

October 2022

EYES ON CINEMA

Issue 1

Director Spotlight

Céline Sciamma

Exploring the mind of France's
leading feminist film-maker

Film Festival Focus

Who are this year's big
winners... and should I care?

FILM SCORING
ACADEMY OF EUROPE

TABLE OF CONTENTS

SECTION 1

Editor's Note	03
Film Review	04
Director Spotlight	05



SECTION 2

Film Festival Focus	07
Hand-Picked Cinema	08
From The Vault	11
Ones to Watch	Films We're Excited About This Autumn 13

SECTION 3

Independent Films: Shorts	14
---------------------------	----

Exclusive Director Interview

Erica Eng talks to the Film Scoring Academy of Europe about her award-winning short film: "Americanized"



Upcoming Publications



'Cultivate a love for cinema.'

Editor's Note



Welcome to the first edition of **Eyes On Cinema**, the official film magazine of the **Film Scoring Academy of Europe**. We have asked the most successful film composers in the business the same question: *"What should a burgeoning composer do to become successful?"* and time and time again we get the same answer: *"Get to know film."*

Every issue includes a selection of curated films from all over the globe, a director spotlight and all of the latest industry buzz coming out of the film festival circuit and beyond.

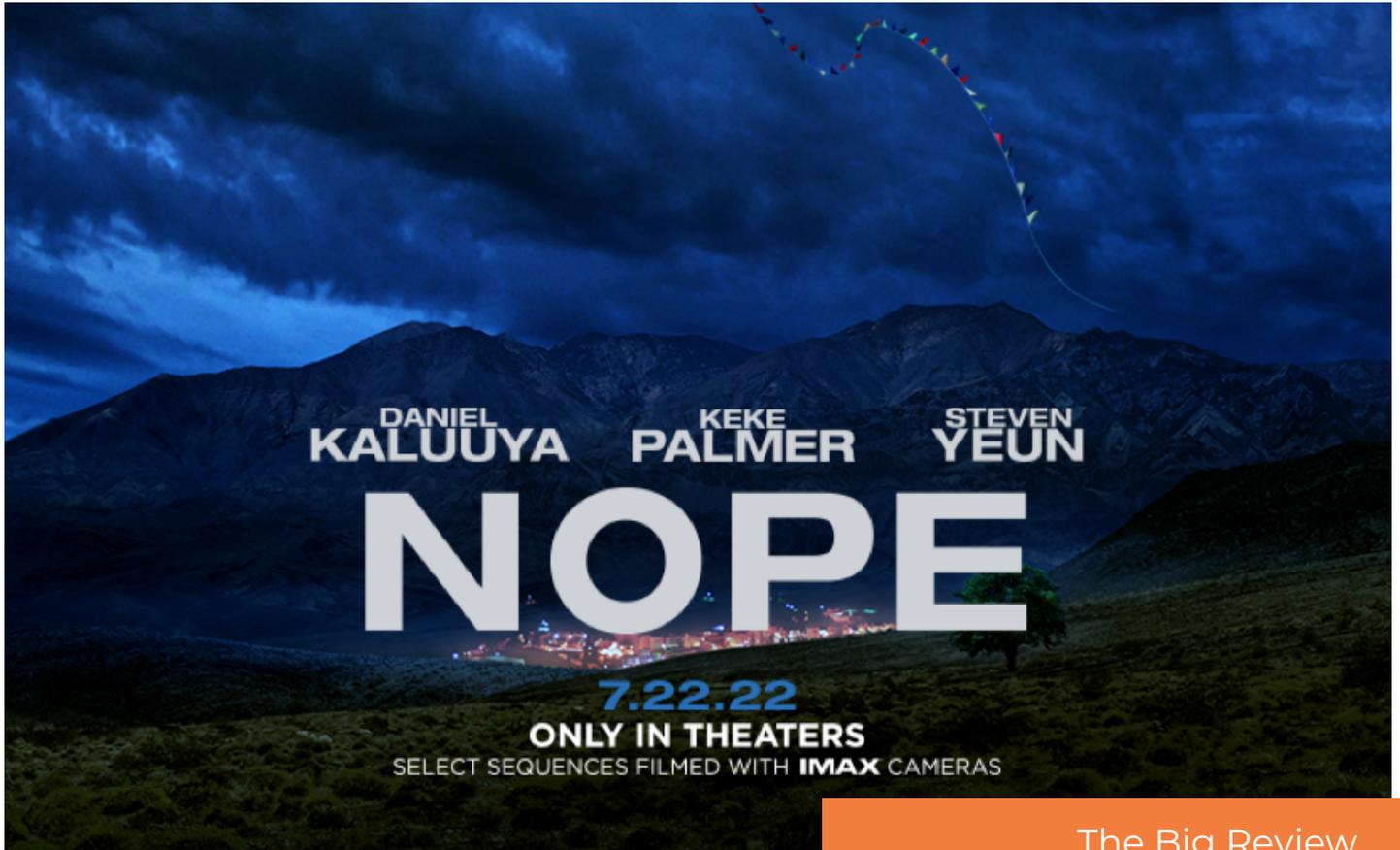
Every year we are bombarded with the newest, hottest films sweeping the globe. No one would blame you if you feel like you're constantly behind the latest and greatest. When you think you've just about caught up, you discover you've missed the train again and there's a brand new show on Amazon Prime you just have to see.

Well, it's ok if you haven't seen every film festival winner or runner up or honorary awardee. Our focus here is to provide you with a bespoke selection that keeps you on top of what's happening in the industry without making you feel like you need to spend the next decade catching up on last year's nominees list.

Conor O'Boyle
Editor-in-Chief

A handwritten signature of Conor O'Boyle in black ink, written in a cursive style.

***Eyes on
Cinema
Magazine***



The Big Review
By Conor O'Boyle
22 August, 2022

Jordan Peele is back with a spectacle fit for the big screen



In 2015 Jordan Peele hung up his comedic boots in order to pursue a completely different creative voice. Gone were the silly slapstick sketches of Key and Peele. *Get Out* (2017), his first foray into the world of psychological horror was a smash hit and took audiences by storm the world over. Now, in a post-pandemic world, Jordan is back with a modern take on the sci-fi/horror genre.

Nope follows the siblings OJ and Emerald Haywood whose family own a horse hiring company for the film industry. When uncanny and strange things start happening, they attempt to catch them on video to become famous. However, they quickly come to realise that the danger is far closer and more perilous than they could have imagined.

My Comment

Nope is a beautifully shot spectacle of a film that examines current zeitgeist themes of UFO sightings, fame, celebrity culture and our relationship with cameras. Keke Palmer steals the show as the larger than life Emerald opposite Daniel Kaluuya as the stoic OJ who turns in a rock solid performance that doesn't quite hit the heights of *Get Out*.

Jordan Peele's seeming fascination with the uncanny is central to his raison d'être as a filmmaker and storyteller. In *Nope* he twists our expectations of genre tropes and provides some wonderfully timed comedic moments.

Nope is either a deeply multilayered exploration of the monster/sci-fi/horror genre or a somewhat less developed narrative that just misses the mark. You can decide for yourself.

CÉLINE SCIAMMA

Inside the Mind of France's Leading Feminist Film-Maker

Céline Sciamma (12 November 1978) is a French screenwriter and film director. She is especially known for her films *Girlhood* (2014), *My Life as a Courgette* (2016), and *Portrait of a Lady on Fire* (2019) and *Petite Maman* (2021). She has won many nominations and awards for her films.

A common theme in Sciamma's films is the fluidity of gender and sexual identity among girls and women. Her films look at lesbianism and queerness, and how this is represented on screen. She focuses on the idea of the body, and how touch is related to it within cinema. Her films frequently explore the female gaze which looks at three viewpoints: the individual filming, the characters within the film, and the spectator. Many scholars have cited her as a pioneer for creating a new way of seeing women in media.

She views her acclaimed 2019 film *A Portrait of a Lady on Fire* as a "manifesto" of her Feminist approach to filmmaking. With clear influences from directors such as David Lynch, Chantal Akerman and Agnès Varda. Her early films dealt with the coming of age narratives. She considers *Girlhood*, *Water Lilies* and *Tomboy* a trilogy.

Sciamma frequently collaborates with the same composer (*Para One*) and cinematographer (*Crystel Fournier*) as well as frequently casting non-professional actors. She views fashion and style as being important aspects of characterisation and often works with the same costume designer on her films.



In this issue,

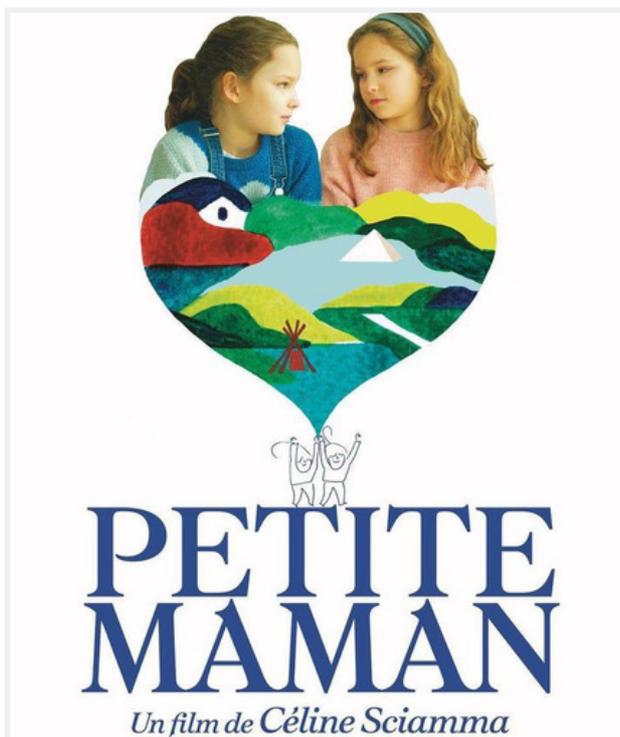
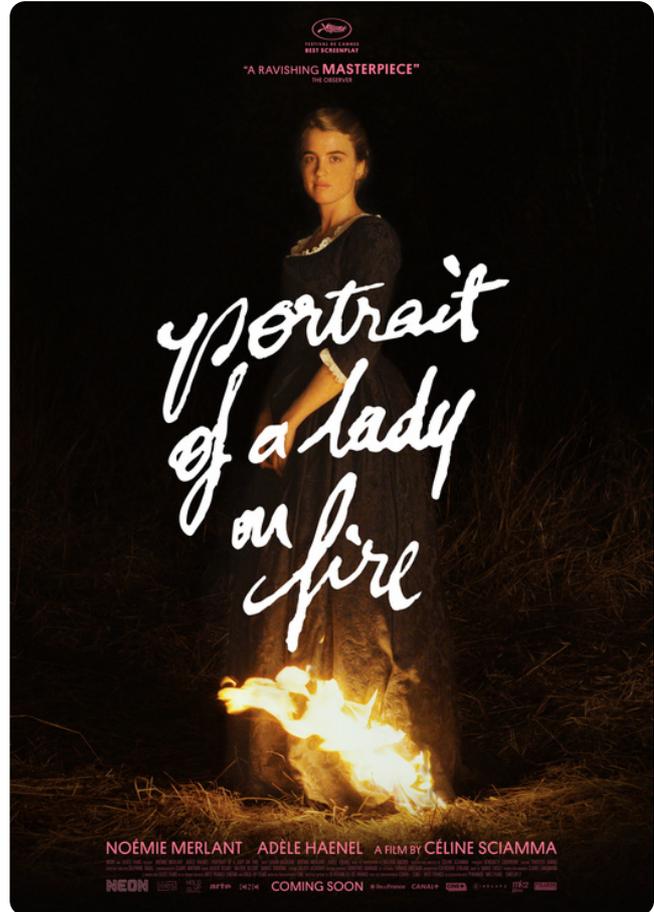
Céline Sciamma continues to prove herself as one of the most accomplished and unpredictable contemporary French filmmakers.

"The movie is only about what story you are telling and who you are looking at. It's mostly about how you're telling it and how you are looking at it."

Director Spotlight

In 18th-century France young painter Marianne is commissioned to do the wedding portrait of Héloïse without her knowing. Therefore, Marianne must observe her model by day to paint her portrait at night. Day by day, the two women become closer as they share Héloïse's last moments of freedom before the impending wedding.

prime video



prime video

Following the death of her beloved grandmother, 8-year-old Nelly accompanies her parents to her mother's childhood home to begin the difficult process of cleaning out its contents. As Nelly explores the house and nearby woods, she is immediately drawn to a neighbor her own age building a treehouse. What follows is a tender tale of childhood grief, memory and connection.



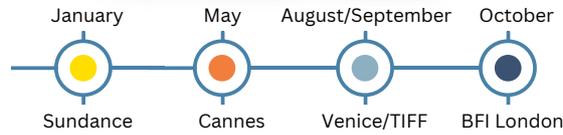
FILM FESTIVAL FOCUS



Today's world of filmmaking features a wealth of talented voices all equally deserving of recognition. From household names we've heard since we were kids, to the young, up-and-coming hotshots coming off the back of successful short films

Here we focus on who's making noise in the industry and whose work you should get to know.

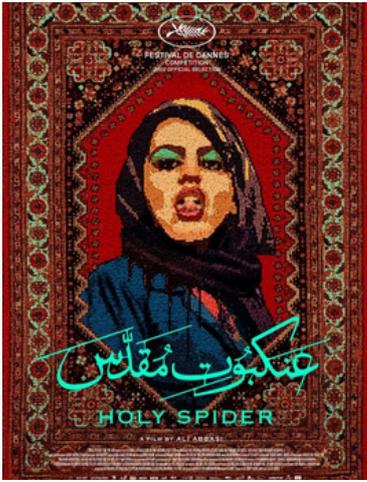
Film Festival Timeline



TIFF

HOLY SPIDER (2022)

ALI ABASSI

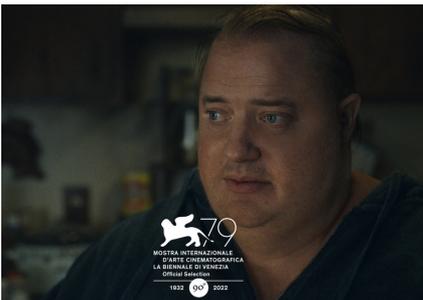


Ali Abassi follows up his indie hit *BORDER* with this latest crime-thriller about a journalist who descends into the dark underbelly of the Iranian holy city of Mashhad as she investigates the serial killings of sex workers by the so called "Spider Killer", who believes he is cleansing the streets of sinners.

VENICE

THE WHALE (2022)

DARREN ARONOFSKY



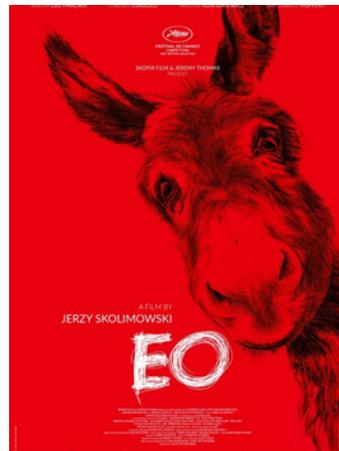
Areclusive English teacher living with severe obesity attempts to reconnect with his estranged teenage daughter for one last chance at redemption.



CANNES

TRIANGLE OF SADNESS (2022)

Ruben Östlund's acerbic dramedy starts out echoing *Zoolander* and ends as a full-on *Lord of the Flies* catastrophe. Along the way you're treated to one of the smartest, most pointed critics of society you'll ever see with a tux-wearing crowd. Winner of Cannes Palme d'Or and easily one of the best films of 2022.



CANNES

EO (2022)

Jerzy Skolimowski

Jerzy Skolimowski twists Bresson's classic *Au Hasard Balthazar* to tell the tale of a sentient donkey dunking on the vagaries of human ideas and emotions. The 84-year old Polish director shared the Cannes Jury prize for this quirky yet remarkable film.



CANNES

DECISION TO LEAVE (2022)

Park Chan-Wook

The winner of the best director prize at Cannes and nominated for the Palme d'Or, *Decision To Leave* is about a detective investigating a man's death in the mountains when he meets the dead man's mysterious wife in the course of his dogged sleuthing.

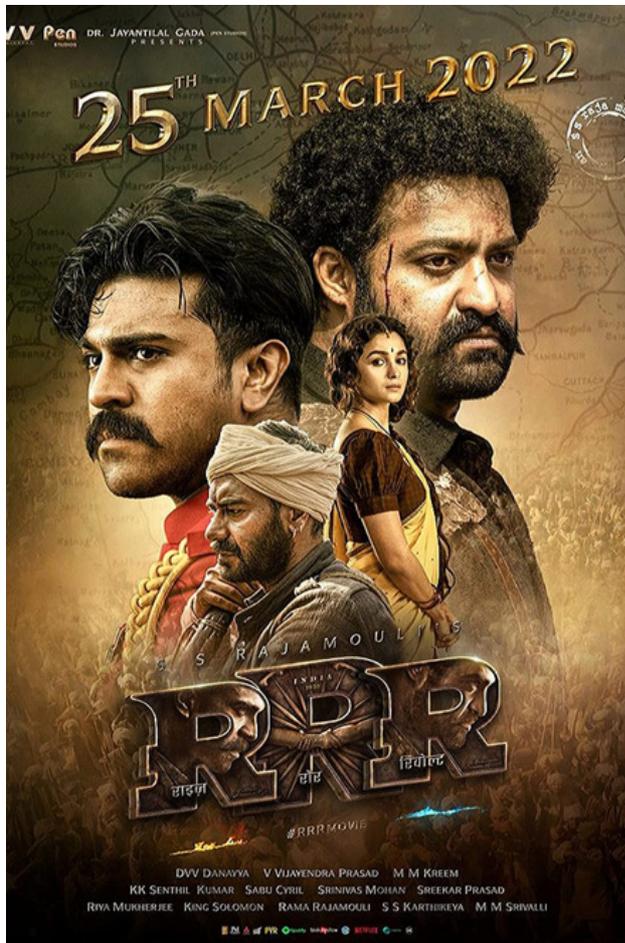
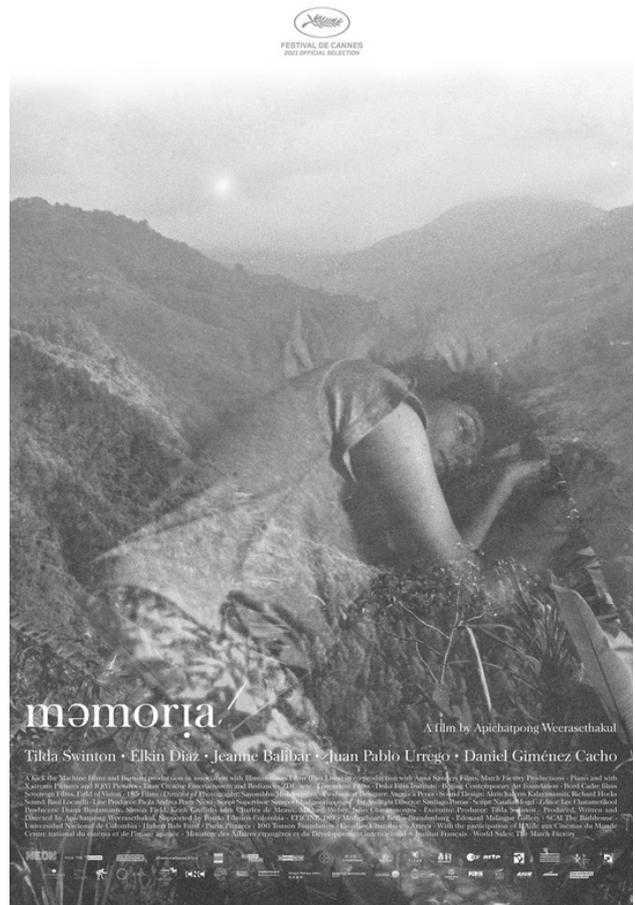
Hand-picked Cinema

Our hand-picked cinema section is a personally curated programme of amazing current films that lots of people are talking about. It demonstrates a broad range of artistic voices who through their films explore a plethora of human experience across various genres with expert skill and craftsmanship across all elements of filmmaking.

MEMORIA (2021) Apichatpong Weerasethakul

From the extraordinary mind of Palme d'Or winning director Apichatpong Weerasethakul, 'Memoria' stars Academy Award-winner Tilda Swinton as Jessica Holland, who, after hearing a loud 'bang' at daybreak, begins experiencing a mysterious sensory syndrome while traversing the jungles of Colombia.

She experiences auditory hallucinations and tries to find the sources of the sounds causing her insomnia. Soon, she begins to confront the unsettling sights and sounds that call her identity into question.



RRR (2021) S.S. Rajamouli

A fictitious story about two legendary revolutionaries and their journey away from home before they started fighting for their country in 1920s. Wildly flamboyant, bombastic and downright over-the-top in this action adventure, where fantastically choreographed set pieces – including a human pyramid of colossal proportions that seems to defy physics take centre stage. Set pieces, which are matched only by the utterly charismatic performances of its two leads (who, for all of their earth-defiant fighting might as well be literal superheroes) give every instalment of the Marvel multiverse a run for their money. With wildly catchy tunes from composer: M RRR's and a run time of 277 minutes, RRR really is a historical Tollywood epic.

NETFLIX

THE NORTHMAN (2022)

Robert Eggers

The Viking Age. Mind aflame with hate and revenge, Prince Amleth, the wronged son of King Aurvandill War-Raven, heads to cold, windswept Iceland to retrieve what was stolen from him: a father, a mother, and a kingdom. Like a war dog picking up the enemy's scent, brutal Amleth embarks on a murderous quest to find the hateful adversary, whose life is forever woven together with his by the threads of fate. Now, in the name of Valhalla, no one can stop the Northman, not even God.

Hailed as this generation's "Braveheart" With the The Northman, acclaimed filmmaker Robert Eggers brilliantly subverts audience's expectations of what a revenge epic should be while delivering everything we've come to expect from the genre.



LICORICE PIZZA (2021)

Paul Thomas Anderson

LICORICE PIZZA is the story of Alana Kane, played by Alana Haim (of the band fame) and Gary Valentine played by Cooper Hoffman, son of the late Philip Seymour Hoffman, growing up, running around and falling in love in the San Fernando Valley, 1973. Named after a now defunct LA based record store chain; Licorice Pizza is a partly autobiographical story written and directed by Paul Thomas Anderson. The film tracks the treacherous navigation of first love between the two protagonists who despite the concerning age difference manage to wheel and deal their way through numerous business start-ups, perilous Hollywood personalities and political upheaval. Tarantino had *Once Upon A time in Hollywood*(2019) Licorice Pizza is PTA's homage to his home town and might just be his most innocent and optimistic film to-date.



TICK TICK BOOM (2021) Lin-Manuel Miranda

The film follows Jonathan Larson (Andrew Garfield), a young theatre composer who's waiting tables at a New York City diner in 1990 while writing what he hopes will be the next great American musical. Days before he's due to showcase his work in a make-or-break performance, Jon is feeling the pressure from everywhere: from his girlfriend Susan, who dreams of an artistic life beyond New York City; from his friend Michael, who has moved on from his dream to a life of financial security; amidst an artistic community being ravaged by the AIDS epidemic. With the clock ticking, Jon is at a crossroads and faces the question everyone must reckon with: What are we meant to do with the time we have?

NETFLIX

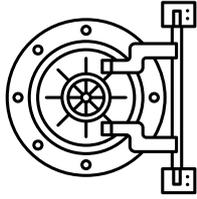


EVERYTHING EVERYWHERE ALL AT ONCE (2022)

Daniels

With her laundromat teetering on the brink of failure and her marriage to wimpy husband Waymond on the rocks, overworked Evelyn Wang struggles to cope with everything, including a tattered relationship with her judgmental father Gong Gong and Joy, her daughter. And, as if facing a gloomy midlife crisis weren't enough, Evelyn must brace herself for an unpleasant meeting with an impersonal bureaucrat: Deirdre, the shabbily dressed IRS auditor. As the stern agent loses patience, an inexplicable multiverse rift becomes an eye-opening exploration of parallel realities. Will Evelyn jump down the rabbit hole? How many stars are there in the universe? Can weary Evelyn fathom the irrepressible force of possibilities, tap into newfound powers, and prevent an evil entity from destroying the thin, countless layers of the unseen world.

prime video



From The Vault

This section is really an extension of the previous Hand-Picked Cinema list. We felt there have been so many incredible films from the past few years that some may have slipped under the radar that we would be remiss not to draw your attention to these beautiful stories

Synopsis

A passionate love story between two people of different backgrounds and temperaments, who are fatefully mismatched and yet condemned to each other. Set against the background of the Cold War in the 1950s in Poland, Berlin, Yugoslavia and Paris, the film depicts an impossible love story in impossible times

Our Take

Peering behind the iron curtain of 1950s Poland, Pawel Pawlikowski's melancholic, jazzy period piece ruminates on the possibility of borderless love in an ideologically polarized world. Inspired by his parent's own experiences, this deeply personal film takes us through the highs and lows of Zulu (Joanna Kulig); a young and ambitious woman who is faking a peasant identity and is on probation after attacking her abusive father and Wiktor (Tomasz Kot) a composer and conductor who is starting an arts school that showcases the folk musics of the Polish Peasantry. We follow their obsessive love over the course of two decades as they navigate a broken Europe that is trying to rebuild itself after the Second World War.

In *Cold War*, Pawlikowski examines themes of identity, obsessive love, jealousy, and Soviet Communist Nationalism vs Western Capitalism.

While less hieratic than *Ida* (2013), *Cold War*'s exquisitely stark cinematography by Łukasz Żal evokes the aesthetic of Tarkovsky's *The Sacrifice* (1986) with stunning lighting and beautifully framed images, the tight 1.37:1 aspect ratio creates a sense of being trapped as our protagonists most certainly are but it also constrains the story to the human experience at the centre which never escapes its circumstances.

Joanna Kulig and Tomasz Kot excel as the star-crossed lovers whose flawed characters endure the trials and tribulations of failed marriages, identity crises and alcoholism all against the backdrop of bureaucratic nationalistic Soviet propaganda, the bourgeois artisans of Paris and their own egos.

The editing by Jaroslaw Kaminski sets a slow-to-moderate tempo with long sequences that reflect the slow pace of life in the Polish country side. With clear bookending of sections (although not explicitly stated) as each chapter fades to black and we open in a new location and time period the editing strongly contributes to how the structure of the narrative unfolds.

An exquisitely shot, black-and-white gem nominated for 3 Academy Awards including Best Director.



Cold War (2018)

Pawel Pawlikowski



Synopsis

A Japanese couple stuck with part-time jobs and inadequate incomes avail themselves of the fruits of shoplifting to make ends meet. They are not alone in this behaviour. The younger and the older of the household are in on the act. The unusual routine is about to change from care-free and matter-of-fact to something more dramatic, however, as the couple open their doors to a beleaguered young girl. The reasons for the family's habit and their motivations come under the microscope.

Our Take

Koreeda Hirokazu's small family drama explores the day-to-day existence of a family of thieves whose lives are turned upside down when a young girl enters their world. Hirokazu was inspired to write this film while pondering the question "What makes a family?" We follow the story from the perspective every member of the family so as to take a "wider point of view" within Japanese society. One thing we quickly learn is that this is no ordinary family, something is quite off here. There are many aspects of this "family" that can only be described as "dysfunctional". For instance; the son, Shota, never goes to school and when he inquires about this he is told: "school is a place kids go when they can't study at home." The film deals with themes of love, belonging and acceptance while also exploring trauma and poverty. One of the most thought provoking lines in the film comes from Nobuyo who says "Sometimes it's better to choose your own family". We are presented with a set of circumstances that challenges our preconceptions of what a family unit is and how it should be considered from the different members of the family in relation to outside pressures from wider society. Although, huge revelations in the final act of the film ultimately cause the undoing of the familial bond that ties these characters together we are still left wondering if the lives that they subsequently go on to live are in any way better than their previous ones. For all the flaws of our protagonists their love may have been genuine.

We follow Lily Franky (from *Like Father, Like Son* (2013)) who plays Osamu who works on a construction site but who makes money selling things he steals while shopping with his boy, Shota. His wife, Noboyu (Sakura Andô), who works in a hotel laundry and she, too, steals things left in clothes' pockets all the time.

Much like Bong Joon-ho's 2019 Oscar-winning drama "*Parasite*" we soon come to realise that the family's "shoplifting" mentality is more than just a means to an end. It permeates through every aspect of their being and allows them to commit some extraordinary acts.

With outstanding cinematography, script and editing the best part of this film for me has to be the acting. The depths of human emotion portrayed by the actors really blew me away. A stand out scene comes from Sakura Andô near the end when a tightly framed portrait shot of Noboyu shows her struggling to accept what is being said to her.

A beautifully shot and directed film that took home the Palme d'Or at Cannes and was nominated for "Best Foreign Language Film" at the Academy Awards.



Shoplifters (2018)

Hirokazu Koreeda



ONES TO WATCH

FILMS WE'RE EXCITED ABOUT THIS AUTUMN



Three Thousand Years of Longing George Miller

Dr Alithea Binnie (Tilda Swinton) is an academic - content with life and a creature of reason. While in Istanbul attending a conference, she happens to encounter a Djinn (Idris Elba)

who offers her three wishes in exchange for his freedom. This presents two problems. First, she doubts that he is real and second, because she is a scholar of story and mythology, she knows all the cautionary tales of wishes gone wrong. The Djinn pleads his case by telling her fantastical stories of his past. Eventually she is beguiled and makes a wish that surprises them both.

In cinemas now



Clerks III Kevin Smith

After Clerks (1994) became a cult classic and inspired a generation of independent slacker films we followed our heroes into their 30's a decade later where they still hadn't amounted to much

Now in their 50's; Dante, Elias, and Jay and Silent Bob are enlisted by Randal after a heart attack to make a movie about the convenience store that started it all. With the wonderfully hilarious dialogue that is guaranteed to offend and the charm that only Kevin Smith can bring we are all in on this one.

In cinemas now



The Banshees of Inisherin Martin McDonagh



Set on a remote island off the west coast of Ireland, THE BANSHEES OF INISHERIN follows lifelong friends Padraic (Colin Farrell) and Colm (Brendan Gleeson), who find themselves at an impasse when Colm unexpectedly puts an end to their friendship. A stunned Padraic, aided by his sister Siobhan (Kerry Condon) and troubled young islander Dominic (Barry Keoghan), endeavours to repair the relationship, refusing to take no for an answer. But Padraic's repeated efforts only strengthen his former friend's resolve and when Colm delivers a desperate ultimatum, events swiftly escalate, with shocking consequences

October 21, 2022.



SEE HOW THEY RUN

Tom George

In the West End of 1950s London, plans for a movie version of a smash-hit play come to an abrupt halt after a pivotal member of the crew is murdered. When world-weary Inspector Stoppard (Sam Rockwell) and eager rookie Constable Stalker (Saoirse Ronan) take on the case, the two find themselves thrown into a puzzling whodunit within the glamorously sordid theater underground, investigating the mysterious homicide at their own peril

The "whodunit" genre seems to have had a major revival in the past few years, and we are all for it.

In cinemas now

WORLD SHORTS

This is our last section of the magazine, we felt it was really important to include new voices by emerging filmmakers because these are the most logical collaborators for you as you develop in your own careers. Here we are looking at a few short films that have been programmed as part of a film festival run or have been featured on the Short of the Week platform.



Americanized (2021)

Erica Eng (USA)

Growing up in Oakland's hip-hop culture, Eng struggles with her Chinese-American identity. To her high school basketball team she's just that girl who sits on the bench, but to the Asian kids she's "Americanized." As her sophomore year of high school comes to an end, Eng tries to find a sense of belonging within the two worlds that don't accept her. Sweeping Best Short Film across many West Coast film festivals, Americanized is currently available to be streamed on <https://www.shortoftheweek.com>

Our Take

Director Erica Eng's loosely autobiographical directorial debut is a beautifully crafted narrative that explores the ambiguities of cultural identity through the eyes of 16 year old Eng; a Chinese-American basketball player who aspires to secure her permanent position on the team. Eng finds herself confronted with the dualities of her bi-cultural upbringing (on the one hand she comes from a deep tradition of Chinese culture; she lives with her grandma who doesn't speak English) while on the other she is fully immersed in the American way of life. We follow Eng as she navigates these two worlds trying to find her place in both worlds which don't fully embrace her as authentic. A wonderfully shot and directed film that takes us on a real journey but doesn't necessarily give us the catharsis we come to expect from the genre. While it pays homage to the high-school sports films that have preceded it, it remains quite fresh because it keeps the focus on the character driven arc which ultimately keeps us engaged. That being that we care about Eng and we want her to succeed in the end.





Erica Eng is a fifth-generation Chinese-American director based out of Los Angeles. Her film "Americanized" screened at the Atlanta Film Festival, Cleveland International, and Urbanworld among others. The film, based on her experiences playing high school basketball, premiered on Vimeo's Short of the Week and took home 18 awards including Palm Springs International ShortFest (Young Cineastes Award), Bentonville Film Festival (Best Short Film), and the Oscar-qualifying award at Cinequest (Best Dramatic Short).

Recently, Erica became one out of six directors hand-selected for Disney's Launchpad Shorts Incubator program where she will be mentored by executives from Marvel Studios and Lucasfilm as she directs a coming-of-age ghost story for Disney+. She's currently in post-production, while her latest film "Off Fairfax" is touring the festival circuit after its world premiere at Tribeca Film Festival.

FILM SCORING
ACADEMY OF EUROPE

The Film Scoring Academy of Europe was fortunate enough to sit down with Erica to discuss the creative process of making "Americanized".

Hi Erica, thanks so much for taking the time to sit down with the Film Scoring Academy of Europe and firstly, let me say a massive congratulations on the film.

Thank you so much.

I know our time is limited so I think I like to come at this from two angles, the first being the creative choices involved in the film and secondly, that practical aspects of making the film. Is the film autobiographical?

I wrote the story which is somewhat autobiographical. I'm a 5th generation Chinese-American and I didn't really fit in with the Asian kids at my school. So growing up, I focused more on Oakland culture, rather than Chinese Culture.

The film has obviously been dramatised and heightened for narrative effect and we are aware of the dualities of the circumstances the protagonist finds herself in. On one hand she occupies a typical African-American basketball clique and on the other hand she feels a pull towards a more Asian-centric group of friends. Is this true to your own experiences?

Yea, I had friends in both groups - the basketball team and the Asian clique at my school. But in both worlds, I didn't feel like I belonged. But the team never really cared if I was Asian, they only really cared if I was good on the court. So the film really reflects a "clique-within-a-clique" so to speak. It's not so cut and dry as popular and unpopular. It really explores what it feels like to be in the middle of these groups to which you don't completely belong.

Having watched the film I get a strong sense that language plays a significant role as mechanism by which Eng (the protagonist) is both accepted and excluded from these communities. How did you conceptualise the role of language within the larger narrative of the story?

Not being able to speak any dialect of Chinese has always been an insecurity of mine. I used language in the film as a way to show Eng's disconnect from her Chinese culture, which is rarely seen on screen. I wanted my perspective as a Chinese person who couldn't speak Chinese to be clearly represented in this film because I wanted to show how we as Asian-Americans or Chinese-Americans are not all the same and we don't always share the same experiences.

The reason I ask because I'm thinking about the scene in the film where we get the first real sense of conflict within Eng. Specifically the scene before the rally when she meets her (Asian) friend in the corridor and decides to leave the basketball team to follow him into this heightened Asian-centric space where she is met with clear adversity for the first time.

I want to dive a little deeper into the narrative and psychology of the protagonist and how as you take her on her character arc we see her confronted with challenges that serve to develop her into a richer, more nuanced person. What is interesting, however, is that we don't see her full redemption. When we meet her she is really full of hope and optimism some might say naïvely so and when we leave her she is in a place, although comforted by her grandmother, she hasn't yet fully overcome that conflict in a typical heroic sense. What was the thinking behind this narrative choice?

Yeah, I mean it's about a 16-year-old girl trying to figure out who she is and where she belongs. That's such a big task for a teenager. I don't think I really understood myself until my late 20's, so I didn't feel it was right for the main character to understand herself by the end of the film.

The film is really about identity and acceptance, which is represented by the home we see at the bookends of the film. The home and the grandmother's character represent her Chinese culture, which is always there for her but we kind of see her brush off her grandmother at the beginning of the film and instead go for shallow relationships at school. But by the end of the film, we see that the Grandmother is the only person there by her side - representing that her culture is always there for her no matter what. And that was true for me too. I think I spent a lot of time not paying attention to my Chinese culture, I kind of pushed it away. But it was always there for me, even if I didn't see it.

Switching gears a little bit, obviously the film has been very successful having won numerous prizes at various film festivals and being featured on Short of the Week. Having worked on a few short films myself, I'm acutely aware of the constant struggle directors feel working within the constraints of the time format of a short film. From a more practical point of view what is the current climate in California towards short films and getting shorts made? Is it entirely independent or are there mechanisms you can go through to get something like this made?

It's the wild-wild-west out here. Everyone must self-fund a short film. Rarely does a short film get financing (in my opinion) unless you go through a fellowship program. My film was completely self-funded but I worked with compassionate and passionate people who worked really hard to help me get this thing off the ground. .

I think the film industry in the UK is a little more forgiving. There are various funding opportunities available although the competition is quite fierce and you have to have some kind of proven track record before they will trust you with any budget. So to self-fund a film of this calibre is a very impressive achievement. Even to pay people properly must have taken a significant amount of your budget.

(Laughing) No-one got paid properly! It's a lot of volunteers. That's how these films get made. I struck a lot of luck getting people on this project. It was really personal so they resonated with the story and I had a great producer, Simran Mahal, who was able to get a lot of crew on board. I definitely envy the U.K. system of funding short films and art because I feel like films in America even story-wise are just so different. Because of the competition, like we said, it all has this very indie/nuanced feel and I really admire that.

How long was the shoot?

It was four days. We had two locations; the school and the home.

Turning towards the film's score and music more broadly, how do you think of music and its role in your films?

Well I love music and I came from music videos so whenever I was making music videos I'd have to write a narrative for that piece of music and that always really excited me. With that being said, within this film, I knew the source music. I knew the song that was going to open the film and the exact lyric that was going to open the film. There were other moments in the film that needed source music that felt very "of Oakland" because you're in this city and there's no way you'd know unless you heard the music and the identity of the people from there. So the source music in the film is really important to providing the tone of the film. I find that my style isn't so flowery, I like to have a more hard-hitting tone in my work.

That being said, with score, I don't know, I've never studied music but having studied films I know what I like. I like strings, I like piano. I don't like synths, I don't like horns or other brass instruments. I know exactly what instruments I like and what frequencies I like. I don't like something too sweet, I only like something bittersweet and I say to the composer "go with it".

I think because Americanized was my first film, I basically picked scores I liked. The "A ha" moment really came with the hallway scene, that was probably one of the first

things that was scored. The main character comes from the classroom and she's really sad, you hear the source music coming from the rally outside but once she sees her friend the score kind of lifts up and she has a moment where she feels like she belongs. The camera wraps around them and the score then moves into tension which leads us into the next scene. So the score from the hallway to rally to the game was all kind of one big piece. I'm doing that again on this new project because I rely on the music to help communicate what the character is feeling because it's so internal. I looked at the music of "Moonlight" and "The Leftovers" as references for this film. I liked the ambient way the music can lift up through different emotions.

The hardest scene to score was the game! I wanted to do a classical version of a hip-hop track like, an orchestral version of the song "*I got 5 on it*" like in the movie "*Us (2019)*". But when the composer tried to score the game scene to this kind of hip-hop-ish track, it was NOT right. After the 7th draft, I had to bite my ego and say "I'm so sorry, I think I dragged us into the wrong direction - would you mind just doing something you think is right?" She took one day and scored what you now hear now in the film.

Also, the game score is a very emotional score. It goes through so many beats in one piece of music. It begins where there are 3 beats in the game where the character of Stephanie loses herself. She misses the shot, she gets crossed over and then she loses the ball. 1,2,3 and she's down, she's out of the game.

The film goes from the high intensity of the rally, to the character losing her own game, to Eng stepping in and it lifts back up again. However, I was so focused on this hybrid orchestra-hip hop sound to stay true to the hip hop culture, that I forgot to focus on the emotions of the scene and what the scene was really about.

Overall, this experience taught me that I just need to trust the people I hire. I don't need to have all the answers and it's okay to experiment - but I don't know what I don't know, and a certain amount of trust in collaboration is required. And my composer, Aiko Fukushima, helped me get back on the right track by focusing on the character arc.

What do you look for in a composer?

I like composers who can understand where the music can be, and where you don't need music at all. Just because you didn't score a scene, doesn't mean you're a bad composer. It means you're a smart composer because you're not putting yourself in front of the project.

Similarly, when I tried to score the game, I was so focused on being artsy and experimental and hip hop, that I forgot that the scene was actually about the emotional downfall of Stephanie. And it reminded me why it's always good to anchor all your decisions in the emotions of your characters. So composers should always look to serve the narrative, not themselves.

Lastly, I'd like to touch briefly on something you mentioned earlier which is how you use the camera and composition of image to create meaning and tone in a scene and throughout the film.

I studied cinematography and I used to shoot a lot on my own and I really do think more visually (probably due to my background in music videos) so the way I choreograph my camera movement is very intentional. It was important to follow each character to get into their mindset visually because there are so many non-verbal beats in the film. When I was younger, I used to think that "being in their mindset" always meant shooting lots of shallow close-ups.

But I'm challenging myself to use more establishing wides or asymmetrical framing to create a sense of emptiness around the character. I watched "Her" and I studied how to isolate someone in a crowded room to find what that feels like. Prep-wise we used a lot of camera maps for our scenes (like the locker room dynamic, classroom dynamic, and basketball game) and I planned all the shots with my DP, Drew Daniels, who's such an artist, and I lean on him for his advice a lot too. He's such a great collaborator and listener, and I really do like to trust the opinions of people I work with.

For the game scene specifically, we separated the emotional character-building shots, from the regular game footage. So we first shot all the emotional beats on the court with the main players like when she loses the ball and her reaction and all that stuff. Then, when we had all the footage in the can, we invited the audience of extras to the tands and we shot all our wides and the zooms, pans, whips etc. all that energy and movement we did in the last 4 hours of the shoot. It was like flying by the seat of our pants but I had a really great 2nd Camera Operator, Tyler McPherron, who was on a telephoto zoom lens.

I use him as a DP as well, and he's done some wonderful documentaries so I know he can capture human emotion really well and just trusted him completely. He found all of these beautiful candid moments from the audience and from our actors when they thought we weren't watching. That scene honestly wouldn't have looked as great without it.

Well Erica, thank you so much for giving us an insight in to your creative process and a massive congratulations again, we will follow your career very closely.

Thank you for having me.



Everything Will Be Alright (2022)

Farhad Pakdel (Canada)

Amid the outbreak of the pandemic in Montreal, a young drama teacher who has been keeping a secret from her family finds herself in a predicament after her father falls ill and she is called back home in the Middle East. A beautifully shot and edited film, *Everything Will Be Alright* explores the difficulties of decision-making people endured as the reality of the COVID-19 pandemic began to bite. In addition, the film deals with broader themes of culture and personal relationships. A well-crafted and tight narrative, beautifully shot and edited with a wonderful performance from Nahéma Ricci.



Sunbelly (2021)

Jordan Speer (USA)

Sunbelly is an animated sci-fi short-film about a group of interplanetary explorers searching for home. When a scout from a distant planet uncovers a lost civilisation, the explorers discover the long forgotten origins of their mission.

Quite a leisurely-paced short, with its viewing experience more focused on a little quiet reflection, rather than all-out action (although there is a great chase sequence around the six-minute mark). Speer and his team do excellent work in instantly immersing viewers into their universe, the rich detail in the short's inventive world-building making you buy into the universe and its inhabitants right from the start. .