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MAY 15, 2026 | DAY 4 | CANNES

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THE *Hollywood* REPORTER

MAY 15, 2026

DAY 4

CANNES

CANNES
WEATHER
AND HIGH
TEMPS

TODAY

68° F
20° C



TOMORROW

70° F
21° C



REVIEWS | [Fatherland](#) page 46 | [Teenage Sex and Death at Camp Miasma](#) page 47 | [Butterfly Jam](#) page 50 | [The Meltdown](#) page 52 | [more reviews on THR.com](#)

RISING SUN?

Japan Is Having a Moment, But Its Auteurs Aren't Satisfied Yet

Three competition titles, a record box office and a country of honor slot at the Marché — and the filmmakers leading the charge say the real work hasn't even started

BY PATRICK BRZESKI

The Japanese film industry has arrived in Cannes with considerable wind at its back in 2026. For the first time in 25 years, three features by Japanese filmmakers have been selected for the festival's main competition — Palme d'Or winner **Hirokazu Kore-eda's** *Sheep in a Box*, Oscar winner **Ryūsuke Hamaguchi's** *All of a Sudden*, and **Koji Fukada's** *Nagi Notes*. They are joined by several other strong contenders across the festival's other sections — such as **Kiyoshi Kurosawa's** *Kokurojo: The Samurai and the Prisoner* in Special Screenings and **Yukiko Sode's** *All the Lovers in the Night* in Un Certain Regard — not to mention Japan's place as the Marché du Film 2026 country of honor. From panel discussions to pitch sessions, Japanese buyers, sellers and studio operators are everywhere in Cannes this year, with registered attendance up nearly 50 percent at the market, according to organizers.

(Continued on page 2)

ACTOR Q&A

Maika Monroe's Having a Killer Year

With prosthetic teeth, an English accent and buckets of fake blood at 4:30 in the morning, *Victorian Psycho* pushed the actress further than any role before it — and she wouldn't have it any other way

BY DAVID CANFIELD



READ ON PAGE 18



For all the latest coverage of the Cannes Film Festival, go to [THR.COM/CANNES](#)

JAPAN

Continued from page 1

The surge is even spilling over into the festival's fabled nightlife, with two glitzy Japan Night parties taking place back-to-back this week (one co-hosted by the Tokyo International Film Festival and Japanese studios at Majestic Beach on May 14, and another staged by pop star turned producer **Megumi** at the Martinez on May 15).

Perhaps more significantly, the bullish indicators on the Croisette are echoed by recent box office and awards milestones across both the Atlantic and the Pacific. Buoyed by blockbusters like *Demon Slayer: Infinity Castle* (\$250 million in Japan/\$740 million worldwide) and the live-action kabuki drama sensation *Kokuho* (\$130 million in Japan), Japan's box office not only regained ground from the pandemic downturn, but surged 32 percent, year-on-year, to set a new all-time record in 2025 of 274.45 billion yen (\$1.79 billion) in total ticket revenue. Japanese-themed content has also nabbed a slew of major international honors in recent years, including Oscar wins for Hamaguchi's *Drive My Car* in 2022 and *Godzilla Minus*

One, and a near clean sweep of the 2024 Emmys by FX's Japanese-language samurai series *Shogun*. Meanwhile, Netflix, Disney+ and other streamers are spending record sums on growing slates of local originals in Japan, arguably the world's last mature major economy with considerable room still left for subscriber growth. With Japan welcoming a record 42.7 million foreign visitors in 2025, global interest in the country's content and culture has arguably never been stronger.

If you ask Japan's industry leaders whether they believe this backdrop heralds an imminent renaissance for Japanese cinema, they are far more circumspect, however.

"Of course, seeing the box office grow to that level after COVID is something I'm very happy about," says Kore-eda. "But if you look deeper into the numbers, roughly 90 percent of films released in Japan are in the red after their theatrical run, and our market has become very winner-take-all, with just a few very big titles succeeding."

He adds: "For Japanese cinema to truly become creatively and commercially healthy, we must improve the independent

(Continued on page 54)



Lucy Hale is best known for *Pretty Little Liars*.

STARTING OVER

Lucy Hale Boards *A Young Widow's Guide to Life*

Pretty *Little Liars* alum **Lucy Hale** is set to lead a new romance, *A Young Widow's Guide to Life*, with international sales launching in Cannes.

The film will be directed by rising filmmaker **Mackenzie Munro** and produced by **Pascal Borno**, **Alain Gillissen**, **Silvio Muraglia** and **Jack Greenbaum**. Principal photography will commence this September in Italy.

Written by **Katrina Day Schaefer**, *A Young Widow's Guide to Life* follows Tess Fuller (Hale), a 30-year-old widow who remains emotionally stuck five years after the death of her husband. "On the anniversary of his passing, Luke's childhood friend publishes a letter he left behind asking the town to help Tess create a list of things to try to start over and move on with her life," a plot synopsis reads.

"Reluctantly, Tess starts checking items off the list and slowly reconnects with life, love and herself. As she develops a connection with a charming single father and professor named Marcus, Tess must decide whether she is ready to open her heart again — or if she still needs time to find herself first. After an emotional turning point, she embarks on a solo road trip that ultimately helps her let go of the past and embrace a new chapter."

The project marks another commercial movie role for Hale, whose recent film *F*** Me Kill* topped Hulu in 2025. The star is best known for TV hit *Pretty Little Liars*, as well as *Truth or Dare* and *The Hating Game*.

Munro, meanwhile, began her career in film production as a teenager and went on to direct projects for Facebook Watch, Crypt TV and The Shade Room before making her feature debut with *Salvation*. She recently wrapped production on *Stampede* and Wattle's *Chasing Red*, starring *Riverdale*'s **Madelaine Petsch** and *The Summer I Turned Pretty*'s **Gavin Casalegno**.

Producers Borno and Gillissen of Angel Oak Films are bringing *A Young Widow's Guide to Life* to Cannes with the aim of securing international distribution partners ahead of production. A deal with **Andreas Klein**'s German powerhouse Splendid Films was closed on the Croisette for German-speaking territories.

"We are so excited to bring this unique project to Cannes and introduce it to our key buyers," says Borno. "We are particularly proud of being involved with an established as well as dynamic star, Lucy Hale, and pairing her with another young female rising star, director Mackenzie Munro. This unique script combined with these two incredible women is a winning combination." — LILY FORD



Hirokazu Kore-eda's *Sheep in a Box*.

Meanwhile, in the Real World ...

→ The stars are aligning. **Madonna**, **Shakira** and **BTS** will play the first-ever halftime show for the FIFA World Cup Final. **Coldplay**'s **Chris Martin**, **Elmo**, **Miss Piggy**, **Kermit the Frog** and **Animal** shared the news in a social media video.

→ The popular Netflix series *The Lincoln Lawyer*, based on a series of novels by **Michael Connelly** and starring **Manuel Garcia-Rulfo** as attorney Mickey Haller, will end with its fifth season. Production is underway in Los Angeles right now.

→ London Police are preparing for one of their largest protest deployments in decades on Saturday amid concern that far-right demonstrators at a "Unite the Kingdom" event could clash with pro-Palestine marchers at the annual "Nakba Day" protest.

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Ben Kingsley (left) and Aaron Eckhart in *Deep Water*.

ACTION JACKSON

Aura Entertainment Takes Renny Harlin's Samuel L. Jackson Actioner *The Beast* for U.S.

BY SCOTT ROXBOROUGH

Aura Entertainment has picked up U.S. rights to *The Beast*, a new action-thriller from **Renny Harlin** (*Cliffhanger*, *Die Hard 2*), starring **Samuel L. Jackson** and **Joel Kinnaman**.

Jackson plays a U.S. president who comes under attack as a militia group tries to stage a coup. Caught inside the presidential limousine, code-named "The Beast" by the Secret Service, he discovers the car is also a superweapon, with highly classified offensive capabilities. He decides to use the machine to, in the words of the promo blurb, "fight his way back to safety, his country, and the woman he loves."



Harlin

The Beast is produced by **Keith Kjarval**, **Wayne Godfrey**, **Nicki Cortese**, **Rob Van Norden** and **John Logan Pierson**, together with **Fifth Season**. Aura Entertainment is planning a fourth-quarter theatrical release for the film.

"*The Beast* is exactly the kind of film that gets audiences back in theaters," says Aura Entertainment CEO **Marc Goldberg**. "Renny Harlin knows how to deliver action at the highest level, and with Samuel L. Jackson and Joel Kinnaman leading the charge, this film is going to be an absolute must-see event. We couldn't be more excited to bring it to audiences this fall."

The deal was negotiated by Goldberg on behalf of Aura and by WME Independent on behalf of the filmmakers. WME Independent is representing international sales on the title.

The Beast adds to Aura's growing slate. The company, launched by Capstone Studios, Signature Entertainment and Ascending Media Group ahead of the Cannes film market last year, has since rollout out action comedy *Code 3*, starring **Rainn Wilson**, **Lil Rel Howery** and **Aimee Carrero**; *K-Pops!*, the directorial debut of rapper **Anderson .Paak**; and the **Dave Bautista** action movie *Trap House*. Upcoming releases include the Hippo survival thriller *Hungry* and the shark thriller *Above and Below* starring **Laura Marano** and **Antonio Banderas**.

Aura has said it plans to release 10 to 15 titles a year. **THR**



From left: Samuel L. Jackson and Joel Kinnaman

FLY GUYS

Signature Wades Into *Deep Water*

BY LILY FORD

Signature Entertainment have acquired the U.K. & Irish rights to **Aaron Eckhart's** survival thriller, *Deep Water*, with **Ben Kingsley**.

Directed by **Renny Harlin** (*Die Hard 2*), the Arclight Film project is written by **Shayne Armstrong** (*Acolytes*) and **S.P. Krause** (*The Darkness*). It follows a plane that goes down in the middle of the Pacific in deadly, shark-infested waters. Terrified, the eclectic group of passengers are forced to work together to escape the sinking aircraft and the frenzy of sharks swarming below.

An exclusive still of the film, released to *The Hollywood Reporter* on Thursday, shows the Eckhart and Kingsley in pilot attire ahead of their ill-fated flight.

Producers include **Dale G. Bradley** and **Grant Bradley**, **Adrián Guerra**, **Gary Hamilton**, **Ryan Hamilton**, **Neal Kingston**, **Robert Van Norden**, **Bob Yari** and **Ying Ye**.

The deal was negotiated between Signature

Entertainment's chief commercial officer, **Elizabeth Williams**, and Arclight Film's **Gary Hamilton**.

Williams said Signature is "extremely pleased" to be bringing Harlin's "super entertaining thriller" to U.K. and Irish audiences. "The top-level cast add brilliant performances and heart to a rollicking crowd-pleaser of an action spectacle."

Hamilton added: "We're excited to continue our great relationship with Marc and Elizabeth and the rest of Signature team on Arclight blockbuster *Deep Water*."

U.S. star Eckhart is best known for his performance opposite **Julia Roberts** in 2000's *Erin Brockovich*, and later, in **Christopher Nolan's** Batman film *The Dark Knight* as DA Harvey Dent (and Two-Face). Kingsley, on the other hand, is a British actor who became an Academy Award winner for **Richard Attenborough's** 1982 movie *Gandhi*. **THR**

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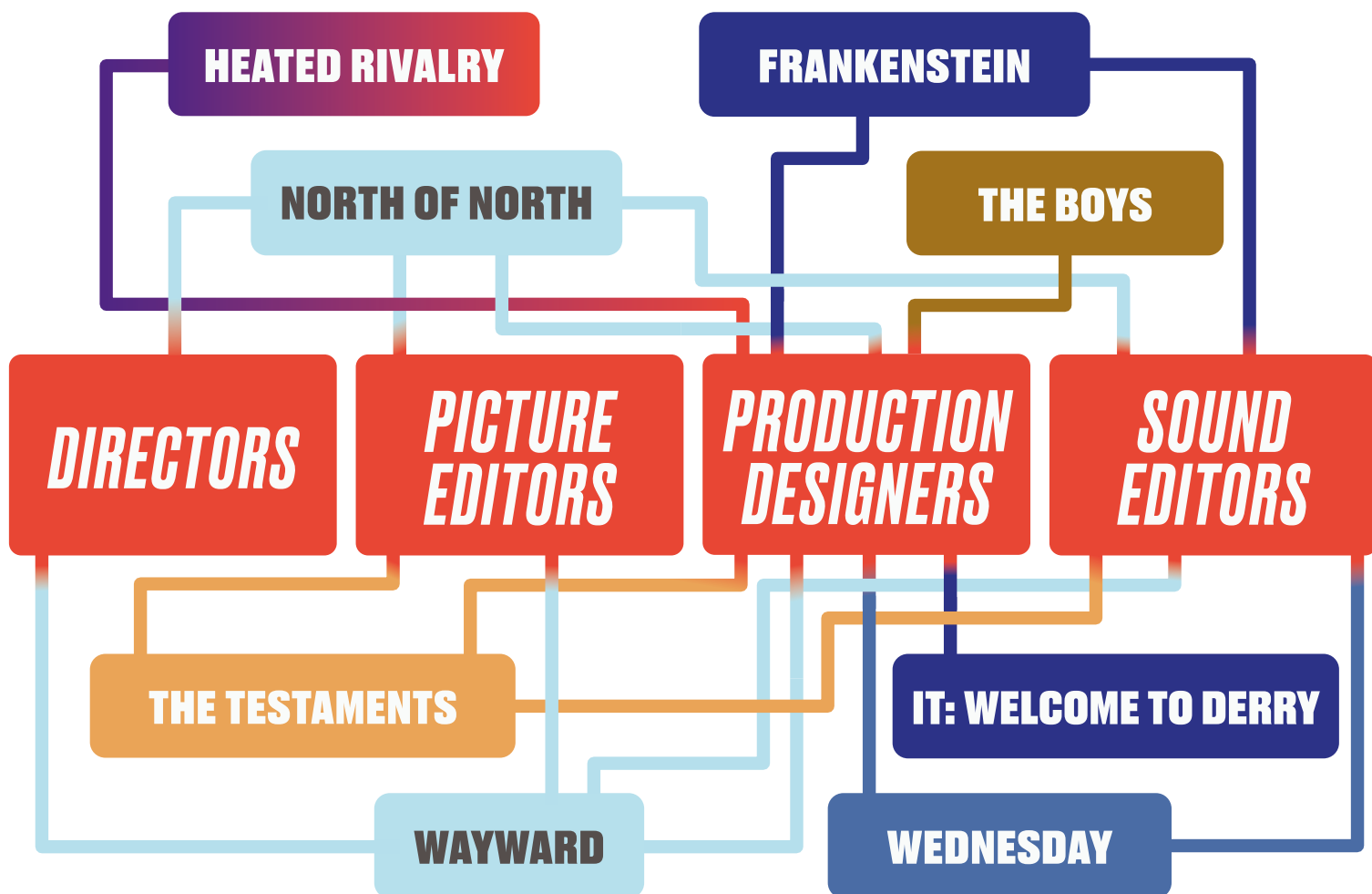


Into the Deep Blue

The Hollywood Reporter can reveal an exclusive first look at YA romance *Into the Deep Blue*, co-led by *Maxton Hall* star **Damian Hardung** and *Ginny & Georgia's* **Sara Waisglass**, about two best friends — bound together by loss — who embark on a weekend road trip together. From director **Jonathan Wright**, North.Five.Six is handling worldwide sales on the film at Cannes.

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MOCKBUSTER

Uwe Boll Lives for the Undead

BY SCOTT ROXBOROUGH

Uwe Boll is back from the dead. The cult B-movie director has begun production on *23 Years Later* — *The Castle of the Dead*, a zombie horror film the German director bills as an “unofficial sequel” to his 2003 video game adaptation *House of the Dead*.

Boll is set to begin principle photography of the film on Sept. 5 in Germany, with **Jonathan Cherry** and **Ona Grauer**, the original stars of *House of the Dead*, returning for the new feature. Officially, the film has no connection to the Sega *House of the Dead* video game, as Boll does not have the adaptation rights.

Boll is directing *23 Years Later* from a script co-written by **Lutz Geiger**, with long-term partner **Michael Roesch** producing. **Boris Wolffgardt** is a co-producer on the project.

The first *House of the Dead* film follows a group of students who book a boat trip to an island to attend a rave, only to discover the place is infested by zombies. The bulk of the action takes place in a derelict house where the survivors fight off the undead onslaught.

Boll is keeping the plot of the new film under wraps but said *23 Years Later* will be based in a castle. “So in a way,” says Roesch, “we’re upgrading from a house full of zombies to a castle full of zombies.”

House of the Dead, like most Boll movies, was trashed by critics on release but went on to gross more than \$10 million on domestic



Uwe Boll has plans for a “bloody, gory and handmade” zombie film.

release and, according to Boll, has earned over \$100 million on home video and VOD worldwide to date. **Michael Hurst** directed a straight-to-video sequel, *House of the Dead 2* (2005).

The new zombie movie comes amid news that **Paul W.S. Anderson** is working on an official *House of the Dead* reboot for Sega. Boll’s mockbuster move feels like a deliberate trolling of the *Resident Evil* director.

“When I heard that Paul Anderson is rebooting *House of the Dead*, I immediately knew that it will be a soulless CGI orgy,” said Boll in a statement. “And I want to do a completely different zombie movie: bloody, gory and handmade.”

Boll has also announced plans for an official reboot of *Alone in the Dark* (2005), another of his early video game adaptations. Boll’s Event Films has optioned the film rights to the survival horror video game series from publisher THQ Nordic. The original *Alone in the Dark* starred **Christian Slater** and **Tara Reid**.

The ever-prolific Boll has the action thriller *Citizen Vigilante*, starring **Armie Hammer**, releasing this summer, via **Quiver**, and is in postproduction on two back-to-back sequels of his 2024 cop thriller *First Shift*, which was a surprise hit on Paramount+. **VH1**

SOLIDARITY

U.K. and French Film Unions Unite at Cannes to Protest Long Working Hours

British and French entertainment workers unions are joining forces in a campaign to protest conditions for creative workers in the film industry.

In a joint statement issued at the 2026 Cannes Film Festival, Britain’s Bectu (Broadcasting, Entertainment, Communications and Theatre Union) and its French sister trade unions called out a working culture that they say has “normalized long working days” with “serious consequences for workers’ health, safety and overall well-being.”

The statement is part of Bectu’s Broken Turnaround campaign, which aims to eliminate the practice of film and TV workers being routinely

asked to ignore the minimum rest period that they are entitled to between shifts. Workers are legally entitled to refuse to break turnaround but, the unions say, the practice is widespread and many workers feel pressured to work longer hours without appropriate mandated breaks. The “unrealistic timelines for productions,” say the unions, “put intense pressure on workers.”

The campaign, tied to the French festival, includes a series of posters and social media images with the slogan “You Can(nes) say no to long hours.”

“Cannes is a time to celebrate achievements in the film industry, but the reality is that these achievements are built on the hard work of thousands of workers who are often pushed to their limits by the grueling schedules of productions,” Bectu national secretary **Spencer MacDonald** said in a statement. “If we want a sustainable film industry, with good careers for workers at all levels and in all crafts, then we need to put an end to this dangerous practice.” —S.R.



The campaign includes posters urging members to say no to long hours.

Beyond the Croisette: The Ultimate Cote d’Azur Playground

From vintage Porsche drives along the Corniches to helicopter rides in St. Tropez, here’s how to live the fests like a movie star

BY MELINDA SHECKELLS



BY LAND
Cruise the Corniches

Nothing captures the romance of the Côte d’Azur quite like driving the famed three Corniches — the trio of winding coastal roads connecting Nice to Menton high above the Mediterranean — in a vintage convertible (*Classicdrivers.co*). With the top down and sea air rushing past, the route that passes through towns such as Èze and Beaulieu-sur-Mer feels lifted from an old Hollywood film. Sunlight flashes across cliffside villas while the coastline glitters below in stunning shades of blue.



BY AIR
Explore the Riviera by Helicopter

In just 20 minutes by helicopter (*blade.com*), Cannes connects to the Riviera’s most glamorous destinations. Fly to Aïnelles Saint-Tropez, Château de la Messardière (a filming location for *The White Lotus* season four) for beachside afternoons at Jardin Tropezina or lunch at Matsuhisa Saint-Tropez overlooking Pampelonne Beach. Or head east to Monaco for champagne and people-watching at Café de Paris Monte-Carlo.



BY SEA
Yacht Days Along the Côte d’Azur

During the fest, yachts become floating private clubs and exclusive event venues as Cannes is best experienced from the water (*arthaudyachting.com*). The Lérins Islands offer a serene escape from the Croisette, where superyachts anchor in turquoise coves for rosé-soaked lunches, champagne-fueled sunset cocktails and afternoons spent swimming off Sainte-Marguerite Island. Nearby Saint-Honorat offers peaceful vineyard tastings and abbey-produced wines beside the sea.



BY DAY
The Beach Clubs

The Croisette transforms into one long Riviera runway where sun worshipers drift between the beach clubs. Plage du Martinez channels old Hollywood elegance with striped loungers, crisp rosé and fantastic people-watching. Every chair features the name of an iconic celebrity. Nearby, La Môme Plage captures the spirit of 1950s Riviera glamour with Mediterranean cuisine, champagne lunches and an atmosphere inspired by *La Dolce Vita*.



BY NIGHT
Palm Beach Cannes

After a 2024 reimagining, the almost-century-old Palm Beach Cannes is the Riviera’s defining after-dark destination. During the 2026 Cannes Film Festival, the waterfront complex transforms into a glamorous nightlife playground with the arrival of Rasputine Cannes at FLASH, a hidden speakeasy-inspired bar designed by **Hugo Toro**. Nearby, KLUB Cannes takes over the historic Alain Delon Ballroom with performances by **Peggy Gou**, **Black Coffee** and **Rüfüs Du Sol**.



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HIDDEN GEM

In Waves Turns a Surfer's Grief Memoir Into Cannes History

Phuong Mai Nguyen's debut makes history as the first animated film to open Cannes Critics' Week — and it exists because she fell in love with California **BY DAVID CANFIELD**



In Waves focuses on the love story between two teens who bond over their shared love of surfing.

When **Phuong Mai Nguyen** first landed in Southern California, she was struck by the sunshine. The Vietnamese-French filmmaker had signed on to direct an animated adaptation of *In Waves*, AJ Dungo's hit 2019 graphic memoir, and traveled across the Atlantic to meet her subject — and immerse herself in his world. “It’s weird because in France we don’t have that kind of lighting all the time — now it’s spring-time, but we still have gray skies,” she says. “The light [in Los Angeles] was amazing.” You can feel that direct inspiration all over



Nguyen

In Waves, Nguyen's feature debut, working off of a screenplay by **Fanny Burdino** and **Samuel Doux**. Expanding on the visual style of the original book, the movie draws heavily from nature to tell the bittersweet love story between teenagers AJ and Kristen, whose bond is strengthened by a shared love of surfing. The water is its own character here, in its adventure and natural beauty and stormy volatility. Indeed, the aquatic motif changes shape as Kristen battles terminal cancer. “For AJ, the way to overcome a loss is being in the water — it’s really a beautiful metaphor for life and being humble in the face of nature and also in this world,” Nguyen says.

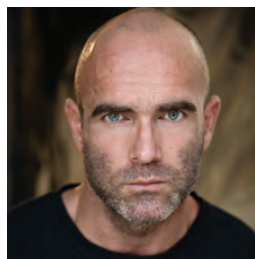
When she first met with Dungo, Nguyen was nervous about how he'd react to her distinct, outsider's visual take on the milieu. But the author was immediately taken with her vision. “They're adding a whole new dimension to this and they're all way better artists than I am,” Dungo says of Nguyen and her team. “The amount of work and love that they poured into it is more than I could have imagined.”

The movie also removes the bulk of the narration of the memoir, which often reads like a tone poem, and adds in a ton of dialogue. Kristen, for instance, is more of a memory in Dungo's book and only has one line. Here she speaks regularly, with Dungo having supplied anecdotes about her to help inform an authentic characterization.

“They were mining my experience, my family life, my friends, asking, ‘What was Kristen like?’ — they wanted more background,” Dungo says. “It was interesting to see your own history reflected back to you through someone else's lens, but still capturing the deep emotions and the pain and the joy in the way they did.” When she came to California and Dungo gave her the *In Waves* tour, Nguyen recalls noticing how far Kristen's hospital was from the beach. “It was interesting in a symbolic way because she was very attracted to oceans and the waves — that was her passion, and she was geographically removed from that,” Nguyen says. “That gave me a lot of ideas for staging.”

Alternately naturalistic and dreamlike, *In Waves* will open Critics' Week at the Cannes Film Festival — the first animated movie in history to do so. “We feel like we are the ugly duck in the film industry — in the last maybe 10 years, there weren't a lot of animated movies selected,” Nguyen says. “So being the opening film, I think, is good for the animation industry. We are very happy and overwhelmed.” **THR**

Cannes, According to ... The Celebrity Bodyguard



Simon Newton
Actor; bodyguard to such stars as Kendall Jenner, Bella Hadid and Michael Jackson

Favorite meal in Cannes?
I'm a simple man and always try to keep it meat and fish if I can. I always try to visit Anna Cannes while I'm here, though.

Most overrated restaurant?
I think it would be unfair to single one out. There are probably more overrated here than anything else. I guess the part of the country and the people it attracts brings overrated with it.

Biggest faux pas?

Probably has to be trying to speak to people of interest while they're busy. You need to read the room.

Best place to grab a drink after 3 a.m.?
Not the cheapest, but my heart is always with Bâoli Cannes.

Place to avoid during the festival?
It depends on the interest you have for being here. Most places start to get busy around 12 for lunch time. But the busiest place will always be the Croisette.

Your “only in Cannes” moment?
Some of the outfits I see people wearing, and it's not uncommon to take a walk and bump in to someone like **Tom Cruise** at certain parts of the festival.

Cannes guilty pleasure?
Cigars and champagne. Although I sometimes do that at home, but it's a must in Cannes.

Strangest request you've ever received in Cannes?
I've been asked for a few photos due to looking like

someone else. I get the **Jason Statham** question when I'm here. I guess people expect someone like that to be here, so it's not really uncommon for someone to think I'm him.

How has the past year changed your attitude to theatrical?
I'm still very much in love with being an actor. My first love is being on set bringing characters to life. The glitz, glam, smoke and mirrors of events like Cannes film festival will always be second to me.

The Character



GOES TO CANNES
MARCHÉ DU FILM



Days of Fire



GOES TO CANNES
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Carolina Maria de Jesus

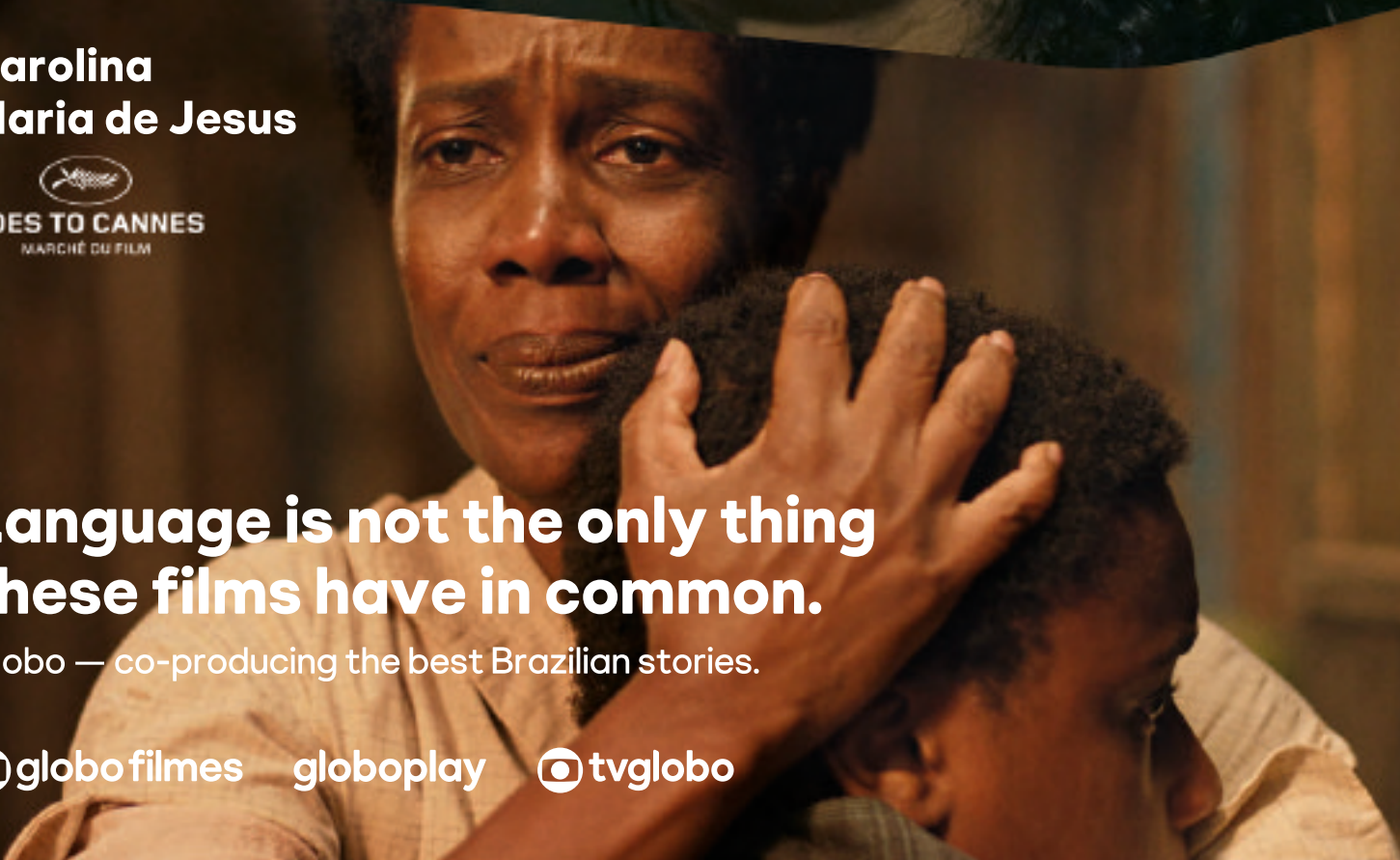


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CANNES RISING STAR

Bitter Christmas' Milena Smit

She had no acting training, no vocation and no plan — until Pedro Almodóvar discovered a star and then wrote a character just for her BY LILY FORD



One or two summers ago, at Pedro Almodóvar's house, while Milena Smit's sister and nephew swam in his pool, the young actress suddenly found herself sitting alone with the host.

In the middle of his soiree, the Spaniard had crept away from the other guests to tell Smit some exciting news. "He [said], 'I have a character in my new film for you,'" Smit remembers. "He told me, 'I wrote this character especially for you, inspired by you, your tone of voice, how you walk, [how you] breathe,'" she continues. "I was in shock. I said, 'I'm in a dream!'"

It was no dream. The 29-year-old Smit fell into this business entirely by chance. While working as a model in Madrid, the casting team for David Victori's 2020 thriller *Cross the Line* happened upon her Instagram and asked that she join the Mario Casas starrer. Her performance caught the attention of a certain cult director, who would then make Smit a co-lead in 2021's Oscar-nominated *Parallel Mothers*, opposite Penélope Cruz. It would be the beginning of a great artistic friendship — after Smit had retrieved her jaw from the floor.

A few years later, the former model and Goya Award nominee is admittedly no closer to comprehending the relationship they've struck up. "Pedro has this tenderness. He's so kind," she tells *The Hollywood Reporter*. "*Parallel Mothers* was my second film, and it was all beginning and a little bit overwhelming. There are things that now, I think, 'How did I dare to do that?'" she smiles. "I'm so happy and so proud of my younger self."

The Elche-born Smit confesses that her teenage years were not marked by wisdom. "I was so lost before doing this, because I don't

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Smit plays a woman coping with unimaginable grief.

have any vocation. At 18, none of my decisions would have been the right decision,” she recalls with a laugh about unearthing a desire to act in her 20s. The choices she went on to make have now, however, brought her to the forefront of Almodóvar’s 24th feature film, *Amarga Navidad* (*Bitter Christmas*). It’ll no doubt be another Cannes hit for the Spanish showbiz sage.

There’s a fair bit of meta storytelling going on in *Bitter Christmas*. The film — as vibrant and sharp as his first English-language project, 2024’s *The Room Next Door* — revolves around Elsa (**Bárbara Lennie**), a migraine-ridden advertising executive struggling to process the death of her mother. We also follow Raúl (**Leonardo Sbaraglia**), a celebrated filmmaker rejuvenated by the realization of his next script. In among these concurrent stories comes Natalia, played by Smit, a friend of Elsa’s haunted by the sudden death of her young son.

“She’s so, so, so in pain,” begins Smit about the character written for her. “But we wanted to keep this pain on the inside. It’s something you don’t want to show, but it’s a mirror. You can’t escape it.” There’s a particularly tragic scene where Natalia, lured on holiday by Elsa, spots a small child innocently giggling at the table across from her at dinner. “I was thinking, ‘I don’t want anybody in this restaurant to see me crying.’ There is so much shame,” she says about Natalia’s grief. “That moment, for me, was the perfect moment to do something more profound, more

deep, than [just] crying.”

Of course, at this stage in her career — and with no formal acting training under her belt — every set is still a learning experience. “Pedro gives you a whole day to shoot one sequence, which means that you really have a lot of time to develop the moment,” continues Smit about witnessing her friend at work. “He has energy all the way to the end of the day.” She laughs again. “He’s not so old, but he is a man of a certain age. And you are surprised when it’s 3 a.m., we’re at the end of the shoot, and everybody’s out of energy, everybody’s yawning, and he’s still going!”

Smit describes her first Cannes Film Festival premiere as an evening she’ll approach with childlike wonder. It’s not a profession she’s keen to idealize — “sometimes I’m tired, sometimes I want a particular shoot to end” — but, after a little while, “I fall back in love again.” Up on the horizon for this accidentally active actress is Spanish Western *Trinidad* with **Gabriela Andrada** and **Karla Sofía Gascón**, and the starlet lists **Chloé Zhao**’s *Hamnet* among her would-have-killed-to-have-been-in films released recently.

But Milena Smit will remain forever loyal to the first director to write a role just for her, who just so happens to be the acclaimed, effortlessly cool Almodóvar. The thought of walking up the Palais steps arm in arm together has her, well, still pinching herself: “It’s a beautiful part of my life, [having] this connection with him. I’ve learned so much.” **TWTR**

HOPE IN THE RUINS

3 Questions With ... Mahsa Karampou

Into the Jaws of the Ogre is the feature film debut from Iranian-French director **Mahsa Karampou**, world premiering in ACID, the Cannes Film Festival sidebar run by France’s association of film directors. The music-tinged documentary with a road movie feel



Karampou

is about two very different Iranian-born siblings searching for common ground and a bond — namely Karampou, who now lives in France, and her musician brother **Siavash**, who chose exile in New York. His Iranian indie rock band **The Yellow Dogs** was featured in **Bahman Ghobadi**’s docudrama film *No One Knows About Persian Cats*, which won the special jury prize in Cannes’ Un Certain Regard section in 2009.

What inspired the film?

The motivation was to reconnect, find a meaningful [bond] between us and have our musical stories filmed and documented. [After the 2013 killing of three of his bandmates and an associate in a murder-suicide] and after our father passed away in 2012, I felt like my world was vanishing. I had the huge anguish of being a passive spectator of a world that was disappearing. So I wanted to [set] an act against this disappearance. And I realized the film is about all these unfinished things — stories, songs, mourning — and the bond with my brother.

Why are ruins a recurring symbol?

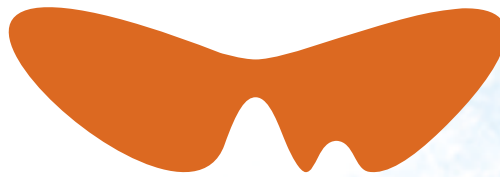
These were the types of places in which my brother could find inspiration to write his songs. And during that period in Iran when rock music was forbidden, in these ruins in Tehran, they played forbidden concerts. There is Persian mythology and mysticism in the film, and ruins in Persian poetry are very significant places. Actually, my brother uses the word all the time — “kharabat.” It’s something very difficult to explain in another language. It is a ruin that is fertile. It is a destroyed place in which you drink wine and connect to the divine. It is also a place in which you do controversial things. It is destroyed, and yet it is fertile, so it is a kind of connection to the past.

How did you approach the personal or the political in the film?

I felt that I could tell a very personal sister and brother story, and people can feel and understand the political context, such as the war, the propaganda, the songs, censorship and everything. “Ruin” is also a symbol for this world — all the wars, **Trump**, **Netanyahu** and the ayatollahs, ecological problems, economic problems and young generations who have no hope. This is a ruined world. But things are not hopeless. And if we can tell our little stories, it’s our way of resisting. — GEORG SZALAI



Into the Jaws of an Ogre follows an Iranian-born musician brother and his sister who now live in New York and France, respectively.



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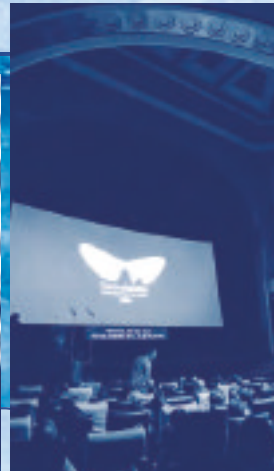
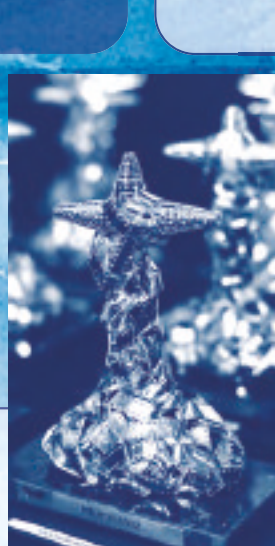
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Dress du Jour Gillian Anderson

In Miu Miu

The *Teenage Sex and Death at Camp Miasma* star made her Cannes Film Festival debut at the film's photocall in a throwback look from the brand's spring-summer 2022 collection, paired with Chaumet jewelry and styled with wild hair — a perfect vibe to play a reclusive scream queen back for her closeup.



STEP INTO THE RING

A Knockout Workout

The Carlton has a regulation boxing ring, two world champions on staff and a one-hour class that will make you question every life choice **BY PATRICK BRZESKI**

For the Hollywood fitness obsessive on the hunt for workout options in Cannes, here's an offbeat combination: boxing lessons in a Côte d'Azur palace hotel.

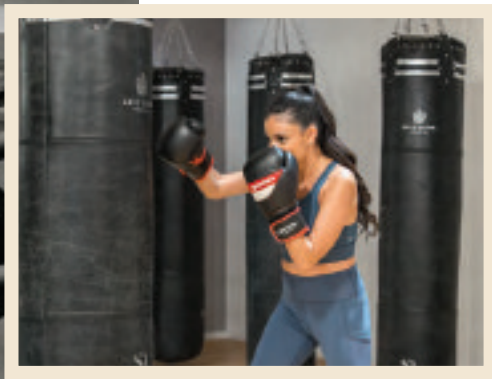
Nestled inside the Carlton Cannes, in a wing connected to the historic hotel's glamorously appointed C Club Fitness & Spa, sits a 16-foot, regulation-sized boxing ring. Surrounding it are floor-to-ceiling mirrors, a half-dozen punching bags and all the other accouterments of a professional boxing gym — including, often, several legitimately world-class fighters working through their routines.

Since the Carlton's two-year renovation, which concluded in 2023, one of C Club's signature fitness offerings has been intensive boxing programs — along with a more typical five-star hotel lineup of bespoke

personal training services, yoga and pilates classes, and even 3D body composition scans and a cryogenic chamber (think ice plunge, but via a blast of filtered polar air).

The Carlton's somewhat unlikely embrace of boxing — like so much at the hotel — is rooted in superlative history. In 1982, photojournalist and celebrity portraitist **Richard Melloul** shot former heavyweight champion of the world **Muhammad Ali** on the Carlton Beach, creating a series of images that became an indelible part of both the fighter's and the hotel's iconography. The Carlton resurrected its association with boxing legends in 2023, hiring Iron **Mike Tyson** to be the gym's ambassador for the relaunch. French boxer **Brahim Asloum**, a former WBA light flyweight champion and gold medalist at the 2000

Above: Mike Tyson in 2023 at the Carlton Cannes boxing ring. Right: The hotel's boxing classes are available to guests for free.



Sydney Summer Olympics, was then recruited to be the gym's permanent ambassador and guest coach. The Carlton also brought back Melloul, now 76, to photograph Tyson and Asloum in the hotel's ring, creating a series of photographs that hang with the image of Ali, infusing the facilities with a spirit of elite boxing legacy and continuity.

"The key for us is to offer activities and treatments that are timeless," says **Joscha Kranz**, one of the directors of the Carlton. "We're not interested in chasing every trend, because there are always more, and many of them do not stand the test of time."

So what is boxing at the Carlton actually like? Brahim Asloum's younger brother, **Redouane Asloum**, a fellow former fighter turned coach, is the gym's gregarious and engaging full-time trainer. *The Hollywood Reporter* joined one of his small group sessions on the eve of the Cannes Film Festival in a valiant effort to quell curiosity while combating the cross-Atlantic jetlag. In short: Boxing, even for amateurs, is intense.

The one-hour session began with about 25 minutes of vigorous conditioning work, focused mostly on core training and sustaining a high heart rate. This was followed by intervals of hitting the bag blended with leg work (squats and holds). During this middle window, the elder Asloum dropped in to offer our six-person group generous pointers on punch form (he came accompanied by an associate, introduced as a fellow French boxing gold medalist, who leaned against a wall surveying the class with an eye that came off as alternately friendly and menacing).

For the final, 20-minute stretch — at which point, your writer, moderately fit at best, was wondering whether they could complete the session without puking or crying — the group broke off into pairs to spar. Throughout the class, hip-hop blasted over the speaker system and the younger Asloum weaved through the group with a flyweight's grace, offering encouragement and instruction. The communal exertion bred instant camaraderie among the group — big smiles and relieved glove taps all around when the hour was up.

After a long sit on the floor, it was time to emerge from the ring in pursuit of rosé.

The Carlton's classes are available to hotel guests and C Club members for free, and a discreet inquiry with the concierge can usually secure access to the hotel for non-guests for a 130 euro day fee (the Carlton's ring can then be rented for the eminently reasonable rate of 50 euros per hour, per fighter). Private coaching is 120 euros per hour. **THR**

ECO-WARRIORS

Cate Blanchett Tries on Fast-Fashion Doc

The creators hope the *Fashionopolis* adaptation will drive sustainability in the \$3 trillion industry: 'Fashion can transform itself into a responsible future' **BY CHRIS GARDNER**

Cate Blanchett is diving deeper into the fashion business — on the big screen.

The Oscar-winning actress and her production company Dirty Pictures with **Andrew Upton** and **Coco Francini** have boarded the documentary adaptation of **Dana Thomas'** book *Fashionopolis: The Price of Fast Fashion and the Future of Clothes*, being directed by auteur **Reiner Holzemer**.

The project, which is moving into the financing phase, investigates the \$3 trillion global fashion industry by examining the "environmental and human cost of an industry built on speed and scale while spotlighting the designers and innovators reshaping the system," per the filmmakers. Thomas' book was hailed by *The New Yorker* as "a glimpse into how consumerism, slowed to a less ferocious pace, might be reconciled with sustainability."

The *Fashionopolis* doc will feature access to leading voices across the industry including designers, policy-makers, labor activists and innovators who are driving systemic change.

It's a subject close to home for Blanchett, who has often used her voice and red carpet appearances to shine a spotlight on sustainability and eco-conscious business practices. Same for Holzemer, who previously helmed documentaries about bold-faced names from fashion, theater and photography. His credits include *Martin Margiela: In His Own Words*; *Dries*, about acclaimed Belgian designer **Dries Van Noten**; *Thom Browne: The Man Who Tailors Dreams*; *Lars Eidinger*, about the German actor and artist; and *Leica — A Century of Vision*, about the cultural significance of the camera and its impact on visual history.

It's also squarely in Thomas' wheelhouse as a leading fashion writer who

has long examined sustainability in the industry. She is a longtime contributor to *The New York Times* and host of *The Green Dream*, an award-winning sustainability podcast. She has dipped her toes into the film industry by scripting *Salvatore: Shoemaker of Dreams*, a feature doc directed by **Luca Guadagnino**, which premiered at the Venice Film Festival in 2020. She also penned the tome *Deluxe: How Luxury Lost Its Luster*, which was adapted for the docuseries *Kingdom of Dreams*.

Thomas is writing and producing the *Fashionopolis* documentary alongside another noted fashion writer, **Bronwyn Cosgrave**. Her credits include co-producing *The Super Models*, the Apple TV project that traced the modeling careers of superstars **Naomi Campbell**, **Cindy Crawford**, **Linda Evangelista** and **Christy Turlington**. **Danielle Perissi** (*Anbessa, Every Last Child*) is on board as an executive producer.

"At its heart, *Fashionopolis* is a film about possibility — about the belief that fashion can transform itself into a more responsible, more beautiful future," Holzemer says. "Throughout my career, I have been drawn to fashion for its artistry and creativity. With *Fashionopolis*, I want to shift my lens toward the change-makers reimagining fashion from within. My goal is not to point fingers, but to portray stories that inspire dialogue and spark hope."

Adds Thomas: "We meet designers, activists, and innovators working to change fashion from within — and reveal how everyday choices can help build a more just and beautiful future."

Dirty Pictures produces genre-spanning work for TV and film and is behind the podcast *Climate of Change*. The company's credits include *Mrs. America*, *Stateless*, *Truth* and *Carol*.



Cate Blanchett and her Dirty Pictures are boarding a documentary based on Dana Thomas' book *Fashionopolis*.



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MAIKA MONROE'S HAVING A KILLER YEAR

With prosthetic teeth, an English accent and buckets of fake blood at 4:30 in the morning, *Victorian Psycho* pushed the actress further than any role before it — and she wouldn't have it any other way **BY DAVID GANFIELD**

Maika Monroe may have starred in multiple defining horror films of the past 10-plus years, from her breakout in *It Follows* to the recent box office smash *Longlegs*, but no amount of scream-queen credits could prepare her for the gory terror of *Victorian Psycho*.

"It terrified me. I knew that it would be the hardest role that I have ever done — and so incredibly different from anything I've ever done," the Santa Barbara native says. "There's always a little part of me in roles that I do, something that I can ground it with or connect it with within my own personal life — but this role was really a departure from that. It was working from the ground up, creating this character where I couldn't rely on my own self. It really, in the most magical, best way, took a toll on me. I felt it every day."

Set in 1858 and adapted by Virginia Feito from her own novel, *Victorian Psycho* stars Monroe as Winifred Notty, a quirky young woman who arrives at the wealthy Pounds family's old gothic manor, claiming to be the house's new governess. She's reluctantly welcomed in by the matriarch and patriarch (Ruth Wilson and Jason Isaacs), tasked with watching over and teaching their children. She bonds with a fellow employee of the house, the kindly Ms. Lamb (Thomasin McKenzie) and expresses a plucky determination to fit in.

"It's fascinating to see an outsider who desperately wants to be an insider, and it's simply impossible," says director Zachary Wigon (*Sanctuary*). "It's

a very, very deep paradox. She will never belong — and she will never stop wanting to belong."

Those irreconcilable truths are but one reason things start going so very wrong inside the Pounds household. People go missing; blood starts littering the garden, the hallway, the kitchen. This isn't just any oddball employee slowly losing her grip on her job. "I remember reading the manuscript of the novel, and it's like, 'What is this woman going to do?'" Wigon says. "There was an interesting visual language to be had in depicting this woman's losing of her grip. ... What was animating about it from an aesthetic perspective was to do something set in 1858, but with a contemporary style."

The project came about organically for Wigon, who'd been collaborating with Feito on an unrelated screenplay before she informed him of her then-impending next book. They pivoted to fast-track *American Psycho* and swiftly sold the rights to A24, with Margaret Qualley

attached to star. That setup gradually fell apart. "It changed distributors; it comes with the territory of the volatile nature of independent filmmaking," Wigon says when asked about how the project evolved from the A24 version to a new package headlined by Monroe and distributed by Bleecker Street. "We're enormously pleased with all the support that Bleecker has given me to bring the film into the world," he says.

What drew him to Monroe, who's having a big 2026 as she comes off of leading the commercial success *Reminders of Him*? "She has this very, very intense internal quality, where you can tell that the gears are whirring and there's a lot going on in the character's head," Wigon says. "I thought it would be perfect for a serial killer."

To prepare for portraying a 19th century serial killer, Monroe went through extensive rehearsals, Zooming every week with Wigon to nail down the specific blocking. She needed to perfect the English accent,

adjust her mannerisms and body movements. She suggested painfully visible prosthetic teeth. One memorable sequence from the film required Monroe to be covered in fake blood in the cold for an elaborate technocrane shot, at 4:30 in the morning.

In short, Monroe needed to be all in. "I had every scene memorized because you're running the script so many times — it was so ingrained in my head, and I could still recite probably for years to come," Monroe says. "This character might be the character that I miss the most." It helped that each of her principal costars kept her off balance in the best way: Isaacs' slithery Mr. Pounds shows a discomfiting interest in Winifred. "Your eyes are just absolutely glued to him, he's totally unpredictable and his choices are always as unusual as his wife," Wigon says. Wilson then plays Pound's wife as a kind of desperate shit-stirrer. "Some of my favorite scenes that I've ever filmed in my entire career were with Ruth," Monroe says. "Sometimes in the scenes I would just be watching her, blown away by what she was doing — and I find her role actually incredibly challenging."

Then there's the friendship with Ms. Lamb, a rare instance of seeing Winifred and another person able to enjoy each other's company. "Most times with people, they look at her with a bit of disgust and don't understand her," Monroe says. "And for the first time, she feels this bit of connection with a person." In these interactions, Winifred's characterization gets more

Continued on page 54



"Some of my favorite scenes that I've ever filmed in my entire career were with Ruth," says Monroe (left) of working with Ruth Wilson.



"This character might be the character that I miss the most," says Maika Monroe of her role in *Victorian Psycho*.

THE WHITE LOTUS HAS FOUND ITS PERFECT HOTEL

Tiny elevators, celebrity name-tagged loungers and a general manager who jokes about fake celebrities slipping past security — the Hôtel Martinez was born for this **BY MELINDA SHEGKELLS**

Few experiences can match the thrill of arriving at the Hôtel Martinez during the Cannes Film Festival, the kind of scene that feels ripped from the arrival sequence from any one of the past three seasons of *The White Lotus*. It's a descent into organized, performative chaos under the watchful eyes of an unflinching, five-star-trained, white-gloved staff.

Ferraris and Mercedes-AMGs snake through the tiny porte cochère while paparazzi scream celebrity names from behind barricades lining the Croisette. The ropes keeping the paps and lookie-loos out — and the celebrities and scene-makers in — go up days before the event actually starts, with just enough distance between the two groups to keep it interesting. Towering campaign images of Bella Hadid draped in Chopard diamonds wrap portions of the driveway, turning the arrival itself into a luxury advertising campaign. Security teams occupy key corners in the lobby as assistants sprint garment bags through the sliding doors. Somewhere in the chaos, a stylist balances an iced latte, three phones and a couture gown worth more than

a Riviera apartment.

All of this goes down before even one Louboutin touches the surgically clean white marble floor or ultra-plush Yves Klein blue carpet within the monumental lobby.

When HBO announced that Mike White's Emmy-winning satire would officially head to Cannes for season four — with the Martinez serving as “White Lotus Cannes” — the scene was set with perhaps the series' best casting yet: a gorgeous grande dame who's no stranger to the spotlight and an expert at checking in and unpacking lots of baggage.

The Martinez has spent nearly 100 years preparing for this role.

Unlike previous hotels that have served as *White Lotus* locations and relied heavily on destination resorts under the Four Seasons Hotels and Resorts brand, Hôtel Martinez is part of the Hyatt Unbound Collection, a portfolio of independent luxury and lifestyle hotels that retain their own distinct identities. Arguably, Martinez was already a major player without *TWL*.

“The Martinez has been a star long before this,” says Tamara

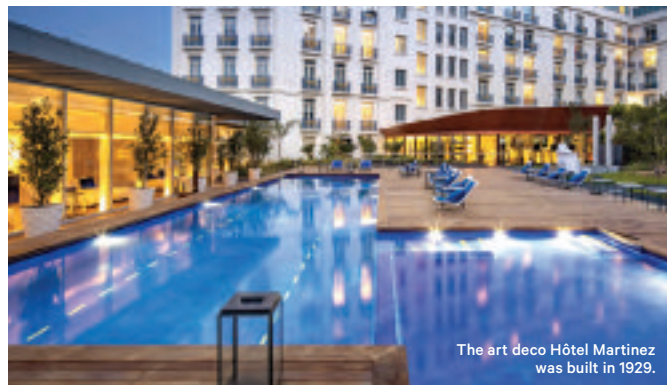
Lohan, Hyatt's global brand leader of luxury. “This is just another pin in the history of the hotel. Martinez became the definitive French Riviera beach club decades before beach clubs became a global trend.”

Word on the Croisette is that the Martinez will ultimately receive the lion's share of the screen time and production days, despite Airelles Château de la Messardière — reimagined onscreen as “White Lotus du Cap” — serving as the season's other major hotel anchor.

Opened in 1929 by Emmanuel Martinez during the Roaring '20s, the art deco hotel, now with more than 400 rooms, quickly became one of the French Riviera's defining social theaters. Through wars, movie-star eras, yacht booms and influencer takeovers, it has remained Cannes' unofficial headquarters for glamour and spectacle.

Actresses descend the seven-story staircase with photo crews like they're already on the red carpet. Influencers stage balcony shoots with their breakfast trays, echoing the curated vacation narcissism that defines nearly every *White Lotus* guest. Jewelry couriers carrying armored cases disappear into the famously tiny elevators. Even a few days before the festival officially began, the hotel already felt like a functioning production set.

One afternoon, the rooftop penthouses were being transformed into a temporary compound for Chopard, which buys out the entire top floor every year. Below, L'Oréal Paris teams moved through a beauty studio buildout with a massive photo opp overlooking the ocean, while on the beach,



The art deco Hôtel Martinez was built in 1929.



Hôtel Martinez offers a luxury beachside oasis convenient to the Cannes Film Festival. Restaurant La Palme (bottom left) displays tributes to film history, and celebrity names adorn chairs at the beach (bottom right).

crews create a pop-up Air France lounge.

The beach, the pool and a boat are the holy trinity of the *White Lotus* universe, and Martinez has them all.

The hotel's L'Oasis pool garden — hidden slightly farther inside the property away from the frenzy of the Croisette — mimics the show's poolside power plays. Surrounded by palms and cabanas, unpacking who's sitting where with whom is as juicy as the perfect-cut fruit platters that appear on every table. Lounge chair positioning doubles as a social hierarchy chart.

It is also guaranteed that *TWL* will tap into the mythology of the Martinez. The hotel's corridors are lined with black-and-white celebrity photographs documenting nearly a century of Cannes history. Grecian-inspired murals stretch across walls. Decorative flourishes as painted skies create

moments that already feel slightly surreal, as if they could come to life at any moment.

The hotel's tiny elevators, hilariously unequipped for modern Cannes realities like couture gowns and glam teams, routinely force strangers into uncomfortable proximity. Guests find themselves shoulder to shoulder with celebrities, all pretending not to notice each other.

General manager Michel Cottray says some of his favorite moments occur in the elevators as he escorts stars discreetly through the property.

"We shared the same lift for 20 seconds," he says of accompanying countless celebrities. "So we already have a history."

Cottray, who is leading the hotel through his fourth Cannes Film Festival, says the property's existing infrastructure made it uniquely suited for *White Lotus*-level production demands.

"We offer a more secure, protected environment, which makes stars and VIPs more comfortable," he says.

TWL hasn't officially begun filming at the Martinez yet, though Cottray confirms discussions have been underway for more than a year. Staff members from the property have already visited the active Saint-Tropez set at Airelles Château de la Messardière to observe how the HBO production operates on site.

"They will transform the property to their needs," Cottray says. "But they are very professional."

As in previous seasons, the production is expected to fully or partially buy out its hotel locations while immersing itself deeply in the surrounding destination. Although there's no word yet on when the new *White Lotus* guests will check in, multiple weeks appear blocked off on the Martinez booking calendar in both June and September.

While Hôtel Martinez has survived a world war and nearly 80 years of the Cannes Film Festival, one thing is certain: In the world of *White Lotus*, somebody probably won't survive the trip. **TUR**

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VALESKA GRISEBACH PLAYS THE LONG GAME

The German auteur spent five years researching *The Dreamed Adventure*, watched as the funding collapsed and just kept going **BY SCOTT ROXBOROUGH**

It's been a long time coming, but Valeska Grisebach is back in Cannes.

The German director is presenting her new feature, *The Dreamed Adventure*, in competition, closing out the festival on the final Friday, May 22.

The last time she was on the Croisette was way back in 2017 with *Western*, which premiered in the Un Certain Regard section to critical acclaim, a confirmation of the promise of her two previous features, *Mein Stern* (2002), which won the

Critics' Award at the Toronto Film Festival, and *Sehnsucht* (2006), a competition entry in Berlin in 2006.

But *Western's* success — it went on to win the German Film Critics' Award for best feature film and was a runner-up for

the *Lolas*, Germany's Oscar-equivalent — didn't make it much easier for Grisebach to get *The Dreamed Adventure* made. Her way of working — using amateur actors, shooting without a conventional script — has made it difficult for her to secure traditional financing from European funds and film boards.

"That happens to me constantly," she says, "even though I've already made several films without a conventionally written screenplay, it still irritates [funders]. I hope one day that changes for me."

The Dreamed Adventure could be the film that does it. The slow-burning crime thriller continues Grisebach's experimentation with "male-coded genres" that she explored to such powerful effect in *Western*, which followed German construction workers who set up camp in rural Bulgaria like Union Soldiers in Apache country in an old John Ford movie. In *The Dreamed Adventure*, the focus is on Veska, an archaeologist working near the Bulgarian-Greek-Turkish border — "Europe's external border," as Grisebach put it — who becomes entwined in a war between rival criminal gangs.

The Match Factory is handling international sales for *The Dreamed Adventure* at the Cannes market.

Why do your films require so much time to get made?

It's been different each time. After *Sehnsucht*, I had a daughter, so that played a role in delaying things. But one reason is research. I could probably spend years researching endlessly. For me, research, casting and writing all go hand in hand. And that simply takes time.

After *Western*, it became clear to me I wanted to make another film in Bulgaria. Because I realized how little I actually know about Europe, how many blind spots I have, and how different Europe feels in Bulgaria compared to Germany. I grew up in West Berlin and was socially conditioned to go farther West. It took me quite a while to travel in the other direction.

But I was worried, as a German director, trying to make a film in Bulgaria without really knowing the place. It was clear my research would take time, time to get to know certain places, certain people, to collaborate. Through the research and the collaboration, my doubts kept dissolving. But because I was moving on very unfamiliar terrain, it was important to give that process time. Then, of course, there are all the financing issues. With every project, it seems I am ready and then have to wait another year to finish financing before I can shoot.

Was there a particular moment that became the initial spark for the idea that eventually turned into this film?

I think that actually came before the research. What deeply moved me when we were shooting *Western* was talking to people from my generation — I'm 58 now — and people who were young in 1989, during the fall of the Berlin Wall. I had the feeling that we are all deeply connected through those ruptures and through that transformation in Europe, but at the same time separated by very different experiences in the years after reunification and afterward, up until today. That echo still continues today.

There was a kind of click moment when people said that the 1990s in Bulgaria were like wartime — a time for men, not a time for women. That was a motif that kept coming up and that interested me, this war analogy. It connected with my interest in genre, especially male-coded genres, and with questions about which roles are assigned to women and men. That was one of the starting points that I then took with me into the research process. I also tried to let those themes that confronted me in reality collide with fiction, almost like sparring partners.

Where does this fascination with male genres come from?

Those are simply the films I grew up with. In the 1970s, I

sat in front of the television with my father and all those films were still on TV — that's no longer the case today. It's a very classic, maybe even specifically female experience, that you identify with those [male] heroes while at the same time experiencing yourself as separate from them, or maybe falling in love with them. Men probably feel the same way.

I also realized how much I had deeply internalized that male gaze. Genre interests me because it tells us so much about the construction of society and gender roles. That's why I find it incredibly exciting to engage with it.

What does working with non-professional actors give you as opposed to professional performers?

It developed naturally because going out into the world, making contact and doing the research becomes connected with these people. Then at some point there's a moment where you say, "OK, now we begin, now we begin to play and step into these roles."

I couldn't say that I'll never work with professional actors one day. But based on the logic of these projects and what the performers bring with them — their knowledge, their life experience, what is inscribed in their bodies, which later becomes part of the texture of the films, films that are supposed to appear naturalistic — it always made sense.

Filmmaking itself also has a lot to do with not knowing for me. I don't know everything, and I value that feeling — not

“GENRE INTERESTS ME BECAUSE IT TELLS US SO MUCH ABOUT THE CONSTRUCTION OF SOCIETY AND GENDER ROLES.”

exactly a loss of control, but understanding that I don't have everything in my own hands, that something happens in the encounter itself.

Do you work from a fixed screenplay?

There absolutely is a screenplay. I worked on it for a very long time, later together with my co-writer Lisa Bierwirth. But it doesn't really look like a screenplay — it looks more like prose. The construction of the story is there, and there is dialogue written, although I also keep writing new dialogue while we're shooting.

But I don't give the screenplay to the crew or the actors for them to read and memorize. Everything is handled verbally. I have to put the script aside and perform it. I have to tell the story and tell the dialogue. And in doing that, something also happens between us.

You mentioned how difficult it is to finance films like this. Why does it take so long?

That happens to me constantly. It's always a combination of different things. Even though I've already made several films without a conventionally written screenplay, that still causes irritation. I hope one day that changes for me.

When [EU subsidy body] Eurimages didn't support us

in the final financing stage, and neither did the German Film Fund, it looked like we wouldn't be able to make the film at all. After five years of research. That was a bitter moment. What saved us in the end was that Panama Film from Austria came in. That rescued us. But I think [Berlin producer] Komplizen Film and I also pushed ourselves to our limits because there came a point where we realized: We've worked on this film for five years, there are so many human encounters inside it, we can't just say goodbye and never come back.

All the more rewarding, then, to now be going to Cannes and into competition.

It's wonderful. Truly. No one expects that. You hope for it, of course. I hoped for many things. But the fact that it actually became competition — that was a huge stroke of luck and a great gift for all of us.

After *Western*, I experienced what kind of attention a film receives in Cannes, also in the conversations afterward with the press. It was a very special moment for me. Naturally, you hope for a kind of continuity, to return there again. It's really fantastic.

Now that you're in competition, does that mean we won't have to wait another 10 years for your next film?

My dream would actually be to make a series with nonprofessional actors at the external border of Europe. During those five years of research at the border, we gathered a real treasure trove of stories. It would have to come together faster, of course. And it would be a completely different format and a different narrative structure. But that's what I would really love to do next. **THR**



Amateur actor Yana Radeva stars as Veska, a Bulgarian archaeologist who gets drawn into a war between criminals in Grisebach's competition title *The Dreamed Adventure*.

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JORDAN FIRSTMAN IS READY TO CRASH THE PARTY

The writer-director-star shot his feature debut, *Club Kid*, in real New York clubs, cast a British kid he'd never met and bet his opening scene on a Rihanna song he didn't have the rights to — now he's in the Cannes lineup **BY MIA GALUPPO**

From the very beginning, Jordan Firstman had faith.

Club Kid, Firstman's feature debut as writer-director-star, opens with a flashback to a simpler time, namely 2016. A group of friends pile into an Uber on the way to a party where, crucially, Rihanna hit "Sex With Me" plays on the aux. "[Producers] begged me to shoot alts, and I said, 'No, I'm not doing it. We will get the song,'" remembers Firstman of filming the scene sans

rights to the *Anti* hit, running the risk of losing the opening of his film.

The 34-year-old finished filming at the top of the year and started editing. By the time filmmakers learned that *Club Kid* would be debuting at the Cannes Film Festival in May, they still hadn't heard from Rihanna. "There did come a time about three weeks ago, where they're like, 'What are we going to do?' And I was like, 'Just trust. It will work itself out. I know if Rihanna sees this, she's gonna

gag for it,'" says Firstman. "We got it to her, and she did."

(How did Firstman get *Club Kid* to the superstar? "God and my publicist, which may be one in the same.")

In the making of *Club Kid*, from filming on location in New York during real parties to shooting on film to serving as the writer-director-star, Firstman gave himself a difficult mandate for his first turn as a feature director. But all that faith paid off, and now the

film is heading to Cannes for a premiere in the Un Certain Regard section as one of the festival's most anticipated sales titles.

Firstman is best known for onscreen work, first for his viral Instagram impressions and then supporting turns in films like Sebastián Silva's *Rotting in the Sun* and series like *I Love LA*. But, prior to this, he spent nearly a decade in writers rooms for such comedy series as *Search Party* and *Big Mouth*, and at film festival like Sundance and SXSW with his short films.

In 2023, while at the Sundance Film Festival premiering *Rotting in the Sun*, Firstman came up with initial kernel of the idea for *Club Kid*, thinking, "Something with me and a kid would be funny." At the time, he was in a relationship with a Berliner and enmeshed in the party scene there, all of which started to inform his writing.

The result is a story that follows a past-his-prime party promoter whose life takes a sharp left turn when he discovers he has a 10-year-old son.

Firstman moved out to L.A. when he was 20, selling his first TV show at 24 years old and his second at 28, each of which spent years in development but never got made. He didn't want *Club Kid* — which he planned to shoot on film in New York City in real clubs — to suffer the same fate in the traditional studio system.

So, Firstman went the indie route. Alex Coco, prior to his Oscar win for Sean Baker's *Anora*, and *Lurker* producer Galen Core came on board as producers, with backing coming from Topic Studios, then hot off Jesse Eisenberg's *A Real Pain*.

"Jordan's unique because he's, technically, a first-time filmmaker, but he's anything but green. He was coming with a level of experience that was distinct from what you might think of as a first time director," says Topic's head of film Ryan Heller.

Four months after landing his financing, Firstman was on set for the first day of his 26-day shoot.

Club Kid has six separate club scenes, many of which the crew just staged scenes in real parties. "We were granted access to spaces that no one can even get to in life, let alone be filmed. We were let in because I was already there partying, and these are my friends," says Firstman, adding, "The invitation was not taken for granted."

It was important to the filmmaker to accurately portray New York party culture. Most of the extras were "scene kids," says Firstman.

"I call this a foreign-language film. This new era of party, queer people. It really does feel like we're speaking in gibberish sometimes." He adds with a laugh, "I watched a lot of our crew, who were straight men, learn the language."

Casting director Lucy Bevan was tasked with finding Firstman's onscreen son. Having just worked on the *Harry Potter* television series, Bevan had a near canonical knowledge of tween actors from the U.K. Even before he watched his audition tape, Firstman remembers seeing Reggie Absolom, whose credits include the Apple series *Silo* and Britbox's *The Other Bennet Sister*, and knowing that he was the right choice.

"I was like, 'That's him,'" remembers Firstman. "I was so nervous before I pressed play [on the tape]. I was like, 'Please let him be able to act. Please let him be able act.'" (He could act.)

Onscreen, Firstman and Absolom's relationship is awkward at first and then disarmingly endearing. Like their characters, they established their own relationship over the course of filming. Says Firstman, "I don't

Filming on location in New York City was nonnegotiable for the director, who, with cinematographer Adam Newport-Berra, looked to New York-set films of the '70s and '90s for inspiration, particularly Paul Mazursky's *An Unmarried Woman* and Michelle Pfeiffer-George Clooney starrer *One Fine Day*. Lots of grit, shot through with glamour.

Club Kid captures a culture that is rarely seen on film, especially films getting as big of a stage as Cannes. When writing, Firstman wanted the city's party scene to look lived-in and feel authentic, appearing onscreen as it does in real life.

"These people in it are my friends. I'm critiquing certain aspects, but I'm not taking shots," says Firstman. "There's a scene at the end of the movie where I tell one of the party girls, 'Take care of yourself.' And she's like, 'I always do.' To me, what I'm saying about the

"WE WERE GRANTED ACCESS TO SPACES THAT NO ONE CAN EVEN GET TO IN LIFE, LET ALONE BE FILMED. WE WERE LET IN BECAUSE I WAS ALREADY THERE PARTYING."

really like rehearsals. I get awkward. I was like, 'You know what, let's just do it.'"

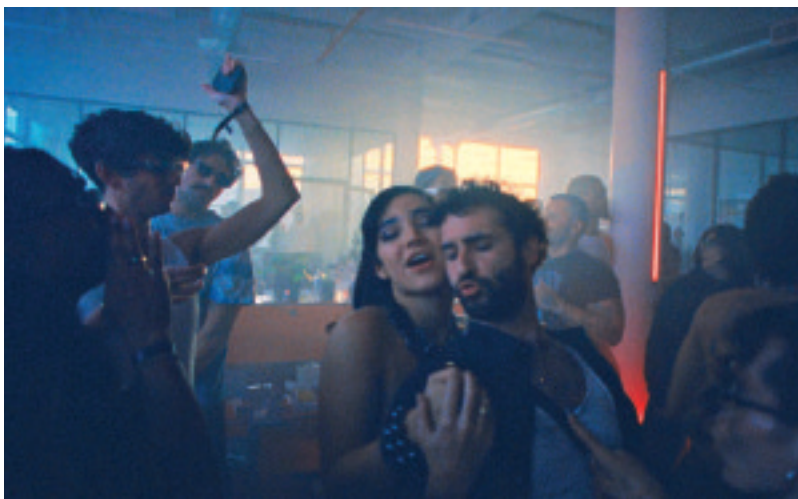
Club Kid's stellar supporting cast includes Colleen Camp as a kooky neighbor, *Babylon*'s Diego Calva as a children's therapist and flo-tilla of breakout queer performers, including Miss Benny and Saturn Resin9.

"After day one, Reggie's mom said he came home and said, 'I love the dolls!'" says Firstman of Absolom meeting his trans co-stars. "It makes me emotional thinking about it, because this is how you teach kids how to accept people — by introducing them."

party scene is that there is a moment for it, and you can outgrow it. Or, you can be right for it at the right time. It's not a condemnation of people who do drugs or like to have fun. This is more about this man who has overstayed his welcome, or never known a different option."

After nearly a decade in writers rooms and years of short films, Firstman feels he arrived at his first feature exactly when he was supposed to.

"I knew my taste and I knew what I wanted it to look like," he says. "I just knew how to do it better." **THR**



Club Kid has six separate club scenes, many of which were populated by real New York partiers.

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'IT'S SO DIFFICULT TO MAKE A MOVIE ABOUT KINDNESS'

Ryūsuke Hamaguchi's *All of a Sudden* pairs Virginie Efira with Tao Okamoto in a Cannes competition film about dying, caretaking and the simple act of being present for another person **BY DAVID CANFIELD**

When Tao Okamoto first read the script for Ryūsuke Hamaguchi's *All of a Sudden*, one scene told her above all others that this was hers for the taking. The sequence saw her character, a well-regarded playwright named Mari, explaining the systemic failures of modern capitalism. The monologue is long and complex, propelled by interconnecting arguments that, on the surface, might resemble an academic paper; it's complete with her drawing whiteboard graphics to illustrate and summarize her points.

"This is something that I'd been thinking about over the years — and I got to lecture people on it in the movie, it's amazing," Okamoto says. "I think it will help a lot of people to connect the dots."

I don't think I've ever seen any movie explain and verbalize the system of capitalism and where we are like this."

Of course, *All of a Sudden* is not an academic paper. Hamaguchi's film feels about as far from that as you can get, in fact, playing as a richly textured and emotionally vast tapestry of human connection. But it's no small detail that one of the screenplay's most meticulously intellectual portions is where Okamoto felt most artistically inspired. This is a movie overflowing with big ideas, determined to imbue them into its intimate, character-driven story.

Hamaguchi tends to operate this way, most notably with *Drive My Car*, a three-plus-hour epic that won the 2022 Oscar for best international feature and received nominations for best picture, director and adapted screenplay — the only movie to do so in Japanese cinema history. His most recent drama, *Evil Does Not Exist*, examined the natural world as besieged by modern industry. With *All of a Sudden*, which like *Drive My Car* also runs more than three hours and will premiere at the Cannes Film Festival, he turns his attention to caretaking. Loosely adapted from the book *You and I — The Illness Suddenly Get Worse* (Léa Le Dimna co-wrote the screenplay with Hamaguchi), the film traces the deepening

bond between Okamoto's Mari, who is dying of cancer while staging a new production just off of the Seine river, and Marie-Lou (Virginie Efira), the director of a nearby nursing home in Paris.

It's an instant meeting of the souls. The two women first encounter each other by chance in a park, where Mari invites Marie-Lou to see her show. Marie-Lou attends, finds herself extremely affected, and stays behind to chat with the writer about it — a bravura getting-to-know-you set piece that becomes the first of many lengthy conversation scenes wherein Marie-Lou speaks in French and Mari in Japanese (except when they occasionally switch, meaning yes, each is fluent in both). Over just a few days, the deeper they dig, the more they come to rely on one another. This kind of mutual caretaking, physical as well as emotional, prods larger conversations about the state of the world — particularly, Marie-Lou's nursing home facing a perpetual funding crisis.

"I was very sensitive to how intellectual the film was because the way of looking at

things through otherness and this philosophical lens can broaden our horizons," says Efira. "We shot in a working nursing home with real residents, and it was all about these bodies who are not functional anymore for capitalism. Then, Hamaguchi's dialogue is extremely powerful to the point that it can combine the intimate and the political."

The two stars came into *All of a Sudden* willing, even eager, to completely surrender to the material, and that commitment shows in their finely tuned and vulnerable performances. Hamaguchi cast them with interest in their past individual work with noted directors: He quizzed Efira about her collaborations with Paul Verhoeven (*Elle*, *Benedetta*) and gushed to Okamoto about acting for James Mangold in, of all things, *Wolverine*. "I wouldn't think he would be watching that type of movie," Okamoto says with a laugh, "but he remembered me from that time, 13 years ago."

That X-Men installment actually served as Okamoto's film debut, following a successful modeling career that brought her to New York, and the Japanese native went on to star in other studio-driven Hollywood projects like *Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice* and *The Man in the High Castle*. In 2023, she moved back to Japan to refocus her career away from blockbusters, and toward auteur-driven cinema. Then Hamaguchi came calling. Okamoto pretended she knew French, since that was required of the role, before actually gaining some command of the language after her casting. She had 12 months of prep all told, immersing herself in various facilities like a cancer research center while chewing on the many layers of the dense script.

Efira, a César Award winner, came in later, first meeting Hamaguchi at the Place de la Bastille in Paris. "He has this attentiveness, this curiosity, and that puts you almost in sort of a trance," she says. "After we met, I was left there almost like I was drunk." Like Okamoto, she felt a profound kinship with her character's story, explaining, "It had a spiritual power to it, and it felt



Hamaguchi

Virginie Efira (left) and Tao Okamoto





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The friendship that developed between Okamoto and Ekira mirrored their relationship onscreen.

like I couldn't let this script get away from me." She didn't know any Japanese, so she started with the basics, but was astounded by how Hamaguchi facilitated such thorough preparation for his actors. For instance: "He wrote entire scenes that were not in the script, that we [acted out], just to inform the characters by creating memories for them. All this was in prep."

Both admit to a learning curve to Hamaguchi's methods. It'd take two days to complete a given conversation scene, which could run 20 minutes or more. He'd begin with one tracking shot, then break it down into smaller sections, then return to a master — and then rehearse what the next day would look like. "If something goes wrong or you misunderstand or misreact at the 12th minute, we just start all over," Ekira says, noting they had to be exact with the script's words but were totally free in how they interpreted the dialogue.

Okamoto felt the pressure of stepping into a very different style of filmmaking. "I have been complimented before on how I can be aware of where the light is coming from,

where the camera is without looking at it, how I'm being captured — I thought that was my strength," she says. "But he told me the first week, 'Can you just forget that you're acting?' It was quite a challenge for me to cancel all these systems within myself."

Okamoto and Ekira developed a friendship over the two-month shoot that mirrored the dynamic between Marie-Lou and Mari. "Even though Virginie seems very confident and experienced, she was very nervous — it was so cute, she made me touch her heart, and it was beating like crazy," Okamoto says of one of their earliest days on set. "She was also a real caretaker, on and off set." Ekira adds, "It turns out the best summer of my life was in a nursing home, which I never expected. We all say that it changed our lives, and I've never had this on any other set — and that's not a promo line."

Indeed not — Okamoto takes that sentiment a step further: "It changed my life completely. I was scared of death as a child — it was one of my biggest fears, and something that I learned how to avoid thinking about growing up — and I had to face it again."

While still politically uncompromising and laced with cutting wit, *All of a Sudden* is a remarkably open-hearted work, confronting seemingly intractable systems with a simple belief in people. Hamaguchi holds tight to that conviction beginning to end.

"The result of the movie is just him being himself, as a human being," Okamoto says. "And that's beautiful. If someone doesn't know who Hamaguchi-san is, it's all there. That's him."

Ekira puts it this way: "It's so difficult to make a movie about kindness."

As for that rather significant runtime? Hamaguchi regulars shouldn't be deterred, but Ekira argues that, true to *All of a Sudden's* spirit, all should walk in with their hearts and minds open. "It's always best to see a good film that's three hours long, rather than a bad film that's an hour and 20 minutes," she says with a smile. "Hamaguchi has this sense of detail. He doesn't take you by the hand and tell you what to think. He really takes his time, and I think our society needs that time — we don't have it, but we need it." **THR**

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LIGHTS, CAMERA, CANNES

Tangles' Seth Rogen, Sarah Leavitt, Julia Louis-Dreyfus, Abbi Jacobson, Samira Wiley, Leah Nelson and Lauren Miller Rogen are photographed by Guy Aroch on May 14 at *THR's* Portrait Studio at Meta House

BEHIND-THE-SCENES PHOTOGRAPH BY JORDAN WATSON



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Rio Wants to Be the World's Next Great Filmmaking Hub

Brazil's film industry is arriving in Cannes with momentum, major titles and a serious incentive pitch: 'We are eager to welcome crews and creatives from all over the world' **BY MATHEW SCOTT**

The Brazilian film community is still buzzing over the acclaim they received across the Cannes of 2025. Kleber Mendonça Filho was named best director for his *The Secret Agent* and Wagner Moura was named best actor for leading the same film, in what were both firsts for a nation that prides itself on its cinema and has done since the industry first took root there in the late 1890s.

Filho's layered, nuanced political thriller showcased the strength of contemporary Brazilian cinema and built on the success enjoyed globally by veteran filmmaker Walter Salles' *I'm Still Here*, which came to the Cannes market last year as the nation's first-ever best international feature film Oscar winner, and was duly picked up by Sony Pictures Classics for North American and international markets.

Heads were also turned toward Brazil's role as Country of Honor at the 2025 Marché du Film, and now the industry is determined to keep the world's focus fixed in 2026.

Brazilian production company RT Features is leading the way this year, with Dominga Sotomayor's lyrical tale of a woman haunted by childhood trauma, *La Perra* — starring *I'm Still Here*'s Selton Mello — in the Directors' Fortnight and the international crime drama, and Brazilian co-production,

Paper Tiger, directed by James Gray, starring Adam Driver and Scarlett, in competition.

Ilda Santiago, executive director programming and international projects at the Festival do Rio, is keen to explain how the domestic industry in Brazil continues to expand in terms of confidence and creativity.

"Brazilian cinema is being regarded in a higher level and

be more confident that our stories do have an interest for the world."

There's a full schedule of screenings and events along the Croisette this year that Santiago believes will support those claims. With the support of RioFilme, Santiago and her team are, for the second year running, bringing five projects in postproduction stages to be presented in the Goes to Cannes

drama *Talented*, and the Fábio Mendonça-helmed thriller *The Character*.

Other Brazilian initiatives include the Dejeuner Carioca lunch — also on May 15 and hosted by Globo, Festival do Rio and RioFilme, with the aim of providing a platform for networking. It's invitation-only and will feature speakers including Santiago, Alex Medeiros and Gabriel Jacome — respectively director of drama, documentaries and film, and director of TV content at Brazilian broadcast giant Globo — and Leonardo Edde, RioFilme's president director.

Festival do Rio is also behind the Matinee Brasil program on May 18 — with support from Globo, RioFilme, Spicine, Embratur and the Ministry of Culture of the Brazilian Government — and it will feature a day full of panels and presentations as the organization "continues the strategic efforts to position Brazilian audiovisual content on the global stage."

Says Santiago: "Rio has ranked high [globally] on the number of shooting days over the last years, and the number of international productions coming here to use the city in different locations is growing. We are working on making Rio the preferential hub for audiovisual, in the same way that it is a strong reference for Brazilian cinema globally." **THR**



Last year, Walter Salles' *I'm Still Here* became Brazil's first-ever international feature film Oscar winner.

has created great expectations for the coming years, but we have been around for a long time," she says. "As much as we might see it as a surprise, it is not. We have lived through bad and good years, in government, public policies and internal issues. However, creativity and the desire to tell stories never failed us, as well as the strength to keep going. So Brazil's industry became stronger and more resilient and now we can

program on May 15 — all hoping to emulate the success of Cíntia Domit Bittar's project *Virtuosas*, which claimed the initiative's top prize in 2025.

This year's slate includes Jefferson De's biopic *Carolina Maria de Jesus* and Jo Serfaty's eco-themed drama *Beyond the Edge* — both Brazil-France co-productions — as well as the Maju de Paiva-Bernardo Florim-directed horror *Days of Fire*, Thais Fujinaga's family

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Kurdistan offers varied landscapes, some of which could be a stand-in for Ireland.

The Best Filming Location Nobody Knows About

With a new \$2 million fund and a second year at Cannes, the Kurdistan Film Commission is making the case that one of the world's most misunderstood regions is also one of its most compelling shooting destinations **BY GEORG SZALAI**

Last year, the Kurdistan Film Commission (initially known as the Kurdistan Film Commission Slemani) made its global debut at Cannes. The world's biggest film festival served as the coming-out party for the commission of the small, semi-autonomous region in northern Iraq, operating under the office of Deputy Prime Minister Qubad Talabani, who serves as its president. This year, he, founder and chair Bavi Yassin, and her team are back for an encore.

The commission, based in the cultural hub of Slemani — also known as “Suli” — has a threefold mission: to empower Kurdish creatives through training and support, attract foreign productions to the region and bring

Kurdish stories to the world. Recruitment has been in full swing, and Yassin arrives at Cannes 2026 with financial news to match the ambition. After signaling plans for a fund last year, the Kurdistan Film Fund — worth \$2 million per year — was officially unveiled May 13.

Talabani highlighted the uniting force of storytelling during the event at the Cannes Marché, titled “Owning Our Story.” “We want to show the world that despite political differences, despite regional tensions, or war, that cinema can cross those boundaries, that storytelling can unite where politics divides. This fund is not just an opportunity for Kurdistan. It’s a signal to the region that we see the momentum and that we want to be

part of it, that we are willing to invest in the relationships, the collaborations, the partnerships that make this region stronger.”

The deputy prime minister also highlighted the importance of changing the narrative. “We have decided that today Kurdistan stories will no longer be told by others on our behalf. We will tell them ourselves, on our terms, with the depth and accuracy that only we can provide,” Talabani told the Cannes audience.

“Kurdish films have always relied on external support, without a solid system of their own. The fund changes that by placing the Kurdish narrative at the center, wherever it is told in the world,” Yassin tells *THR*. “It is not only about financing films — it is about creating ownership, continuity and visibility for Kurdish stories on an international level. At the same time, it is designed to open the door for global creators and producers to engage with Kurdish talent and stories through meaningful collaboration.”

Projects will be assessed on artistic merit, but also on their “international co-production potential, their ability to circulate and their relevance to the local ecosystem,” she says. The ultimate goal is “to create a structure that supports our narrative, while also encouraging international interest — and ultimately, to start bringing that attention back to Kurdistan itself.”

The cultural and economic case for attracting productions is equally clear. “For Kurdistan, this is about diversification,” Yassin says. “The audiovisual sector brings immediate economic activity — jobs, services, infrastructure — but beyond that,

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Timeless Landscapes



A Location Managers Guild International scouting trip visited Kurdistan's Hawraman region and the local bazaar.

it builds long-term value. It shapes how a region is seen globally and opens the door to cultural tourism. When people see a place onscreen, they connect with it. That connection creates curiosity and, over time, it translates into real interest in visiting and engaging with that place."

The pitch to filmmakers rests on three pillars: "authenticity, access and cost effectiveness." Kurdistan's stories and landscapes, Yassin argues, remain largely unseen — an advantage in an industry hungry for the new and unique. "There is a strong narrative identity. Kurdistan offers stories, locations and cultural depth that have not been overexposed," she says. "For European and Asian partners, this represents originality — something audiences have not seen repeatedly."

On location, the region punches well above its weight. "I have had professionals reach out to us, saying they are tired of the overused locations that always stand in for other countries they so much need," Yassin tells *THR*. "Kurdistan is in the MENA [Middle East and North Africa] region, very accessible, and yet it has four proper seasons per year, a wide range of diverse locations, from extreme greenery to drylands, waterfalls, mountains and hills, rivers, and urban cities. These locations can stand in for Syria, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran and so many more." She recalls taking visitors to one area and hearing their reaction: "They said, 'It looks precisely like Ireland!' Can you believe that: In the heart of the MENA, there is a country with corners that look like Ireland!"

Cost is another compelling argument. "Within a very compact geography,

productions can access a wide range of locations — urban, rural, mountainous — without the logistical complexity or costs found in many other countries," Yassin notes. "This has a direct impact on budgets and timelines." She also points to soft incentives that she says are "often underestimated": "In Kurdistan, facilitated permits, flexible coordination, access to locations and overall lower operational costs make it highly competitive — even without relying solely on large rebate schemes."

Over the past year, the commission has invested heavily in building local talent. A five-day Kurdistan Producers Lab, run in collaboration with European Audiovisual Entrepreneurs (EAVE), covered budgeting, financing, funding applications and marketing. A four-day location management workshop was led by John Rakich, president of the Location Managers Guild International, and Andrea Keener, a senior location manager whose credits include *Ant-Man*, *Captain America* and *Killers of the Flower*



Deputy Prime Minister Qubad Talabani serves as the president of Kurdistan Film Commission, and Bavi Yassin is its founder and chair.

Moon. The commission plans to expand its training opportunities further.

"This year, we will work with top professionals around the world and highly established institutions on scriptwriting, documentaries and more focused professional training for crews, especially below the line," Yassin tells *THR*. "We will also start our Suli Screens programs, which are free-of-charge film screenings all over the city."

For productions considering the region, the commission has assembled a location database that includes the sixth century archaeological remains of Bazyan, the Red Prison Museum and Tuni Baba, a gorge known for its dramatic scenery. One international production is already confirmed: *Daudistan*, a Canadian drama from writer-director Ariel Nasr, set on the eve of Kabul's fall to the Taliban, shoots in Kurdistan this year.

The broader regional picture is harder to ignore. War in Iran has cast a shadow across the entire MENA industry, and Yassin is candid about the impact. "The truth is, many countries in our region are affected by conflicts they are not directly part of. As Kurds, this is something we have lived with for decades. We are often carried by the consequences of wars that are not ours, yet we absorb their impact — politically, economically and culturally. One of the first sectors to suffer is film: Production slows down, and, more importantly, a region's reputation — something that takes years to build — can be affected almost overnight. But there is another reality that is often overlooked. If you look at daily life in a place like Kurdistan, it is stable, functional and safe. There is a disconnect between perception and reality, and part of our role is to correct that."

It is precisely why showing up at Cannes matters. "Our presence is a statement: that we are open, that we are building and that we are not waiting for perfect conditions to start," Yassin says.

At the Marché du Film, the commission is hosting the first-ever Kurdistan Producers Circle — a curated showcase of 10 projects drawn from across the wider region. "As we reintroduce Kurdistan to the international industry, we are not limiting ourselves to the domestic market," Yassin explains. "This reflects how we see our role: not only building locally, but positioning Kurdistan as a platform for collaboration."

She concludes: "Ultimately, this is what we are doing — building bridges that did not exist before." **THR**

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Lake Nipissing, just outside North Bay in Ontario, doubled as the frozen Arctic in Guillermo del Toro's *Frankenstein*.



As Hollywood Pulls Back, Northern Ontario Steps Up

With tax credits that stack to 45 percent, lakes that double as the Arctic and a production ecosystem built for tighter budgets, Canada's north is one of the industry's most compelling shooting alternatives **BY ETAN VLESSING**

Like the entertainment industry everywhere, Ontario's film and TV business has absorbed its share of external shocks — the 2023 L.A. strikes, the Peak TV hangover, a streaming boom going in reverse. But production beyond greater Toronto has emerged as a welcome buffer, with regional bonus incentives, cheaper labor and a

diverse array of iconic locations helping the province weather Hollywood's pullback.

Cities and towns across northern Ontario, having already pivoted from mining and manufacturing to hosting major film and TV shoots, are rising to the logistical challenges of turbulent times. And while talent, crews and infrastructure remain a draw, tax

credits, currency savings and government rebates are the real superpower.

"Beautiful locations and strong infrastructure get you into the conversation, but incentives are what help close the deal," says David Anselmo, CEO and president of Sudbury-based Banner Hideaway Pictures. Provincial incentives can be stacked with

the federal rebate to a bonus tax credit rate of 45 percent — a significant lever in an era when every greenlight is being scrutinized. "License fees are tighter, buyers are more selective," Anselmo adds. "But I actually think that favors places like northern Ontario, because we're no longer selling a theory. We're offering a proven production ecosystem."

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That confidence echoes across the province, even as Ontario faces added competitive pressure from a foreign film tax credit hike in British Columbia. “If Kingston can stand in for Maine, we have better incentives that help you with your budget and your bottom line,” says Joanne Loton, Kingston’s film commissioner. The southwestern Ontario city recently hosted shoots for Peacock’s *Devil in Disguise: John Wayne Gacy* miniseries and Amazon’s scripted Muhammad Ali biopic *The Greatest*, both of which made use of the Kingston Penitentiary — a former maximum security prison turned museum.

The economic case for shooting outside Toronto is reinforced by the Northern Ontario Heritage Fund (NOHF), a tier-based grant that draws qualifying producers to the province’s northern reaches and can be layered on top of existing provincial and federal film tax credits. The fund has already contributed \$2 million each to the Paramount+ medical drama *SkyMed* and the third season of Hallmark’s *When Hope Calls* to bring production north.

“We want Toronto to be busy. And we’re always going to go through those ebbs and flows,” says Patrick O’Hearn, executive director of Cultural Industries Ontario North (CION), which works to advance production across six major centers: Sudbury, North Bay, Timmins, Sault Ste. Marie, Thunder Bay and Parry Sound. “But we’ve really defined there’s no central hub that needs to be the be-all and end-all of production. We can use the full province and all of this great country to make amazing film and television.”

Sudbury has been particularly active. Recent shoots include Jason Biggs’ directorial debut *Getaway*, gory fantasy action comedy *Deathstalker*



Megan Park shot her second feature *My Old Ass* in the forested landscapes and lakeside cottages of the Muskokas in Ontario’s Parry Sound.

starring Patton Oswalt and executive produced by Slash of Guns N’ Roses, and body horror feature *The Pond* from director Jeff Renfroe. The city’s natural landscape — lakes, wilderness, remote cottage country — has proven as much of a draw as its infrastructure. “People think of us as an industrial city, which we are, but we have beautiful lakes and wilderness here,” says Clayton Drake, Sudbury’s film officer. “Above-the-line talent often find gorgeous Airbnbs or cottages that give them the northern getaway experience while they’re filming.”

That promise of natural beauty was realized most dramatically by Guillermo del Toro’s *Frankenstein*, which used the icy surface of Lake Nipissing just outside North Bay to double as the Arctic’s frozen expanse, where Victor Frankenstein (Oscar Isaac) pursues the Creature (Jacob Elordi) by sled and dogs. “We knew we needed the Arctic, and at a certain time of the year. North Bay was perfect for that,” says producer J. Miles Dale. “Literally by just stepping off the land and going 100 yards to the west, we had this beautiful, unobstructed view of the sunset.”

Tyler Levine, producer on

Michael McGowan’s *All My Puny Sorrows*, also shot in North Bay, and found the small-town rhythm suited the production perfectly.

“Filming in North Bay is like having your own big studio where instead of taking a golf cart from one lot to another, you just have to drive your car a few minutes down the road to the next location,” he says. “The people are uniquely kind and accommodating. The city is beautiful and in no particular rush.” Most mornings, he and McGowan would run along Lake Nipissing, sometimes joined by crew. “It was like a moving production meeting but much more scenic and refreshing.”

Farther south, in Parry Sound, filmmaker Megan Park shot her second feature, *My Old Ass* — a fantasy drama starring Maisy Stella and Aubrey Plaza, produced by Margot Robbie’s LuckyChap Entertainment — among the forested landscapes and lakeside cottages of the Muskokas. The location was just a two-hour drive from Toronto. “Relatively speaking, it’s not that far,” notes Jeff Thom, an economic development officer in Parry Sound.

The threat of further disruption — whether from a repeat of the 2023 strikes or President

Donald Trump’s proposed tariffs on foreign films — has regional jurisdictions actively exploring alternatives. “We’re all looking for ways we can collaborate in different ways,” says Kingston’s Loton. “Can we do more treaty co-productions with countries like Ireland, which is really upping the ante with their incentives and investments? Can we do more interprovincial filming?”

Ontario’s regions are also investing in homegrown storytellers. Director Lisa Jackson is at work on *Medicine Fire*, a documentary about an Anishinaabe couple restoring a traditional healing ceremony in their fly-in reserve of Kitchenuhmaykoosib Inninuwug in northwestern Ontario — a project that uses the region’s stunning natural landscape as a backdrop for a story about cultural survival and renewal. “It’s just a stunningly beautiful and peaceful area,” Jackson says. For this community, she adds, the ceremony she’s documenting is “within lived experience” — “a very valid way of looking at our place in this world.”

Fellow Canadian filmmaker Tricia Black is taking a different approach, anchoring her found footage horror comedy *The B-Side: Dusk* in the geological drama of the Canadian Shield — a vast exposed rock formation across the province estimated to be 4 billion years old. The film, now in development, follows two cousins trying to solve a cold case involving a rock duo who disappeared without a trace in 1999. “We know more about what’s in the skies, what’s above us and beyond our planet, and we don’t focus as much on the things that are below our feet,” Black says.

In northern Ontario, the ground beneath the feet turns out to be worth paying attention to — in more ways than one. **THR**

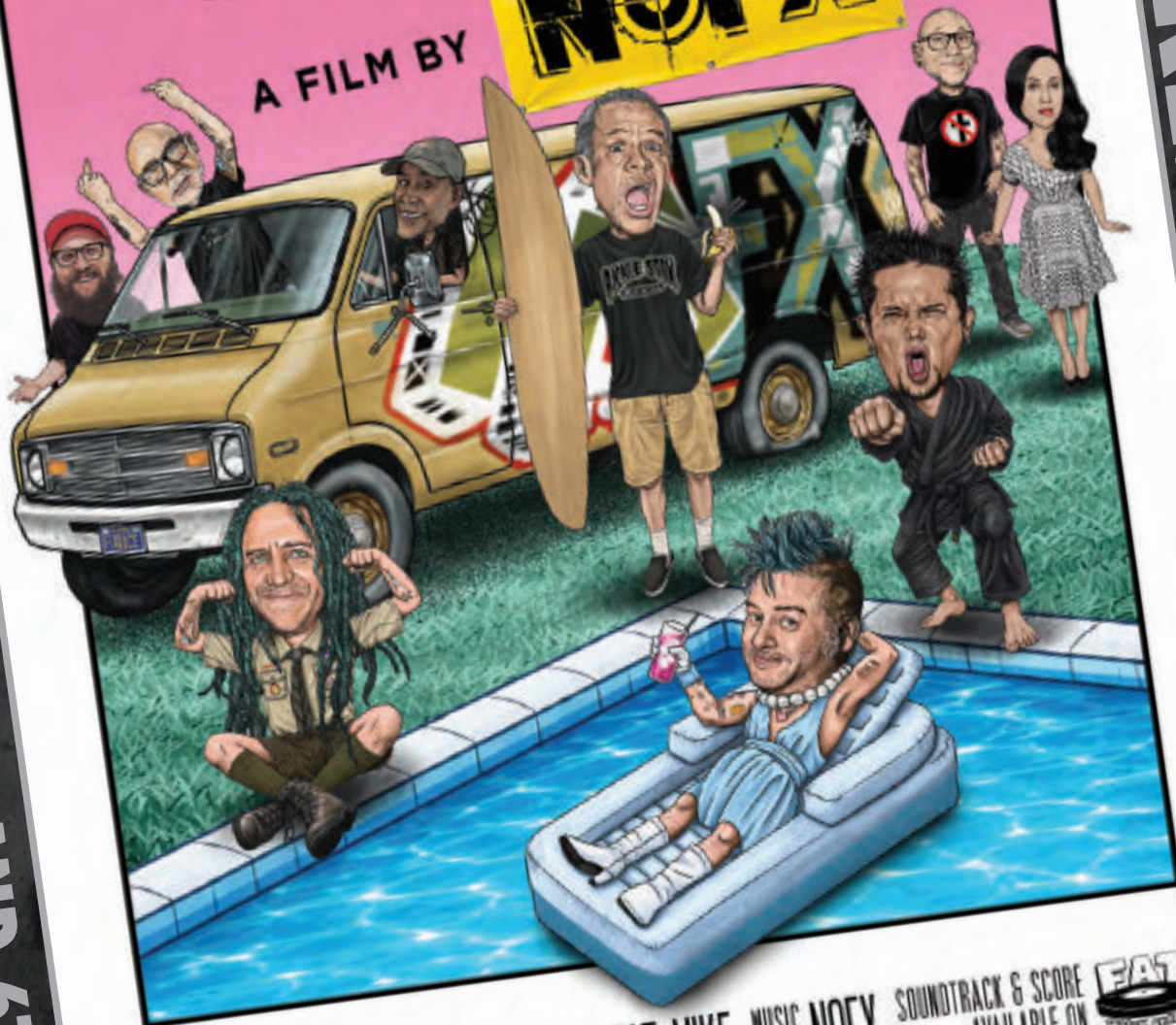
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SCREENING GUIDE

FRIDAY
May 15

0:30 *Colony* (123 mins.), Lumiere, Showbox Corp.

8:30 *Parallel Tales* (138 mins.), Agnès Varda, Charades

8:30 *The Meltdown* (100 mins.), Debussy, Les Films du Losange

8:30 *1949* (82 mins.), Lumiere, The Match Factory

8:30 *Viva* (112 mins.), Miramar, Loco Films

8:45 *Atonement* Theatre Croisette, Goodfellas

9:00 *De Gaulle — Bourguiba: The Battle Of Bizerte* (90 mins.), Arcades 3, Media Art

9:00 *A Mighty Adventure* (77 mins.), Lerins Cinema Club, Golden Network Asia Ltd

9:00 *The Upside of Unrequited* (105 mins.), Palais J Online, Capture

9:00 *Kill Me* Palais H, XYZ Films

9:00 *La Gradiva* (145 mins.), Palais J, mk2 Films

9:00 *The Girls From Above* (94 mins.), Riviera 2, Be for Films (Paris)

9:30 *Noise of Time* (100 mins.), Arcades 2, Luminescence

9:30 *Knife: The Attempted Murder of Salman Rushdie* (107 mins.), Lerins 3, Dogwoof

9:30 *Tin Castle* (105 mins.), Olympia 8 Online, Films Boutique



Atonement

9:30 *Monster Mia* (81 mins.), Olympia 3, Sola Media GmbH

9:30 *Vita Mia* (125 mins.), Palais G Online, Beta Cinema

9:30 *Balandrau, Where the Fierce Wind Blew* Palais C, Filmax (Castelao Pictures)

9:30 *The Pond* Palais E, Myriad Pictures

9:30 *November 1963* (120 mins.), Palais G, K5 International GmbH

9:30 *Double Freedom* (100 mins.), Palais I, Luxbox

10:00 *Docs-in-Progress 2026 — Canada Showcase* (75 mins.), Lerins 1, Cannes Docs — Marché du Film

10:00 *Festival Do Rio Goes to Cannes* (48 mins.), Palais K, Festival Do Rio — Rio De Janeiro International Film Festival

10:30 *Parallel Tales* (138 mins.), Lumiere,

Charades

11:00 *Congo Boy* (110 mins.), Debussy, The Party Film Sales

11:00 *Bearcave* (113 mins.), Online #1, MMM Film Sales

11:15 *1949* (82 mins.), Agnès Varda, The Match Factory

11:15 *A Girl Unknown* (125 mins.), Miramar, Pyramide International

11:30 *Carte Blanche* (90 mins.), Arcades 3 Online, Latido Films

11:30 *Gabin* (105 mins.), Arcades 1, Lightdox

11:30 *Agata Christian — Murder on the Snow* (109 mins.), Lerins 2 Online, Piperplay

11:30 *Sanctuary* Olympia 1, Sublimity Entertainment

11:30 *Che Guevara: The Last Companions* Olympia 4, Lucky Number

11:30 *Corporate Retreat* (100mins.), Olympia 5, The Film Sales Company

11:30 *Straight Shot* (96 mins.),

Palais B, Pinnacle Peak Pictures

11:30 *Make Me Feel* (90 mins.), Palais D, Arthood Entertainment GmbH

11:30 *Nezha's Destiny* (30 mins.), Palais F, Blast Films International Ltd.

11:30 *Mallorca Confidential* Palais H, Filmax (Castelao Pictures)

11:30 *The Golden Key: A New Pinocchio Story* (102 mins.), Palais J, Kinokult

11:30 *Cannes Animation I Spotlight Screenings: Animation* (110 mins.), Riviera 2, Marché du Film

11:45 *Docs-in-Progress — Scotland Showcase 2026* (75 mins.), Lerins 1, Cannes Docs — Marché du Film

11:55 *1949* (82 mins.), Olympia 7, The Match Factory

12:00 *Blaise* (80 mins.), Arcades 2 Online, Best Friend Forever

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Family Adventure / 107 min. / USA

A coming-of-age adventure of a tech-obsessed teenager who goes on a week-long mission with his conservationist father in the forests of Florida's Panhandle to track an elusive black bear. **Directed by Ariz Zalace**

Cast: Jason Burkey (*The Walking Dead, October Baby*), Max Ivutin (*Home Sweet Home Alone*)



Sci-Fi Thriller / 90 min. / UK

Sentient robot EVE flees into the wild. Hunted and pushed to the brink, she evolves from servant to predator in a visceral, near-future tale of survival and vengeance. **Directed by Daniel Simpson**

Cast: Vincent Leroy, Fe Valen



LGBTQ+ Romance / 90 min. / UK-Italy

In London's cutthroat fashion scene, a shared trauma ignites a forbidden attraction between designer Olivia and her mentor Nina, forcing them to choose between career and heart. **Directed by Flaminia Graziadei**

Cast: Melanie Liburd (*This Is Us, Bad Boys: Ride or Die*), Nina Pons (*Baby, Enea*), Matteo Bassi



Female-led Crime Thriller / 92 min. / USA

Lifetime Movie Network 2026 premiere. Investigative reporter, Lauren, returns home for her father's funeral and discovers that her birth mother is a powerful Madam who may be responsible for his death. **Directed by Jon Osbeck & Phillip Boyd**

Cast: Gina Vitori (*Star Wars: Ahsoka*), Susan Gallagher (*Cobra Kai*), Isabella Hofmann (*Burlesque*), Philip Boyd



Romantic Drama / 86 min. / USA

Lifetime premiere, executive produced by bestselling author **Terry McMillan**. When two single parents navigate the relationship of their teenagers, a secret romance develops between them, leading to a dilemma. **Directed by Patricia Cuffie-Jones**

Cast: Taye Diggs (*The Best Man*), Lesley-Anne Brandt (*Lucifer*), Aimee Garcia (*Dexter*), Juanita Jennings (*Cross*)



Romantic Drama / 86 min. / USA

A critically successful Lifetime-premiere and top 10 Netflix ranking in 2026, Johnnie, returning from military service, is shocked to find divorce papers awaiting him. At a turning point in life, he unexpectedly falls for Carlie, a local policewoman. **Directed by Charles Murray**

Cast: Taye Diggs (*How Stella Got Her Groove Back, The Best Man*), Meagan Good (*Think Like A Man, Shazam!*)

Trailers & more at www.multivisionnaire.com • market@multivisionnaire.com

12:00 *Tangles* (102 mins.), Arcades 2, Charades

12:00 *Pacific* Lerins 3 Online, Filmsharks / The Remake Co.

12:00 *Beast of Prey* (95 mins.), Lerins 3, Piperplay

12:00 *Children of Liberty* (82 mins.), Olympia 2, Urban Sales

12:00 *The Way Home* (96 mins.), Olympia 6, Nexo Studios

12:00 *Lakadbagha 2 — The Monkey Business* (111 mins.), Palais E Online, Webfilmland Productions

12:00 *Frequency of Fear* (76 mins.), Palais G Online, Bleiberg Entertainment LLC

12:00 *Under Your Feet* (94 mins.), Palais C, Filmsharks / The Remake Co.

12:00 *Sophia* (115 mins.), Palais E, Arab Cinema Center

12:00 *Dreamer* (108 mins.), Palais G, Palm Tree Universal

12:00 *Rolling Loud* (90 mins.), Palais I, Evolution Pictures Ltd

12:00 *Tokyo International Film Festival Goes to Cannes* (69 mins.), Palais K, Tokyo International Film Festival

12:00 *Almost Grazia* (80 mins.), Riviera 1, True Colours Glorious Films SRL

12:00 *The Diary of a Chambermaid* (94 mins.), Theatre Croisette, Quinzaine des Cinéastes / Directors' Fortnight

13:00 *No Way Down* (120 mins.), Lerins Cinema Club, Ginger & Fed

13:15 *Festival de Cannes 1947* (60 mins.), Bunuel, Cannes Classics

13:30 *Decorado* (95 mins.), Arcades 3, Le Pacte

13:30 *Dudley & the Invasion of the Space Slugs* (85 mins.), Lerins 2, All Rights Entertainment (France)

13:30 *Funk* (103 mins.), Olympia



I'll Be Gone in June

4 Online, Cinema Do Brasil

13:30 *Forest High* (102 mins.), Olympia 4, Rai Cinema

13:30 *I'll Be Gone in June* (122 mins.), Olympia 5, Luxbox

13:30 *In the Company of Wolves: An American Journey* (83 mins.), Olympia 7, Vision Films

13:30 *The Last Supper. The Passion by Leonardo Da Vinci* (80 mins.), Olympia 9, Nexo Studios

13:30 *Zoners* (120 mins.), Palais B Online, Pinnacle Peak Pictures

13:30 *Young Washington* (120 mins.), Palais F Online, Angel Studios

13:30 *The Sun Never Sets* (102 mins.), Palais J Online, Capture

13:30 *The Profiler* (60 mins.), Palais B, Westside Studios

13:30 *Daniel* (120 mins.), Palais D, Pinnacle Peak Pictures

13:30 *Hershey* (120 mins.), Palais F, Angel Studios

13:30 *The Darkness Returns* (110 mins.), Palais H, California Pictures

13:30 *Rogue* (91 mins.), Palais J, Kazakhfilm JSC

13:30 *The Experiment* (121 mins.), Riviera 2, Picture Tree International GmbH

14:00 *Dua* (101 mins.), Arcades 2, The Party Film Sales

14:00 *God Forgives Everyone* (114 mins.), Lerins 3 Online, Piperplay

14:00 *Ulya* (98 mins.), Lerins 3, B Rated International

14:00 *All of a Sudden* (195 mins.), Lumiere, Cinefrance

14:00 *Yesterday the Eye Didn't Sleep* (100 mins.), Olympia 3, Salaud Morisset

14:00 *Merry Christmas Aubrey Flint* Olympia 6, WestEnd Films

14:00 *Teenage Sex and Death at Camp Miasma* (106 mins.), Olympia 8, The Match Factory

14:00 *A Fading Man* (102 mins.), Palais E Online, Bendita Film Sales

14:00 *The Furies* (106 mins.), Palais G Online, Other Angle Pictures

14:00 *Winnipeg, Seeds of Hope* (81 mins.), Palais I Online, MMM Film Sales

14:00 *Blaise* (80 mins.), Palais C, Best Friend Forever

14:00 *Closure* (108 mins.), Palais E, Autlook Filmsales

14:00 *Another League* Palais G, Filmmax (Castelao Pictures)

14:00 *Romare Bearden: A Life in Collage* (88 mins.), Palais I, Coffee Bluff Pictures

14:00 *Adelaide Film Festival Goes to Cannes 2026* (72 mins.), Palais K, Adelaide Film Festival

14:00 *Masters* (73 mins.), Riviera 1, True Colours Glorious Films SRL

14:15 *Club Kid* (119 mins.), Debussy, Charades

14:30 *Cantona* (115 mins.), Agnès Varda, Cinetic Media

14:30 *The Blow* (104 mins.),

Miramar, Charades

14:45 *Pelechian Project* Bunuel, Cannes Classics

15:00 *Versailles* (92 mins.), Online #1, MMM Film Sales

15:00 *Grind* (105 mins.), Online #5, Cercamon

15:00 *Thanks for Coming* (82 mins.), Theatre Croisette, Quinzaine des Cinéastes / Directors' Fortnight

15:45 *Viva* (112 mins.), Arcades 1, Loco Films

15:45 *We Are Aliens* (111 mins.), Arcades 3, Charades

15:45 *Tatti, Land of Dreams* (91 mins.), Lerins 2, Innovative Eye

15:45 *The Golden Age* (112 mins.), Olympia 4, Films Boutique

15:45 *Retribution: A Footsoldier Story* (113 mins.), Olympia 5, Carnaby International Sales and Distribution

15:45 *Death Has No Master* (105 mins.), Olympia 7, Lucky Number

15:45 *Sweet Violence* (93 mins.), Palais D Online, Jinga Films

15:45 *Wild Is the Wind,* (105 mins.), Palais F Online, Media Art

15:45 *Someone's Daughter* (102 mins.), Palais B, Filmoption International

15:45 *Doc Showcase* (110 mins.), Palais D, Mediawan Rights

15:45 *All That We Never Were* (106 mins.), Palais F, Filmsharks / The Remake Co.

15:45 *Double Edge* Palais H, California Pictures

15:45 *All About Corinne* (113 mins.), Palais J, Indie Sales

15:45 *Mariinka* (94 mins.), Riviera 2 Online, Films Boutique

15:45 *The Harvester* (100 mins.), Riviera 2, Latido Films

16:15 *A Girl's Story* Arcades 2, Paradise City Sales (Ex Memento International)

16:15 *Downtown* (98 mins.),

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Cannes 2026 | Marche Du Film | Riviera E12



SCREENING: Sat, May 16
13:30 (1:30p) | Palais H



SCREENING: Sat, May 16
15:45 (3:45p) | Palais H



SCREENING: Sun, May 17
15:45 (3:45p) | Palais H



AT THE END OF THE SANTA FE TRAIL
Dir. Tomas Sanchez



SCREENING: Sun, May 17
13:30 (1:30p) | Palais H



ANNIE
Dir. Nicolas Bosc



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16:15 *Vittorio de Sica la Vita In Scena* (100 mins.), Lerins 1, Fandango

16:15 *Ice Cream Man* (120 mins.), Olympia 2, WME Independent

16:15 *The Last Day* Olympia 6, WestEnd Films

16:15 *Storm Rider* (104 mins.), Olympia 8, Garden of Titans, LLC

16:15 *Torment* (80 mins.), Palais E Online, Filmsharks / The Remake Co.

16:15 *American Doctor* (92 mins.), Palais C, Autlook Filmsales

16:15 *Dance of the Living* (92 mins.), Palais E, Bendita Film Sales

16:15 *Sapiens* (106 mins.), Palais G, Hive Filmworks Inc.

16:15 *Madame* Palais I, mk2 Films

16:15 *Tallinn Black Nights Film Festival Goes to Cannes* (44 mins.), Palais K, Tallinn Black Nights Film Festival

16:15 *She Dances* (93 mins.), Riviera 1, Pinnacle Peak Pictures

16:45 *Jim Queen* (84 mins.), Olympia 5, Global Constellation

16:45 *Sugata Sanshiro* Bunuel, Cannes Classics

17:00 *Leftover* (125 mins.),

Lerins Cinema Club, Newton Cinema

17:15 *Marie-Madeleine* (104 mins.), Agnès Varda, Pyramide International

17:30 *A Girl Unknown* (125 mins.), Miramar, Pyramide International

17:30 *Atonement* Theatre Croisette, Goodfellas

17:45 *Club Kid* (119 mins.), Arcades 1, Charades

17:45 *Flesh & Fuel* (90 mins.), Arcades 3, Pyramide International

17:45 *Maya Satya Bhram* (120 mins.), Lerins 2, Indywood Distribution Network

17:45 *A Girl Unknown* (125 mins.), Olympia 9 Online, Pyramide International

17:45 *Act One* (104 mins.), Olympia 4, Visit Films

17:45 *By Any Means* (115 mins.), Olympia 7, North.Five.Six.

17:45 *Treasure Trekkers* (98 mins.), Olympia 9, Goodfellas

17:45 *White Nights* (98 mins.), Palais B Online, Cinema Do Brasil

17:45 *Laalo Krishna Sada Sahaayte* (135 mins.), Palais F Online, Impa-Indian Motion Picture Producers Association

17:45 *Four Minus Three*

(121 mins.), Palais J Online, Beta Cinema

17:45 *Black Red Yellow* (93 mins.), Palais B, Kyrgyz Cinema

17:45 *Scarred* (118 mins.), Palais D, Impa-Indian Motion Picture Producers Association

17:45 *Zero Ad* (120 mins.), Palais F, Angel Studios

17:45 *The Weight of Longing* (93 mins.), Palais H, Jai Viratra Entertainment Limited

17:45 *Gimp and the Hitman* (74 mins.), Palais J, Majestic Film

18:15 *Women on Trial,* (105 mins.), Arcades 2, Gaumont

18:15 *Quelques Mots d'Amour* (95 mins.), Bazin, StudioCanal (Fr)

18:15 *Mouse* (120 mins.), Olympia 6 Online, Visit Films

18:15 *Redemptions* (110 mins.), Olympia 3, Cinefrance

18:15 *The Correspondent* (119 mins.), Palais I Online, Tricoast Worldwide

18:15 *Indian Saga (Anthology)* (105 mins.), Palais C, Impa-Indian Motion Picture Producers Association

18:15 *Tera Mera Nata* (116 mins.), Palais E, Impa-Indian Motion

Picture Producers Association

18:15 *Within a Budding Grove* (112 mins.), Palais G, China Film Foundation-Wutianming Film Fund for Young Talents

18:15 *Dear You* (118 mins.), Palais I, China Film Foundation-Wutianming Film Fund for Young Talents

18:15 *Asherah: A Love Odyssey* (70 mins.), Riviera 1, Q2 Films

18:30 *Karma* Lumiere, Pathé Films

18:45 *Propeller One-Way Night Coach* Debussy, Apple TV+

19:00 *The Story of Documentary Film* Bunuel, Dogwoof

19:45 *John Lennon: The Last Interview* Agnès Varda, Apple TV+

20:00 *Blaise* (80 mins.), Arcades 1, Best Friend Forever

20:00 *Parallel Tales* (138 mins.), Olympia 1, Charades

20:00 *The Trail of the Wolf* (99 mins.), Olympia 4, Mr Miyagi Films

20:00 *April May 99* (129 mins.), Palais B, Maharashtra Film, Stage & Cultural Development Corporation Ltd

20:30 *Blaise* (80 mins.), Arcades 2, Best Friend Forever

20:30 *1949* (82 mins.), Palais K, The Match Factory

20:30 *The Diary of a Chambermaid* (94 mins.), Theatre Croisette, Quinzaine des Cinéastes / Directors' Fortnight

20:45 *Think Good* (95 mins.), Debussy, Playtime

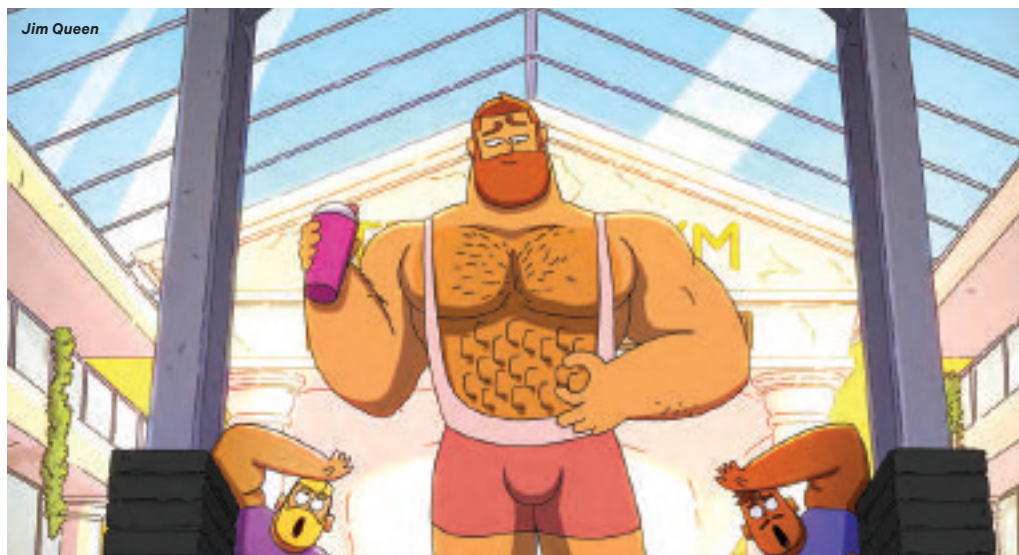
21:00 *The Blow* (104 mins.), Miramar, Charades

22:00 *Gentle Monster* Lumiere, mk2 Films

22:15 *Parallel Tales* (138 mins.), Palais K, Charades

22:30 *We Are Aliens* (111 mins.), Arcades 1, Charades

22:30 *1949* (82 mins.), Olympia 1, The Match Factory



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REVIEWS



REVIEWS

Fatherland

A stellar Sandra Hüller plays the daughter of *Death in Venice* author Thomas Mann (Hanns Zischler) in Pawel Pawlikowski's haunting and exquisitely nuanced road movie **By Leslie Felperin**

The Nobel-prize-winning novelist Thomas Mann (Hanns Zischler) and his daughter Erika (Sandra Hüller) go on an unsentimental journey in 1949 through West and East Germany in Pawel Pawlikowski's damn-near perfect period piece *Fatherland*.

Told with exacting restraint yet as layered as the lacquer on an ebony Biedermeier console, this forms a loose triptych with Pawlikowski's last two features, *Ida* and *Cold War*, both of which were set at least partly behind the Iron Curtain. As with its predecessors, the characters here go through the ringers of personal crises, with extra rolling pressure applied by the politics of the times. In *Fatherland's* case, Mann finds himself compelled to confront his failings as a parent and also make an invidious choice between the ideologies of "Mickey Mouse or Stalin" when the lofty rhetoric of high art can no longer offer ivory-tower sanctuary.

It is immaculately performed by Zischler and especially Hüller, grounding the film throughout with an uncanny, expressive stillness. But it is also exquisitely rendered

Hanns Zischler and Sandra Hüller confront personal and ideological choices in the latest from the *Ida* filmmaker.

in the same boxy ratio and silvery monochrome lensing Pawlikowski and DP Lukasz Zal (*The Zone of Interest*) deployed on *Ida* and *Cold War*, and scrupulously detailed down to the ruined buildings, sharply cut suits, surly restaurant service and eclectic selection of jazz, classical and folk tunes chosen by Pawlikowski, all of which is sure to set discriminating viewers swooning.

That said, those who prefer to have every motivation spoken aloud, plus diagrams showing precisely where they should stand on ethical issues raised in the drama, may whinge that the screenplay, credited to Pawlikowski and Henk Handloegten, is insufficiently didactic, too elusive and sidelong compared to much Anglophone prestige cinema. Almost nothing, for instance, is ever spelled out about the queer sexualities of the leading characters, even if the evidence is there in hungry looks, tiny gestures, costume choices and elephant-sized, room-squatting

unsaid feelings.

Similarly, scholars may nitpick over the film's historical veracity, even though the end credits' disclaimer acknowledges that liberties have been taken with the known facts in the interests of drama. Nevertheless, given the reputations of the cast and crew here, awards consideration, not just in Cannes' competition strand where it premieres, could follow.

Toggling nimbly between public and private spheres, the story unfolds through a mix of scenes in crowded auditoriums, hotel ballrooms and Party-sponsored events thick with extras, as well as quieter moments where someone is alone or just two characters talk, argue or sit in silence behind closed doors. Alternatively, sometimes they're practically alone in cavernous spaces that were once public or are supposed to be, like a ruined church, a near-empty restaurant

Competition

CAST Sandra Hüller, Hanns Zischler, August Diehl, Devid Striesow, Anna Madeley, David Menkin
DIRECTOR Pawel Pawlikowski
1 hour 22 minutes

Teenage Sex and Death at Camp Miasma

Hannah Einbinder and Gillian Anderson headline Jane Schoenbrun's strange, frustrating, ultimately fulfilling exploration of desire **By Richard Lawson**

in East Germany (where we get that aforementioned glimpse of socialist service culture), or the semi-sequestered space of the Buick sedan that Erika, a former race car driver, is chauffeuring through Germany as her father's factotum.

The opening scene unfolds in that private register as we listen in on a conversation inside a Cannes hotel room occupied by Erika's brother Klaus Mann (August Diehl), as well as a barely glimpsed androgynous lover lolling naked in bed. Klaus talks to his sister in California on an elegant brass and Bakelite 1940s telephone (the props are divine throughout), complete with operator interruptions. She implores him to meet her and their father in Frankfurt in West Germany or Weimar in the East, where Thomas is coming to celebrate the 200th birthday of Goethe, Mann's revered literary predecessor. Klaus will never come to Germany, but the phone call reveals much about the Mann family dynamics, especially Klaus' fraught relationship with his father and the deep bond with his sister.

After that, Pawlikowski and his team plunge us into the ruined world of Germany in 1949 via a long traveling shot out the Buick window observing block after block of crumbling freestanding facades and smashed masonry. (Apparently it was created via practical sets built in Poland, where most of the film was shot.) Erika and Thomas arrive at the Metropol hotel in Frankfurt, where their first engagements will proceed, including a speech from Thomas in an austere church-like space, followed by a party full of fresh and familiar faces, from the sinister CIA operative (David Menkin) assigned to watch over them; AP journalist Betty Knox (Anna Madeley), with whom Erika appears to have some history, possibly of a romantic nature; and her ex-husband, Gustaf Gründgens (Joachim Meyerhoff), a Nazi collaborator whom Erika can barely tolerate. Familiar to us Pawlikowski fans but not necessarily to the characters in the film is the sultry blonde jazz singer belting away period classics, played by Joanna Kulig, the co-lead of *Cold War*.

Particularly notable in these early scenes is how often figures are positioned in the lower half of the frame, with acres of empty space above their heads. You can lay any number of meanings over this like a palimpsest. Perhaps it's meant to suggest the

weight of history or the state apparatuses crowding characters into the bottom of the frame, or space that's occupied by unseen spirits (Goethe himself? Folks killed in the war?) hovering above in the ether. Whatever metaphor you might prefer, it mostly suggests that these people, made to look diminished and small, are somewhat powerless.

That said, this bilateral framing becomes less notable, or at least less frequent, as the film goes on — especially in relation to Erika, who begins to defy her father's authority, arguing with him about his treatment of Klaus and questioning his precarious apolitical stance in relation to the regimes hosting their visit. Thomas' dialogue is often full of airy, vapid pronouncements that sound sonorous but mean almost nothing, especially as they go deeper East, finishing their trip in Weimar. While the oppressiveness of the German Democratic Republic is acknowledged — especially through an unexpected visit from a local who wishes to draw Erika and Thomas' attention to how the nearby concentration camp in Buchenwald has been repurposed to house political prisoners — the film's streak of dry dark humor comes through strongest in these later scenes. That's especially true of the satirical fun had here with Colonel Tulpanov (Daniel Wagner), a Soviet soldier who is both sinister and a pretentious buffoon, especially when he wants to debate dialectical materialism with Thomas.

It should be noted that both Pawlikowski and Hüller themselves grew up behind the Iron Curtain, in Poland and East Germany, respectively, and the same probably goes for many members of the cast and crew. While the film is never blindly nostalgic for the Cold War, there's a sense that insiders and survivors know this world from the inside out, that they remember the secret police and the bad food just as much as the choirs singing songs about birch trees and the generosity of people who barely have anything to share.

At the risk of sounding wishy-washy like Thomas Mann at his worst moments, that understanding of the full spectrum of experience in both types of society and all the attendant nuances that made neither order much better or worse than the other comes across affectingly here. The film may be in black and white, but the world it depicts is not. **THR**

The filmmaker Jane Schoenbrun's last film, *I Saw the TV Glow*, used a made-up artifact from the pop-culture past — a cultishly beloved supernatural television show — as a kind of seeing stone, gazing through its lens to inspect matters of identity. Schoenbrun draws from the next well over in their new film, *Teenage Sex and Death at Camp Miasma*, which employs a fictional slasher movie of yesteryear as the portal into a conversation about self and desire. It's heady, strange stuff, perhaps not as emotionally resonant as *TV Glow*, but captivating in both its confusion and honesty.

Hannah Einbinder plays Kris, an up-and-coming filmmaker who has parlayed Sundance success into a gig rebooting a once-popular horror franchise called *Camp Miasma*. The original film was a smash hit, spawning myriad sequels and merchandise and intense fan adoration of its killer, Little Death, who was once a gender fluid teenager bullied to death by his fellow campers. Kris, long a devotee of the franchise, is determined to cast the reclusive star of the first film, a mostly forgotten actress named Billy (Gillian Anderson). A journey to Billy's house — a remote cabin near the Washington/British Columbia border — leads Kris on a curious, blood-spattered journey of discovery.

Schoenbrun has stuffed their film with references, to amusing effect. If something about the now-problematic gender-bending killer of *Camp Miasma* reminds you of 1983's *Sleepaway Camp*, Schoenbrun is not coy about the parallel. If Billy, who wears a turban and caftan in a few scenes, calls to mind Norma Desmond of *Sunset Boulevard*, Schoenbrun assures you that that is not an accident. There is a hyper awareness to *TSADACM*, a determination to point out each of its Easter eggs and allusions, lest the viewer think Schoenbrun is trying to outsmart anyone. Schoenbrun is welcoming us into a collective pool of memory, though they have very particular, personal

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Hannah Einbinder (left) is a rising filmmaker and Gillian Anderson a fading actress in the *Un Certain Regard* entry.

things to discuss once we're in there.

There's an awkwardness to the film's invitation, a fussy kind of table setting that offers some trite (though not inaccurate) Hollywood satire to ease us toward what the movie is really about. That nervousness feels deliberate; the film is about a person who is forever in their head, unable to exist in a moment without qualifying, explaining and apologizing for their presence. Kris' chief insecurity has to do with sex, an act during which she's never felt comfortable, unable to fully inhabit her body and accept how others might make it feel.

But *Camp Miasma*, specifically one (ahem) climactic scene involving Billy's character, has triggered something in Kris. She first saw the film as a probably too-young child, and its depiction of horror-movie teen hedonism — most of its characters operating on horny id — remains both alluring and othering. When Kris tries to academically explain what the film means to her, Billy offers a simpler interpretation: The film is just about “flesh and fluids,” she says.

In many ways, Kris aches to be reduced to such simple matter, to strip away her anxiety and surrender to basic want. Feeling so outside of that, so different from the teens in the movie (minus Billy's final girl, who is less eager about sex than everyone around her), has, in a way, made Kris identify with *Little Death* most of all. Schoenbrun, who transitioned in their 30s, divulges something intimate here, attempting to explain their own long-standing hang-ups about

sex, their detachment from something so many people seem to enjoy so readily.

That candor is refreshing, and the film's conclusions about accepting the idiosyncrasies of one's individual eros are quite moving. But Schoenbrun does not make it easy for the audience to reach those conclusions. *TSADACM* can be alienating; it is situated somewhere between the real world and fantasy, consistently blurring those borders. We see scenes of the movie within a movie, and it looks and moves nothing like actual 1980s slasher films. *Little Death* wears a giant HVAC vent on their head instead of a mask, there are founts of blood that would be more at home in a Troma film. Schoenbrun is not going for kicky mimicry here — literalism is not their aim.

Similarly, the landscape around Billy's cabin — on the property of the abandoned camp where the original film was shot — is made up of highly saturated color and painted backdrops. We have ventured into some kind of other place, much as Kris (and, in some ways, Billy) disappear into the reverie of a movie. But that abstraction does not dilute the potency of Schoenbrun's inquiry; we do, by the end, keenly feel that a crucible has been passed through, that Kris — and, by extension, her creator — have come to some new and significant realization about their physical being.

If that sounds heavy, it is, instead,

handled mostly with a comic touch, full of pithy one-liners and exaggerated depictions of gore and arousal. As she is on *Hacks* (another story of a connection between a younger writer and an older performer), Einbinder is droll and peppery, while also handling the dramatic bits quite well. Anderson is having a lark; she takes a rare juicy film role and runs with it, happily serving as a vessel for Schoenbrun's complicated obsessions.

Teenage Sex and Death at Camp Miasma will not be to everyone's liking. It isn't a movie-nerd paean to B-movie horror. Nor is it strictly a tête-à-tête between two lesbian icons (Anderson is not gay, but she has been an idol of the community since her *X-Files* days). It is less definable than that, and difficult to get a hold on. But it makes an impact; one leaves the theater awed by Schoenbrun's willingness to bare so much of themselves (albeit in allegory). The film is disarming in the way it tries to explain to an audience of strangers how its maker has lived in their changing body. It's an act of generosity, one person saying to another with wistful empathy, “I can be weird about this stuff, too.” And then, Schoenbrun presents a comforting idea: Life isn't a movie. But if it was, maybe you get to write it for yourself.

Un Certain Regard

CAST Hannah Einbinder, Gillian Anderson, Dylan Baker, Jack Haven, Sarah Sherman

DIRECTOR Jane Schoenbrun

1 hour 52 minutes

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Butterfly Jam

Barry Keoghan and Riley Keough star in this third feature from Russian director Kantemir Balagov (*Beanpole*), an absorbing but meandering drama set in New Jersey's close-knit Circassian community **By David Rooney**

Kantemir Balagov showed talent in his 2017 debut, *Closeness*, about a kidnapping in a North Caucasus town, then delivered fully on that promise with his stunning second feature, *Beanpole*, about two traumatized women in post-World War II Leningrad. Both those films centered on women whose worlds were closing in on them — a tomboyish auto mechanic in *Closeness*; a nurse and the front-line friend who turns on her in *Beanpole*. The Russian director's first film in English, by contrast, is testosterone-driven, a father-son story in which codes of masculinity lead to senseless loss.

The milieu of a small swath of New Jersey with a close-knit Circassian community is drawn in sketchy fashion. Balagov originally intended to make the film in his hometown of Nalchik in the foothills of the Caucasus Mountains. But after publicly condemning Russia's invasion of Ukraine, he self-exiled in 2022 to Los Angeles.

That might partly explain why the characters here seem to exist in isolation. The texture that should have been provided by a broader view of the community and by interactions with Americans outside the family's immediate circle is missing. That said, the actors kept me engaged, and the visuals are intoxicating thanks to gifted DP Jomo Fray (*Nickel Boys*).

Azik (Barry Keoghan) immigrated to the U.S. as a youth, along with his older sister

Zalya (Riley Keough), with whom he runs what his American-born son Temir (Talha Akdogan) calls a "shithole diner." Azik serves as the chef, taking great pride in his *delens* (Circassian potato and cheese pies), which he and others tout as the best in the world. But the business is failing, forcing Azik to consider going after a chef's position at a high-end restaurant being opened in Newark by an ex-lawyer acquaintance.

In truth, Azik's hopes and dreams are pinned largely on 16-year-old Temir, nicknamed Pyteh, whom he talks up to his card-game buddies as "my beautiful son ... future Olympic champion." Pyteh has shown skill on the high school wrestling team. Shy first flickers of romance spark up between him and Alike (Jaliyah Richards), another wrestler, whose progress is held back by a skin condition that makes her too embarrassed to strip down to practice gear.

Despite being at a late stage of pregnancy, Zalya works tirelessly to keep the diner in order, shouldering responsibilities in ways her brother seems unequipped. Or too lazy. She chafes at Azik bringing his deadbeat friends in to mess the place up.

The worst of them is Marat (Harry Melling), an abrasive, scrappy prankster. His cockamamie scheme to boost revenues by installing a broken-down cotton candy machine in the diner makes more symbolic sense than a bizarre subplot involving the

theft of a pelican whose rare appearance in the area made local news.

The screenplay, co-written by Balagov with Marina Stepnova, fails to give satisfying development to any of these strands and sorely under-uses the movie's most interesting character, Zalya. Keough is terrific, weary and impatient from having to exceed big-sister responsibilities from an early age. Despite having too little to do, Keough gives the movie's standout performance, which perhaps speaks to Balagov's nuanced handling of women characters.

The film struggles to find its focus, coming closest in Temir's growing recognition of his dad's shortcomings, particularly the minimal effort he puts into grasping the opportunities that America ostensibly presents. Keoghan's boyish physicality makes them seem more like brothers at times, notably so in a lovely moment when Azik accidentally triggers a car alarm and the two of them then set off the alarms of every vehicle parked in the street, getting a high off the cacophonous noise.

The turning point comes when Temir, in an argument, calls his dad "weak," perhaps the worst label you could slap on a man from such a patriarchal family background. Softness and even expression of feelings between fathers and sons are not part of the male Circassian factory model. The slight brings out Azik's insecurities.

In one of the film's most quietly powerful moments, he asks Zalya, "Am I weak?" She responds with silence, her face remaining out of the frame, letting us see only one arm with which she's furiously mopping the floor. When Azik tries to rid himself of the stigma, calling someone else weak as if to offload the weight of the insult, a startling act of violence occurs. But the movie's tragedy ultimately just kind of hangs there.

Balagov is indisputably a filmmaker with his own distinctive vision, ideally matched with Evgueni and Sacha Galperine's glowering score and with Fray's nimble shooting style, which often takes its cue to get in close from the knotted bodies on the wrestling mats. Story-wise, however, *Butterfly Jam* is too diffuse to measure up to the brutally transfixing *Beanpole*.

Directors' Fortnight

CAST Barry Keoghan, Talha Akdogan, Riley Keough,

Harry Melling, Jaliyah Richards

DIRECTOR Kantemir Balagov

1 hour 42 minutes

Barry Keoghan (left) and Riley Keough play siblings, who immigrated from the Caucasus to America as children and now run a diner, in Russian filmmaker Kantemir Balagov's English-language debut.



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A long strip of film, showing sprocket holes, winds through the frame from the top left towards the bottom right. At the bottom, it is spooled onto a metal reel.

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A young German skier disappears from a hotel in a remote corner of the Andes in this *Un Certain Regard* entry.

The Meltdown

Chile '76 director Manuela Martelli's sophomore feature is a haunting and sensitively helmed drama whose 9-year-old protagonist has an insider's view of a missing-person case and the lies spun around it **By Sheri Linden**

As *The Meltdown* (*El Deshielo*) begins, vintage news footage reveals something being lifted out of a frosty sea. It's a huge chunk of an Antarctic iceberg, on its way to becoming the centerpiece of Chile's pavilion at the 1992 world's fair. As a symbol of national ingenuity, the frosty specimen is kind of out-there. And yet, for a country emerging from 17 years of military rule and determined to redefine itself, it represents an understandable leap of faith. It's also an apt starting point for a movie in which submerged things come to light, if only briefly — a coming-of-age story where the key lesson is to keep what you know to yourself.

Manuela Martelli's well-received debut, *1976* (aka *Chile '76*) took place during Chile's Pinochet era. The writer-director sets her sophomore feature barely two years after the country shook off the despot's iron grip. Inés, the lead character, was born in the final years of the dictatorship. A cherub-faced 9-year-old with an old soul, she watches grown-ups around her calibrate their actions to a shifting world.

Watchful, precocious and utterly un-cutesy in the compelling performance of Maya O'Rourke, Inés moves freely around her grandparents' mountain ski lodge while her mother and father are away. They're in Spain as members of Chile's iceberg-delivering delegation at Expo '92 in Seville. While her grandmother, Techa (Paulina Urrutia), and grandfather, Ricardo (Mauricio Pesutić), are busy entertaining

potential investors, Inés has the run of the place, a pleasingly dated hotel in a remote corner of the Andes, near a ski lift. Inés is friends with the pair of hardy dogs who oversee the property, and moves easily among the hotel's employees and, later, when she's in detective mode, its guest rooms. She hangs with receptionist Sonia (Paula Zúñiga), trades greetings with Sonia's brother, bartender Genaro (Luis Uribe) and, against Techa's wishes, slips into the room of housekeeper Paty (Daniela Pino) when she doesn't want to sleep alone.

Inés grows fascinated with one guest, a German skier about five years her senior. Hanna (Maia Rae Domagala), the only girl on her training team, is also its star, but her dwindling drive frustrates her coach, Alexander (Jakub Gierszal), whose bond with Hanna appears more troubling each time the screenplay places them together.

Inés approaches the teen with a homemade gift, and despite their age difference, they bond readily, two girls separated from their parents, English their common language. Hanna alludes to strained relations with her single mother, a former skating champion from East Germany.

Exploring the mountain, the girls skip stones on its frozen lake and traipse through its defunct military outpost, a piece of land Inés' grandparents are determined to sell to a couple from Madrid. Techa cautions her granddaughter: "Behave yourself while the Spaniards are here."

But one morning, after an eventful evening that includes interludes with Alexander, Inés and Sebastián (Lautaro Cantillana), Inés' teenage cousin, Hanna is gone. A disappearance, a far-flung location — it's a classic plot engine, fueled by upheaval and dark secrets, and given fresh life in this telling. Benjamín Echazarreta's cinematography is alert to the workaday energy of the hotel as well as the eerie beauty of the setting, with its mix of fairy-tale wonder and bone-deep dread. The discordant, Bernard Herrmann-esque bursts of María Portugal's rich score ratchet up the suspense and foreboding.

The film's second half places Inés alongside Hanna's anguished mother, Lina, brought to anxious, guilt-ridden, ferocious life by Saskia Rosendahl. Excluded from the local authorities' search for her daughter, Lina conducts her own. A hopeful but guarded Inés rides shotgun with her and serves as translator when necessary, a role that puts her in an uncomfortable and painfully enlightening spot when the official excuses are pathetic or the civilian indifference is acute.

Martelli has drawn persuasive and involving performances from her cast. The production design by Nohemí González and Carolina Espina's costumes are outstanding contributions that never overshadow the action (though the hand-stitched embroidery on one of Inés' sweaters might break your heart a little with its brightness and innocence).

In a couple of instances, the director overplays her hand. The opening sequence ponders a long, slow swirl of blood down a bathroom sink that feels like foreshadowing in overdrive. Later, a long close-up of a shattered glass of milk works neither as visual rhyme with the snowy setting nor dramatic insight. It's merely distracting.

But these are quibbles when a movie conjures a world as aching and in-between as the one in *The Meltdown*. Confused connections, parental proxies, colonial histories — Martelli interweaves these narrative strands with skill and artistry. Through the mystery of one person's fate, a young hero awakens to certain ground rules and discovers a haunted place. You might call it the place of things that "you don't think about but are still there," as the story's unhappy teenager puts it in the journal she's left behind.

Un Certain Regard

CAST Maya O'Rourke, Saskia Rosendahl, Maia Rae Domagala, Jakub Gierszal, Paulina Urrutia

DIRECTOR Manuela Martelli

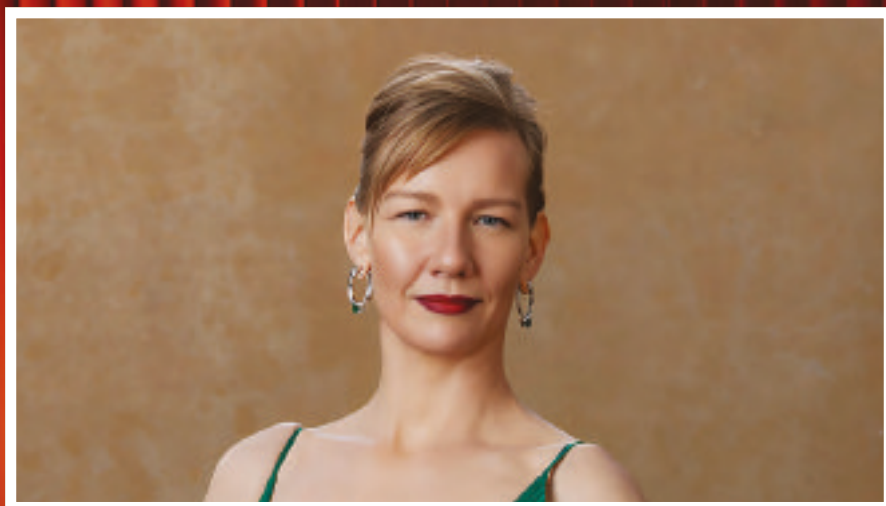
1 hour 48 minutes

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Continued from page 2

and mid-budget market.”

Kore-eda has also worked to reform the notoriously punishing working conditions of the Japanese industry, which operates without any major unions or empowered guilds. In 2022, he co-founded action4cinema, a nonprofit pushing for a Japanese equivalent of France’s Centre National du Cinéma — a central body funded by levies on theaters, broadcasters and distributors to support production, training and better labor conditions. The campaign is driven largely by a worsening talent drain, as long hours, low pay and a culture long permissive of bullying and harassment erode the appeal of film work for Japanese young people. There has been incremental movement, including the 2023 launch of Eiteki, an industry body that certifies productions that meet working-condition benchmarks; it revised its guidelines for the first time on April 1.

“We’ve been able to tighten the regulations a little bit, but we’re still nowhere near international standards,” Kore-eda says. “Improving conditions also makes filming more expensive, which reduces the number of midbudget films — so we really need to work

together as a whole industry and show commitment to solving these issues.”

Fellow industry elder statesman **Kiyoshi Kurosawa**, appearing in Cannes for the seventh time this year, says he believes contemporary Japanese directors will also need to expand the scope of their ambition before film buffs can claim a new golden era of Japanese cinema is upon us to rival the country’s great post-war period.

“I feel that Japanese filmmakers — and I include myself — have gotten very good at making films that identify universal themes in aspects of everyday life, but I question how much we are really engaging with the spirit of our times and tackling the fundamental issues that Japanese society is

going through,” Kurosawa says.

The cult director says he’s taken inspiration over the past year from recent U.S. film successes, such as *One Battle After Another* and *Sinners*, as well as less successful but nonetheless daring commercial experiments like **Maggie Gyllenhaal’s** *The Bride!*

“In my opinion, none of these are quite perfect movies; each is a little imbalanced in its own way,” Kurosawa says. “But there is a vitality to their attempt to engage with the fundamental problems they see in American society and to make really entertaining cinema out of that. Japanese cinema — in the 1950s and ’60s — once did this, too. If we can find that impetus again, we’ll be able to say our film culture has entered a wonderful new era again.” **VIR**



From top: Koji Fukada’s *Nagi Notes* and Ryūsuke Hamaguchi’s *All of a Sudden*.

MAIKA MONROE

Continued from page 19

complicated — she’s an unhinged murderer, yes, but she’s after something relatably human. The tension then becomes: What happens if she gets it, and what if she doesn’t?

The movie’s arch-horror-comic tone came to Wigton only after the initial script stages. “The first thing that you’re thinking about — it’s a little bit more like engineering in the beginning,” he says. “It’s more about the structural math of, ‘How are we going to fit this narrative and how are these scenes going to be arranged?’” That led to a one-word descriptor that Monroe says defines his overall approach to the show: “Demented.”

“When I talked to people about it in the beginning, I said, ‘This is a kind of manic madness,’” Wigton says. The presence of Monroe helped matters: “Every single time that we got into a setup, it was like Maika had the character in a vice grip. It’s like she never really left. You were always right there. It was like a magnet. It was just amazing to watch.”

The postproduction aspect, Wigton adds, was straightforward — if only because he’d laid out the movie so exactly before shooting even began. He had access to the castle where they shot for prep. “We had almost everything in the shot list pre-visualized before we started shooting, so in a situation like that, there’s almost zero coverage,” he says.

For her part, Monroe saw that all come together in the final edit. “Zach had such specific visuals and certain shots, and you’re filming it like, ‘I have no hope, that looks cool, hope that works out, seems cool’ — and then seeing it all put together, it really blew me away,” she says. “As with most actors, it’s always a bit odd watching yourself, but what was really nice about this project is that it was very different for me — that little part of me was able to take myself out of it.” Indeed, it’s not just the fake teeth — Monroe may have scared you before onscreen, but never quite like this. **VIR**

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Unlike Her Film, Anderson Didn't *Alienate People*

Gillian Anderson's 2008 visit to the Cannes Film Festival was not especially auspicious. The Chicago-born actress was still most closely associated with the TV series *The X-Files*. In fact, that year she also starred in the second film spun off from the series, *The X-Files: I Want to Believe*. She did make a glamorous appearance as she walked the red carpet for the 61st festival's opening night film, Fernando Meirelles' *Blindness*, in a white Alberta Ferretti gown. (Asked what makes a successful red carpet gown, she cracked, "I guess what fits. If something fits, you wear it.")

But the film that actually brought her to the Croisette was Robert Weide's *How to*

Lose Friends & Alienate People, starring Simon Pegg and loosely based on British journalist Toby Young's memoir about his disastrous stint at *Vanity Fair*. A special promotional screening was held to whet appetites for the film, but as Rotten Tomatoes reported, "The event turned into the type of shambles that is a feature of the book when the projectors broke down midway through the first sequence." And when the film was released later that year — a No. 1 opening in the U.K., it flopped in the U.S. — *THR* critic Sheri Linden, mentioning "Gillian Anderson's master manipulator publicist," noted that the movie "collects a fine group of actors but gives them

little to do beyond striking one-note poses."

Since then, of course, Anderson has become a queen of both prestige TV (winning an Emmy for *The Crown*) and British theater (where she's to star in a revival of *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* this fall) as well as a L'Oréal global ambassador. During a swing through

Cannes last year, she told *The Standard*, "I've just come in from Vancouver, where I've been shooting a Jane Schoenbrun film with Hannah Einbinder. A little indie horror." And now that film, *Teenage Sex and Death at Camp Miasma*, has had its world premiere in this year's Un Certain Regard sidebar.

— GREGG KILDAY

By Sheri Linden

LOS ANGELES — A film that sets out to demonstrate the shallows of celebrity-obsessed pop journalism should at least offer a few fully fleshed characters, if only as a point of comparison. "How to Lose Friends & Alienate People" keeps stubbornly to the surface, though, reducing Toby Young's sharp-eyed memoir of his rise and fall at *Vanity Fair* to an uninspired romantic comedy punctuated by cheap jokes. Simon Pegg is likably smart and obnoxious as the fish-out-of-water Brit in high-gloss Manhattan, but he's swimming upstream in a feature that substitutes slapstick for scathing wit.

Gillian Anderson at the promotional Cannes screening of *How to Lose Friends & Alienate People*. A few months later, *THR*'s review said, "Shtick supersedes satire in this tale of the media-industrial complex."

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