe *All That Jazz* as a musical comedy about death, but that short-changes the visceral sense of fear at its raw and bloody heart – fear of failure, fear of humiliation, fear of oblivion. I first saw it at the age of 12, and already it held me rapt, dazzled, and frightened by the adult world it seemed to reveal... It's exhilarating but terrifying. It pushes the bounds of film narrative to create an unsentimental tableau that incorporates grotesque and even cruel fantasy elements. *All That Jazz* is a remarkable, genuinely epochal achievement; sometimes I despair that there may never be another like it. Thirty-five years on, it retains its status as the last great American movie musical. Bryant Frazer, *Film Freak Central*



Monday 17 March at 6:00 pm

Early start – long run time

The Blue Caftan Le bleu du caftan France/Morocco/Belgium/Denmark 2022

Director: Maryam Touzani
Producer: Nabil Ayouch
Screenplay: Maryam Touzani, Nabil Ayouch
Production Co: Les Films du Nouveau Monde, Ali n' Productions, Velvet Films
Photography: Virginie Surdej
Editor: Nicolas Rumpf
Music: Kristian Eidnes Andersen

With: Lubna Azabal (Mina), Saleh Bakri (Halim), Ayoub Missiouï (Youssef)

124 mins, Blu-ray. M nudity & sex scenes
In Arabic with English subtitles

At one point in *The Blue Caftan*, a master tailor instructs his young apprentice in cutting fabric. They stand with their bodies pressed close together, their hands intertwined, clutching a pair of large shears. The scene is suffused with eroticism and as the tailor speaks, the symbolic implication of what they are about to do becomes clear. He tells the young man to be certain before making the cut because there is no going back.

Maryam Touzani's second feature, which won the Fipresci award at Cannes last year, is an overwhelmingly tender, dignified drama. It offers a powerful vision of love and bravery, suggesting that the two are inseparable.

Halim (Saleh Bakri) and his wife Mina (Lubna Azabal) own a caftan shop in one of Morocco's oldest medinas. A stoic master of his craft, Halim sews and embroiders his dazzling handmade caftans in a disappearing tradition inherited from his father, while Mina runs the business side of things – dealing with demanding customers and fabric dealers, and shielding her husband from an impatient world. The couple take on a shy young man named Youssef (Ayoub Missiouï) to assist Halim, and together, the two men work on what promises to be Halim's masterpiece: a glorious blue caftan lined with an intricate gold-patterned trim.

Youssef's arrival arouses a longing in Halim previously expressed only in fleeting rendezvous with strangers at a local bathhouse. The obvious attraction between the two men stirs hostility between Youssef and Mina, and after she accuses him of stealing fabric, he leaves...

Appropriately enough, *The Blue Caftan* is full of elegantly woven narrative and emotional threads, giving the work a delicately rendered cumulative impact. The film's deliberately paced dramatic revelations, rather than existing primarily to further the plot, are in the service of something greater: what at first appears to be a story of secret lives and betrayal destined for a tragic end becomes a nuanced portrait of unconditional love and acceptance at its most radical...

A critical mass of dramatic and psychological details is built up through an impressive marriage of script and performance. The subtleties of Touzani's actors – their glances, gestures and silences – bring to life the mysteries of the human heart with deft restraint, and at the centre of it all is the sincere connection, sensitively and memorably realised, between Halim and Mina...

The Blue Caftan is a film that venerates the tradition of craft while arguing that true freedom also requires a break with an oppressive status quo. It ends with a perfect poetic expression of this idea, with a deeply touching gesture from Mina and a tribute from Halim that combine defiance, devotion and transcendent love. – Chris Shields, *Sight and Sound*



Monday 24 March at 6:15 pm

Ghost Dog: Way of the Samurai USA 1999

Director: Jim Jarmusch
Producers: Richard Guay, Jim Jarmusch
Production co: Pandora Film
Screenplay: Jim Jarmusch
Photography: Robby Müller
Editor: Jay Rabinowitz
Music: RZA

With: Forest Whitaker (Ghost Dog), John Tormey (Louie), Cliff Gorman (Sonny Valerio), Henry Silva (Ray Vargo), Tricia Vessey (Louise Vargo), Isaach De Bankolé (Raymond)

116 mins, Blu-ray. R16 violence & offensive language

It's always a pleasure to watch an actor who knows how to use his body beautifully, who moves with grace and also has the ability to telegraph the subtlest of emotions by changing the set of his shoulders or the meter of his gait. In Jim Jarmusch's uneven but compelling *Ghost Dog: The Way of the Samurai*, Forest Whitaker plays a reclusive and mysterious inner-city hit man who lives and breathes by the code of ancient Japanese warriors, and he moves with so much conviction that he barely needs to speak...

Ghost Dog is not only a hit man but a bird lover – possibly not in that order – who lives alone on his rooftop with a coop full of carrier pigeons and a stash of firearms that he uses to carry out his missions. He's fashioned himself into a modern-day samurai, drawing his inspiration from the *Hagakure*, a text with tenets like "Meditation on inevitable death should be performed daily." He's employed by Louie (John Tormey), a second-tier mobster to whom he's indebted (Louie saved him from a brutal, life-threatening beating years earlier), but not even Louie knows where he lives. The two communicate by carrier pigeon; Ghost Dog insists on being paid not by the job, but by the year, always on the first day of autumn...

Between his physical gifts and his easy expressiveness, Whitaker is the perfect actor to reveal Ghost Dog's peaceful-as-a-fishpond soul. That droopy left eye gives him a sleepy, contemplative look, as if he'd worked out the secrets of the universe in his dreams only to spend his waking hours haunted by them. He's marvelous in his scenes with Pearlina (the charming Camille Winbush), a little girl who strikes up a conversation with him in the park, and who uses a lunchbox to tote a selection of paperbacks including *The Wind in the Willows*, *The Souls of Black Folk*, and a lurid paperback called *Night Nurse*, which she admits she hasn't read but likes for its saucy cover. The solitary little girl who likes to read and the samurai loner who freely confesses to loving *The Wind in the Willows* strike an easy rapport, and their moments together are some of the loveliest in the movie.

Ghost Dog has an almost dreamy, rather than gritty, urban look, courtesy of cinematographer Robby Müller. And Jay Rabinowitz has edited it beautifully against RZA's resonant hip-hop soundtrack. Even so, it's best to be prepared for *Ghost Dog's* uneven rhythms. The banter between the mobsters provides some of the liveliest moments – Gorman's Valerio declares that his favorite rapper is Public Enemy's Flavor Flav – and the picture's muted doses of action and violence are often more lyrical than they are jarring... there's something mysteriously alluring about *Ghost Dog*. Its heart beats most persistently in Whitaker, with his Buddha body and his easy, rolling walk. He may be a big guy, but everything about him seems as spare as haiku. – Stephanie Zacharek, *Salon*



Monday 31 March at 6:15 pm

BlackBerry Canada 2023

Director: Matt Johnson
Producer: Fraser Ash, Niv Fichman, Kevin Krikst, Matthew Miller
Production co: XYZ Films, Rhombus Media, Zaprunder Films
Screenplay: Matt Johnson, Matthew Miller, based on the book *Losing the Signal: The Untold Story Behind the Extraordinary Rise and Spectacular Fall of BlackBerry* by Jacque McNish and Sean Silcoff
Photography: Jared Raab
Editor: Curt Lobb
Music: Jay McCarroll

With: Jay Baruchel (Mike), Glenn Howerton (Jim), Matt Johnson (Doug), Kelly Van der Burg (Jasmine)

120 mins, Blu-ray. M offensive language

Scooch over, *The Social Network* (2010). Budge up, *Steve Jobs* (2015). Make a little room for rise-and-fall comedy *BlackBerry*, Canadian actor/writer/director Matt Johnson's hugely entertaining, boisterously bittersweet addition to the tech-hubris true-story genre. Following the surging then crashing fortunes of the eponymous palm-sized pocket device, and the seesawing egos of the men behind it, it's a movie that turns the constraints of low-budget filmmaking to its thematic advantage – mirroring not just the scrappy, velcro-wallet ethos of the buddies-in-a-garage startup, but the shaky-cam aesthetic of workplace mockumentary *The Office*, which, across its UK and US versions, was airing right around the time of the events depicted. Seldom has history so recent been made to feel so poignantly, pointedly ancient.

A white-haired Jay Baruchel plays Mike Lazaridis, the nervy, asocial engineering prodigy who, besting all the other whiz-nerds attempting to put email onto a mobile phone, found a way to make it viable. Chugging into a drab parking lot in a crappy car with his affable, headbanded best friend and co-founder Douglas Fregin (Johnson himself, who co-wrote the film with Matthew Miller) and an armful of presentation boards, their arrival is swiftly upstaged by ruthless corporate climber Jim Balsillie (Glenn Howerton) pulling up in his BMW. Then a limo full of dark-suited money guys rolls in after, a reminder that in capitalism, there's always someone higher up the food chain. Small fry meet big fish meet great white...

Baruchel and Johnson are good; Howerton, borderline unrecognisable (physically, if not spiritually) from his *It's Always Sunny in Philadelphia* (2005-) persona, is outstanding. His Jim Balsillie is a figure ripped from a Greek tragedy and plunked down in Waterloo, Ontario, a man of titanic ego, extravagant pettiness and male-pattern baldness, who holds legendary grudges and has a penchant for beating telephones to death in fits of uncontrollable rage. People like him should never gain power, so his downfall is as satisfyingly ironic as anything Sophocles could have dreamt up...

BlackBerry is very funny, but there is also something sad and almost profound in its neat encapsulation of the dizzying speed at which modern culture can change. And while it's a kick to observe the stuff of 20 years ago... treated like artefacts excavated from the dig site of a lost civilisation, it is also gently sobering. The movie mines comedy from the human tendency to believe that we're living in the most advanced moment possible. But while even those of us who lived through its reign as adults can now chuckle at the BlackBerry, its mayfly existence also reminds us to look around our lives today and wonder, suspiciously, just which of our current obsessions will look absurdly quaint by the day after tomorrow. – Jessica Kiang, *Sight and Sound*



Monday 07 April at 6:15 pm

Open Your Eyes Abre los ojos Spain/France/Italy 1997

Director: Alejandro Amenábar
Producer: Fernando Bovaira, José Luis Cuerdo
Screenplay: Alejandro Amenábar, Mateo Gil
Production co: Las Producciones del Escorpión
Photography: Hans Burmann
Editor: María Elena Sáinz de Rozas
Music: Alejandro Amenábar, Mariano Marín

With: Eduardo Noriega (César), Fele Martínez (Pelayo), Penélope Cruz (Sofía), Najwa Nimri (Nuria), Tristán Ulloa (Camarero), Chete Lera (Antonio)

114 mins, Blu-ray. M violence & sex scenes
In Spanish with English subtitles

With barely a moment's distinction between reality and dreams, Alejandro Amenábar's maddening existential thriller *Open Your Eyes* persistently undermines conventional notions of time, setting, and personal identity. To what end remains similarly ambiguous, but as an especially severe case of millennial anxiety, the film is nonetheless an intriguing (if unsolvable) puzzle. Lifting elements from *Blowup*, *Vertigo*, *Seconds*, and the paranoid universe of Philip K Dick, Amenábar and co-writer Mateo Gil open the story at a psychiatric hospital where wealthy playboy Eduardo Noriega is being held for murder and flashes back from there. Of course, the psychiatric hospital may or may not exist, the murder may or may not have occurred, and the flashbacks don't always lead to reliable places. – Scott Tobias, *AV Club*

César is handsome, superficial and rich. Once he meets drama student Sofía, he's also head over heels in love. But fate sticks out a foot to trip him up when a former flame, Nuria, tries to kill him, leaving him with a bruised ego and a severely disfigured face. He's depressed and isolated until a seemingly miraculous surgery restores his face. But then things start getting weird: the supposedly dead Nuria suddenly appears, claiming to be Sofía...

Up-and-coming Spanish director Alejandro Amenábar wanted to pay homage to the Master of Suspense, borrowing his themes of melding identities and obsessive romance. At one point, in a clear nod to Hitch's *Vertigo* (1958), Nuria and Sofía seem to merge together, with César unable to distinguish one woman from another. César's creepy white mask is also reminiscent of Georges Franju's classic scalpel horror *Eyes without a Face* (1960)... Amenábar and his regular co-writer Mateo Gil (they'd written *Tesis* together and would go on to co-write *The Sea Inside* too) were inspired by a news article about cryonics and wanted to explore it. Gil would return to this theme later in his career with *Realive* (2016).

Although Amenábar has since declared this to be his worst film, it's a delightfully tense and accomplished sci-fi that has great fun playing around with levels of reality. And it all comes with a delicious 90s aesthetic. César and Sofía's apartments, everyone's outfits, the haircuts, the trip-hop soundtrack – everything is a perfect capsule of the time; a snapshot of what was cool and what was nerdy. It also shows us around a gorgeous Madrid, with an impressive series of shots in the middle of the city's Gran Vía showing it completely deserted.

Spanish cinema has an incredibly rich history with horror and sci-fi (Segundo de Chomón, one of the pioneers of silent cinema, played around with horror in his work). In the 90s, a new generation of filmmakers...revitalised genre across thrillers, sci-fi and horror, achieving commercial and critical success... *Open Your Eyes* is... the work of a talented director on the brink of exploding onto the international film scene. – Anna Bogutskaya, BFI



Monday 14 April at 6:00 pm

Early start – long run time

Here is Your Life Här har du ditt liv AFS thanks Metropolitan Rentals Ltd Sweden 1966

Director/Photography/Editor: Jan Troell
 Producer: Bengt Forslund
 Production co: Svensk Filmindustri
 Screenplay: Bengt Forslund, Jan Troell, based on the novel by Eyvind Johnson
 Music: Erik Nordgren

With: Eddie Axberg (Olof Persson), Allan Edwall (August), Max von Sydow (Smålands-Pelle), Gunnar Björnstrand (Lundgren), Gudrun Brost (Olof's foster mother), Ulla Akselson (Olof's mother)

168 mins, Blu-ray, B&W and colour. M sexual content. In Swedish with English subtitles

The [colour] sequence must be one of the most beautiful evocations of memory in the whole of mid-20th-century cinema – I would say right up there with passages from Andrei Tarkovsky's great masterpiece *The Mirror*. And wonderfully bold is the way the flashback contains another flashback within it. Mark Le Fanu

Troell's expansive first feature is a statement of intent, reviving the outdoor naturalism through which the classic Swedish cinema of Sjöström and others made its name, but applying a typically '60s sensibility highlighting social divisions. Based on Eyvind Johnson's novel *Romanem om Olof*, it's a celluloid Bildungsroman, set during the years of the Great War, and following Axberg's teenage protagonist as he quits his peasant foster parents' humble home in northern Sweden. Moving through a variety of labouring jobs, he eventually signs up as projectionist in a travelling cinema show, and begins to develop some political awareness. He has always had aspirations to be a novelist, and Troell's understated but authentic record makes clear how crucial these school of life experiences will be in shaping this alert individual. The documentary-influenced style that later marked *The Emigrants* emerges almost fully formed here, the director/editor/cameraman's evident respect for ordinary workers and his faith in letting the material speak for itself are justified by a leisurely but compelling narrative through-line. – Trevor Johnston, *Time Out*

Here Is Your Life may have been the 35-year-old Troell's first feature, but he had already completed 14 shorts for television... In addition, his photographic skills had been honed by his work as the director of photography on another fascinating first film, 1963's *Barnvagnen (The Pram)*, by Bo Widerberg. The aleatory visual register of that movie, full of fragmentary scenes with unexpected entrances and exits, anticipates, in part, the elliptical narrative freedom that is such an enjoyable aspect of *Here Is Your Life*.

Yet perhaps more important than any other factor in allowing the film to take its own way was the close working relationship Troell was forging with an extraordinarily gifted young producer named Bengt Forslund, whose many skills included knowing how to take advantage of the extensive new funds made available for domestic filmmaking through changes in the law fostered by the recently founded Swedish Film Institute – including a levy of 10 percent on every ticket sold in movie theaters. Forslund, rare among producers, was also a talented writer. He and Troell share the main writing credit for *Here Is Your Life*, as they would go on to do with Troell's *The Emigrants* (1971) and *The New Land* (1972)... Ambition and energy were Forslund's hallmarks, so one can imagine him responding positively to Troell's argument for... the full epic treatment. That decision in the end issued in artistic triumph: the film's quality is absolutely tied up with its leisurely expansiveness. Yet, outside Sweden, the length did give rise to distribution difficulties... Only now... can the movie be seen widely, in its integrity, and appreciated for the masterpiece it is. – Criterion



Tuesday 22 April at 6:15 pm

Brewster McCloud USA 1970

Director: Robert Altman
 Producers: Lou Adler, John Phillips
 Production co: Lion's Gate
 Screenplay: Doran William Cannon
 Photography: Lamar Boren, Jordan Cronenweth
 Editor: Lou Lombardo

With: Bud Cort (Brewster McCloud), Sally Kellerman (Louise), Michael Murphy (Det Lt Frank Shaft), William Windom (Haskell Weeks), Shelley Duvall (Suzanne Davis), René Auberjonois (The Lecturer), Margaret Hamilton (Daphne Heap), Stacy Keach (Abraham Wright)

105 mins, Blu-ray. R16

After the success of 1970's *M*A*S*H*, Hollywood essentially gave Robert Altman the green light to pursue any project his heart desired, no matter how strange or seemingly non-commercial. In a trademark fit of perverse iconoclasm, Altman scooped up one of the hottest scripts in the business – a black comedy about a misanthropic, womanizing New York murderer obsessed with flight, from *Skidoo* screenwriter Doran William Cannon – then changed the setting and discarded everything aside from its basic premise... Altman was well on his way to developing a reputation as an actor's best friend and many screenwriters' and executives' worst nightmare.

In a role Cannon wanted Austin Pendleton to play, *Harold and Maude's* baby-faced Bud Cort stars as an eccentric, reclusive young man who lives in the bowels of the Houston Astrodome and dedicates his life to building and perfecting a homemade one-person flying machine. Sally Kellerman co-stars as a mysterious figure that just might be Cort's guardian angel and the seraphic creature behind a string of murders of creepy conservative Texans whose deaths go rightfully unmourned by the people they've callously exploited.

As befits an oddball fantasy-comedy about a man monomaniacally obsessed with transcending this sick, sad material world for the sensual ecstasy of flight, *Brewster McCloud* is pulled throughout in antithetical directions. In the earthly realm, it's a sledgehammer-subtle social satire filled with cartoonish Keystone Kops haplessly pursuing their elusive prey, and crudely drawn authority figures behaving like petulant children. On a more ethereal level, it's an intermittently lyrical, strangely poignant fantasy powered by the beatific, magnetic presence of Cort and Shelley Duvall in an electric debut, and "Papa" John Phillips' lovely songs. *Brewster McCloud* is... a strangely compelling, utterly singular (even in Altman's oeuvre) film rife with indelible moments. Even at the beginning of his film career, Altman was boldly reaching for the sky and sometimes falling straight on his ass. – Nathan Rabin, *AV Club*

One of the things about *M*A*S*H* was that people wanted to see it a second time. That's typical of the recent Robert Altman style; *Brewster McCloud* is just as densely packed with words and action, and you keep thinking you're missing things. You probably are. It's that quality that's so attractive about these two Altman films. We get the sense of a live intelligence, rushing things ahead on the screen, not worrying whether we'll understand.

...Anyway, the young man hides in the Houston Astrodome and works on his wings. The detective investigates the murders. The girl appears mysteriously whenever she's needed to help the young man. And beyond that, there's nothing I can tell you about the plot that would be of the slightest help. Altman's style is centrifugal, whirling off political allusions, jokes, double takes and anything else that flies loose from the narrative center. – Roger Ebert



Monday 28 April at 6:15 pm

AFS AGM follows screening

The Haunting USA 1963

Director/Producer: Robert Wise
 Production co: Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer
 Screenplay: Nelson Gidding, based on the novel *The Haunting of Hill House* by Shirley Jackson
 Photography: Davis Boulton
 Editor: Ernest Walter
 Music: Humphrey Searle

With: Julie Harris (Eleanor "Nell" Lance), Claire Bloom (Theodora "Theo"), Richard Johnson (Dr John Markway), Russ Tamblyn (Luke Sannerson), Fay Compton (Mrs Sannerson), Rosalie Crutchley (Mrs Dudley)

117 mins, Blu-ray, B&W. R16

Everything about the 1963 film is exactly right: from the chilling opening titles accompanying Humphrey Searle's top-notch score, to the exquisitely cluttered production design; from the sound design (on which so many of the scares depend), to the beautiful chiaroscuro widescreen cinematography of Davis Boulton (shooting only his second film). Among haunted house films – a subgenre sadly gone to seed these days – *The Haunting* ranks at the very top, shifting position every now and then with *The Innocents*, itself another master class in adaptation and widescreen black and white cinematography.

The script, credited to Nelson Gidding (a talented, though not particularly illustrious, veteran of TV teleplays) but obviously guided by the steady hand of Robert Wise (who bought the rights to the book himself and produced and directed the film), trims away all of the excess of the novel. When he set out to write the script, the first thing Gidding did was to cut away any scene beyond the opening scenes that did not take place within the house, to "keep it claustrophobic." Whole days are excised from the story, the elaborate backstory of the house is wisely distilled into a brief montage sequence, characters providing comedic relief are eliminated, and supernatural occurrences that work on the page but that would appear ludicrous on film (carpet patterns that shift, statues that appear to move, bloody clothes that mysteriously clean themselves) are discarded. All of the action that takes more than a week to unfold in the book is compressed in the script to occur in no more than roughly 60 hours. The result is a distillation and intensification of the plot and the tension created from it.

At the same time, the film is not just boos and screams. While *The Haunting* is a horror film, it is perhaps primarily a psychological portrait of a sensitive woman losing her mind. This kind of portrait was precisely the thing that Shirley Jackson excelled at... Gidding transposed from the book most of the scenes and dialogue that portray the slow dissolution of Eleanor's sanity.

A script only gets you so far, though, and then it is down to careful direction of a superb cast. It probably goes without saying that Julie Harris is nothing less than perfect in the role of Eleanor, and I can't imagine anyone else in the role of Theodora than Claire Bloom, extraordinary in her tights and miniskirts and as a lesbian so open about her sexuality that no one even needs to be told (as if they could be, even in the dying days of the Production Code). Russ Tamblyn is perhaps typecast as a smart-aleck, but he's always a pleasure to watch, and he even gets to show off his gymnastic skills jumping from the rickety spiral staircase that features in the climax of the film. Richard Johnson rounds out the cast and is no less good in his role as a pipe-smoking professor than the rest of the cast... So if you're reading these reviews looking for a good, spooky movie, I can make few recommendations more confidently than for this film. Matt Bailey, *Not Coming to a Theatre Near You*



Monday 05 May at 6:15 pm

La Chinoise France 1967

Director/Screenplay: Jean-Luc Godard
 Production co: Anouchka Films, Les Productions de la Guéville
 Photography: Raoul Coutard
 Editor: Delphine Desfons, Agnès Guillemot
 Music: Pierre Degeyter, Michel Legrand

With: Anne Wiazemsky (Véronique), Jean-Pierre Léaud (Guillaume), Michel Séméniako (Henri), Juliet Berto (Yvonne), Lex De Bruijn (Kirilov), Omar Blondin Diop (Omar)

92 mins, Blu-ray. M adult themes. In French with English subtitles

By 1967, Jean-Luc Godard had become disillusioned with cinema – or rather, with the cinema that he had been making and that had shaped him. Over the course of the Sixties, his films had gone from deconstructing classic genres – spy movies, crime dramas, domestic melodramas, lovers-on-the-run flicks – to more directly engaging with the world around him. A radicalism had taken seed in him, as it had in much of France; the riots of May 1968 were just around the corner. With that came Godard's search for new forms, new ways of making films and confronting the audience... *La Chinoise* may be the film that best shows Godard in transformation, as he abandons the cinephilia and embraces a kind of direct but playful polemicism. He was still Godard: He would never offer a party line, the same way he could never offer a linear narrative or a classically drawn character. His films were always a dialogue, with people and ideas and story strands constantly interrogating one another.

La Chinoise dwells on the interactions of a group of Maoist students as they hunker down in a comfy flat – it belongs to the parents of a friend, away for the summer – to discuss politics, ideologically purify themselves, fall in and out of love, and prepare to assassinate a Soviet cultural ambassador. (In the era of French intellectuals' love affair with the Chinese Cultural Revolution, the status-quo Soviets were almost as big an enemy as the Americans.)

All of this is presented in highly self-aware fashion, with direct address and immaculately designed frames. (At times, you wonder if the characters are in love with Maoism so much as they are with the color red.) That playfulness lightens the didacticism. We're invited to wonder about the authenticity of these characters we see onscreen: Is their lack of artifice, and the performers' lack of actorly affect, a sign that they are merely mouthpieces, or does it actually speak to their sincerity?

The most fascinating and powerful sequence comes near the end, when Wiazemsky's character discusses with philosopher Francis Jeanson on a train her belief that violent action must be taken in order to shut down her university. Jeanson had famously helped lead a secret left-wing network that supported Algeria's National Liberation Front during its anti-colonialist struggle against France – and had been convicted of treason for his efforts. But now he argues against her decision to act, challenging what he sees as a shallow bourgeois radicalism. ("I'm only a worker producing revolution," she insists. "So be a worker and work," he retorts.)

Godard reportedly fed Wiazemsky lines through an earpiece, and was in effect himself debating Jeanson; at the time, the filmmaker felt he had won. But Jeanson's humanity and pragmatism come off as far saner than Godard/Wiazemsky's chic stridency. Maybe that disconnect speaks to the power of *La Chinoise* – as a time capsule of an attitude, capturing an electricity in the air that foretold the chaos to come. It's a beautiful, troubling, prophetic work. Bilge Eberi, *Village Voice*



Monday 12 May at 6:15 pm

How Far is Heaven

New Zealand 2012

Directors: Christopher Pryor, Miriam Smith
 Producer: Miriam Smith
 Production co: Deer Heart Films
 Photography: Christopher Pryor
 Editors: Cushla Dillon, Christopher Pryor
 Music: Rachel Shearer

98 mins, Blu-ray. M offensive language

This New Zealand-made and focused documentary is as impressive for its provenance as its exquisite photography and delightful subject matter. Co-directors Chris Pryor and Miriam Smith spent a year living with the community at Jerusalem/Hiruharama on the Whanganui river, but even before that they visited many times over a period of years, to gain trust and receive permission, not even knowing exactly what they would film or what story would eventually be revealed.

Their faith, patience and hard yards paid off, as *How Far is Heaven* paints a stunning portrait of a village, a people, and three devoted nuns who “accompany” the community in its daily life. The Sisters of Compassion have lived in Jerusalem since the 1880s, and these Pakeha women of God continue to live alongside the Maori families, teaching at the school, encouraging kindness and fairness, and learning their own lessons about life.

The film gently follows a selection of children, a couple of adults, and one nun in particular, Sister Margaret Mary, who is newest to the village and speaks hopefully about her calling and her openness to learning from the locals. The handling of religious subject matter is pitch-perfect, filming prayers, Bible readings and candid discussions between the nuns so we see how natural, unpressured and gracious their received wisdom can be. Almost more importantly, the Maori community is treated without judgement or condescension – while we laugh at DJ’s hypotheses about heaven’s distance from earth and the existence of the local taniwha, there is a matter-of-fact solemnness when another child talks fondly of his father in jail.

Pryor and Smith must surely have had thousands of hours from which to sew this patchwork quilt, and they have created a magical picture of what will be, to many of us, an almost mystical world. Without the need for a crazy central character or dramatic narrative arc, *How Far is Heaven’s* grace and subtlety lends weight to how we can justify calling our country Godzone. Sarah Watt, *Sunday Star Times*

When Smith was a child she visited Jerusalem. “It lived on in my mind since then. I visited it again a few times when I was older. It just grew in my mind as an idea, I suppose.” Smith broached the idea of making a film with Sister Sue in 2007 and “she was open to the idea”. Pryor was keen to be involved and in 2008 he and Smith arrived with a camera.

“We felt it was a story that had to be told, especially because the sisters may not be there for too much longer because of the aging of the order,” says Smith. All three nuns have since left Jerusalem, so Smith says they were fortunate to have filmed when they did, because Sister Sue and Sister Anna Maria had built deep links with the local community where they had been there a long time.

While the nuns were happy for the two to film, Pryor and Smith also needed the permission of the community. “It did take time. We just communicated as we went and it was a really smooth process.” – Tom Cardy, *Dominion Post*



Monday 19 May at 6:15 pm

Falcon Lake

France/Canada 2022

Director: Charlotte Le Bon
 Producers: Sylvain Corbeil, Nancy Grant
 Production co: Cinefrance, Ley Line Entertainment, Sons of Manual
 Screenplay: François Choquet, Charlotte Le Bon, Bastien Vivès, based on Vivès’ graphic novel *Une Soeur*
 Photography: Kristof Brandl
 Editor: Julie Lena
 Music: Klò Pelgag, Shida Shahabi

With: Joseph Engel (Bastien), Sara Montpetit (Chloé), Monia Chokri (Violette), Arthur Igual (Romain), Karine Gonthier-Hyndman (Louise)

92 mins, DCP. R16 sex scenes & sexual references
 In French and English with English subtitles

This ambitious yet nimbly assured tonal mash-up is introduced in the opening shot, in which a girl’s body floats face down in a placid, forest-fringed lake, while the film’s title inscribes itself, in inkblot-parchment Gothic lettering, across the landscape. A little while after the last possible moment there could be a non-sinister explanation, the girl turns over nonchalantly and starts to swim. Whatever solitary game she was playing, it was only made morbid by the way it was observed: the gray glitter of the water, the glowering green hills beyond.

Time and again Le Bon plays this mischievous trick on us. A shot of an empty forest lane creeps in imperceptibly, long before the gaggle of chattering teens appears around the bend; an impromptu stolen-booze picnic happens under ominously buzzing pylons. Using the watchful compositions of DP Kristof Brandl’s lush, dark-edged 16mm photography and the glimmering pianos and eerie echoes of Shida Shahabi’s shivery score, the film telegraphs a darkly foreboding mood of which the characters, interacting naturally and normally, are unaware.

Sometimes, they even make jokes about it, as when “nearly 14”-year-old Bastien (Joseph Engel) and his Francophone family arrive at their summer vacation destination in the Canadian countryside, and thanks to the classic cabin-in-the-woods production design by Alex Hercules Desjardins, it could not look more ripe for ghostly or ghostly shenanigans. “Creepy,” remarks his mother Violette (Monia Chokri), on discovering the electricity isn’t working. They’ve come to spend some time with Violette’s longtime best friend Louise (Karine Gonthier-Hyndman), who comes as a package deal with her surly 16-year-old daughter Chloé (Sara Montpetit), with whom Bastien and his younger brother Titi (Thomas Laperrière) are to share a bedroom...

At first Chloé barely tolerates Bastien... But soon, as each discovers there’s more to the other than first appears, an easy chemistry evolves between them. For Bastien of course, it flares into a massive crush... *Falcon Lake* really comes alive in the interactions between these two eccentric, interesting young people. Bastien, beautifully played by Engel (an easy pick for the “new Timothée Chalamet,” in case anyone’s sick of the old one) is a wonderfully rounded creation, both awkward and oddly self-assured, and really, properly funny to boot: You understand why Chloé, despite hunkier options afforded by the older boys nearby, might be drawn to Bastien in spite of herself.

Chloé, who in other hands could have been reduced to the enticing outline of a young boy’s fantasy, is similarly well-drawn. That Le Bon takes such mischievous pleasure in playing with the macabre tropes of the slasher flick suggests a deep kinship with the witchy, cynical young girl. – Jessica Kiang, *Variety*



Monday 26 May at 6:00 pm

Early start – long run time

Beginning

Dasatskisi
 Georgia/France 2020

Director: Dea Kulumbegashvili
 Producers: Ilan Amouyal, Rati Oneli, David Zerati
 Production co: First Picture, OFA
 Screenplay: Dea Kulumbegashvili, Rati Oneli
 Photography: Arseni Khachaturan
 Editor: Matthieu Taponier
 Music: Nicolas Jaar

With: Ia Sukhitashvili (Yana), Rati Oneli (David), Kakha Kintsurashvili (Alex), Saba Gogichaishvili (Giorgi)

126 mins, Blu-ray
 R16 rape, sexual references, offensive language & content that may disturb
 In Georgian with English subtitles

In a Jehovah’s Witnesses church, outside of Tbilisi, the Bible story of Abraham is read aloud. As the moral passage declares life to be a test to strengthen one’s faith, the sense of calm is replaced by screams. A firebomb has been thrown into the Kingdom Hall by a group of extremists. The event leaves Yana (Ia Sukhitashvili) deeply unsettled and it is her questioning of credence that is central to *Beginning*, writer-director Dea Kulumbegashvili’s astounding feature debut and Georgia’s submission at this year’s Academy Awards.

The impressiveness of Kulumbegashvili’s cinematic grammar is immediately established in this opening, with no cuts and no camera movement, only the stillness of acute observation. Trapped in both her religious community and the boxy 1:33 frame, Yana’s rumination of faith becomes one of quiet introspection as she embarks on a meditative journey of desire...

As Yana seeks something outside the borders of her own belief, Kulumbegashvili approaches the subjects of womanhood and religion with a focused intensity. With a divine sense of contemplation, the Georgian filmmaker takes full advantage of *Beginning’s* unhurried pace to linger on Sukhitashvili’s performance. Sukhitashvili is a remarkable presence, occupying the frame with a subdued femininity that is, in its own way, a powerful resolve. Her performance expertly frames Yana’s entrapment in this harrowing patriarchal culture. Throughout, an unyielding sense of dread hangs in the silences between *Beginning’s* sparse dialogue. This unnerving tension is particularly pervasive throughout many of Kulumbegashvili’s long, static shots...

Arseni Khachaturan’s cinematography captures the rural landscape of Georgia with a raw textual quality, a grittiness that reflects the hardships of Yana’s narrative. Shot in Lagodekhi, Kulumbegashvili’s hometown, the patient, elongated shots give time to appreciate both Sukhitashvili’s subtleties and the stunning, scenic compositions. Khachaturan’s framing often takes the position of the observer but in one particularly striking scene, this stillness ascends to new heights of quietude. Yana lies back on the leaf sprinkled floor of the woods, eyelids plastered closed while her son’s calls are drowned out by bird song. The shot adjoins actor, landscape and stillness; it is as if Yana is grounding herself in the forest, quietly waiting for her body to decay back into the Earth.

“It’s as if I were waiting for something to start, or to end.” *Beginning* is Yana’s rebirth, a meticulous portrait of femininity that craves for something more. As Yana goes in search of self-assurance, Kulumbegashvili finds her own in this phenomenal debut feature. – Emily Maskell, *We Love Cinema*



Tuesday 03 June at 6:15 pm

Petite Maman

France 2021

Director: Céline Sciamma
 Producer: Bénédicte Couvreur
 Production co: Lilies Films
 Screenplay: Céline Sciamma
 Photography: Claire Mathon
 Editor: Julien Lachery
 Music: Para One

With: Joséphine Sanz (Nelly), Gabrielle Sanz (Marion), Stéphane Varupenne (Father), Nina Meurisse (Mother), Margo Abascal (Grandmother)

72 mins, Blu-ray. PG

There are certain pieces of art that feel like treasure, delicate objects that are almost too good to be true. *Petite Maman* is one of those discoveries.

Clocking in at a mere 72 minutes, this film from *Portrait of a Lady on Fire* director Céline Sciamma is shorter than some episodes of television, and yet it is packed to the brim with beauty and keen observations about families and sadness and the ways the past and present collide. After debuting at various festivals last year, *Petite Maman* is finally coming to theaters, and it’s the best way to spend a little over an hour.

Portrait of a Lady on Fire was Sciamma’s epic, a sweeping love story that felt like it transcended time, but *Petite Maman* is equally as impactful just on a much smaller scale, a conceptually daring fable that asks the question: What if you met your own mother when she was your age? Yes, it’s a delightfully fantastical premise that Sciamma somehow executes evenhandedly. It feels thoroughly magical, but without twinkly-eyed whimsy or easy jokes.

The film opens as Nelly (Joséphine Sanz) rides to her recently deceased grandmother’s house with her mother (Nina Meurisse). They have a sweet, easy sense of communication – Nelly feeds her mom from the backseat. But there’s an unspoken pain troubling the older woman, and one night she leaves Nelly with Nelly’s father (Stéphane Varupenne) to finish the job of clearing the grandmother’s space. As her dad does most of the work, Nelly explores the surrounding area. In the woods she finds a fort made of branches and twigs and another girl building it. Her name is Marion (Gabrielle Sanz) and she looks eerily similar to Nelly. (The actresses are indeed twins.) They start playing together, and when Marion invites Nelly over to her home during a rainstorm, Nelly comes to a strange realization: Marion is her mother at her own age.

Sciamma restrains from providing the exposition that other, lesser filmmakers might lean on. There’s no explanation for how any of this works... Sciamma is particularly attuned to the ways children play and the specificity of those interactions. There’s a mutual understanding that Marion and Nelly immediately develop that requires no language. Joséphine and Gabrielle Sanz have the benefit of being actual sisters, but their performances are not to be underestimated. They both somehow intuit things far beyond their years – their knowing permeates the screen.

Without any of the tropes one might expect, Sciamma, along with cinematographer Claire Mathon, has created something that feels like magic. *Petite Maman* asks existential questions with the purity of youth, while at the same time remaining utterly true to life. It’s rare that a film feels as special as this one. Hold it tight. – Esther Zuckerman, *Thrillist*



Monday 09 June at 6:15 pm

The Universal Theory Die Theorie von Allem Germany/Austria/Switzerland 2023

Director: Timm Kröger
Producers: Heino Deckert, Viktoria Stolpe, Timm Kröger
Production co: MaJa.de Fiction, The Barricades, Panama Film, Catpics AG
Screenplay: Timm Kröger, Roderick Warich
Photography: Roland Stuprich
Editor: Jann Anderegg
Music: Diego Ramos Rodriguez

With: Jan Bülow (Johannes Leinert), Olivia Ross (Karin Hönig), Hanns Zischler (Dr Julius Strathen), Gottfried Breitfuss (Professor Blumberg), David Bennent (Kommissar Arnold), Philippe Graber (Kommissar Amrein)

118 mins, Blu-ray, B&W. M violence & content that may disturb
In German with English subtitles

Imagine that one of Hitchcock’s villains – say, the guy missing the tip of a pinkie in *The 39 Steps*, or the shrink who runs the institute in *Spellbound* – did not simply come from a place of murderous intent but from a different place altogether, perhaps another dimension. Imagine that villain’s supranatural malfeasance backdropped by jagged mountains, captured in black-and-white so crisp it could cut, and widescreen frames so wide whole Alpine ranges fit comfortably inside them. And imagine it all unfolding to a deliberately overpowering score, like Bernard Herrman and Scott Walker conceived a baby during a sonic boom. Now you are somewhere near Timm Kröger’s superbly crafted *The Universal Theory*. – Jessica Kiang, *Variety*

This twisted and twisty German feature takes the modish notion of the multiverse for a spin and sends it into a deep elliptical orbit. The result is strange and discomfiting, a bleak work of retro sci-fi noir, pristine as an Alpine mountain after a snowfall and just as crispy cold. Not all its gambits play out and it won’t be to everyone’s taste, but director Timm Kröger displays admirably reckless ambition with this very original yet oddly familiar work.

There’s certainly a lot of code-switching in genre terms going on, which contributes to the sense of familiarity but keeps undermining itself. A delicious, luridly coloured parody of a late 60s/early 70s talk show introduces main character Johannes (Jan Bülow) as the author of a “novel” (that he insists is nonfiction) about the aforementioned m-verse. The film then transitions into stark black and white in a 1962 setting, as if acting out the story in Johannes’ novel-memoir.

Then fresh-faced German doctoral student Johannes... travels to Switzerland with his grumpy supervisor Dr Strathen (Hanns Zischler) for an academic conference on physics. When they arrive all manner of weird things happen... A sense of guilt and shame hangs over everyone, like the malformed cloud formations seen in the horizon. Johannes meets melancholy pixie-nightmare girl Karin (Olivia Ross), a jazz-pianist femme fatale he can’t stop thinking about. She knows secrets about him he’s never told anyone and even what he dreamed the night before.

And then it all starts getting really weird, with visual effects sparkling like Tesla coils. The score, credited to Diego Ramos Rodriguez, David Schweighart and Viola Hammer, is laid on thick, thrumming its strings and eerie melodies practically throughout. There are obvious, clearly intentional echoes of Bernard Herrmann, especially his work for Alfred Hitchcock’s *Vertigo*, while the period’s fashions and the vintage Magnum look of the cinematography recall *La Jetée* by Chris Marker, with its own meditations on time-travelling, loss and guilt. Leslie Felperin, *Guardian*



Monday 16 June at 6:15 pm

The Crossing La traversée France/Germany/Czech Republic 2021

Director: Florence Miailhe
Producers: Dora Benousilio, Luc Camilli
Production co: Les Films de l’Arlequin, Balance Film
Screenplay: Marie Desplechin, Florence Miailhe
Editor: Julie Dupré, Nassim Gordji Tehrani
Music: Philipp E Kumpel, Andreas Moisa

With: Emilie Lan Dürr (Kyona), Florence Miailhe (adult Kyona), Maxime Gemin (Adriel), Arthur Ferreira (Iskender), Serge Avedikian (Jon), Axel Auriant (Erdewan)

84 mins, Blu-ray. M violence & nudity
In French with English subtitles

A remarkable coming-of-age tale, *The Crossing* is also the first feature-length animation created using oil paint on glass, which makes for a rich texture and breathtaking, experimental visual style. – Justin Johnson, London Film Festival

“We followed the same roads, were arrested by the same soldiers and ended up in the same camps.” From *In This World* to *Sin nombre*, to mention only two examples among many others, the subject of youth caught up in the whirlwind of forced migration has already been widely used in fiction, but in animation, the question is much more delicate to tackle, as the harshness of the journeys is, at first sight, difficult to reconcile with the target of the widest possible audience. But it seems that a new artistic wind is blowing, like the remarkable *The Crossing*, Florence Miailhe’s first feature film, which received a special mention last June at Annecy...

It is indeed a perfect marriage that the French filmmaker achieves by uniting a highly original, inventive and creatively beautiful form of animation (a style based on painting and sketches) and a story (a screenplay by the director with Marie Desplechin) on the right borderline between harsh realism and the classical roots of storytelling.

“That’s how we left, my brother was being slow, my mother was crying, my father was shouting and I was overexcited: it was the first time I had left my village.” It is summer. Fleeing the exactions of obscure militias, Kyona (13) and her family leave behind them a bucolic life in Novi Varna. Very quickly separated from her parents (and the three other, younger members of her siblings) at a railway checkpoint, the teenager, who never lets go of her sketchbook, continues her journey with Adriel (12), whom she has promised to protect...

Wonderfully staged with its shifting colour palette and a multitude of subtle ideas gracefully put into images, *The Crossing* is a simple and profound, sophisticated and clear film, combining a humanist spirit with a look that does not turn away from the darker sides of beings. A first feature film with high artistic added value not to be missed (and to be shown to children) that Florence Miailhe has dedicated to her “grandmother who, one day in 1905, left Odessa with her ten children, to flee the pogroms” and to “all those who one day or another leave their country hoping to find a better future elsewhere.” Fabien Lemercier, *Cineuropa*



Monday 23 June at 6:00 pm

Early start – long run time

The Wild Bunch USA 1969

Director: Sam Peckinpah
Producer: Phil Feldman
Production co: Warner Brothers
Screenplay: Walon Green, Sam Peckinpah, Roy N Sickner
Photography: Lucien Ballard
Editor: Louis Lombardo
Music: Jerry Fielding

With: William Holden (Pike Bishop), Ernest Borgnine (“Dutch” Engstrom), Robert Ryan (Deke Thornton), Edmond O’Brien (Freddie Sykes), Warren Oates (Lyle Gorch), Jaime Sánchez (Angel), Ben Johnson (Tector Gorch)

145 mins, Blu-ray. R16 violence

They don’t make them like *The Wild Bunch* any more. They don’t make opening credits (a vital part of the story, perfunctory in most modern movies) which grab you by the throat like this. The wild bunch riding into town in soldiers’ guise; a temperance union marching along to the strains of “Shall We Gather at the River” (a faintly mocking reference to John Ford); a heist about to go wrong; children gleefully tormenting an ant colony which, in turn, swarms over a scorpion – a forecast of the predatory action to come. At the very moment when William Holden, as the leader of the band, growls “If they move, kill ‘em,” the final credit flashes up: “Directed by Sam Peckinpah.”

They also don’t make movies (or if they do, it’s shamefacedly), where the women are all shadowy beings given a line or two of dialogue before they’re blown away. Movies where it’s a man’s, man’s world, bonded by guns, booze, loose women and constant stand-offs whose tension is released by gales of raw, comradely laughter... Peckinpah’s great 1969 film remains hugely impressive, both for its technical brilliance (the intricately timed and edited robbery would repay dozens of viewings) and the emotional ferocity of its themes: old age, friendship, betrayal and the struggle to retain some kind of cock-eyed code of honour in an increasingly cynical world. – Sheila Johnston, *Independent*

Peckinpah’s West is a place where legends meet realities (or perhaps other legends): where men biting on the bullet of the old Western code – four of them going out in the end to confront a whole Mexican garrison, because a man has to do what a man has to do and the guns they have lived by demand a death – can still be shot in the back by jaded señoritas or grinning children. The Wild Bunch themselves are a grimy, ageing crew of ruffians who skip across the border between the United States and Mexico, robbing a small-town bank... then falling in with a Mexican general who pays them to go back and hijack a munitions train. It is 1914, and the soldier of fortune business is just about played out...

Perhaps the Western, anyhow, has moved irreversibly into its elegiac phase: all the gunfighters are tired, and it is always the last chance and the last shoot-up. But Peckinpah plaits simple strands into an intricate pattern of contradictions and moral ambiguities. At the opening, as the gunmen ride into town, they pass children cheerfully watching a killer battle between scorpions and ants, and their elders collecting for a temperance rally. The first sequence of spinning, twisting, gun-blazing ferocity... is possibly the most electrifying sequence in a Hollywood movie since the violence down main street in *Bonnie and Clyde*; and it seems no accident that again the mood is of savagery biting into reminiscence – innocent, D W Griffith, front-porch and picket-fence America sprayed with lead. Penelope Houston, *Spectator*



Monday 30 June at 6:15 pm

Kes UK 1969

Director: Ken Loach
Producer: Tony Garnett
Production co: Woodfall Film Productions, Kestrel Films
Screenplay: Barry Hines, Ken Loach, Tony Garnett, based on Hines’ novel, *A Kestrel for a Knave*
Photography: Chris Menges
Editor: Roy Watts
Music: John Cameron

With: David Bradley (Billy Casper), Freddie Fletcher (Jud), Lynne Perrie (Mrs Casper), Colin Welland (Mr Farthing), Brian Glover (Mr Sugden), Bob Bowes (Mr Gryce)

107 mins, Blu-ray. PG coarse language

Is there a more popular British film among British audiences than *Kes* – which remains, all these years later, the only Ken Loach picture that everybody seems to like? Strangely, the film isn’t that well known overseas – even though Loach himself is now rather more venerated abroad than at home, and the story is a simple, universal, timeless one. This may well be down to the broad Barnsley accents in which almost all of the characters speak – not easily decipherable by those in the south of England, never mind viewers from farther afield. But the unmediated accents are a crucial element in locating *Kes* so vividly within a specific place, time, and class: a tough South Yorkshire mining village in the late sixties, evoked by a limited number of real-life locations (school, home, shop, working-men’s club).

The only viable economic choice for the area’s young men is to go “down the pit” – a prospect which fills scrawny, undernourished teenager Billy Casper (David Bradley) with horror. His loutish older half-brother Jud (Freddie Fletcher) has been a miner for several years, but still lives at home with Billy and their mother (Lynne Perrie) – both boys’ fathers having long since vacated the scene. Hassled at home and a misfit at school, Billy prefers to spend his time wandering the nearby countryside – where one day he chances upon a kestrel’s nest.

He (illegally) purloins a young bird and, with help from a book stolen from the town library, learns the rudiments of falconry – to the delight of his kindly English teacher Mr Farthing (Colin Welland), and the bemused contempt of Jud, who prefers to spend his free time drinking and gambling...

Part of *Kes*’s status as beloved perennial is the fact that it’s (very closely) based on Barry Hines’ 1968 novel *A Kestrel For A Knave* – for decades a staple on British school syllabuses, and thus never out of print. Hines, Loach and producer Tony Garnett collaborated on the script, which strikes an engaging combination of grit and humour – the comic highlight arriving around half-way when Billy plays hapless goalkeeper during a PE lesson football-game run by martinet-like teacher Mr Sugden (Brian Glover).

Glover, like Welland, had been a schoolteacher in real life – and the fact that in most instances the ‘actors’ are playing ‘characters’ very close to themselves means that performances are totally convincing across the board. Seldom off-screen, Bradley is nothing less than a marvel as the heartbreakingly resilient Billy – much credit to Loach for eliciting such remarkable work from such a raw newcomer. John Cameron’s music occasionally verges on the twee, but on the whole Loach – aided by Chris Menges’ cinematography and Roy Watts’ incisive editing – nimbly avoids the mawkishness and sentimentality which might, in lesser hands, have overwhelmed this utterly engaging, piercingly moving tale of a boy and his wild ‘pet.’ – Neil Young, *Jigsaw Lounge*



Monday 07 July at 6:15 pm

AFS thanks The Surrey Hotel

Cléo from 5 to 7 Cléo de 5 à 7 France/Italy 1962

Director: Agnès Varda
 Producer: Georges de Beauregard, Carlo Ponti
 Production co: Ciné-Tamaris
 Screenplay: Agnès Varda
 Photography: Jean Rabier
 Editor: Janine Verneau
 Music: Michel Legrand

With: Corinne Marchand (Florence / Cléo Victoire), José Luis de Vilallonga (José), Loye Payen (Irma), Dominique Davray (Angèle), Serge Korber (Maurice), Dorotheé Blanck (Dorotheé)

86 mins, DCP, B&W. G
 In French with English subtitles

So elegant, so stylish, so extremely and eternally cool. In broad strokes Agnès Varda's second feature film sounds like a downer: Cléo Victoire (Corinne Marchand), a singer in Paris, nervously awaits the results of a biopsy. In more specific terms it sounds rather uneventful: unfolding in real-time, Cléo spends her day faffing about – going to a café, trying on clothes, hanging out in her apartment with friends, walking the streets, catching cabs. But the sheer delightfulness of *Cléo from 5 to 7* comes down to execution, its form and aesthetic born from the coolest cinema movement of them all: the French New Wave, to which the legendary Varda was a key contributor...

“People die suddenly nowadays – especially artists,” Cléo observes... A lover visits, then two friends, congregating around the piano to play, sing and smoke (a legal requirement for being French, surely). But Cléo's mood sours and she sends them out. Various people come and go, but it feels like a stretch to describe any of them as side or supporting characters; this is Cléo's film through and through.

At almost exactly the halfway mark, when Cléo visits Le Dôme cafe (known for attracting clientele including Pablo Picasso and Ernest Hemingway), Varda switches to first-person perspective to navigate the space, the camera now acting as the protagonist's eyes. Varda deploys so many different techniques, potentially so clashing and discordant, that it's amazing the experience feels tonally consistent. The camera is stationary, the camera roams; the cuts are quick, the takes are long; the frame pauses to soak up the faces of some people and whizzes by others.

Cléo from 5 to 7 is divided into 13 chapters, which is the only touch I don't particularly like, the sum of its parts so wonderfully melodic and cohesive. It's rare for a film so lovely and elegant to roll out lines like: “I might as well be dead already.” Yet so much about this film is exquisitely rare, including the way time itself unfolds, as one long fluid moment, a classic example of the “real-time” concept.

Films are sometimes described as being like time capsules or mausoleums – but watching this one, which is always in the here-and-now, one hour for the protagonist equalling one hour for us, is more like entering a portal.

On the other side of it we arrive in Paris in the 60s, with Cléo Victoire as our beautiful, sad guide. There's not the slightest hint of the film overstaying its welcome. We could watch her ambling around for hours; this joyous exercise in elegance and style never gets old. – Luke Buckmaster, *Guardian*



Monday 14 July at 6:15 pm

Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid USA 1973

Director: Sam Peckinpah
 Producer: Gordon Carroll
 Screenplay: Rudy Wurlitzer
 Production co: Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer
 Photography: John Coquillon
 Editor: David Berlatsky, Garth Craven, Tony De Zarraga, Richard Halsey, Roger Spottiswoode, Robert L. Wolfe
 Music: Bob Dylan

With: James Coburn (Pat Garrett), Kris Kristofferson (Billy the Kid), Richard Jaeckel (Kip McKinney), Jason Robards (Lew Wallace), Bob Dylan (Alias), Rita Coolidge (Maria), Chill Wills (Lemuel)

117 mins, DCP. M violence & sex scenes

Had all five found themselves in the same cantina – and it's not impossible that at some point they did – they might have called themselves the Wild Bunch. All fashioned themselves outlaws or at least flirted with the idea: screenwriter Rudolph Wurlitzer, a homegrown Beckett whose novels were bulletins from Armageddon; lead actors James Coburn and Kris Kristofferson, the former from a generation of ugly-cool amorlists who hijacked movie stardom and the latter a Rhodes-scholar janitor who emerged as the hottest country songwriter since Hank Williams; co-star and film composer Bob Dylan, the 1960s' single most revolutionary figure in any medium, Warhol notwithstanding; and director Sam Peckinpah, the best American filmmaker of his time who wasn't named Kubrick or Altman. Among them they had enough genius, ego, and creative firepower to generate any brilliant enterprise from the dust up, not to mention the neuroses, arrogance, and alcoholism to completely fuck up everything. On 1973's *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid*, they managed to do a little of both, producing one of cinema's towering westerns, in which self-destruction is not only an aesthetic but its own subject matter...

Garrett is Peckinpah's greatest movie, an examination of how American power and greed corrode the stuff of freedom and friendship. “How does it feel?” Billy asks his old friend about selling out to the cattle barons (echoing a classic Dylan song in the process), to which Garrett wearily answers (echoing another Dylan classic), “Like times have changed.” Billy retorts, “Times, maybe. Not me.” As with all of Peckinpah's most important films, regarding *Garrett* in autobiographical terms is irresistible. If you wonder whether the filmmaker is Garrett or the Kid in this allegory of innocence, betrayal, and the obliteration of a brave and savage American spirit, the answer is: yes. Like all great artists who never saw the point of having a cake you can't eat, Peckinpah has it every which way in *Garrett*: his vision of the Old West is utopian and anarchic, lyric and sordid, preposterously male with its few rare women the only voices of reason, all invoking the bard's power and the beast's primal ruin. Peckinpah deromanticizes everything he has ever romanticized, then romanticizes the deromanticizing. The most turbulent production of a turbulent career – shot in faraway, dusty Durango, Mexico, with a crew racked by illness and cameras that didn't work and a studio that never showed any faith in it – *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid* is, among other things, the story of an artist who gave himself too much license for too much excess while also never really cutting himself a break for an instant... Against a landscape of upheaval and doubt, caught in a self-loathing Hollywood career where he may have felt as much traitor as outlaw, Peckinpah made this movie about a country where one of its most stalwart values, loyalty – loyalty among men, loyalty to an idea – is cut down by the ruthless onslaught of expedient centuries. It's the most deeply elegiac film made by a director for whom the whole point of life was its elegy. – Steve Erickson, *Criterion Collection*



Monday 21 July at 6:15 pm

Pulse Kairo Japan 2001

Director/Screenplay: Kurosawa Kiyoshi
 Producer: Shimizu Shun, Okuda Seiji, Inoue Ken, Shomoda Atsuyuki
 Production co: Daiei
 Photography: Hayashi Junichirō
 Editor: Kikuchi Junichi
 Music: Haketa Takefumi

With: Asō Kumiko (Kudo Michi), Kato Haruhiko (Kawashima Ryosuke), Koyuki (Karasawa Harue), Arisaka Kurume (Sasano Junko), Matsuo Masatoshi (Yabe Toshio), Takeda Shinji (Yoshizaki)

114 mins, Blu-ray. R13 violence, horror scenes & content that may disturb
 In Japanese with English subtitles

The action in *Pulse* takes place among a small, interconnected group of college-age youths in a Tokyo that already seems vacant before people start disappearing. When one of them goes incommunicado for a week, his friends don't think too much of it, assuming that he's lost himself on a computer project for school. It turns out they're right, but how lost is another matter: When Michi (Aso Kumiko) goes looking for the missing young man in his apartment, she finds him dazed and a little off; the minute she turns her head to look for an important computer disc, he quietly walks into the other room with a coil of rope and hangs himself. Like many moments to come in *Pulse*, it's disturbing in large part because it's totally inexplicable. What got into this guy, anyway? And what's with that black, splotchy stain he leaves on the bedroom wall?

An answer – or least a suggestion of an answer – comes when the dead man's friends take a look at the disc and find an eerie shot of his apartment, which resembles a static webcam image, save for a persistent flicker (or pulse, if you will). On his computer monitor is the same image reflected ad infinitum, and his friends can see his figure standing frozen in place, off to the side... The first big shock comes when another student goes back to the victim's apartment to do some snooping. He finds a piece of paper that mentions “The Forbidden Room,” which for the sake of this movie is a cordoned-off space where shit goes down. What happens in that place is arguably the signature sequence in all of J-horror, and one that had my petrified psyche doing its best impersonation of Lou Costello in *Abbott And Costello Meet Frankenstein*...

It's one thing to come out and talk about how humans in the Internet age are like dots that never connect, as Harue does at one point. But Kurosawa also makes that point felt in the way his characters occupy these lonely corners of the city, and are doomed, in life and the afterlife, to wander around in isolated pods without coming into meaningful contact with anyone else... Kurosawa's ghosts aren't sexual predators lurking in chat rooms or evil glitches in an OnStar system, but normal people living within their screens and banished to an eternity of immortal despair. As otherworldly and strange as the film gets sometimes, anyone who's ever spent much time around a computer undoubtedly knows the feeling. – Scott Tobias, *AV Club*

The intermittent appearances of the film's 'phantom' presences are all, in their way, amazing: a female spectre walks through a darkened room, seemingly flickering on the verge of insubstantiality as her whole body buckles and warps before she straightens herself to resume her spooky progress. A shadowy male spectre looms out of the darkness, insubstantial until his onyx eyes come into horrifyingly sharp focus... Best of all is a haunting in an empty amusement arcade – a ghost that looks like a column of black smoke undulates on the spot to a deliciously incongruous soundtrack of tinny electronic bleeps and jingles. Neil Young, *Jigsaw Lounge*



Monday 28 July at 6:00 pm

Early start – long run time

Ikiru Japan 1952

Director: Kurosawa Akira
 Producer: Motoki Sōjirō
 Production co: Tōhō
 Screenplay: Kurosawa Akira, Hashimoto Shinobu, Oguni Hideo
 Photography: Nakai Asakazu
 Editor: Iwashita Kōichi
 Music: Hayasaka Fumio

With: Shimura Takashi (Watanabe Kanji), Himori Shinichi (Kimura), Tanaka Haruo (Sakai), Chiaki Minoru (Noguchi), Hidari Bokuzen (Ohara)

137 mins, Blu-ray, B&W. PG low level offensive language
 In Japanese with English subtitles

The old man knows he is dying of cancer. In a bar, he tells a stranger he has money to spend on a “really good time,” but doesn't know how to spend it. The stranger takes him out on the town, to gambling parlors, dance halls and the red light district, and finally to a bar where the piano player calls for requests and the old man, still wearing his overcoat and hat, asks for “Life Is Short – Fall in Love, Dear Maiden.”

“Oh, yeah, one of those old '20s songs,” the piano man says, but he plays it, and then the old man starts to sing. His voice is soft and he scarcely moves his lips, but the bar falls silent, the party girls and the drunken salary men drawn for a moment into a reverie about the shortness of their own lives.

This moment comes near the center point of *Ikiru*, Akira Kurosawa's 1952 film about a bureaucrat who works for 30 years at Tokyo City Hall and never accomplishes anything. Mr Watanabe has become the chief of his section, and sits with a pile of papers on either side of his desk, in front of shelves filled with countless more documents. Down a long table on either side of him, his assistants shuffle these papers back and forth. Nothing is ever decided. His job is to deal with citizen complaints, but his real job is to take a small rubber stamp and press it against each one of the documents, to show that he has handled it...

A group of women have been shuttled from one office to another, protesting against a pool of stagnant water in their neighborhood. Watanabe becomes a madman, personally escorting the case from one bureaucrat to another, determined to see that a children's park is built on the wasteland before he dies. It all leads up to Watanabe's final triumph, seen in one of the greatest closing shots in the cinema.

The scenes of his efforts do not come in chronological order, but as flashbacks from his funeral service. Watanabe's family and associates gather to remember him, drinking too much and finally talking too much, trying to unravel the mystery of his death and the behavior that led up to it. And here we see the real heart of the movie, in the way one man's effort to do the right thing can inspire, or confuse, or anger, or frustrate, those who see it only from the outside, through the lens of their own unexamined lives.

We who have followed Watanabe on his last journey are now brought forcibly back to the land of the living, to cynicism and gossip. Mentally, we urge the survivors to think differently, to arrive at our conclusions. And that is how Kurosawa achieves his final effect: He makes us not witnesses to Watanabe's decision, but evangelists for it. I think this is one of the few movies that might actually be able to inspire someone to lead their life a little differently. Roger Ebert, *Chicago Sun-Times*



Monday 01 September at 6:00 pm

Early start – long run time

Pacifiction Pacifiction – Tourment sur les îles
France/Spain/Germany/Portugal 2022

Director: Albert Serra
Producers: Pierre-Olivier Bardet, Dirk Decker, Joaquim Sapinho, Andrea Schütte, Albert Serra
Production co: Idéale Audience Group, Andergraun Films, Tamtam Film, Rosa Filmes
Screenplay: Baptiste Pinteaux, Albert Serra
Photography: Artur Tort
Editors: Albert Serra, Artur Tort, Ariadna Ribas
Music: Marc Verdaguer, Joe Robinson

With: Benoît Magimel (High Commissioner De Roller), Pahoia Mahagafanau (Shannah), Marc Susini (the Admiral), Matahi Pambrun (Matahi), Alexandre Mello (the Portuguese), Sergi López (Morton)

165 mins, DCP. M nudity & sexual content
In French with English subtitles

Albert Serra's bizarre epic is a cheese-dream of French imperial tristesse, political paranoia and an apocalyptic despair. It is a nightmare that moves as slowly and confidently as a somnambulist, and its pace, length, and Serra's beautiful widescreen panoramic framings – in which conventional drama is almost camouflaged or lost – may divide opinion. I can only say I was captivated by the film and its stealthy evocation of pure evil...

The setting is Tahiti, part of French Polynesia and thus part of the French republic; its lush coasts and landscapes are evoked with breathtaking flair, yet with something lowering in their beauty, something sinister imposed upon them from above or a haze they have had to generate from below.

Benoît Magimel (who seems to be morphing into Gérard Depardieu before our very eyes) is M de Roller, the French high commissioner who strolls around with raffish entitlement in his rumpled white suit, a breezy sleazy fellow who enjoys patronising all ranks of the Tahiti population. He hangs out at the local club owned by Morton, another white expatriate, played by the reliably unsettling Sergi López, and De Roller grinningly ogles the almost naked bar staff and glad-hands all the other seedy officials there. He also loves hanging out with the semi-clad indigenous dancers who perform traditional dances for the tourists and, like a poundshop Paul Gauguin, fancies himself a connoisseur of their traditions. He has also fallen in love with the dancers' choreographer Shannah (Pahoia Mahagafanau).

But De Roller's mood has become more cynical and dyspeptic as his term of office reaches its end, and he is disconcerted by new developments on the island. There seem to be more and more military personnel around, including a certain admiral (Marc Susini), who, when drunk, tells people at the club about the importance of behaving ruthlessly with one's "own people" (which constitutionally includes Tahitians) to scare potential enemies. De Roller chairs an excruciatingly difficult meeting with indigenous representatives who demand to know if there is any truth in the rumour that the French government is preparing to resume nuclear testing on the island (which, notoriously, took place in secret from the 60s to the 90s)...

As the neurosis and horror roll in like invisible fog, De Roller takes a final tour of his beloved, yet also hated, colonial possession... But will he actually leave? Perhaps *Pacifiction* is flawed, but its waywardness is part of Serra's authorship: it is an authentic descent into darkness. – Peter Bradshaw, *Guardian*



Monday 08 September at 6:15 pm

Victims of Sin Víctimas del pecado
Mexico 1951

Director/Screenplay: Emilio Fernández
Producers: Guillermo Calderón, Pedro Calderón
Production co: Cinematográfica Calderón
Photography: Gabriel Figueroa
Editor: Gloria Schoemann
Music: Antonio Díaz Conde

With: Ninón Sevilla (Violeta), Tito Junco (Santiago), Rodolfo Acosta (Rodolfo), Rita Montaner (Rita), Arturo Soto Rangel (Prison warden)

84 mins, Blu-ray, B&W. PG violence & coarse language
In Spanish with English subtitles

"Film is like a battleground. There's love, hate, action, violence, death. In one word: emotion." So said Sam Fuller of Jean-Luc Godard's *Pierrot le Fou*, but he could just as easily have been speaking about Emilio Fernández's *Victims of Sin* given how drastically and often ferociously the 1951 film shifts in emotional registers, from the erotic to the violent, from the tragic to the transcendent.

As one of the quintessential *cabaretera* films from the golden age of Mexican cinema, *Victims of Sin* moves at the quickening pace of the Afro-Cuban rumba dances we witness throughout. These dances, and the music supporting them, underscore the sensuality that seems to run beneath almost everything in the seedy little corner of Mexico City where the film takes place, as well as set up the female characters as objects of male lust and jealousy.

Written by Fernández and Mauricio Magdaleno, the film centers on Violeta (Ninón Sevilla), an almost heroically resilient cabaret dancer who doesn't put up with any nonsense from her demanding boss, Don Gazalo (Francisco Reiguera), or the sleazy gangster, Rodolfo (Rodolfo Acosta), who gets her friend Rosa (Margarita Ceballos) pregnant... [When] Rosa abandons the infant... Violeta rescues the child and raises it as her own.

Victims of Sin refuses to present Violeta as some sort of pure, angelic force. Strong, smart, and independent... [her] aggressiveness and fearlessness make her stand apart from other *cabaretera* heroines, since, despite the film's title, she never allows herself to be made a victim, retaining her agency and independence even as she endures threats of violence and is forced to engage in sex work.

Throughout, Gabriel Figueroa's stunning noirish cinematography captures the kineticism of Violeta's performances and the sense of impending danger that seems to grow with every second. A particularly gorgeous, yet foreboding, shot of Violeta sees her walking to the side of a bridge over the nearby train station. She watches a train come in from the distance, and as it gets closer, it releases a giant plume of smoke that darkens the bright yet cloudy sky as it swoops in toward the bridge. It's a harbinger of things to come for Violeta – a symbolic reminder of the precariousness of women's lives in this world. But it's only fitting that she remains unphased, and like many other situations in her life, appears like David standing before Goliath.

The vibrancy of Sevilla's performance is a consistent marvel, especially when Violeta takes the stage, dancing as if trying to transcend the cruel determinism of fate. But it's her ferocity, which seems incongruous to her small frame, that makes Violeta such an iconic character. Indeed, her unbridled passion is evident off stage as well as she directly confronts a world that wants to diminish her and refuses, time and again, to ever back down. – Derek Smith, *Slant*



Monday 15 September at 6:15 pm

Oh Boy
Germany 2012

Director/Screenplay: Jan-Ole Gerster
Producers: Marcos Kantis, Martin Lehwald, Michal Pokorny
Production co: Schiwago Film, Chromosom Filmproduktion
Photography: Philipp Kirsamer
Editor: Anja Siemens
Music: The Major Minors, Cheryl MacNeil

With: Tom Schilling (Niko Fischer), Friederike Kempter (Julika Hoffmann), Marc Hosemann (Matze), Katharina Schüttler (Elli), Justus von Dohnányi (Karl Speckenbach), Andreas Schröders (Psychologist)

82 mins, Blu-ray, B&W. M violence & content that may disturb
In German with English subtitles

A bad day is compounded by a lack of caffeine in *Oh Boy*, writer-director Jan Ole Gerster's deadpan black-and-white portrait of a 24-hour span of lousy luck suffered by unemployed 20-something Niko Fischer (Tom Schilling). Waking early in the morning, only to have his girlfriend promptly dump him, Niko sets off into Berlin with little plan except to procure himself a cup of joe – a quest that, in the film's running gag, constantly eludes him. Unfortunately, he's more than successful at finding disappointment, discontent, and general bizarreness around every subsequent corner...

A young man whose face would be described as "fresh" if it wasn't perpetually stuck in a semi-frown, Niko soon meets up with actor friend Matze (Marc Hosemann) to visit another acquaintance on the set of a Holocaust drama. That uneventful incident is followed by a golfing get-together with Niko's dad (Ulrich Noethen), who reprimands his son for dropping out of school and cuts him off financially. Eventually, the hero attends the play of Julika (Friederike Kempter), a former childhood classmate whom Niko used to tease about being fat. Julika is now slender and interested in her former tormenter, making it seem like things might turn up for the protagonist. Yet, as befitting the wry tone struck by Gerster, this subplot is merely another pothole along Niko's path to figuring out who he is and what he's doing with his life...

Gerster has a knack for eliciting laughs out of silent reaction shots and awkward pauses, and he generates an overarching atmosphere of romantic loserdom. Niko's final stop along his journey is a bar and, after a strange conversation with a sloshed, rueful older gentleman, a hospital makes an appearance. Though it clashes with the lightly morose humor of what came before, the ending is fitting; this understated indie deepens its portrait of growing up by suggesting, ultimately, that anyone who thinks wasting time is a reasonable course of action needs to wake up. – Nick Shager, *AV Club*

Gerster sets the movie to a freewheeling jazz soundtrack that similarly echoes Niko's drifting mindset. But its chief asset is Schilling's ever-deadpan reactions, which go to far greater lengths to address his situation than he can. Despite its series of capricious developments, *Oh Boy* finds a rich blend of humor and sadness in its leading man's predicament.... But *Oh Boy* truly justifies its winding path during a climactic scene involving Niko's encounter with an elderly barfly that leads him to a fresh understanding of his situation. It's here that Gerster finally cuts away from his protagonist, in a telling montage of various Berlin sights, all of which are devoid of people. With the notion of a typically bustling urban scene emptied out, *Oh Boy* ends on a tranquil note. Like everyone else, Niko feels isolated by his problems, but the world is a much bigger place. Eric Kohn, *Indiewire*



Monday 22 September at 6:15 pm

The Phantom Carriage Körkarlen
Sweden 1921

Director: Victor Sjöström
Producer: Charles Magnusson
Production co: Svensk Filmindustri
Screenplay: Victor Sjöström, based on the novel *Körkarlen* by Selma Lagerlöf
Photography: Julius Jaenzon
Editor: Eugen Hellman

With: Victor Sjöström (David Holm), Hilda Borgström (Anna Holm), Tore Svennberg (Georges), Astrid Holm (Edit), Concordia Selander (Edit's Mother), Lisa Lundholm (Maria)

106 mins, Blu-ray, B&W. G
Silent with Swedish intertitles and English subtitles

It is New Year's Eve, and a consumptive Salvation Army sister named Edit (Astrid Holm) sits up from her deathbed and mysteriously demands that one David Helm be sent for at once. Yet when the man (Victor Sjöström), a misanthropic and abusive alcoholic, is eventually found carousing by a cemetery, he spurns Edit's 11th-hour intervention on his behalf, refusing even to see her – and, as the clock strikes midnight, he is accidentally struck dead.

Not that death is the end – for in this ghostly morality tale, the first person to die in the New Year is doomed to drive the phantom carriage for the next annual cycle – a grisly, punishing existence reaping lost souls for the afterlife. Before handing over the reins, the incumbent driver Georges (Tore Svennberg) – a man once well known to David – takes his reluctant successor on a tour through time, showing him the error of his ways and the damage that his life of dissipation has wrought on other people, including David's brother (Einar Axelsson), wife (Hilda Borgström) and two young children – not to mention on pious Edit herself. At last, for the first time in years, David's conscience is pricked – but is it too late for him to redeem himself?...

It would be all too easy to reduce *The Phantom Carriage* to a piece of propaganda for the temperance movement, but that would be to overlook its rather sophisticated suggestion that addiction might be as much a symptom as a cause of societal ills. It would be easy, too, to dismiss the film as a mere showcase for "special effects" – and certainly its use of double exposures and match cuts to create the illusion of phantom activity is most striking – but that would be to ignore altogether both its ethical convolutions and the complexity of its narrative, whose flashback-within-flashback structure expands the events of an hour or so into the events of several years. And it would be simplicity itself to ignore *The Phantom Carriage* as an unwanted ghost from a forgotten and (to today's tastes) rather clunky period of cinema, but the cast (led by Sjöström himself) put in performances much closer to modern realism than silent-era histrionics, while the crispness of Julius Jaenzon's cinematography can speak to any age.

What is more, Sjöström's film is not just an early horror, but an argument for the moral validity of cinema itself. For just as David's limbic carriage ride, whether supernatural reality or stupor-driven vision, reveals to him the value of turning over a new leaf, Sjöström's film has the same effect on the viewer. Here, it is cinema itself which is the phantom carriage, taking us on a journey that can divert, horrify and depress – but also enlighten and improve. The film may still bear some of the outmoded stylisations of the silent era, but its message survives the test of time and, as we learn along with the vice-ridden protagonist, never comes too late. – Anton Bitel, *Eye For Film*



Monday 29 September at 6:00 pm

Early start – long run time

Peppermint Candy Bakhasatang South Korea 1999

Director/Screenplay: Lee Chang-dong
Producers: Myeong Gye-nam, Ueda Makoto
Production co: East Film Company
Photography: Kim Hyung-ku
Editor: Lee Jae-jin
Music: Lee Jae-jin

With: Sul Kyung-gu (Kim Yong-ho), Moon So-ri (Yun Sun-im), Kim Yeo-jin (Hong-ja), Park Soo-young (Operative), Park Sung-yeon (Factory worker)

130 mins, Blu-ray. R16 violence, sexual material, suicide & offensive language
In Korean with English subtitles

At the beginning of Lee Chang Dong's *Peppermint Candy* a well-dressed man, possibly drunk and visibly distressed, stumbles into the reunion picnic of a group of men and women who had worked together in a factory 20 years before. They remember him from the old days, but he seems to have fallen out of touch. After alarming the group with his erratic behavior, the man, whose name is Yong-ho (Sul Kyung-gu), climbs a nearby railroad bridge and, as the train approaches, screams into the camera, "I want to go back."

The film grants Yong-ho's wish, vaulting backward across 20 years of South Korean history to track his dissolution in reverse. The movie ends where it began: at the same riverbank in 1979, where the young factory workers, their lives still ahead of them, sing songs and prepare a picnic. Yong-ho, a tall, shy 20-year-old, shyly tells his sweetheart, Sun-im (Moon So-ri), about his dreams of the future, none of which, we know by now, will come true.

The end has a quiet, heartbreaking power because the audience knows what the young man does not: that in the next two decades he will drift from youthful optimism into brutal, callous manhood and cynical, ultimately despairing middle age. The film's seven sections are punctuated by images shot from the front of a moving train and shown in reverse motion, to suggest a life backing away from its destination toward its starting point. The chapters of Yong-ho's life make sense only in relation to one another. The awkwardness of a chance encounter in a restaurant in the early 90's is retroactively explained by a brutal police interrogation in the previous decade...

That there is a political dimension to Yong-ho's malaise is evident, but also, for one not intimately familiar with recent South Korean history, hard to grasp. The defining crisis of Yong-ho's life comes during a tense military mobilization. Only by consulting the film's press notes after the fact did I learn that the scene takes place during the 1980 Kwang-ju massacre, a watershed moment in South Korea's long and difficult transition to democracy.

But if some of the force of Mr Lee's film may be lost on non-Korean audiences, the artful assurance of his directing and the brooding charisma of Mr Sul's performance will not be. The immediate source of Yong-ho's anguish may lie in a specific series of national traumas, but the anguish itself – the feeling of a life gone incomprehensibly wrong, of events that overwhelm the capacity to understand them – is a painfully familiar modern malady.
AO Scott, *New York Times*



Monday 06 October at 6:15 pm

Rashōmon Japan 1950

Director: Kurosawa Akira
Producer: Minoura Jingo
Production co: Daiei
Screenplay: Kurosawa Akira, Hashimoto Shinobu, based on the stories "Rashōmon" and "In a Grove" by Akutagawa Ryūnosuke
Photography: Miyagawa Kazuo
Editor: Kurosawa Akira
Music: Hayasaka Fumio

With: Mifune Toshirō (Tajōmaru, the bandit), Mori Masayuki (Kanazawa Takehiro, the samurai), Kyō Machiko (Masako, Kanazawa's wife), Shimura Takashi (Woodcutter), Chiaki Minoru (Priest), Ueda Kichijirō (Commoner)

85 mins, Blu-ray, B&W. M violence
In Japanese with English subtitles

If the greatest films of all time are also the most prismatic, Kurosawa Akira's masterpiece *Rashōmon* deserves its high slot in the pantheon, for simultaneously encouraging and questioning every interpretation tossed in its direction. From the opening shots of an almost biblical torrent of rain, Kurosawa blankets the screen in layers of obscurity, filtering "the truth" through ambiguous images, conflicting testimonies, self-serving motivations, and subjective memory. As Robert Altman points out in his introduction to the film's sumptuous new edition, people intrinsically trust what they see – "Seeing is believing," as the expression goes – but no one comes away from *Rashōmon* with the same understanding of what happened. Kurosawa doesn't just muddy the characters' points of view; he divides the audience along with them, letting viewers bring their own personal histories and experience to bear on the story. Expanded from a pair of Akutagawa Ryūnosuke short stories, *Rashōmon* employs a radical flashback structure to look at a single event in the forest from four wildly varied perspectives, as recalled at a trial three days after the fact. The only uncontested truth is that a man (Mori Masayuki) was killed in an incident involving his wife (Kyō Machiko), who may or may not have been raped, and a bandit (Mifune Toshirō) who may or may not be responsible for the rape or the murder. The bandit claims the wife freely yielded to him and he killed her husband in a duel for her affections, the wife insists that she was raped and her unforgiving husband committed suicide with her dagger, and the deceased, speaking through a medium, pins full responsibility on his wife's womanly treachery. To confuse matters further, a seemingly impartial witness (Shimura Takashi) watched the whole thing unfold, yet even his testimony sounds conspicuously biased. Flip-flopping the conventional whodunit, which starts out with confusion and leads to a clear answer, *Rashōmon* moves further away from the truth as more information comes to light. Every element in the film, from the dense thicket of forest branches to master cinematographer Miyagawa Kazuo's deceptive framing and lighting design, is precisely calibrated to make the facts more difficult to discern. Winner of the Best Foreign Film Oscar in 1952, *Rashōmon* not only altered film language significantly (and brought the legal term "the *Rashōmon* effect" into the lexicon), but also opened up Japanese cinema to the Western world, which may be its most enduring achievement of all. With his elegant essay on the slipperiness of vision, Kurosawa bridged cultures with the common truth that what they see may be a lie.
Scott Tobias, *AV Club*

There's a showboat performance from Mifune Toshirō as the swaggering yet hollow bandit desperate to live up to his reputation, but it's Kurosawa Akira's direction that commands the attention as he mood ranges from the savage to the wistful to the comic. Its cynical neatness perhaps lodges it a notch down from masterpiece level, but still outstanding. – Kim Newman, *Empire*



Monday 13 October at 6:15 pm

Eileen USA/UK 2023

Director: William Oldroyd
Producers: Anthony Bregman, Stefanie Azpiazu, Peter Cron, Luke Goebel, Ottessa Moshfegh, William Oldroyd
Production co: Fifth Season, Film4, Likely Story, Omniscient Films
Screenplay: Luke Goebel, Ottessa Moshfegh, based on Moshfegh's novel
Photography: Ari Wegner
Editor: Nick Emerson
Music: Richard Reed Parry

With: Thomasin McKenzie (Eileen Dunlop), Shea Whigham (Jim Dunlop), Marin Ireland (Anne Polk), Owen Teague (Randy), Anne Hathaway (Rebecca Saint John), Sam Nivola (Lee Polk)

98 mins, Blu-ray. R16 child sexual abuse themes, violence, cruelty, sexual material, suicide & offensive language

A psychopath watching William Oldroyd's deliciously deranged *Eileen*, based on the book by Ottessa Moshfegh, might simply see in it an uplifting tale of personal liberation. After all, Eileen (Thomasin McKenzie) goes from being a dowdy, downtrodden compulsive masturbator — we watch her rub herself surreptitiously under her tweed skirt on two separate occasions in the first few minutes — to an independent young woman of decisive action and agency, facing her future in a fur coat topped with a lipstick smile. Non-psychos, however, are destined to have a more complex range of reactions to Oldroyd's brazen genre-bender: some combination of alarm, amusement, disgust, surprise and horrified, possibly inappropriate laughter. It might prove an off-putting cocktail in some quarters, but the weirdos among us will find Eileen's sheer chutzpah, couched as it is in classy, clever filmmaking, curiously exhilarating and addictive...

Such a dramatic transformation needs a catalyst. For Eileen, the sly, socially withdrawn, rather hygiene-averse secretary at a boy's penitentiary in '60s Massachusetts, it arrives in the Marilyn-esque shape of "Dr Miss Rebecca St John" (Anne Hathaway), the facility's improbably glamorous new prison psychologist. With her clicking heels, slim cigarettes and her hair a perfect scoop of blonde, Rebecca is as exotic in Eileen's drab environment as a bird of paradise. And when she condescends to befriend Eileen, the effect is immediate: Eileen starts to wash more regularly and to wear make-up, ditching her shapeless beige outfits for pretty dresses and powder-pink outerwear harvested from her dead mother's closet. "You're different these days," observes her father rheumily. "Almost interesting..."

This is a film that is practically drunk on the possibilities of cinema, pumping a recklessly modern energy through a plethora of classical Hollywood genres... *Eileen* is deliriously movie-literate. It moves, sometimes sinuously, sometimes with lurching abruptness, from Sirkian romantic melodrama to film noir into black-comedy horror, coming to rest somewhere in the realms of one of the more effed-up Hitchcock thrillers. (No coincidence that the gorgeously sinister opening credits are a direct pastiche of *Rear Window's* or that Rebecca's name and her aloof blonde persona also nod to the Master of Suspense.)

The formal rigor that made Oldroyd's *Lady Macbeth* such a striking debut is in evidence here throughout, but this time that directorial precision is applied to a narrative of bold, even garish ambition, which *Eileen* conceals, along with its unhunged heart, beneath a controlled, placid exterior. In that way, it's just like its fantastically weird heroine. It's always the quiet ones. – Jessica Kiang, *Variety*



Monday 20 October at 6:00 pm

Early start – long run time

All the Beauty and the Bloodshed USA 2022

Director: Laura Poitras
Producer: Laura Poitras, Nan Goldin, Yoni Golijov, Clare Carter, John Lyons, Howard Gertler
Production co: Praxis Films, Participant
Photography: Nan Goldin, Clare Carter, Robert Kolodny, Alexander W. Lewis, Laura Poitras, Sean Vegezzi, Thom Pavia
Editor: Amy Foote, Joe Bini, Brian A. Kates
Music: Soundwalk Collective, Dawn Sutter Madell

122 mins, Blu-ray. M nudity, strong sexual imagery & content that may disturb

"The wrong things are kept private, and it destroys people," the photographer Nan Goldin says in *All the Beauty and the Bloodshed*, the tremendously moving and illuminating new documentary from Laura Poitras. Goldin's art specialised in portraying young outsiders who might not ordinarily be in the spotlight, but in 2017, she wrote an extraordinary article in *Artforum* that announced a new focus: her near-fatal struggles with addiction to the painkiller OxyContin and the organisation, PAIN (Prescription Addiction Intervention Now), she was founding to hold the drug's purveyors to account. No longer, she maintained, would the Sackler family and its biggest company, Purdue Pharma, be able to make millions of dollars off their helplessly addicted customers, who died in the thousands from overdoses – at least, not without their business being exposed to the world, especially the art world, which benefited from what Goldin called "blood money".

It's not every day when an artist of Goldin's stature puts herself on the line against such a powerful foe, but PAIN is only one strand in *All the Beauty and the Bloodshed*, a beautifully constructed film that shuttles through multiple narratives and histories: Goldin's traumatic family past, the friend-families she found in Boston and New York, the personal and social circles explored in her soul-baring work, and the present-day efforts by PAIN to target museums like the Guggenheim and the Metropolitan Museum of Art with protests...

Goldin's smoker-tinged voiceover lends an intimacy and lack of illusion to grittily poetic lines ("My roommates were running away from America"). She guides us, with the occasional audible question from Poitras, through her repressive Boston suburban upbringing, through her friendship with David Armstrong and the demimondes of queer-friendly bars in decidedly unfriendly times, and onto the cross-sections of New York artist milieux (like an apartment on the Bowery where "we used to fuck in the elevator"), with a freshness impressive in a documentary landscape already saturated with cross-sections of New York artist milieux. Poitras is aided by glimpses of film and video by Vivienne Dick and Bette Gordon, and of course by Goldin's own photography; Goldin also is credited with consulting on the music. The movie doesn't seek to romanticise the direr straits of Goldin's history, such as the boyfriend who savagely beat her.

Poitras doesn't press the point, but there's a sense that Goldin made art in portraying the love and angst and pain around her, while the Sacklers' drugs made money off pain and annihilated personhood in the process. The AIDS crisis of the 1980s, and the activism of the fearless New York artist David Wojnarowicz, perhaps planted a seed for Goldin, who would loom large as a protector and supporter of friends, much as her sister (and later, figures like the writer and frequent John Waters collaborator Cookie Mueller) had loomed large for her. Poitras's film understands the life-and-death urgency of the artistic pursuit, and illustrates the possibility and necessity of forming one's own communities. – Nicolas Rapold, *Sight and Sound*



Tuesday 28 October at 6:15 pm

A Ghost Story USA 2017

Director/Screenplay: David Lowery
Producer: Toby Halbrooks, James M Johnston, Adam Donaghey
Production co: Sailor Bear, Zero Trans Fat Productions, Ideaman Studios, Scared Sheetless
Photography: Andrew Droz Palermo
Editor: David Lowery
Music: Daniel Hart

With: Casey Affleck (C), Rooney Mara (M), Kenneisha Thompson (Doctor), Liz Cardenas Franke (Linda), Barlow Jacobs (Gentleman Caller), Sonia Acevedo (Maria)

88 mins, Blu-ray. M offensive language

There's a scene about midway through writer/director David Lowery's modest, experimental supernatural tale *A Ghost Story* that's simple in conception, but will absolutely deck you in execution. Our female protagonist, who is never referred to by name but is played by Rooney Mara, has lost her partner, and is still in a state resembling shock. A friend has come by, as friends often do, and left her something to eat; a pie, covered in foil. After a moment or two of busy work, she takes off the foil and looks at it, and it's immediately clear that she's just gonna eat that pie, as if it's going to fill the hole in her heart. (We've all been there.) And that's what she does, stuffing bite after bite into her face; she occasionally stops to take a breath or drop a tear, and then she pushes on.

It's a quietly revelatory portrayal of grief, a moment so profoundly private, it feels like we shouldn't be there (and frankly, neither should the other presence in that room). To stay with it is a risky act of filmmaking, but that's what's so remarkable about *A Ghost Story* – that in spite of its marquee stars and its writer/director's recently vaunted-by-Disney profile, it is an honest-to-goodness experimental movie, a story that starts going in one direction and unexpectedly veers into unexplored territory, rewriting its rules as it goes.

This also makes it a tricky movie to talk about without unraveling the delicate thread that holds it together. Suffice it to say that there is a couple, and they seem about average – they love and fight in equal measure, and there are enough weird noises and refractions of light that you believe, from the title, that there is a ghost in their home. And then something else happens. The way the movie turns there, without the kind of clichéd run-up and action we've come to expect, is the first tip that Lowery is going off the grid; he tells his story in aftermath rather than incident, which is not, to put it mildly, standard operating procedure...

Lowery's narrative can move breathlessly forward and then tumble backward; the most clichéd expression of boredom is "like watching paint dry," but there's a bit of running business about peeling paint away, and it's an astonishingly potent image. You're never quite sure what he's up to; he'll give us long stretches where nothing is said at all, and then turn the whole movie over to a long, philosophical monologue by Will Oldham, playing a character we've never seen before and never see again. (All told, Oldham probably has more dialogue than either Affleck or Mara.)

Yet Lowery's confidence as a filmmaker never wavers, and as a result, neither does our attention. He pairs his powerful imagery with Daniel Hart's bottomless, mournful score, and gives us moments of absurdist humor, and will then pivot to a flash of emotion so heartrending, it leaves you agog. *A Ghost Story* should not work. It sounds like it won't work. It works. – Jason Bailey, *FlavorWire*



Monday 03 November at 6:00 pm

High and Low Japan 1963

Director: Kurosawa Akira
Producers: Kikushima Ryūzō, Tanaka Tomoyuki
Screenplay: Kikushima Ryūzō, Oguni Hideo, Hisaita Eijiro, Kurosawa Akira, based on the novel *King's Ransom* by Evan Hunter
Production co: Tōhō
Photography: Nakai Asakazu, Saito Takao
Editor: Kurosawa Akira
Music: Tōhō

With: Mifune Toshirō (Gondo Kingo), Nakadai Tatsuya (Inspector Tokura), Kagawa Kyōko (Gondo Reiko), Ishiyama Kenjiro (Chief Detective 'Bos'n' Taguchi), Sada Yutaka (Aoki), Yamazaki Tsutomu (Takeuchi Ginjiro)

137 mins, Blu-ray, B&W. M
In Japanese with English subtitles

High and Low illuminates its world with a wholeness and complexity you rarely see in film. As Kurosawa Akira weaves together character study, social commentary and police procedure, he combines what might have been a whole series of movies for another, lesser director... *High and Low* focuses on Gondo Kingo (Mifune Toshirō), a powerhouse executive in the Japanese shoe industry. In the midst of an attempt to take over his company, a proposition that throws him in hock down to his own furniture, he's hit by a huge ransom demand, with a twist – the kidnapper (Yamazaki Tsutomu) takes, not his own son, but his chauffeur's.

Paying the ransom will ruin him financially; not paying it will ruin him as a human being. Gondo's anguish plays against the backdrop of financial intrigue and a more conventional police thriller, as Kurosawa delves into the cops' massive effort to track the kidnapper, led by the sensitive, but briskly ruthless, Detective Tokura (Nakadai Tatsuya)...

One aspect of Kurosawa's genius is the way he composes his tableaux to dramatic purpose. The struggle within Gondo's psyche is expressed physically, through the figures of Gondo's scheming corporate confederates, a 10-legged monster feeding on the bottom line, opposed visually to the meek chauffeur (Sada Yutaka), staring at his shoes, trying to hide behind the child's tiny sweater that he clutches in his hands. And the social themes that *High and Low* alludes to are made immediate with the simple image of Gondo's house on a hill above the sooty town below. (Kurosawa makes the same point with sound: The glass doors of Gondo's aerie seal out the industrial noise outside)...

High and Low has its faults. The opening exposition, which takes place entirely in Gondo's home, is overly static, and the immersion in forensics throughout the denouement, while intriguing, goes rather deeper into police methods than it's worth. And the movie could use more of composer Masaru Sato's glossy, film noir score.

But these are mere quibbles compared with the experience of watching a movie where every scene, every sequence, every shot are alive with confidence in the medium. Your complaints dissolve in the backwash of pure film pleasure, as you're introduced once again to the master. – Paul Attanasio, *Washington Post*

Early start – long run time



Monday 10 November at 6:15 pm

The Royal Hotel Australia/UK/USA 2023

Director: Kitty Green
Producers: Liz Watts, Emile Sherman, Iain Canning, Kath Shelper
Production co: See-Saw Films
Screenplay: Kitty Green, Oscar Redding, based on the documentary *Hotel Coolgardie* directed by Pete Gleeson
Photography: Michael Latham
Editor: Kasra Rassoulzadegan
Music: Jed Palmer

With: Julia Garner (Hanna), Jessica Henwick (Liv), Ursula Yovich (Carol), Hugo Weaving (Billy), James Frecheville (Teeth), Daniel Henshall (Dolly), Toby Wallace (Matty)

91 mins, Blu-ray. R16 violence, offensive language & sexual material

"You're going to have to be okay with a little male attention," the agency worker says. Liv (Jessica Henwick) grins slowly, glancing at a straight-faced Hanna (Julia Garner). "Yeah, we'll be fine," Liv says, accepting temp work at a pub in the Aussie outback on behalf of them both, bolstered by the promise of seeing kangaroos. Hanna doesn't seem so sure. She is, as you might expect, right to be reluctant.

From the second Liv and Hanna arrive at their new location, the atmosphere is unsettling. The sun beats down on the dry, dusty, endless brown landscape – just looking at it makes you thirsty. The lady who picks them up (Carol, played with quiet strength by Ursula Yovich) is brisk and unsmiling. Their living space is strewn with chaos generated by the British girls they're taking over from. They're yelled at by pub owner Billy (an almost unrecognisable Hugo Weaving) for turning the water on. This set-up is enough to put anyone at unease. But as soon as the doors open, that feeling ramps up, as a mob of rowdy locals, mostly men, descend on the bar – demanding drinks, yelling rude jokes, and telling the girls to smile.

There are flickers of joy amid the stress, found in a trip to a nearby swimming spot, sunbathing with booze in a box, and some tender romantic moments between Hanna and regular punter Matty (*Babyteeth's* Toby Wallace). But mostly, *The Royal Hotel* is a stomach-churning slide into full-on dread, as the girls become more vulnerable, their working conditions more precarious, and the men's attention and actions towards them start to cross a line. Director Kitty Green isn't afraid to let the camera sit in the awkward moments, the heavy silences, and the increasingly fraught conversations between Liv and Hanna, as the latter tries to convince the former to leave. Green and co-writer Oscar Redding's script perfectly captures the delicate nature of the power dynamics on display, and how the girls – particularly Hanna – have to swing between playing nice to stay safe and standing their ground.

Liv and Hanna are in this together, but Garner is the lead, and gives an incredibly controlled, convincing turn as the protective, hyper-vigilant friend that has to keep their shit together. Henwick is excellent as the more easygoing, prone-to-attracting-trouble Liv, who's clearly using travelling as a way to escape something back home that Hanna isn't – and the sense that this pair have each other's backs at all times deepens their characters in a way that doesn't require excess backstory... This volatile concoction all comes to a crescendo – one that does deliver on shocks, violence and catharsis, but not quite to perhaps the level you might expect... However you feel when the credits roll, the exhilarating time spent in the film's harsh, unforgiving world feels absolutely worth it. – Sophie Butcher, *Empire*



Monday 17 November at 6:15 pm

Ninotchka USA 1939

Wayne Weston Memorial Screening

Director: Ernst Lubitsch
Producers: Ernst Lubitsch, Sidney Franklin
Production co: Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer
Screenplay: Charles Brackett, Billy Wilder, Walter Reisch
Photography: William H Daniels
Editor: Gene Ruggiero
Music: Werner R. Heymann

With: Greta Garbo (Nina Ivanovna "Ninotchka" Yakushova), Melvyn Douglas (Count Léon d'Algout), Ina Claire (Grand Duchess Swana), Bela Lugosi (Commissar Razinin), Sig Rumann (Iranoff), Felix Bressart (Buljanoff), Alexander Granach (Kopalski)

110 mins, DCP, B&W. Rating tbc

Has there ever been a more charming, sexy, infectious laugh put to film than the one Greta Garbo delivers in *Ninotchka*? – Brian Eggert, *Deep Focus*

In *Ninotchka*, her first comedy, Garbo plays the single-minded, pragmatic "envoy extraordinary" from Moscow, sent to Paris to sell the crown jewels that once belonged to the Grand Duchess Swana (Ina Claire). There she winds up falling in love with Swana's handsome inamorato, Leon. The witty screenplay by Charles Brackett, Billy Wilder, and Walter Reisch is a gently satirical treatment of Soviet Russia. It's about seduction – the seduction of capitalism and its bourgeois benefits, the seduction of Paris, and the seduction of romance, all of which exert a powerful influence on Garbo's severe Ninotchka...

Interestingly, the villain of the movie isn't the humorless and mostly faceless apparatchiks who deprive the Soviet people of freedom and joy, but the White Russian émigré Swana, who lacks humanity – and who blackmails Ninotchka into giving up Leon... [A] hat is one of the two prevalent motifs in the movie; the other is the jewels, which symbolize both the Russian royals' callous disregard of the needs of the proletariat and the element that their successors have stupidly bleached from Russian life, beauty...

Melvyn Douglas's Leon glides effortlessly from high comedy to romantic comedy when he falls in love for the first time; as he negotiates his (terrific) lines, romantic comedy is the genre to which we feel his Leon belongs. But of course we would: Claire is brilliant, but Garbo is soulful. Claire's performance boasts technical finesse and theatrical wizardry; Garbo's is all camera instinct and all heart...

It hadn't occurred to Garbo's home studio to star her in a romantic comedy before *Ninotchka* because somehow she seemed too precious a commodity, like the crown jewels. Her triumph in Lubitsch's film is an affirmation that almost all the great romantic comedies have some seriousness at their core; that's how they succeed in stealing our hearts away.

Somehow Garbo brings to bear in *Ninotchka* all of the qualities that made her unforgettable in her best silents and talkies – the penetrating intelligence, the psychological complexity, the moral strength, the emotional endurance, the pulsating sexuality. – Steve Vineberg, *Threepenny Review*

AUCKLAND FILM SOCIETY 2025 SEASON

Academy Cinemas, 44 Lorne St, Auckland Mondays at 6:15 pm (except as noted below)

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Please arrive early – no guaranteed seating. Programme may change if a film does not arrive. Please check website

aucklandfilmsociety.org.nz

10 March 6:00 pm	Early start – long run time ALL THAT JAZZ Ω 123 mins, Blu-ray. M	07 July 6:15 pm	CLEO FROM 5 TO 7 90 mins, DCP, B&W PG contains sexual references
17 March 6:00 pm	Early start – long run time THE BLUE CAFTAN 124 mins, Blu-ray. M nudity & sex scenes	14 July 6:00 pm	Early start – long run time PAT GARRETT AND BILLY THE KID Ω 121 mins, DCP. M violence
24 March 6:15 pm	GHOST DOG: WAY OF THE SAMURAI 116 mins, Blu-ray. R16 violence & offensive language	21 July 6:15 pm	PULSE 114 mins, Blu-ray R13 violence, horror scenes & content that may disturb
31 March 6:15 pm	BLACKBERRY 120 mins, Blu-ray M offensive language	28 July 6:00 pm	Early start – long run time IKIRU 137 mins, Blu-ray, B&W. PG coarse language
07 April 6:15 pm	OPEN YOUR EYES 114 mins, Blu-ray M violence & sex scenes	August dates tba	NEW ZEALAND INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL Discounts for AFS Premier Card Members
14 April 6:00 pm	Early start – long run time HERE IS YOUR LIFE 168 mins, Blu-ray, B&W and colour. M sexual content	01 September Early start – long run time 6:00 pm	PACIFICTION 165 mins, DCP. M nudity & sexual content
22 April 6:15 pm	Tuesday BREWSTER McCLOUD 105 mins, Blu-ray. R16	08 September 6:15 pm	VICTIMS OF SIN 84 mins, Blu-ray, B&W. PG violence & coarse language
28 April 6:15 pm	AFS AGM follows THE HAUNTING 117 mins, Blu-ray, B&W. R16	15 September 6:15 pm	OH BOY 82 mins, Blu-ray, B&W M offensive language
05 May 6:15 pm	LA CHINOISE 92 mins, Blu-ray. M adult themes	22 September 6:15 pm	THE PHANTOM CARRIAGE 106 mins, Blu-ray, B&W. G
12 May 6:15 pm	HOW FAR IS HEAVEN Ω 98 mins, Blu-ray M offensive language	29 September Early start – long run time 6:00 pm	PEPPERMINT CANDY 130 mins, Blu-ray R16 violence, sexual material, suicide & offensive language
19 May 6:15 pm	FALCON LAKE 102 mins, DCP. R16 sex scenes & sexual references	06 October 6:15 pm	RASHŌMON 85 mins, Blu-ray, B&W. M violence
26 May 6:00 pm	Early start – long run time BEGINNING 126 mins, Blu-ray. R16 rape, sexual references, offensive language & content that may disturb	13 October 6:15 pm	EILEEN 98 mins, Blu-ray R16 child sexual abuse themes, violence, cruelty, sexual material, suicide, & offensive language
03 June 6:15 pm	Tuesday PETITE MAMAN 72 mins, Blu-ray. PG	20 October Early start – long run time 6:00 pm	ALL THE BEAUTY AND THE BLOODSHED 122 mins, Blu-ray. M nudity, strong sexual imagery & content that may disturb
09 June 6:15 pm	THE UNIVERSAL THEORY 118 mins, Blu-ray, B&W M violence & content that may disturbs	28 October Tuesday 6:15 pm	A GHOST STORY 88 mins, Blu-ray M offensive language
16 June 6:15 pm	THE CROSSING 84 mins, Blu-ray. M violence & nudity	03 November Early start – long run time 6:00 pm	HIGH AND LOW 137 mins, Blu-ray, B&W. M
23 June 6:00 pm	Early start – long run time THE WILD BUNCH 145 mins, Blu-ray. R16 violence	10 November 6:15 pm	THE ROYAL HOTEL 91 mins, Blu-ray R16 violence, offensive language & sexual material
30 June 6:15 pm	KES 107 mins, Blu-ray. PG coarse language	17 November Wayne Weston Memorial Screening 6:15 pm	NINOTCHKA Ω 110 mins, DCP, B&W. Rating tbc