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Moviemaker magazine

**FELICITY
JONES'**

**LOVE
LETTERS**

**INSIDE
CODA
WITH
SIÂN
HEDER**

**JAMES
GUNN
DOESN'T
NEED TO
SHOUT**

+

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- Shelly Short,
Film & Digital Media Department Chair

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—Gayle Ferraro, producer
(*To Catch a Dollar*; *Ganges: River to Heaven*)

”

“

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—Hus Miller, Writer/Actor/Producer
(*You Can't Say No*)

”



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28 REFERENCES TO LOVE

BY TIM MOLLOY

ONE MAGAZINE I like a lot is *Harper's*—especially the index, the statistical poem in each issue that uses numbers to break down the state of affairs. As we edit each issue of *Moviemaker*, we notice curious little patterns sometimes, and are never sure how or whether to point them out to you, our beloved readers. So, with apologies to the *Harper's* staff, we thought we might borrow their index format to share some things we noticed about this issue. Here we go.

Number of women whose last name is,
in full or in part, Jones: **3**

Number of men named Jones: **1**

Number of British Joneses: **3**

Percentage of pages that include the word Jones: **25**

Number of references to the 1988 dystopian
sci-fi film *Akira*: **2**

To other dystopian sci-fi films: **7**

Number of moviemakers quoted who confessed
that they feared, last year, that movies might be over: **3**

Who made movies amidst those fears: **3**

Number of times James Gunn uses the word “love,”
or a variation on it: **28**

Number of references to love letters: **4**

Number of those love letters that are to a lover: **1**

To Los Angeles: **1**

To family: **1**

Films that could easily be construed as love letters
to Los Angeles: **2**

To Gloucester, Massachusetts: **1**

MovieMaker magazine

ISSUE NO. 140, VOLUME 28
SUMMER 2021
ASSISTANT@MOVIEMAKER.COM
WWW.MOVIEMAKER.COM

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MOVIEMAKER® MAGAZINE IS PUBLISHED

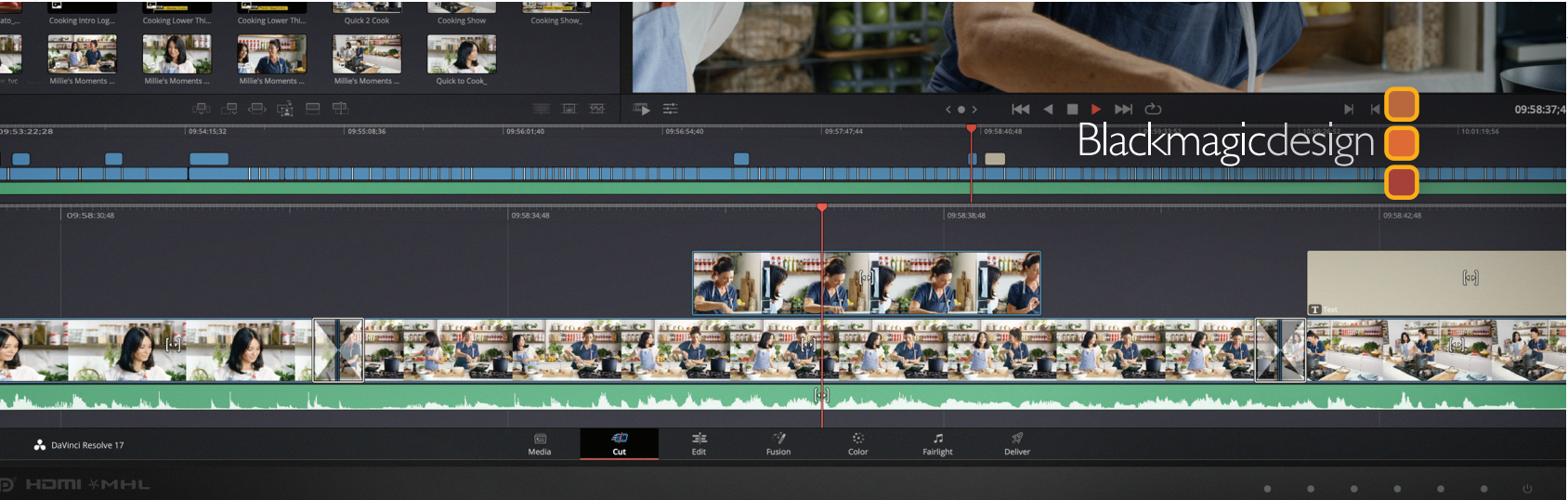
FOUR TIMES PER YEAR BY

MOVIEMAKER

P.O. BOX 91565

LONG BEACH, CA, 90809

SUBSCRIPTIONS TO MOVIEMAKER MAGAZINE:
IN U.S./CANADA, FOUR ISSUES FOR \$19.95;
EIGHT ISSUES FOR \$24.95, 12 ISSUES FOR \$34.95.
(INT'L, DIGITAL ONLY)
ANNUAL DIGITAL SUBSCRIPTIONS, REGARDLESS
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ITUNES AND GOOGLE PLAY FOR \$9.99
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Search Dial Control

The search dial is very large and has a weighted feel so it can be spun fast to move up and down the timeline quickly. However the search dial is more than this, simply press one of the trim buttons and it transforms into a large adjustment knob for real time, precise trimming! You can select various trim modes with your left hand and adjust the trim with your right.

Source Tape for Scrolling Clips

In the old days, editing using videotape had the advantage of all media being on a tape that could be scrolled up and down so you could see all your shots! Now the cut page has a modern version of the videotape called 'source tape'. Simply push the source button and use the search dial to scroll through all the media in your project! Plus, the current clip is highlighted live in the bin!

Intelligent Edit Modes

Cut page editing functions are intelligent and take advantage of the speed of a keyboard. They use the 'smart indicator' in the timeline to work out where to insert, so you don't always need to place in or out points to do an edit! Each time you edit, the cut page saves time by staying in the source tape. It's much faster as you can keep browsing, throwing clips into the timeline!

Sync Bin Multi-cam Editing

The sync bin lets you do multi-cam editing by searching through all your media and showing you any matching clips to use as cutaways. It makes multi-cam editing fast! You can select cameras simply by pressing the number on the keyboard. Or you can hold down the camera number while spinning the search dial to paint the cutaway into the timeline directly! It's so fast!

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ON THE COVER



FELICITY JONES,
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Originally from Mexico City, **CARLOS AGUILAR** was chosen as one of six young film critics to partake in the first Roger Ebert Fellowship organized by RogerEbert.com, the Sundance Institute, and *IndieWire* in 2014. Carlos' work has appeared in publications such as the *Los Angeles Times*, *Variety*, *The New York Times*, *The Wrap* and *Indiewire*. He is a member of the Los Angeles Film Critics Association (LAFCA). Read his piece on Carlos López Estrada's film *Summertime* on **p. 30**.



WYATT GARFIELD is a New York-based cinematographer from Portland, Maine. Working primarily on dramatic feature films, Wyatt has photographed a diverse range of projects in locations across the United States and Europe. His recent releases include *Give Me Liberty*, filmed in the not-so-disparate sub-communities of Milwaukee (Sundance and Cannes 2019), and *Diane* (Best Cinematography, Tribeca Film Festival 2019). Both films were nominated for multiple Independent Spirit Awards. Take a look inside his jam-packed kit for *Nine Days* on **p. 12**.



ELÉONORE HENDRICKS is an actor, photographer and casting director from New York City. She is known for her non-traditional, or "street casting," on projects like Tim Sutton's *Memphis* and *Dark Night*, Andrea Arnold's *American Honey* and HBO's *Euphoria*. She has worked with *Uncut Gems* directors Josh and Benny Safdie for over a decade as both an actor and in the casting department. She is most passionate about her work on the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota with *Songs My Brothers Taught Me*, by Chloé Zhao, and a forthcoming untitled Pine Ridge film, which was cast entirely with Lakota community members. Read Hendricks' primer on street casting on **p. 46**.



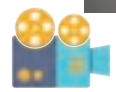
DASH SHAW is a Richmond, Virginia-based cartoonist and animator. His graphic novels include *Doctors*, *New School*, *BodyWorld*, *Bottomless Belly Button*, *Clue: Candlestick* and the forthcoming *Discipline*, from the New York Review of Comics. His feature film debut as writer-director was 2016's *My Entire High School Sinking into the Sea*. His second film, *Cryptozoo*, premiered at the 2021 Sundance Film Festival, and won awards there and at the Berlin International Film Festival. Check out his illustrated piece on the development and production of *Cryptozoo* on **p. 20**.

Welcome to *MovieMaker*...



MARGEAUX SIPPELL is an entertainment reporter and folk-pop singer-songwriter from Portsmouth, Rhode Island who has been balancing her passions for music and writing all her life. She studied literature at Emerson College and began her career in journalism working in newsrooms including *The Boston Globe*, *Variety* and *TheWrap* before landing at *MovieMaker*. Read her Flash Forward feature on rising star Emilia Jones on **p. 88** and her cover story on Felicity Jones on **p. 50**.



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STAGING 'LIMBO' AND 'REALITY'

The Nine Days cinematographer uses a Sony DSLR as a viewfinder and multi-color pens for better diagrams

BY WYATT GARFIELD



WRITER-DIRECTOR EDSON ODA imagined a rich visual logic for *Nine Days* well before I came aboard, so we were able to spend our time getting very specific about how to capture it. There are two worlds in the film: the after-life limbo in which the protagonist is trapped, and reality, which he observes through the eyes of living people by way

of televisions in his home.

The “limbo” takes place in an old house, which we shot with an ARRI ALEXA Mini with Elite Anamorphics. We wanted to feel that the house itself was subtly bending and breathing and not totally concrete, so we tested some older anamorphic glass. With Kowas and the other vintage lenses we tried, the distortion was so strong it

felt more like the viewer’s perspective was warped. Jack Allred, our camera source in Salt Lake City, suggested the Elites, which had just the right amount of character.

“Reality” was photographed with various lightweight cameras rigged to helmets and other headgear, depending on the action. We added many strange items to our kit to pull these off.



1. Sony A7S (refurbished from Adorama) w/ Metabones PL Adapter & Stockton Goods camera strap

This is the viewfinder we used on *Nine Days* and videos I did for The Lumineers. I used to rent ground-glass finders for this, but it's nice to flip back through rehearsals and show options to the director.

2. VOIGTLANDER 40mm

This lives on the A7S when it's off set. Great for scouting, rough camera tests, and photography.

3. VIGNETTES

These little donuts narrow the coverage of lenses, barreling and vignetting the image. Panavision came up with a system for swapping them out on *Beatriz at Dinner*, for which I was the DP, and camera operator David Stragmeister ran with the idea and made this colorful variety pack.

4. BOSCH BLAZE LASER TAPE

For scouting. Stage rafters may be lower than advertised!



5. BLACK JEWELER'S GLOVES

Great for fast in-camera vignettes, nightmarish abstractions, and making hands disappear in reflections. We also used these on *Mediterranea* to cover the lens and let flashes of light in for a lightning-storm effect.

6. CLEAR-COM HEADSETS

Having a direct line to the gaffer, key grip, AC, and operators makes the set a very quiet, controlled space.

7. BIC 4-COLOR PEN

AD Cedric Vara re-introduced me to these grade-school novelties. They allow you to add many more layers to diagrams before they become completely incomprehensible.

8. TV-LOGIC VFM-056WP

A familiar onboard monitor, great for its adjustable false-color. You can easily slide the colors up and down the scale to identify where a value is landing, or to set a target value.

9. OLYMPUS OM-1 with Portra 400 film

For weekend excursions.

10. Watson Adapter Plugs

Small enough to fit most EU sockets, and you can stash them anywhere.

11. SPECTRA IV

With filtration-to-ISO cheat sheet.

12. SEKONIC L-758 Cine meter

Another great meter.

13. EYELINE MARKER

I try to give actors something more interesting to look at than a piece of tape.

14. MOLESKINE JOURNAL & PLANNER

With custom Hilma af Klint exhibit cover.

15. POLISH REMEDIES

16. BAG SEALER

This was just for *Nine Days*: We used it

to seal water in cellophane candy bags and squeeze them in front of the lens to create a crying effect for POV shots.

What item can't you live without?

PL viewfinder. I really like finding frames during rehearsals, and lining up the next shot before moving equipment into position. Often the first thought is the best thought, but if you're free to hunt with a viewfinder you never know what you might find.

What do you consider an indulgence?

I wish I wasn't so dependent on coms but they really help me stay in the zone.

What's the next piece of gear you'd acquire if you could?

I'd like to try an Artemis Prime, or build out my A7S PL finder a bit more. **MM**

Nine Days opens in theaters on July 30, from Sony Pictures Classics.

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GET LOST IN THESE RECOMMENDATIONS




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AST YEAR we asked some of our favorite moviemakers, film critics and more for their summer reading recommendations. And while this summer promises to be about a million times more social than last summer, we also love using long hot days to catch up on books.

Before diving into this lengthy list, we leave you with some words of advice from cinematographer Sean Price Williams—whose book picks can also be found later in this feature:

“Enjoy this summer. Listen to Ennio Morricone’s soundtrack to *Vergogna Schifosi*. Listen to it over and over. Drink Orange wine! Bifaro is a nice bottle. And wear bright colors. Let’s live and love a lot.”





BING LIU

(DIRECTOR, *MINDING THE GAP*)

ON EARTH WE'RE BRIEFLY GORGEOUS BY OCEAN VUONG

Mesmerizing, thought-provoking and beautiful. I got a chance to meet Ocean and quickly knew I wanted to shepherd this story into film form.

THE PROPERTIES OF PERPETUAL LIGHT BY JULIAN AGUON

A collection of writing about American empire and finding oneself through language. It is full of pain, love and reframing of our place on this Earth, and what we do with it.

THE MOST FUN THING: DISPATCHES FROM A SKATEBOARD LIFE BY KYLE BEACHY



Kyle articulates what so many of my peers have felt but haven't been able to make sense of. It's a candid, funny and sometimes damning rumination on why we skateboard and the responsibilities we wield as sons, daughters, lovers, friends, filmmakers and filmed. It's a love letter to the Midwest scene and a manifesto toward post-consumerism. It's gonzo journalism and a portrait of a skater as a young man. It's the most thought-provoking writing on skateboarding I've ever read.

MICHAEL ALMEREYDA

(WRITER-DIRECTOR, *TESLA*)

THE OLD DRIFT: A NOVEL BY NAMWALI SERPELL

THE LEWIS AND CLARK JOURNALS: AN AMERICAN EPIC OF DISCOVERY BY MERIWETHER LEWIS, WILLIAM CLARK, AND MEMBERS OF THE CORPS OF DISCOVERY



Namwali Serpell's exhilarating epic novel is a group portrait set in Zambia—a vast, multi-layered, multi-generational saga constructed from a mix of historical facts, myths, and sci-fi invention. At one point Serpell defines history as “the word the English used for the record of every time a white man encountered something he had never seen and promptly claimed it as his own, often renaming it for good measure.”

It's possible to keep this in mind while still

being thrilled by the col-laged first-hand accounts documenting the Lewis and Clark expedition, chronicling an over two-years-long adventure story that jolts through a series of “difficulties, privations, and dangers,” reminding you that the territory known as the United States was once, not so long ago, unmapped by colonizers and that—you get this in Serpell's book too—human resources can be both inspired and mocked by the fierce unpredictability of the natural world.

I also recommend three exceptional recent books of film criticism:

- *The Earth Dies Streaming* by A.S. Hamrah
- *Goodbye, Dragon Inn* by Nick Pinkerton
- *The Press Gang: Writings on Cinema from New York Press, 1991-2011* by Godfrey Cheshire, Matt Zoller Seitz and Armond White



NIKOLE BECKWITH

(WRITER-DIRECTOR, *TOGETHER TOGETHER*)

and passionate, whether she is writing about herself or Maeve Brennan.

MOTHERHOOD BY SHEILA HETI

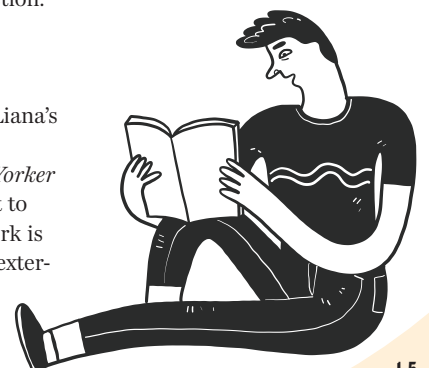
I was surprised by how taken I was with this book. Reading it felt like a sigh of relief and recognition. The book explores the crossroads of whether or not to become a mother in an unexpected way, ricocheting from one thought to the next with charged uncertainty and profound openness. I think anyone with a mother should read it, whether or not they are asking themselves that question.

nal struggle of being alive, being a person, being alone, wanting to be alone, wanting to not be alone, wanting to be yourself, wanting to be someone else, identifying your boundaries and also breaking them. A lot of her work is single panel and she communicates *so much* using just the corner of a napkin, so it is no surprise that with the space of a long-form narrative, the trip you take with her is deep.



PASSING FOR HUMAN BY LIANA FINCK

I am a huge admirer of Liana's drawings (she is an avid contributor to *The New Yorker* and her Instagram is not to be missed). All of her work is tethered to the internal/exter-





ROBERT GREENE

(DIRECTOR, *BISBEE '17*)



A few books to strengthen your spine as you try to make nonfiction art in these times:

- *9.5 Theses on Art and Class* by Ben Davis
- *Landscapes: John Berger on Art* edited

by Tom Overton

• *After Uniqueness: A History of Film and Video in Circulation* by Erika Balsom

• *Soul of the Documentary: Framing, Expression, Ethics* by Ilona Hongisto

• *Reality Hunger* by David Shields

And maybe my favorite book of all time, a work of sweeping energy, ravishing optimism and acute turmoil, about utopia and its heartbreaking impossibility:

TO THE FINLAND STATION

BY EDMUND WILSON

EUGENE KOTLYARENKO

(CO-WRITER/DIRECTOR, *SPREE*)



UNDERSTANDING MEDIA: THE EXTENSIONS OF MAN

BY MARSHALL MCLUHAN

Everything McLuhan was saying about television, movies and radio in 1964 hits 10 times harder when applied to smartphones and social media. Chapters on Narcissus as narcissis and hybridized media don't just feel like a prescient diagnosis, but seem to offer strategies on a way out of the screen-opticon we find ourselves trapped in.

ELIA KAZAN: A LIFE

An 800-page, can't-put-it-down, guilt trip through the first half of 20th century theater, film, politics and NYC. Kazan passes brutal judgment on everyone he's ever met with the observational clarity you'd expect from the director of *On the Waterfront*, *A Face in the Crowd* and one of my faves, *Wild River*. Reserving the harshest criticism for himself, he paints a clear picture of an insecure first-gen



striver with endless imposter syndrome, spending close to 100 pages alternately justifying and excoriating himself for naming names to HUAC. During our moment of casual public denunciation, going through the thought process of this notorious snitchery is fascinating.

THE KEY

BY JUN'ICHIRO TANIZAKI

The ultimate perverse relationship mystery. I revisit *The Key* every few years, trying to get a handle on how to make the definitive adaptation (outta my way Kon Ichikawa and Tinto Brass).



NATHAN SILVER

(CO-WRITER/DIRECTOR, *THE GREAT PRETENDER*)



INTERVIEWS WITH FRANCIS BACON

BY DAVID SYLVESTER

I have trouble reading books from cover to cover these days. I pick up a lot of things, take in what I can, then place them in some corner of the apartment I avoid so as not to feel bad



about leaving them unfinished. Maybe that's why this book immediately came to mind. You can open it at random, read a page or two, and come away feeling the effects for a decent chunk of time. Bacon tries to be evasive in his answers, but, happily for the reader, he's a total failure at this. He reveals himself again and again and generates that thing lacking in

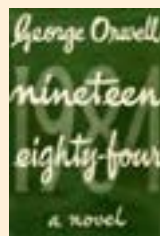
so much: empathy. If I ever own a house, I'd like to build a bookcase by the toilet, and fill it with books that pack at least one punch on every page. This is all to say: *Interviews* would hold a prime spot in my pantheon of "toilet books."

Other "Toilet Books:"

- *The Witkiewicz Reader* by Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz
- *Reza Abdoh (PAJ Books: Art + Performance)* edited by Daniel Mufson
- Anything by Kathy Acker and David Wojnarowicz

SOPHIA BANKS

(DIRECTOR, *BLACK SITE*)



1984

BY GEORGE ORWELL

1984 is my favorite book of all time and one that I feel remains relevant today, and will likely continue to be so throughout the ages. I re-read it again recently and still marvel at George Orwell.

THE FIVE C'S OF CINEMATOGRAPHY

BY JOSEPH V. MASCELLI

This was the book I read before I shot my first movie earlier this year. This has been a pivotal read for me as a director and my drive to keep learning more so I can always do my best. I recommend this book to anyone who wants to learn invaluable information about filmmaking.



WE

BY YEVGENY ZAMYATIN

This was the book Orwell read before he wrote *1984*. I just finished reading it recently. It's a fascinating take on dystopian sci-fi.

ADAM PIRON

(ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR, INDIGENOUS PROGRAM + FILM PROGRAMMER, SUNDANCE INSTITUTE)



OUR OWN IMAGE: A STORY OF A MAORI FILMMAKER

BY BARRY BARCLAY

Barry Barclay has a particular standing within the history of Indigenous cinema. His films marked a radical shift in how documentaries were being made by Indigenous filmmakers, particularly the Maori, in this case. He offers so many valuable insights in this book about his formal approaches, what worked and what didn't, and more importantly what it means for an Indigenous



artist to approach cinema in a way that's rooted from culture and community.

THE FILMS OF DORIS WISHMAN

EDITED BY PEGGY AHWESH

I've been spending a lot of time with Doris Wishman's work over the past year and I've yet to come across anything as comprehensive about her films as this zine, put together by Peggy Ahwesh, Light Industry and Inpatient Press. So much of Wishman's work feels like it's out of a fever dream, out of time and of a different dimension, that this work feels like a rare manuscript. I love this publication so much, I still keep it in the plastic covering I got it in.



GOODBYE, DRAGON INN

BY NICK PINKERTON

Nick Pinkerton's essay

on Tsai Ming-liang's 2003 film seems like it couldn't have come at a more important time. With this past year bringing up so many questions and yearning for the theatrical experience, I've been thinking a lot about both this film and this book in particular. It's been one of the more enriching and urgent reflections on the state of things, as well as their possibilities.

CHRISTINE HAROUTOUNIAN

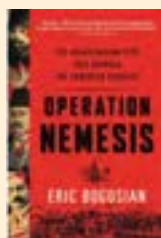
(WRITER-DIRECTOR, "WORLD")



OPERATION NEMESIS

BY ERIC BOGOSIAN

What does reconciliation look like in the face of exponential violence and injustice? *Operation Nemesis* details the covert assassination campaign led by seven avengers whose targets were the Ottoman perpetrators of the 1915 Armenian Genocide. Whether it is a refusal or admission of being superfluous within the machinery of power, Bogosian's account plays in my mind like Alan Clarke's *Elephant*.



SMILE AT FEAR: AWAKENING THE TRUE HEART OF BRAVERY

BY CHÖGYAM TRUNGPA

At the other extreme of unconditional fearlessness, Chögyam Trungpa's writing is a reminder that nonviolence can also be the warrior's way. Unhooking allows for an honest observation of the world from a place that is expansive and vivid. This is much harder in practice than theory. While Trungpa's personal struggles with addiction can be off-putting to some, he embodies how messy the process of facing oneself often is.

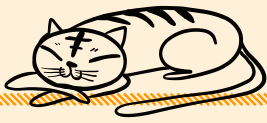


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SEAN PRICE WILLIAMS

(CINEMATOGRAPHER, *TESLA*, *GOOD TIME*)



Well, it's summertime. The seasonal excuse to accumulate books with the awesome intention to consume. Again. The piles grow. I have a new apartment. Even more room to fill. No, that's certainly not true. I have, for many years, a habit of never finishing a book. I don't feel good at all closing the final leaf. Closing the back cover. There is no satisfaction in that for me. I remember reading *The Dice Man* by George Cockcroft and just absolutely loving every bit of it, and deciding 11 pages before the end that there was no way on Earth that knowing the end could possibly make me happy. Maybe the books are like friends and I would rather just never know their final moments. I guess I won't read my own final page. So now I have a clear understanding of my laziness when it comes to tackling my stacks of books. It's a deep fear, in fact. However, let me suggest a few reads that have me currently engaged all at the same time.

**FLOWERS OF
PERVERSION,
VOLUME 2: THE
DELIRIOUS CINEMA
OF JESÚS FRANCO**
BY STEPHEN
THROWER



As a middle-aged cinephile, I have pretty much settled on who I think are worthwhile filmmakers and who are a waste of time. Overwhelmed in my early 20s by Euroslaze and sexy trashy films, I had to take some stands, just so I could prioritize time and energy. After watching about 15 films by Jess Franco, ranging from the newly discovered, newly restored, to the wretched blurry bootleg, I decided I had had enough. He was just an inept horndog. I fell off the wagon, and decided to give him another try. And now it all clicked. Franco was an absolutely liberated artist—liberated but also completely driven by pure musical impulse. Luckily, there are so many beautiful Blu-rays now of his early '80s Spanish films, which I find the most full of treasures. And they feature great interviews with Franco, usually lounging very awkwardly and smoking cigarettes. Often also featured are discussions by Stephen Thrower, who has written two brilliantly researched and enjoyable tomes on Franco. Unusually, I enjoy the second half of the career even more than the much more celebrated first half. It's

rare that a filmmaker gets better with age. So it's this second volume that I suggest.

**RUMORS OF NOIZU:
HIJOKAIDAN
AND THE ROAD TO
2ND DAMASCUS**
BY KATO DAVID
HOPKINS



Of course, I wish I had been a guitar god. Many of my heroes are guitar geniuses. Inventors. The more untraditional, the more I am in awe. And I love reading music bios and histories. I am happy to not know the facts from the fictions. A few months before Little Richard died, I read the very outrageous and wonderful biography by Charles White, called *The Life and Times of Little Richard*. Not limited to American music history, I followed it up with *Dokkiri! Japanese Indies Music 1976-1989: A History and Guide*.

It's a very lively account of exactly what the title suggests, by Kato David Hopkins. A strange and colorful writing style adds to the alien scene documented. I had been familiar with some of the music in the book, but I came away with hours and hours of downloaded material that I still gleefully digest. Hopkins followed up the book with

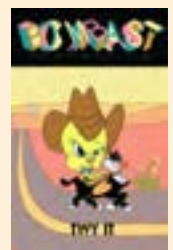
Rumors of Noizu. It's also very fun to read—and to imagine the late '70s coffee shops in Kyoto, Tokyo and Osaka where one would go just to hear a new

import record, or a brand-new underground cassette recording.

Within these scenes, a new music is born, and it is Noizu! I have been gathering up as much of the music mentioned in this book as in the previous book, but there is a difference—I am not enjoying almost any of this Noizu. The worst part of listening to these endless squeals is that I want to like it so much. In fact, I need to like it. If I don't like it, what kind of a listener am I? Do I have any real taste for the extreme? Don't I want to define myself by not just tolerance, but deep appreciation for such pure expression? I hope I live another 20 years and finally have the ears to hear.

**BOMBAST #1:
"A JOURNAL OF FILM
AND FUNNIES"**

A new zine by Nick Pinkerton, featuring art by Caroline Golum, Nathan Gelgud, Demian Johnston, Jasper Jubenvill, Owen Kline, Casey Moore, Marc Palm, Gina Telaroli and Thu Tran, along with assorted conversations.



It's a zine in spirit, though it's quite a handsome little nugget. I am eagerly anticipating this. And not because it contains a lengthy conversation between myself and Nick Pinkerton on the subject of the later films of Blake Edwards. I think this is going to be a very healthy, funny, beautiful collection of singular points of view that may challenge a very stuck film culture. Necessary. Order yourself a copy pronto.



STEVIE SZERLIP

(WRITER-DIRECTOR, "YOUNG FOREVER")

GETTING AWAY WITH IT BY STEVEN SODERBERGH

Soderbergh transcribes a career retrospective interview with the filmmaker Richard Lester, interspersing it with his own journals from the period 1996-97, as he is running out of money from writing jobs and has just finished the low-budget *Schizopolis*, which he is trying to get distribution for. It's a funny, candid and self-deprecating peek into his professional life and a great hang with both filmmakers as they make jokes and talk shop.

Also:

- **Speedboat**
by Renata Adler
- **Crome Yellow**
by Aldous Huxley



COURTNEY STEPHENS

(DIRECTOR, *TERRA FEMME*, *THE AMERICAN SECTOR*)

BASIC BLACK WITH PEARLS BY HELEN WEINZWEIG

This 1980 Canadian novel, which disappeared for 35 years, was recently republished and accurately praised as a feminist landmark. A woman must decipher the clues left for her by a shape-shifting lover, a man of international intrigue, in the pages of *National Geographic* issues, airplane freebies, and academic conference notes. She will follow these signs around the world, and to the most intimate spaces of her psyche.



SEAN DURKIN

(WRITER-DIRECTOR, *THE NEST*)

THE NEW YORKER STORIES BY ANN BEATTIE

I love this collection of short stories. I pick it up every couple of weeks and read a story when I'm in search of some inspiration. Subtle, specific, human. I find myself immediately lost in each character she depicts.

DREAM BROTHER: THE LIVES AND MUSIC OF JEFF AND TIM BUCKLEY BY DAVID BROWNE

A stunning portrait of father and son, plagued by demons, linked by tragedy, trying to communicate

THE BUENOS AIRES AFFAIR: A DETECTIVE NOVEL BY MANUEL PUIG

Wong Kar-Wai's *Happy Together* was originally conceived as an adaptation of this formally inventive Argentine novel about a closeted art critic and a one-eyed sculptress. A novel of high pulp and sexual pathos. By the time Gladys discovers her truest mode of expression—collecting jetsam and flotsam on the beach by moonlight—she is in too deep in a manufactured mystery. She channels the tragic glamour queens of Von Sternberg and Cukor as a pathway out.



THE MOVIEGOER BY WALKER PERCY

A classic novel about the search ("to become aware of the possibility of the search is to be onto something"). An adaptation of this book was proposed by Terrence Malick in the '90s but never made, and Percy similarly received training in philosophy before applying it to the Southern psyche in search of a sensibility. In the word of protagonist Binx Bolling, "Before, I wandered as a diversion. Now I wander seriously and sit and read as a diversion."



with each other through time, space and music. I have thought about this book every day since I read it.

DANCER FROM THE DANCE BY ANDREW HOLLERAN

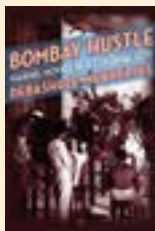
A perfect summer read: It is transporting. You feel the heat of NYC and Fire Island in the 1970s. A visceral journey to such a specific place and time. When I think back on the book, I feel it isn't something I read, but something I witnessed. Detailed, graphic, humorous, celebratory and devastating.

R. EMMET SWEENEY

(ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR OF MEDIA PRODUCTION AND OPERATIONS AT KINO LORBER)

BOMBAY HUSTLE: MAKING MOVIES IN A COLONIAL CITY BY DEBASHREE MUKHERJEE

A kaleidoscopic portrait of Bombay cinema from the 1920s-40s, offering deeply researched histories of the studios, perform-



ers, technologies, and below-the-line workers who built the infrastructure of what would become Bollywood.

LAST ORGY OF THE DIVINE HERMIT BY MARK LEYNER

Bowel-bustingly funny.

THE CORNER THAT HELD THEM BY SYLVIA TOWNSEND WARNER

Crack some cold ones and read this one-of-a-kind, centuries-long epic, in which a rotating cast of bickering nuns survive the Black Death along with the daily annoyances of living.



ORNETTE COLEMAN: THE TERRITORY AND THE ADVENTURE BY MARIA GOLIA

Not a traditional biography, but offers an expansive look at the aural landscape and cultural milieu that nurtured Coleman's young genius in Fort Worth, Texas and beyond. **MM**

How They Did It

a whole zoo world

CRYPTOZOO writer-director Dash Shaw on '60s underground newspapers, GOOGLE spreadsheets as marriage mediator, and the "beholder's share"

By Dash Shaw



CRYPTOZOO IS AN ANIMATED FILM about a 1960s zoo that rescues and houses mythological beings a.k.a. "cryptids." It was inspired by a few different things. One was an interest in drawing as our first and only way of seeing imaginary beings. Cryptids cannot be photographed. Drawing is a direct circuit to imagination. My wife Jane, who painted most of the cryptids in the movie, ran an all-women's Dungeons & Dragons group in Brooklyn. I wanted to write something she would enjoy contributing to, and I think that inspired the mostly female cast of the movie. When she had the D&D group, it was when I had a fellowship at the New York Public Library and one of the other fellows there was researching countercultural newspapers of the 1960s from around the world, which the NYPL had an amazing archive of. Those inspired the 1960s timeframe.

1. The script

My first movie, *My Entire High School Sinking into the Sea*, I wrote assuming I wouldn't get any good actors. That dictated the main dissonance in the movie, which is that while it's a disaster movie, the characters remain talking about school and mundane things.

I thought that might work if it was just recorded with my friends. But, wonderfully, I ended up getting great actors in that movie. So, when it came time to do *Cryptozoo*, I wanted to write more nuanced, specific parts. I wanted to write something more complicated—morally, emotionally and technically—than my first movie, while still having the pop art sensibility.

2. The storyboards into the computer

Jane, the animation director, created a Google spreadsheet that saved the film (and our marriage). Instead of arguing with each other face-to-face, we'd type our notes into the Google sheet under the appropriate asset. Every shot and every asset had a line with specific stages that interns or assistants would write their name into as they completed it, so we would know exactly who





Illustration by Sam Barsky & Shaw

to blame if something went wrong.

3. The voice recordings

None of the characters look exactly like the actors, but I tried to take some spiritual element or sideways inspiration. Lake Bell, who plays Lauren, is a perfect example. Her voice and appearance suggested she could have been a Pre-Raphaelite woman. The Dante Gabriel Rossetti paintings of

Jane Morris are iconic, on every teen girl's bedroom wall, but I had never seen that look in a film before.

4. The music

The films *Cryptozoo* I hope is in the lineage of, like *Akira* and *Fantastic Planet*, all have really surprising, original scores—a magical friction between sound and image. I called the label Jagjaguwar and the first person

they recommended was John Carroll Kirby. I had never heard of him before, but I listened to his album *Travel* and fell in love. He was perfect for *Cryptozoo*. Years later, when the project was ready for him, he'd made more albums and become more well-known. He had never scored a film before. We only got him because his tours had been canceled due to the pandemic. He was quarantined at home, so he scored *Cryptozoo*.

5. The edit

I think of my films as large collages. Collage is like directing, in that you're orchestrating different elements to arrive at one unified composition. The goal is to find interesting arrangements, harmonies or juxtapositions between everything—the story, characters, and the formal properties. Alex Abrahams and Lance Edmands, the *Cryptozoo* editors, are key collaborators. Often the pieces I give them feel flat, like storyboards or video game playthroughs, and with their magic wand they turn it into cinema, a felt time-based experience. The best feeling is when inspiration strikes and an element that shouldn't work, does. A familiar object is placed into a new context and its meaning changes.

6. Showing the film

I believe in the "beholder's share," the idea that an art piece is ultimately completed in the viewer's mind. I definitely feel this when a film plays in different places in different contexts. I did the best I could to provide my contribution, and I hand it over to the viewer, to be completed in their time and place, which is different from the time and place I made it in. I have to accept this exchange, and trust, respect, and even love the viewer—strangers I do not know! They outnumber me and are more powerful than me! *mm*

Cryptozoo opens in theaters and on demand on August 20, from Magnolia Pictures.

A woman with dark hair, wearing a light-colored button-down shirt, blue jeans, and brown boots, is walking towards the camera on a paved, winding road. The background is filled with lush green trees and a clear blue sky. In the distance, the Griffith Observatory is visible on a hill. The title 'NOT WITH A BANG' is overlaid on the image. 'NOT' and 'WITH' are in large, white, outlined capital letters. 'A' is also in white outline, while 'BANG' is in large, bold, red capital letters with a white outline.

NOT WITH A BANG

How It Ends, by Zoe Lister-Jones and Daryl Wein, imagines a very L.A. approach to the apocalypse

BY ZOE LISTER-JONES
AS TOLD TO TIM MOLLOY

A

*LMOST ALL OF US spent a lot of the last year thinking about mortality and time. Our nostalgia for carefree, maskless days in the company of strangers commingled with our hopes for a better future, spiked by the panic or calm—but most of all uncertainty—that filled the present. Zoe Lister-Jones and Daryl Wein plumbed and heightened all of these emotions for *How It Ends*, in which Lister-Jones plays a woman named Liza who spends the last day of humanity wandering some of L.A.'s lovelier neighborhoods with her inner child (Cailee Spaeny, who is best known for her tragic turn as Erin McMenamin in *Mare of Easttown* and stars in Lister-Jones' upcoming *The Craft: Legacy*). As an asteroid nears, Liza and Inner Child encounter a series of curious personalities played by a murderers' row of comic actors, from Whitney Cummings to Fred Armisen to Olivia Wilde to... let's stop listing names, because one of the joys of the movie is seeing who will appear next. In the piece below, Lister-Jones talks about shooting a movie in the spring and summer of 2020 that addressed what everyone was feeling, but wasn't about the pandemic. She and Wein wrote, produced and directed *How It Ends*, which debuted at the Sundance Film Festival.*

Daryl and I tend to process our feelings through our work. And we were doing a lot of inner-child work in our respective virtual therapy sessions, because a lot was coming up. As we were being forced to face our most vulnerable selves, and trying to figure out how to speak to those inner children who are needing a lot of assurance, we were also feeling a lot of despair and hopelessness and concern over the future of filmmaking. We just didn't know when we would be able to get back into the creative sort of spirit in that way.

Our inner children are always looking to be heard when it comes to their fears and their sense of safety, whatever that means for each person. It's so much about what we weren't able to express—or if what we *did* express as children wasn't really received or responded to by those taking care of us. We sort of have to—no shade to our parents—but reparent those inner children ourselves, as adults. And what does that look like? And what does that look like in the context of this apocalyptic landscape?

We didn't want to make a film that was centered in the pandemic, literally, but we were interested in exploring the emotional landscape that we were living in, in an adjacent manner. So the last day on Earth felt pretty resonant. I think the Trump presidency felt like a slow burn to the end of humanity every day. I don't think any of us can really even fathom unpacking the last four years. We're just at the

beginning of understanding what traumas our psyches have endured from that experience. Whether or not the world was ending, it felt like democracy might be ending, and that we might be entering something that none of us had ever faced in our lifetimes in this country.

That in combination with, obviously, a global pandemic, felt apocalyptic. I think the reason why we wanted to make a film that was sort of playing with the banality of the apocalypse was because every time you see the apocalypse portrayed in cinema, it's violent mayhem. And I think what was interesting to us about the sort of apocalypse occurring in real life was that the world felt like it was ending, but we were watching Netflix in sweatpants.

I chose Cailee Spaeny to play my character's inner child after we met on *The Craft: Legacy*, which we had shot over the fall of 2019. For that story I wrote a sort of revamp of the original, and infused it with a lot of my own personal, adolescent narrative. So in a sense, Cailee was already playing my teenage self. And I think filming that for both of us was really transformative and cemented a very deep friendship between us, in addition to a creative collaboration. We had very different upbringings, but I think that on a soul level we're really similar people, in many ways.

And then when quarantine began, she was in L.A., and so we were going on a lot of socially



ZOE LISTER-JONES GOES
FOR A WALK ON
THE LAST DAY OF
HUMANITY IN *HOW IT ENDS*



CAILEE SPAENY PLAYS INNER CHILD TO ZOE LISTER-JONES' CHARACTER, LIZA

distanced walks. We became a part of a pod. And we were both dealing a lot with our inner children, having nothing to do with the work we had done on *The Craft*. And so it was very organic. I mean, I would work with her on anything—she's such a brilliant actor. And having worked with her on *The Craft*, it was clear that she would be one of my players forever as a director, and this was a great opportunity for us to then also be able to act opposite one another, in addition to me being able to direct her. It was really a dreamy collaboration and one that happened quite naturally.

In the content that Daryl and I were looking to consume, we were looking for things that could make us laugh but could make us feel as well. That's such a specific Venn diagram. We're always really excited when we can make films that can navigate both humor and meaning or poignancy. As human beings, it was important for us to try to be playful, even though it felt so anathema to what we were going through.

When we reached out to our friends who co-starred in the film with me, almost all of them hadn't been in front of the camera yet during quarantine. And there was some concern with some of our actors: "I don't know that I can show up and be funny right now." And these are some of the greatest comic actors of my generation. So it was an interesting challenge. For me to say, "I can

still show up and do my job, I can have a sense of play in a very bleak and harrowing time"—for me at least, it really was a lifeline.

The beauty of the conceit was that you could show up wherever you were emotionally on that day. If you were in a deep state of depression and despair, then that's what your character is.

We shot some people in their actual backyards, and then other people in friend's



backyards that we could enter through a side gate. It was all dependent on each actor's comfort level.

Daryl and I started by making distinctly New York films. And then we moved to L.A. I think it's a love letter and commentary on the beauty and also ridiculous nature of being an Angeleno. Everyone is trying to be the best version of themselves, which felt resonant for us, because I think that quarantine, amongst many things, obviously

put the importance of human connection into hyper focus. When you would talk to people there was a different attention to the way friendships were valued or communication was valued. There was more tenderness, I think, and so we were looking to play with that a little bit—and also make fun of it, because there's a lot of misguided tenderness. Bradley Whitford's character is really trying to connect, but is just too narcissistic to do so successfully.

I'm very grateful that it feels like there's some light at the end of the tunnel, with the vaccines and witnessing the world open up a little bit more. I hope that it fades a little bit more into a memory rather than such an intense and destabilizing present. The film does serve as a time capsule, for me personally, in a way that's very meaningful. And it doesn't feel like the distant past. But I think it serves as a nice reminder of some of the lessons that we learned and are continuing to learn.

The film asks: What do you do if you have one day? I think that was a heightened version of a larger tenet of the year: What is important to you? For so many of us, work and the hustle is at the forefront of our identities. And I think, for me at least, the last year and a half really forced me to face that. Who am I outside of the hustle? Who am I outside of just constantly grinding to get to that next milestone in my career?

And do I prioritize life in the same way?

Making the film was interesting in that way, because it was work, but it was also sort of experimental on a spiritual level—a sort of cathartic enterprise by design. It's already stressful making independent films, but adding a pandemic to the mix was just an added set of challenges. But we were really light on our feet in terms of our crew, and Daryl and I were wearing so many hats, we were in a very intimate emotional space where we could explore

things that we maybe wouldn't on a more conventional set.

And as Daryl mentioned at one point, other movies would pay gazillions of dollars to clear L.A. of cars. So we had this singular opportunity to capture a sort of apocalyptic landscape IRL. **MM**

How It Ends opens in theaters on July 20, from United Artists.

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'THE HUMAN SPECIES IS ON A REALLY DANGEROUS PATH'



NATHALIE BOLTT
IN *DEMONIC*

THERE WAS A PERIOD early in the pandemic when directors Neill Blomkamp and Ben Wheatley wondered if they might not have jobs anymore. At least not in film.

"You know, my new job might be riding around on a motorbike looking for gasoline," says Wheatley, whose films include *Kill List* and *High-Rise*.

"Like *Mad Max*," replies Blomkamp, whose work includes *District 9* and *Elysium*.

Both Wheatley and Blomkamp responded to the possibility that the film industry might be snuffed out... by making films. Wheatley's *In the Earth*, which he wrote and directed, takes place largely outdoors, a concession and response to COVID-19. The pandemic-set horror movie follows a scientist (Joel Fry) who ventures into the woods with a park ranger (Ellora Torchia) in search of a colleague.

Blomkamp's *Demonic*, his first feature film since 2015's *Chappie*, is about a woman (Carly Pope) who is able to communicate with her murderous mother (Nathalie Boltt) through extraordinary new technology. The film uses an optimal technology called volumetric capture that is similar to LIDAR (light detection and ranging) to illustrate the virtual, eerily realistic world where they meet. Blomkamp did it through Unity, a platform by Unity

A conversation between Neill Blomkamp and Ben Wheatley about predicting the future

BY TIM MOLLOY

Technologies often used to develop video games, and Wheatley sees it as an extension to the "bullet-time" of *The Matrix*.

Wheatley, who is British, and Blomkamp, who moved to Canada from his native South Africa, are thrilled by how technology can aid filmmaking—but afraid of how it may divide our world. Both are wary of the smooth-edged future promised in Apple ads. Their mix of excitement and apprehension is captured by the blend of sci-fi and horror in the films they shot during the pandemic, and comes out very quickly when they begin

talking shop. The Zoom conversation that follows covers everything from the speculative fiction of Neal Stephenson to Archillect, an A.I. that seeks out visually stimulating content. At the moment of this writing, its Twitter account has just posted text about the 1988 animated cyberpunk film *Akira*—another subject that Wheatley and Blomkamp reference.

We began the talk by asking about actor Sharlto Copley, who has appeared in every Blomkamp feature except *Demonic* and was a star of Wheatley's 2016 shootout drama *Free Fire*.

MOVIEMAKER: I was hoping you both could start by saying how you know each other. Is it through Sharlto Copley? The internet?

BEN WHEATLEY: It was a happier time on the internet, where you could actually talk to people, where you could just reach out and go, "Hey, yeah, what's going on?" And then they'd respond. Instead of the madness that it is now you know. I basically hide from it.

NEILL BLOMKAMP: I'd actually seen some of your viral stuff before, like the guy jumping over the car. ... and then my favorite thing ever, which is the guy trying to catch the axe in his mouth.

WHEATLEY: When *District 9* came out, I was almost paralyzed with nerves going into it, because it felt like it had the ingredients of everything I wanted to see. And I was like, fine, if it's no good, this is gonna be terrible.

And it was just like, “Fucking amazing. There you go. That’s sci-fi reset.”

It’s an odd one, because you look at effects stuff at the time, and then you look at effects stuff afterwards, and it’s still not as good. When the mech suit turned up in *District 9*, I thought, “They’re never gonna be able to pull this off.” And it’s totally seamless.

BLOMKAMP: You’ve spoken about almost making the camera a character in a scene.

The way that I always thought of it was, “How do you go about trying to

emulate pure reality? What is the closest thing you can get to reality?” Because my favorite form of science fiction or fantasy would be something that would fool me into believing it was real. And so that was the goal. It was always to take away this thing where you put expensive computer graphics on a pedestal, and light it perfectly—really what you’re doing when you do that is you’re just telling the audience that this is synthetic.

WHEATLEY: Exactly. And also, if you put any kind of impossible camerawork into it as well, that immediately tells the audience it isn’t real. The grounding of all those things is super important. When I look at *Elysium*, and look at the compositing in that and the extensions of the factories and stuff, there’s no question what that is. It feels like it’s totally

real. And I remember looking at the “making of” stuff going, “Oh, man, hardly any of it’s real.” When you look at other stuff that’s from the same period, it still looks fake-ass. I was looking at something the other day, a big movie recently, just going, “None of this looks fucking real at all, even though they’ve spent billions on it to make it look right.” As soon as you allow the audience a second to have that gap between them and the reality, they’ll pick it apart completely.

BLOMKAMP: But then on the flip side, audiences seem to really love stuff that has that kind of spectacle in it. I mean, it’s really interesting. For my own personal taste, the more grounded and real it feels, the better.

WHEATLEY: It’s a thing about horror as well. I started to learn that terrifying people and horror films are two different things. A lot of horror stories, people want to see because they know what’s going to happen. Which seems to me to contradict the whole idea, which is the surprise and the mystery. There are almost two streams of the

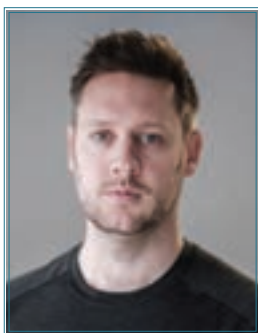
horror genre happening at the same time, one in which you don’t know where you’re going, and one where you completely know where you’re going. And you get cross when you don’t go there.

BLOMKAMP: You get irritated when, like, the third act doesn’t play out the way that you expect.

WHEATLEY: I went back and watched a lot of movies I

“
The constraints
of our traditional
narrative
are evident
everywhere
you look.”

— NEILL BLOMKAMP





3

A SCENE FROM *DEMONIC* USING
VOLUMETRIC CAPTURE

didn't like that much from 10 years ago. And I found I really liked them. And I was like, "Oh, what's that all about? It's bizarre. Have I changed that much?" But I think it was the tyranny of narrative when I watched it. You have that conversation with the screen as you watch something, and if it doesn't go the way you want it, you get cross. But when you know what the story is, that whole pressure goes away, and you can enjoy it for exactly what it is.

BLOMKAMP: The constraints of our traditional narrative are evident everywhere you look. I think studios are just really nervous to finance anything that doesn't sort of fit into that three-act, reasonably traditional framework. And then the audience is so weaned on it now as well. But if you do deviate from it, it irritates them. And then as time goes on you probably soften and warm up to it.

WHEATLEY: But it's all sorts of stuff going on at the same time, isn't it? Because at the same time that they're saying that people's attention spans are getting shorter, they're also watching longer and longer forms of entertainment.

The kind of sci-fi that you're doing, it seems to connect to the original *Akira*, and there's strands of Cronenberg—both David and Brandon—and then Shane Carruth, and then weirdly kind of *Half-Life*, the game. And then this thing I found on Twitter called Archillect.

BLOMKAMP: Yeah, that's a really interesting Twitter account.

WHEATLEY: There's an aesthetic there, a grouping. And also I guess I would put into that kind of pattern recognition William Gibson, and *Snow Crash* by Neal Stephenson. It seems like there's a strand of work that everyone's doing that is aside from the mainstream's idea of what the future looks like, which is a kind of a weird spangly ample future. And then there's this kind of Philip K. Dick, cobbled-together-technology future.

BLOMKAMP: I definitely feel a lot more aligned with someone like Philip K. Dick than I do with any kind of Apple-related future. *Akira* is a really interesting reference. I saw it when I was relatively old, when I'd moved to Canada from South Africa. And it was one of the first ones I saw when I got here, which would have been like 1998. So it didn't have an influence on me when I was



“

I started to learn that terrifying people and horror films are two different things.” — BEN WHEATLEY

younger, but it definitely is extremely interesting. And I've always sort of referenced it since then. But I think Cronenberg, in terms of body horror, and the idea of this idea of transformation, or this Kafkaesque kind of metamorphosis, is something that I definitely feel like I share with him. I actually haven't read any Neal Stephenson, interestingly. I just read *Blindsight* by Peter Watts. I totally loved that novel.

WHEATLEY: *Snow Crash* is really interesting to me. I read it when it came out in the late '90s, and why I mention it is because it's proper predictive science fiction. Everything I read in

Snow Crash came true. ... *The Diamond Age*, which is the second book he wrote after *Snow Crash*, is more terrifying, because it's all nanotechnology and stuff. And if that all comes true, then we're truly fucked.

BLOMKAMP: Generally, if you go away from the Apple version—and I don't know whether I'm naturally pessimistic or not—but I think that the human species is on a really dangerous path. And it's not really like something that we have control over. I

mean, it's just, you know, some force, net, you know, cycle of, of survival of the fittest. But I don't see a lot of good outcomes for the way that we're going. And I think a lot of sci-fi authors are just similar in the way that they look at that. So as emerging technology comes up, it's like a layer of complexity that just keeps getting added. And the complexity just keeps increasing. It makes it harder to predict. But you also know that pretty much any version is going to be quite an intense outcome, no matter how you cut it.

WHEATLEY: I feel it a lot more thanks to COVID and the lockdown. I think that the dislocation was so massive, and also because we went into COVID with this whole thing of a project to break the idea of truth, once we were kind of shucked off the side of the cliff of reality and were adrift—and add to that a year of sitting indoors—everything seems very strange. It's almost like a complete reset for everything. And I started looking at the kind of patterns that people were

making, in terms of politics. It seemed much more abstract than it did before. Before there seemed to be meaning to it, but now it just seems like humans are more like a shape than they are distinct groups of individuals.

BLOMKAMP: *In the Earth* was clearly a reaction to the pandemic.

WHEATLEY: I started writing it within the first week of the lockdown. I don't know how you felt, but I felt like I might have retired—or been forced into retirement—within that first couple of days. I sort of

TOP: COURTESY OF IFC FILMS

thought, there's no job for me anymore. ... I was gonna get a mohawk and then get my crossbow out. It felt like it was the end of my job.

BLOMKAMP: I don't disagree with that. I definitely felt, when things were at a fever pitch, it wasn't really clear exactly what path the film industry or entertainment at large would take. I think *Demonic* was slightly a symptom of that in the sense that I just wanted to shoot something that I knew I was able to do, because it was mostly self-financed. ... And then AGC Studios came on board and kind of doubled our self-financed budget. So we

we gather from an actor onto a 3-D avatar, this process was really turning the video files from multiple cameras into geometry. Which is like LIDAR, like you said. It's 24 frames per second of individual bespoke pieces of geometry, with textures on them.

WHEATLEY: It's the next step from bullet time, basically.

BLOMKAMP: It's like motion bullet time.

WHEATLEY: What was super smart is that it's a kind of a unique, blobby look that you get from that scan, but to



had a bit more cash. But the computer-graphic simulation stuff was always there. We just moved into being able to shoot it more narratively in a traditional sense. It was less found footage as an approach. Yeah. But it still is one-thirtieth or one-fifteenth the size of the other films I've done.

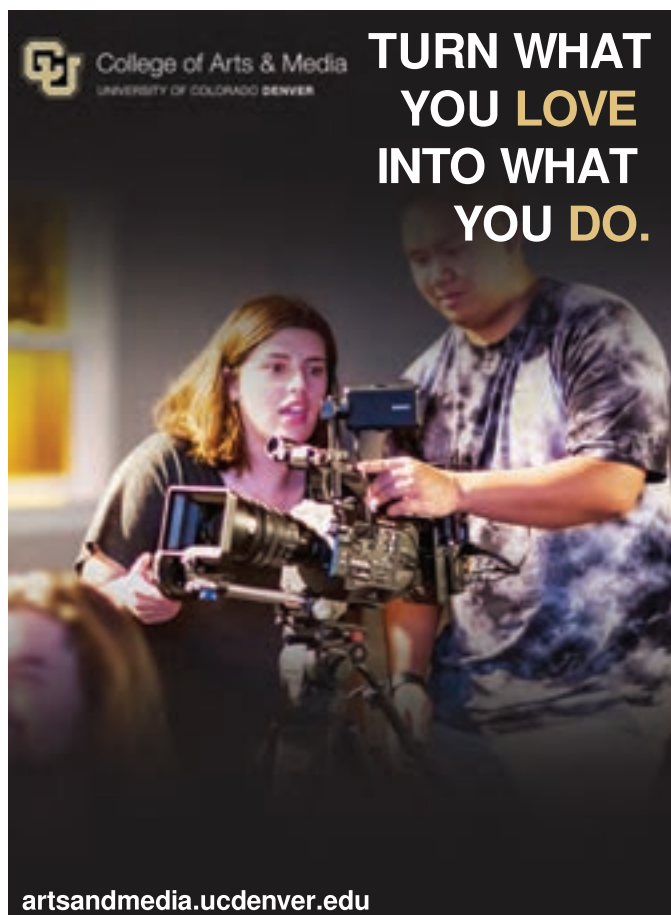
WHEATLEY: The computer graphics stuff looked like LIDAR stuff?

BLOMKAMP: It's volumetric capture. I haven't actually seen that in another film yet, which is kind of cool. ... It was created in Unity, actually. The system of capture was highly unique. Instead of motion capture, where you're assigning the motion or facial capture that

make it as part of the story, then suddenly you can use it without a lot of cleanup and sorting out.

BLOMKAMP: I don't think that volumetric capture is at the point that you could use it unless narratively it was justified—in a way that it felt like some sort of low-resolution world that you were going into. So there almost is no other way to use it. I think you'll see it everywhere in films 10 years from now, but that will be at the point that individual hair strands are visible. **MM**

Demonic opens in theaters and on VOD on August 20, from IFC Midnight. In the Earth was released in April by NEON.



A photograph of Carlos López Estrada, a Black man with a large afro, wearing a blue and white striped shirt. He is smiling and holding up a burger wrapped in clear plastic. The background is a stylized, colorful mural.

 TYRIS WINTER DISPLAYS A BURGER IN *SUMMERTIME*

Carlos López Estrada listens
to the voices of his city

SUMMERTIME

THE BOLDNESS OF *BLINDSPOTTING*, an electric dramedy exploring race and gentrification in Oakland, gained director Carlos López Estrada considerable industry attention. But as the promotional cycle for that summer 2018 film came to an end, the long-time music video director couldn't find anything that excited him as intensely as his feature debut had. Though he didn't pen *Blindspotting*, the creative camaraderie he developed with writers and stars Daveed Diggs and Rafael Casal made it profoundly personal for him.

"I knew that unless I found something that I could feel equally as passionate about, I just wouldn't want to engage in it," López Estrada tells *MovieMaker*.

During his inspiration drought, López Estrada received an invitation to a spoken word showcase put on by the non-profit organization Get Lit-Words Ignite that was held in Los Angeles' Koreatown. For nearly two hours, he listened to a diverse group of young artists talk about themselves and their varied communities. It all landed with a ravishing force.

López Estrada soon presented Diane Luby Lane, the director of the organization, with a plan for the poets to work on a narrative film. The idea was to workshop the movie with the poets rather than writing a script and having them act in it. The appropriately titled outcome, *Summertime*, premiered at Sundance 2020.

Similar in concept to an omnibus film, López Estrada's sophomore endeavor consists of several segments. The twist is that instead of multiple directors, it has multiple writer-performers at the helm.

"We would be working on the script together. Each of them would write and star in their own individual scenes and then together, through the summer workshop, we would

A photograph of Bryce Banks and Austin Antoine in a recording studio. Bryce Banks is on the left, wearing headphones and looking up. Austin Antoine is on the right, wearing a hat and headphones, holding a microphone to his mouth.

 BRYCE BANKS AND AUSTIN ANTOINE IN THE STUDIO IN *SUMMERTIME*

figure out how to piece all of these elements together into a bigger through line. That's what happened for the next four or five months. That's how we spent our summer of 2019," he explains.

Every segment was filmed on location in a different corner of L.A., and the film's behind-the-scenes philosophy hinged on a small crew that made the smallest possible production footprint. Using limited lighting equipment, the filmmakers shot as unobtrusively as possible in

because of its economical dynamic in place: less people and tools to transport and set up.

One exception to that mantra was a musical number involving 35 choreographed dancers. The production shut down a street with police cars and used multiple cameras to capture a set piece centered on an iron-willed Latina. The



OUTSIDE THE UNITED ARTISTS THEATRE IN L.A.

relationship.

López Estrada recalls this being the most delicate moment, because Babers, in her first cinematic appearance, wasn't playing a character, but

sharing her truth. She accesses painful passages of her past in order to finally let them go. But to do it so publicly and on camera was uniquely liberating.

"I remember after we shot that scene, she had this huge smile on her face and was really breathing heavy," López Estrada says. "You could tell that she had just found some closure that she had been looking for. That made us realize the movie had that power to heal. That was a special day."

The director admits he's had a complicated history with L.A., a beautiful sprawl that he hadn't fully appreciated, despite calling it home for a long time. The creative circles he joined when he moved to L.A. after film school painted his relationship with the city. His network, made up of fellow filmmakers trying to

IN LOS ANGELES

BY CARLOS AGUILAR

A LARGE MUSICAL NUMBER IN SUMMERTIME EMPLOYED 35 DANCERS



restaurants, businesses, homes, and on the street.

"We designed the production of the movie knowing that this was going to resemble a documentary shoot in the sense that we were going to be nimble. We were going to leave room for discovery," he notes.

That meant a willingness to reassess if someone became excited by a specific location, for example, as the collaborators brought each stirring story to life. Such improvisation was possible

day before, the production had consisted of shooting inside a small house with just two people.

Sequences criss-cross the West Coast metropolis from the beach to downtown to the southeast as we follow LGBTQ+ youth, two burgeoning rappers, a multi-faceted Latino, or a fast food worker who's had enough of his job. The emotional showstopper is delivered by Marquesha Babers, a young Black woman reciting raw memories of a traumatic

"I FELL IN LOVE WITH L.A. THROUGH MY EXPERIENCE ON SUMMERTIME."

— CARLOS LÓPEZ ESTRADA



OLYMPIA MICCIO SKATES ON THE VENICE PIER

make a name for themselves, was exciting but homogenous. The poets reshaped his experience.

"In meeting these poets, getting to go to all their neighborhoods with them, getting to meet their families, eat their foods, and understand their stories, I feel like for the first time since I lived here, which is over 10 years, I really got to understand the breadth of the city and see it under different lights. I fell in love with L.A. through my experience on *Summertime*," he explains.

López Estrada made sure the structure of this lyrical anthology is close to his experience of that first Koreatown spoken-word event: About every three minutes a new person comes on screen and the audience gets to hear a new story. And the film's visual style, tone, and pacing morphs to adapt to each new narrator.

"The images that each of the poets brought into our head were completely different, and the entire personality of the performance changed," he notes.



RAYA AND THE LAST DRAGON STAR KELLY MARIE TRAN AND LÓPEZ ESTRADA



**"I'LL
PROBABLY
WANT TO
CONTINUE TO
EXPLORE WAYS
TO INCORPORATE
SPOKEN
WORD IN MY
WORK BECAUSE
IT'S GIVEN ME
SO MUCH."**

— CARLOS LÓPEZ ESTRADA

Some chapters are more musically driven than the rest; others offer broad humor that contrasts with the more moving sections. The languages spoken include English, Spanish and Korean.

López Estrada was mostly unfamiliar with the intricacies of spoken word until he became exposed to them through his

friendship with Diggs: The director shot a series of bold videos for the *Hamilton* star's experimental hip-hop trio, clipping. But López Estrada now recognizes a quality to spoken word that speaks directly to his ambitions as an artist. Chatting with George Watsky, a spoken word poet he's known for quite some time, the director made sense of it.

"He said, 'Seeing your work and seeing the kinds of stories that you gravitate towards the most, I think that spoken word became an important tool in your journey because it's about finding the deepest truth behind someone.' That really spoke to me because it's true," shares López Estrada.

In working with these poets, whose work involves looking inward and being vulnerable, he found kindred spirits. And even though he doesn't consider himself a poet, his lifelong fascination with music and music videos—he grew up on a hefty diet of MTV—has made spoken word feel like a language inherent to him.



He had previously worked in the medium, most notably on a stop-motion music video that earned him a Latin Grammy, but in a truly independent manner with friends and insignificant resources. Now he was in charge of 500 people and a massive studio budget. It was a major and daunting departure from anything he'd done.

Understandably, there was initial trepidation that he would have no

“The musicality of spoken word, the lyrical nature of the discipline, the fact it uses metaphors, descriptive images and heightened speech to communicate ideas, related to what I was doing in music videos. I was trying to find lyrical and representative ideas to communicate whatever the music was making me think or feel. I’ll probably want to continue to explore ways to incorporate spoken word in my work because it’s given me so much,” he says.



**CARLOS LÓPEZ ESTRADA
AND HIS *SUMMERTIME* CAST
AT SUNDANCE 2020**



To follow up *Summertime*, López Estrada took yet another surprising career swing by becoming one of the co-directors of the Southeast Asian-inspired Disney animated feature *Raya and the Last Dragon*, released in March.

agency making a film intended for broad appeal. But even in the format of a family-oriented Disney animation blockbuster, and the parameters involved in making a movie meant to captivate a global audience, he maintained enough control to create something that genuinely thrilled him.

“I really value my independence and I really value exploring my voice and feeling like I can be artful with the work that I do,” he concludes. **MM**

Summertime opens in theaters on July 9, from Good Deed Entertainment.



INSIDE A LIMOUSINE IN *SUMMERTIME*



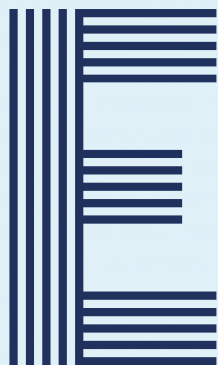


IN THE WORLD 2021

Let's get ready
to normalize

BY MM EDITORS

ILLUSTRATIONS BY MOVIE MAKER/SHUTTERSTOCK; RIGHT: PHOTO BY DANIEL JACKSON



EACH YEAR WHEN WE COMPILE this list, we try to come up with a fresh angle. We always ask: What makes this year new and different?

This time, we have to admit, it's kind of easy to say what's changed.

"We're gonna be licking doorknobs and hugging, with permission," Dan Brawley, the "chief instigating officer" of the Cocalorus Film Festival, one of the coolest of our 25 Coolest Film Festivals in the World of 2021.

We've all been waiting for what feels like a very long time to look up at big screens together, to laugh together, to listen to loud, live music in a crowd. And now the fully vaxxed among us finally can. Even unmasked, pending local rules, regulations, and reading the room.

Not everyone is as fortunate as much of the United States is at the moment. But we're grateful to be back to enjoying

film festivals, one of life's greatest pleasures, one we feared might be gone for years, and one that some of us even feared could disappear forever.

Let's celebrate.

For the festivals still in purely virtual mode: We're grateful cinema still gives us a way to connect, and love. We can't wait to hug you soon. With permission.

2021 PANEL OF COOL



NATALIA ALMADA received the 2012 MacArthur Genius Award and the 2021 Sundance Documentary Directing award for her most recent film, *Users*. She combines artistic expression with social inquiry to make films that are both personal reflections and critical social commentaries. Her directing credits include *Al Otro Lado*, *El General*, *El Velador*, and her narrative feature *Todo lo demás*. She lives in Mexico City and San Francisco.



GINA DUNCAN, producing director at the Sundance Institute, integrates the artistic vision of the festival with its practical elements—and manages year-round programming and engagement among the industry and artist communities. Duncan previously served as vice president of Film and Strategic Programming at the Brooklyn Academy of Music and was director of Industry Engagement and Special Programs at the Jacob Burns Film Center.



SHABIER KIRCHNER was born and raised in Antigua and Barbuda, travels the world as a cinematographer, and was one of *Variety's* 10 Cinematographers to Watch in 2018. Kirchner works on features and TV shows—including Steve McQueen's *Small Axe*, *Bull*, *Only You*, *Skate Kitchen* and *Sollers Point*—as well as on commercials and music videos. He also shoots his own works at home. "Dadli" is Shabier's first work as director-cinematographer.



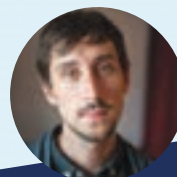
ANJA MARQUARDT is a film and television writer and director with a focus on global stories. She is currently wrapping Season 3 of the anthology series *The Girlfriend Experience* for Starz. Marquardt wrote and directed all ten episodes and is the season three creator. Her first feature film, *She's Lost Control*, premiered at the Berlin International Film Festival, where it won the CICA Award. An alumna of Berlin University of the Arts and NYU's Graduate Film Program, Marquardt currently resides in Venice, California.



JANE SCHOENBRUN (they/she) is a non-binary filmmaker whose first narrative feature, *We're All Going to the World's Fair*, premiered at the 2021 Sundance Film Festival. The film will be released soon in theaters by Utopia and then made available for streaming via HBO Max. Jane's projects include co-creating the touring variety series *The Eyeslicer*, creating the Radical Film Fair, directing *A Self-Induced Hallucination*, producing Aaron Schimberg's *Chained for Life*, and creating the omnibus "dream film" collective: *unconscious*.



JIAYAN "JENNY" SHI is a Chicago-based documentary filmmaker who is passionate about stories that find shared humanity and compassion. Her debut documentary *Finding Yingying*, released by MTV Documentary Films, won Special Jury Recognition for Breakthrough Voice at the 2020 SXSW Film Festival. Jenny is a graduate of Kartemquin's Diverse Voices In Docs program, a TFI Network alum, a fellow of the Inaugural Women at Sundance Adobe Fellowship, and a DOC NYC "40 Under 40" filmmaker.



TYLER TAORMINA is a film director based in Los Angeles whose debut feature *Ham on Rye* premiered at the Locarno Film Festival and went on to receive critical acclaim, landing on Best Films of the Year lists by *The New Yorker*, *Rolling Stone*, *Slant Magazine* and more. His work explores vast ensemble casts and draws influence from '60s European art cinema and '90s kids' television.



BLACKSTAR

BERWICK FILM & MEDIA ARTS FESTIVAL

September 9-12 / Berwick-upon-Tweed, United Kingdom / bfmaf.org

At BFMAF, festgoers are encouraged to engage deeply with the thoughtful programming, which includes the moviemaker and curator-run "Propositions," a program that is "part screening, part talk or performance." BFMAF also runs the Berwick New Cinema Competition, which champions filmmakers who are transgressive of genre, financial limits and expectations. In April, Berwick announced curator, writer and programmer Jemma Desai as its new head of programming, a decision praised by

25 COOLEST IN THE WORLD 2021

GOLDEN APRICOT YEREVAN INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL

October 3-10 / Yerevan, Armenia / gaiff.am

Founded in 2004, this festival is named after the fruit native to Armenia, which means “the Armenian plum” in Latin. With the theme of “Crossroads of Cultures and Civilizations,” the festival has honored many great directors over its more than 15 years, including Claire Denis, Bela Tarr, Margarethe von Trotta, Asghar Farhadi, Darren Aronofsky and many others. Natalia Almada describes the programming as “amazing.” Director Atom Egoyan served as the festival’s president for over a decade, a position fellow Armenian moviemaker Harutyun Khachatryan now holds. Yerevan, Armenia’s capital and largest city, has countless historic sites to take in between screenings, including the Erebuni Fortress, which dates back to 782 B.C.

HOUSTON CINEMA ARTS FESTIVAL

November 11 - 22 / Houston / cinemahtx.org

This year’s hybrid fest, run by the Houston Cinema Arts Society, has the theme of “The Third Coast,” which artistic director Jessica Green says “is in celebration of, and exploration of, the Gulf Coast region, and especially Houston, where the term was coined, and its film, art, music, cultures, performance, food, history, peoples, threats and opportunities.” The fall 2020 festival offered a combination of drive-ins and virtual screenings. The films included Francis Lee’s period-piece lesbian drama *Ammonite*, Pablo Larrain’s *Ema* and Michel Franco’s *New Order*. It wasn’t all contemporary, however—the festival marked the 35th anniversary of *Smooth Talk*, starring Laura Dern, with director Joyce Chopra present.

INDIEBO

July 16-26 / Bogotá, Colombia / indiebo.com.co

Panelist Anja Marquardt says IndieBo programs “independent film from around the world”—and “it’s run by incredible people.” With its a mild, pleasant climate, there are worse places to spend a festival than Colombia’s vibrant, varied, deeply literary and artistic capital city—and not many better ones, many attendees agree. Marquardt says she’d “go back in a heartbeat” before adding that “complete immersion is all I remember. And lots of mezcal.”



THIRD HORIZON

KÜSTENDORF FILM AND MUSIC FESTIVAL

January 2022 / Drvengrad, Serbia / kustendorf-filmandmusicfestival.org/2021/

After landing at Nikola Tesla Airport in Belgrade, you’ll take a scenic three-hour drive southwest to a snowy mountaintop in Drvengrad, home of the Küstendorf Film and Music Festival. The town was founded by Serbian moviemaker and two-time Palme d’Or-winner Emir Kusturica, and the festival is a cozy communal affair. Tyler Taormina, who attended back in early 2020, explains: “This is probably the most bizarre and wonderful festival I’ve ever been to. The beauty of it is that it is attended by only a few hundred people, all of whom experience every film, meal and live performance together. The snowy town Dvngard, built for Kusturica’s *Life is a Miracle*, feels as though from a dream.” And if it’s not too windy or foggy, some lucky festival guests might just get a private helicopter ride around the scenic



mountain region. For the slightly less adventurous, there is a historic train loop which travels in a figure eight.

LOS ANGELES ASIAN PACIFIC FILM FESTIVAL

September / Los Angeles / vcmedia.org/festival

Described by Jenny Shi as a “champion for Asian international and Asian Pacific American artists,” LAAPFF went online in 2020. But this year’s 37th edition will be in-person. “They are dedicated to uplifting emerging voices and improving the Asian American

media representation,” says Shi, while panelist Gina Duncan highlights the “slew of events at a vibrant collection of venues in L.A.’s Little Tokyo and HiFi [Historic Filipinotown] neighborhoods.” For the last four years, LAAPFF has premiered HBO’s Asian Pacific American Visionaries short film winners. The theme for this year’s HBO APA Visionaries is “Taking the Lead,” which highlights films that portray “Asian Pacific Americans as being at the forefront of a given narrative, embracing the spirits of trailblazers, heroes, and luminaries

through a unique lens.” The fest also partners with the Undocumented Filmmakers Collective, the LGBTQ Okaeri Voices, and Kayamanan Ng Lahi, which is focused on students of Philippine folk arts.

MARYLAND FILM FESTIVAL

May 2022 / Baltimore / mdfilmfest.com/

Tyler Taormina, whose *Ham on Rye* played MdFF in 2019, describes it as “one of the most important U.S. film festivals.” “For many years this festival operated under the legendary creative auspices of programming tag team Eric Allen Hatch and Scott Braid, two programmers who did more to revitalize a burgeoning American alternate indie film scene in the mid-2010s than any others I can think of,” adds Jane Schoenbrun. With Hatch and Braid moving on, Schoenbrun notes that new artistic director Christy LeMaster “spent many years running the legendary Chicago microcinema the Nightingale out of her own basement, which makes

record stores, and a big grassy field that's essentially festival headquarters—one that features a decommissioned school-bus you can hang out in." What else could you ask for? Well: "We host a wild experiment every year with lots of performance art and late-night open mics," says Brawley. "Our annual 'Bus To Lumberton' installation/experience honors David Lynch's film *Blue Velvet*, which was shot here in Wilmington with locations all around the festival venues." Finally, he adds, "this year, radical editing collective Racer Trash has taken the challenge and will be slicing and splicing something super special for your eyeholes."

DEAUVILLE AMERICAN FILM FESTIVAL

September 3-12 / Deauville, France / festival-deauville.com/en/

Founded in 1975, this unique French festival programs a mix of American films, from Hollywood titles to independent cinema. Last year, Sean Durkin's *The Nest* took home three prizes, including the Grand Prix, and Kelly Reichardt's *First Cow* took home

sensationalism-free *Finding Yingying* is a great example—DX is the festival for you. Organizers note that it pairs "top-tier film screenings with a robust professional symposium that brings together watchdog journalists and filmmakers venturing into investigative territory." It offers a pro bono legal clinic, one-on-one meetings with industry leaders, and thought-provoking discussions about the issues raised by the films. Past attendees have included Ezra Edelman (the Oscar-winning *O.J.: Made in America*), Maite Alberdi (the Oscar-nominated *The Mole Agent*) and Alexander Nanau (the Oscar-nominated *Collective*). "Double Exposure is the best place for documentary filmmaking to embrace investigative journalism," says Shi. "Other than the incredible film slate, the Double Exposure Symposium is a must-attend multiple-day event where journalists, filmmakers and experts share practical skills and discuss some of the most urgent issues in the industry."

EDOC (ENCUENTROS DEL OTRO DINE)

TBD / Ecuador / festivaledoc.org/

EDOC is a traveling documentary film festival in Ecuador with institutional support from a diverse group of partners, such as the Sundance Institute and the French Embassy of Ecuador. While several film festivals encompass the diverse sprawl of a single location, there is nothing quite like a true traveling festival. "The experience of traveling around this country to show the film in different cities was unbelievable," Almada says. Previous retrospectives have included Chilean moviemaker Patricio Guzmán and American duo Albert and David Maysles, but the festival also works hard to promote and nurture Ecuadorian documentary film.

FESTIVAL DU NOUVEAU CINEMA

October 6-17 / Montreal, Canada / nouveau cinema.ca/en

Anja Marquardt calls the FNC "a celebration of cinema, food, art, light, and everything in between." Founded in 1971 by two film fanatics, Claude Chamberlan and Dimitri Eipidès, the fest celebrates its 50th anniversary this October—and doesn't coast on Montreal's reputation as one of the world's coolest cities. It recently signed The Creative Industries Pact for Sustainable Action, joining dozens of organizations fighting

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NATALIA ALMADA
ON EDOC

climate change, and festival director Nicolas Girard-Deltruc says the FNC also maintains strong "commitments to territorial acknowledgment, gender parity, diversity, accessibility, environmentalism, and supporting local businesses." This year it will present the Eurimages Audentia Award, which recognizes a female moviemaker with a 30,000 euro grant.

FILMS FROM THE SOUTH

November 11-21 / Oslo, Norway / filmfrasor.no/en

Oslo is an exhilarating place, with brilliant, imposing architecture, beautiful natural scenery and a steadfast commitment to the arts. Also cool: It's common to eat waffles as a snack in the afternoon, just one of the pleasant little surprises you discover in this Northern European metropolis. Films From the South welcomed 28,000 attendees in 2019, went digital in 2020, and returns in-person this year with an objective of going all-in on watching films in theaters. "With our core slogan—see the world from a different angle—we are now traveling world cinema, to catch and present new stories and perspectives lost in travel bans and global seclusion," says Ingvild Vaale Arnesen, head of marketing and communications. It boasts three strong competitive sections, and its new Mangapolis section explores animé/animation. Another unexpected benefit, as welcome as an afternoon waffle: "Sometimes being in a far-away foreign country allows us to bond more with people from home," observes Natalia Almada.



DOUBLE EXPOSURE

the jury award. "Easily the best I've ever been treated as a filmmaker," says Tyler Taormina. He also applauds the staff's organization along with their "undying love of cinema." He continues: "Pair this with solid programming and the charm of oceanside Deauville and you'll have a great time." Even if, he jokes, "the audience near-unanimously claims not to understand your film."

DOUBLE EXPOSURE FILM FESTIVAL

October 13-17 / Washington, DC / dxfest.com/

If you love documentaries with taut, journalistic rigor—Jenny Shi's

25 COOLEST IN THE WORLD 2021

GOLDEN APRICOT YEREVAN INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL October 3-10 / Yerevan, Armenia / gaiff.am

Founded in 2004, this festival is named after the fruit native to Armenia, which means “the Armenian plum” in Latin. With the theme of “Crossroads of Cultures and Civilizations,” the festival has honored many great directors over its more than 15 years, including Claire Denis, Bela Tarr, Margarethe von Trotta, Asghar Farhadi, Darren Aronofsky and many others. Natalia Almada describes the programming as “amazing.” Director Atom Egoyan served as the festival’s president for over a decade, a position fellow Armenian moviemaker Harutyun Khachatryan now holds. Yerevan, Armenia’s capital and largest city, has countless historic sites to take in between screenings, including the Erebuni Fortress, which dates back to 782 B.C.

HOUSTON CINEMA ARTS FESTIVAL November 11 – 22 / Houston / cinemahtx.org

This year’s online fest, run by the Houston Cinema Arts Society, has the theme of “The Third Coast,” which new artistic director Jessica Green says “is in celebration of, and exploration of, the Gulf Coast region, and especially Houston, where the term was coined, and its film, art, music, cultures, performance, food, history, peoples, threats and opportunities.” The fall 2020 festival offered a combination of drive-ins and virtual screenings. The films included Francis Lee’s period-piece lesbian drama *Ammonite*, Pablo Larrain’s *Ema*, Robin Wright’s feature directorial debut *Land*, and Michel Franco’s *New Order*. It wasn’t all contemporary, however—the festival marked the 35th anniversary of *Smooth Talk*, starring Laura Dern, with director Joyce Chopra present.

INDIEBO

July 16-26 / Bogotá, Colombia / indiebo.com.co

Panelist Anja Marquardt says IndieBo programs “independent film from around the world”—and “it’s run by incredible people.” With its a mild, pleasant climate, there are worse places to spend a festival than Colombia’s vibrant, varied, deeply literary and artistic capital city—and not many better ones, many attendees agree. Marquardt says she’d “go back in a heartbeat” before adding that “complete immersion is all I remember. And lots of mezcal.”



THIRD HORIZON

KÜSTENDORF FILM AND MUSIC FESTIVAL

January 2022 / Drvengrad, Serbia / kustendorf-filmandmusicfestival.org/2021/

After landing at Nikola Tesla Airport in Belgrade, you’ll take a scenic three-hour drive southwest to a snowy mountaintop in Drvengrad, home of the Küstendorf Film and Music Festival. The town was founded by Serbian moviemaker and two-time Palme d’Or-winner Emir Kusturica, and the festival is a cozy communal affair. Tyler Taormina, who attended back in early 2020, explains: “This is probably the most bizarre and wonderful festival I’ve ever been to. The beauty of it is that it is attended by only a few hundred people, all of whom experience every film, meal and live performance together. The snowy town Dvngard, built for Kusturica’s *Life is a Miracle*, feels as though from a dream.” And if it’s not too windy or foggy, some lucky festival guests might just get a private helicopter ride around the scenic



mountain region. For the slightly less adventurous, there is a historic train loop which travels in a figure eight.

LOS ANGELES ASIAN PACIFIC FILM FESTIVAL

September / Los Angeles / vcmedia.org/festival

Described by Jenny Shi as a “champion for Asian international and Asian Pacific American artists,” LAAPFF went online in 2020. But this year’s 37th edition will be in-person. “They are dedicated to uplifting emerging voices and improving the Asian American media representation,” says Shi, while panelist Gina Duncan highlights the “slew of events at a vibrant collection of venues in L.A.’s Little Tokyo and HiFi [Historic Filipinotown] neighborhoods.” For the last four years, LAAPFF has premiered HBO’s Asian Pacific American Visionaries short film winners. The theme for this year’s HBO APA Visionaries is “Taking the Lead,” which highlights films that portray “Asian Pacific Americans as being at the forefront of a given narrative, embracing the spirits of trailblazers, heroes, and luminaries

through a unique lens.” The fest also partners with the Undocumented Filmmakers Collective, the LGBTQ Okaeri Voices, and Kayamanan Ng Lahi, which is focused on students of Philippine folk arts.

MARYLAND FILM FESTIVAL

May 2022 / Baltimore / mdfilmfest.com/

Tyler Taormina, whose *Ham on Rye* played MdFF in 2019, describes it as “one of the most important U.S. film festivals.” “For many years this festival operated under the legendary creative auspices of programming tag team Eric Allen Hatch and Scott Braid, two programmers who did more to revitalize a burgeoning American alternate indie film scene in the mid-2010s than any others I can think of,” adds Jane Schoenbrun. With Hatch and Braid moving on, Schoenbrun notes that new artistic director Christy LeMaster “spent many years running the legendary Chicago microcinema the Nightingale out of her own basement, which makes

me feel optimistic for Baltimore's film future." When Taormina says that "the East Coast crowds flock towards this gem of a festival, including a cast of familiar faces from the New York film community," he truly means it: Baltimore native and MdFF board member John Waters and *The New Yorker* writer Richard Brody are known to turn up at screenings. "The reputation for this festival is immense and well deserved. Their tastemaker programming is fantastic, and their respect for cinema is resounding," Taormina adds.

MORELIA FILM FESTIVAL

October 27 - November 1 /
Morelia, Michoacán, México /
moreliafilmfest.com/en

Natalia Almada describes this as "just a beautiful film festival in a beautiful city," which draws "the best Mexican cinema but also a really strong international presence." Its impressive guest lists over the years attest to that: Recent attendees include Salma Hayek, Robert Rodriguez, Willem Dafoe, Robert Redford, Jennifer Lawrence, Isabelle Huppert, Guillermo del Toro and many more. The festival declares, "We believe in the power of transformation of a national cinema and in the importance of identifying new Mexican talents whose works can cross cultural and aesthetic boundaries, inspire international artistic dialogue, and thus have a strong impact on society. We believe in the transcendence of human ties; so we encourage meetings, in an enriching context, among others of the regions of the Mexican territory with some of the most outstanding figures of the film community of the world."



**A CELEBRATION
OF CINEMA, FOOD,
ART, LIGHT, AND
EVERYTHING IN
BETWEEN."**

-ANJA MARQUARDT ON
FESTIVAL DU NOUVEAU
CINEMA

NEW ORLEANS FILM FESTIVAL

November 5-21 / New Orleans /
neworleansfilmsociety.org/festival

"For my money, this is the best party festival in America, and artistic director Clint Bowie does a fantastic job of curating a slate of under-the-radar indies and a slew of great shorts to compete for their various competitions," says

Jane Schoenbrun. "One year they rented a party bus, stuffed it with filmmakers all dancing as we drove down the highway, and then dropped us at a secret warehouse somewhere in Louisiana where Win Butler from Arcade Fire DJ'd into the wee hours. Another year I ended up line-dancing at a county fair way out in the Bayou, and then eating at the Waffle House in the middle of an insane thunderstorm. If all this (and a lot of really good food, of course—it's New Orleans!) sounds like your scene, consider applying." We have to admit we didn't predict waffles coming up twice on this list. But seriously, foks: With a mission to "discover, cultivate, and amplify diverse voices of filmmakers who tell the stories of our time," New Orleans promises that 90 percent of its films come from submissions, that at least half of the filmmakers are women or gender non-conforming, and that at least 55 percent of filmmakers are people of color. Given the events of last year, this festival also very coolly paid out its entire travel and hospitality budget of close to \$40,000 directly to moviemakers.

OAK CLIFF

June 2022 / Dallas /
2021.oakclifffilmfestival.com

A couple of years ago, we ran a bold proclamation from a Coolest panelist that the Dallas-based Oak Cliff was more fun than a larger film festival in nearby Austin. Festival director and co-founder Barak Epstein and his team remain committed to fun: Last month's edition featured a spooky, wry "cult" theme. A promotional video featured a flickery, mysterious figure inviting "children of the light" to "come to Oak Cliff" to bear witness to "the light that tells stories on the wall." Consider us indoctrinated. "A truly wonderful regional Texas film festival," says Tyler Taormina. "The Texas Theatre lives in my heart, as does the crowd of film lovers, filmmakers, and festival staff that congregate each year for this one. It's a good energy, one that has stayed with me." Oak Cliff, celebrating its 10th year, isn't just rich with cinematic history: The Texas Theatre, just one of the festival's



OAK CLIFF

venues, is where Lee Harvey Oswald was apprehended.

OLHAR DE CINEMA

October 6-14 / Curitiba, Brazil /
olhardecinema.com.br/en/home/

"This festival has the best programming of any I've attended," says Tyler Taormina. "The theaters are packed with loyal cinephiles and everyday folks of Brazil, ready to see some of the best repertory highlights alongside the most interesting, under-the-radar, international art cinema. I'm blown away by this fest." Curitiba is a bustling, lush, architecturally thrilling locale. And while as of this writing, the 10th edition of the festival may take place entirely online, participants are guaranteed fluid, open conversation, in-depth masterclasses, and a continuation of its proud tradition of "experiments, risks and accurate shots" that celebrate "new forms of cinematographic language" and "great thematic and aesthetic diversity," according to the festival.

SAN DIEGO ASIAN FILM FESTIVAL

October 28 - November 6 / San Diego /
sdaff.org

"Unlike most other Asian film festivals, we're hungry for every format and genre—documentary, independent, experimental, studio films—so long as they capture the creative vitality of film artists across the continent and in the diaspora," says artistic director Brian Hu. "We invite Thai rom-coms and Filipino art cinema, world premieres and new restorations, two-minute student animations and eight-hour Wang Bing documentaries. The heart of

25 COOLEST IN THE WORLD 2021

our festival, though, is the competitive Asian American selection, which has for 20+ years now been one of the premiere platforms for works by Ramona S. Diaz, Justin Lin, Patrick Wang, and others.” Adds Jenny Shi: “SDAFF embraces stories that represent both Asian and Asian American experiences. As a filmmaker who was born and raised in Asia, what has touched me the most is that SDAFF also showcases and honors classic Asian films, which has created a unique transcontinental and transcultural cinematic experience.”

STUDIOFEST

Sept 17-19 / United States / studiofest.com/

We know more about this festival than any other on this list, thanks to the transparency of its *Demystified* video series, presented by *MovieMaker*. Co-founders Jess Jacklin and Charles Beale started the festival in New York in 2018 when they found that other festivals weren't helping them do what they most wanted to do: make films. So StudioFest provides at least a \$50,000 budget for filmmakers to do just that. StudioFest ended up budgeting almost double that for its first film, and over-delivering on its \$50,000 commitment paid off: *Souvenirs*, directed by Anna Mikami and written by Matthew Sorvillo, winners of the inaugural StudioFest, was a top 10 performer on Redbox and recently sold to A+E Networks. Several in-the-works projects came out of its second edition, held in Ojai, California, in 2019. In normal times, StudioFest holds very personable,



STUDIO FEST



SAN DIEGO ASIAN FILM FESTIVAL

social, rustic and outdoorsy gatherings. Due to everything that happened last year, the next StudioFest will be via VR headsets. And if you want to know what else is going on with the festival that is also a production company, just watch *Demystified* on YouTube or *MovieMaker.com*: Jess and Charles will be very honest about it.

THIRD HORIZON FILM FEST

June 2022 / Miami / thirdhorizonfilmfestival.com

Focused on the “Caribbean, its diaspora and other marginalized and underrepresented spaces in the Global South,” this festival held its recent seventh edition mostly online in recognition of the unequal recovery from COVID-19. “Across the Caribbean and the Global South... our family and friends are staring down a legion of mutated strains, surging infection rates, new lockdowns, and the complicated reality of the vaccine: There’s a scandalous shortage for those who want it, while many others want nothing to do with it, their severe distrust grounded in very real trauma. ... We believe, deeply, that we must harness our shock from the harrowing events of the past year and transform it into the epiphanies and practices that create the future that frees us.”

Shabier Kirchner describes the fest as his “all-time fave,” offering the ultimate endorsement: “I’m literally making a film right now just to submit to the festivals so I can go back.” And Gina

Duncan describes Third Horizon as “a shining example of what can be done collectively to create and sustain a rich arts community.”

TRUE/FALSE

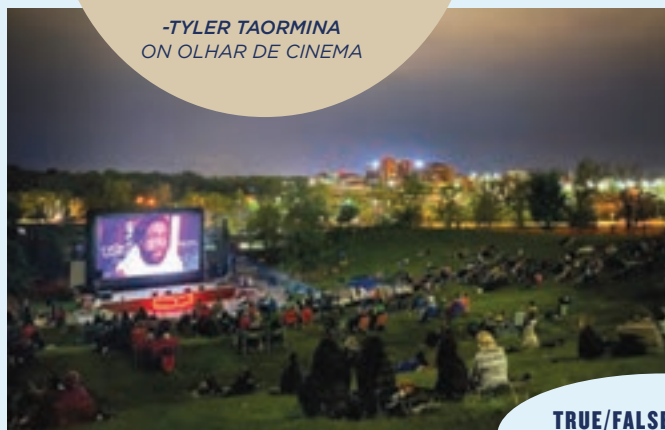
March 3-6, 2022 / Columbia, Missouri / truefalse.org

Widely revered as one of the best documentary festivals on earth, this perennial turner-upper on our Coolest list offers “a sense of community and belonging,” says Shi, who enjoyed “walking down the streets, sitting in a quiet cafeteria, and talking about my favorite films at the festival with my filmmaker friends.” Set in the small college town of Columbia, Missouri, the festival

mixes great docs with fabulous live music, a kick-off parade, and talks that range from mesmerizing to jubilant as it presents 150 screenings each year. It offers 40

THIS FESTIVAL HAS THE BEST PROGRAMMING OF ANY I’VE ATTENDED.”

-TYLER TAORMINA
ON OLHAR DE CINEMA



TRUE/FALSE

feature and 20 short nonfiction films, 12 music showcases, 20 visual art installations, and virtual reality programs. More than 100 filmmakers, 70 musicians and 45 visual artists attend annually. Columbia’s Ragtag Film Society helps teachers lead students to become media-savvy citizens, and the festival’s Rough Cut Retreat and Mentorship programs pair first-time filmmakers with veterans who can guide them in the documentary world. **MM**

1

MovieMaker magazine

2



EYE- OPENING INDEPENDENT FILM COVERAGE

3



4



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YOU WATCH - AND MAKE - CINEMA, ONE ISSUE AT A TIME.**

5



6



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CAMILLE COTTIN,
MATT DAMON AND
LILOU SIAUVAUD IN
STILLWATER

“

TOM MCCARTHY & MORAL AUTHORITY

Stillwater travels to France to examine an American ideology

BY CALEB HAMMOND

WATCHING dailies of his new drama *Stillwater*, Tom McCarthy kept noticing

something about Matt Damon's performance: He seemed angry.

McCarthy couldn't figure out why, so the director asked Thomas Bidegain and Noé Debré, his French co-writers.

They explained very simply: Damon seemed angry as he delivered certain lines because McCarthy seemed angry when he wrote them.

McCarthy was taken aback. He did?

"And they're like, 'Yeah, just in general. We'd start every writer session with a half hour where you would just complain about what a mess the country was and how angry you were about it,'" McCarthy recalls.

Damon had tapped into something McCarthy wasn't consciously doing.

The film is McCarthy's second feature since his 2015 film *Spotlight* won the Oscar for Best Picture, and he won for best original screenplay. But *Stillwater* precedes *Spotlight*, in a way. McCarthy completed the script about nine years ago with co-writer Marcus Hinchey—but something was off.

"The idea was good," McCarthy says, but: "it just felt like a straight-up thriller."



📷 DAMON AND DIRECTOR TOM MCCARTHY ON THE SET OF *STILLWATER*

Damon stars as Bill Baker, an Oklahoma oil worker, or roughneck, whose daughter Allison (Abigail Breslin) has been found guilty of murdering her girlfriend in Marseille, France. Bill tries to clear her name, with help from a French woman, Virginie (Camille Cottin).

When McCarthy picked up the script again two years ago, America had changed—and his film had a new resonance.

"At that point, Trump had come into the White House, and I was seeing America in a completely different way," he says.

He sent the script to Bidegain and Debré, who have worked on Jacques Audiard films like *Dheepan*, *Rust and Bone* and *The Sisters Brothers*, and told them bluntly: "Look, I'm

not particularly happy with this, but I like the idea."

The three began talking.

"It didn't take long after Trump was in the White House to start thinking about America's moral authority, and what that meant to people individually, citizens of the country and the country as a whole, especially in the world's standing," McCarthy says. "The French writers and I spent a lot of time talking about this and that really started to inform Bill on a larger thematic level: where he was now in his life, what he considered to be his moral imperative at this point of his life, and how that would inform character."

McCarthy maintains that *Stillwater*

TO SEE WHERE OUR TWO STYLES, AMERICAN AND FRENCH, MEET, BOTH CINEMATICALLY AND SOMETIMES JUST CULTURALLY, WAS FASCINATING AND EXCITING."

—TOM MCCARTHY

“isn’t a political movie. But certainly, it’s got politics in its DNA.” The thriller is influenced by McCarthy’s love of “European and French cinema specifically.” And like many French thrillers, the film is confident enough to take “subtle detours” and will often “go left and spend more time in moments” that McCarthy describes as “quotidian.”

“To see where our two styles, American and French, meet, both cinematically and sometimes just culturally, was fascinating and exciting,” McCarthy adds about working with Bidegain and Debré.

Damon has a lot of inherent goodwill with audiences, and *Stillwater* plays with it.

“We felt strongly that we needed an actor not only of Matt’s caliber, but Matt’s reputation, someone who really represented a kind of good and decent person. ... There is something good about him, there’s something likable about him, there’s something quintessentially American about him,” McCarthy says.

“We wanted to take that character, take a closer look and get under his skin a little bit more.”

When Damon signed onto the project, McCarthy quickly involved him on scouting trips to Oklahoma to spend time with real roughnecks. McCarthy says those trips helped refresh the story.

“He paid attention to everything: to how they walked, to how they talked, to what they

talked about, and what they cared about,” McCarthy says.

The roughnecks were “generous with their time, their energy, and their input,” he adds. “They worked hard, and they loved their work. They made a lot of money, and they lived hard.”

One line that Damon delivers early in the film came out of one of those trips. When Bill and Virginie are talking in a café to a witness who begins espousing anti-Arab sentiment, Virginie storms out, upset. But Bill is unfazed, telling her: “He’s a racist. We still got to talk to him.”

“That comes directly from a conversation I had with a roughneck,” McCarthy says. The oil worker told him, “Look man, you go back far enough in this state, and there’s some guys who weren’t so great. We had Klan members who were roughnecks, and we knew it. We didn’t like them. But we had to work with them, because we didn’t have a choice.”

“That to me,” McCarthy says, “is really dark and it’s also incredibly compelling. I feel like there’s something in that, like where’s the dialogue in all this?”

As Bill travels further down the rabbit hole of his daughter’s case, he extends his stay in Marseille indefinitely. “One of the things I like most about this film is seeing Bill get into deeper and deeper waters, and by that I mean farther and farther from what he knows and understands, and how that starts to ultimately change him, whether he realizes

it or not,” McCarthy says.


Bill begins to love the Mediterranean city—for its culture, traditions, and most importantly, for the makeshift family he builds with Virginie and her daughter, Maya (played by Lilou Siauvaud in a remarkable performance). The girl teaches him French words for all of his tools.


McCarthy began traveling to Marseille a decade ago when he was first developing the story. “I fell in love with the city, visually, and as I got to know it more, culturally, and the people and the dynamic,” he says.

McCarthy says Bidegain and Debré were initially hesitant to set the story in France’s second-largest city, given its rich history in films such as *The French Connection* and *Breathless*. But after considering different locations, they ultimately ended up back at Marseille. For one thing, it just felt like a city that Allison would be drawn to for college.

“It was obviously very different from Oklahoma, and anything that she knows,” McCarthy says. “It has as much of a Mediterranean, world vibe, port-city vibe, as it does a French vibe. And you can feel it. It’s incredibly integrated. It’s all locked in by those mountains that you see. It’s not like Paris—it’s not a part of a big sprawl.”

Tom McArdle has edited all of McCarthy’s films, going back to 2003’s *The Station Agent*. Test screenings are part of their process, and McCarthy knows they are close to locking in

DAMON, ABIGAIL BRESLIN
AND MCCARTHY ON THE
SET OF *STILLWATER*

A photograph of Tom McCarthy on a film set. He is wearing a light blue button-down shirt and has large headphones around his neck. He is gesturing with his right hand towards a whiteboard in the background. The setting appears to be a rehearsal space or a set for the movie Stillwater.

a final cut when an audience talks less about any points of confusion and more about the decisions the characters make, and their moral implications.

“This is what I want audiences to be leaving the theater and going home and talking about,” McCarthy says. “I love all kinds of movies, but specifically, I love movies that push me to think a little bit deeper and consider: What is my typical perspective on this type of film, and how is this challenging that?”

To McCarthy, it all “goes back to moral authority, and this concept of America First. And what happens when that becomes the philosophy? What happens when you say, ‘I care about my family above all else? Nothing else matters.’ Well, is that always right? Is there something else to consider there, or is what I want most important? Both, on a personal level, and ultimately on the national level, what are we sacrificing in those moments?

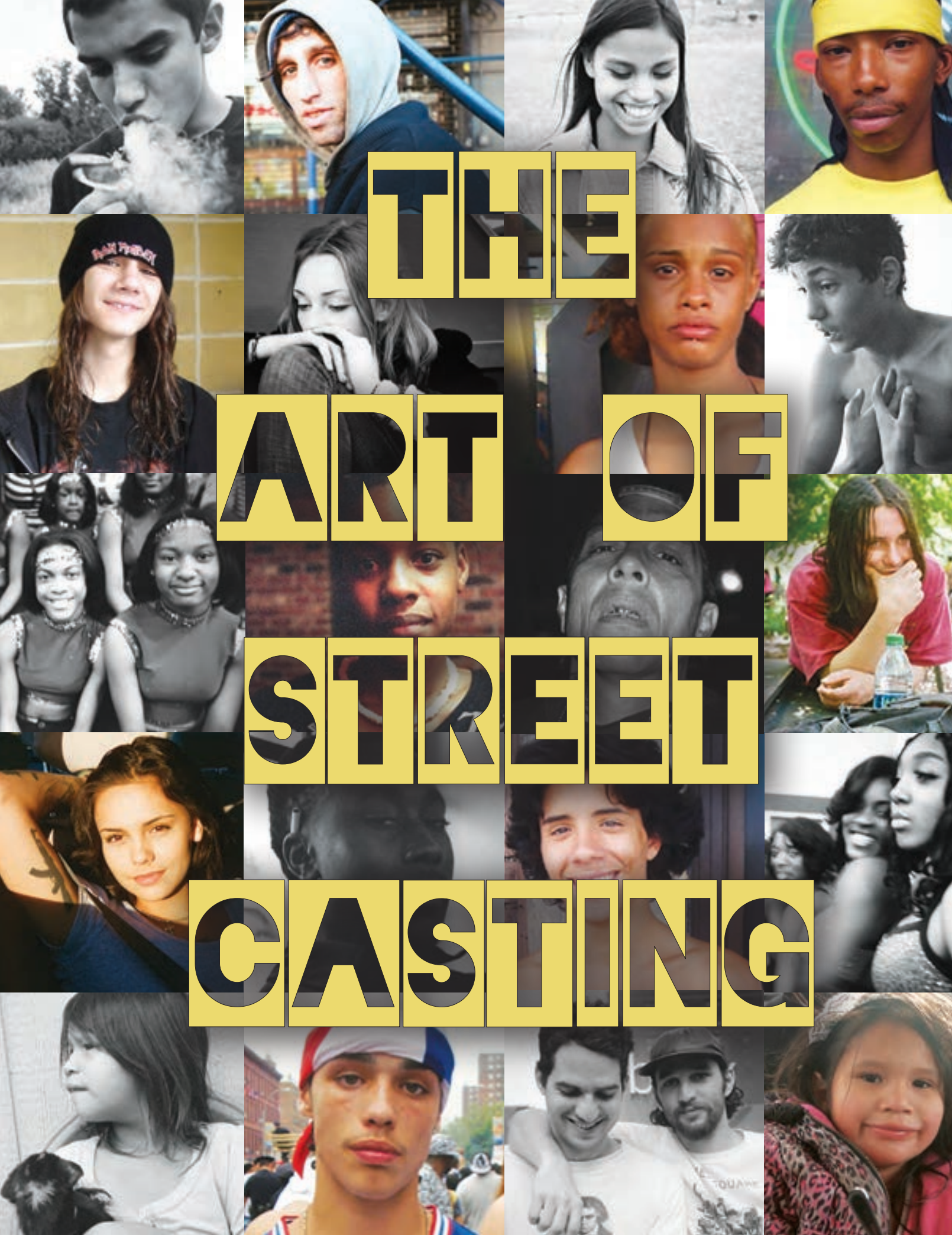
He continues: “But there’s no question by the movie’s end, emotionally, there’s some real sacrifice there. There’s some real pain. And then beyond that, you could say, ‘To what end?’ And that’s really for an audience to talk about and to decide, not me.” **MM**

Stillwater opens in theaters on July 30, from Focus Features.

“

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU SAY, ‘I CARE ABOUT MY FAMILY ABOVE ALL ELSE? NOTHING ELSE MATTERS.’ WELL, IS THAT ALWAYS RIGHT?”

—TOM MCCARTHY



THE ART OF STREET CASTING



**ELÉONORE HENDRICKS
DISCOVERED ANGUS
CLOUD WHILE STREET
CASTING *EUPHORIA***

**NOT
EVERYONE
WALKING
DOWN THE
STREET CAN
BE A MOVIE
ACTOR—BUT
SOME CAN**

BY ELÉONORE HENDRICKS



**HENDRICKS SCOUTED
LOCALS FOR TIM
SUTTON'S *MEMPHIS***

I'M AN ACTOR and a casting director. I'm also a Gemini, so the pairing makes sense as much as it doesn't.

Casting has usually been in the forefront of my career, and acting is its less nourished twin. I've always been afraid of acting. I get nervous, but I revere it. I can see the good and truth in a performance when it's in front of me, and so I celebrate actors by casting them.

I'm a non-traditional casting director. My work is considering trained actors for roles, and also finding those who have never acted before. I do the latter through "street casting" or "scouting," and the talent are "non-actors," "non-professional actors" or "real people."

When people are on set, on camera, giving life to a character that was written on a page, they are actors, and they are acting. And conversely, actors are "real people." When I cast a film, I lump them all, actors and non-actors, into the same bag. My objective is to find the right person to fill the role.

There's a long tradition of casting non-actors and making discoveries, including in the films of Luis Buñuel, Pier Paolo Pasolini,

Federico Fellini, Peter Bogdanovich, John Cassavetes, Héctor Babenco, Abbas Kiarostami, Claire Denis, the Dardenne brothers, Larry Clark, the Safdie brothers, Andrea Arnold, Chloé Zhao—the list goes on. I have been fortunate throughout my career to work with some of these directors.

I've spent two weeks casting a film and I've spent two years casting a film. And most often I'm working with a small team. Expanding the casting net beyond resources like Breakdown Services or *Backstage* usually demands more energy, time and money. But it's also important to remain pragmatic and open. I'm a big fan of looking right under my nose. I consider friends and friends of friends, and look around my block, and during my commute. Street casting can be very cost-efficient. For example, writer-director Ted Fendt has composed his screenplays with some of his closest friends in mind, and has made exquisitely beautiful narrative films like *Classical Period* and *Short Stay*.

On the other hand, films such as *Uncut Gems*, *Songs My Brothers Taught Me* and *American Honey* all had their screenplays written before the cast was set, and had extensive character breakdowns specific to an environment. The casting processes of these films required teams, time and energy. And these films are site-specific. *Uncut Gems* takes place in the insular ecosystem of the Diamond District of 47th Street in Manhat-

tan. *Songs* and *Untitled Pine Ridge Film*, which I'm working on now, are specific to the Pine Ridge reservation and the Oglala Lakota people. *American Honey* is a love letter to the midsection of America, not the edges. To cast an outsider or an actor who pretends to be a part of one of these cultures would be dishonest, and audiences would sense that inauthenticity.

While I've tapped into the dark dank well of Craigslist, and even signed up for Tinder mainly to look at the faces of who's out there (it's particularly interesting while traveling and driving across the country), my *thing* is street casting. It's what I've done for the past 20 years. The potential is infinite.

It's worth mentioning that most people I street cast end up going through a conventional audition eventually. But the energy of being out in public, scouting and discovering these non-professional locals, is crucial to my process.

Street casting takes place in three phases:

SCOUTING

This is where I and one or two other scouts will set out "into the field" to scour an area. We keep our eyes on the street and visit businesses, supermarkets, Walmarts, county fairs, pow wows and high school talent shows. We often walk around a neighborhood and just observe, sometimes alone, but sometimes in tandem, for the sake of

safety and validity. When I'm in a new community, I'll often start out with a "fixer"—a local who can make introductions and guide me through local ins and outs. We hold open calls. Facebook and Instagram help.

I also like to design a catchy and fun flyer with basic essential information: a tagline or short summary about the movie, a specific yet brief description of the characters, the submission deadline, audition and filming dates, the general location, the day rate if possible, and the best contact info. I might set up an email account specific to the project. I include a great image—something that, for me, is representative of the spirit of the film or characters.

INTRODUCTIONS

If I spot someone I'm interested in, I'll stop them and introduce myself and explain that I'm casting a film. I'll speak a little about the project and the character in question.

This can come as a surprise to people, and they often are skeptical that the project is legitimate. I offer business cards or a letter describing the project, with producers' contact information and a casting company contact on company letterhead, so the person can vet the legitimacy of the project. Also, you always need a parent or guardians' permission before scouting or auditioning someone under 18.

You should always approach a stranger with grace and generosity, knowing that your proposal is out of the blue. Try your best not to be nervous about approaching someone—it's an exciting proposal, a movie role. Trust your gut when you see someone who you think could be right for your film. Remember not to straight-up offer the role to the person. Be clear that there's a process, and that other people might be involved in the decision-making process.

Once you have people's trust, it's useful to ask if you can take a few photos, collect their contact information, and perhaps even interview them. A brief interview ignites an understanding of how a person speaks and moves.

Questions include: What's your name? How old are you? What do you do for work? What do you study? What are some of your hobbies? What do you do for fun? What's your dream?

Or they could relate to the character: Have you ever fallen asleep reading a book? Do you remember what you dreamed of? Tell me about that dream. Have you ever followed a white rabbit? Eaten something that made you very small?

People reveal the magic about themselves when they talk.

AUDITIONS

For films like *American Honey*, I con-



[3] ANDREA ARNOLD'S AMERICAN HONEY MIXES ACTORS LIKE RILEY KEOUGH AND SHIA LABEOUF WITH STREET-CAST NON-PROFESSIONALS

**HENDRICKS SCOUTED
LOPAKA AT A
POPULAR MEMPHIS
RESTAURANT**



**THE BIG BATS KIDS FROM RILEY
KEOUGH AND GINA GAMMELL'S
UNTITLED PINE RIDGE FILM**

ducted auditions on the spot, out in public, and filmed improv exercises. Spontaneous auditions can be fun and electric. They are best between people who know each other. Maybe you've spotted one person you think could really fit a role: Ask their friend to help by participating, too. If no one else is available, hold the camera and act with the person yourself.

Examples of improv scenarios:

1. One person accuses another person of taking money left on a table. You can choose to tell the accused that they in fact did take the money, so they lie or make up excuses. Or maybe they didn't take the money, and the accuser is paranoid, or needlessly accusatory.

2. Two friends are at a wild party. Friend 1 wants to leave because something happened. Friend 2 wants to stay, because there's someone at the party they have a crush on.

3. A Mad Hatter is talking wildly and drinking tea at a tea party, asking nonsense

questions. You really want to leave but he and his guests insist you stay.

The point of these scenarios is to set up a situation where there is a tension—the possibilities for scenarios are endless. Set up situations that best suit the story or characters of your film.

The benefit of improv is that there's not a lot of buildup or anticipation or preparation. You can see a raw and unmanicured performance, and witness someone's imagination, wit, and ability to take direction. You can see an ability to fall into an imagined scene, as opposed to a default or "put on" mode. These are things you look for in any audition, with professionals and first-time actors alike.

MEMPHIS TO PINE RIDGE

Many of the films I work on are specific to an area, a community, or a subculture. Everyone in Tim Sutton's *Memphis* is from Memphis, except for the lead, Willis Earl

Beale, who hails from Detroit. But the movie was written with him in mind.

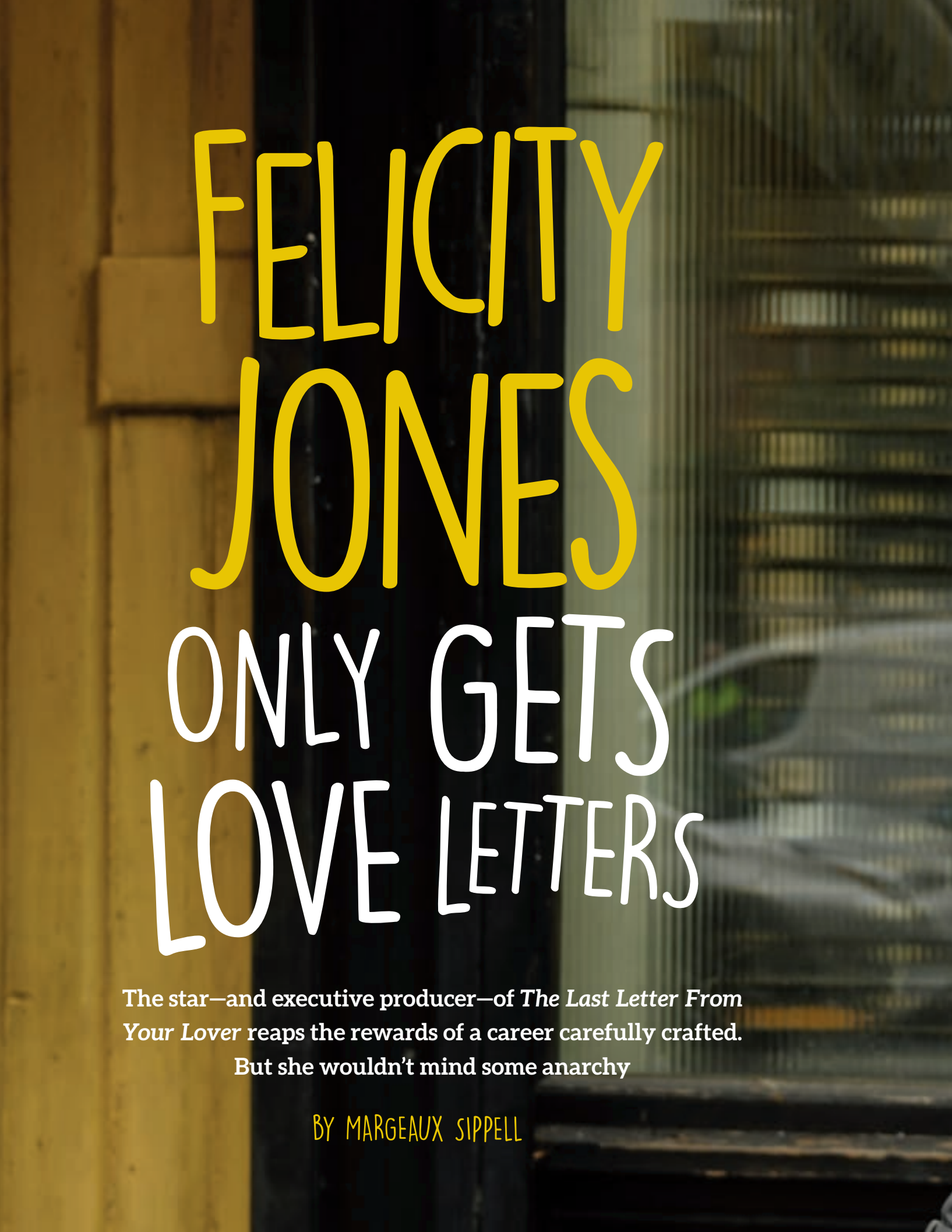
To cast the film, I went to Memphis, linked with a local fixer and set loose. We opened the doors to local professional actors, but ended up casting people who wore the city on their skin. I met a man named Lopaka sitting at the legendary restaurant the Gay Hawk. He was with his uncle and some other friends at a table near my film crew. I wasn't "on" at that moment, but I saw him and locked in. I immediately felt he could be good for this role of the "Rabbi." While it can be disrespectful to interrupt someone's lunch, I did, and he was cool with it.

Recently I've been working on an untitled film set on the Oglala Lakota, Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota. It's the third film I've worked on out there. The first was Chloé Zhao's *Songs My Brothers Taught Me*.

This movie is directed by Riley Keough and Gina Gammell. I met Riley while casting Andrea Arnold's *American Honey*. She filmed a small scene in a hotel in Rapid City, the city nearest to the reservation, with two young men whom I had cast from the reservation. They all developed deep friendships. Riley became very interested in the history and the culture of the Lakota. She and Gina, the film's co-director and writer, gathered stories from their friends and relatives, and these stories became a fictionalized screenplay.

There's very little representation of Native youth in the media, and it must be weird to not see oneself reflected on screen in films, or in music. We hope the new film will be an anthem of sorts for these young people. Every character was cast locally—nothing else would make sense. The dialect is specific, the history is specific, the experience of that reservation and of the Lakota people could only be portrayed by people who have lived those experiences.

My first trip with Riley and Gina out to Pine Ridge lasted about a week. I had to leave early for another film in New York City, *Good Time*, I think, and Gina and Riley drove past Big Bats, the local gas station. They rolled up on five boys of about 12 or 13, sipping pop out of great big cups. In the script, a group of ragamuffin kids loiter around Big Bats—and *these* were those kids. I wouldn't advise a casting director to rely fully on fate, but when it happens, please: Roll with it. **MM**



FELICITY JONES ONLY GETS LOVE LETTERS

The star—and executive producer—of *The Last Letter From Your Lover* reaps the rewards of a career carefully crafted.

But she wouldn't mind some anarchy

BY MARGEAUX SIPPELL



“A

re you Felicity Jones?”

“I think I am.”

This is how Felicity Jones begins most interactions with her fans, and they tend to stay this charming—because most of the people who come up to

her in public are teenage girls.

“I seem to have mainly 16,15-year-old girls coming up, saying, ‘I really loved you in *Chalet Girl*,’” she says, recalling her 2011 rom-com with Ed Westwick. “I’ve been very fortunate in that I’ve always had a very good response. I haven’t had any sort of negativity, or felt any toxicity.”

It’s one of many rewards for the sense of discipline that has governed her career so far. She’s resisted the allure of social media, and the cycle of praise and backlash it inevitably brings.

“I think Instagram can be amazing, particularly for fashion and for visual mediums,” she says. “I definitely know friends who have woken up at 2 a.m. to check the comments feed on their latest picture that they’ve got up. ... It’s hard to have boundaries around it, and I definitely have, at moments, quite an obsessive personality. So I have to tread carefully.”



WITH LAST LETTER, I WAS ABLE TO BE INVOLVED AT A POINT WHERE WE COULD DISCUSS CHANGING SOME OF THE STORY ELEMENTS. I THINK IT'S JUST A VERY EMPOWERING PROCESS."

—Felicity Jones



Jones, who grew up in the small village of Bournville on the southside of Birmingham, England, has had time to plot her life in the public eye. She got her start on the 1996 British TV movie *The Treasure Seekers*, alongside Keira Knightley, at the age of 12.

Jones is 37 now, and her latest movie, *The Last Letter From Your Lover*, marks a new high in her career—it's her first time executive producing, via her new production company, Piecrust, which she co-founded with her

brother, documentarian Alex Jones. Not to be confused with the *Infowars* host, he has a list of credits that include serving as assistant editor on Martin Scorsese's 2011 documentary *George Harrison: Living in the Material World*. Making movies together was their childhood dream.

Out this summer on Netflix, *The Last Letter From Your Lover* is an adaptation of Jojo Moyes' 2008 novel of the same name. Shailene Woodley plays Jennifer Stirling, a 1960s woman whose impassioned correspondence with a man who is not her husband is discovered in the modern day by Jones' character, Ellie Haworth, a journalist for *The London Chronicle*.

Jones may be best in soaring, adventurous, romantic films in which the protagonists are bedeviled by mean, nasty, earthly details. In 2011's *Like Crazy*, her character's passionate, international love affair with an American



**FELICITY JONES AS ELLIE HAWORTH AND
NABHAAN RIZWAN AS RORY IN *LAST LETTER
FROM YOU LOVER***

student (Anton Yelchin) is frustrated by immigration law and bureaucracy. In 2014's *The Theory of Everything*, she earned an Oscar nomination playing literature student Jane Wilde, whose beau, Stephen Hawking, may be able to master space and time—but can't beat a disease that steals his control of his own body. Jyn Erso, Jones' character in 2016's *Rogue One: A Star Wars Story*, sacrifices everything to exploit some intergalactic

small print. And as Ruth Bader Ginsburg in 2018's *On the Basis of Sex*, she played a woman who needed to navigate granular legal points in the service of the grand goal of equality.

Clearly, Jones relates to balancing pragmatism and big dreams—an essential combination in moviemakers. She's good at taking the small steps to achieve big goals, and started paying dues early.

After *The Treasure Seekers*, she spent about a decade on British TV, playing Ethel Hallow in the television shows *The Worst Witch* and *Weirdsister College*, appearing with Tom Hardy on the series *Meadowlands*, and playing a young servant in a 19th century English country house in the appropriately titled *Servants*. In 2009, she appeared in the TV miniseries *The Diary of Anne Frank* as Frank's older sister, Margot.

Her breakthrough into movies came with *Like Crazy*, and, also in 2011, *Chalet Girl*.

Her recent run includes *The Argonauts*, a 2019 on-screen reunion with Redmayne, in which she plays the fictional but fact-based Amelia Wren, who seems at first to be colorful, costumed entertainer, but quickly proves to be a daring balloonist.

For the last year, she's been focusing

more on becoming a new mom than anything else. She and her husband, director Charles Guard, welcomed their first child into the world “very early on in the first lockdown, when we didn't know what the hell was going on and how dangerous this virus was. It was a very, very unknown period of time,” she says. “Everyone was stockpiling various goods from supermarkets. It all got a little apocalyptic.”

Her pregnancy is well documented in 2020's *Midnight Sky*, a sci-fi film directed by George Clooney in which Jones stars as Sully, an astronaut returning to Earth after a mission to one of Jupiter's moons to see if it could become the new home to the human race.

“It was written into the story,” Jones says. “The character became pregnant, which I think is a first for a space film with a pregnant character. So it felt very revolutionary.”

Her role in *The Last Letter From Your Lover* marks a departure from her recent work, in that it's grounded in the present day, lighthearted and funny. It's something she's wanted “for absolutely ages.”

The script is an adaptation co-written by Nick Payne, whose play *Constellations* caught Jones' eye

when it played at London's Royal Court Theatre. Its quality, combined with her quick friendship with director Augustine Frizzell (*Euphoria*), let her know she was in good hands.

"It all felt like the stars were colliding in the right way," Jones says. "I'd been doing more action, I guess—more serious work. And so it felt like a really good opportunity to play a contemporary character in London. And I liked her wit, and I liked the world that she was inhabiting."

Jones was sitting down with Frizzell over a glass of rosé when they realized they both had the same vision for the movie.

"I'd been doing *Aeronauts*, where I'd been doing these stunts in various sorts of freezing cold temperatures," Jones says. She remembers Frizzell volunteering, "I really want to do something cozy."

"And I just sort of yelped, 'Yes!'" Jones says. "That's exactly what I feel like doing. Something that feels romantic. Something that I would definitely watch myself."

Jones says she was hooked on *Last Letter* by a scene in which Ellie dashes out the morning after a one-night stand—and politely advises the guy

not to call her. It ended up being her opening scene, but that wasn't the original plan.

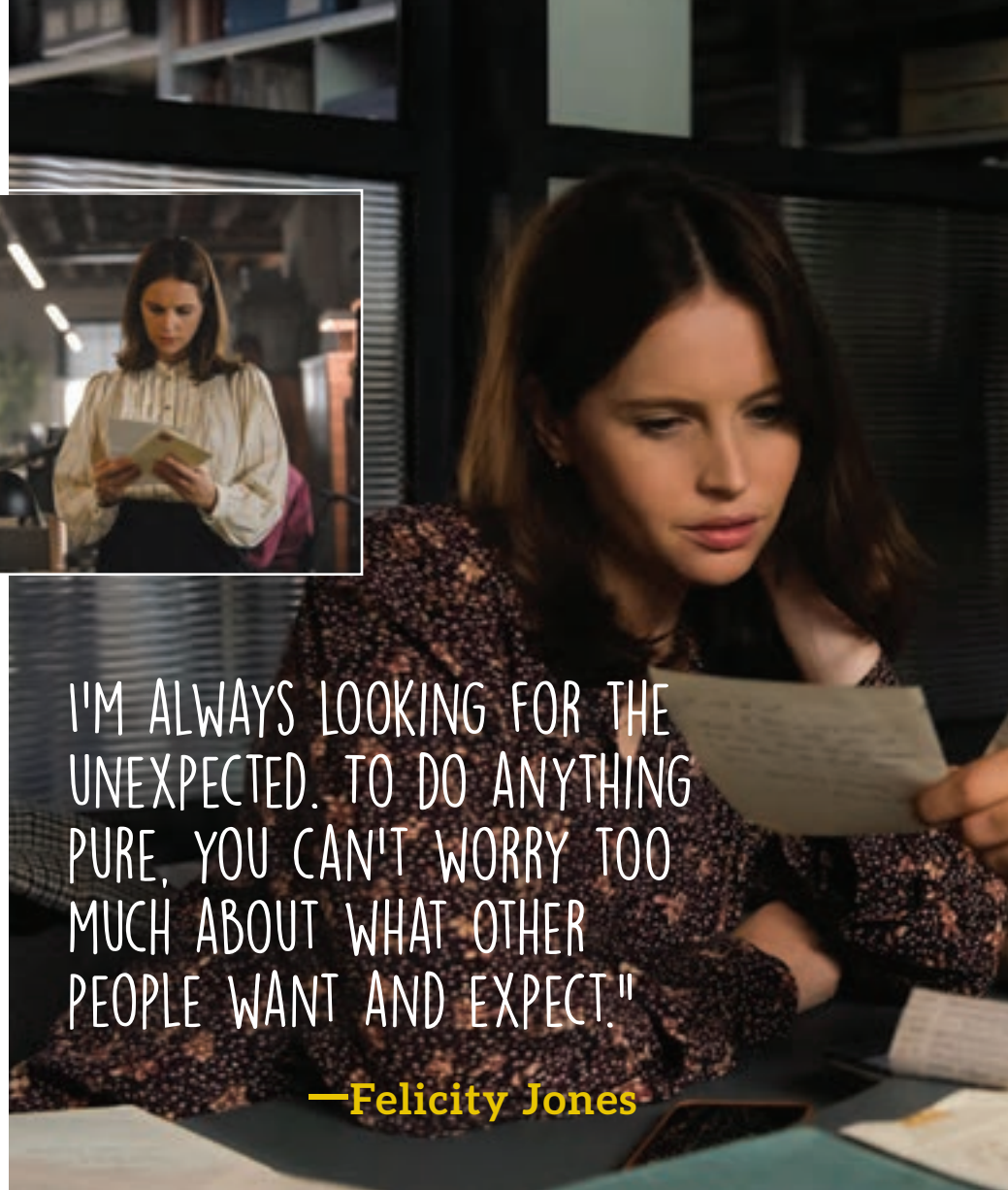
"Interestingly, that scene was in a different place. It was much further into the story, and that was one of the edits,"

she says. "It was a brilliant idea to put that at the front."

The scene immediately establishes that the women in *Last Letter* have agency, and that they take what they want when they want it—and leave it when they don't.

"You can't get away with lazy portrayals anymore," Jones says—which reminds her of recently rewatching 1987's *Fatal Attraction*.

"It was so interesting watching it now. You have so much more empathy for the Glenn Close character," she says. "Whereas obviously, when it came out 30 years ago, she was sort of demonized. It was fascinating how the world has changed, and



I'M ALWAYS LOOKING FOR THE UNEXPECTED. TO DO ANYTHING PURE, YOU CAN'T WORRY TOO MUCH ABOUT WHAT OTHER PEOPLE WANT AND EXPECT."

—Felicity Jones



FELICITY JONES AND NABHAAN RIZWAN,
WORKING ON A MYSTERY





Without worrying what anyone else will think.

"I'm always looking for the unexpected," she says. "To do anything pure, you can't worry too much about what other people want and expect. And I think to do anything original, you can't go outside-in, can you? You've got to go inside-out. So I always have to follow that inner beat."

Piecrust, she says, "was a very natural step, having increasingly been involved in development in the films that I've been doing."

"When playing leads, often you do start having conversations about story and development. And I had studied English literature at university"—at the University of Oxford's Wadham College—"so I'd always wanted to do other aspects of filmmaking."

She adds: "It all felt like a very natural progression."

Executive producing *Last Letter* was a particular joy for her. Often, she says, an actor only becomes involved in a

our expectations. The way we view female characters has, rightly so, fundamentally shifted."

In her research preparing to play Ellie, she spoke with *The Guardian's* Hadley Freeman for advice and insight into playing a woman journalist.

"She was a really great inspiration," Jones says. "She really gave me such rich material to draw from in terms of playing a journalist. What's involved, and the tenacity that you need, is fascinating. You've got to be able to—you can't just go, 'I'm going to give up, I haven't managed to get that person to talk.' You do have to just keep going and going."

Jones continues: "Ellie is at a point in her life where she's definitely looking for meaning. And I think she's at a bit of a crossroads where she's going, OK, why am I doing this? What's the point of this?" And so that's why she stumbled on that story, partly. ... 'I need hope that life is not just a




series of events that don't add up to anything.' And by finding that story, I think it gives her hope in her private life that love endures. But also it gives her professional inspiration."

After recognizing more profoundly over the past year how precious life is, Jones is ready to shake things up.

project "right at the very end of a long development process, which has always been a bit of a shame."

"With *Last Letter*, I was able to be involved at a point where we could discuss changing some of the story elements. I think it's just a very



"SHE'S WHIP SMART, INSIGHTFUL, HAS INCREDIBLE INSTINCTS AND IS FUN TO BE AROUND."

— **Augustine Frizzell**
on **Felicity Jones**

empowering process," she says. "In a broader sense, I do feel that stories, as soon as you put them into the world, dictate ideology, and to be able to have a say in those stories is a dream."

You might think it would be challenging to star in a film and produce it at the same time—but Jones says it was actually the contrary.

"It doesn't feel like the roles contradict

each other. They feel incredibly harmonious," she says. "Obviously, the more that you get inside the story, I find the more that helps with the acting, with understanding the character and their motivations."

Frizzell can attest to how well Jones took to producing.

"Felicity as an executive producer is pretty much on par with her as an

actress. She's whip smart, insightful, has incredible instincts and is fun to be around," she tells *MovieMaker*. "She's unexpectedly funny, and was actually quite fearless."

As for upcoming projects, Piecrust has optioned two books. The first is *England's Mistress*, a biography of a famous woman of the 18th century: Lady Emma Hamilton.



most of the men have died and society is run entirely by women.

"We're definitely drawn to material that is on the edges, that is unexpected. Particularly in the roles that I've played, I've always been drawn to defiant women, and so defiance of expectation will be something that we'll be exploring in our film and TV projects."



(L TO R) DIRECTOR AUGUSTINE FRIZZELL, FELICITY JONES AND AUTHOR JOJO MOYES

Although she's best remembered for her affair with the naval hero Vice-Admiral Horatio Nelson, Jones says, "the story we wish to tell will be a reinterpretation of how from her perspective, rather than the perspective of history, which tends to be quite patriarchal."

It pairs well with the second book they've optioned—*Afterland* by Lauren Beukes, which is set in a world in which

After so much experience in the industry, Jones says becoming a producer has made her much tougher on scripts.

"You see what it takes to bring something to fruition," she says. "I'm looking for a singularity and a strength of vision that has come from obviously just being much more involved in a broader sense of filmmaking."

In the future, she plans on asking filmmakers some tough questions.

"Why do you want to tell this story, and how are you going to tell it?" she says.

After *Last Letter*, her next project is *Borderland*, which she'll star in as well as produce via Piecrust. It's a thriller that follows Jack Reynor (*Midsommar*) as Michael, a member of the Irish Republican Guard who is on the hunt for a man named Tempest (John Boyega) who

killed his pregnant wife.

As we spoke, Jones was at her London home and had just received the first dose of the COVID-19 vaccine. Her plans for when things open back up included dancing.

"I love a bit of raving. That's definitely a passion of mine," she says. "I'm looking forward to a long night of reckless dancing."

But she's also emerged as thoughtful as ever.

"It's gonna be a funny year to look back on, isn't it? Whether it will just all disappear and it'll be like a strange dream, who knows? But it's definitely been a strange one," she says. "The world has collectively been on pause, which I don't think any of us ever imagined in our lifetimes."

Calling the pandemic "a collective near-death experience," she's noticed that people don't seem to sweat the small stuff as much, and muses that

we've all become a lot more resilient. As for her, it's affected the way she values time.

"I think it has shown us that, as we know subconsciously but don't often have to face, time is not infinite. I think it makes what you do more meaningful," she says. "There seems to be a kind of collective calming down, and maybe slightly more appreciative of what we have."

Whatever she ends up doing next, it's going to be unexpected.

|| can feel a kind of anarchy, something with a bit of anarchy brewing. Something that is going to test me, and something just a little bit left-field," she says. "Having had this moment in history, you definitely want to do something that's going to count and, I don't know, feel like a bit of a shock wave." **MM**

The Last Letter From Your Lover is available to stream on Netflix on July 23.



**JAMES
GUNN**

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**DOESN'T
NEED TO**

SH

THE *SUICIDE SQUAD* DIRECTOR
ON *GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY*,
NOSTALGIA - AND HIS WILDEST
PROJECT YET

BY TIM MOLLOY

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OUT

BEFORE HE WAS one of the most successful writers and directors in movies, James Gunn used to think he needed to shout for people to take him seriously.

“When I started out in New York City, nobody would listen to me. And part of the culture of making movies in New York City were these incredibly angry sets with people screaming, and I learned early on, ‘Oh—I’m either going to be screamed at, or scream. I know which side I’m choosing: I’m choosing the scream-at side!’” he says.

Sometime after the 2014 blockbuster *Guardians of the Galaxy*, in which he turned one of Marvel’s lesser-known comics into one of its most successful and celebrated

franchises, he realized he could stop screaming. Now people paid attention to everything he said.

Maybe too much attention.

“One of my issues is that people take what I say *too* seriously, if that makes any sense. I’ll say to an editor, ‘Hey, maybe, maybe, *maybe* this isn’t the best place for the shot. And that becomes then, ‘Oh, absolutely. We have to do everything we can to move heaven and earth to move the shot.’ But when I say maybe, I mean maybe,” Gunn explains.

Three years ago, Gunn suffered the too-familiar modern fate of being taken at face value for saying things he obviously meant as jokes. Right-wing sleuths, irritated by Gunn’s left-wing politics, dug up old tweets, about subjects like pedophilia, that were obviously meant to be, in Gunn’s words, “outrageous and



(L-R) ZOE SALDANA,
CHRIS PRATT AND
JAMES GUNN



I was. And that was a big relief for me.

Do you think being odd was kind of the best thing for you? I know it's painful when you're a kid, but you develop character.

I mean, being completely honest, no. My grade school was a difficult place, because... I've talked about it before, but there was a priest that was molesting kids in the class, and it caused sort of a down trickle of just... a lot of cruelty among the boys in our class. So it was a difficult place because of that. And I would give it up for less money. I would give up that past.

You're really communicative with fans. Do you think part of that is because of being a fan yourself, who looked at movies and comics as an escape?

It's one of the positive things about social networking, of which there aren't that many positive things. But one of the positive things is being able to communicate with people that you look up to. And I was lucky as a kid. I wrote letters to John Romita, the comic book artist, and he wrote me back. I got Sybil Danning's autograph. Also when I was a kid, I met Joe Strummer, the lead singer of the Clash, in a music store, looking through music. And I went up to him, and I didn't want to bother him. And I said, you know, "Mr. Strummer, I'm such a huge fan, you've affected my life in a big way." And he was nice to me. And I started to walk away, and he just walked with me and hung out with me for 10 or 15 minutes in the store. And we talked, and I was like,

taboo." He apologized for them and said his work and sense of humor had evolved.

When you understand Gunn's tough situation growing up, his jokes seem less like punching down and more like a dark attempt to process a painful childhood. But Disney dropped him as the keeper of the *Guardians* franchise.

Gunn was devastated. But he also thought about how he could improve himself, and about why he made movies. He realized he was seeking approval and love, and re-evaluated why he makes movies.

And that, you may be surprised to learn, is the unlikely origin story of *The Suicide Squad*, Gunn's massive campaign to reintroduce a team of unlovable super villains who last assembled in 2016's similarly titled *Suicide Squad*. Marvel's rival, DC, reached out to him between *Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 2* and his reinstatement to write and direct *Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 3*.

Margot Robbie, Joel Kinnaman and Viola Davis are among the returning cast from the previous *Suicide Squad* film, and are joined by Idris Elba, Taika Waititi, and Gunn stalwarts like his brother, Sean Gunn, Michael Rooker and Sylvester Stallone, all of whom appeared in the *Guardians* franchise, as well as Jennifer Holland, who is Gunn's longtime partner.

Gunn was a wittily subversive, sought-after screenwriter for years, writing films like 1996's *Tromeo and Juliet*, 2002's *Scooby-Doo* and its 2004 sequel, and 2004's *Dawn of the Dead* before he directed his own script for 2006's *Slither*. Along the way he wrote a series of bombastic, hilarious shorts—including a "PG Porn" series that is exactly what it sounds like—and "Humanzee," the ridiculous, grotesque sitcom parody that he credits with getting him the *Guardians of the Galaxy* films.

We spoke with Gunn while he was shooting the new HBO Max *Suicide Squad* spinoff series *Peacemaker*, starring John Cena as a super bonehead who violently loves peace. Let's not make the mistake of taking all of the words you're about to read too seriously—Gunn is prone to wry delivery.

TIM MOLLOY: I saw your tweet about your sober anniversary on April 22. I quit drinking about nine years ago and one of the things that kept me drinking for a long time was the fear that I wouldn't have any more fun. But you're a person who proves that you can be sober and have more fun than you probably ever did before.

JAMES GUNN: Yeah, well, I wasn't having fun before I was sober. And I'm having a little bit more now. For me, in terms of being a creative person, I think that, unlike the beliefs of many, alcohol and drugs actually blocked me from the pureness of my imagination,

the purity of my imagination. And so I think that if anything, in terms of my career, it's been helpful. ... In my personal life, my spiritual life, all those things. It's been helpful in a lot of other ways as well.

You grew up near St. Louis, which is a kind of notoriously straitlaced place. Did you find it to be that way?

I grew up in a place called Manchester, Missouri, outside of St. Louis. Today, it's very suburban. When I was young, it was more rural, suburban. And it was parochial, in certain ways. Very Catholic, in both senses of the word. And so being an odd little kid from the start—for whatever reasons I was odd—it probably was not the most conducive atmosphere for me, for making friends or feeling like I belonged or anything like that. But it did give me an opportunity to sort of escape into my own little world with comic books and books. And to start to draw and write my own comic books, and start to make movies when I was 11.

So once that stuff came around, it helped me get through life and it helped me to develop the skills that allow me to do what I do today and get paid to do what I do today. And I don't know if I would have had those skills had I not been such an outcast as a young child.

By the time I got into high school it was a little different. I was in the punk scene. Sex became a part of it. I got along better with women in many ways than men anyway. Life was a little bit easier in high school. I met a group of friends... and I found another group of young filmmakers, and people that were interested in the same things





setups a day with one camera on *Super*, which is unheard of. And just rushing, rushing, rushing—that speed became a part of everything I was doing. That panic, that anxiety that I had on set all day long. And I retained that through *Guardians Vol. 1*, and through *Guardians Vol. 2* even, really. But I really needed to learn how to concentrate more on just relaxing and getting everything right. And that anxiety, I think, is something that is one of my few regrets from that time.

The *Guardians* movies feel really nostalgic to me. I've been thinking about nostalgia a lot because at one point it seemed like nostalgia was kind of a thing for us weirdos living in the past. But then in the last year, we all had nothing to do but look to the past, because the present was pretty much sitting indoors. And then I started thinking about the Victorian idea of nostalgia as a sickness. Has your feeling about nostalgia changed at all recently?

I don't think it has. Obviously, I love a lot of things. One of the beautiful things about, say, Spotify, is that we aren't limited to listening to just what's brand new. When we grew up, it was always like, what's brand new? What's that new thing? What's that new sound? Because whatever happened yesterday is over and done. And I just need whatever is new.

With movies, it's even more so. I mean, so many young filmmakers don't watch the classic films, and I'm like, "That is insane. You've never seen *A Touch of Evil*? You've never seen *Citizen Kane*? You've never seen any of these old films?" And that is unhealthy to me. That is not having a respect for the roots of where you came from. You should go back to the beginning.

If you're writing a comic book, you should go back to the beginning of when they started and see what they're like. We need to know where the stuff grew from, to really take it organically into yourself. So I don't think of that as nostalgia. I think of that as a love of the art form.

But I do think that there's a fetishization of nostalgia that can be harmful. And I do think that Peter Quill in the *Guardians* movies suffers from that. And that in some ways, there's an unhealthiness to that. He has commodified the planet Earth, is what Peter Quill has done. Peter Quill has taken the planet Earth and turned it into John Stamos and *Starsky and Hutch* action figures and *ALF* stickers, because he doesn't want to face what Earth really is to him, which is the death of his mother. And the fact that he left his grandfather and whole family there and never returned, except once during the Infinity Saga, in

"God, that really made a difference in my life—that small act made a difference in my life."

Whenever I met anybody who I looked up to, just the act of their being present, just looking at somebody and taking in who they are, it makes a huge difference. Because most people don't. If you see most people signing autographs or doing whatever, they're just kind of off in space. But there are people that just take a moment to be with that person—just give them that one moment.

By answering questions on social networking sites and being able to talk to people directly, that is my way of being able to do that.

Your 2010 film *Super* is fantastic. But I don't quite get how you went from a relatively low-budget film like *Super* to *Guardians of the Galaxy*. How did you sell Marvel on doing that?

Marvel came to me initially. I had talked to Kevin Feige back when the Hulk movie was coming out after *Slither*, back when *Iron Man* was first coming out. He knew that I knew Marvel. I know more about the characters than most of the people at Marvel. I know more about DC too—I love comic books. I always did love comic books. So I understood comics, but also, I thought that was sort of a dream job.

I don't know why they came to me. I think they took a risk. They always liked me. Even weirder is, I did a short for Xbox, originally—it got kicked off Xbox because it was too messed up—called "Humanzee." Which I don't even know if you can find on

YouTube anymore. And they loved "Humanzee." So it's not only *Super*; it's even the weirder stuff. It's "Humanzee" and "PG Porn" and all the different things I'd done. But I was incredibly fortunate because I had co-produced the *Scooby-Doo* movies. I had been around big-budget movies, I knew a lot about visual effects. ...

By the time I got the *Guardians*, people thought of me as a lower-budget filmmaker, but I had a lot of visual effects and *Slither* and a lot of visual effects in *Super*. You know, it's a \$3 million movie, but we did a lot with it. So I had 15 years of filmmaking experience behind me, and a lot of practical knowledge that made me completely ready to take on *Guardians of the Galaxy*.

I was talking with my partner the other night about this: My biggest regret with *Guardians* was that I still had too much of a producer hat on. ... We were in such a rush to be able to get our shots for the day. I mean, we were doing 54





which he went back for two seconds, and then got off as quickly as he could.

And so I think that he uses some of that nostalgia as a protection against what Earth really means to him.

I thought, like a lot of people, that you got a completely raw deal with the whole Twitter situation in 2018. It was really unfair. And it was really people just weaponizing fake offense, to make an example of you. When that happened, were you crushed by it? Were you angry? Or did you just kind of get strategic and go, “What do I do next?”

I did all those things. I did all of those things. I was emotionally, emotionally affected, obviously, in the very beginning, emotionally devastated. And I was hurt by it, but I also have both my reason and my faith as great tools in my toolshed, and used those things to really say, well, this is the situation as it is. How do I best approach it? What should I do?

And listen, it may not *all* be my fault, but some of it's my fault. I asked, where are the places that I need to take accountability and look at myself and see what I could have done differently? And ways in which maybe I was being callous towards others, which I was. So I did that.

And, obviously, everything turned out OK. And listen, I needed it. Like, I'll tell you, I really just needed it. I was getting too swept up in everything, like the business, the money, the this, the that, the bigger and bigger and bigger. And I was like, what do I really care about?

And number one, the main thing I got out of the situation was, I have, for whatever reasons, because of my own mental issues, I have a problem taking love in. I have a problem seeing how other people care about me. And part of what I have always done is tried to get attention and be famous, and be “great,” so that people will love me.

And I realized in that moment—where I was at my least great, I was at my least genius, I was at my worst—I felt loved for the first time. I felt love from my partner, Jen. I felt love from my mom and dad, who were beautiful. I felt love from my brothers, from my sister, who was a huge friend, and from the *Guardians*—from Dave Bautista, and Chris Pratt, and Pom [Klementieff] and Karen [Gillan] and Zoe [Saldana], from Vin Diesel, Sly Stallone... All these people gave me this love and showed me love I just didn't, hadn't experienced.

So in that way, that was a great day for me, when that stuff happened, because I was able to experience that love. And then the other thing is, it was like, why am I making movies? Am I making movies to get attention? Am I making movies so that people will like me?

And I'm like, yeah, in part, I am. But I thought, that's not why I *want* to make movies. What do I enjoy? Because I don't enjoy that part. That's just unfulfilling. I don't like reading about myself, negative or positive, because... I don't need all that. What I love is creating. I love creating stories. I love molding characters. I love working with actors. I love working with camera operators. I love shooting a film. I love the geometry of putting shots together. I love the creativity of filmmaking.

And so it put me into a wonderful place that I hadn't been in for a long time. And that's what led to *The Suicide Squad* and choosing that project and making that movie.

You're Catholic, right?

Yeah.

There's this idea in Catholicism, and a lot of people don't like this idea, but that everybody's a sinner, and none of us are perfect. And we all make mistakes. And that's why we all need forgive-

ness. And it's almost a joke in social media fights that as soon as you go after someone, someone will find something in *your* Twitter feed, and you'll also be taken down. Because all of us have done something wrong at some point in our lives. And we're all flawed.

Absolutely. And there's a big difference between—you know, listen, I mean, there's certain people that have been canceled that I don't want to see their movies. If you tried to molest 14-year-old kids, then I don't want to see your freakin' movies. I don't care. And maybe that's not separating the art from the artists, but it ruins me seeing your stupid face on screen. I don't want to see it. So I don't care if you're canceled. ...There are things that are reprehensible. I don't want to work with those people.

But also, there are other things that people don't pay attention to, which is, every time I make a movie, we do a background check on the people. Not with private eyes. But by calling people they've worked with. There is no amount of fame or whatever that is worth working with an asshole. I want a creative partner who's going to be good at what they do and put their all into it and be my partner. There's a lot of people in this industry I won't work with, not because they've done anything morally reprehensible offstage, but simply because I don't want to deal with a jerk.

So DC came to you and offered you Superman, as I understand it?

No, that's not exactly what happened. The first



IDRIS ELBA AND MANY OTHERS LISTEN AS JAMES GUNN DIRECTS A SCENE





thing they brought up was Superman. They're like, "What does James want to do? Does he want to do Superman? Does he want to do something else?" Probably the second thing they brought up was Suicide Squad and doing whatever was next with that. They basically said, "Does he want to do anything? We're open." And so I played with a couple of different ideas, and started whit-tling down what my potential ideas were. And I felt like this was a really healthy thing for me, because I've taken on gigs in the past, where I have an idea for something and then I go pitch it, and then I sell it, and then the idea excites me, but the actual story doesn't excite me that much. Where I'm like, oh, this is just a great high concept—and I *don't* know how it's a three-act story.

And with these different projects that I started working on, I actually just took a month or so, and every day I worked on a different project. And one of the things that I worked on was *The Suicide Squad*. And that became the thing that just excited me—I loved the story the most. And I just thought it was something that I could completely have fun with, doing it in a completely unhinged way. And I thought it would be just the most entertaining I'd ever made. So that's what I went for.

Why are the Suicide Squad so fun?

First of all, [DC Comics writer] John Ostrander created the idea of *The Dirty Dozen* meets Z-grade supervillains who get sent out on black ops missions to different parts of the world—sometimes in very grounded stories, sometimes with

science fiction elements, or occult elements or whatever. And so his stories were really good. And I love the basis of that. I love old war movies, I love old war caper films like *The Dirty Dozen* or *Where Eagles Dare*. So being able to put super crappy supervillains in those situations was a lot of fun to me.

And because they're super villains, you really don't know what's going to happen. Like, when you see *The Guardians*, it's like the first movie—they're kind of bad guys. They're rogues, they're rakish. There's a scene in the bar where Rocket is drunk. And Drax is there and Rocket is going on about his terrible life, and he's threatening to shoot Drax in the face. But I don't think anyone in the audience thinks that we're actually going to shoot Drax in the face and murder him in that scene.

And in *The Suicide Squad*, not only can that happen, that stuff does happen.

Some of the characters are good, some are bad, some aren't so bad. They're really just human, and they're as fallible as we are. Some of them might be sort of heroic at their core, but we get to see that develop and those stories unfold. And it gives it a complexity that is actually fun. And it's not a complexity for the sake of being complex, but for the sake of telling the best story I can.

What makes a crappy supervillain crappy?

I mean, naming yourself Polka-Dot Man, you've got to have a problem with you. Like, the first time he makes his costume, there's probably guys you go to—the high-end guys who make superhero costumes, the low-end guys—he

probably goes to the low-end guy. And he puts it on and he looks in the mirror and he's like, *that* is cool. I'm the next Batman. That's what he thinks, right? Polka-Dot Man thinks he's gonna be a hero at first. I think that it's the lack of self-awareness, which is sort of beautiful, because it's like a lot of us. A lot of these guys are doing things they think are cool. I mean, Peacemaker and Polka-Dot Man and Javelin, those guys think they're super cool, but they're all kind of goofy.

Bloodsport is scary. Idris Elba's character, he's mean. He has a creepy costume. And he kills people for money. I wouldn't want that guy to be coming through my house with his weird sort of skeleton face. ... He's not crappy. He's pretty good at what he does. So is Peacemaker. Peacemaker's great at what he does. He's just an idiot.

I think Harley Quinn is legitimately cool.

Oh, yeah. She's the best. I mean, to me, Batman is probably the greatest DC character and Harley Quinn's the second-greatest DC character. And I love the character. I love the way that Paul Dini wrote her originally, and I thought this was an opportunity to take the character and take the essence of who I thought that character was from the early animated films and the early comics and really just let her live in her full, all-out lunacy and power, and give Margot Robbie, who I'm a huge fan of—I was a huge fan of before I made the movie, I'm an even bigger fan of her since working with her—give her a chance to really stretch her wings a bit with the character. And simultaneously see some facets of her that maybe we haven't seen before.

We interviewed Margot Robbie last year and she seems like an actual team player.

If you ask me, what's so unique about Margot Robbie as a movie star is that most movie stars do have a streak of either crazy narcissism, or a really ambitious, just, alpha, fight mentality—male, female, whatever. They just really are pushing all the time and controlling about things. And that is not Margot. Margot is 100 percent an actor first. She cares a lot about what she does. We talk a lot about what she does, but she does not have that need to prove herself. It's a sort of quiet confidence, and seemingly—I don't know the inside of her brain—but sort of a happiness with herself and who she is. And she doesn't have this constantly domineering thing that some people do. Like me. **MM**

The Suicide Squad opens in theaters and on HBO Max on August 6, from Warner Bros.



A photograph of Siân Heder, a young woman with short brown hair, sitting in the driver's seat of a car. She is looking directly at the camera with a slight smile. Her right hand is raised, with fingers spread, in the foreground, partially obscuring her face. The background shows a bright, sunny day with some greenery and a building visible through the car window.

THE OUTSIDER

How CODA writer-director Siân Heder successfully
tells stories of cultures she doesn't belong to

BY TIM MOLLOY

W

HEN *CODA* writer-director Siân Heder used to write for the Netflix prison drama *Orange Is the New Black*, everyone would tease her about being a “research nerd.”

“I was the one who knew how to actually build a prison bomb out of things you could buy in the commissary, because I would go deep. My internet searches probably have me on every Homeland Security watch list. But I just love digging into cultures.”

That love of digging hasn’t yielded any bombs yet, but has turned up a Sundance hit.

CODA, about a teenage child of deaf adults who dreams of becoming a singer, swept its categories at this year’s virtual Sundance awards ceremony and set a festival record when Apple bought it for \$25 million.

“I guess there were a lot of records set this year, which is such an interesting thing, to just do it from my home, because it was just me on the couch with my 5-year-old and my 7-year-old and my husband, and Sundance kept Zooming me to tell me that we won another award,” she laughs. “And it was just the most surreal, funny, amazing thing to not be there, but sort of have every filmmakers’ dream of their ultimate Sundance—but not really have it at all.”

Heder’s involvement with *CODA* goes back to the 2016 Sundance, where she premiered her film

Tallulah, a family comedy-drama. Producers Patrick Wachsberger and Philippe Rousselet were interested in remaking the 2014 French film *La Famille Bélier*,



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STAGE ALL THE WAY
THROUGH PRODUCTION.**

”

—SIÂN HEDER

which Rousselet had produced, for a U.S. audience. They met with Heder.

The original film is about a French girl with musical aspirations who helps her deaf parents run their family farm. But Heder, who grew up in Cambridge, Massachusetts, had strong ideas about how to retell the story in a setting about an hour from Cambridge, in the fishing town of Gloucester. She said regulations that were designed with the good intention of helping the environment have had unintended effects for family fishing businesses.

“All of the big corporations had found a way around the regulations to keep fishing, but all the small boats had been totally destroyed,” she says. “So there used to be like 700 boats out in the harbor, and now there are six. And so I thought it was just interesting in terms of looking at working-class America.”

To tell her story, she had to respectfully and accurately portray three cultures, none of which she belonged to: the Deaf community, musicians, and Gloucester. All required different types and degrees of research—and reaching out.

‘NOTHING ABOUT US WITHOUT US’

“Nothing About Us, Without Us” is a slogan used by many in the Deaf community, and in many marginalized groups, to represent the idea that people should have a direct role in telling their own stories. Heder embraced it completely.

“I felt like in the French film, the deaf characters were a little bit underdeveloped in terms of having their own storylines and really being full characters,” she says. “One important thing for me is the authenticity of casting deaf actors, and making sure that if we were going to portray Deaf culture, that I was going to dig into it and make sure that it was authentic and a strong part of the film.”

She continues: “I was really an outsider to the community. And it was really important to me that I find collaborators early on who were deaf and inside the community who could work with me from the script stage all the way through production.”

One early step was taking lessons in American Sign Language—“because I felt like I knew a large portion of the movie was going to be in ASL and I felt like I wanted to understand the language, and eventually would probably be directing deaf actors on set, and wanted to have some facility with the language.”



**EMILIA JONES SIGNS
IN *CODA*, WRITTEN
AND DIRECTED BY
SIÂN HEDER**

Her ASL teacher, Hillary Baack, “became a really good friend and read the script and sort of started to introduce me in the community to people.” That led her to Alexandria Wailes, who became a director of ASL, or ASL master, on the film. Wailes brought in the film’s other ASL master, Anne Tomasetti.

“They were an amazing team, not just in translating the script with me, but also kind of being my deaf eyes on set—you know, everything from the way that the living room furniture was arranged, to watching the monitor and making sure that signs were always in frame, through post, watching cuts,” says Heder.

Tomasetti was also crucial to a day of improvisation by the deaf actors, when she helped Heder understand what they were communicating.

Heder worried about whether hearing audiences would connect with the ASL scenes. But one thing that bridged the gap is that so many of the sign-language scenes are funny.

“I think so often disability is portrayed in such a precious, earnest way, where characters that are deaf or have a disability are portrayed as being either incredibly noble, or objects of pity. And in fact, you know, the only difference with a deaf person is that they can’t hear.”

She credits her deaf actors, including Troy Kotsur, who plays the father in the Rossi fishing family, and Marlee Matlin, who plays the mother.

“Troy Kotsur is one of the funniest people ever,” Heder says. “Hearing people who don’t sign can watch Troy tell a signed story, and they’ll be laughing along with him because it’s so expressive and fun.”

Matlin, who is to date the only deaf actor to win an Academy Award (for her role in 1986’s *Children of a Lesser God*), says Heder not only did the homework, but “always deferred to the deaf cast and crew when it came to presenting the characters and the story of the film authentically.”

“One moment that stood out was when it came to the script,” Matlin told *MovieMaker*, via email. “Writers/directors that I’ve worked with tend to expect the cast to treat the script as written as the final word. But Siân was always willing to consult with us and make changes that we thought would more accurately portray us. The best example of that was in the concert scene, when Troy Kotsur and I improvised dialogue. She asked us what we were saying and insisted we keep it in the film. Now that’s TRUST! She was willing to give us the trust and work WITH her.”

The parents played by Matlin and Kotsur

were inspired in part by Heder’s own parents, Mags Harries and Lajos Héder, Cambridge-based artists from Wales and Hungary, respectively, who collaborate on public arts projects across the United States. Like the couple in the film, Heder says, her parents are “incredibly blunt about sex and telling dirty jokes and swearing all the time. ... My daughter’s like, ‘Do all grandmas say the f-word as much as my grandma?’ I’m like, ‘No. They don’t.’ ... Showing that this family is just a normal, working-class, bawdy, funny family was really important to me.”

Adds Matlin: “So often deaf characters are portrayed in a manner that lends itself to pathos or straight drama. But, what do you know? Deaf people can be funny and Siân captured the funny moments in the Rossi family so well that anyone, deaf or hearing, could identify with them. I loved both the humor and the pathos in the film, because it felt REAL.”

PITCH SLAPPED

Mastering the musical aspects of the film presented completely different challenges.

“People were like, ‘Were you scared of all the ASL and directing deaf actors?’ And I was like, ‘No—I was scared of the music,’” Heder laughs. “Because I am not musical. I’m probably one of the worst singers you could ever hear.”

Her lead actor, Emilia Jones, plays Ruby Rossi, who has grown up singing mostly out on her family’s boat, where no one else can hear her. Because Ruby finds her voice during the story, Heder wanted to record the music live on set. (*Editor’s Note: You can read our full feature on Jones on p. 88.*)

“I wanted the mistakes and the sloppiness and the rawness of a live performance,” says Heder.

She says composer Marius de Vries and music producer Nick Baxter came up with arrangements that gave her the confidence to try to capture live sound. She enlisted Pitch Slapped—a choir from Boston’s Berklee College of Music, which plays a prominent part in the film—to play the choir at Ruby’s high school.

“And of course, then I heard them and I was like, ‘These kids are too good. I don’t buy that they’re the choir at Gloucester High!’ So I drove Nick crazy because I went out and grabbed other kids who couldn’t sing as well,” Heder says.

She had seen Irish actor Ferdia Walsh-Peel as an aspiring ’80s rocker in the lovely 2016 John Carney film *Sing Street*, and was



delighted when he auditioned. He got the part of a student who is paired with Ruby by a dedicated music teacher, played by Eugenio Derbez.

“And of course, you know, casting an Irish kid and a British kid to play Gloucester townies was another level of acting work. But they were just wonderful together. And their harmonies were wonderful. And he has a really great musical sense and plays guitar. And so it was really helpful, I think, working with Nick and Emilia to find that duet,” Heder says.


She grew confident enough with music that she’s exploring other musical projects, but says it’s a little too early to say what they are.

‘WE DON’T NEED YOUR MOVIE’

The last world that Heder had to enter might seem the easiest to crack. Surely, you say, the people of Gloucester cheerfully threw open their doors to the visitor from Cambridge? The communities are less than 40 miles apart—practically neighbors.

But perhaps you haven’t spent much time in Gloucester. It’s a place that feels no need to prove itself to anyone, in a region where people have a strong tradition of tending to their own affairs. Locals call it “Gloster,” and if you mispronounce it “Glaw-chester,” they’ll laugh you out of town.




**SIÂN HEDER DIRECTS
FERDIA WALSH-PEELO AND
EMILIA JONES IN CODA**

“When I met with the mayor, she’s like, ‘We don’t need your movie. We got lots of movies here—*The Perfect Storm*,’” Heder laughs. “And I was like, ‘*The Perfect Storm* was 20 years ago! Can we please have another Gloucester movie?’”

She knew she needed to get into Gloucester’s good graces, and sought out *Manchester by the Sea* writer-director Kenneth Lonergan for advice. His film was shot not just in the town of its title (technically called Manchester-by-the-Sea), but also in other towns in Massachusetts’ North Shore region, including Gloucester. She asked him who to hire and not hire.

“He said, ‘If you hire one person on your crew, it’s this guy’—Joe Borland, who was his marine coordinator. And he’s like, ‘This guy—our days at sea were our best days of the entire shoot. This guy was incredible.’ And so I hired Joe Borland, three years before we got the movie made. I went out to coffee with him and he was the guy who kept calling me every six months to be like, ‘Are we making this movie or not? What’s going on?’ Joe was a huge help in making inroads within the fishing community.”

She also hung out in bars, and on boats.

“When I was researching the script, I met with the Gloucester Fishermen’s Wives Association and they helped me with my research, and would tell me the bars to go

to to meet the fishermen, and so I knew the boats would get in at like one, and I would go at like two down to the bars and hang out and chat people up. Nina Groppo was one of the heads of the organization, and she would take me down and introduce me to her cousin Enzo, who had a boat.”

Meeting people with boats was one thing.

“Trying to get someone to let me *use* their fishing boat was so impossible,” Heder says, “because everybody was like, ‘I don’t give a shit about your movie. We were in *The Perfect Storm*, in the church scene. We don’t ever need to see another movie again.”

“I finally met Captain Paul Vitale, who was the cousin of Nina. And I asked him if I could go fishing with him. And he was like, ‘Alright, you meet me down at the docks at 3 a.m.’ And I woke up in the middle of the night, and I dragged my production designer Diane Lederman with me, and we went down to the docks at 3 a.m. ... And we went out fishing with him. And he was so freaked out having other people on his boat he barely spoke to us. He was like, ‘Don’t talk to me, I do my thing. I fish alone. You sit over there, don’t touch anything.’”

“And I was like, I want to use this guy’s boat. I’ve got to find a way to use this guy’s boat. And so we kept going back out with him,” Heder continues. “Then I went back with a couple other crew members. And every

time we’d go fishing with him, we’d bring more people until finally I convinced him to let us use his fishing boat. And the day we shot, we had like, you know, 100 people out at sea. We had seven vessels. We had a crew boat, everybody was all over his boat. And he’s like, ‘I don’t know how I got into this.’”

Remember that scene in that other Massachusetts movie, *Good Will Hunting*, when Robin Williams’ character, Sean Maguire, finally wins Will’s respect by just sitting with him, not saying a word?

“I did that with the entire Gloucester fishing community,” Heder says.

Joking aside, she takes very seriously her obligation to get stories right. It’s especially important when presenting cultures that have been woefully underrepresented for years.

Howard A. Rosenblum, CEO of the National Association of the Deaf, tells *MovieMaker* that the organization “applauds directors like Siân Heder who hired deaf actors to take on deaf roles... and also consulted with deaf professionals to assist with various aspects of the movie, including how to properly include ASL in the cinematography and framing of Deaf culture.” He also praised *A Quiet Place* for hiring a deaf actor to play a deaf character in one of the leading roles—while criticizing projects that rely on tropes and caricatures, and the overhiring of hearing actors to play deaf characters.

“When we, deaf and hard-of-hearing people, see other deaf and hard-of-hearing people out in the mainstream, we feel seen,” Rosenblum continued. “Such representations celebrate our ‘differences’ which help others realize that we’re not so different. Young deaf and hard-of-hearing children should see more and more representation in all aspects of society. Representation matters.”

Heder is very aware that representation matters even more when so few stories have been told about people from a particular group—communities that have never gotten their version of *The Perfect Storm*.

“I think as a filmmaker, you can only try as hard as you can, and learn each time and try to do better the next time,” Heder says. “But if someone told me that I had to make movies about white women from Cambridge for the rest of my life, I would give up being a storyteller. Because how boring would that be?” **MM**

CODA opens in theaters and on Apple TV+ on August 13.

Best Film Schools

IN
THE
U.S. &
CANADA

2021

BY GREG GILMAN

AT A TIME WHEN PRO-LEVEL CAMERAS are built into our cell phones, YouTube tutorials teach just about any subject you can imagine, and auteurs like Aaron Sorkin share their wisdom through MasterClass courses, is film school still a necessity for anyone who wants to learn the craft of cinema? It's impossible to generalize. But when you go to film school, you aren't just paying for an education. Film schools offer state-of-the-art equipment, and facilities and training to use it all effectively. They also introduce you to essential history and theory that will shape your perspective and creative work. You'll meet teachers and mentors whose guidance will feel priceless.

But the most important resource might be your fellow students. Writers, directors and producers need crews to bring their vision to life. And for executives, financiers, agents and managers, networking is *essential*. It all begins in film school. Wherever you study, remember to build bridges, not burn them.

MovieMaker continues its tradition of highlighting the best film schools in the United States and Canada, highlighting not just the universities themselves, but particular programs with curriculums we find compelling and useful, based on specific paths students can pursue. Those disciplines include writing, producing, directing, cinematography, overall production, business and more scholarly studies of cinema and mass media, as well. We hope you enjoy the read, and wish you the best of luck being accepted into the film school of your dreams.

U.S. WEST AND NORTHWEST

OUTSTANDING DIRECTING TRAINING

| The AFI Conservatory

(Los Angeles)

This two-year MFA directing program is among the most prestigious available in North America. Ari Aster (*Hereditary*), Kirby Dick (*Allen v. Farrow*), Patty Jenkins (*Wonder Woman*) and Darren Aronofsky (*Black Swan*) are among the former Directing Fellows who went on to craft compelling films that made them household names for cinephiles. “I’m so grateful for my years at AFI,” Jenkins says. “I deeply believe they helped me find my voice and defining principles of story and craft that inform me to this day.” The American Film Institute Conservatory guarantees Fellows will refine their skill by directing at least five films in two years, while learning from inspiring guest lectures and enlightening seminars from masters of the craft like Quentin Tarantino and David Lynch. The Los Angeles-based film school also offers graduate programs for screenwriting, editing, producing, production design and cinematography, creating a collaborative environment in which Fellows from all disciplines join forces on projects, establishing relationships that will carry on long after graduation. Brad Ingelsby, who created the HBO drama *Mare of Easttown*, describes his experience at AFI as “incredible”: “I learned how to be a writer at AFI,” he tells *MovieMaker*. “And then of course, you get the knowledge in your backpack, and then you’ve got to go off and make yourself into your own writer, but I got all that knowledge. And by the time I graduated from AFI, I felt like I was completely equipped to actually be a writer, at long last.”

OUTSTANDING DIRECTING TRAINING

| ArtCenter College of Design

(Pasadena, California)

OUTSTANDING DIRECTING TRAINING

| California Institute of the Arts

(Santa Clarita, California)

OUTSTANDING FILM PRODUCTION TRAINING

| California State University, Northridge

(Los Angeles)



NYU ALUM AND *JUDAS AND THE BLACK MESSIAH* DIRECTOR SHAKA KING

OUTSTANDING CINEMATOGRAPHY TRAINING

| Chapman University

(Orange, California)

OUTSTANDING FILM AND DIGITAL CONTENT PRODUCTION TRAINING

| Hussian College

(Los Angeles)

This film school is young, so its reputation is still growing, but it should be on the radar of anyone seeking a

The school offers a four-year BFA that will prepare students to apply their skills in the real world. An intensive series of collaborative and mentored projects help students through the processes of screenwriting, directing, sound design, cinematography, producing, pre-production and post-production, while the location of the program makes it easy to mix and mingle with professionals.

OUTSTANDING TV WRITING AND PRODUCING TRAINING

| Loyola Marymount University

(Los Angeles)

OUTSTANDING CINEMATOGRAPHY TRAINING

| New York Film Academy

(Los Angeles and New York City)

With campuses in both hubs of the entertainment industry, NYFA is a fertile training ground for all disciplines of moviemaking. Bill Hader, Issa Rae, Paul Dano and Aubrey Plaza are among the Hollywood stars who have taken courses here. The Los Angeles campus offers an accelerated, two-year MFA in cinematography, studying under experienced faculty, headed by chair Anthony Richmond, a BAFTA award-winning director of photography, whose eclectic list of 93 credits includes *The Sandlot*, *Legally Blonde* and *Candyman*. Over the course of five semesters, students crew in all positions on their peers’ films, while working with film and digital cameras to photograph their own thesis films in various forms—including music video, documentary



MARE OF EASTTOWN

program that emphasizes practical production experience, through working on a studio lot in the heart of the industry, along with essential film theory courses. “We are the first film school created in partnership with a studio and situated inside a major Hollywood lot, Los Angeles Center Studios,” Elric Kane, chair of Film & Digital Content, tells *MovieMaker*. “This industry immersion allows students to learn by doing and being surrounded by the business. Our focus is to balance the art and commerce of filmmaking in the ever-changing entertainment landscape.”

Best Film Schools

IN THE U.S. & CANADA

2021

and narrative. The curriculum blends academic theory with practical skills to equip students with the on-set knowledge they need to actually land a job in the competitive field of cinematography. Practice makes perfect, so MFA students can expect to complete 10 of their own projects as director of photography, in addition to working on numerous other productions in other capacities on set.

OUTSTANDING FILM STUDIES

Portland State University

(Portland, Oregon)

This is a fantastic environment for aspiring filmmakers seeking a bachelor's degree that can lead to an industry job in Portland or elsewhere, or lay the foundation for more education. The curriculum is heavy on theory, but offers students the chance to dive into their particular areas of interest, whether they

want to pursue narrative or documentary film production, screenwriting, digital cinematography, animation, or editing. "Our major does not distinguish a production path from a film theory path," Amy Borden, director of the PSU School of Film, tells *MovieMaker*. "We

of courses on every aspect of production, this school will give undergrads a strong foundation.

OUTSTANDING PRODUCTION TRAINING

San Francisco State University

OUTSTANDING PRODUCING TRAINING

University of California, Los Angeles

OUTSTANDING PRODUCING TRAINING

University of Southern California

(Los Angeles)

Given its state-of-the-art facilities and proximity to the studios in Hollywood, as well as the esteemed faculty who spent decades working for those studios, and its strong legacy of producing graduates who go on to be a force within the industry, USC is consistently ranked as one of the best film schools in the world. Prepare to

make your own impact through the Peter Stark Producing Program, an innovative, two-year, full-time MFA designed to prepare highly motivated students for careers as producers and executives of film, television and new media. The program is spearheaded by professor and chair Lawrence Turman, who has produced 40 films, including *The Graduate*



MASTER OF NONE STAR AND WRITER LENA WAITHE (L)

believe that makers need a significant grounding in film history, theory and aesthetics, including a broad engagement with genres, global voices and film forms to develop into knowledgeable, creative filmmakers." With classes analyzing various genres and even influential filmmakers, such as the Coen Brothers and John Carpenter, as well as a plethora

Joi McMillon

Editor of *Zola* and *The Underground Railroad*

Florida State University
College of Motion Picture Arts



What advice do you wish someone had given you when you were a film student?

Extract pressure from this process and enjoy yourself. These years are of such value to really exercise your creative energy. Disregard what others might think, free your imagination and allow it to take you to worlds we have yet to discover. Now is the time to be bold and uninhibited—don't play it safe.

Did you have a mentor during your program? If so, what invaluable lessons did you take away from that mentor?

Richard Portman, our sound professor, taught us that filmmaking is 50 percent picture and 50 percent sound. To this day, that still resonates with me, and I believe it's evident in the films I've collaborated on, and in the degree that we excavate sound and use it to enhance what's on the screen.

What did you do right out of film school?

Once I graduated, I packed up my hand-me-down Mazda Protegé and headed west. I had an interview lined up for the American Cinema Editors internship, and since the interview was in L.A., I thought there was no better reason to move out there myself.

and *American History X*. Graduates are successful not just because of the excellent education, but also because of the tight-knit comradery between the select group of students. There are no electives; all Stark students take the same classes at the same time in a mandated sequence. Screenwriting powerhouse John August (*Big Fish*, *Corpse Bride*, *Aladdin*) and writer-producer Melissa Rosenberg (*Jessica Jones*, *Dexter*) agreed during a 2019 Q&A in front of USC students that they both broke into the industry with the help of classmates. “I thought I wanted to write, but I didn’t know if I was good enough to do it. I chose Stark as a safer, business-y degree and it was the right choice,” August said. “The people were so smart and so driven and kept me on their toes, and I flourished.”

U.S. MIDWEST AND SOUTHWEST

OUTSTANDING TELEVISION WRITING AND BUSINESS STUDIES

DePaul University

Writer-producer-actor extraordinaire Lena Waithe (*Master of None*, *Them*) studied at this school, which offers a unique BFA combining the art of television writing with the business of managing productions. This hybrid education produces graduates with high-level writing skills and sound business acumen and entrepreneurial thinking, allowing more control over any creative endeavor they take on in the industry. “Students are mentored by working professionals in world-class facilities, provided with opportunities to work on production lots in Chicago and Los Angeles, and enmeshed in an active and engaged alumni network,” Thelma Vickroy, chair of the Cinema and Television Arts department, tells *MovieMaker*. “Graduates grow to become visionaries in their fields and are represented in a multiplicity of roles in narrative film, television, documentary, screenwriting



and new media.” The four-year program concludes with a capstone thesis project, collaborating with students pursuing other disciplines in the medium, while intensive workshops provide a taste of “writer’s room” life. And advanced classes in executive management and digital media strategies prepare students to become the showrunners of tomorrow.

OUTSTANDING ANIMATION TRAINING

DePaul University (Chicago)

OUTSTANDING FILM AND MEDIA STUDIES

University of Michigan (Ann Arbor, Michigan)

OUTSTANDING DOCUMENTARY TRAINING

University of Missouri, Murray School of Documentary Journalism (Columbia, Missouri)

Whether you’re an aspiring auteur or want to pursue a more commercial path, nonfiction opportunities are plentiful: Documentaries are more popular than ever, thanks to the explosion of reality television and streaming services’ seemingly insatiable appetite for multi-part deep dives. This focused master’s program was launched back in 2014 after a \$6.7

million gift from UM alum Jonathan B. Murray, an Emmy-winning producer and chairman of Bunim/Murray Productions, and is spearheaded by filmmaker-in-chief Robert Greene—director of the Sundance award-winning doc *Kate Plays Christine*—and award-winning journalist Stacey Woelfel. Both bring a wealth of experience to guide students through a very thorough 40-credit program exploring theory, ethics and research methods, along with the production skills required to bring stranger-than-

Chris Westlund

Cinematographer of *Best Summer Ever*

Ohio University’s School of Film

What’s one area of focus that every film school program shouldn’t be without?

Editing is crucial and will make anyone a better filmmaker.

Did you have a mentor during your program? If so, what invaluable lessons did you take away from that mentor?

My screenwriting professor ended up being a great mentor with lots of enthusiasm and no B.S. Throughout the creative process he would constantly ask: Who cares? Why does this matter?

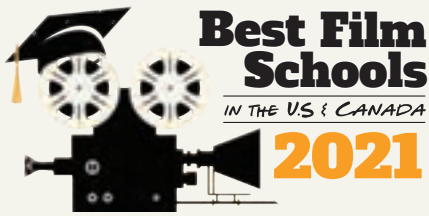
What did you do right out of film school?

I took the summer off then moved straight to L.A. where I started freelancing in G&E and Camera as a loader/2nd AC. I even edited for a bit to make ends meet and keep my mind sharp.



fiction stories to life through long-form documentary storytelling. The visiting artist program connects students to major moviemakers like Garrett Bradley (*Time*), Kirsten Johnson (*Dick Johnson Is Dead*), and Yance Ford (*Strong Island*).

“For us the idea is to help our students gain a deep understanding of the complex aesthetics and ethics of documentary filmmaking while they also learn who they are as filmmakers and people,” Greene tells *MovieMaker*. “With the world’s oldest and best journalism school as our backbone, we apply the hands-on ethos known as the Missouri Method to go out and create original, daring, personal and impactful documentary films.” Woelfel adds: “The center builds on the 113-year history of the Missouri School of Journalism, which has always put experiential learning first. Just as the school runs a daily city newspaper and a commercial, network-affiliate television station, our program operates a film production company, Method M Films, to give students the opportunity to make documentary content that audiences will actually get to see.”



OUTSTANDING FILM AND MEDIA PRODUCTION TRAINING

| The University of Texas at Austin

OUTSTANDING CINEMATIC ARTS TRAINING

| University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee

Whether you're preparing to study for a bachelor's degree or want a master's in cinema, this school offers an outstanding education for career-minded cinephiles. The Film, Video, Animation & New Genres department, made up of passionate artists, makers, professionals and scholars, is tailored toward cultivating independent artistic expression over commercialism. Students receive a holistic education, participating in every aspect of the filmmaking process to better understand how every role works together. The curriculum balances essential theory courses with production, offering a variety of facilities to shoot and edit projects. It also offers classroom and creative space in Oscar winner John Ridley's 40,000-square-foot Nō Studios filmmaking hub in the historic Pabst Brewery complex. Students who want practical professional experience have the opportunity to work with Doc|UWM, which functions like a small production company, producing short and feature-length documentary films for hire. "Our students think through doing and do through thinking," Stephen Wetzel, the chair of the film department, tells *MovieMaker*.

U.S. NORTHEAST

OUTSTANDING FILM AND TELEVISION STUDIES

| Boston University

OUTSTANDING PRODUCTION TRAINING

| Brooklyn College's Feirstein Graduate School of Cinema

Affordable and located in the heart of the East Coast industry hub on the Steiner Studios lot, this is a great school to get an MFA in cinema arts and learn a specialized skill such as directing, cinematography or editing. The three-year program, overseen by two-time Oscar nominated producer Richard N.



Brad Ingelsby

**Creator of *Mare of Easttown*,
screenwriter of *The Way Back***

AFI Conservatory

Did you have a mentor during your program? If so, what invaluable lessons did you take away from that mentor?

I had two wonderful instructors: Daryl G. Nickens and Len Schrader, Paul Schrader's brother. I was probably eager to ask a million questions, because I truly had very little knowledge about the craft. I loved it but I didn't have a lot of training, and they were both so kind to take time after class to sit with me, to email with me and really teach me how to be a writer.

I probably had some raw talent when I got there, but I did not know structure. I didn't know so many of the things that I learned, like how to get in and out of a scene and how to write dialogue that feels natural.

I still think about some of those lessons and some of those mantras, and I can hear their voices in my head to this day.

Gladstein (*The Hateful Eight*), grants students access to state-of-the-art equipment and facilities, including four sound stages and numerous post-production suites. "We are a production orientated, hands-on program where students will make a minimum of five films," Gladstein, the executive director of the Feirstein Graduate School of Cinema, tells *MovieMaker*. "We create an atmosphere where the making of projects is paramount and collaboration is taught and mandatory." Director

Steven Soderbergh, actor Ethan Hawke, cinematographer Rachel Morrison, producer Nina Yang Bongiovi and other industry titans sit on a newly created advisory board to mentor students on their films.

OUTSTANDING DIRECTING AND WRITING TRAINING

| Columbia University

(New York City)

This Ivy League institution in New York City has long been considered a brilliant training ground for world-class filmmakers, including writer-director-producer James Ponsoldt (*The Spectacular Now*, *The End of the Tour*), who graduated in 2005. "The MFA Film program at Columbia University is a vital and supportive home for international storytellers united in a desire to make films that are as deeply personal as they are boundary-pushing," he told *MovieMaker*. "Writers, directors and producers work side-by-side to challenge each other in a community defined by curiosity, empathy and courage." The program, which covers both directing and writing, includes two years of creative workshops and related courses, followed by one to two years of thesis and research arts work. The faculty understands the importance of collaboration and networking in the film business, so students in the Creative Producing MFA concentration share the first-year curriculum and some of the second-year electives, creating a bond that lasts throughout film school and beyond. Students find their unique voices together while working on short and feature film projects, and then work together professionally. "They launch their careers together," says producer Maureen A. Ryan (*Man on a Wire*), chair and director of production at Columbia University's Graduate Film program, in a video detailing the program. A perfect example of this in action is writer Phil Johnston bringing fellow Columbia grad Jennifer Lee onto *Wreck-It Ralph*, which was her first screenwriting credit before she won

an Oscar for Disney's *Frozen*, which she co-wrote and co-directed. "One of the joys for me about coming to Columbia and teaching here is I see the students forming incredibly close friendships," faculty member and screenwriter David Klass (*Kiss the Girls*) says in the same video. "I see them after they graduate moving out to Hollywood, pulling each other onto jobs and shows."

OUTSTANDING CINEMATOGRAPHY TRAINING

Emerson College
(Boston, Massachusetts)

OUTSTANDING CINEMATOGRAPHY TRAINING

New York University

OUTSTANDING ANIMATION TRAINING

Rhode Island School of Design
(Providence, Rhode Island)

The New School
(New York City)

Filmmaking is just one aspect of a larger industry—the mass media—and this 100-year-old university located in the heart of the media capital of the world offers a master's program that will immerse students in studying the various mediums that share human stories through audio and visual elements. The two-year education is designed to be broad or specific, with a limited number of required courses, allowing a flexible curriculum catering to students' interests. Take a deep dive into digital cinema production of documentary or narrative storytelling to learn the craft, or take the scholarly route to analyze, criticize and philosophize about the history and future of film. In addition to a fine faculty of diverse media professionals, students will have the opportunity to learn from modern masters

through the Hirshon Director-In-Residence, which previously featured Oscar-nominated filmmaker Raoul Peck (*I Am Not Your Negro*) and Oscar nominee Benh Zeitlin (*Beasts of the Southern Wild*). "It's a unique opportunity for students to learn from contemporary filmmakers in an intimate setting," Vladan Nikolic, the dean of the School of Media Studies, tells *MovieMaker*. "The filmmakers are very open about their processes, and all it takes to get a film made, especially for those films that are personal and oftentimes difficult to get made. Students have regularly said afterward that they have been immensely inspired by the filmmakers, and that these master classes helped them in thinking about and shaping their own work."

OUTSTANDING LOS ANGELES STUDY AWAY PROGRAM

Temple University
(Philadelphia)

Networking is *everything*, and knowing the right people in Los Angeles might open up more doors than a degree ever will. Although Temple is based in Philadelphia, the school, which we highlighted last year for outstanding directing training, offers year-round L.A. Study Away opportunities. Students continue regular coursework pertaining to their degrees and are treated to prominent professional guests every week, all while getting real-world experience working in the industry as interns. 2009 TU graduate Mike Ganzman, who co-produces the Fox drama *Prodigal Son* and previously was an associate producer on NBC's *Blindspot*, tells *MovieMaker* his experience in the internship program was "invaluable," because it provided an enlightening glimpse into the industry that one can only obtain through the experience of working on the set of a professional

Alice Brooks

Cinematographer of *In The Heights*

USC School of Cinematic Arts

What should aspiring moviemakers consider when picking a school?

The most important consideration regarding film school is not where you go, but what you make out of it once you get there. The best thing I got out of film school were my relationships.

I have an amazing core group of friends that all went to USC together—and we work together to this day. I met Jon M. Chu there. I shot his student short musical "When the Kids Are Away" 19 years ago. Jon and I bonded over our love of musicals, and we became a great team through the years, culminating in most recently working together on *In the Heights*.

Wherever you go to film school, remember to find people that have a similar work ethic as you and that you love spending time with. These are the people you should stick together with.

What's one area of focus that every film school program shouldn't be without?

Every film school program should make a producing class a requirement. I never had any interest in being a producer, but taking a producing class at USC helped me understand the producing process. The class taught me that although as a cinematographer, I view myself as an artist, the movie industry is a business and I needed to conduct myself as a business person. I also learned a valuable lesson on what it takes to succeed from my producing professor, Jerry Eisenberg. He said Hollywood is like a massive brick wall. The goal is to get to the other side of the wall. You spend day after day throwing rocks against the wall, trying to break through. It will probably take many years or even decades. Much of the time you will want to give up. But one day you will see a small hole through to the other side. No matter how small the opening, that is the moment you can't give up and must be more determined than ever. You must throw more rocks, even harder, because you are closer to breaking through than you think.

What advice do you wish someone had given you when you were a film student?

The overnight successes you read about in the press are years and years in the making.

What did you do right out of film school?

I was an undergraduate at USC and when I finished, I realized I didn't have enough material to have a great cinematography reel. I decided to hang around school the following year and offered current students to shoot undergrad and grad thesis films. I shot almost 20 shorts that year. As a result, I was able to build my reel, and was able to use it to get my first agent.



Best Film Schools

IN THE U.S. & CANADA

2021

production. “The people I interned for were able to give me a crash course in how they got into the industry, and gave strategic guidance so I could better position myself for success,” he says. “If you love film and TV like I do, you realize that even though you might start trying to go in one direction with your career, you’re working in a very creative environment that might lead your passion to be in another area of the business. Understanding how that all works is crucial, and I attribute this to the knowledge I gained early on while doing my L.A. internship.”

OUTSTANDING FILM STUDIES

Wesleyan University
(Middletown, Connecticut)

U.S. SOUTHEAST

OUTSTANDING ANIMATION TRAINING

U.S. Southeast Florida State University
(Tallahassee, Florida)

OUTSTANDING FILM PRODUCTION TRAINING

Full Sail University
(Winter Park, Florida)

Full Sail offers a variety of programs on campus or online, but what especially caught our eye is the accelerated Film Production MFA, which aims to give students the fundamental skills, tools and experience they need to succeed in an ever-evolving industry, in just 12 months. Students are equipped with a MacBook Pro loaded with filmmaking technology through the school’s signature Project LaunchBox™. Full Sail also covers production costs for films, and provides a Hollywood-style backlot with versatile sound stages for professional-level productions. The best way to learn about filmmaking is to make films, and

this program provides that priceless hands-on-experience, while also connecting students with industry professionals through virtual alumni mixers and networking workshops. “Our students at Full Sail are given a one-of-a-kind university experience that closely emulates the real world and the professional working environment,” Anne Russell, program director, Film Production MFA, tells *MovieMaker*. “We take our students’ education beyond theoretical learning and embrace a hands-on project-based style of learning in tandem. With our educators having years of industry experience, students are learning directly from those who have actively been in the industry.”

school’s motto is “we learn by doing,” so expect lots of opportunities to put classroom theory into practice, through student-produced shows and short films. These turn into networking opportunities at the esteemed SCAD Savannah Film Festival, the largest university-run film festival in the country, which attracts a bevy of A-listers and averages 63,000 attendees every year. The school boasts excellent facilities and experienced faculty, headed by actor and director D.W. Moffett, chair of the film and television department. “We do it just like the pros. All student sets, protocols and procedures that we call out in our classes... all of them are modeled on and directly mirror the professional world,” Moffett tells *MovieMaker*. “Theory, as



OUTSTANDING NARRATIVE FILMMAKING TRAINING

Ringling College of Art and Design
(Sarasota, Florida)

OUTSTANDING PRODUCTION TRAINING

Savannah College of Art and Design
(Savannah, Georgia)

The abbreviation SCAD especially makes sense when you consider the scads of professional productions drawn to one of the most charming places in the South (or anywhere). You can cut your teeth in Savannah or work in Atlanta’s booming film community. The

such, is really devoted to storytelling. We emphasize story over everything else. All classes must reference what is being taught to how that impacts the storytelling. Story first... execute like the pros... never stop working.”

OUTSTANDING SCREENWRITING TRAINING

University of Miami
(Miami, Florida)

OUTSTANDING SCREENWRITING TRAINING

University of North Carolina School of the Arts
(Winston-Salem, North Carolina)

CANADA

OUTSTANDING FILM AND MEDIA STUDIES

Queen's University
(Kingston, Ontario)

OUTSTANDING FILM PRODUCTION TRAINING

Red Deer College
(Red Deer, Alberta)

OUTSTANDING DOCUMENTARY TRAINING

Ryerson University
(Toronto, Ontario)

OUTSTANDING FILM PRODUCTION TRAINING

Toronto Film School
(Toronto, Ontario)

OUTSTANDING PRODUCTION DESIGN TRAINING

University of British Columbia's Department of Theatre and Film
(Vancouver, British Columbia)

The Vancouver area lured plenty of Hollywood productions during the pandemic, with \$3.1 billion pouring into the city's economy. This excellent program is in the center of it all. UBC's renowned theatre training creates the perfect environment for aspiring production designers to gain real-world experience on department productions, practicing set, lighting, sound and projection design, while studying history and theory in classrooms. Once students graduate with a BFA in theatre design and production, they're in a perfect location to score jobs on the set of *dozens* of TV shows and films shooting in the production hub.



OUTSTANDING 3D ANIMATION AND VFX TRAINING

Vancouver Film School
(Vancouver, British Columbia)

This 12-month, production-focused program is described as "a non-stop sprint to graduation," by Colin Giles, head of the School of Animation and VFX at VFS, who tells *MovieMaker* the experience is "almost exclusively hands-on." Notable alumni include Lino DiSalvo, who served as head of animation on Disney's *Frozen*, and Neill Blomkamp, whose visually dazzling sci-fi films include *District 9*. Others have gone on to create VFX for *Game of Thrones*, *Sonic the Hedgehog*, *Wonder Woman*, and many more blockbuster film, TV and video game projects. After students narrow their focus to animation, modeling or VFX, they are mentored by experienced faculty through the process of creating a demo reel that will

be showcased at the end of the year during an industry night that attracts professionals ready to hire. "No other post-secondary institution provides better training, more hands-on industry production experience, and better professional mentorship than VFS," Giles adds. "Our fast, comprehensive and industry-acclaimed education delivers in-depth knowledge and shapes our students' talents into marketable skills that get them hired in the entertainment and creative technology worlds."

OUTSTANDING FILM PRODUCTION TRAINING

York University
(Toronto, Ontario) **MM**

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WITH THE HELP OF
VISUAL EFFECTS WIZARD
NICHOLAS ASHE BATEMAN,
DAVID LOWERY TOOK
HIS TIME RETOOLING
THE GREEN KNIGHT DURING
THE PANDEMIC—ADDING
NEW SCENES AND
60 VFX SHOTS

CHALLENGE ACCEPTED



BY DAVID LOWERY
AS TOLD TO CALEB HAMMOND

DAVID LOWERY first encountered the 14th century poem *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* in his college freshman English class. It tells the story of a literal green knight who invites any of the knights of King Arthur's Round Table to try to land a blow against him. "That type of chivalric game was something that actually existed as a way to test one's honor. It exists in other poems, it exists in other texts, it exists in historical records," says Lowery. "That concept itself was bizarre and unwieldy to me in a way that I liked grappling with." Sir Gawain accepts the challenge, and beheads the knight—who then picks up his severed head and keeps talking. He gives Gawain one year until they will meet again, when the green knight will take his own swing. "That image in and of itself was enough to keep that ember alive over the ensuing years before I decided to write the script," Lowery says. Production on the film was difficult, and after completing the shoot, Lowery says he worked through a "destructive" period of "hate editing" in which he cut out many good sequences. But then his date with destiny, like Gawain's, was delayed. As he explains below, Lowery took two months to reflect, and then took a second swing. —C.H.

March of 2020: We were racing to have a version of *The Green Knight* ready for South by Southwest. There was the understanding that maybe the movie wouldn't be completely done, but even if it wasn't, it was still going to open two months later in May, so we were pretty much racing to finish the movie that was going to come out in theaters. That was our mindset: This is going to be the version that everyone sees, so let's just try to get it as good as we can get it.

Making movies is a luxurious job to have, but in this case, it took a lot out of me. It took a long time to get the edit into shape.

I was editing and at the mixing stage simultaneously. I was sitting in one room editing one reel while the mixing team was mixing. My composer, Daniel, was sitting next to me writing new music for the scenes I was editing. So we were definitely rushing, and as soon as the brakes got hit, we just put our pencils down. We were at Skywalker



DEV PATEL IS SIR GAWAIN IN THE GREEN KNIGHT



“

IS THERE SOMETHING ABOUT THIS POEM AND ADAPTING THIS POEM THAT MAKES YOU WANT TO JUST KEEP ADAPTING AND KEEP WORKING ON IT?

”

—DAVID LOWERY

Ranch when South by Southwest was canceled, and that was the same day that Tom Hanks came down with COVID, and then later the NBA season was canceled. We were like, “This probably means the movie isn’t coming out.”

And so we just stopped working on it, and went and dealt with reality for a little while, as we all did.

I had divorced myself from it, as I do with all my movies when they’re done. It took a little bit of time for it to seep back into my consciousness. I had closed that door, and that door stayed closed for a little while.

But sometime around May I opened up the edit, and there was one little thing that was bothering me: “I wonder if we could just keep working on this one shot.” It was a shot that’s in the trailer, of the plant growing out of the center of the ring that Morgan le Faye had drawn with her sisters.

We worked with Weta Digital for the visual effects for most of the production, and then once we shut down, they were done. They delivered all the shots. So we had a filmmaker friend of ours, Nick Bateman—whose film *The Wanting Mare* came out earlier this year—work on that visual effects shot. And the pace of that shot

changed, and all of a sudden, reel one was 14 frames shorter. As soon as that happened, that meant we had to revisit the sound mix because the cut had changed.

I said: “Well, as long as it’s 14 frames shorter, let me see if there’s anything else I can improve.” Instantly I just started unpacking the entire movie, cutting it and overhauling a lot of things. It was really nice because at that point I’d had almost two months away from it, not looking at it and not really thinking about it, either. So I was able to revisit it with some perspective and spend time on it.

One of the things that happened was the movie got longer. I realized I’d been trying so hard to make it more palatable and make it more fast-paced. I realized there’s no world in which this movie is ever going to be particularly audience-friendly. It’s not a rip-roaring adventure, so I might as well just let it breathe a little. So I put a bunch of scenes back in that I cut out and put a lot of little grace notes back in that I had cut out. And then we kept finding more visual effects to work on and added probably about 60 visual effects shots, which was fun, because I love visual effects. Then we re-scored, and by October, we went back to

4 THE GREEN KNIGHT INFLUENCES

the sound mix and what was supposed to be half a day of tweaks that we hadn't finished in March turned into another week of redoing a lot of stuff.

We added a shot with the giants, and there's a sequence where Gawain hallucinates and sees Alicia Vikander in front of him. We redid that sequence completely and made it much bigger than it was in the initial cut.

There were little things where I was like, I wish this shot was wider. So we would take the shot, shrink it down and create a matte painting to make a shot wide. In that scene, where Gawain is hallucinating, we shot it in relatively close proximity. There wasn't a wide shot of him where he was. So we took the widest shot we had and shrunk it down in the frame, so it was occupying less space. Then Nick went in and created a 3D landscape that tied into the photography and painted in all the rocks and the landscape that would have been there. And he lit it to match the lighting we had on set and turned what was initially a pretty tight medium shot into a big wide shot. And he had to add a fox into it, because all of a sudden, the fox would be there. So it was things like that, which you don't watch the movie and think of as visual effects. That's just me getting very meticulous about how I want to reframe this image.

We did that a couple of times. One of the shots, of a puppet show, I also wished was wider. So we shrunk it down again and created a completely fabricated landscape that's partially 3D, partially a matte painting, and that broadens the scope of that image. But that helps actually broaden the scope of the film too, because now, you're seeing more in these moments. It's a lot of little shots like that that added up to 60.

And there are a few big ones too, like a shot going into the castle through the castle doors, that's the first shot in the trailer. That was one that we added. Anything that was bugging me, I was like, "How can we address this?" Nick came in and did all these 60 shots single-handedly, and really did a great job with them.

I love tinkering with individual frames and making them better. The DP of *Mank*, Erik Messerschmidt, said of working with



LANCELOT DU LAC (1974)
DIR. ROBERT BRESSON

One of my favorites. It also has one of the best movie posters of all time. I initially thought that *The Green Knight* would be more aligned with this, in terms of its stripped-down, basic nature.



MONTY PYTHON AND THE HOLY GRAIL (1975)
DIR. TERRY JONES AND TERRY GILLIAM

A legitimately great treatment of Arthurian legends. We looked at this in prep too. It was a very low-budget movie for its time, but it feels more authentically medieval than many of the giant multi-million dollar spectacles that came in the years following. It's a high-watermark for me in terms of Arthurian cinematic adaptations.



EXCALIBUR (1981)
DIR. JOHN BOORMAN

The gold standard of cinematic Arthurian legends. It's not perfect, but it's stood the test of time.



PERCEVAL LE GALLOIS (1978)
DIR. ÉRIC ROHMER

Very impressionistic and bold. We looked at this in prep, and I was really struck by it.



“
**MAKING MOVIES
IS A LUXURIOUS
JOB TO HAVE,
BUT IN THIS CASE,
IT TOOK A LOT
OUT OF ME.**
”

—DAVID LOWERY

David Fincher, “We don’t find shots, we build them.” I really empathize with that as something that I like doing. I do everything I can to get a perfect shot on set, obviously, but I also know that the tools exist in post-production to refine them, and I can adjust the composition, I can move people around, I can use split screens, I can try to maximize all the tools at my disposal to make an individual image better, and when I can do that, I will.

About the puppet-show shot that wasn’t wide enough: We were in a little courtyard, near our hotel in Ireland when we shot that. So there wasn’t really much more set to it. We took what was behind there, and we’re like, OK, this looks like a barn, and now let’s make this a little bigger. So it would be a barnyard, which means we need sheep and the animals. So then we add in some stock footage of sheep against a blue screen. And then beyond that, you would see some towers or castles or some medieval detail in the background. So you sort of are building a set. Basically, you’re

taking the little elements that were in the frame, and using those as inspiration for a new set that wouldn’t have existed before. Because it’s a medieval film, we were shooting in real castles sometimes. But in that case, we weren’t—you would have seen the hotel landscape behind us. So it definitely was a chance to use our imaginations and broaden things.

When you’re dealing with natural landscapes it’s a little easier, just because rock formations are a little bit more forgiving in some ways. But also, there’s tricky things. That shot of Dev hallucinating wasn’t locked off, it was moving. So it had to be tracked in 3D and stabilized. And all the rocks had to connect to the rocks that were in the photography. And it was a specifically lit shot. It was a nighttime exterior, so that lighting had to match. Things like that get tricky, whereas with the puppet shot, it was pretty flat daylight lighting—it was pretty easy to match.

None of this is easy to do, but it’s all doable. That’s the thing, whenever I come

up with an idea, we’ll email Nick and ask, “Could you do this?” I know it’s not easy, but I know it’s all doable, and you just need someone who’s up to the challenge.

Director Stephen Weeks had adapted this story twice with 1973’s *Gawain and the Green Knight* and then 1984’s *Sword of the Valiant*. I always thought that was an interesting bit of trivia. And suddenly I realized: Is it something about the material? Is there something about this poem and adapting this poem that makes you want to just keep adapting and keep working on it? I think there might be something to that, because I feel like I could make this movie again, and there’s more to be discovered in the text.

I would never say that there’s much good that can come out of a global pandemic at all. But, among other things, it was a time to slow down and refocus on things. One of the things I was able to refocus on was this movie. **MM**

The *Green Knight* opens in theaters on July 30, from A24.



CUCALORUS

WOODS HOLE FILM FESTIVAL

Located in the idyllic New England getaway of Cape Cod, Woods Hole pleasantly combines a historic, tranquil locale with forward-thinking films, and is especially focused on supporting New England filmmakers on the rise. It's also one of the longest-serving American festivals, and marks its 30th annual edition with a combined in-person and virtual festival from July 31 through August 7. Boasting 150 films submitted from around the world, the festival is also proud to share that the majority of its filmmakers this year are women. And one of its most notable and original programs is its Film and Science Initiative, which encourages collaboration and discussion between scientists and moviemakers. It aims to inspire the creation of films that will increase the public's scientific knowledge.

FANTASIA INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL

A standout on our list of the World's 50 Best Genre Festivals, this Montreal celebration is one of the best-run and most influential you'll find. (One moviemaker we quoted on the list noted that Fantasia can "change the trajectory of one's career.") Serious filmmakers take it seriously, which

is one reason why James Gunn will show his new film *The Suicide Squad* at Fantasia this year, two days before its release date—and one day before the festival officially begins with Julien Knafo's *Brain Freeze*. This year's 25th annual edition

will feature a focus on Japanese cinema, with notable North American premieres including *Kakegurui 2: Ultimate Russian Roulette* from Tsutomu Hanabusa, and Daigo Matsui's *Remain in Twilight*. Richard Bates Jr.'s *King Knight* is among the films that will world premiere at the festival, set to take place mostly virtually, at the time of this writing, from August 5-25. More in-person events may be added depending on local health authorities. Last year's Fantasia was one of the virtual fests we enjoyed most, given its thrilling programming and ability to maintain a sense of drama and spectacle online. Past attendees of the fest—known for its extremely enthusiastic audience—have included Bates, Robert Pattinson, Ben and Josh Safdie, Guillermo del Toro, Mark Hamill, Takashi Miike and Sam Elliott.

VICTORIA FILM FESTIVAL

"Bringing film to life," declares this vibrant festival, held since 1995 on majestic Vancouver Island in Victoria, British Columbia. Featured on our latest list of 50 Film Festivals Worth the Entry Fee, Victoria focuses on the changing ways we watch films and consume all kinds of media, and aims to use the internet and other technology to help new voices break through. The latest, virtual edition of the

FESTIVAL SPOTLIGHT SPONSORED EDITORIAL

festival featured 70 films from around the world, as well as discussions and interactive experiences. In a typical year, the festival hosts films at cherished venues around Victoria, including the historic Vic Theatre. Submissions for the 2022 festival are currently open to short and feature-length films made in 2020 and 2021 that are fiction, documentary, animation or experimental.



VICTORIA FILM FESTIVAL GALA

CHAGRIN DOCUMENTARY FILM FESTIVAL

Celebrating the art and power of documentary film, this festival, marking its 12th year, sets out both to elevate filmmakers and raise awareness among its smart, dedicated audience.

This year's edition will take place from October 5-10. It's produced by Fevered Dream Productions, a company originally founded by filmmaker David Ponce as he was filming his documentary *The Lost Sparrows of Roodepoort*, about an AIDS orphanage in Johannesburg, South Africa. Ponce died of leukemia at age 20, but his mother, Mary Ann Ponce, and his friends completed it after his death. As director of the festival, which turns up quite regularly on our annual list of the 50 Film Festivals Worth the Entry Fee, Mary Ann Ponce honors her son's memory by helping other

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documentarians share their important stories with the world.

CUCALORUS FESTIVAL

This Southern, spirited film festival will take place for the 27th year in a row from November 10-14 in downtown Wilmington, North Carolina. Another of *MovieMaker's* 50 Film Fests Worth the Entry Fee—and one of our 25 Coolest Film Festivals—the fun, frisky gathering is put on by the Cucalorus' multi-disciplinary arts organization, which aims to support local creatives through many community programs in addition to its yearly film and stage festivals. Cucalorus managing director Rachel Taylor said in a press release when Cucalorus made our list of festivals worth the entry fee: "Cucalorus is constantly working to make the festival circuit better for filmmakers in terms of charging fair entry fees, being transparent

about our selection process, and making sure that filmmakers get paid for their work. The festival in November is more like a creative retreat, encouraging collaboration and friendship."

HOLLYSHORTS FILM FESTIVAL

Also on *MovieMaker's* 2021 list of 50 Film Fests Worth the Entry Fee, this short-film-centric festival takes place every year at the TCL Chinese 6 theaters in Hollywood. From August 2-12, this year's 17th annual festival will feature short films that are 40 minutes or less, including awards categories like Short Animation, Short Live Action, Short Documentary, Music Video, Webisode, Commercials, Youth Film and Digital Microbudget. Hollyshorts also puts on a monthly screening series at the Chinese theater and makes occasional stops to New

York, Austin and Miami throughout the year. The festival earned a special place in many Angelenos' hearts during the pandemic, when organizers realized people stuck at home needed some fresh inspiration—and quickly assembled a 418-film, weeklong virtual festival that included a screenplay competition and even a new film market.

MAMMOTH LAKES FILM FESTIVAL

Held at a resort high in California's Eastern Sierra mountains, this gorgeously situated festival is a five-hour drive from both San Francisco and Los Angeles. It usually takes place over Memorial Day weekend but has been moved to September 22-26 for its 7th annual festival this year. In the past, Mammoth Lakes has been home to the West Coast premiere of *Damsel*,

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DESALES UNIVERSITY

Students at DeSales begin making films right away as freshmen, and will be involved in approximately 40 film projects by graduation. "I was drawn to the major because it seemed like a fun, hands-on field of study in which I could learn a wide variety of different skills, each applicable in the workforce," says alum Sovie Goad. Students come out of the program with demo reels to prove their skills, which will be wide-ranging: They lead the charge in every stage of their productions, from writing to directing to camera operation to producing and editing. It also boasts close-knit classes. Based in lovely Center Valley, Pennsylvania, DeSales provides in-person, online and hybrid classes in a nurturing environment.

VANCOUVER FILM SCHOOL

Featured this issue in our list of the Best Film Schools in the U.S. and Canada, Vancouver Film School functions like a major studio, with multiple production facilities creating content for film, TV, games, animation, design, digital applications and more. It is efficient and effective, focused on the approach that one year of concentrated work, balancing industry-led theory and hands-on production, gives students the necessary skills to craft a professional-level portfolio or reel. Those portfolios and reels have led to major success for alumni, who have credits on major projects including *Stranger Things*, *Captain Marvel* and *The Lion King*. Alums include *District 9* director Neill Blomkamp.

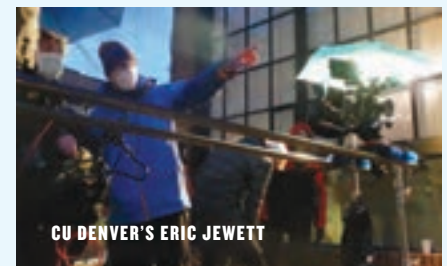
UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA SCHOOL OF THE ARTS

At the time of this writing, UNCSCA alum David Gordon Green has social media

shrieking with delight, thanks to the release of the trailer for his latest film, *Halloween Kills*. It's just another achievement for the school, which is again on our list of the Best Film Schools in the U.S. and Canada and is known especially for its outstanding training in screenwriting and producing—and emphasis on solving logistical problems without sacrificing creativity. Tony-nominated alum Stephen McKinley Henderson, who can next be seen in *Dune*, summed up the role of filmmaking in society when he addressed graduates during this year's commencement ceremony. "You are the essential workers whose workplace has been closed for a dangerous length of time. Our country needs your services," he said. "Sometimes artists put pressure on ourselves to achieve some sort of lofty status, some sort of celebrity... Our purpose as artists is not to lift ourselves. It is to lift the art and thereby lift us all."

COLORADO UNIVERSITY DENVER

Professor Eric Jewett is a Hollywood vet who has spent 40 years as a director and assistant director on major film and TV projects. As a five-year member of the CU Denver Film & Television faculty, he's a favorite among students who flock to his classes to hear stories of working on *Christmas Vacation*, *The Lost Boys*, *Weeds* and *Code Black*, among other projects—and to



participate in the Hollywood Internship Program, where Jewett matches students with hand-picked Hollywood studios through his own network. But most of all, students seek out Jewett to master the skills they need to make films.

Jewett says that "filmmaking is learned by doing." In his

starring Robert Pattinson and Mia Wasikowska and the world premiere of Netflix true-crime hit *Abducted in Plain Sight*. Included in *MovieMaker's* 2021 list of 50 Film Fests Worth the Entry Fee, the festival is also dedicated to discovering little-known artists and elevating new voices, and festival director Shira Dubrovner is especially good at spotting and highlighting bold, uncompromising filmmakers.

NEVADA CITY FILM FESTIVAL

From attending screenings to wandering the streets of magical Nevada City, California at midnight, this festival is winsome, entrancing fun. Nicknamed "the Sundance of the Sierra," and included in *MovieMaker's* 50 Film Fests Worth the Entry Fee, this festival brims with artistry, independence and character. The 2021 edition will be held both in-person and online, featuring filmmaker panels, workshops, and house shows, and features exquisite music and amazing parties. There are plenty of opportunities to learn more about filmmaking and make fast new friends. This year's festival also has a special 20th anniversary beer from local Three Forks Brewery. **MM**

FESTIVAL BEAT

JULIEN DUBUQUE INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL

Home to the world's shortest, steepest railway, Dubuque, Iowa is also home to another welcome presence on our list of 50 Film Festivals Worth the Entry Fee. Dubuque celebrated its 10th annual festival this year from April 18-25 and boasted over 200 film screenings, as well as panels, coffees with filmmakers, and other warm and welcoming events. It has varied and very good taste. This year's prize for Best Documentary went to *The Girl Who Wore Freedom* from director Christian Taylor, which looked at D-Day through the eyes of the local people of Normandy, France. Best Feature went to *Last Night in Rozzie* directed by Sean Gannet, telling the story of a New York lawyer who ends up having to face a childhood trauma when he returns home to Boston in order to reunite a dying friend with his young son. **MM**

POPPY JASPER INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL

Home to the world's shortest, steepest railway, Dubuque, Iowa is also home to another welcome presence on our list of 50 Film Festivals Worth the Entry Fee. Dubuque celebrated its 10th annual festival this year from April 18-25 and boasted over 200 film screenings, as well as panels, coffees with filmmakers, and other warm and welcoming events. It has varied and very good taste. This year's prize for Best Documentary went to *The Girl Who Wore Freedom* from director Christian Taylor, which looked at D-Day through the eyes of the local people of Normandy, France. Best Feature went to *Last Night in Rozzie* directed by Sean Gannet, telling the story of a New York lawyer who ends up having to face a childhood trauma when he returns home to Boston in order to reunite a dying friend with his young son. **MM**

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courses, rather than show or talk about the techniques to film a scene, Jewett turns a class into a full-scale production. With his CU Denver Advanced Acting class, he is directing “180 Degrees,” a dramatic short that demonstrates use of the 180-degree rule, which determines camera point of view in two-person scenes. While mastery of this rule may seem subtle to the viewer, it’s a filmmaking staple that requires command, control and proficiency.

The students, who diligently and professionally repeat what they learn, value the experience.

“Talking about the 180-degree rule in class and watching movies with the 180-degree cut is a nice

example,” says CU Denver student Monique Salas. “Still, it is very different from actually being present during the filming process and experiencing the cut.”

Beyond learning camera and scene technique, the students have big roles to fill both in front of and behind the camera: scouting locations, securing permits at Denver’s Mile High Stadium, acting, designing scenes, choosing costumes, and managing sets, schedules and production.

Jewett is inspired by his students, who he says show up each day with creative ideas, and don’t just rehash what has already been done in the industry. In fact, “180 Degrees” was written by a CU Denver Film & Television grad while she was a student in a senior

thesis class.

Jewett is also invigorated by the diversity of his CU Denver class. “Forty-two percent of the people in the class are people of color and 30% of my cast are women of color,” he says. “I think it’s important to show that people of color have stories, because they’re so often ignored in mainstream filmmaking.”

IDYLLWILD ARTS ACADEMY

“Art is the path to both self-discovery and the solution of community and global problems,” says Marianne Kent-Stoll, head of school at this treasured institution set on 205 acres of pine forest in Southern California’s San Jacinto Mountains. It offers a

boarding arts school that gives pre-professional training in the arts and a college preparatory curriculum, as well as a summer arts program.

The student body is made up of gifted young artists from all over the world. Its rich, inspiring approach holds that “art is the greatest teacher of humanity,” emphasizing that an artist should be an interdisciplinary thinker, an individual, a partner, a citizen, and an apprentice to nature.

That also sounds like a pretty perfect description of a moviemaker, and an education at Idyllwild can be one of the best ways to introduce young people to film and other creative arts in an atmosphere that embraces diversity and inclusion. **MM**



A LOCATION WE LOVE: NEW ORLEANS

Producer Todd Lewis helps us see one of our greatest cities differently than we usually do

WELCOME TO A LOCATION WE LOVE, a brand-new feature in which moviemakers tells us about places where they love to film. Our inaugural location is New Orleans—a regular city on our annual list of the Best Places to Live and Work as a Moviemaker, and a truly magical location...

for a few reasons Todd Lewis is about to share.

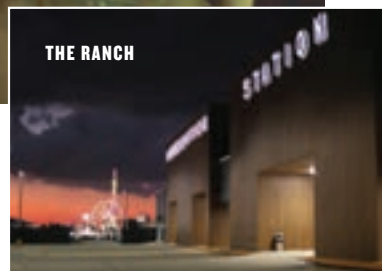
TELL US ABOUT YOURSELF:

I’m a New Orleans-based producer and production manager for film and television. I started as a director’s assistant and learned from the likes of Norman Jewison, Michael Mann and Walter Hill. During the past 25 years, I’ve amassed over 50 feature film and television credits—20 of those in Louisiana. They include *Your*

Honor, Deepwater Horizon, Jason Bourne, Fantastic Four, Captain Phillips, 21 Jump Street, X-Men: The Last Stand, Black or White and Mr. Brooks.

LOCATION I LOVE: In Louisiana, there are two jewels in the crown to mention specifically for filming, one of which is of course the French Quarter. Not the French Quarter you see on the news. The beauty of the architecture and atmosphere make this section of New Orleans feel like a small, quaint, European city.

The other jewel for moviemakers is The Ranch Film Studios. If you’re looking for offices and stages, and the proper support to make your project shine, then look no further. They offer a state-of-the-art facility just minutes from downtown and the French





FILM PIPELINE

Film Pipeline

In 2018, Film Pipeline joined the well-established Script Pipeline and Book Pipeline as part of Pipeline Media Group—an enterprise devoted to matching creators with film and TV executives. Film Pipeline includes a short film and short script competition designed to help deserving projects find financing and production. Standouts are circulated among agencies, producers and managers looking for filmmakers from a wide range of backgrounds. Rather than taking a one-and-done approach, it actively promotes directors to help them get their stories told. Pipeline loves to highlight its success stories, pointing to millions in sold screenplays and pilots, as well as talent who found representation with Pipeline's help. **MM**

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Quarter. I've worked out of The Ranch many times and consider it to be the premiere place to be when filming in New Orleans.

WHERE TO EAT: Expect a different answer from every New Orleanian you meet. There are so many options for great food, from hole-in-the-wall joints to James Beard-award-winning restaurants. All have one common thread—great New Orleans food. For my wife and myself, we'll take La Petite Grocery every time.

WHERE TO RECHARGE: We love the River. The old man. The lazy Mississippi River.

LOCAL SAYING YOU'LL HEAR A LOT: "Only in New Orleans." **MM**



CALL FOR ENTRIES

The **CINEQUEST FILM & VR FESTIVAL** draws over 110,000 attendees and showcases over 300 films and shorts, VR experiences, and groundbreaking screenplays and teleplays. "It's a perfect film festival in a glorious place," says *American Gods* creator Neil Gaiman. Cinequest programs 90% of its festival from paid submissions. "Being a part of Cinequest is not to follow industry trends, but to witness the moment they're being set," says *MovieMaker*. Submit Today!

EVOLUTION MALLORCA INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL celebrates its 10th edition with a clear mission: Bridging cultures, bridging people. EMIFF is recognized as one of the fastest-growing film festivals in Europe, shaping a creative community, and allowing independent filmmakers to feel inspired and thrive in this idyllic Mediterranean island paradise. evolutionfilmfestival.com, @evolutionmallorcafilmfestival

Ranked as one of the top 50 Film Festivals Worth the Entry Fee by *MovieMaker*, the **JULIEN DUBUQUE INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL** (JDIFF) is known for its great programming, inquisitive audience, consistent communication, multiple screening opportunities, workshops, panels and so much more. JDIFF is *the* film festival for independent filmmakers. julienfilmfest.com

MAMMOTH LAKES FILM FESTIVAL is the West Coast's premiere festival dedicated to discovering and supporting the next generation of filmmakers. We are committed to showcasing the work of emerging, innovative filmmakers against the backdrop of California's ruggedly beautiful Eastern Sierra. Industry professionals provide mentoring and support, and relationships and collaborations are actively promoted and nurtured. mammothlakesfilmfestival.com

Dubbed the Sundance of the Sierra, for the last 21 years, the **NEVADA CITY FILM FESTIVAL** has brought top independent film, music and comedy, while attracting thousands of attendees, international filmmakers, and industry guests to the historic town of Nevada City, California. nevadacityfilmfestival.com

Join us for the 19th **OXFORD FILM FESTIVAL**. Trans filmmakers get a full waiver and there are discount codes for BIPOC, disabled and female filmmakers at oxfordfilmfest.com/submit—or on FilmFreeway. Join us for a weekend of great films, food and fun.

The **POPPY JASPER INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL** seeks submissions that are original, have a strong point of view, and represent values of inclusivity, diversity and equity. We

want to promote voices and perspectives often absent from the media. PJIFF welcomes filmmakers of all backgrounds and perspectives. All genres are welcome, short and feature.

San Luis Obispo is not only known for its wine, beaches, rural charm and friendly small towns. It's also the home of the world-class **SLO FILM FEST!** It's a destination for independent cinema and great networking opportunities—and an easy drive from Los Angeles and San Francisco. Visit slofilmfest.org to submit today!

The 2022 **VICTORIA FILM FESTIVAL** launches its Call for Entries started March 31. Screening more than 80 features and shorts in all genres, it's a quirky celebration of all things film—just the right size to get your film noticed, but not missed. Submit at victoriafilmfestival.com/submit

WY Submit to the **WYO FILM FESTIVAL?** Well: **1.** We're nestled at the foot of the beautiful Bighorn Mountains in Sheridan, Wyoming. **2.** We cover travel costs for our filmmakers. **3.** We provide an intimate atmosphere for showcasing a diverse range of films. So, WY not submit today on FilmFreeway!

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victoriafilmfestival.com

FLASH FORWARD

("FLASH FORWARD", CONTINUED FROM P. 88)

"I think sign language is the most challenging," she said, "but singing was the most daunting."

The 19-year-old's recent credits include Netflix's young adult drama *Locke & Key*, and her acting history includes childhood roles in *One Day* and *Pirates of the Caribbean: On Stranger Tides*. But *CODA* was Jones' first time singing on the big screen.

"I'm always kind of singing around the house and things, but I'd never done anything

Spotify playlists she curates for every project she acts in—one happy playlist, one sad playlist, and one full of music her character would listen to.

"I think music is just so universal, and it makes you feel so much, that it really helps me," she says.

Some of her favorite artists to listen to are Marvin Gaye and Otis Redding.

"I listened to a lot of that kind of music while I was shooting *CODA*," she says. "I love music that makes me feel."

Looking back on *CODA*, Jones will remember it as a "love letter to family—and to love."

"What really kind of also drew me to *CODA* is that it's such a feel-good, relatable movie about family," she said. "I have an amazing family who I'm incredibly close to, and they have

always been so supportive... and I think because I've been so lucky with my upbringing and with my family that I just wanted to portray the love that you have for your family and the closeness that you have."

Post *CODA*, she plans to keep using sign language to connect with people in the Deaf community.

"I actually went to the *Locke & Key* premiere in L.A., and this man came up to me and he said, 'Can you please sign this?' He's like, 'I'm deaf.' And so I started signing to him," Jones says. "His face kind of lit up, and he was so excited that someone there knew his language. And that was kind of a moment for me where I thought, OK, I have to continue this because this is a skill now that I can use in real life, and it's such a beautiful language." **MM**

CODA opens in theaters and on Apple TV+ on August 13.



at the same level that was required for *CODA*. I'd never sung songs like that before," Jones said.

For her audition song, she went with "Landslide" by Fleetwood Mac. But just as choir teacher Bernardo (Eugenio Derbez) urges Ruby to take on powerhouse numbers in the movie, Jones was soon tasked with singing songs by Etta James, Aretha Franklin, and Christina Aguilera to prepare for the role.

"All these big, big songs with these big voices—and I kind of found it a bit daunting," she says.

She used Ruby's motivation of getting accepted into Berklee College of Music to find the inspiration.

"At the back of my mind, I was like, 'You have to get into Berklee. You have to be the one in the choir that is picked out,'" she says.

In moments where she needs a little bit of inspiration on set, Jones puts on one of the three

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'SUCH A BEAUTIFUL LANGUAGE'

Emilia Jones on singing and signing in CODA

BY MARGEAUX SIPPPELL

EMILIA JONES HAD NEVER USED American Sign Language before snagging the role of Ruby Rossi in Siân Heder's *CODA*, but you'd be forgiven for assuming otherwise.

"I felt like I was in such safe hands," Jones tells *MovieMaker* of her experience learning a new language with the help of her ASL coach, Anselmo DeSousa, and on-set ASL masters Alexandria Wailes and Anne Tomasetti.

In the new Apple TV+ film, she plays teenager Ruby Rossi—a child of deaf adults, or CODA. Every morning she wakes up at the crack of dawn to help her family's fishing business in Gloucester, Massachusetts, not only by hauling in nets but by serving as their liaison between the Deaf community and the hearing world. All the while, she's grappling with her newfound love for singing—a passion her non-hearing family members struggle to understand.

"I worked with them in depth and we created Ruby and all these signs and made everything as truthful and honest and as good as we can make it," Jones says.

The film was the native Londoner's first time ever visiting Massachusetts.

"I loved Gloucester," she says. "I had this gorgeous little bungalow cottage by the water. It was a safe haven."

But as she was befriending the crew and her fellow cast members, the audition process didn't go off without a hitch.

"Siân wanted to Skype me and talk to me about the project and the role and

Ruby, and then she said, 'I know you don't know any sign [language], but can I send you a video of my friend signing, and you try and sign the scene?' And I was like, 'Yeah, sure, OK,'" Jones says.

Jones watched the scene twice on the Friday that she received it, planning to take the whole weekend to practice ASL—but when she went back to the link the next day, she realized with dread that it had expired—and that she couldn't get ahold of anyone over the weekend.

"I was like, 'Oh no, I'm not going to be able to do it justice now. I haven't been able to practice!' But I remembered that Ruby

I LOVE MUSIC THAT MAKES ME FEEL."

would fingerspell 'Berklee' in the scene, so all weekend I was practicing fingerspelling Berklee.

And fingerspelling, it takes you a while to get fast at it," she said. "I was doing it all weekend, then I was quite quick with it. So I think in a way, although I had a panic with the link and I had to stay up till like 4 a.m., 5 a.m. trying to get it right, it kind of helped me in a way, 'cause it made my fingerspelling fast."

Two weeks later, she found out she'd gotten the part.

The word *CODA* has two meanings in Heder's story—"coda" is Italian for "tail," and in musical terminology, it means a passage that brings a piece of music to an end. *CODA* the movie presented a double whammy for Jones. Not only did she have to master ASL, but she also had to carry the show with her voice.

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