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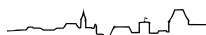
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72° F
22° C

TOMORROW
71° F
22° C

TIFF Confronts Gender Inequality on Set

BY ETAN VLESSING

Late Night director **Nisha Ganatra** has a straightforward way to achieve gender parity in Hollywood.

"Hire women. That's it. Hire them," Ganatra, who also directed **Tracee Ellis Ross** in *The High Note*, told a Toronto Film Festival panel on dismantling toxic behaviors on set and in the entertainment industry on Saturday.

Ganatra argued that getting producers and major studio execs to back the quest for gender equality and safer spaces for women is easier today because commitments to hiring equity are taken more seriously in the Time's Up era. "Where everybody aspired to do it, you started seeing all the reasons why it quickly unwinds and people don't do it," she said of Hollywood backsliding in the past.

Ganatra added that the solution is to convince Hollywood gatekeepers

(Continued on page 2)



Nisha Ganatra



Paying Tribute

Benedict Cumberbatch and Jessica Chastain attended TIFF's Tribute Awards press event on Saturday. The awards serve as TIFF's largest annual fundraiser in support of the fest's diversity, equity and inclusion initiative.

Toronto Fest Subdued as Dealmaking Hums Along

TIFF has been predictably low-key amid diminished star power and even fewer execs, but pandemic-era online business is once again proving efficient: 'We're becoming very experienced at these virtual festivals' **BY SCOTT ROXBOROUGH AND ETAN VLESSING**

Director **Stephen Chbosky** called the opening night of the 2021 Toronto International Film Festival — which kicked off with Chbosky's *Dear Evan Hansen* Sept. 9 — "the opening night of cinema in North America."

Well, maybe.

As TIFF rolls through its first weekend, the Toronto festival and film market seemed more subdued than celebratory. Strict COVID-19 travel restrictions meant few industry execs have made the trip up North, preferring the safety of Zoom meetings and Toronto's online market.

Those who did brave the trip were faced

with major delays — four hours or more — coming in from New York and L.A. And TIFF red carpets and gala premieres have been muted affairs. Limited-capacity screenings have put a damper on the typically raucous Toronto audiences and with few major stars attending — in sharp contrast to the VIP-studded Venice Film Festival last week — there have been no mobs of screaming fans crowding the Toronto streets around major venues like the Roy Thompson Hall and Bell Lightbox.

Film buyers skipping the flight to Toronto also came about after TIFF for the second year

(Continued on page 2)

For all the latest coverage of the Toronto International Film Festival, go to **THR.COM/TORONTO**

The Report

Behind the Headlines

GENDER INEQUALITY

Continued from page 1

not to just hire a man over a woman because he has an Oscar nomination and she has a thin reel as a newcomer. “We have to keep having the conversation of, ‘This woman could have an Academy nomination, but nobody will ever let her get that because she doesn’t have the jobs because of what you’re saying,’” she insisted.

Andria Wilson Mirza, a producer and director of ReFrame, told the panel that Hollywood TV shows and movies earning the ReFrame Stamp — first given in 2018 to productions that achieve gender-balanced hiring — has also turned the industry conversation toward seeking more equitable and inclusive hiring practices.

“It really hones in on those roles where there has been historical exclusion of women and in particular women of color,” Mirza said.

Elle-Máijá Tailfeathers, star of the TIFF title *Night Raiders* and director of the documentary *Kimmapiiyipitssini: The Meaning of Empathy*, about the opioid crisis in her indigenous community, called for more representation in collaborative storytelling, even from the edit suite.

“I showed all of my participants various cuts of the film to make sure they felt they were being represented in a respectable way,” she explained. Tailfeathers also had indigenous technicians on her doc operating the camera and filling other key creative roles.

“It’s all about a strategy and thinking about power and privilege and voice and what it means to be the filmmaker and ensure my community also has agency and power in this process,” she said. **THR**



This year there have been no mobs of film fans crowding the Toronto streets around major venues like the Roy Thompson Hall.

FEST SUBDUED

Continued from page 1

running shrank its film lineup to around 100 titles — down dramatically from the 280 to 300 movies pre-pandemic and which had film buyers complaining they couldn’t take in the full breadth of cinematic offerings in Toronto, especially during the front-end-loaded first weekend.

Toronto’s pandemic-impacted market this year has also refashioned itself as a film bazaar. In earlier years, major buyers filled seats at Roy Thomson Hall and the Elgin and Princess of Wales Theatres on Saturday night to gauge whether TIFF’s first weekend acquisition titles were worth bidding on well into Sunday morning, and where the risk was paying over the odds. With no audience reaction to rely on this year, dealmakers may opt to keep their powder dry and pay less for titles toward the end of the festival or at the AFM.

The more somber mood this year suited the atmosphere on Saturday, which marked the 20th anniversary of the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks. The 2001 Toronto Festival was at its midway point on that Tuesday morning in September, when news of the attacks on the World Trade Center first broke. Planes were grounded for days and TIFF organizers struggled with a decision to cancel or finish the festival (they decided to finish).

But while Toronto 2021 might be lacking the buzz and glamor of pre-COVID-19 fests, the pure market side of the business continues to tick over virtually for the second year running. “The good news ... is we’re becoming very experienced at these virtual festivals,” **Kent Sanderson**, president of acquisitions and ancillary distribution at indie distributor Bleeker Street, insists.

Toronto has never been a major market for pre-sales — most packages come in earlier, in Berlin or Cannes, or later for the American Film Market — but there have been a fair number of midsize projects pitched to TIFF buyers this year. FilmNation, CAA Media Finance and WME kicked off sales on *We All Die Young*, a drama set in the rap world with **Justice Smith**, **Idris Elba** and **Taylor Paige** attached to star, a script from *Hamilton* star **Daveed Diggs** and with **Jake Schreier** (*Robot & Frank*, *Paper Towns*) on board to direct. Endeavor Content unveiled its noir drama *Sniff* featuring **Morgan Freeman**, **Danny DeVito**, **Al Pacino** and **Helen Mirren**, and Embankment spurred interest in its upcoming biopic *Joika*, about elite American ballet dancer **Joy WOMACK**, after announcing **Diane Kruger** has signed on to star alongside *Never Rarely Sometimes Always* actor **Talia Ryder**.

Sales executives, whether on the ground or Zoom-ing in from home offices worldwide, said distributors are still hungry for films. “There’s still that huge demand for content,” said **Janina Vilsmaier** of Protagonist, which is screening its (sold-out) Spanish-language comedy *Official Competition*, starring **Penélope Cruz** and **Antonio Banderas**, in Toronto. “We’ve been doing good business at every film market since the start of the pandemic.”

Says **JJ Caruth** of The Avenue Entertainment, Highland Film Group’s domestic distribution arm: “The big difference in Toronto this year is there aren’t as many finished films available for acquisition. The production slowdown we saw because of COVID is still having an impact with fewer projects available for acquisition. But I think we’re already starting to see that change and we should have a robust slate of finished films from Sundance next year.” **THR**

Meanwhile, in the Real World ...

→ California Governor **Gavin Newsom**’s odds of winning the recall election against him improved over the past week. Bookmakers Betfair, the world’s largest online betting exchange, put Newsom’s odds of being recalled at 1/18. The odds were previously 2/9.

→ **Donald Trump** skipped a 9/11 commemorative ceremony in New York on Saturday that was attended by a number of former presidents. Trump planned to mark the 20th anniversary of the attack by providing commentary for a pay-per-view boxing match in Florida.

→ The Venice Film Festival gave its top honor, the Golden Lion for best film, to **Audrey Diwan**’s French abortion drama *Happening* on Saturday night. The best director honor, the Silver Lion, went to **Jane Campion** for her Netflix neo-Western *The Power of the Dog*.

WENL

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Netherlands at Toronto

Official Selection
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TIFF DOCS

THREE MINUTES - A LENGTHENING

By Bianca Stigter
Prod: Family Affair Films
Sales: Autlook Filmsales

Official Selection
tiff
Toronto International
Film Festival 2021



PLATFORM COMPETITION

HUDA'S SALON

By Hany Abu-Assad
NL Co-prod: KeyFilm
Sales: Memento Films

Official Selection
tiff
Toronto International
Film Festival 2021



SPECIAL PRESENTATIONS

WHERE IS ANNE FRANK

By Ari Folman
NL Co-prod: Submarine
Sales: Wild Bunch

Industry Selects
tiff
Toronto International
Film Festival 2021



TIFF INDUSTRY SELECTS

NR. 10

By Alex van Warmerdam
Prod: Graniet Film
Sales: Nine Film

Industry Selects
tiff
Toronto International
Film Festival 2021



TIFF INDUSTRY SELECTS

COOL ABDOUL

By Jonas Baekeland
NL Co-prod: N279 Entertainment

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3 Questions With ...

TIM ROTH

The veteran British actor, about to make his return to the MCU with the Disney+ series *She-Hulk*, re-teams with Mexican auteur **Michel Franco** on *Sundown*, playing Neil, a rich Brit who, while on vacation in Acapulco, decides to walk away from his life.

On the idea of leaving everything behind and walking away from life:

I can understand Neil's decision only from a work perspective. Sometimes it's overwhelming and you go: 'wouldn't it be nice to stop?' But I don't think I could ever do that to my family. I think I'd be more caring. Michel [Franco] was having a tough time when he wrote the film. That's why he had Neil do what he did. Some people think he's a sociopath. Others find him very funny.

On why he never watches his own movies:

I tend not to. Michel's movies are an exception. But for me, after I'm done filming, it's not my movie anymore. I've done my part. It's for the director and editor to work with. And for the audience and critics to judge it ... I don't think it's particularly healthy to obsess about that as an actor. I just do my job and then it's over to you guys [the press] to do yours.

On returning to the Marvel:

When they came to me and said: 'we're adapting the *She-Hulk* thing. Can you come back as that character again?' I was like, sure. It should be fun. I was very surprised though, because it was difficult at first. It was only when Mark Ruffalo came in to shoot his stuff [reprising his role as Bruce Banner] that I went: 'Oh, that's how you do it! With a sense of humor!' —S.R.

HOW DP GREIG FRASER CREATED THE LOOK OF *DUNE*

"You don't want to be the guy who messes up the photography in *Dune*," the Oscar-nominated Fraser said during a TIFF Visionaries Talk **BY SCOTT ROXBOROUGH**

Greig Fraser has always let fear be his guide.

"I don't take on projects I don't get nervous about — fear is always a part of it," the Oscar-nominated cinematographer (*Lion*, *Zero Dark Thirty*) said, explaining why he decided to take on the challenge of shooting **Denis Villeneuve's** sci-fi epic *Dune*.

"You don't want to be the guy who screws up the photography on *Dune*," Fraser quipped, speaking to *The Hollywood Reporter's* **Carolyn Giardina** on Friday's live video session for a TIFF Visionaries Talk.

Dune, from Legendary and Warner Bros., premiered at the Venice Film Festival last week and will have its North American bow at TIFF on Saturday.

"I get nervous with every new project I take on," said Fraser. "I hope that's natural and I hope it never goes away."

Fraser, by his own admission, has lead "a very charmed existence" as a cinematographer. "I've worked with the people I've dreamed of working with," he said, citing



Villeneuve but also his long-time collaborator **Garth Davis** (*Lion*) as well as **Gareth Edwards** (*Rogue One: A Star Wars Story*).

Technology, of the cutting-edge variety, was very much at the center of Fraser's process for shooting *Dune*.

"With *Dune* it just started by listening to Denis [Villeneuve]," Fraser explained. "He's incredibly passionate about it. He dreamed his film in 4:3 [ratio], which initially was an unusual thing to hear because 4:3 doesn't immediately make me think of a big epic. But when I saw how we were shooting it for IMAX, I saw *Dune* how Denis saw it. The story is big. It's epic. You can't really get bigger from a scale perspective. But ultimately, it's about this boy, Paul Atreides (played by **Timothée Chalamet**) [and] about Paul's journey with his family. It wasn't dissimilar to *Lion*, where we had to view the world from Paul's eyes."

Warner Bros. will be releasing *Dune* in the U.S. both theatrically and on its streaming service HBO Max, but Fraser implored everyone to see the film on the big screen. **THR**

EXCLUSIVE
FIRST LOOK



Hayley Law in *Door Mouse*

Hayley Law (*Riverdale*) is showing off her artistic skills in the first look photo of actor-turned-filmmaker **Avan Jogia's** neo-noir thriller *Door Mouse*. Law leads the cast as Mouse, a woman stuck in a dead-end job at Mama's Burlesque Club. When a friend from work goes missing and the cops do nothing about it, Mouse and her sidekick Ugly (**Keith Powers**) take it upon themselves to find her. Highland Film Group is handling worldwide rights in Toronto.



An Immigrant Perspective on a Coming-of-Age Tale

Director Haya Waseem drew on her own experiences for *Quickening*, her narrative feature debut about a Pakistani girl coping with the pressures of family, friends and community while adapting to her new life in Toronto **BY ETAN VLESSING**

Hidden Gem

Haya Waseem's *Quickening* is part of a new wave of immigrant films

from Canadian filmmakers telling first-generation tales of having to choose between freedom and family duty in a new and strange land.

"It's a coming-of-age story, but the character comes of age in Canada," says Waseem, who was born in Pakistan and raised in Switzerland before immigrating to Canada at age 16. *Quickening* combines YA angst with an immigration tale, told from the perspective of a 19-year-old woman in a Canadian Pakistani household in Toronto.

"To me, Canada is a very neutral

environment. The benefit of being Canadian is that you can come from any background, and no one questions where you're from," says Waseem, who has since moved from Toronto to be based in Brooklyn, New York, as a filmmaker.

Quickening tells the story of Sheila (**Arooj Azeem**), who has room to grow in Canada beyond the expectations and constraints of her family home. That narrative is in part a product of Waseem's own upbringing, as



Waseem

the script for her debut feature came about after long conversations with her friends, extended family and Pakistani

Arooj Azeem is caught between the liberation she feels living in Toronto and the pressure from her family and community to conform.

community.

The result is an exploration of a young woman of color coveting romance and acceptance in a new country, only to face heartbreak and her family unravelling due to financial problems.

But adding the layer of a Pakistani family coming from a part of the world not as liberal as Canada serves to torque the dramatic tension in *Quickening*. "The conflict comes from what you're used to as suppression, and a form of being oppressed and being used to that, and suddenly having this veil lifted and told, 'You have freedom, you don't have to worry about how you're dressed and how you're behaving,'" Waseem explains.

Nearing the end of her first year at college, Sheila has to contend with the reality that her family is living well beyond their means, occupying a big house they can't afford and headed toward a financial cliff. "In the Pakistani house, it's about hosting and having the appearance of wealth and generosity, and in Sheila's family, the father is not necessarily generating a house that's large and opulent for the community. He falls short," Waseem says.

Sheila also begins to see her life unravel when, after losing her virginity, her young lover suddenly breaks up with her and she feels even more estranged from

her friends, family and community. But Waseem leaves Sheila's intimacy mostly to the imagination, as her camera reveals some embracing — but certainly no nudity.

"It's because I'm going further than I can bear to go telling this story," she says of an onscreen coyness reflected in her name, Haya, which in Urdu means shyness and a sense of modesty.

In Pakistan or Bollywood, explicit sexual content and nudity is rarely shown onscreen. "It's too vulgar," declares Waseem. "It's shameful. In fact, like Bollywood movies I grew up with, it would be comical because you'd see two characters embrace and then you'd see flowers. I kind of became inspired by that."

She adds that *Quickening* strikes a balance between what felt truthful to the director and what proved too daring to the point she'd "break off ties from what I'd been taught."

The Canadian director insists she's trying to keep the gravity of the film's bow in perspective, while feeling the usual pre-premiere jitters. "I try to think it's still home where I would chase around [TIFF] programmers at 19, and now at 30 I'm invited based on a film I worked very hard on for 10 years," she says.

Waseem's film has its world premiere Sept. 12 at Bell Lightbox, on the opening weekend of the Toronto International Film Festival. **TIFF**

Toronto, According to ...

Toronto Film Festival regular **David Manning**, executive vp and CMO of L.A.-based events planner A-List Communications, is one of the few international executives who will be on the ground for this year's TIFF. A-List is even organizing some parties, including a VIP lounge and cocktail event at the Windsor Arms for **Joshua Jackson's** Liquid Media Group.

My "only in Toronto" moment was ...

Meeting and hanging with one of my favorite rock stars, **Dave Matthews**, when I hosted the afterparty for his Toronto film festival premiere, *Killer Joe*, in 2011. Sadly, my path didn't cross with **Bruce Springsteen**, **Eddie Vedder** and **Neil Young** for their TIFF appearances!

What I've missed most about

THE EVENT PLANNER



David Manning
Executive vp, A-List
Communications

Toronto is ...

Everything — great people, fun city, and great films and talent!

The place I avoid during the festival is ...

Pearson International Airport. Billy Bishop Airport is a must for simplicity!

My favorite Canadian director/talent is ...

Tatiana Maslany always crushes it on the big screen, and is always super fun and sweet as can be at our after-receptions.

The most Canadian thing about Toronto is ...

You don't go there in December — March!

The biggest challenge working at the festival during the COVID era is ...

Trying to stay COVID-19 free despite being double vaccinated so I don't get stuck here after the festival. — S.R.

Interview edited for length and clarity.

Alison Klayman

The doc maker and Alanis Morissette superfan discusses how she captured the artist in her latest outing, *Jagged*

BY MIA GALUPPO

This is the first CD I ever bought,” says **Alison Klayman**, holding up a worn copy of **Alanis Morissette’s** 1995 album *Jagged Little Pill*, which she has had since her pre-teens. “I have a vivid, visceral, emotional memory of lying on my twin bed with the album on the boom box and just pouring over the lyrics in the CD insert.”

It’s with this deep-seated passion that the filmmaker, whose prior work includes docs on a variety of cultural and political figures such as **Steve Bannon** (2019’s *The Brink*) and flower artist **Azuma Makoto** (*Flower Punk*, also from 2019), embarked on the making of the HBO documentary *Jagged*, which takes a nuanced look at Morissette’s early career through the release and reception of her landmark studio album. The doc features an extensive sit-down with Morissette in her California home, as well as archival footage that tracks her rise from Canadian pop prodigy to post-grunge phenomenon.

The movie premieres at the Toronto International Film Festival on Sept. 13 before heading to the HBO via the **Bill Simmons**-produced Music Box series of documentaries. Prior to its festival bow, Klayman talked to *THR* about combing through Morissette’s massive personal archive and how a doc about **Ai Weiwei** prepared her *Jagged*.



In addition to a lengthy interview with Alanis Morissette, Alison Klayman sifted through hours of the artist’s personal archival footage.

When did you first begin talking to Alanis about the documentary?

It was a series of phone calls that then became FaceTimes and then she was down. I think in the interim she watched my films. I’ve never had a subject who I felt cared in that way about me. I’m there to forge a connection, but I also want to blend into the background. I don’t want you to overly think about my presence too much, but she just was someone who was very interested in what it meant to do a documentary and who I was.

For production, were you working throughout the pandemic?

I was set to fly out for what would have been like — I don’t even know if I was going to shoot — but to hang out with Alanis in person and to get the archival [materials] out of storage and transfer everything to a digitizing house. It was the week that everything shut down. And it just became like, “Oh, we’re doing this in a very different set of circumstances.” I ended up doing that trip at the end of July. It was me and my producer, and thank God I didn’t downsize the rental car. I was like, “Why do I need a van?” But we were just filled to the brim with all of these boxes of materials [from storage]. We had all these Hi8 tapes and VHS and video cam footage, plus all the reels of film and, in the middle

of abandoned downtown San Francisco, we were unloading all the material to Bay Area Video Coalition, which did the digitization and preservation.

Was the plan to shoot Alanis on tour, as well?

For practical reasons, I probably would have tried to film one or two shows in a fairly big way to get that full coverage. It was a happy coincidence that it was going to be the 25-year anniversary tour. But it wasn’t like it was fundamental to see the shows today [for the documentary]. I think the really compelling stuff is the [archival] footage from ’95 and ’96. I had a sense that there’s going to be footage on buses or behind the scenes of shows. I was always betting that the archive was going to be the gem, but we were really taking a gamble.

What was your reaction when you finally saw what was in the archives?

There’s just a tiny shot of where she gets onstage at a club show and you hear her voice from behind the camera and she’s like, “Here’s my perspective.” And you see the microphone in the center, and you just see how small the

empty [club] space is and that it’s going to get to be arena-size [venues]. She really understood that something special was happening without knowing where it was going to go. She had a really good instinct that something special was happening and that she should film it.

How did you go about making a doc for fans while introducing new audiences to her music?

My first film, about Ai Weiwei, was a perfect example of this because I needed this to satisfy the China journalists in the art world and his peers, and then also there’s a huge audience in America who doesn’t know about him. That’s always set me on a path of wanting to satisfy the insiders and the general audience. The real key was the team I had was not very big, and two key members of the team were at the age — probably like 30 to 31 — where you’re like, “I’ve heard of *Jagged Little Pill*. I think I know a song?” My favorite thing was that after watching the final cut, Bill Simmons’ daughter the next day was playing “Ironie” on the piano.

Interview edited for length and clarity.





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Hany Abu-Assad

The acclaimed Palestinian helmer discusses the real-life story behind his latest thriller, *Huda's Salon*, why he was happy to work independently after a stint in Hollywood and how artists use anger to 'fuel their engine' **BY ALEX RITMAN**

Hany Abu-Assad — the two-time Oscar nominee behind 2005's *Paradise Now* and 2013's *Omar* — didn't intend to make another Palestinian movie. But a query from his producer wife sparked an idea, an idea that eventually would become *Huda's Salon*, making its world premiere in Toronto and the Nazareth-born director's first feature since he took a break from the Middle East and ventured to Hollywood with 2016's *The Mountain Between Us*, starring Kate Winslet and Idris Elba.

Set in Bethlehem in the West Bank, the

thriller centers on a young woman who finds her life turned upside down after a simple trip to a salon, where she is blackmailed into working for the occupation. IFC recently picked up U.S. rights to the film, which stars Abu-Assad's *Paradise Now* lead Ali Suliman, plus Maisa Abd Elhadi (*Baghdad Central*) and Manal Awad (*Gaza mon amour*). Speaking to *THR*, the director describes the real-life scandal at the heart of the story, why he loved going from a crew of 200 to just 20 (and no comfortable chairs) and why it's important for artists to use anger as creative fuel.

"From a career point of view, your strategy after *The Mountain Between Us* should be another Hollywood movie," says Hany Abu-Assad. "But I never had that."

What's the backstory behind *Huda's Salon*?

I wasn't actually planning on doing another Palestinian film, but my wife, Amira, asked me if I knew any stories about women in Palestine that were worth writing about, and I told her about the salon. It's a real story about this salon that, let's say, misused women to get them to collaborate with the occupation. She said, "OK, but what's the story?" So I slept on it, and in the morning I had the story in my

mind, so she said, “Well, now you have to do it.” But it really struck me, the idea of going to the salon to fix your hair and coming out with this Shakespearean drama between yourself and your country.

What’s the actual blackmail that takes place?

It’s a very common trick from the secret service. It happens in different places but with the same principle. In this one, you would go to the salon, where they would drug you, strip off your clothes and take a picture of you with a naked man, and then when you wake up, you have a Polaroid picture of this, and either you have to collaborate or you’ll be exposed. One of the girls committed suicide and wrote a letter, which is how the whole story came out.

How does *Huda’s Salon* deal with this story?

In a very cinematic way, I wanted to see what happens to a woman in flashbacks — but without actually using flashbacks. I made the parallel between two women, one who is already trapped and the other who has to make a decision, as if the one making the decision is the flashback of the one who is trapped. It’s just two locations and three characters.

You’ve been doing a lot of producing and have just had Mohamed Diab’s *Amira* premiering at the Venice Film Festival. What’s your balance between producing and directing your own films?

I think producing it about 20 percent of my time, but I want to reduce it back to 10 or maybe 5 [percent]. I feel like I’m a better director and writer than I am a producer.

Huda’s Salon is your first feature since you ventured to Hollywood for Fox’s *The Mountain Between Us*. How was the change going from a big-budget studio project to your independent feature?

I loved it so much because it gives you enormous experience to have a new challenge every time, to reinvent yourself. I think this is why I’m still doing movies because every time it’s a new adventure. If you just go on automatic pilot, it’s not as fun anymore. I really like it. It was lovely going from 200 crewmembers on *The Mountain Between Us* to now having just 20. I had to do a lot myself. There were no comfortable chairs to sit on. There is nothing. Sometimes there’s no time to eat. I thought, this is so good — if I’m still able to do it, I’m still on the right path.



Manal Awad plays a woman who is drugged while at a salon and then wakes up to discover she is being blackmailed. “It’s a very common trick from the secret service,” says Abu-Assad. “It happens in different places but with the same principle.”

Would you make a Hollywood movie again?

Oh, yeah, no problem at all. Again, it’s a new challenge, and every time you take that challenge you try to learn from it. Actually, adventure is my motivation for making things. And you know, I truly realized I never made a plan in my life about what to do next. I just let things happen and then throw myself in it without thinking about a strategy. From a career point of view, your strategy after *The Mountain Between Us* should be another

Hollywood movie. But I never had that. One night my wife asked me if I had a story, and I came up with it. So I never plan and don’t know what’s coming.

Earlier this year, your lead actress from *Huda’s Salon*, Maisa Abd Elhadi, was shot and injured by Israeli police during a protest in the city of Haifa. Your features don’t take a black-and-white viewpoint of the Israel and Palestine conflict, but is it easy to keep a balanced approach and not take direct sides when such real-world issues impact people you know?

I believe so. Even Maisa was very rational about it. But mostly what you do with your anger, as an artist — not just me but all the artists — the anger is their fuel for their engine. But at the end, the engine doesn’t produce anger, it produces art. The anger just adds more fuel to your machine. Yes, I am angry, but I always use it to make art and art with meaning, art that surprises yourself and the audience because it has a different point of view. Because if you

just throw [in] your own point of view, there’s no discussion, no challenge. Who cares? I am bored and everybody will be bored. But if you challenge your point of view in your art, you will create something interesting.

After the violence this year, it seemed that attitudes toward the conflict may have been changing in Hollywood, with people who haven’t spoken out before now making statements on social media expressing solidarity with Palestine or calling on Israel to stop its attacks. Is this something you felt?

I actually felt that earlier. After I made *Paradise Now*, I started to feel that the aggressiveness of the, let’s say, Zionist propaganda — how they punish people if you say your opinion — was starting to have a backlash. And sometimes they didn’t realize that they were harming themselves by punishing people who were expressing their opinion about Palestinian rights. It’s not even controversial, but already you would be labeled antisemitic, which is so unfair.

After *Paradise Now*, they fought the film in a very aggressive way, and a lot of people were angry because they felt it was unfair. In the long term, they are losing. By punishing people unfairly, they’re just giving more positive exposure to the Palestinian cause. I know they punished me very hard for many years, but so what, I’m still making movies.

I know of one case where someone very powerful didn’t let me direct a movie that I really wanted to direct. And he said it in the room, so all the other people there were really angry. Then all these people were the assistants but now are the powerful ones. So my punishment was, in the end, in my favor.

Interview edited for length and clarity.

BY THE
NUMBERS

8
Feature films directed

20
Awards amassed by
Paradise Now and
Omar (including
a Golden Globe for
Paradise Now)

\$62.8M
Box office for *The
Mountain Between Us*,
Abu-Assad’s last feature



VICKY KRIEPS IS EVERYWHERE

With *Old*, *Beckett*, *Bergman Island* and — premiering in Toronto — Barry Levinson's Holocaust drama *The Survivor*, Vicky Krieps has been very busy of late, ending several years of self-imposed Hollywood exile after a very special meal with Paul Thomas Anderson **BY ALEX RITMAN**

T

Somewhat poetically, Vicky Krieps was participating in an anti-Nazi demonstration in

Berlin when she got the call about the biopic of a real-life Auschwitz survivor that Barry Levinson was putting together.

But that coincidence isn't the only reason the actress — hailing from the tiny landlocked European duchy of Luxembourg — says she still gets “goose-bumps” on recalling the first time she read the script for *The Survivor*, starring Ben Foster as Harry Haft, a Polish Jew who was forced by his SS captors to box fellow camp inmates. Krieps' late grandfather Robert Krieps, who passed away in 1990 when she was just six, also spent much of WWII in Nazi concentration camps, and she immediately began thinking of him.

“It was almost like my grandfather talking to me, saying, ‘Vicky, you know this is one you have to do’” she tells *The Hollywood Reporter*, speaking from the Palace of Fontainebleau outside Paris, where she's currently shooting Martin Bourboulon's big budget *The Three Musketeers* two-part adaptation. “It's like, ‘It's not about you... you have to carry the sword.’”

The Survivor sees Krieps play Haft's wife Miriam, who he meets in post-war New York, where he was briefly a lightweight boxer, and who helps him overcome the deep emotional scars he's still struggling to contain. It's a delicate, nuanced performance — Krieps likens her character work to “painting with a miniscule brush” — and one in which she offers the same reassuringly calming screen presence that first catapulted her into the spotlight in Paul Thomas Anderson's *Phantom Thread* back in 2017.

The Survivor — bowing in Toronto — also marks the culmination of just a few short months in which the 37-year-old has dramatically resurfaced after effectively turning her back

on Hollywood following this much-lauded breakout as Daniel Day-Lewis' plotting (and poisoning) muse.

"After *Phantom Thread*, I really wasn't interested in Hollywood, because it just felt like everything was the same and nothing was as good as Paul," she says. The film's tightly PR-managed press tour and Oscars campaign were especially gruelling, something Krieps admits that, as someone from a much quieter part of the world and with a distinctly rebellious "punk" streak in her, she just wasn't used to. "I come from this small country and grew up with cows and trees and forests," she notes.

So, despite the clamouring of casting directors (she turned down at least one major project),

'Yes.," she recalls. "It was really simple, but I think it was really important for both of us, after all this time, to just once, for us, say, 'Okay, I think we did a good job.'"

Only after this ramen-assisted closure did Krieps feel she was now ready to find herself a U.S. agent, but even that was something she did on her own terms, buying her own flight (she mostly now lives in Berlin) and renting a car ("It makes a huge difference if you're in your own car in LA," she says). Eventually she signed with CAA, a move she credits with playing a major part in 2021's grand resurrection.

Alongside *The Survivor*, in July she led M. Night Shyamalan's time-twisting supernatural mystery *Old* for Universal as a mother who watches her children

holidays (Krieps doesn't live with their father) and with Cannes' dates having been pushed back to June, she decided to just bring them along for the ride, renting a "beautiful house with a pool" and persuading her father to come down to help. "I had all these ideas about swimming in the pool, but in the end I never had five minutes in the house," she says. "My dad basically spent his holiday with my kids and I was just working and testing [for COVID]. I even missed one film because I hadn't got the test result on my phone."

different kind of reality and realising you find peace the moment you let go."

And it's her late grandfather — who would help bring about the abolition of the death penalty as Luxembourg's Justice Minister in the 1970s — Krieps again credits with these perhaps subconscious role decisions, the horrors he witnessed in the Nazi camps forcing her to question humanity from an early age.

"I never found an answer as to why people would do these things, but I really wanted to believe in good ... and I think I still do.

"I remember Paul looking at me from over a bowl of ramen in this really little restaurant, and suddenly he said to me, 'Vicky, I think we did a good movie.'"



From left, Krieps with Ben Foster in *The Survivor*, with Gael Garcia Bernal in *Old* and with Tim Roth in *Bergman Island*. Says Krieps of her hiatus from Hollywood: "After *Phantom Thread*, I really wasn't interested in Hollywood, because it just felt like everything was the same and nothing was as good as Paul."

she fled potential tinseltown stardom and headed back to her European arthouse roots, trying her hand at French cinema. "I was sent a few scripts, which I accepted right away, even though they were small and independent," she claims.

It took over two years and lunch with Anderson for Krieps to be able to "close the circle" on any anxieties and scepticisms borne from her first brush with Hollywood.

"I remember Paul looking at me from over a bowl of ramen in this really little restaurant, and suddenly he said to me, 'Vicky, I think we did a good movie.' And I said,

age years in matter of minutes on a secluded beach, then weeks later she showed up in Netflix's Locarno-opening action thriller *Beckett* as a Greek political activist. Earlier in the summer she was arguably one of the busiest attendees in Cannes, where she had three films, including Mia Hanson-Love's English-language debut *Bergman Island* (playing one half of a filmmaking couple opposite Tim Roth).

Krieps' experience on the French Riviera was supposed to be a "fairytale" but she admits it more closely resembled chaos. Scheduled to look after her two young children over the summer

Her newly buoyant credits may span an impressively broad spectrum of the film industry — from studios, to streaming giants, to indie distributors, and across a wide range of genres — but Krieps says she's noticed some distinct themes running throughout.

"I realised that I have a few topics that keep coming up," she says, pointing to the political elements of *Beckett*, *The Survivor* and *Faithful*, an upcoming French drama set against the Algerian War of Independence, and *Old*, *Bergman Island* and her other Cannes feature *Hold Me Tight*, which deal with "leaving time-lines and opening yourself up to a

There's not one day I don't think about what we should do to make this world a better place," she says. "So I want to use the time I'm here for right thing."

And how would Robert Krieps have reacted on learning that his granddaughter had become undoubtedly Luxembourg's most famous actor?

"Imagine, that guy, at 20 years old, in a concentration camp, and somebody telling him that one day your granddaughter will be the biggest star of your country, and for making movies mostly about good," she says. "I think he would have cried. He lives in me now." **THR**

A NEW PERSPECTIVE ON SCHOOL SHOOTINGS

Without any onscreen violence, Phillip Noyce's thriller *Lakewood* ratchets up the tension by focusing exclusively on a mother (Naomi Watts) as she desperately tries to locate her son after shots ring out at school **BY SCOTT ROXBOROUGH**

S

School shootings, a depressingly familiar aspect of American society, have been the subject of a surprisingly broad range of films.

Michael Moore's documentary *Bowling for Columbine* (2002) was a treatise against American gun culture. Gus Van Sant's Palme d'Or-winning *Elephant* (2003) took a radically banal approach, depicting the day of a school shooting as largely ordinary and uneventful. Until it wasn't. Lynne Ramsay's *We Need to Talk About Kevin* (2011) focused on the mother, played by Tilda Swinton, of a shooter who questions her parenting and herself after her son commits an atrocity. Brady Corbet's *Vox Lux* (2018), starring Natalie Portman, takes the bird's-eye view, showing how the sickening repetition of these massacres and their endless, clichéd framing in U.S. media have traumatized American youth.

With *Lakewood*, which premieres Sept. 12 at the Toronto Film Festival, the focus is back on the mother. Naomi Watts plays Amy Carr, a woman whose son is caught up in a school shooting, though it is not clear — not until near the end of this taut thriller from Australian director Phillip Noyce (*Rabbit-Proof Fence*) — whether he is a victim or the shooter himself.

The other radical choice made by Noyce is not to show any images of the violence itself. Instead, *Lakewood* focuses entirely on Watts' character as she runs through the woods (she was on her morning jog when she got the news about the shooting) trying desperately to find out what has happened and if her child is safe.

"We fully supported Phillip's vision not to glamorize any aspect of the violence or the shooter," says Zack Schiller, one of the producers of *Lakewood*. "To not take the easy or lazy approach but to tell this story entirely from the perspective of Naomi's character."

The contained nature of the story was one of the primary appeals for Watts, who came to the project via *Lakewood* screenwriter Chris Sparling.



Since Watts spends much of the film in a full sprint, she was aided by an on-set physical therapist. Says Watts: "She's a marathon runner herself and she said I must have run the equivalent of two marathons in those two weeks of production."

"I'd worked with Chris on [2015's] *Sea of Trees*, which he wrote, and I knew he had written another film, [2010's] *Buried* with Ryan Reynolds, which was also a contained story told from one person's perspective," says Watts. "I thought it was an approach worth unpacking. Because I also live with the same dread and fear that most people have around this subject matter."

Lakewood shot in Northern Ontario in 6 square miles of woods near North Bay, about four and a half hours north of Toronto. The isolated location and the small crew made it an ideal project to shoot during COVID.

"We were the first project to start production in North American under COVID and the first to finish," says Schiller. "We got in and out without anyone getting sick."

Instead of shooting short takes of every scene, Noyce had Watts copy the experience of her character, running full tilt through the woods, gasping for breath as she tries to call the police, the school and anyone who can help her. "I'd been running and running in character, and after 10 takes the physical emotion would just kick in; I'd be living the experience of this character," says Watts.

The experience took its toll on the two-time

Oscar nominee.

"I have a bit of a fitness background, and I consider myself quite agile," she says, "but I needed to train to get my body back to a place where I could handle that much running. ... Luckily they had a physical therapist on set who was an absolute genius woman. She's a marathon runner herself, and she said I must have run the equivalent of two marathons in those two weeks of production."

But, Watts says, it will be worth it if *Lakewood* — which is being sold by UTA Independent Film Group, Endeavor Content, and CAA Media Finance for the U.S. and by Mister Smith Entertainment internationally — can spark new discussions around the issue of gun violence.

"School shootings were definitely not part of how I grew up, and it was not a conversation that I was aware of as a child," Watts says. "But the world has changed a lot since then, and it is something we all now fear. That such an innocent place like a school can be so vulnerable is such a horrible thing. I'm not trying to be prescriptive in what should be done to help. It's not for me to decide on policies or come up with solutions. But I hope this film can help crack open the conversation." **THR**

THR

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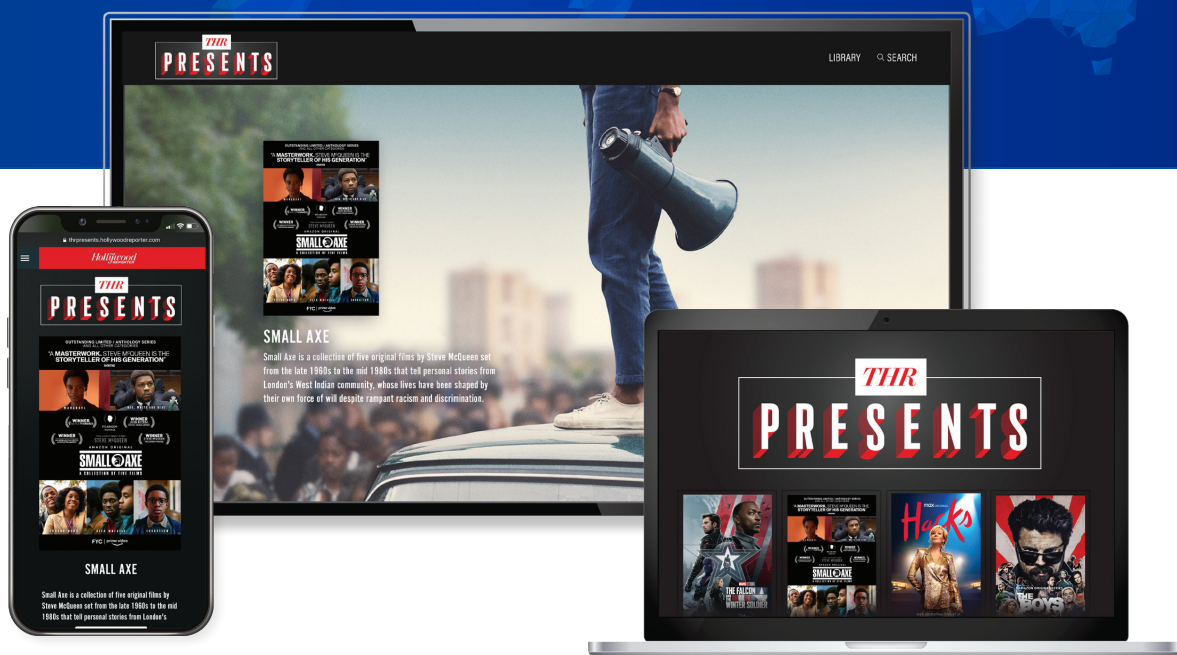
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Left: The Busan Cinema Center, home to the Busan International Film Festival. Below: The floor of the Asian Content & Film Market.



BUSAN PREPARES FOR A POST-PANDEMIC MAKEOVER

After a strong virtual event in 2020, the Asian Content & Film Market is looking to expand by moving beyond its traditional art house fare and embracing everything from TV to webtoons **BY SOOMEI PARK**

For Oh Seok Geun, who was newly appointed as Busan International Film Festival's director of the Asian Contents & Film Market (ACFM), this year's market is an opportunity to reflect on Busan's identity and prepare for a post-COVID market.

"There are three key functions of a film market — networking, sales and project market," says Oh, a former chairman of the Korean Film Council, the country's main film body. "The first two functions are important, but we want to expand on the project market as a way to engage with films that have not been invited

to Busan's official screenings and stay integrated with the film festival. That's a slightly different approach from other markets like Cannes and Hong Kong FILMART that are very independent from the festival and business-focused."

Busan's embrace of the industry's diversifying platforms is another sign that the festival is seeking to expand its identity, which was heavily focused on the art house genre.

In 2019, the market changed its name from the original Asian Film Market to ACFM, to expand trading content distributed on TV, OTT and other platforms, and include nontraditional

film-market mediums such as novels and webtoons, or digital comics that are hugely popular in Asia. The market also launched the Asia Contents Awards (ACA), which recognizes outstanding TV and OTT dramas across Asia. This year's festival, which opens Oct. 6 with Im Sang-soo's *Heaven: To the Land of Happiness*, added a new program called On Screen, which showcases new drama series on OTT platforms such as Netflix's *Hellbound*, a fantasy thriller from director Yeon Sang-ho (see opposite page), and *Forbidden*, HBO ASIA's original series co-directed by Thailand's Anucha Boonyawatana and Josh Kim, a Korean American director.

"It's true that Busan once prided itself on being 'a conservative cinemaphile,' clinging onto the classic notion of cinema and distancing itself from other forms of contents such as TV dramas," Oh says. "But during the pandemic, the film industry underwent a period of confusion with dramatic changes happening to how content is being created and distributed."

The ACFM, which opens Oct. 11 and marks its 16th edition, is largely keeping its online format from last year, while also holding on-site business meetings for domestic participants. Despite being a virtual event and changing its name, ACFM achieved moderate success in 2020, attracting 205 companies from around the world and trading 833 various forms of content, a slight increase from the previous year.

"ACFM is a good market if you are launching a new film or have a lineup that releases in the latter part of the year, since it is attended by many film programmers and key buyers from around the world," says a local distributor. "It's unfortunate that we're going to have another online market, but it uses convenient tools that are effective in introducing new works on sale and provides good networking opportunities with buyers and programmers."

The organizers are generally

optimistic about the organic growth of ACFM and its role as a gateway to Asian films and content. Corporate giants including Disney, Apple and Netflix have flocked to Busan in recent years to buy licensing rights to the original works, and used the market as a networking platform with Asian filmmakers and artists. *Delivery Man*, a new drama series by Netflix, which is scheduled for a 2022 release, was a recipient of Busan's E-IP Pitching Award from 2018. The Entertainment Intellectual Property (E-IP) Market, which expanded its previous concept of Book to Film that matched publishers with film producers, now brings original works published on multiple platforms, including radio scripts, digital comics and even video games.

While the current focus of ACFM is mainly on films from Korea, Japan and Taiwan, market organizers are hoping to expand the territory and include films from Southeast Asia, the largest buyer market of Korean content, and even China, which has expressed interest in Korean IP.

"There is a fierce battle over entertainment IP," says Daniel Kim, ACFM's general manager. "There is a high demand for curated content, especially among small and medium-sized companies, as more streaming services are picking up a majority of good local films."

ACFM is largely divided into project and sales market. The Asia

Project Market, which is largely seen as ACFM's main program, introduces new feature film projects by emerging and established directors and connects them with global film investors, producers, distributors and coproduction partners. This year, APM selected 25 film projects out of 429 submissions, the largest since APM launched. It highlights a strong lineup of female directors, including director Kamila Andini's *Before, Now & Then*; Zoe Sua Cho's upcoming collaboration with Nepali American director Nani Sahra Walker, *The Silence of Birds*; and *If Wood Could Cry, It Would Cry Blood*, the directorial debut of Nguyen Phan Linh Dan, Vietnam's first female cinematographer.

"Our market should not only focus on buying and selling ready-made products, but also [discover] hidden gems and films with potential," says Huh Moon-young, the newly appointed director of the Busan International Film Festival, hinting at the role of Asia Project Market. "ACFM will play a role in the latter as much as the former."

This year's market also hosts an online conference and forums about the industry's post-COVID prospects, with panelists made up of experts in the Korean content industry. There will also be panels featuring the heads of global film markets, discussing ways to strengthen business through partnership and exploring the role of a film market for filmmakers and artists.

"Last year, when the South Korean government unveiled a rescue plan for the film industry, sales and marketing companies were excluded," says Oh, who was the Korean Film Council's chairman at the time of the announcement. "It was an inevitable decision, because many film professionals were facing the risk of survival. I'm just grateful that companies are able to participate in this turbulent period. During the market, I want to send my gratitude and encouragement to every one of them." **VIVA**



IS TORONTO READY FOR THE HELLBOUND?

Yeon Sang-ho, the mastermind behind global zombie hit *Train to Busan*, brings his latest genre outing to TIFF

In the new Netflix original series *The Hellbound*, people are told the exact time of

their death and dragged to hell by grim reapers. Set in the city of Seoul, South Korea, the story depicts a society in the throes of chaos, with the victims struggling to survive, as a local cult group called The New Truth tempts people to believe that the occult-like events are part of a divine plan.

The confusion and fear surrounding a mysterious event is nothing new for director Yeon Sang-ho, whose previous film, 2016's *Train to Busan*, about a zombie outbreak that takes place on a high-speed train, was largely viewed as a social metaphor for the class divide in a highly conformist Korean society. The film struck a chord, drawing more than 11 million theatergoers in South Korea and grossing more than \$92 million globally.

"*Hellbound* is a work about supernatural occurrence," says Yeon, who adds that he grew up watching videos of Hong Kong action flicks and Japanese animation. "But it also delves into my views on various phenomenon in a Korean society and how we struggle to cope with these events."

Yeon's new work, the first three episodes of which will premiere in the Toronto International Film Festival's Primetime section, was also invited to Busan International Film Festival's On Screen section, the festival's new program featuring new drama series on OTT platforms. "I was at TIFF with my earlier film *The Fake* [2013] and there were a lot of deep,

interesting questions during the Q&A," he recalls. "I hope the work evokes a lot of discussions."

Yeon's latest story is based on a popular digital comic of the same title and one of Yeon's earlier short films from 2003. In the Netflix series, he collaborated with his close friend and a popular comic artist Choi Gyu-seok, who co-wrote the script.

"We're such good friends, and the main motive behind the collaboration was to spend more time together as we work on the same project," Yeon says. "We also share common interests in depicting stories about social phenomenon. The process of collaboration, however, was trickier than we had imagined. He was very attentive to details, and we learned our perspective was quite different."

Hellbound is Yeon's first drama series, but already there is increased interest in the original comic among the market insiders. Futabasha, a Japanese webtoon publisher, purchased Japan's publication rights, and Dark Horse Comics, the U.S. publisher of *Hellboy*, took on the work's worldwide distribution in English.

While Yeon believes that platforms like Netflix offer a valuable opportunity to reach a global audience, he is aware of the inherent risks of how storytelling on such a large scale can create cultural challenges.

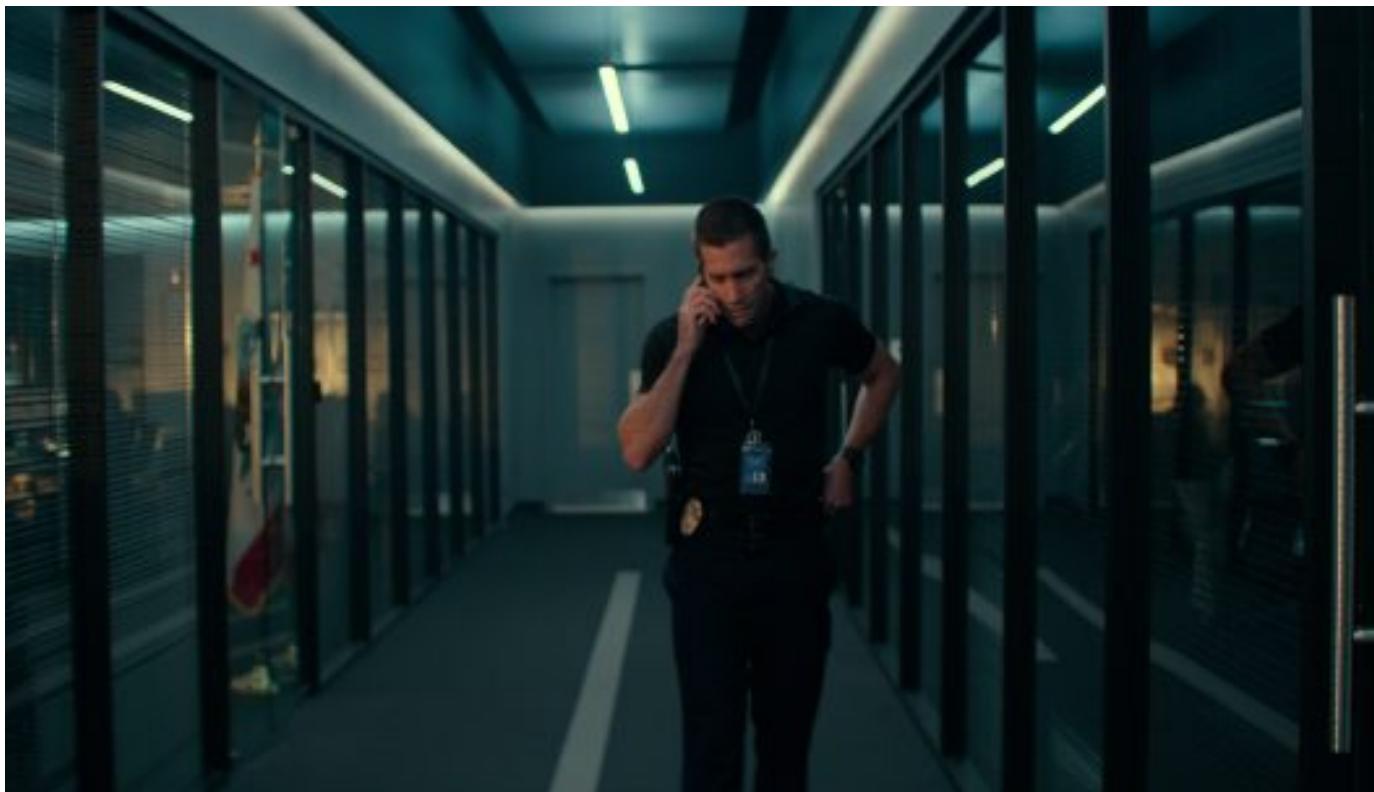
Says Yeon: "Since it will be released to global audiences, I wanted to make sure that there aren't any settings or expressions in the drama series that might be offensive to some audiences from other cultures." — S.P.



Im Sang-soo's *Heaven: To the Land of Happiness*, the opening-night film of the Busan Film Fest.

Reviews

Film



The Guilty

Jake Gyllenhaal stars in director Antoine Fuqua's American remake of the taut 2018 Danish thriller

By Michael Rechtshaffen

A filmmaker with a firm grip on gritty action, Antoine Fuqua gamely takes up the challenge presented by *The Guilty*, a deceptively spare crime thriller that relies on the fertile imagination of the viewer to conjure up the usual highly charged set pieces.

Based on the 2018 Danish film by Gustav Moller that masterfully ratcheted up maximum tautness in minimal surroundings, the American remake stars typically dependable Jake Gyllenhaal as a police officer working in a dispatch center who receives a cryptic distress call from the victim of an abduction from inside a speeding vehicle.

But although both Fuqua and

his *Southpaw* star are essentially up to the task at hand, they're let down by an exposition-heavy script that continually undercuts the crucial building tension. The film still offers Netflix viewers something that's off the beaten track, but those unfamiliar with the cleverly crafted original will be getting only a diluted taste of what made the concept so bracingly effective.

Anxious to get back out on the street, Gyllenhaal's Joe Baylor is an LAPD cop relegated to 911 duty (for reasons soon to be revealed), robotically taking the usual crackpot calls against the imposing backdrop wall of huge TV news monitors displaying raging

wildfires that threaten to engulf the city.

Frustratedly tethered to his headset, he's jolted to attention by that hushed, tearful call from a woman (Riley Keough, heard but never seen), who, as Baylor is able to piece together, has been taken against her will by her estranged husband (voiced by Peter Sarsgaard), leaving their two young children home alone.

Doing the best he can given the limited information and resources at his disposal, Baylor battles a ticking clock to save the woman and, in the process, find some much-needed redemption where his own culpable past is concerned.

Those personal stakes are played out too early in Nic Pizzolatto's script, rather than allowing for the chilling details surrounding the abduction to first build in necessary intensity.

Played out in real time on what is essentially a single set,

Gyllenhaal is a cop working in a dispatch center who receives a mysterious call for help.

the production mines all the energy it requires from Fuqua's precise direction, which wisely keeps the focus nice and tight on Gyllenhaal, capturing every feverish moment of his palpable anguish. Perhaps, in this case, a bit too palpable. The thing about those extreme close-ups is that the slightest wrinkle of an eyebrow can come across as being over-modulated, and there are times when things threaten to reach an unintended melodramatic pitch.

As with the imposing images of the blazing inferno that surround him, the true potency of the film's construction lies in the spark rather than the flame.

Special Presentations

CAST Jake Gyllenhaal, Ethan Hawke, Riley Keough, Da'Vine Joy Randolph, David Castaneda, Paul Dano, Peter Sarsgaard

DIRECTOR Antoine Fuqua

1 hour 30 minutes

A Banquet

Ruth Paxton's feature debut watches as a teen's nihilistic epiphany tortures her already traumatized mother **By John DeFore**

A psychological horror tale built around a mysterious eating disorder and unusually fraught mother-daughter dynamics, Ruth Paxton's feature debut, *A Banquet*, shares key ingredients with several much-discussed recent indies by and/or about women, from *Swallow* to, in its end-of-everything theme, Amy Seimetz's arresting *She Dies Tomorrow*.

Paxton acquits herself well, making the most of Sofia Stocco's chilly interiors and some committed performances from stars Jessica Alexander and Sienna Guillory. But Justin Bull's screenplay comes up short, failing to adequately capture the depth of

at a party when she tires of friends' jokes and walks out to the edge of nearby woods. A moon nearly as red as her lipstick mesmerizes her, and she comes home a changed girl.

She's tingly, queasy, uneasy in ways she can't (or won't) explain at first. When Holly notices her lack of appetite, she'll work quickly through concern and support to anger: "Entitled middle-class white girls" get anorexia, Holly snaps at one point, not seeming to recognize that entitled middle-class white girls also grow up to prepare the kind of photogenic meals she cooks, and a mother with more insight might offer her

That question is partly answered six months later, when Betsey's hunger strike has left her weighing exactly what she did when she began. She's already told her family what she saw in that red moon: "I can feel what's coming for us. It's just darkness," she says, not unhappily, and her awareness of the meaninglessness of life now threatens to spread to Isabelle and Holly.

This kind of doom contagion evolved into a constantly reinterpretable thriller in *She Dies Tomorrow*. But it's more inert here, never resonating with the real world and its many reasons for nihilism, that sit outside the film's



its teen's encounter with the abyss — her anorexia is the aftermath of an apocalyptic revelation — and to integrate it into the more comprehensible domestic tensions that serve as the plotless film's only framework.

Guillory plays Holly, who recently nursed her husband during an illness that he ended with a gruesome suicide. His death was witnessed by their daughter Betsey (Alexander) but the two never speak of the tragedy when, some time later, the story begins in earnest.

Betsy's a high schooler near graduation, and her counselor urges her to look deep within while deciding what to do next. "What Really Interests Me," she writes at the top of a journal page. But the page remains empty. Later, she's

appetite-deficient child something more comforting than beautifully grilled sardines.

Holly is far from uncaring, but something is wrong in the cavelike home she has made for Betsey and younger daughter Isabelle (Ruby Stokes), where dark walls and quiet routines insulate the family from the outside world. The only real witness to the unfolding psychodrama is Holly's mother, June (Lindsay Duncan), who, while not a fairy tale-grade wicked old crone, is more skeptical than loving. Years ago, she was also a mother with a mentally ill child. Has that child passed illness on to her own daughter, or is Betsey, as June suspects, shrewdly playing a part for some secret reason?

Jessica Alexander is a teen who stops eating after having an enigmatic encounter in the woods.

frame. Nor does Bull's script persuasively draw connections between one generation's actions and the next one's wounds. Unless, that is, it's quietly arguing that the simple act of perpetuating the species is the real crime. Maybe Bull is thinking of reproduction, not nurturing emotion, when he has Betsey deliver a killer punchline to her mom: "Your love made all of this possible."

Discovery

CAST Sienna Guillory, Jessica Alexander, Ruby Stokes, Kaine Zajaz, Lindsay Duncan

DIRECTOR Ruth Paxton

1 hour 37 minutes

Bergman Island

Vicky Krieps and Tim Roth star alongside Mia Wasikowska in a movie about filmmakers navigating crises of love and career on the island made famous by Ingmar Bergman

By Jon Frosch



Mia Hansen-Løve's *Bergman Island* begins in the clouds. A plane descends through the white fluff toward its destination in rural Sweden, where two passengers — a couple of filmmakers played by Vicky Krieps and Tim Roth — will spend the summer nurturing new projects. That airborne starting point feels apt for a movie whose sun-dappled dreaminess belies the existential heft and reach of its themes: art, love, work, memory, identity, gender dynamics, ambition, obsession and the agonizing, exhilarating challenge of simply being alive.

Hansen-Løve's best films, the intimate EDM epic *Eden* and gorgeous Isabelle Huppert showcase *Things to Come*, capture the ineffable ache and occasional thrill of human experience with such gentle precision they seem to be whispering in your ear. *Bergman Island* achieves a similar magic. It doesn't cohere like those films — one senses Hansen-Løve couldn't quite figure out how to fit all the pieces together — nor is it likely to broaden the director's fan base when IFC Films releases it stateside; the movie's milieu of well-off intellectuals in crisis against a postcard-perfect bucolic Euro-backdrop is nothing if not rarefied. But it's further evidence that no one makes films quite like Hansen-Løve's. Delicate, droll and imbued with a haunting, understated wistfulness, *Bergman Island* wears its layers so lightly it may take you a while to notice just how much it's got going on.

What won't take you long to notice is the luminous lead performance by Krieps. For the first time since her breakout turn in *Phantom Thread*, the actress gets to unfurl the full tapestry of her talent as Chris, a filmmaker fighting, in her quiet, dogged way, to climb out from the shadow of two men: Tony (Roth), her partner in life and love, and the sacred monster that looms large over the movie — Ingmar Bergman himself.

The setting is the island of Faro, where that

most iconic of Swedish directors shot several films and spent the final years of his life. Our protagonists are there for a writers' residency program that has arranged to put them up in one of Bergman's old cottages, nestled amid dense green woods, near fields of rustling golden reeds and just a short bike ride from pristine Baltic beaches. (Much to Tony and Chris' amused trepidation, it's the house where *Scenes From a Marriage* was filmed.) The pair set up separate workspaces, and hunker down to start their new screenplays. But Chris is unsettled from the get-go. "All this calm and perfection, I find it oppressive," she tells Tony.

Hansen-Løve draws out the differences between the two gradually, through glances, snippets of conversation and slight turns in the narrative that accumulate significance. Tony is an established director with a fervent following; Chris isn't as familiar, or comfortable, with the spotlight. He's relaxed and confident, cranking out drafts with ease; she's plagued by self-doubt and anxiety, battling to get past an outline. He doesn't like to talk about his writing while in the midst of it; she needs to vent and process every step of the way.

The two even diverge when it comes to their touchstone, Bergman. The more detached Tony accepts his well-documented personal foibles (the director had nine children with six women) and embraces the searing despair coursing through his work; Chris has a love/hate relationship with Bergman's movies — after watching his wrist-slasher of a masterpiece *Cries and Whispers*, she wonders if there's sadism in the spectacle of so much suffering — and struggles to reconcile the creative genius with the flawed human. "I don't like when artists I love don't behave well in real life," she admits.

Depending on your perspective, the film's preoccupation with its characters' attitudes toward a giant of European art cinema will

Krieps and Roth discover more about each other than they bargained for on the Swedish island of Faro.

strike you as either charming or the ultimate in first-world-problem triviality; I admit to being in the former camp. For her part, Hansen-Løve doesn't satirize the auteur worship or the commodification of art driving Faro's economy (the "Bergman safari" is a main attraction). Rather, she takes it all in with wry matter-of-factness, wringing sly humor from the esoteric singularity of this ecosystem.

Bergman Island takes its biggest swerve when Chris starts telling Tony about what she's writing, narrating the plot of her screenplay-in-progress as we watch it unfold as a movie within a movie. In these scenes, a touching Mia Wasikowska plays 28-year-old director Amy, who reunites with long-estranged first love Joseph (Anders Danielsen Lie) at a mutual friend's wedding on — where else? — Faro. Amy and Joseph strike up a push-pull affair, their initial encounters possessing a stilted quality that jars, but also feels fitting; what we're seeing, essentially, is a visualization of a rough draft having its kinks worked out aloud.

Though Bergman's legacy haunts Chris, Tony and Amy, Hansen-Løve doesn't take her tonal cues from the Swedish master: Far from the severity and starkness of much of his oeuvre, the vibe here is warm and supple. But if the film is one of the director's breeziest and most pleasurable, it also registers as profoundly personal. Among other things, *Bergman Island* is an ode to a female artist's freedom to derive creative inspiration and sustenance where she chooses — from an idol, a lover, a place, a remembrance or the bracing cleanse of a cold-water swim.

Gala Presentations

CAST Vicky Krieps, Tim Roth, Mia Wasikowska, Anders Danielsen Lie, Hampus Nordenson
DIRECTOR-SCREENWRITER Mia Hansen-Løve
 1 hour 52 minutes



For reasons unknown, Romane Hemelaers is painstakingly fitted with a new set of frozen teeth every day.

Earwig

French filmmaker Lucile Hadžhalilović (*Evolution*, *Innocence*) directs her first English-language feature in this twisted tale of frozen teeth and postwar malaise

By Jordan Mintzer

With her third feature, the eccentric and exquisitely made *Earwig*, French filmmaker Lucile Hadžhalilović confirms her status as one of art house cinema's most singular auteurs, fashioning a rich and strange body of work that sits somewhere between Lynch, Cronenberg and a more restrained narrative approach that feels strictly European.

"Body" is indeed the key word in a movie that, like the director's previous efforts, *Innocence* (2004) and *Evolution* (2015), explores the corporal horrors inflicted on the young — in this case a little girl forced to undergo a tortuous daily routine in which her teeth are surgically replaced by ice cubes.

Why she needs to do this, or who she even is, are not really questions Hadžhalilović concerns herself with in this moody chamber piece that premiered in Toronto's Platform competition. Viewers looking for explanations should probably stay away, but those willing to be carried by the film's casual pace and haunting

aesthetic will find there are few places like it in contemporary cinema.

"Earwig" is actually the nickname of the silently tormented man, Albert (Paul Hilton), tasked with caring for the girl, who's called Mia (Romane Hemelaers), in a dingy Lynchian apartment located in an unspecified dingy city sometime after World War II. It's also the title of the novella, set in Liege, by British sculptor-author Brian Catling that Hadžhalilović and co-scribe Geoff Cox adapted their script from, sticking fairly close to a story that mixes the macabre with the squeamishly surreal.

Captured in foggy, underexposed images by Jonathan Ricquebourg (*The Death of Louis XIV*), whose cinematography here recalls the paintings of Belgian symbolists like Fernard Khnopff and Léon Spilliaert, the film establishes its bizarre scenario and setting from the very first frame, with hardly a line of dialogue offered for purposes of clarity. All we know is that Albert

is Mia's caretaker at the behest of a brusque, menacing man who occasionally calls him on the phone for updates, making sure the girl's frozen chompers are doing whatever they're supposed to be doing.

Much attention is given to the laborious process by which Albert removes Mia's teeth each morning, after they've melted onto a metal-supported filtration system that looks like the world's most horrible retainer, to install a new set fresh from the freezer. The methodical oral surgery is performed with ultimate precision, as if the fate of the world depended on these icy little dentures functioning perfectly. Sound designer Ken Yasumoto (who works with Hadžhalilović's ex-partner, Gaspar Noé) makes sure we hear everything as well as we can see it, with each click, scrape and chatter amplified to the max.

At some point we learn Mia is to be sent away, prompting a chilling sequence where Albert takes her out in the world for the

first time and she tries to drown herself. Unable to cope with such developments, Albert goes to the local bar to drown himself as well, except in beer, until he's accosted by a man who seems to know way too many facts about his life — including the trauma he suffered during the war and the death of his wife. Albert tries to attack the man with a broken bottle, but accidentally plunges it into the face of a waitress (Romola Garai), whom he winds up permanently disfiguring.

It's a lot to take in, and none of it makes sense sometimes, even all the time. But that doesn't seem to be the point of *Earwig*, which relishes in its weirdness until the bitter end, when the plot is finally tied together but also torn apart. At nearly two hours, it's a bit much to handle — Lynch's *Eraserhead*, which is close to this movie in both style and spirit, clocks in at 89 minutes — and you feel, at times, that Hadžhalilović is overindulging in all her creepy tones and textures but also losing her grip on the story.

And yet it's that same refusal to play by the book that makes her oeuvre so unique. Like her earlier movies, *Earwig* works in subtle ways, luring you in with its meticulous direction and design, then providing a few flashes of real emotion — most of them backed by a gorgeous minimalist score from Augustin Viard and Warren Ellis (of Nick Cave and the Bad Seeds).

It may not be enough to turn the film into a cult hit, but it does show how Hadžhalilović is a rare breed among genre directors today, especially those specializing in body horror. Like a good surgeon, she works at her own rhythm, administering gore and violence with extreme caution, killing us but doing it ever so softly. The knife cuts carefully but it cuts deep.

Platform

CAST Paul Hilton, Romola Garai, Alex Lawther, Romane Hemelaers
DIRECTOR Lucile Hadžhalilović

SCREENWRITERS Lucile Hadžhalilović, Geoff Cox

1 hour 54 minutes

Screening Guide

Toronto International Film Festival

**Today
(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

11:30

Wochiigii lo: End of the Peace,
Scotiabank 2

12:00

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
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
The Guilty, digital TIFF
Bell Lightbox

15:30

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,
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

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
Quickening, 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

**Monday
(Sept. 13)**

9:00

The Eyes of Tammy Faye, Scotiabank 1

9:30

A Night of Knowing Nothing, Scotiabank 13
Burning, TIFF Bell Lightbox 4

10:00

La Civil, digital TIFF Bell Lightbox Pro
Night Blooms, digital TIFF Bell Lightbox Pro
Nr. 10, digital TIFF Bell Lightbox Pro
Shankar's Fairies, digital TIFF Bell Lightbox Pro
The Hidden Child, digital TIFF Bell Lightbox Pro

Ahed's Knee, TIFF Digital Cinema Pro
Benediction, TIFF Digital Cinema Pro
Maria Chapdelaine, Scotiabank 3
Maria Chapdelaine, TIFF Digital Cinema Pro
Oscar Peterson: Black + White, TIFF Digital Cinema Pro
Sundown, TIFF Digital Cinema Pro
The Game, TIFF Digital Cinema Pro
The Humans, TIFF Digital Cinema Pro
The Mad Women's Ball, TIFF Bell Lightbox 3
The Odd-Job Men, TIFF Digital Cinema Pro

10:30

Benediction, Scotiabank 4

11:00

Unclenching the Fists, TIFF Bell Lightbox 1

11:30

Belfast, Scotiabank 2
DIY Networking Groups, TIFF Bell Digital Talks

12:00

Jagged, TIFF Bell Lightbox 2
Quickening, Scotiabank 12

12:30

Julia, Scotiabank 9

13:00

Cinema Sabaya, digital TIFF Bell Lightbox Pro
Finding Angel, digital TIFF Bell Lightbox Pro
Ostap Bender: The Beginning, digital TIFF Bell Lightbox Pro

Rhino, digital TIFF Bell Lightbox Pro
The Conference, digital TIFF Bell Lightbox Pro
Ahed's Knee, digital TIFF Bell Lightbox
Hold Your Fire, digital TIFF Bell Lightbox
Lakewood, Scotiabank 1
Lo Invisible, TIFF Digital Cinema Pro
Quickening, digital TIFF Bell Lightbox
Quickening, TIFF Digital Cinema Pro
Short Cuts, Digital Cinema Pro

Programme 03, TIFF Digital Cinema Pro

Short Cuts, Digital Cinema Pro

Programme 04, digital TIFF Bell Lightbox

The Devil's Drivers, TIFF Digital Cinema Pro
The Mad Women's Ball, digital TIFF Bell Lightbox

16:00

5 Weeks, digital TIFF Bell Lightbox Pro
Jump, Darling, digital TIFF Bell Lightbox Pro
Love Is Love Is Love, digital TIFF Bell Lightbox Pro
Minor Premise, digital TIFF Bell Lightbox Pro
Wandering, a Rohingya Story, digital TIFF Bell Lightbox Pro
Burning, TIFF Digital Cinema Pro
Drunken Birds, Scotiabank 12
Farha, TIFF Digital Cinema Pro
Jagged, TIFF Digital Cinema Pro
Memoria, Ontario Place Cinesphere
Nobody Has to Know, TIFF Digital Cinema Pro
Sahraa Karimi, TIFF Bell Digital Talks

14:00

Small Body, TIFF Bell Lightbox 3
Tug of War, Scotiabank 3

14:30

The Devil's Drivers, Scotiabank 4

15:00

Belfast, digital TIFF Bell Lightbox
Celebrating Alanis Obomsawin — The Dignity of Children: Programme 1, digital TIFF Bell Lightbox
Sundown, digital TIFF

Bell Lightbox
The Big Pitch! — The Creators of Colour Incubator Program Presented by CaribbeanTales Media Group, TIFF Bell Digital Talks
The Odd-Job Men, digital TIFF Bell Lightbox
The Rescue, digital TIFF Bell Lightbox
Yuni, TIFF Bell Lightbox 1

15:30

Creating Authentic and Inclusive Content With the Black Screen Office, TIFF Bell Digital Talks
The Middle Man, Scotiabank 2

16:00

5 Weeks, digital TIFF Bell Lightbox Pro
Jump, Darling, digital TIFF Bell Lightbox Pro
Love Is Love Is Love, digital TIFF Bell Lightbox Pro
Minor Premise, digital TIFF Bell Lightbox Pro
Wandering, a Rohingya Story, digital TIFF Bell Lightbox Pro
Burning, TIFF Digital Cinema Pro
Drunken Birds, Scotiabank 12
Farha, TIFF Digital Cinema Pro
Jagged, TIFF Digital Cinema Pro
Memoria, Ontario Place Cinesphere
Nobody Has to Know, TIFF Digital Cinema Pro
Sahraa Karimi, TIFF Bell Digital Talks
The Mad Women's Ball, TIFF Digital Cinema Pro
The Wheel, TIFF Bell Lightbox 2
Wochiigii lo: End of the Peace, TIFF Digital

Cinema Pro
You Are Not My Mother, TIFF Digital Cinema Pro

16:30

Lo Invisible, Scotiabank 9
Viggo Mortensen on Eastern Promises, digital TIFF Bell Lightbox

17:00

Oscar Peterson: Black + White, digital TIFF Bell Lightbox
The Eyes of Tammy Faye, digital TIFF Bell Lightbox
The Falls, Scotiabank 1
The Middle Man, digital TIFF Bell Lightbox
Unclenching the Fists, digital TIFF Bell Lightbox
You Are Not My Mother, digital TIFF Bell Lightbox

17:30

Ste. Anne, TIFF Bell Lightbox 4
The Daughter, Scotiabank 13
The Survivor, Roy Thomson Hall

18:00

Charlotte, VISA Screening Room at the Princess of Wales Theatre
Jockey, Scotiabank 3
Paka (River of Blood), TIFF Bell Lightbox 3

19:00

Drunken Birds, TIFF Bell Lightbox 1
Inu-Oh, digital TIFF Bell Lightbox
Lakewood, digital TIFF Bell Lightbox
The Electrical Life of Louis Wain, TIFF Digital Cinema Pro
The Girl and the

Spider, digital TIFF Bell Lightbox
The Hill Where Lionesses Roar, digital TIFF Bell Lightbox
The Starling, digital TIFF Bell Lightbox

19:30

I'm Your Man, Scotiabank 2

20:00

7 Prisoners, TIFF Bell Lightbox 2
Dune, Scotiabank 12
OUT OF SYNC, Ontario Place Cinesphere

20:30

The Eyes of Tammy Faye, VISA Skyline Drive-In at Ontario Place
The Survivor, Scotiabank 9
You Are Not My Mother, Scotiabank 4

20:45

Costa Brava, Lebanon, Scotiabank 1

21:00

Ali & Ava, West Island Open Air Cinema at Ontario Place
Benediction, digital TIFF Bell Lightbox
Charlotte, digital TIFF Bell Lightbox
Comala, digital TIFF Bell Lightbox
Small Body, digital TIFF Bell Lightbox
The Guilty, RBC Lakeside Drive-In at Ontario Place
The Survivor, digital TIFF Bell Lightbox

21:30

Bergman Island, Roy Thomson Hall

2001 2002 2003 2004 2005 2006 2007 2008 2009 2010 **2011** 2012 2013 2014 2015 2016 2017 2018 2019 2020 2021

In 2011, the ‘Chastain Curse’ Was Finally Lifted



When Jessica Chastain arrived at the 36th Toronto International Film Festival in 2011, it marked the ending of what she herself considered the “Chastain curse.” Having begun her career with 2004 appearances on TV shows like *ER* and *Veronica Mars*, the California-born actress, then just 34, had racked up 11 film roles over the preceding years, only to see their releases all delayed for various reasons. That logjam began to break in May 2011 at the Cannes Film Festival, where she was hailed as a rising new star for her luminous performance in Terrence Malick’s *The Tree of Life*. And just weeks before the Toronto fest kicked off, she popped up onscreen in both the Southern drama *The Help* and the spy thriller *The Debt*, in which she had supporting roles. In Toronto, she busily made the rounds, proving herself a new red carpet fashion siren, appearing in a Louis Vuitton black jumpsuit for the premiere of Jeff Nichols’ *Take Shelter* and then changing into a Viktor & Rolf saffron yellow gown for Ralph Fiennes’ adaptation of Shakespeare’s *Coriolanus*, in which she played the title character’s wife. At a press conference, Chastain confessed, “This has been such a very strange year for me. It was a bit of a joke in my life ... the Chastain curse where I made 11 films in 4½ years and for some reason they would be stalled or companies would be sold and it was a bit of a comedy.” Chatting with *Vanity Fair*’s Krista Smith, she added, “For *Take Shelter*, when I met Jeff, first time I met him I said, ‘I really like you and I’d love to do your movie, but I feel because you’re a nice guy, got to let you know, if I’m in your film, it may not come out for four years.’ [But] he took the risk.” Chastain, who has long since learned to take all the attention in stride,

will be front and center again at this year’s festival, which is offering up the world premiere of Searchlight Pictures’ *The Eyes of Tammy Faye*, in which she stars as bedazzled televangelist Tammy Faye Messner under the guidance of director Michael Showalter. This time, there won’t be any waiting for its release since the film is scheduled to quickly hit theaters Sept. 17.

— GREGG KILDAY

Coriolanus

First-time director Ralph Fiennes makes Shakespeare modern and bloody brilliant *By Roy Bennett*

A TIME WHEN REVOLUTION IS again in the air around the world, Ralph Fiennes delivers a delicious reminder of the perils of a military leader becoming head of state. He directs and stars in William Shakespeare’s *Coriolanus*, converting the Roman history play into a full-on action picture, complete with tanks, rockets and automatic weapons.

Set in current times, it looks and sounds like a war picture with lots of men in uniform, often covered in blood. But screenwriter John Logan, an Oscar nominee for his work on *The Aviator*, has employed the original writing skillfully; the film illuminates the humanity for timeless insight.

Jessica Chastain at the Toronto press conference for *Coriolanus*. Inset: *THR*’s review of the Ralph Fiennes-directed film called it “a tough, violent and moving tragedy with splendid performances.”

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