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SEPTEMBER 11, 2021

DAY 2

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# THE SEPTEMBER 11, 2021 | DAY 2 | TORONTO *Hollywood* REPORTER

TORONTO  
WEATHER  
AND HIGH  
TEMPS

TODAY  
78° F  
26° C

TOMORROW  
73° F  
23° C

## Diane Kruger Pivots to *Joika*

James Napier Robertson's film tells the story of elite American ballet dancer Joy Womack

BY ALEX RITMAN

**D**iane Kruger and rising star **Talia Ryder** are set to don ballet shoes for writer-director **James Napier Robertson's** *Joika*, which has also landed a number of key territory deals and now has a production date in its sights.

Ryder, who broke out in **Eliza Hittman's** indie hit and Berlin Silver Bear-winning *Never Rarely Sometimes Always* for Focus Features, will play **Joy "Joika" Womack**, one of a handful of foreigners — and only two U.S. women — to ever penetrate Moscow's infamously tough Bolshoi Ballet Academy. She replaces *JoJo Rabbit* star **Thomasin McKenzie**, who was originally attached when the film was first announced ahead of the

(Continued on page 2)



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REVIEW  
ON PAGE 16

## Universal's High School Clique

From left: Castmates Julianne Moore, Ben Platt, Amandla Stenberg, Colton Ryan, Danny Pino and Nik Dodani attended the world premiere of *Dear Evan Hansen* on Sept. 9 as the Universal Pictures adaptation of the hit Broadway musical opened the Toronto International Film Festival.

## Are Theatrical Windows Making a Comeback?

The strong box office performance of Marvel's *Shang-Chi and the Legend of the Ten Rings* is good news for international buyers at TIFF, most of whom are betting that exclusive runs in cinemas will push fans to return in force to theaters

BY SCOTT ROXBOROUGH AND ETAN VLESSING

**T**oronto couldn't have wished for a better opening-day present.

Last weekend's \$90 million four-day box office haul for Marvel Studios' *Shang-Chi and the Legend of the Ten Rings* meant the 2021 Toronto Film Market kicked off on an optimistic note.

Long-suffering theatrical distributors, producers and sales agents could point to **Destin Daniel Cretton's** blockbuster — which has grossed more than \$200 million worldwide to date — as a win for the theatrical experience in an era of day-and-date releases. Unlike previous Marvel release *Black Widow*, which

premiered day-and-date in theaters and on Disney+ Premier Access, *Shang-Chi* will have an exclusive 45-day theatrical release. For those in the business who pine for a return to strict theatrical windows — with films released exclusively in cinemas before going online — the movie has been a godsend.

"We were very pleased with the performance of Marvel Studios' *Shang-Chi and the Legend of the Ten Rings*, especially since [the film's star] **Simu Liu** is a homegrown Canadian talent and a rising star," **Ellis Jacob**, president and CEO of Canadian cinema giant Cineplex, tells *THR*.

(Continued on page 2)

Diane Kruger



For all the latest coverage of the Toronto International Film Festival, go to [THR.COM/TORONTO](https://www.thr.com/toronto)



## The Report

Behind the Headlines

### KRUGER

Continued from page 1

Cannes market in 2020.

Kruger — best known for films such as *Inglourious Basterds*, *Unknown* and *In the Fade*, for which she won the Cannes best actress award — is set to play Joika's tough but inspirational mentor Tatiyana Volkova, a former ballet dancer



Robertson



Ryder

and the head of the Bolshoi's training academy whose exacting standards drive Ryder's Joy to greatness.

"Diane and Talia are a match made in heaven. Diane's talent and experience are the perfect complements to Talia's bold, rising star," said Napier Robertson. "It will be a thrill and delight to watch them spar — sparks will fly! Talia's gifts as a dancer are only equaled by her stunning talents as an actor, and Diane is a force of nature, embodying Volkova's no-nonsense brilliance and passion. The dynamic between the two will be absolutely electric."

Embankment has closed a raft of presales on *Joika*, landing deals for Australia/New Zealand (The Reset Collective), Germany (Square One), Italy (Eagle), Spain (Vertice), Greece (Spentzos), Israel (United King), South Africa (Filmfinity) and Portugal (Nos Lusomundo). The company, executive producers on the film, also represent worldwide sales and co-represent U.S. rights with UTA Independent Film Group.

A New Zealand-Polish co-production, *Joika* is set to start shooting in Poland in early 2022 and is part of Embankment's sales lineup at the virtual Toronto Film Festival market. **THR**

### THEATRICAL WINDOWS

Continued from page 1

"We have an exciting film slate ahead of us, and we look forward to releasing more great films with strong box office results and exclusive theatrical windows."

Cineplex's Scotiabank Theatre in Toronto is back this year as the headquarters for TIFF media and industry screenings after remaining shuttered for much of 2020 amid the pandemic. Cinema owners in the city will be carefully watching the response to audiences this weekend as TIFF kicks off in force, hoping that the festival buzz will help put bums in seats.

*Shang-Chi's* performance is also good news for international buyers at the TIFF market, most of whom are betting that exclusive theatrical windows will push fans to return in force to cinemas.

"The distributors are all buying for theatrical release," says **Janina Vilsmaier**, director of sales at Protagonist Pictures, which closed deals on most of the world for the **Penelope Cruz-Antonio Banderas** Spanish-language comedy *Official Competition* ahead of its North American premiere in Toronto on Sept. 14. "Everyone is looking for movies that will pull people off their sofas, get them away from Netflix and back into cinemas."

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, as cinemas were forced to shut down and distributors delayed releasing their top movies, the independent film industry continued to gamble on a theatrical bounce back. Business at the world's virtual film markets, starting with one at Cannes last year and continuing this week with Toronto's second hybrid

market, has remained robust as buyers bet there is a pent-up demand from movie fans to return to stadium seating, surround sound and buttered popcorn.

It seems clear that, at least for big mainstream titles with star power, the theatrical window retains its appeal: See the multiple theatrical deals signed by HanWay for **Doug Liman's** epic adventure thriller *Everest*, starring **Ewan McGregor, Mark Strong** and **Juno Temple**, on day one of the TIFF market. For smaller or more niche movies, however, few distributors are calling for a return to the rigidity of the fixed theatrical window.

**Kent Sanderson**, president of acquisitions and ancillary distribution at indie distributor Bleecker Street, said he's released 10 movies during the pandemic, and eight of those had a dedicated theatrical window.

"I do think that exclusive theatrical window is important, certainly for our movies," Sanderson tells *THR*, "but I do believe that the way in which you release [a film], price it downstream and the length of that exclusive window should remain somewhat elastic and tailored to what is best for each individual film."

**JJ Caruth** of The Avenue Entertainment, the domestic distribution arm of genre specialist Highland Film Group, which did a multi-platform bow in June for the **Pierce Brosnan-Tim Roth** actioner *The Misfits*, thinks there's no going back to fixed theatrical windows and business models pre-pandemic.

"We have crossed the rubicon," she says. "The industry now demands more flexibility, to have a traditional window for some movies but [also] to have the option to do a shortened window or online-only release if that's best for the film." **THR**



Destin Daniel Cretton's *Shang-Chi and the Legend of the Ten Rings* has grossed more than \$200 million worldwide and counting.

## Meanwhile, in the Real World ...

→ A judge for the U.S. District Court in the Northern District of California ruled Friday that Apple violated California's Unfair Competition Law by forcing *Fortnite* and its maker Epic Games to use Apple's payment systems on the App Store.

→ **Jim Gianopulos** is leaving Paramount as chairman and CEO. **Brian Robbins**, who now runs kids network Nickelodeon for parent company ViacomCBS, will take over. Robbins will continue to oversee Nickelodeon and kids and family content at Paramount+.

→ Los Angeles has become the first major school district in the U.S. to mandate coronavirus vaccines for students 12 and older who are attending class in person. The district's Board of Education voted 6-0 to pass the measure on Thursday.



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3 Questions With ...

## SIGOURNEY WEAVER

The three-time Oscar nominee plays recovering alcoholic Hildy Good in the romantic dramedy *The Good House*, an adaptation of the **Ann Leary** novel, which premieres Sept. 15 at TIFF. Weaver's frequent onscreen love interest, **Kevin Kline** (*Dave*, *The Ice Storm*), co-stars.

### On her three-time "movie husband" Kevin Kline

We've been great friends for a long time. We went to rival drama schools, so that's part of our daily banter. We have a mildly competitive and very affectionate relationship. It was just a joy to act with him again.

### On breaking the fourth wall in *The Good House* to talk directly to the camera

I remember my first week on *Alien*, **Ridley Scott** kept saying, "Don't look in the camera!" and I finally said, "Well, you keep putting it right in front of me!" So to suddenly be able to speak directly to the camera was incredibly liberating to me. It was quite a surprise.

### On Hollywood finally embracing older female characters

I feel so fortunate because suddenly all these jobs are coming at me, and they are all so different. I finished *Avatar 2* and *3*, and I've gotten to so many small and intimate projects, like *The Good House*. I'm about to go to Australia to play a farmer, a flower farmer. Then I play this very wealthy woman for **Paul Schrader** in a movie [*Master Gardener*] with **Joel Edgerton**. Then I'm supposed to go to England to play another wonderful character. I'm just grateful for all this work and each role. —S.R.

# LevelFILM Will Distribute Greenwich Films in Canada

The multiyear agreement kicks off with the Ebs Burnough documentary *The Capote Tapes*

BY SCOTT ROXBOROUGH

Toronto-based distributor levelFILM has signed a multiyear deal with Greenwich Entertainment to handle all of Greenwich's films in Canada. The deal kicks off with the release of **Ebs Burnough's** *The Capote Tapes*, a documentary exploring the explosive impact of **Truman Capote's** unpublished novel *Answered Prayers*. *The Capote Tapes* had its world premiere at the 2019 Toronto Film Festival and U.S. premiere at DOC NYC. Greenwich is bowing the film Sept. 10 in theaters stateside.

Greenwich's **Andy Bohn** negotiated the output agreement with levelFILM head of distribution **John Bain**.

Greenwich, an art house and documentary film specialist, is best-known for its release of **Jimmy Chin** and **Elizabeth Chai Vasarhelyi's** Oscar-winning documentary *Free Solo* (2018), which grossed more than \$17 million at the North American box office.

Greenwich also is handling the U.S. release of Vasarhelyi and Chin's *The Rescue*, a look at the search and rescue mission that saved a boys' soccer team trapped inside a system of caves in Thailand, with NatGeo (it premiered at Telluride and screens Sept. 12 in Toronto); **Debbie Lum's** *Try Harder!*, about ultra-competitive Asian American pupils at a high school; and **Camilla Nielsson's** *President*, which follows

a crucial election in Zimbabwe. *Try Harder!* and *President* both premiered at Sundance this year.

On the feature side, Greenwich has handled the release of **Isabel Coixet's** *The Bookshop*, starring **Emily Mortimer** and **Bill Nighy**, and **Madeleine Olnek's** *Wild Nights With Emily*, starring **Molly Shannon**.

LevelFILM has established itself as one of Canada's premier boutique art house distributors with the release of such films as **Joe Talbot's** *The Last Black Man in San Francisco*; *Together Together*, with **Patti Harrison**, **Ed Helms** and **Rosalind Chao**; and the Canadian ingenious drama *The Body Remembers When the World Broke Open*, from directors **Kathleen Hepburn** and **Elle-Máijá Tailfeathers**. **THR**



## Jason Priestley to Direct Thriller *Projekt M*

Samizdat Pictures has tapped **Jason Priestley** to direct its suspense thriller *Projekt M*.

*Inglorious Basterds* actor **Richard Sammel** is already on board for a lead role in the Canada-Spain co-production about a psychologist sent to evaluate someone with special needs and special abilities who is sequestered near a remote village.

Sammel will play geneticist Dr. Karl Young, whose terminal illness triggers a domino effect of events. *Projekt M* will also star **Nina Kiri**, **Peter Shinkoda** and **Pedro Miguel Arce**, while *La Casa de Papel* star **Darko Peric** is in talks to join the cast.

"I am very excited to join the team for *Projekt M*

and direct an international story with an international cast that takes a different spin on what truly is the meaning of family," Priestley said in a statement. *Projekt M* is based on an original story and

screenplay penned by **Timothy York** and is being introduced to foreign buyers at the Toronto Film Festival virtual market.

Priestley has assembled some 35 directorial credits since playing teen

heartthrob Brandon Walsh on the hit 1990-2000 Fox primetime soap *Beverly Hills, 90210*. *Projekt M* is the first film under the Samizdat Pictures banner, led by cinematographer **Eric Oh**, York and finance and sales executive **Edin Mujovic**.

Principal photography is set to start in November as preproduction continues in Barcelona. The international co-production has Toronto's Hangar 18 Media on board as the Canadian partner, with **Pasha Patriki** sharing the producer credits.

Priestley is repped by **Brent Jordan Sherman** of The Characters Talent Agency. Sammel is repped by **Matthias Frik** of Spielkind. —ETAN VLESSING



Jason Priestley (left) and Richard Sammel



## Arman Julian Preps Italian WWII Drama

Indie producer **Arman Julian** has secured the film rights to *Siamo Qui, Siamo Vivi* (*We Are Here, We Are Alive*), a true-life account by writer **Roberto Mazzoli** based on the diaries of **Dr. Alfredo Sarano** during World War II in Italy. Julian will develop the Holocaust-era movie adaptation as a likely 2023 European co-production.

"Aided by the Catholic priest **Padre Sant Rafael**, they risked their lives to hide more than 300 souls, including beneath the tunnels of the Convent Beto Sante. Incredibly, while there, Padre Sant Rafael helped **Erich Eder**, a young officer of the Wehrmacht and a devoted Catholic who was in charge of the area, to embrace his faith and betray **Hitler** by not killing those hiding in the convent, including the Sarano family," Julian said in a statement. — E.V.



*Inu-oh* brings a rock 'n' roll sensibility to the biwa, a Japanese lute traditionally played during storytelling.



## Noh Theater Meets Arena Rock in *Inu-Oh*

Masaaki Yuasa's animated musical channels David Bowie to tell the tale of two outcasts in medieval Japan who find redemption in the liberating power of music **BY PATRICK BRZESKI**

### Hidden Gem

Japanese director **Masaaki Yuasa** focused on an improbable artistic hybrid as the creative basis for his latest anime feature, *Inu-Oh*, screening Sept. 11 in Toronto's Special Presentations section. What would it have been like if a performer of traditional Japanese Noh theater during the Muromachi period (1336 to 1573) danced to arena rock music instead of the gentle, evocative plucking of the ancient Japanese biwa instrument?

"If you think about it, when rock music first came out, it was something so new and exciting," Yuasa says. "So if everyday people of the Muromachi era had a chance to hear anything like that kind of music in their time, it would have been an unimaginable surprise — and that was fun for

me to think about."

Based on the Japanese book *Heike Monogatari Inu-Oh no Maki* by **Hideo Furukawa**, Yuasa's adaptation is a musical anime telling a buddy story about two social outcasts: Tomona, a boy blinded by a mysterious curse who joins a Buddhist monastery and takes up playing the biwa, a common life path for the blind in that era; and Inu-Oh, a boy born with extreme physical deformities — one very long arm, one short, and a disfigured face — whose family of traditional Noh dancers covers him in a mask and forces him to live in shame, hiding. One day, he hears Tomona playing a delicate song of tangled fate, and Inu-Oh discovers he possesses a superhuman ability to dance. The duo then pair up, extending



Yuasa

their musical experimentations to the point where traditional biwa playing begins to merge with and resemble Ziggy Stardust-era **David Bowie** or stadium rocking **Queen** (the film's wildly creative and infectious music is produced by accomplished Japanese multi-instrumentalist **Otomo Yoshihide**).

Today, Noh theater is famous for its slowness and almost impossible subtlety of expression — traits that make it a highly forbidding form of classical Japanese dance-drama for young people or newcomers. But in its origins, back in the Muromachi period and prior, it was very much a people's art form, featuring acrobats, song, dance and comic sketches. Traditional biwa music, which accompanied Noh and was used to channel and resurrect the dead, was intended to provide the audience with an opportunity to reflect on their ancestors' lessons and ponder the proper paths of their own lives, Yuasa says. So the director sought to recapture these qualities and combine them with more contemporary music and a relatable coming-of-age story in order to rekindle appreciation for the ancient art forms.

"The playing of the biwa was about posing the question, 'In what way are you going to live? The way society asks you to, or the way you really want to?'" he says. "Rock music is really fundamentally about the same thing. I found that really interesting, and then the whole approach for this film came to me." **THR**

## Toronto, According To ...

### What is your favorite thing about Toronto?

The people, the city ... it's like being in New York City, but everyone is polite, kind and nice.

### The most inaccurate thing about Canadians proved by Toronto is ...

That Toronto is really a huge city and not a small town. I would say that it's the New York City of Canada.

### What one item do you always take with you to Toronto?

A jacket I got at one of the gifting suites in 2006 when I was at the festival with the film *Bella* (which won the People's Choice Award that year). It was my first time at TIFF, and I consider that jacket my lucky jacket.

### Advice for a Toronto first-timer?

Enjoy every moment of being

### THE FILMMAKER



**Manny Perez**  
Writer-director of  
TIFF entry *La Soga 2*

part of Toronto during the festival.

### Your best only-in-Toronto story?

During TIFF, you always see stars as they walk in and out of hotel lobbies, so at one point I was coming out of a hotel and I see a familiar face and think, "I definitely know this dude," and so I say, "Yo, what are you doing here? It's been a long time." And he says, "What's up, dude?" and keeps walking, and then a friend of mine says, "Bro, I didn't know

you knew Keanu Reeves," and I was like, "Who? I thought that was Hector from my hood."

### In Toronto, you should never ...

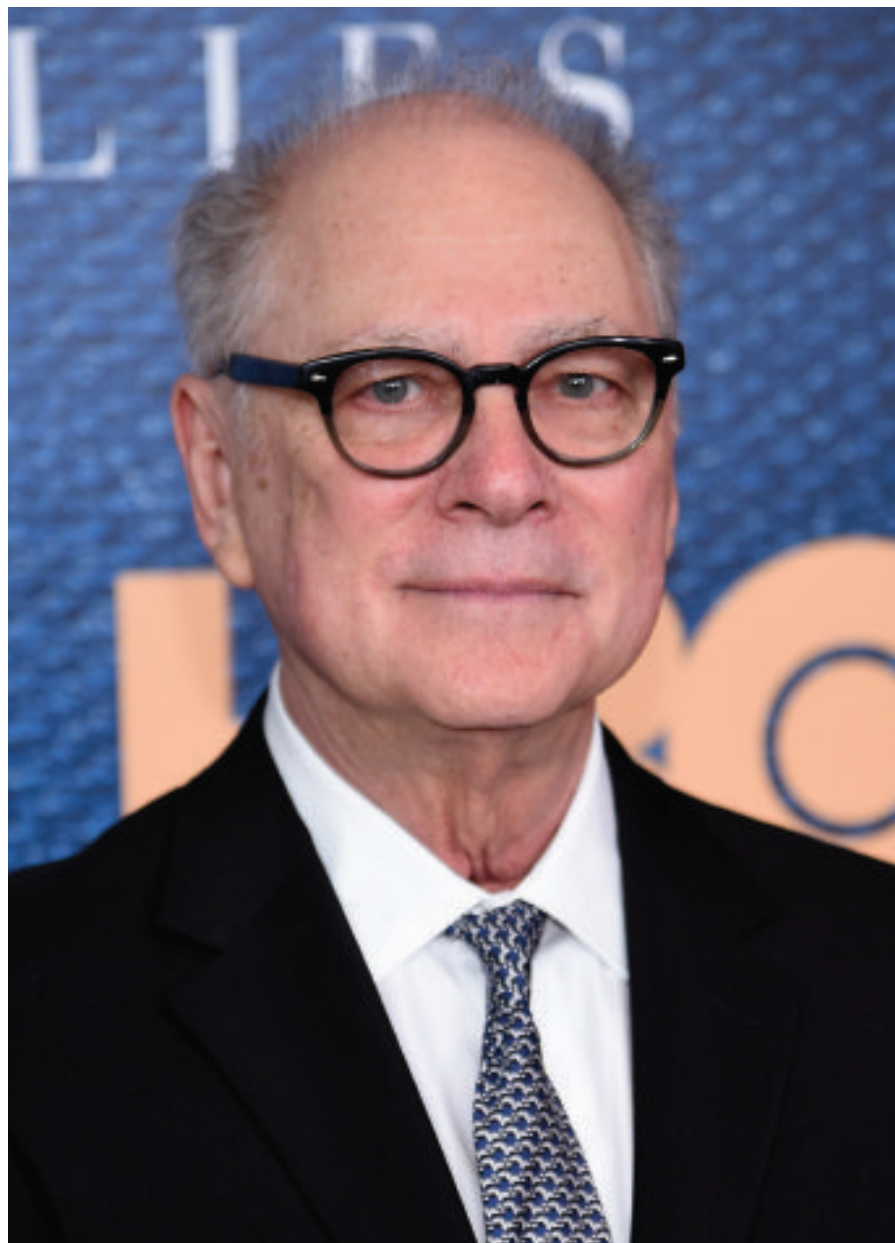
Do what I did and mistake Keanu Reeves for Hector from the hood.

### The best Toronto food/drink can be found at ...

Any corner stop or any restaurant. Just being in Toronto is a thrill of joy and drinks. — E.V.

Interview edited for length and clarity.





## Barry Levinson

The Oscar-winning helmer discusses the vivid childhood memory that led him to direct the true-life World War II-era boxing drama *The Survivor* and why in his next film he may be setting his sights on Donald Trump **BY ETAN VLESSING**

**B**arry Levinson has a film and TV track record few Hollywood directors can match.

He earned the best director Oscar for *Rain Man* in 1999 and helmed classics like *Diner* (1982), *The Natural* (1984), *Good Morning, Vietnam* (1987) and *Bugsy* (1991). Now he's back with the World War II-era biopic *The Survivor*, which tells the true story of Harry Haft, a boxer broken by being forced by an SS Nazi officer to fight fellow Jews in Auschwitz, only to narrowly escape to America and box against Rocky Marciano.

Levinson tells *THR* his latest directing gig

came after reading a scene in the movie's original script that triggered a vivid childhood memory from his time growing up in Baltimore of Russian Jewish descent. "I thought, 'This film is actually about post-traumatic stress disorder, as we would now call it,'" Levinson says ahead of the Ben Foster starrer's gala world premiere at the Toronto International Film Festival on Sept. 13.

Ahead of that Roy Thomson Hall launch, Levinson talked about Foster losing 60 pounds to play a young Haft in Auschwitz, TV culture electing Donald Trump and the instinct to survive a personal trauma.

"I'm hoping to go," says Barry Levinson of attending TIFF in person. "We'll wait for the latest travel advisories and pandemic-related requirements. I'm looking forward to going there."

### What led you to decide to direct *The Survivor*?

When I was about 4 or 5 years old, in post World War II, I lived with my parents and grandparents. And one day this man showed up at the door, and it turned out it was my grandmother's brother. I never heard her mention him, and I never thought she had a brother. He stayed with us for two weeks. I had my own room, and it was cramped for space, but they put a cot in my bedroom and he slept in that room across from me. At night, I would wake up and hear him saying something in a foreign language, and he was upset and he was thrashing about and he would call out, and then he would fall back asleep. That went on night after night for two weeks. And one day he left, and he moved on to New Jersey. I always remembered that. When I got the original Harry Haft script, I thought of him. I thought, "This isn't a film that takes place in the [death] camps." There are flashbacks to the camps. I thought, "This film is actually about post-traumatic stress disorder, as we would now call it." So it was the original script that caught my attention and the idea of post-traumatic stress disorder.

### The life lesson of Harry Haft and the trauma he endured is perhaps you can run from your past, but it always catches up with you?

The trauma is what happened to him in the camps. But it haunts him as he gets older. It haunts him as he gets married. It haunts him when he had kids, until he can come to some type of peace. Other people hear, "OK, let's get on with life," and on the outside, they are. But on the inside, you can't get past what happened. It haunts you. You can go to work, you can have a relationship. But it haunts you. And I thought, "This is an interesting subject."

### *The Survivor* is certainly no sports movie. But it portrays a boxer. Was it Harry Haft's sheer will to survive, to prevail over everyone and everything else, that allowed him to survive that boxing ring in Auschwitz?

I think in a lot of people there's the instinct to survive. But with normal boxing matches, you win and life goes on. This is different. You either survive or you die. You either go on to another fight, or you die. And that's the struggle that you live with and are haunted by. If [Haft] wasn't, it wouldn't have been the same scenario.

### Besides this will to live, your film has Haft surviving Auschwitz because of lost love, and

that's why he fought Rocky Marciano, to locate this young woman he'd known in Auschwitz after getting to America.

What pulled him through was this young woman, this romance that kept them going in the camps. Oddly enough, this summer romance kept them alive. Of course, that's what happens when you're there. But the point is how do you deal with it after you're free of that? The mind doesn't always let go of what happened, of the problem. And that's the story.

**To portray that war experience and its aftermath in America, you weave together memories of Auschwitz with Haft's life post-war. Why this use of shifting timelines, and not a straight chronology?**

[The movie] has three timelines. That's because we're not experiencing the camps, or recalling the camps. If you did the movie in chronological order, it wouldn't tell the story as well that, in fact, what happened is what haunts him. That's the difficulty, as opposed to, "Let's just follow his journey through the camps and then afterwards." It's flashing back to what stands out for him, and that gets us to 1949. OK, he survives and he's getting on with life. But he can't quite get on with life. That sets the table of the overall drama.

**Would you have made *The Survivor* in the 1980s or '90s, or is this film very much of the moment for you?**

It's a good question. If it came up earlier, would I have wanted to do it? I probably would. But it wouldn't have been the same film. And it was a childhood remembrance that stayed in my head. When I read the script, I thought, "OK, this is interesting. This is about how do you basically survive after it happened, mentally, how do you deal with the haunting of it?"

**You shot much of the movie in Hungary. Was that eerie because of that country's own World War II experience with the Holocaust?**

To be honest, the experience of shooting it there, in terms of the crew, was really exceptionally good. The whole crew was quite invested in the story. Obviously, most would not have experienced [the war], it was too long ago. They heard stories passed on to them. In terms of shooting, they were very respectful. We had to shoot rather quickly. It's not that big a budget film. We had to shoot the movie in 34 days. We had to do a lot of trickery to give it the size the movie needed, and the credibility.



For his role as real-life boxer Harry Haft, Ben Foster lost 60 pounds. "It's extraordinary how he was able to do that," says Levinson. "It was a taxing experience, physically and mentally. But he was up for that."

**Ben Foster, in playing Haft, has to very much carry the film. He really immersed himself in the role.**

Ben lost 60 pounds for the camp sequences. It's extraordinary how he was able to do that. You lose 60 pounds and then do boxing scenes? The stamina needed for all of that, he was just remarkable. He had to lose weight and then gain weight and then gain extra weight. It was a taxing experience, physically and mentally. But he was up for that. He's a terrific actor and among only a handful of actors that can really play character roles and just literally disappear into them.

**In September, *The Survivor* will screen in Toronto. Do you expect to be on hand for the premiere?**

I'm hoping to go. We'll wait for the latest travel advisories and pandemic-related requirements. I'm looking forward to going there.

**And for your next project, I gather you're in talks to possibly direct *The Winner*, a movie about Donald Trump. Is that going to happen?**

I'm very interested in it. We'll see where it all goes. But it's a very unusual take on that. It's quite inventive, and very different from anything I've ever seen or related

to a biopic. The concept and design is quite fascinating.

**You've made political films before, such as *Wag the Dog*, about the White House concocting a war as a distraction, and *Man of the Year*, where a TV host decides to run for the U.S. presidency. There are some obvious parallels with the Trump era. Did you feel like you needed another go at a political satire?**

Sometimes you do work about what you think the state is and where things are going. I don't think it's a dark secret about the proliferation of [TV culture]. It was very much responsible for the election of John F. Kennedy. That was the beginning. And then comes Obama, as he's charismatic on television. And along comes Trump, who is not charismatic in a real positive way, but he captures the imagination and we're talking about a guy who had a reality television show for 10 years and he had a lot of people watching and some people thought, "He's very successful, he runs his business, I see him every week on TV and, well, he should be president." And you ask, "What about credentials?" We don't care anymore. He captures our imagination. So that's been on my mind for a long time, someone who basically captures our attention. And that's the nature of television. So inevitably there was going to be a president who was a real TV personality. That's not going away. I think down the road it's going to get worse, not better.

*Interview edited for length and clarity.*

BY THE  
NUMBERS

21

Feature films directed

6

Oscar noms, with  
one best director win  
for 1999's *Rain Man*

4

Levinson films set in his  
hometown of Baltimore  
(*Diner*, *Tin Men*, *Avalon*  
and *Liberty Heights*)



# ‘NOBODY KNOWS MY LIFE BETTER THAN I DO’

Music icon Dionne Warwick dishes on her new Toronto Film Fest doc *Don't Make Me Over*, her musical legacy, concern for Britney Spears and how she conquered Twitter with humor and kindness **BY TATIANA SIEGEL**



**D**

Dionne Warwick is sitting on a bed in her South Orange, New Jersey, home. A calendar with a fluffy white Pomeranian bounding across a beach hangs on the wall behind her, providing the room's sole embellishment. The bedroom offers a telling glimpse into the legendary singer's world — minimalist, no-nonsense and infectiously positive.

For the first time in her 66-year career, the alto with the unmistakably husky voice behind

such classics as “Do You Know the Way to San Jose?” and “Walk on By” is getting the doc treatment with *Dionne Warwick: Don't Make Me Over*, a nod to her first solo single of the same name. Directed by her longtime business partner Dave Wooley and Oscar-nominated documentarian David Heilbroner (*Traffic Stop*), the film traces her arc from her early gospel roots in New Jersey to becoming one of the most charted female vocalists of all time.

“I was bulldozed into [the film] by Dave the same way he did with my book,” says Warwick, now 80, with a laugh about why she

acquiesced. (Wooley co-wrote with Warwick 2010's *My Life, as I See It: An Autobiography*, which served as a basis for the film.) “It was about time that everybody got to really know me without surmising who I am and what I am. The press has a tendency to say and write things that they feel they want said and written. The only way you're going to get the true essence of anything, especially when it comes to a documentary, is everything coming from my mouth. Nobody knows my life better than I do.”

Along the way, *Don't Make Me Over*, which

Illustration by **Ryan Olbrysh**

has its world premiere at the Toronto International Film Festival on Sept. 11, follows such defining Warwick moments as her touring the Jim Crow South with Sam Cooke during the 1960s, being discovered by hitmaker Burt Bacharach and her friendship with screen icon Marlene Dietrich, who introduced her to haute couture.

"She broke ground with this grace and poise," Heilbroner notes of Warwick. "And I remember growing up as a kid and always feeling like she inhabited this interesting place in pop culture between Black and white. She caught criticism from both sides, which is what you get when you're a trailblazer."

**G**rowing up in a musical family — her mother was manager of the Drinkard Singers and her father was a sometime record promoter — Warwick sang with her sister Dee Dee Warwick and their aunt Cissy Houston in the New Hope Baptist Church Choir in Newark. The trio later formed the musical act the Gospelsaires, which sang backup vocals on the hit single "Just One Look."

"I was kind of forced into that. I didn't want to do this. This is not my vocation of choice," she explains. "I was going to teach. I went to college for that reason. I had a hit record, which kind of demanded my becoming a performer. And so I kind of backdoored into entertainment. It chose me. And, because subsequently as the years went on and recordings became more and more appreciated, I have settled into who I am and what I do. And I happen to love it."

Bacharach discovered her in 1962 when she was singing background for The Drifters' "Mexican Divorce." Warwick then signed as a solo artist with Bacharach and Hal David's production company. "I've been spoiled rotten with the master lyricist in the world, and it's Hal David," she says.

Over the ensuing years, she became a songstress, paving the way for her cousin Whitney Houston and others like Jennifer Hudson and Alicia Keys, "who stand on Dionne's shoulders," says Wooley. (Houston appears in archive footage in *Don't Make Me Over*.)

Whitney Houston's death in 2012 affected Warwick deeply. "Not that we saw each other [much in the years before her death]. She was living in Atlanta, and I was in either Los Angeles or New Jersey. It wasn't that she could leave her home and come to my house like she would in the earlier days. But, the cellphone calls, we had an awful lot of," says Warwick. "I always said that Whitney was my daughter I never had. She was my baby, and not only

her. I had another baby who is also my cousin, Felicia. And, the two of them were like two peas in a pod. They were always together. And whenever I took one, I took the other. There's never any separations with any of my cousins. My babies, they were on the road with me when I could bring them out with me and they weren't in school."

These days, Warwick has courted a new generation in the most unexpected place: Twitter. With a style that bucks the cynical trappings of the platform, she boasts more than 500,000 followers and has become such a sensation that "Jack Dorsey said to me, 'You have no idea how refreshing it is now for me to even look at tweets and see how positive the babies have become,'" Warwick says. "And, it's so true. Now, all of a sudden, they're smiling, and I think they're very cautious about what they

activism on behalf of the LGBTQ community. In 1985, she recorded the single "That's What Friends Are For" with Gladys Knight, Elton John and Stevie Wonder. It has raised millions for the American Foundation for AIDS Research and will do so in perpetuity. It also became an anthem for those hoping to combat the stigma of AIDS at the time and replace it with kindness and empathy. "That's what her spirit and her energy is all about, bringing people together as one," says Wooley. "She was doing it way back in the '60s. And she's [now] the Twitter queen. She has been relevant through each decade. She never became an oldie-but-goodie act."

More recently, she performed a benefit co-chaired by Barack Obama for the Center on Halsted, a lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community center in Chicago.



Left: Dionne Warwick (second from left) performs "That's What Friends Are For" in 1986 on the TV show *Solid Gold* with (from left) Clive Davis, Gladys Knight, Stevie Wonder, Burt Bacharach, Carole Bayer Sager and Elizabeth Taylor. The song has raised millions for the American Foundation for AIDS Research. Right: Performing at the Paris Olympia Hall in 1964.



say. Because I will let them know, 'Hey, chill out. That's not what we're on this thing for. We got some nice things to say to each other. And if you want to ask a question, then do that. Just do it with a little bit of diplomacy here.'"

Twitter has become just another way for Warwick to use her influence to spread her message of kindness. She is consumed by the latest Britney Spears conservatorship news.

"I feel so bad for that baby — to be treated the way she had to be treated just did not make sense," says Warwick. "You cannot take control of somebody's life in that manner. I got to know her through my son, [record producer] Damon [Elliott]. Damon produced a few tracks for her. I did a CD of duets with my female peers, and I requested Britney to do it. She was going to do it with me, and then she got cold feet. She backed out of it, which is OK."

Another key part of her legacy is her

She also drew praise for taking on DaBaby on Twitter over his disparaging comments about gay men and HIV during a performance at a Miami festival in July. "He didn't have to do that," she says. "It just doesn't make sense to be ugly because that's the only word I can come up with right now: Why be ugly when beauty is available?"

For now, the woman who was twice married to (and twice divorced from) American actor and jazz musician William Elliott, with whom she had Damon and brother David Elliott, is content to ride into the next decade solo.

Says Warwick: "I've been on my own much too long, and to share my space now, I don't think I'm really able to do that. I do have companionship, of course. But aside from that, it's like, 'Here we are right now, and thank you very much. Good night.' That's enough for me, really." **TJR**



# HOW TO MAKE A THRILLER IN 11 DAYS

It took director Antoine Fuqua less than two weeks to make the TIFF title *The Guilty* after a heartfelt pitch from friend and collaborator Jake Gyllenhaal: 'We're always trying to find a project that makes sense that we both are passionate about' **BY TATIANA SIEGEL**



**D**

Days before production kicked off in November on the real-time thriller *The Guilty*, director Antoine Fuqua was forced to quarantine after a

close contact tested positive for COVID-19. He wound up helming the entire film — which centers on a demoted cop (Jake Gyllenhaal) assigned to a dispatch desk who fields a 911 call from a kidnapped woman — from a van, hardwired to the Los Angeles set from a block away. Armed with three monitors, a walkie talkie and his phone, Fuqua completed the film, a remake of a 2018 Danish thriller of the same name, in 11 days. Much like Nic Pizzolatto's plotline, that left no time for second guessing. "My most memorable day was when I was having [an echo] of my own voice in my ear because we had six actors on Zoom for a 20-minute-long take," says Gyllenhaal, who also produced. "We couldn't figure out this reverb of my voice, and we're running out of time. And I did one whole section with my own voice repeating back to me as I spoke to every single actor. I can't almost watch that section of the movie because after 10 hours of that I truly got the closest to insanity as I've ever been." While Fuqua initially panicked, he quickly realized that Gyllenhaal was pulling it off despite the technical difficulties. "He had to perform with all these different echoes and voices in his head," Fuqua recalls. "So, he focused, and he delivered. I remember just watching him going, 'It's what I love about Jake.' The focus is incredible." The film, which makes its world premiere at TIFF on Sept. 11,

marks the second time Fuqua and Gyllenhaal have collaborated following 2015's *Southpaw*. The pair spoke to *THR* about staying sane during *The Guilty*'s surreal shoot and why Netflix was the ideal home for the film.

**Jake, you acquired the rights to the Danish film back in 2018. What was the mind-set behind that move?**

**JAKE GYLLENHAAL** Initially, I felt like it just translated so well into the American context — socially, politically. It said something about our systems. I thought it was a really interesting, important conversation. I sort of felt it in my bones. I also have become really enamored

by the monologue or spaces in which storytelling uses half or three-quarters of your imagination as opposed to telling and showing everything.

**What made you decide to work together on this project?**

**GYLLENHAAL** We've been looking for something to do together since *Southpaw*. There have been many times where Antoine shared something with me, or I've shared something with him, and it just hadn't felt like the right fit. He is a wonderful filmmaker. He deeply loves performance and how to handle very intense subject matter. He really knows how to grind



Says Gyllenhaal (right) of Antoine Fuqua: "He is so deeply charismatic and loving and fearless. And handsome is an asterisk to the charismatic."



Based on a 2018 Danish thriller of the same name, *The Guilty* stars Jake Gyllenhaal as a demoted cop who fields a 911 call from a kidnapped woman. Says Gyllenhaal: "I felt like it just translated so well into the American context — socially, politically."

out a thriller. And he's not afraid of the darker sides of humanity. In fact, I think he thrives in those spaces. It just felt like a perfect fit. On top of that, the role required an intimacy with the filmmaker. We already had one.

**ANTOINE FUQUA** The material spoke to me — the script — when he sent it to me, and we talked about it. Since *Southpaw*, we developed a really good friendship. So, we're always trying to find a project that makes sense that we both are passionate about. And this one, in particular, because it's so focused on Joe, the character, I got excited about it. It was a challenge. Also I felt like it was something that really highlights Jake's abilities — to hold the screen, to hold the audience, being so focused on him only in every single frame. He's so talented. It was a great opportunity to do that together.

#### What do you remember about the first conversation you had about the project?

**FUQUA** He called me and said, "I got this project that I've been trying to put together for a while. And I thought about it and it made sense that I should talk to you about it." And I remember saying, "How come you didn't call me first?" (*Laughs.*) But I was busy doing other things. And he said, "It's something we could do quickly." And he kind of gave me a quick rundown of it. I almost said yes without reading it because I could tell how passionate he was about it. And I trust his taste.

**GYLLENHAAL** The first thing I said to him was, "Imagine this movie being shot in a week," which is the only opportunity I had to get a

director of his stature. We both like a challenge. And I know that he's got limited time and availability. I was really focused on shaping a thriller and making an audience entertained. And then he started to talk about what was underneath all of it, kind of forcing me back into what had drawn me into it in the first place, which was the issue of mental health and our systemic issues. He really wanted to make a movie that not only entertained, but also entertain those ideas.

#### What prompted you to go with Netflix as the distributor?

**GYLLENHAAL** We were talking to buyers, and [Netflix] provided a perspective on the movie that I felt was the right perspective. This is a movie that I feel lives beautifully theatrically, but it has your attention when you watch it on the small screen. I always thought of it as somebody coming across it and saying, "OK, I'll check that out." It's the type of movie that as soon as you click on it, I don't think there's any way you can stop watching it. And frankly, the disappointing part of streaming has been that people have the opportunity to turn it off. So, I found it a challenge to make something that would make people need to get to the end to know what happened. Also, I think they're wonderful [at Netflix]. I've worked with them so many times, and there's so much creative freedom.

**FUQUA** Netflix is just a great place to make films now. Scott Stuber gives you freedom to make your movie. They talked to me and Jake and pretty much said, "Go make it." We

had creative conversations about a couple of things, but it wasn't anything that disrupted the flow in any way. I think it's great because you're not worried about the weekend box office on this type of thing. You just know everyone around the world gets to see it immediately. I've been wanting to work with Netflix. This is my first project with them. I hope to do more.

#### Jake, what's unique about Antoine's process?

**GYLLENHAAL** He's a visualist. He comes from that Propaganda [Films] school of filmmakers who came out of that world with deep, deep visuals and a love of the classics, and his references are always [Sidney] Lumet. We discussed Lumet throughout this entire process and performance. When he rolls, he lets me lead. He says, "I'm working with you because I trust you." When he's worked with Denzel [Washington], for instance, I think he, he just loves the actor. He's just such a wonderful actor's director. And if you want that, he's your guy. I will go anywhere for him.

#### Jake, describe Antoine in three words.

**GYLLENHAAL** Best. Voice. Ever. He is so deeply charismatic and loving and fearless. And handsome is an asterisk to the charismatic.

#### Antoine, describe Jake in three words.

**FUQUA** Tenacious, focused, passionate. And he's got the nice long hair.

#### Jake, what's your favorite Antoine movie?

**GYLLENHAAL** *Training Day*.

#### Antoine, what's your favorite Jake performance?

**FUQUA** *Brokeback Mountain*. He's just brave. He's outside of himself and played a beautiful role, and was so sincere and truthful about it.

#### What are you doing next? Any plans to work together again?

**FUQUA** I'm doing *Emancipation* with Will [Smith] and focused on that right now. We got [hit] with Hurricane Ida [in New Orleans]. We'll get back into it in the next week or two, hopefully. But I would like to do something with Jake immediately.

**GYLLENHAAL** I made *Ambulance* with Michael Bay. And right now, I'm really focused on my company and the projects that we're developing. But Antoine and I are always looking. That's what's nice about having these relationships. I feel like I know now when he'll be into something.

*Interview edited for length and clarity.*





# MELANIE LAURENT IS HAVING A BALL

The actress-writer-director discusses her latest drama, *The Mad Women's Ball* (Amazon's first original French feature), and why she set out to make a period piece from a female perspective: 'My heart goes naturally to women's stories' **BY ETAN VLESSING**



Quentin Tarantino's *Inglourious Basterds* was French actress Melanie Laurent's

breakout role in Hollywood, and she followed that up with starring roles in *Now You See Me* and *6 Underground*.

But Laurent also has thrived as a film director, and she's bringing her latest work, *The Mad Women's Ball*, in which she also stars in Amazon's first original French feature, to the Toronto International Film Festival for a world premiere.

The film, set in 19th century Paris, tells the story of a young woman named Eugenie, played by Lou de Laâge, who is hospitalized against her will because she claims to be able to talk to ghosts. When Eugenie meets Geneviève (Laurent), a nurse in the neurological clinic at the La Salpêtrière Hospital in Paris, a bond develops between them thanks to Geneviève's desire to communicate with her dead sister. The lives of the women are changed forever when they attend the famous Bal des Folles, a society ball held at the clinic every year.

Ahead of *The Mad Women's Ball* launch in Toronto, Laurent talked with *THR* about her preference for book-to-screen adaptations, working with women on set and not attending her world premiere in person because of COVID-19.

***Mad Women's Ball* is based on Victoria Mas' 2021 novel. What attracted you to adapting the novel?**

It started two years ago, and I wanted to make a movie about women and something feminist. I wanted to do a period movie, and I had in mind a story about witches and women who couldn't do anything and were seen as monsters and witches because they knew something. The producer came to me with the book, and I thought that's exactly what I've been looking for — a story about someone who's seeing ghosts and spirits, which would be acceptable today,

but not two centuries ago, and especially for women.

**Your movie follows Eugenie, a bourgeois woman who believes in spirits and is unjustly institutionalized, and Geneviève, a nurse who works at the hospital, obeys science and doctors and finds herself ultimately confined in the same hospital. Tell us about the clash and collaboration of these two women in the film.**

I loved the idea of having a woman who believes in science and a woman who is gifted and can talk to spirits in a hospital and then to be able to talk about who can believe in what, and what is freedom at the end.

**Your movie hinges on the disturbing, yet captivating performance of Lou de Laâge. You worked with her in *Breathe* (2014), a coming-of-age tale that you also directed. Was Lou always going to star in *Mad Women's Ball*?**

Lou is a dream to work with. I loved her as a friend and of course as a director to see how she's gained so much maturity, she's accessing emotions so much easier. In *Breathe*, the first movie we made together, she was the mean one, and now she's the beautiful angel who's arriving and taking care of people in a very soft way. It's amazing as a director to meet someone who can be your muse and to see how she can be different in so many different characters.

**Your movie has this constant, yet slowly improving, distance between Eugenie and Geneviève, which culminates in the final climactic scene. How did you plan and maintain that?**

What I really wanted to show on the screen was the coolness and the distance between all these human beings who have [a comfortable] life and yet don't know how to communicate. You have a cold father, a mother who doesn't know how to protect her own daughter, a very nasty grandmother. So she's coming from that cold world, with space between



Melanie Laurent (center) plays a nurse in 19th century Paris who befriends a young woman who has been hospitalized against her will because she claims to talk to ghosts.

everyone, and arriving in a very crazy hospital where everyone has such a need to touch one another.

**You slowly and yet surely close that distance between Eugenie and Geneviève during the course of the film through the camerawork. Can you talk about that?**

At the beginning of the movie, there's way more tracks to show camera movements and the space between them and their coolness and their inability to talk together. As the movie goes on, there's more ability to see them touch, almost, and in one scene their hands actually come together. You're right, it takes the whole movie to close that space between them, because it's not easy for them.

***Breathe* was based on a novel. So is *Mad Women's Ball*. What is it that attracts you to screen adaptations?**

Well, yes, the past three movies were coming from novels. Maybe I don't have a lot of imagination (*Laughs*). No, there's something exciting about adapting a book. For example, *Breathe*, I read it when I was 18, and I was traumatized by the book. And 10 years later I'm adapting the movie and I'd never read the book again. I had memories of it. I did another movie called *Diving* [released in 2017], and I remembered reading the last page and the last six lines and I just pictured the whole movie in those six lines

and I closed the book. I'm pretty lucky every time with the writers. I guess that's key to feeling free to work in this way. It's always writers who trust the idea that the movie is going to be based on, and I can have the freedom of having my own vision. And with book adaptations, sometimes it's just one line, sometimes it just the title, sometimes it's a general story and you make it your own. And weirdly, you have so much space to bring your world into it.

***Breathe* was about a female relationship. Your next movie, *Nightingale*, is about the lives of two sisters in France, to be played by Dakota Fanning and Elle Fanning. Can you talk about why you like making movies about relationships between women?**

My first movie was about two sisters, and they had issues about letting a man arrive in their lives. And I think that's my relationship with cinema and story. I love working with women so much. It's not part of the spirit of movies right now, about female directors being able to make movies. I always made movies about women, and most of the time they were about strong women. I love actors, but it's not the same work. It's not the same relationship. I love working with actresses. I find it so much easier to work with women. It would be interesting for me to go into a very male movie. For now, my heart goes naturally to women's stories.

**Is it that actresses are just better at expressing emotions onscreen?**

No. It's not about emotion. I've found actresses less complicated, first of all. They're more open-minded, more accessible, more, "I'm going to give you that. I'm ready to work and to take your hand and listen to what you have to say, and then all together we're going to go somewhere." I think it's a feeling of maybe being more comfortable working with women. Now I love working with male technicians, more than female technicians, sometimes. So it's funny. I've never intellectualized this. I just know as a female director and as a female actress that I've made more than 40 movies and I've worked only with three female directors. And it's obviously very different.

**How excited are you about *Mad Women's Ball* premiering in Toronto?**

I'm just so happy to have my movie screen in a big theater. It matters to me to make it with Amazon Prime Video. But it just makes sense for me to screen it in a big theater and with an audience that will see it all together and for the movie to be released in so many countries at the same time. You know, when you make a movie and work on it for four years and then your movie goes into two theaters and only for two weeks? It's the best case that we have with these [online] platforms to make real cinema and also knowing the movie will be seen. It's a new and interesting way to work. And I'm waiting again for that new world where you can have both: you can see movies in theaters but also on platforms. I'm sure that fusion will be the way we will work in the future.

**You won't be at the Toronto world premiere though?**

No, they just told us that European artists can't travel because of COVID. That's so sad.

*Interview edited for length and clarity.*



# JUSTINE BATEMAN IS NO LONGER AFRAID

The actress turned director discusses her TIFF entry *Violet*, her strong feelings about a *Family Ties* reboot (she's against) and why she stopped making 'fear-based decisions'

BY TATIANA SIEGEL

"Acting was really good to me," says Justine Bateman. "I had a longer-than-normal acting career. And then when it started shifting, it was, 'What's going on? How come this door is getting shut?'"



D

During the 2017 incarnation of the Toronto International Film Festival, where Justine Bateman debuted her short *Five Minutes*, she carved out

some time to catch other filmmakers' premieres, including Darren Aronofsky's *mother!* at the Princess of Wales Theatre. Now, the former actress is returning to the festival in person with her feature directing debut, the Olivia Munn starrer *Violet*, and will launch her woman-at-a-crossroads drama in similar fashion "in a big, beautiful theater." That will mark a first given that the Relativity Media film's world premiere at South by Southwest in March was virtual. "It will be the first time I get to see this with an audience," she adds. "We've shown it for investors and department heads, but I haven't seen it like this yet. That's what I'm most looking forward to." The writer-director-producer talked to *THR* about saying goodbye to acting, delaying college for nearly three decades and why she wouldn't support a *Family Ties* reboot.

**What was the first moment when you decided you wanted to direct?**

I was 19. I was having lunch with a couple of agents, talking about [1986 French film] *Betty Blue*. I was saying how I love the colors and the pacing, and one agent looked at me and said, "You should be directing." I thought, "Oh, yeah." But the timing never felt right. So, I waited, and it wasn't until a few years ago that I felt the timing shift. I used to have a great, great T-shirt from CAA. There was a dog sitting in a chair, across from an agent, and the speech bubble above the dog said, "But what I really want to do is direct."

**What was the genesis of *Violet*?**

I wrote a few scripts around the time I wrote *Violet*, so it's a little bit of a blur. This was in 2011. I did a lot of research for the role, which is my jokey way of saying, "I've been through a lot. I've processed this in my life."

**So, you personally connected with the character *Violet*, whose entire life is built on fear-based decisions?**

I used to make a lot of decisions based on fear years ago, and when I realized I was doing that and that there are a couple of things that may get me on the other side of that — that made a big difference. And then looking at those irrational fears and going, "I don't think that's going to happen," and then finding empirical evidence that it's not true. Then I could get to a place where I'm making instinct-based decisions instead of fear-based decisions. We're

exposed to so much information and so much news about what's happening everywhere else that it can be devastating for anybody who has their antenna up.

**What was the mind-set behind casting Olivia?**

When I'm casting, I like to look at videos — the work that somebody's done, also any interviews they've done and any videos they put on social media. I'm looking for certain characteristics or elements that I would like to have in the character and whether they are obvious characteristics or more subtle ones. I want to tease it out and broaden it. There were characteristics of Olivia's that I could see in all of her roles that I wanted to tease out and expand for this role. And she really gave herself to the part, and we were able to do that.

**As a writer, you made your first sale with *Wizards of Waverly Place*. Why that series?**

[Producer] Peter Murrieta brought me on to help break stories in the beginning of the season. And then they gave me a script to do. That is a big part of how I got into the WGA. With SAG, you just have to say something onscreen and you're in. But the WGA or DGA, those are hard guilds to get into. Those were very proud moments to get those membership cards. I'm very grateful to Peter for bringing me in on that. And that show was a great experience.

**As a former teen actress, do you have any special bond with young adults?**

Not really. Acting was really good to me, and I had a longer-than-normal acting career. And then when it started shifting, it was, "What's going on? How come this door is getting shut?" I was like, "Oh, I get it. I need to go in this other direction." This other direction is happening and it's not like it's as a footnote to acting but, rather, it's completely replacing it. Anyway, young actors, I don't know. I can't imagine what the experience is now with fame, social media and everybody having a camera in their pocket? It seems pretty difficult to navigate that, considering all the new elements.

**You were unable to attend college because you were told you were under contract with Paramount. In hindsight, do you think that was fair?**

I don't feel like it was anything unkind they were doing to me or anything like that. The whole job was a fantastic experience. I think I was just too new to the business to understand that I couldn't just go [to college without getting their approval]. But it's fine because I graduated from UCLA eventually. And my

experience at college from 46 to 50 was a much different experience than it would have been from 18 to 21. But it was great.

**There are so many classic TV series being rebooted. Has there been any talk of rebooting *Family Ties*? How would you feel about a reboot? Would you be game to be involved?**

I don't want to. I mean, whatever. I don't own the show. It's Paramount's business or Viacom. It's just my own personal taste, but I'm not supportive of a reboot. I mean, it's *Family Ties*. Don't touch it. What's important about art is the context in which it lived. So, *Family Ties*, within the context of the '80s, and everything that was going on in the 80s, is kind of part of that art project [of the era]. I'm not a fan of reboots. I just feel like there are so many incredible new things we could



Bateman on the set of *Violet*, which tells the story of a female Hollywood exec dealing with misogyny and self-doubt.

be doing, which are specific to us now. I feel disappointed for this generation because so much of their pop culture is reboots, re-blogs, retweets of other people's childhoods and young adulthood or whatever from the past. Thank God for Christopher Nolan doing these big-budgeted, totally new ideas, because that's not that common. Film after film are based on comic books that were established and had impact on the childhoods of people who are 50 or dead. It's not quite fair to this generation that they don't have their own moment.

**Do you have any plans to return to acting?**

No, that's done. I haven't done [acting] for many, many, many, many years. It's definitely writing, directing, producing for me.

*Interview edited for length and clarity.*



# Reviews

Film



Ben Platt, 27, plays the 17-year-old title character.

## Dear Evan Hansen

Ben Platt reprises his Tony Award-winning performance in this Stephen Chbosky screen adaptation **By Michael Rechtshaffen**

It's easy to see why the Toronto International Film Festival opted to kick off its 46th edition with the world premiere of *Dear Evan Hansen*. After all, what better choice to reflect the collective post-lockdown zeitgeist than the movie version of the smash Broadway musical about forging human connections in a world of loneliness and uncertainty?

Less clear is the extent to which fans will embrace an adaptation that, however heartfelt, often falls short of the intended, emotionally uplifting mark.

Filmed last summer in the heat of the pandemic under the direction of Stephen Chbosky (*The Perks of Being a Wallflower*), with Ben Platt reprising his affecting, Tony Award-winning lead role, the production boasts its share of tenderly crafted moments.

But in the story's transition from a two-act to a three-act

proposition, Platt's Hansen isn't the only one who at times feels on the outside looking in, as the dictates of opening up the intimate settings too often result in numbers that incorporate distancing cutaways and music video clichés that water down their potency.

A weakness for the formulaic, combined with a noticeably weighty running time, continually bumps up against the film's many fine points, provided by the supporting ensemble including Kaitlyn Dever, Amandla Stenberg, Julianne Moore and Amy Adams.

Having shed some pounds and grown out his hair (setting tongues a-wagging when the trailer was first dropped), 27-year-old Platt convincingly conjures up his teen-geek self as the highly introverted, overly medicated Hansen, a high school senior whose habitually sweaty palms keep him well distanced from the cool kids.

He's nevertheless reluctantly thrust into the spotlight when one of the therapeutic motivational letters he has written to himself shows up in the possession of sociopathic schoolmate Connor Murphy (Colton Ryan), who has taken his own life. Believing Evan to be her son's only connection, Connor's mother (Amy Adams) invites him into their home, prompting Hansen to fabricate a nonexistent friendship between them that inevitably spirals out of control.

Along the way, Evan bonds with both Connor's sister, Zoe (Kaitlyn Dever), and the school's resident activist, Alana (Amandla Stenberg), and finds himself doing a little less "waving through a window" in the process.

On the subject of songs from the stage version, four of them didn't make it into the movie, including the original opener,

"Anybody Have a Map." In their place are a pair of new Benj Pasek-Justin Paul numbers, including the aching "The Anonymous Ones," performed by Stenberg.

They fit well into the Hansen tapestry, as do, for the most part, the shifts from the straight dramatic scenes (provided by Steven Levenson, based on his book for the stage show) into song, especially Platt's delicate reading of "You Will Be Found" and Moore's lovely take on "So Big/So Small," two tunes wisely left unencumbered by visual embellishments.

The absence of a more cohesive tone is noticeable in director Chbosky's nonmusical renderings, which can struggle to find an agreeable balance between the theatrical and the melodramatic. Despite the pesky distractions, Platt and company manage to deliver the right message at precisely the right time.

Gala

**CAST** Ben Platt, Kaitlyn Dever, Amandla Stenberg, Julianne Moore, Amy Adams

**DIRECTOR** Stephen Chbosky

**SCREENWRITER** Steven Levenson

PG-13, 2 hours 17 minutes



Sarah Gadon (left) and Alison Pill are sisters in crisis.

# All My Puny Sorrows

Based on the semiautobiographical novel by Miriam Toews, the drama stars Alison Pill as a struggling novelist trying to help her brilliant big sister (Sarah Gadon) recover from a recent suicide attempt **By Angie Han**

Pretty quickly into *All My Puny Sorrows*, two things become apparent. One is that the film is rooted in firsthand experience — the emotions on display seem too jagged not to be. The other is that it's based on a book; even those who've never heard of it would glean as much from the sporadic voice-overs and literary-sounding dialogue. And then, not long after, a third realization follows: In the case of this particular film, those two tendencies work directly at odds with each other.

Written and directed by Michael McGowan, the drama revolves around two sisters in crisis. Protagonist Yoli (Alison Pill) is a frustrated mother and struggling novelist who's grown up in the shadow of her big sister, Elf (Sarah Gadon), a brilliant concert pianist. After Elf attempts suicide, Yoli returns to their hometown near Winnipeg to help her recover, though Elf insists she is absolutely determined to die.

Author Miriam Toews has readily acknowledged that her 2014 novel was based on similar events in her own life, and her intimate understanding of the situation shows in the film's refusal to smooth over the thorny situation it presents. Pill imbues her every line reading as Yoli with a melange of restless emotions — her affectionate teasing carries undercurrents of desperation and anger, her furious rants a note of pleading. Gadon tempers Elf's fragility with surprising resolve, and she regards Yoli's mood swings with the bittersweet remove of someone who doesn't plan to stick around for many more of them.

As Yoli puts it, Elf has "enemies that love [her]" — people working their hardest to keep

Elf from what she wants most in the world because what she wants most in the world is not to be in it anymore. It's an irreconcilable position for both sisters, and *All My Puny Sorrows* has no interest in pretending otherwise. Whatever one's stances on assisted suicide, mental illness or the Canadian health care system (and the movie is bound to provoke conversations about all of the above), there's no denying that the film's attempts to grapple with them feel honest and earned. It's willing to hear out Elf's darkest thoughts and Yoli's ugliest ones and to present both of them as human beings in pain rather than as talking points in some larger cultural discussion.

But at nearly every turn, the film's urgent emotions are undermined by the way the characters choose to express them. Yoli and Elf — really the whole Von Riesen family, which also includes mom Lottie (Mare Winningham) and, in flashbacks, dad Jake (Donal Logue) — are unapologetically bookish sorts, given to name-dropping Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn or Thomas Aquinas in casual conversation or reciting Philip Larkin poems from memory. (The film's title itself is drawn from a Samuel Taylor Coleridge poem.) But that goes only so far in explaining why their conversations sound not like people speaking spontaneously from the heart but like authors savoring their own words at a book reading.

Even as Yoli is breaking down in near hysterics, the words tumbling out of her mouth sound overworked and affected, and McGowan's unadorned direction — he favors clean lines in gray winter light and close-ups so sharp you could count every hair on

a character's head — does little to bridge the gap between the film's messy truths and its polished prose. Meanwhile, Jonathan Goldstein's maudlin piano-heavy score only pushes the whole endeavor toward the sentimental. *All My Puny Sorrows'* artificiality works best in its faint flights of fancy, as when a character imagines addressing a dead loved one as if they were in a room together. For most of its running time, however, it seems to be aiming for a grim realism.

At the same time, the film elides too many details that would help deepen the Von Riesens' story. Scattered flashbacks and conversations sketch out a vague picture of the sisters' strict Mennonite upbringing and their father's death by suicide some years prior, but the film leaves it to the viewer to shade in the spaces between their past and Elf's present state. Such restraint might read as admirable in a movie more committed to showing and not telling, but it feels too coy for one that otherwise stumbles over itself to spell out its characters' every cleverly worded insight.

Indeed, *All My Puny Sorrows* makes such an overwhelming case for the preciousness of its language that after a while, it becomes a case against itself: Why sit there sighing as the actors strain to make Toews' prose sound like naturalistic dialogue when you could go read them on the page? That McGowan admires the source material and wants to do it justice is clear, and that he's resisted the temptation to sand down its sharpest edges speaks to a desire to meet his troubled characters where they are. But his movie ends up just another reminder that paying tribute to a novel isn't the same as breathing it into life.

#### Special Presentations

**CAST** Alison Pill, Sarah Gadon, Mare Winningham, Donal Logue, Amybeth McNulty  
**DIRECTOR-SCREENWRITER** Michael McGowan  
 1 hour 43 minutes



Film

# The Box

Lorenzo Vigas, who won the 2015 Golden Lion for *From Afar*, returns to Venice with a drama recounting an orphaned Mexican teenager's reckoning with a man he's convinced is his purportedly dead father **By David Rooney**

Six years after becoming the first Latin American to win the Venice Film Festival's top award with his searing debut, *From Afar*, Lorenzo Vigas returns to the competition with another stealth gut punch. In *The Box*, the director leaves his native Venezuela for the vast empty landscapes of northwestern Mexico, though his thematic interest in absent fathers and the corresponding hunger to fill that void remains. An acutely observed chamber piece played out by two exceptionally well-cast actors who keep you guessing about the subtle shifts in their characters' relationship, this is an unflinching account of human lives rendered disposable by greed and corruption.

Like Mexican director Fernanda Valadez's head-turning 2020 debut, *Identifying Features*, Vigas' slow-burn coming-of-age drama builds a potent mystery around human remains, rippling throughout with a subdued undertow of rage and pain. But where Valadez's howl of despair was fueled by the casualties of undocumented border crossings, *The Box* draws its sorrow from the dehumanizing supply chain of cheap labor. Michel Franco once again serves as a producer, and Vigas shares some of that filmmaker's austerity, along with his chokehold of dread.

Shot in the Chihuahua region by frequent Pablo Larraín collaborator Sergio Armstrong on 35mm anamorphic, the film masterfully presents a moving human drama — one of countless such stories of families shattered by the combustible union of poverty and crime — against a badlands backdrop of sprawling plains and rugged mountains.

Orphaned young teenager Hatzín (Hatzín Navarrete), who lives in Mexico City with his grandmother, is first seen obsessively kicking the walls of a train restroom stall as he travels alone to the remote site of a recently discovered communal grave. His father, Esteban, is believed to be one of at least 50 bodies exhumed there. After providing the required documentation and signing the paperwork, Hatzín is handed an identification card found with the body, along with a rectangular metal



box, roughly two feet in length, containing his father's remains. Other families are heard weeping at the grim finality of this process, but Hatzín remains impassive, reassuring his grandmother over the phone that he's OK.

As he begins the return journey the next day, Hatzín glimpses a man through the bus window on the street of a nearby town who looks remarkably like his father's ID photo. But when he gets off the bus and approaches him, the burly stranger introduces himself as Mario Enderle (Hernán Mendoza), telling the kid he has the wrong guy. Hatzín is unconvinced, however, returning the box and saying there's been an error. He starts stalking Mario, who initially shows him kindness before growing frustrated and impatient, driving the boy to a stop outside town on the Mexico City bus route in an attempt to get rid of him. But Hatzín's determination wears down Mario's resistance.

Mario is a labor supplier to local factories, recruiting workers by the busload who have the strength as well as the desperation to endure punishing long sweatshop hours in a manufacturing sector competing with China. Hatzín starts accompanying him on his rounds, observing Mario as a good-humored man who presents a caring front, providing free coats to the workers for protection against the cold desert nights. While the boy pitches in with physical work, his education soon comes in handy as Mario entrusts him with documenting the number of hires and checking that factory payments are in order.

When Mario is tasked with providing 1,500 workers for a new factory, Hatzín becomes an indispensable member of his crew. While the subject of paternity is dropped for some time, Mario reveals that he was working as a foreman and saw an opportunity to carve out a more lucrative line of business. He also has acquired a warehouse where he plans to open his own factory.

Orphan Hatzín Navarrete gets sucked into a world of crime and hard labor.

Continuing to telephone his grandmother but withholding the truth from her about why he's not returning, Hatzín eventually moves in with Mario and his pregnant wife (Cristina Zulueta). But a festering conflict grows within the impressionable adolescent as he responds, on the one hand, to a paternal influence he's clearly been missing in his life, while on the other, he becomes troubled by blatant illegalities. Hatzín is expected to participate in activities that go far beyond a moral gray area into outright crime and violence, but Mario brushes off his concerns, encouraging him not to think too much about it.

In his first screen role, Navarrete is riveting, his dark, expressive eyes making Hatzín alert to everything going on around him as shocking discoveries and fresh disclosures late in the film force him to question just how much he's willing to accept in order to have a father figure. One stunning shot, an hour into the movie, in which the audience, along with Hatzín, sees a sweatshop production floor for the first time, speaks volumes. His observation of a young woman (Dulce Alexa Alfaro) asking awkward questions about worker conditions leaves him with more uncertainties.

An understated desolation runs through *The Box*, which considers the human cost of the industrial labor chain but by implication extends to the countless Latin Americans who disappear in the drug trade, under right-wing regimes and in the extortionate criminal trafficking networks that exploit migrant dreams. Framed as the consuming desire of one teenage boy to know the love of a father, this is a multilayered story that resonates powerfully.

Toronto Section

**CAST** Hatzín Navarrete, Hernán Mendoza, Elián González, Cristina Zulueta, Dulce Alexa Alfaro, Graciela Beltrán

**DIRECTOR** Lorenzo Vigas

1 hour 32 minutes

# Where Is Anne Frank

Waltz With Bashir director Ari Folman uses two styles of animation and interweaves two time periods to tell Anne Frank's Holocaust story from a tween-friendly POV **By Sheri Linden**



Director Ari Folman worked with a foundation established by Anne Frank's father, Otto, to make a film that would appeal to young people.

Kitty, the imaginary friend addressed in Anne Frank's diaries, jumps off the page as a pen-and-ink version of a flesh-and-blood girl in Ari Folman's vividly rendered *Where Is Anne Frank*. Given that the Anne we meet in the film is an ardent movie fan, it's fitting that Kitty's exploits cover a Hollywood-style narrative range — historical drama, action-adventure, romance, social commentary. There's a lot going on in this feature — at times too much, although that surfeit of story is designed to click with the younger viewers the film aims to reach.

The son of Auschwitz survivors, Folman set out to make the first international Holocaust film for young people, ages 12 and up. In collaboration with the foundation established by Frank's father, Otto, he and his filmmaking team have developed an accompanying educational program as well. There's an instructive element to the film, and adult audiences likely will find one or two passages conspicuously didactic. Despite this, and putting aside the occasionally convoluted plotting, *Where Is Anne Frank* spins around exceptionally engaging central characters, expresses the

story's unspeakable sadness with eloquence and sensitivity, and winningly captures the intelligence, humor and adolescent exuberance so evident in photographs of Anne Frank and in her writing.

Working with animation director Yoni Goodman, whose innovative work gave Folman's 2008 documentary, *Waltz With Bashir*, its hauntingly distinctive look, the filmmaker has taken another novel approach, placing 2D characters against stop-motion backgrounds. In its depiction of Amsterdam, where the story is largely set (with a heartrending visit to present-day Bergen-Belsen, the concentration camp where Frank died), there's an architectural integrity to match the historical one.

Most of the action revolves around the Anne Frank House — in its contemporary status as a world-famous museum and during its use from 1942 to 1944 as the secret annex where the Franks and the van Pels (called the Van Damms in the diaries and this film) hid from the Nazis. In the present day, designated for the sake of narrative license as "a year from now," museum-goers queue up in a blustery

storm. Sowing the seeds of a subplot, a family of refugees from Mali, living on the street, struggle to save their tent from the violent winds.

On special exhibit inside is Anne's original diary, with its red plaid cover and pages overflowing with her cursive writing. Through a serendipitous collision of weather and magic, the book's glass display case shatters, an antique fountain pen is brought to life, and Kitty (voiced by Ruby Stokes) materializes from the lines of ink. She's a resourceful and willowy redheaded teen with a fierce devotion to her creator, Anne (Emily Carey, whose unforced soulfulness matches that of Stokes), and she has no idea that she's stepping into another world, 75 years after the girls last communicated.

Kitty's baffled to find an endless stream of strangers crowding into Anne's bedroom, peering at its sparse furnishings and the fangirl movie-star photos hanging on its walls. Kitty is invisible to them. The logic of when she can and can't be seen is explained to her — and us — by Peter (Ralph Prosser), a young street kid whose skills as a pickpocket would make Robert Bresson smile. According

to the somewhat shaky logic, whether she's visible or not, the diary is the crucial puzzle piece she needs. She removes it from the museum as she embarks on her quest for Anne, and the missing diary becomes the city's top story, a 100,000-euro reward in the offing.

The film's title refers to Kitty's search, but it's also something of an accusation, a reminder that totems of cultural significance like the diary can become cast in amber, detached from their meaning. In the contemporary setting, Anne Frank's name emblazons a hospital, theater, bridge and school. At the same time, the government is cracking down on war refugees and refusing to grant them asylum. Among the seekers is the Malian family from the opening sequence, whose young daughter Awa (Naomi Mourton) charms Kitty with her dazzling knack for cat's cradle.

Scenes of the war-era past pulse with the perspective of a bright, perceptive teen. Folman doesn't deny the weight of fear and oppressiveness — indeed, he builds to it powerfully. But he makes sure to give time and space to the joys that shaped Anne's privileged youth before the dark days took hold. A run-down of the boys who loved her, presented in the whimsical form of a parade, bursts with color and zingy schoolgirl language, 1940s-style: "He's a tough guy, but he's a brat," she declares of one unqualified hopeful. In another scene the image on a jigsaw puzzle comes to life, and there's a wonderfully wry commercial for the company Otto Frank works for, complete with a Felix the Cat look-alike.

There's something surprisingly urgent in the way Folman and company turn clean, simple lines into full-blooded characters. It's not kid stuff the way Anne's brow furrows with worry, and the tears of her beloved Kitty, when she learns what happened to Anne, just might knock you sideways.

#### Special Presentations

**CAST** Ruby Stokes, Emily Carey, Sebastian Croft, Ralph Prosser, Maya Myers

**DIRECTOR-SCREENWRITER** Ari Folman

1 hour 39 minutes





Tilda Swinton is a botanist from the U.K. who keeps hearing a mysterious sound while visiting Colombia.

# Memoria

Tilda Swinton takes a metaphysical journey into the jungles of Colombia in Apichatpong Weerasethakul's first film outside his native Thailand **By David Rooney**

For anyone wondering if *Memoria*, slow-cinema master Apichatpong Weerasethakul's first film in English (and Spanish) and his first made outside his native Thailand, would be a radical departure, the answer is a decisive no. The director's abiding fascination with dreams, nature, time, solitude and of course memory flows like liquid through this lyrical enigma, which maintains his characteristic aesthetic purity of long static takes, meditative pacing and intimacy negotiated from a coolly scrutinizing distance. Starring Tilda Swinton as a foreigner in Colombia who becomes obsessed with tracing a sound that invades her sleep, this is a sensory experience that unfolds beyond narrative, often in empty spaces and hushed solemnity.

Conventional notions of plot in a Weerasethakul movie are seldom the point, but here it goes anyway: Swinton plays Jessica, a botanist from the U.K. who specializes in orchids, in Bogotá visiting her hospitalized sister, Karen (Agnes Brekke). In the film's opening moments, Jessica is jolted out of slumber

in the pre-dawn hours by a loud bang, a single thud she mistakenly assumes must be from construction work on a neighboring property. A mutual friend connects her with a young sound engineer, Hernán (Juan Pablo Urrego), who draws from a file of movie audio effects to help her describe what she heard — "like a ball of concrete hitting a metal wall surrounded by seawater; it's like a rumble from the core of the earth."

The nature of Karen's illness remains unclear, but in a dream she recalls seeing a dog injured by a car and left to die, which she took to a vet and then forgot due to preoccupations about her own health. She wonders if the dog cursed her. Later, when Karen is released from the hospital, Jessica goes to dinner with her sister and the latter's partner, academic and poet Juan (Daniel Giménez Cacho). Karen belongs to an experimental theater company developing a piece about an Amazon jungle tribe called "The Invisible People," whose elders are believed to keep outsiders away with incantations. Again, she wonders if one of those spells is

making her sick.

Even while sitting at dinner, Jessica hears the same startling sound over and over, though neither of her companions appears to notice it. She visits art galleries, which are nothing if not vaults of memory, and walks the city streets, stopping in a public square where she hears the noise again.

She has an illuminating encounter with Agnes (Jeanne Balibar), an archeologist studying ancient human remains disinterred during construction on a tunnel. The skull of a young girl has a hole that Agnes explains was probably drilled into it to release bad spirits, in a sense what Jessica is attempting to do by seeking out the noise that triggered her insomnia. She travels out of town past roadside military checkpoints to visit Agnes at the excavation site, still looking for answers in her broken Spanish.

But those only come when she follows a creek in a nearby mountain village and meets an older man also named Hernán (Elkin Díaz). In Weerasethakul's conceptual world, he appears to be the same person. He explains that he has never traveled nor watched movies, TV or seen news in any format because there are already enough stories and he remembers everything. He picks up a rock and shares the past it contains. He also tells her that his kind never dreams, demonstrating by falling

into a motionless sleep on the creek bank with his eyes open.

Their conversation continues in Hernán's home, where he offers Jessica a glass of liquor he makes himself that appears to be *aguardiente*. "This stuff brings me close to what you call dreams," he tells her. When she begins telling a story of a frightening childhood incident involving her mother, Hernán tells her she's actually reading his memories, like an antenna.

She weeps quietly as she hears storms, rain and tremors of the past intertwined with a tangle of stories, including a ghostly replay of the one Hernán previously extracted from the rock, about a man being beaten and robbed. In a typically surreal Weerasethakul touch, Jessica witnesses an occurrence that introduces a brief sci-fi or supernatural element, which would appear to explain the origin of the sound she's been chasing.

Her emotional response is quietly moving in Swinton's otherwise muted performance. Whether audiences will share the character's clarity depends on how willing they are to tune in to the director's singular wavelength. *Memoria* is a challenging film that requires work, and its somnolent rhythms, particularly during an early morning screening at the end of a busy festival, pushed this critic to the brink of sleep a couple times. But that's somehow in keeping with a haunting contemplation of the porous walls separating personal from collective memory. The beautiful closing landscape shots of the jungles and mountains suggest that memory extends even beyond the human dimension.

Acquired by Neon for the U.S., the film won't expand Weerasethakul's following, but admirers will find it an imaginative, thematically and stylistically cohesive addition to his distinctive output.

## Special Events

**CAST** Tilda Swinton, Elkin Díaz, Jeanne Balibar, Juan Pablo Urrego

**DIRECTOR-SCREENWRITER** Apichatpong Weerasethakul

2 hours 16 minutes

# Violet

Olivia Munn toplines Justine Bateman's feature directorial debut, the story of a Hollywood executive's struggle to turn off the hostile voice in her head and live a more authentic life **By Sheri Linden**

In a memorable episode of *Seinfeld*, George Costanza decides to change his life by doing the opposite of what he usually does in his daily decision-making. That same existential experiment drives *Violet*, although without the intended laughs. For the title character, played by Olivia Munn, the switch isn't as easy as it was for George. But after a lifetime of obeying "the committee" in her head, she's increasingly aware of the disconnect between the life she leads and the life she wants.

That committee is really one guy, a dictatorial meanie voiced by Justin Theroux, as The Voice. His withering put-downs and harsh orders to Violet are woven into and around the film's dialogue and action. A second voice also reacts to what's going on, but it's a silenced one, the voice of Violet's innermost desires and questions. These thoughts appear onscreen in large handwritten text: "What's wrong with me?"; "I want you to stay"; "Why have I been afraid to do the things I love?" The ensuing back-and-forth pits Violet's inner enemy (what practitioners of The Tools know as Part X) against Violet's soul.

At particularly self-defeating moments for her protagonist, writer-director Justine

Bateman injects flashing images of disaster, violence and decomposing animals. The screen might go red and the score, by Los Angeles electronic-rock trio Vum, might deepen its groan. It doesn't take long to catch on to this multichannel narrative scheme, with its disturbing visuals and conflicting voices. But you might soon hear an additional voice — the one in your head wondering where the self-improvement earnestness leaves off and the satire begins, if at all, and just what to make of Violet herself. Is she an emblematic figure or one we're supposed to take at face value?

She's a 30-something production executive who's staying with her screenwriter friend Red (Luke Bracey) in his hilltop midcentury spread while her rain-damaged kitchen is being repaired. His place is also undergoing renovation. That's the world we're in, the circle of high-end L.A. real estate and high-powered social circles. Following her inner committee's orders, Violet puts up with the condescension and disrespect of people who technically report to her, transparent manipulator Bradley (Zachary Gordon) and the oozyly snarky Julie (Cassandra Cardenes). As with most organizations, the stink starts at the head; Violet's boss is a first-rate louse, played by an exceptionally hissable Dennis Boutsikaris.

Her protective assistant, Keith (Keith Powers), can't understand why she puts up with the abuse, but he doesn't know about the voice in her head. On that front, Violet has confided in only one person, her friend Lila (Erica Ash), and their initial conversation on the matter doesn't go very well. A

production designer with a strong self-image ("My parents told me I'm great"), Lila urges Violet to think of Red as more than her geeky childhood friend. But even though he's single, handsome, supportive, kind and emotionally available, he's not an executive and therefore, according to Violet, not "the type of guy I should be dating."

But still she finds herself avoiding the calls of the studio hotshot (Peter Jacobson) who would fit that bill. Something in her carefully maintained mission to ascend the ladder is coming apart at the seams. The abstract poetry-based passion project she pushed aside starts resurfacing (in Hollywood?!), even as she plows ahead with the redundantly titled game-based movie *Fireflake*, and endures long-distance intrusions of disdain and jealousy from her brother (Todd Stashwick) and aunt (Bonnie Bedelia) back in the Midwest.

Hollywood vet Bateman has a sure eye for the industry scene, from its transactional-sex deals with the devil to the eateries that are about being seen as much as being fed. Her observations of the biz can be sharp, and the three-minute sequence that puts 45 crewmembers onscreen after the closing credits serves as a cleansing tonic after the parade of egos during the preceding hour and a half.

She draws naturalistic performances from Munn and a large supporting cast. But the story itself finally feels lost beneath the levels of artifice rather than heightened by it. The stakes for Violet certainly matter to her, but they haven't the dramatic heft to make them matter to us. A Hollywood denizen who has never considered therapy is a little hard to believe, but there are times when Violet's mental health seems like a problem that calls for more than a shrink.

However constant and extreme Violet's doubts and self-criticism are, certainly most of us can relate to the general experience, and to Lila's comment to Violet that "maybe you've cast yourself in a role you don't want to play anymore." But as age-old and universal as the careerism-vs.-happiness clash at the heart of *Violet* is, it's hard to relate to its central character's bravery. The supposed big leaps that Violet takes — between one executive position and another, and into the arms of the dreamboat standing two feet away — fall short of the mark. I'm curious to see what Bateman does next. Violet, not so much.

#### Special Presentations

**CAST** Olivia Munn, Luke Bracey, Justin Theroux, Bonnie Bedelia, Zachary Gordon, Erica Ash  
**DIRECTOR-SCREENWRITER** Justine Bateman  
 92 minutes

Olivia Munn experiences moments of extreme doubt and self-criticism that are sometimes scrawled onscreen.





# Screening Guide

Toronto International Film Festival

**Today  
(Sept. 11)**

**9:00**

**The Worst Person in the World**, Scotiabank 1

**9:30**

**Farha**, Scotiabank 13  
**Hellbound**, TIFF Bell Lightbox 4

**10:00**

**107 Mothers**, digital TIFF Bell Lightbox Pro  
**Commitment Hasan**, digital TIFF Bell Lightbox Pro  
**My Night**, digital TIFF Bell Lightbox Pro  
**Sinjar**, digital TIFF Bell Lightbox Pro  
**Yaya e Lennie — The Walking Liberty**, digital TIFF Bell Lightbox Pro  
**Comala**, Scotiabank 3  
**Earwig**, TIFF Digital Cinema Pro  
**Hold Your Fire**, TIFF Bell Lightbox 3  
**Neptune Frost**, TIFF Digital Cinema Pro  
**Night Raiders**, TIFF Digital Cinema Pro  
**Scarborough**, TIFF Digital Cinema Pro  
**Terrorizers**, TIFF Digital Cinema Pro  
**The Gravedigger's Wife**, TIFF Digital Cinema Pro

**10:30**

**Silent Land**, Scotiabank 4

**11:00**

**Memory Box: Echoes of 9/11**, TIFF Bell Lightbox 2

**11:30**

**Maria Chapdelaine**, TIFF Bell Lightbox 1  
**Scarborough**, Scotiabank 2

**12:00**

**Becoming Cousteau**, Ontario Place  
**Dune**, Scotiabank 12

**12:30**

**Terrorizers**, Scotiabank 9

**13:00**

**Ama**, digital TIFF Bell Lightbox Pro  
**Born Dead**, digital TIFF Bell Lightbox Pro  
**Jill**, digital TIFF Bell Lightbox Pro  
**Mi lubita, Mon Amour**, digital TIFF Bell Lightbox Pro  
**The Love You Don't Know**, digital TIFF Bell Lightbox Pro  
**A Banquet**, digital TIFF Bell Lightbox  
**Comala**, TIFF Digital Cinema Pro  
**Lingui, the Sacred Bonds**, TIFF Digital Cinema Pro  
**Murina**, TIFF Digital Cinema Pro  
**Neptune Frost**, digital TIFF Bell Lightbox  
**Night Raiders**, TIFF Digital Cinema Pro  
**Night Raiders**, digital TIFF Bell Lightbox

**Short Cuts**

**Programme 02**

TIFF Digital Cinema Pro

**Short Cuts: YYZ**

**Edition**, Scotiabank 1

**Silent Land**

TIFF Digital Cinema Pro

**The Gravedigger's**

**Wife**, digital TIFF Bell Lightbox

**Wildhood**, TIFF Digital Cinema Pro

**13:30**

**Inu-Oh**, Scotiabank 13  
**Last Night in Soho**, Roy Thomson Hall  
**WL Shorts: Present, Tense**, TIFF Bell Lightbox 4

**14:00**

**Dionne Warwick: Don't Make Me Over**, VISA Screening Room at the Princess of Wales Theatre  
**Encounter**, TIFF Bell Lightbox 3  
**La Soga 2**, Scotiabank 3

**14:30**

**Wildhood**, Scotiabank 4

**15:00**

**Dug Dug**, digital TIFF Bell Lightbox  
**Short Cuts Programme 02**, digital TIFF Bell Lightbox  
**Silent Land**, digital TIFF Bell Lightbox

**15:15**

**Wildhood**, Ontario Place Cinesphere

**15:30**

**Earwig**, Scotiabank 2  
**Inexorable**, TIFF Bell Lightbox 2

**16:00**

**Ghost Song**, digital TIFF Bell Lightbox Pro  
**Language Lessons**, digital TIFF Bell Lightbox Pro  
**Shark: The Beginning**, digital TIFF Bell Lightbox Pro  
**The Marijuana Conspiracy**, digital TIFF Bell Lightbox Pro  
**Walking With Herb**, digital TIFF Bell Lightbox Pro  
**Becoming Cousteau**, TIFF Digital Cinema Pro

**Celebrating Alanis Obomsawin — The Dignity of Children: Programme 1**, TIFF Digital Cinema Pro  
**Compartment No. 6**, TIFF Digital Cinema Pro

**Encounter**, TIFF Digital Cinema Pro  
**Hold Your Fire**, TIFF Digital Cinema Pro  
**Inexorable**, TIFF Digital Cinema Pro  
**La Soga 2**, TIFF Digital Cinema Pro  
**Oscar Peterson: Black + White**, Scotiabank 12  
**WL Shorts: Present, Tense**, TIFF Digital Cinema Pro

**16:30**

**A Banquet**, Scotiabank 9  
**Montana Story**, TIFF Bell Lightbox 1

**17:00**

**Hold Your Fire**, digital TIFF Bell Lightbox  
**Maria Chapdelaine**, digital TIFF Bell Lightbox  
**Terrorizers**, digital TIFF Bell Lightbox  
**The Worst Person In The World**, digital TIFF Bell Lightbox

**17:30**

**All My Puny Sorrows**, VISA Screening Room at the Princess of Wales Theatre  
**Anatolian Leopard**, TIFF Bell Lightbox 4  
**The Forgiven**, Roy Thomson Hall

**18:00**

**Beba**, TIFF Bell Lightbox 3  
**Compartment No. 6**, Scotiabank 3

**18:30**

**Murina**, Scotiabank 13

**19:00**

**A Banquet**, Scotiabank 4  
**Encounter**, digital TIFF Bell Lightbox  
**Inexorable**, digital TIFF Bell Lightbox  
**Learn to Swim**, Scotiabank 1  
**The Tsugua Diaries**, digital TIFF Bell Lightbox  
**Titane**, digital TIFF Bell Lightbox

**19:15**

**Dune**, Ontario Place Cinesphere

**19:30**

**Colin in Black and White**, TIFF Bell Lightbox 2  
**Lingui, the Sacred Bonds**, Scotiabank 2

**20:00**

**Costa Brava, Lebanon**, Scotiabank 12

**20:30**

**Anatolian Leopard**, Scotiabank 9  
**Arthur Rambo**, TIFF Bell Lightbox 1  
**The Electrical Life of Louis Wain**, VISA Skyline Drive-In at Ontario Place

**21:00**

**Encounter**, West Island Open Air Cinema at Ontario Place  
**Kicking Blood**, digital TIFF Bell Lightbox  
**Learn to Swim**, digital TIFF Bell Lightbox  
**Listening to Kenny G**, RBC Lakeside Drive-In at Ontario Place  
**Montana Story**, digital TIFF Bell Lightbox  
**The Forgiven**, digital TIFF Bell Lightbox  
**The Guilty**, VISA Screening Room at the Princess of Wales Theatre

**21:30**

**The Electrical Life of Louis Wain**, Roy Thomson Hall

**23:59**

**Dashcam**, TIFF Bell Lightbox 1

## Sunday (Sept. 12)

9:00

**Bergman Island**,  
Scotiabank 1

9:30

**Arthur Rambo**,  
Scotiabank 13  
**Colin in Black and White**, TIFF Bell  
Lightbox 1  
**Dionne Warwick: Don't Make Me Over**,  
TIFF Bell Lightbox 4

10:00

**Cadejo Blanco**,  
digital TIFF Bell  
Lightbox Pro  
**Onoda — 10,000 Nights in the Jungle**,  
digital TIFF Bell  
Lightbox Pro  
**Reflection**, digital TIFF  
Bell Lightbox Pro  
**The Legionnaire**,  
digital TIFF Bell  
Lightbox Pro  
**The Swimmer**,  
digital TIFF Bell  
Lightbox Pro  
**Arthur Rambo**, TIFF  
Digital Cinema Pro  
**Celebrating Alanis Obomsawin — The Dignity of Children: Programme 2**, TIFF  
Digital Cinema Pro  
**Colin in Black and White**, TIFF Digital  
Cinema Pro  
**Dashcam**, TIFF Digital  
Cinema Pro  
**Listening to Kenny G**,  
TIFF Digital Cinema  
Pro  
**The Forgiven**,  
Scotiabank 3

10:30

**Listening to Kenny G**,  
Scotiabank 4  
**The Starling**, TIFF Bell  
Lightbox 3

11:00

**Antoine Fuqua on Training Day**, TIFF Bell  
Lightbox 2  
**Inside the Rescue**,  
TIFF Bell Digital Talks

11:30

**Intimacy on Set With Ita O'Brien**, TIFF Bell  
Digital Talks  
**Wochiigii lo: End of the Peace**,  
Scotiabank 2

12:00

**German Films and Talent at Summer Film Festivals**, TIFF  
Bell Digital Talks  
**Lo Invisible**, Ontario  
Place Cinesphere  
**The Wheel**,  
Scotiabank 12

12:30

**Dashcam**,  
Scotiabank 9  
**Lakewood**, Roy  
Thomson Hall

13:00

**Leave No Traces**,  
digital TIFF Bell  
Lightbox Pro  
**Stars Fell on Alabama**, digital TIFF  
Bell Lightbox Pro  
**Trenches**, digital TIFF  
Bell Lightbox Pro  
**Visitor**, digital TIFF  
Bell Lightbox Pro  
**Welcome to Sieghelkirchen**,  
digital TIFF Bell  
Lightbox Pro  
**All My Puny Sorrows**,  
digital TIFF Bell  
Lightbox  
**Anatolian Leopard**,  
TIFF Digital Cinema  
Pro  
**Celebrating Alanis Obomsawin — Lighting the Fire: Programme 1**, TIFF  
Digital Cinema Pro  
**Colin in Black and White**, digital TIFF Bell  
Lightbox

**Costa Brava, Lebanon**, digital TIFF  
Bell Lightbox  
**Dionne Warwick: Don't Make Me Over**,  
TIFF Digital Cinema  
Pro

**Documenting History**, TIFF Bell  
Digital Talks  
**Inu-Oh**, digital TIFF  
Bell Lightbox  
**Julia**, TIFF Digital  
Cinema Pro  
**Montana Story**,  
Scotiabank 1  
**Montana Story**,  
TIFF Digital Cinema  
Pro

**The Daughter**, TIFF  
Digital Cinema Pro  
**The Electrical Life of Louis Wain**, TIFF  
Digital Cinema Pro  
**The Electrical Life of Louis Wain**, digital  
TIFF Bell Lightbox  
**The Guilty**, TIFF  
Digital Cinema Pro

13:30

**Are You Lonesome Tonight?**, TIFF Bell  
Lightbox 4  
**The Humans**, VISA  
Screening Room at  
the Princess of Wales  
Theatre  
**Yuni**, Scotiabank 13

14:00

**A Night of Knowing Nothing**, TIFF Bell  
Lightbox 3  
**Benediction**, TIFF Bell  
Lightbox 1  
**Julia**, Scotiabank 3  
**Spotlight on Russia: Animation**, TIFF Bell  
Digital Talks

14:30

**Learn to Swim**,  
Scotiabank 4

15:00

**Arthur Rambo**, digital  
TIFF Bell Lightbox  
**Beba**, digital TIFF Bell  
Lightbox  
**Celebrating Alanis**

**Obomsawin — Portraits: Programme 2**, digital TIFF Bell  
Lightbox  
**Dashcam**, digital TIFF  
Bell Lightbox  
**Short Cuts Programme 03**,  
digital TIFF Bell  
Lightbox  
**Spotlight on Talent: Fresh Perspectives From the North**, TIFF  
Bell Digital Talks  
**The Guilty**, digital TIFF  
Bell Lightbox

15:30

**In Conversation With ... Benedict Cumberbatch**, TIFF  
Bell Digital Talks  
**Nobody Has to Know**,  
Scotiabank 2  
**The Rescue**, Ontario  
Place Cinesphere

16:00

**Big Gold Brick**, digital  
TIFF Bell Lightbox Pro  
**Emptiness**, digital TIFF  
Bell Lightbox Pro  
**Hard Luck Love Song**, digital TIFF Bell  
Lightbox Pro  
**Rising Wolf**, digital  
TIFF Bell Lightbox Pro  
**Son of Monarchs**,  
digital TIFF Bell  
Lightbox Pro  
**Beba**, TIFF Digital  
Cinema Pro  
**Celebrating Alanis Obomsawin — Lighting the Fire: Programme 2**, TIFF  
Digital Cinema Pro  
**Futura**, TIFF Digital  
Cinema Pro  
**Lakewood**, TIFF Digital  
Cinema Pro  
**Learn to Swim**, TIFF  
Digital Cinema Pro  
**Paka (River of Blood)**, TIFF Digital  
Cinema Pro  
**The Daughter**,  
Scotiabank 12  
**The Middle Man**, TIFF  
Bell Lightbox 2  
**The Rescue**, TIFF  
Digital Cinema Pro  
**The Starling**, TIFF

Digital Cinema Pro  
**The Wheel**, TIFF  
Digital Cinema Pro

16:30

**Beba**, Scotiabank 9

17:00

**Ali & Ava**, Scotiabank 1  
**Compartment No. 6**,  
digital TIFF Bell  
Lightbox  
**Listening to Kenny G**,  
digital TIFF Bell  
Lightbox  
**Vengeance Is Mine, All Others Pay Cash**,  
digital TIFF Bell  
Lightbox  
**Wildhood**, digital TIFF  
Bell Lightbox

17:30

**Belfast**, Roy Thomson  
Hall  
**Futura**, TIFF Bell  
Lightbox 4  
**The Devil's Drivers**,  
Scotiabank 13

18:00

**In Conversation With ... Steven Yeun**, TIFF  
Bell Digital Talks  
**Listening to Kenny G**,  
Scotiabank 3  
**The Starling**, VISA  
Screening Room at  
the Princess of Wales  
Theatre  
**Tug of War**, TIFF Bell  
Lightbox 3

18:30

**The Humans**,  
Scotiabank 4

19:00

**Ali & Ava**, digital TIFF  
Bell Lightbox  
**Becoming Cousteau**,  
digital TIFF Bell  
Lightbox  
**The Humans**,  
digital TIFF Bell  
Lightbox  
**WL Shorts: Present, Tense**, digital TIFF Bell  
Lightbox

19:30

**Dune**, Ontario Place  
Cinesphere  
**Oscar Peterson: Black + White**, TIFF  
Bell Lightbox 1  
**Sundown**,  
Scotiabank 2

20:00

**Ahed's Knee**,  
Scotiabank 12  
**Quickenin'**, TIFF Bell  
Lightbox 2

20:30

**Lakewood**, VISA  
Skyline Drive-In at  
Ontario Place  
**Paka (River of Blood)**,  
Scotiabank 9

21:00

**Anatolian Leopard**,  
digital TIFF Bell  
Lightbox  
**Are You Lonesome Tonight?**, digital TIFF  
Bell Lightbox  
**Dionne Warwick: Don't Make Me Over**, West Island  
Open Air Cinema at  
Ontario Place  
**Lingui, the Sacred Bonds**, digital TIFF  
Bell Lightbox  
**Lo Invisible**,  
digital TIFF Bell  
Lightbox  
**Murina**, digital TIFF  
Bell Lightbox  
**The Mad Women's Ball**, Roy Thomson  
Hall  
**The Starling**, RBC  
Lakeside Drive-In at  
Ontario Place

21:30

**The Eyes of Tammy Faye**, VISA Screening  
Room at the Princess  
of Wales Theatre

23:59

**You Are Not My Mother**, TIFF Bell  
Lightbox 1



Memorable moments  
from a storied history

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## In 2012, Terence Stamp Sang His Way to Success

Terence Stamp managed to fulfill a longstanding dream to sing onscreen when *Song for Marion* closed the 37th Toronto Film Festival in 2012 — and in doing so, he was able to put a lingering regret behind him. In Paul Andrew Williams' comedy-drama, which was released by The Weinstein Co. in the U.S. under the title *Unfinished Song*, Stamp, then 74, played a curmudgeonly pensioner who reluctantly agrees to take part in a chorus of senior citizens who perform pop hits. "I've never sung publicly," Stamp confessed as he met with reporters at that year's festival (though he did prove himself adept at lip-syncing as part of the drag act in 1994's *Priscilla, Queen of the Desert*). But, he recalled, back in the 1960s, "I was begged publicly in a restaurant in Soho by [director] Josh Logan as he went on his knees and begged me to play King Arthur in *Camelot*, and I was just too fearful. My main fear was that I would be revoiced, which for a young actor is like the end of your career as a

serious performer, you know? And so I turned it down." The role in the movie version of the Broadway musical went to Richard Harris, and, Stamp continued, "I've always regretted it. I can't explain it really. It's something that has returned to me over the years. I thought, 'My God, what a mug I was to turn down King Arthur.' So when Williams approached him about *Song* — as fate would have it, his character would be called Arthur and he'd be starring opposite Vanessa Redgrave, who also headlined *Camelot* — Stamp thought, "Well, he's called Arthur, Vanessa Redgrave is playing the wife, and I have to sing. I can't spit in the face of the universe a second time, though I had great trepidation." He needn't have worried. Stephanie Merry of *The Washington Post* said, "The formidably talented duo inject so much humanity into their characters that all of the other overly sentimental elements — even the title sounds like it belongs on the Hallmark Channel — seem utterly

reasonable." Now, Stamp just has to hope that Edgar Wright's time-traveling psychological horror tale *Last Night in Soho* — in which he will be seen at this year's festival as part of a cast that includes other Swinging London icons as Rita Tushingham and the late Diana Rigg — doesn't trigger any further flashbacks to that Soho meeting when he turned his back on *Camelot*. — GREGG KILDAY



Terence Stamp signed autographs at TIFF in 2012. Inset: The actor (bottom right) appeared with Steven Soderbergh in *THR*'s coverage of the 1999 fest, at which their film *The Limey* screened.





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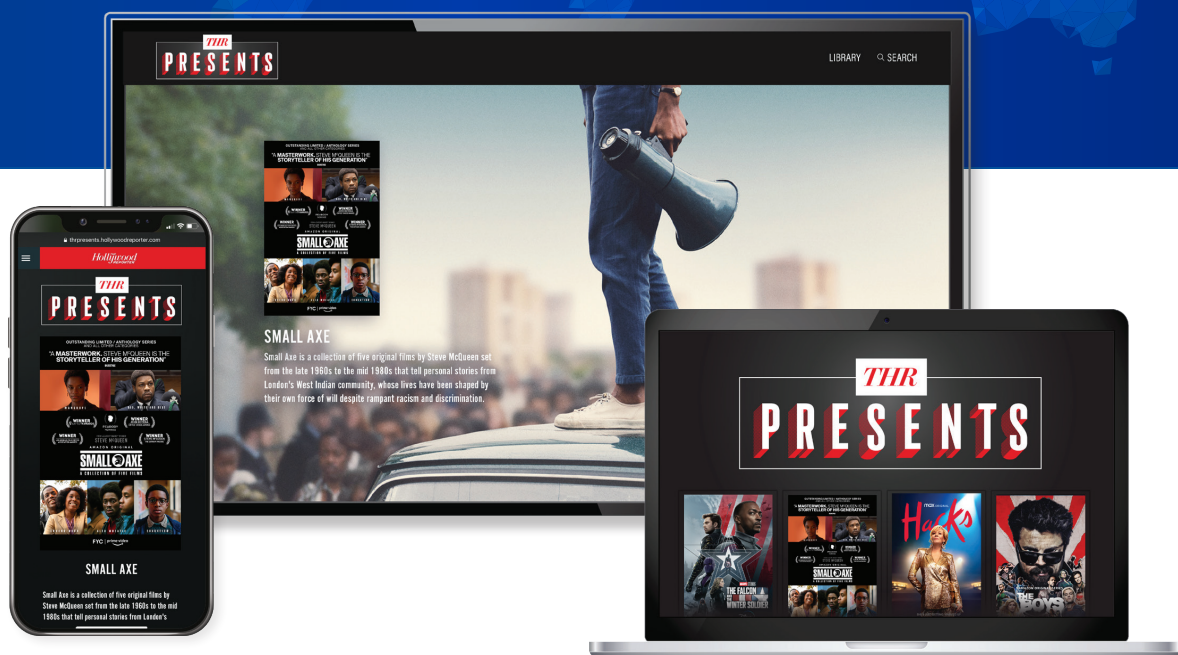
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