

SAN SEBASTIAN REVIEW DAILY

Making Movies for the Soul in Ukraine: “La Palisiada”



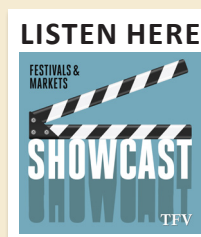
PODCAST: TFFV's Matt Micucci speaks with Sashko Chubko and Valeria Sochyvets, producers of La Palisiada, in his first on-location Showcast episode from the 2023 San Sebastián Film Festival. La Palisiada marks the feature directorial debut of Philip Sotnichenko and has been making waves on the festival scene this



year, having won awards in Rotterdam and Sarajevo.

The film is described as a police detective neo-noir set in the last months of capital punishment in Ukraine in 1996.

Find out more about it in this episode of the Showcast, where we also talk about the role of the arts during times of war in Ukraine and the collective of filmmakers who are making an impact on the country's independent scene, making movies not for money but for the soul.



NEW DIRECTORS

MOTHER, COUCH!

VERDICT: Ewan McGregor goes from IKEA to maternity in Swedish director Niclas Larsson's muddled but ambitious debut, a surreal family farce set inside a giant furniture store.

Stephen Dalton, September 26, 2023

A flavoursome blend of darkly surreal comedy, magical-realist fantasy and dysfunctional family psychodrama, *Mother, Couch!* is a frustratingly muddled but admirably ambitious debut feature from Swedish writer-director Niclas Larsson. Freely adapted from Jerker Virdbor's 2020 novel *Mamma i Soffa*, the fable-like story mostly takes place inside a giant ramshackle furniture store. Ewan McGregor, who also has an executive producer credit, is first among equals in a stellar ensemble cast that also includes Ellen Burstyn, Taylor Russell, Rhys Ifans, Lara Flynn Boyle and F. Murray Abraham.

Filmed in North Carolina but set in a more universal, purposely vague North American locale, *Mother, Couch!* has a knowingly grungy, downbeat, indie-movie look. World premiered in Toronto, it screens in the New Directors strand in San Sebastian this week. Early reviews have already drawn parallels with

Continues next page

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***Mother, Couch!* from page 1**

Everything Everywhere All at Once (2022), another family crisis story disguised as a reality-bending comedy adventure. Echoes of Darren Aronofsky and Charlie Kaufman are also discernible here, especially in Larsson's use of glum surrealism and sudden tonal shifts. How much of these jarring effects are deliberate, and how much the result of film-making inexperience, is a moot point. But patient, open-minded viewers will enjoy the ride, even if the destination proves disappointing. A starry cast and puzzle-driven suspense plot should help secure audience interest beyond the festival circuit.

The unnamed mother of the title is played with an imperious swag-



San Sebastian International Film Festival

ger by venerable screen queen Burstyn. Evidently confused, possibly suffering from dementia or depression, this flinty matriarch has defiantly planted herself on a couch in a huge family furniture

store, refusing to leave, giving no explanation why. This creates major anxiety for her middle-aged son David (McGregor), who is already on a tight time schedule

[Full review, click here](#)

SURPRISE MOVIE AT SAN SEBASTIAN

THE KILLER

David Fincher's eagerly awaited new movie, "The Killer," is the surprise film at the 71st San Sebastian Festival.

From the director of *Se7en*, *Zodiac* and *The Social Network*, and based on the eponymous novel by Alexis Nolent (Matz) and illustrated by Luc Jacamon, *The Killer* stars Michael Fassbender and tells the story of an assassin who, after a fateful near-miss



battles his employers and himself in an international manhunt he insists isn't personal.

The cinematographer Erik Messer-

schmidt, winner of an Academy Award for his work in *Mank* (David Fincher, 2020), will introduce the film at the Victoria Eugenia Theatre on Saturday 30th (19:00). The Killer can also be seen on the same screen at 08:30 and at 13:00 in the Principal Theatre.

San Sebastian returned to the tradition of programming a surprise movie in 2019. Preceding *The Killer* were *Joker* (Todd Phillips, 2019), *Sportin' Life* (Abel Ferrara, 2020), *Spencer* (Pablo Larraín, 2021) and *Blonde* (Andrew Dominik, 2022).

GERMAN FILMS IN SAN SEBASTIÁN



AFIRE
by Christian Petzold



ACHILLES
by Farhad Delaram (DE/IR/FR)



SHE CHEF
by Melanie Liebehit, Gereon Wetzell

german
films

U.S. ShowBiz Sparks Investor Confab

Creative Investors' Conference Kicks Off at San Sebastian With Spotlight on U.S. Market

Kelly Jones, September 26, 2023

A bevy of high-power American executives hit the San Sebastian International Film Festival on Tuesday for the 2nd edition of the Creative Investors' Conference. That conference serves mainly to put a spotlight on business beyond Europe. The film festival is Spain's most important, with a strong focus on the local market. Despite recent movement towards resolution of the industry strikes, the U.S. star quotient at San Sebastian is minimal.

The conference, taking place at the Basque country's trendy Tabakalera cultural center September 26-28, launched with the panel: Challenges and Opportunities in the Shifting U.S. Landscape. The opening session began with an announcement regarding the tentative agreement for industry writers.

Panelist Tendo Nagenda, a producer at 10 by Ten, said: "Ultimately our business of film is constantly reinventing itself, so coming out of the strike is an opportunity to tell more stories every day."

Jeb Brody, President of Production at Amblin Partners, addressed the strike: "Certainly the strike has impacted everything. It's very hard on different companies of all sizes, especially in the development phase. It's definitely going to be a problem for the next little while. It's been tricky for a couple of years, but suddenly, because it's all been taken away for a couple of months, there's a real enthusiasm for people to come back to work. We are having more conversations around the storytelling." Other speakers at the opening event include Sarah Colvin (Director of Acquisitions at Neon), and Kiska Higgs (President,

Production & Acquisitions at Focus Features).

Panelists from the United States on Tuesday said more risk-taking distributors and smarter films would help create added momentum to the business. The inaugural Creative Investors' conference, last year, saw one of the largest contingents of U.S. execs in the festival's history, helped by the clout of co-host CAA.

Amblin Partners Brody shared: "Our friends at Neon and A24 have proven there's still a market for more tricky content. But there are no longer ten companies ushering in edgy filmmaking. It's now three or four.

"These days, to be a great movie, it has to combine genres,

be better. People have become meaner about films they don't like," Brody added.

There was no reinventing the business wheel at the panel – just the confirmation of hard-won experience and risk taking and instincts paying off.

"It's proven that if you stand out that's what works. It's hard to take a bet on Australian YouTubers but we try," said Neon's Sarah Colvin.

Kiska Higgs of Focus Features added: "So far we have just bought what we like, and it has worked for us."

Panelists agreed that financing is out there for indie films, but costs need to come down.

"I just financed a film that is creatively risky," said producer Nagenda about *The Book of Clarence*. "There is financing out there for creatively inventive projects. I haven't seen a ton of money out there for slates. Before I lived in the big budget space. Those budgets kept changing. There was a lot of inflation."

[Full article, click here](#)



OFFICIAL SELECTION



EL SUEÑO DE LA SULTANA

CINE VERDICT: El deslumbrante e imaginativo cuento animado de la directora española Isabel Herguera 'El sueño de la sultana' sobre una artista itinerante está inspirado en la pensadora feminista bengalí Rokeya Hossain y su cuento de 1905 sobre Ladyland, un país gobernado por mujeres.

Deborah Young, September 25, 2023

Llámelo una utopía de ciencia ficción, o una fértil polinización cruzada de pensadoras a través del tiempo y el espacio, pero El sueño de la sultana lleva al público a un viaje de fantasía que es tan encantador como educativo.

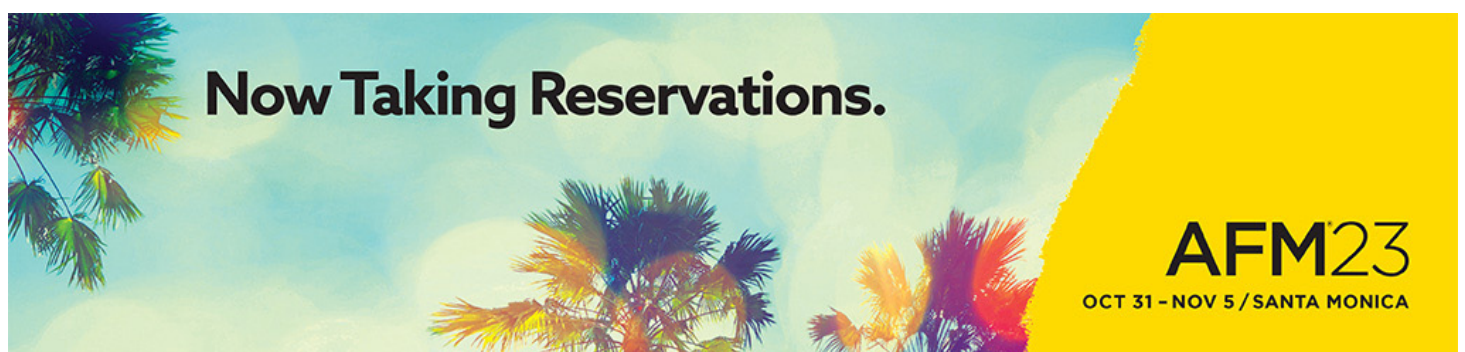
Este largometraje de animación, el primero de la directora española Isabel Herguera está inspirado en una historia del mismo título de la profesora y escritora musulmana Rokeya Hossain (1880-1932), nacida en Bengala y tras negársele el entierro en un ce-

menterio musulmán fue inhumada en el patio de un colegio. Después atrapar la atención en la Selección Oficial de San Sebastián, seguramente extenderá sus alas en festivales y casas de arte, siguiendo los pasos de clásicos de la animación feminista como Persépolis (2007) de Marjane Satrapi y No. 7 Cherry Lane (2019) de Yonfan.

Herguera y su coguionista Gianmarco Serra cuentan sus fantásticas historias a través de los ojos de una joven artista y cineasta mochilera, Inés, cuyos viajes entre España e India constituyen la columna vertebral de la película. El hecho de que cada rostro en la película esté coloreado de un cálido y rico tono marrón subraya la universalidad de esta historia y la conexión entre europeos e indios de diferentes razas y religiones; después de todo, es una historia que explora a hombres y mujeres.

Inicialmente, Inés va a Ahmadabad para ver a su ex-

[Full review, click here](#)



OFFICIAL SELECTION



San Sebastian International Film Festival

A SILENCE

VERDICT: Emmanuelle Devos plays the complicit wife of the famous lawyer and closet pedophile Daniel Auteuil in Joachim Lafosse's slow-moving family drama 'A Silence'.

Deborah Young, September 26, 2023

Some stories just don't seem to benefit from an ultra-delicate treatment on screen, and Joachim Lafosse's careful bourgeois drama about a pedophile in the family – someone everyone knows but no one talks about — is a case in point.

Despite two French stars the caliber of Daniel Auteuil and Emmanuelle Devos fretting over how to handle a hot situation about to boil over, *A Silence* pretty much lives up to the mood suggested by its title: a long, painful delay before the big reveal scene which, when it happens, takes place off screen, in the dark.

And just to make sure the violence doesn't come as too much of a shock, it is anticipated in the first scene, a flash-forward to the police investigation. This Belgian-French-Luxembourg coprod bowed in San Sebastian's Official Selection and will probably find Euro audiences for its sensitive, tasteful take on a bitter, tasteless topic.

Belgian auteur Joachim Lafosse (*Private Property*, *Loving without Reason*) is well-known to festival audiences for his stories of marriages on the verge of breakdown and families coming unglued, like his recent tale of a bipolar painter in *The Restless*. Here the couple in question have been married some 25 years and have a grown-up daughter living on her own and an adopted son in high school. Raphael (Matthieu Galoux), the son, is shaggy-haired and shift-eyed, a rebel who has been cutting school and who obviously harbors a secret of some sort. Yet he puts up with

[Full review, click here](#)



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BEYOND THE FESTIVAL

THE CREATOR

VERDICT: While lovely to look at, Gareth Edwards' latest doesn't make the case for why we should stop worrying and learn to love AI.

Alonso Duralde, September 26, 2023

When nations go to war, one side of the conflict tends to strip the other side of their basic humanity, all in the service of making it easier to slaughter enemy combatants. (In 1943's *Destination Tokyo*, submarine commander Cary Grant gives a speech about how the Japanese — and he doesn't use the word "Japanese" — "don't love their women the way we do.") But what happens when your enemy isn't human at all?



Glen Milner/20th Century Studios

That's the idea that director and co-writer (with Chris Weitz) Gareth Edwards seeks to explore in *The Creator*, a future dystopia in which super-advanced robots have become humanity's helpers, at least until a nuke is detonated in Los Angeles. At that point, the

United States seeks to wipe out the human-appearing synthetic beings, while "New Asia" embraces these creations and gives them shelter. Caught in the middle is soldier Joshua (John David Washington), who goes undercover to find the

[Full review, click here](#)



PERLAK

THE NEW BOY

VERDICT: Warwick Thornton's latest may star Cate Blanchett but newcomer Aswan Reid steals the show in this historical drama.

Boyd van Hoeij, May 19, 2023

An Aboriginal boy finds himself in a remote religious institution in the Australian outback in *The*

New Boy, the seventh feature from writer-director-cinematographer Warwick Thornton. This time, he has cast a major Australian star, Cate Blanchett, as the female lead, though the titular boy, played by newcomer Aswan Reid, is really the star of the show — and all the more because he only utters two different words over the course of the film's two-hour running time. Through the story, set in the early

1940s, of an indigenous boy who is delivered to a monastery headed by Cate Blanchett's Sister Eileen, Thornton explores complex topics related to colonisation and religion as well as the basic concepts of decency, care and education. With Blanchett's star power, this should have a better-than-usual chance of pickups internationally, further reinforcing the name-recognition factor for Thornton, whose first film, the Cannes Un certain regard title *Samson & Delilah*, won the Camera d'Or back in 2009.

Early on, the nameless "New Boy" (Reid) is delivered to a remote monastery at night by the police, with Sister Eileen (Blanchett), having to pretend she's still taking orders from the saintly man supposedly running the institution. Instead, he's been dead for a year already and she hopes to be able

[Full review, click here](#)

VERDICT SHORT

AMMA KI KATHA (MY AMMA'S TALE)

VERDICT: History, folklore, and contemporary realities intertwine in Nehal Vyas' essayistic meditation on national aspiration and how stories become enmeshed in state oppression.

Ben Nicholson, September 26, 2023

Nehal Vyas' Amma ki Katha – or My Amma's Tale – explores the way memory and myth become entangled in political narratives.

The film takes as its structure the fables told by grandmothers such as a creation story in which India is held aloft upon the backs of four giant elephants. Through this form, Vyas creates four chapters in which each of the elephants encounters



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the next progression in the ongoing saga of the country – from its birth to its current political landscape via the legends that inform some of the populace's sense of national identity.

The film uses a variety of techniques to examine the different fac-

ets of its discourse, from non-fiction montage to stop-motion animation, theatrical performance, and song. Each of the chapters has a slightly different aesthetic flavour that perhaps intimate, in some sense, the different ways in which

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