

2022 Buyer's Guide Narratives



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Dear Reader,

Trusted by librarians and academics for over 30 years, Video Librarian is your source for discovering the best in film.

Video Librarian's inaugural list of Best Narrative Films of 2022 ranks our highest-rated narrative films from the past year. This brand new list honors narrative films that we have reviewed in 2022, having recently been released in theaters, on Blu-Ray, or via streaming. Carefully selected by our staff from our vast collection of reviews, these 25 films celebrate the diversity and artistic creativity of this year in documentaries.

This list recognizes how useful narrative films can be to learning. These titles would be welcome additions to a number of university or library programming events, covering topics such as mental health, queer history, family dynamics, international stories, and more. Whether you are an educator or a casual film fan, these unique titles can open up viewers to unique perspectives from independent distributors and filmmakers and offer educational and entertaining value.

Allow this list to be your guide in making collection development easier for this coming year. Please click on the links to learn more about each film and where you can purchase them.

We would like to extend our appreciation to our subscribers, readers, and sponsors. Without your commitment, we wouldn't be able to do our job of bringing excellent films to libraries and communities around the world.

Thank you,
Caroline Madden - Editor in Chief



THE ARTIST'S WIFE

DIRECTOR Tom Dolby

DISTRIBUTOR [Strand Releasing](#)

GENRE Drama

CAST Lena Olin, Bruce Dern, Stefanie Powers

RATING R

RELEASE DATE June 28, 2022

DURATION 95 minutes

REVIEW DATE [June 21, 2022](#)

Review by Nunzio Santoro

Tom Dolby's highly moving masterpiece, based on real-life events inspired by his parents, is both heartbreaking and tear-jerking. It's a moving survey of intergenerational and unconditional love. *The Artist's Wife* confronts the gritty reality of dealing with eccentric, patronizing, and erratic conduct justified by an artistic exception, which in this case a tragic Alzheimer's diagnosis exacerbates.

The film is a poignant display of the struggles that Alzheimer's patients deal with on a regular basis: the misunderstandings, alienation, and forgetting your loved ones and the outstanding talent that made you special.

Lena Olin and Bruce Dern's wonderful performances are the film's touchstone. As a younger partner, the artist's wife makes sacrifices, caring less about her own artistic pride to put her ill husband's reputation first and—despite struggling with ambiguous feelings about him brought on by the degenerative disease. She chooses to gift him with creative immortality at the expense of her own merit.

Dolby's narrative focuses on the raw trauma of the artist's loved ones having to tread on eggshells while trying to nourish a healthy and heartfelt bond. *The Artist's Wife* is a compelling look at the complexities of marriage and devotion elevated by Olin's astute characterization. Highly Recommended.

LIBRARY SHELVES:

This could potentially be of interest to any institutions and /or academics focusing on film studies, fine arts, or psychology. It could be a useful tool in demystifying symptoms of Alzheimers.



BROADCAST SIGNAL INTRUSION

DIRECTOR Jacob Gentry

DISTRIBUTOR [Dark Star Pictures](#)

GENRE Horror, Crime, Drama

CAST Harry Shum Jr., Chris Sullivan, Kelley Mack

RATING Not Rated

RELEASE DATE December 12, 2021

DURATION 104 minutes

REVIEW DATE [May 19, 2022](#)

Review by J. Zimmerman

Broadcast Signal Intrusion is a neo-noir set in 1999 Illinois. Harry Shum Jr. plays James, a video archivist and camera enthusiast who is still grieving the recent disappearance of his girlfriend. From the beginning, we can see James' pain and paranoia. He is a loner in the truest sense of the word, communicating with his boss and co-workers through sticky notes and avoiding human contact throughout the film. One night while transferring old news tapes to DVD, James sees a disturbing pirate signal captured on the tape.

He becomes intrigued, searching everything at his disposal to discover the source and perhaps the meaning behind the broadcast intrusion. With his job on the line and the Feds breathing down his neck, James enters a bizarre underworld in search of answers. Obsessed with the idea that there are more intrusions that need to be analyzed to decode their meaning, James begins to believe that somehow these disturbing videos are connected with the disappearance of Hannah.

Harry Shum Jr. drives this film home. His performance is outstanding. We watch him change from experience to experience in a fascinating dive into an increasingly bizarre rabbit hole of last century's hacking exploits. While it could go the way of *The Matrix* or other cyber thrillers, *Broadcast Signal Intrusion* roots itself firmly in noir stylings from the get-go. The somber trumpet, cleverly crafted conspiracy and steady pace really drive the noir themes and tropes home as James continues to dive into his obsession. Centering the viewer's experience on James' encounters makes the nightmare sequences more nightmarish, the breakthroughs more substantial, and the betrayals hurt so much more.

It makes the mystery much more mysterious to experience it as it unfolds, not through a frame story or narrator. While embracing horror elements at many points (such as the intrusions themselves and an on-screen suicide), Broadcast Signal Intrusion remains firmly in the mystery genre. It is brooding, dark, and dreamlike at times, portraying James' nightmares with little warning and frightening clarity. This film is a superior choice for any horror film collection in a public library and is highly recommended. Editor's Choice.

LIBRARY SHELVES:

This title may be of interest to academic institutions focusing on criminal studies, psychology, or video archives. This title would be welcome in mystery or neo-noir collections.



EL HOMBRE BÚFALO

DIRECTOR David Torres

DISTRIBUTOR [IndiePix Films](#)

GENRE Drama, Fantasy, Crime

CAST Raul Briones, Sofia Alvarez

RATING Not Rated

RELEASE DATE November 9, 2021

DURATION 69 minutes

REVIEW DATE [March 22, 2022](#)

Review by J. Zimmerman

El Hombre Búfalo is a bizarre and somewhat haunting mockumentary that attempts to artistically address the dangers of journalism in Mexico. Over 100 journalists working in Mexico have been murdered since 2000. Journalists Without Borders calls Mexico “The most dangerous country without a war in which to practice journalism.” This art film crafts one such narrative. Director David Torres creates a classic yet modern labyrinth tale complete with its own minotaur.

At only 69 minutes in length, *El Hombre Búfalo* does an excellent job of introducing and developing characters while telling the story with just enough detail. While the titular Buffalo Man is only visible in glimpses, the other characters in the film are intriguing, humorous, beautiful, and very human.

The story follows Eric (Raúl Birones), a journalist who has been threatened by some criminal enterprise. They promise to kill him if he ever publishes again. Despite this, he finds a story in a homeless man (Antonio Monroi) who left home to search for his wife’s body and never returns. At points, it is hinted that perhaps this man is Eric’s Father, though we never get a clear answer. The film also follows other subjects, those who were touched by Eric, the Buffalo Man, or both.

There is one problem with this movie: its subtitles. While my Spanish is far from fluent, I noticed from time to time the translation took some massive liberties which affected the narrative’s meaning. The biggest issue with the subtitles occurs during the final minutes of the film: A duo of narrators begin speaking in Zapotec and the subtitles say “Speaking in Zapotec ” then disappear for about 4 minutes. This entire segment is untranslated.

Despite this, the film is highly enjoyable. There are many moments of genuine beauty, exploration of the human condition, and outstanding cinematography. The more experimental segments show the subjects of the film 'traversing the labyrinth' of their daily lives, some unique long shots using GoPro footage, while the subject narrates. There is a simple and human beauty to the entire film. Its short length makes it easily digestible and poignant. Very little is said or shown which is not important to the story somehow. For these reasons and the very important message the film communicates, *El Hombre Búfalo* is an outstanding choice and is highly recommended for drama and world cinema library shelves.

LIBRARY SHELVES:

This film could be of interest to collections focusing on Mexican cinema and mockumentary style. The film's short length and captivating visuals make it a great option for potential screening events.



EXPOSURE 36

DIRECTOR Mackenzie G. Mauro

DISTRIBUTOR [Gravitas Ventures](#)

GENRE Thriller, Science Fiction, Sci-Fi

CAST Charles Ouda, Jennifer Leigh Whitehead,
Nick Smithson

RATING Not Rated

RELEASE DATE May 10, 2022

DURATION 92 minutes

REVIEW DATE [July 5, 2022](#)

Review by J. Zimmerman

Three days before a climate catastrophe which experts report will destroy humanity, aspiring photographer and prescription drug dealer Cam (Charles Ouda) goes about his life. He meets with clients, snaps photos, and remembers his past. We are given dreamlike glimpses into Cam's mind as various events remind him of something or graze old wounds. He thinks often of his girlfriend who died two years before of a drug overdose and of his mother and sisters who raised him. This introspective, almost meditative pacing dissolves as it becomes clear his friend and occasional client Nick (Nick Smithson) is in life-threatening danger.

Nick's kid sister Katie (Jennifer Leigh Whitehead) confirms this when she shows up at Cam's apartment covered in blood and bruises. The young man initially acts on his pessimistic impulse and knowledge that the world is ending and pleads with Katie to take a wad of cash and use it to leave the city. She refuses and Cam washes his hands of the ordeal. The further appearance of the ghosts of his friends and loved ones drives Cam to help the girl find Nick, sending him into a bizarre corner of a dying city's underworld.

This film exceeds expectations. I wasn't expecting such strong worldbuilding and character development from the get-go, but *Exposure 36* delivers in massive quantities. What little exposition we are given is stylistically similar to other great apocalypse films such as *12 Monkeys* and *Mad Max*: A simple title card proclaims man's doom and a general reason why. The cinematography on display in *Exposure 36* will fail to disappoint and shows a love for the medium. Obviously shot mostly on film, the movie does use some digital effects when Cam talks to or sees the ghosts of his friends and loved ones.

While the dialogue and writing are lacking in many moments, the addition of dark humor during tense moments helps this apocalyptic thriller pace itself as the film loses the zen-like pacing it uses to introduce us to Cam. Charles Ouda puts on an outstanding performance, playing both the Xanax abusing and hyper-emotional or traumatized aspects of Cam's character equally well. The trance or dreamlike nature of many segments makes this a very interesting movie to watch and the use of Covid-19 lockdown footage of New York City adds an element of dread and eeriness to the entire film. It really does look like the end of the world. *Exposure 36* is a must-see for lovers of thrillers, dramas, and apocalyptic films alike. This outstanding movie is highly recommended.

LIBRARY SHELVES:

Exposure 36 would be equally at home alongside disaster movies, apocalypse movies, thrillers, and science fiction flicks.



FRIEND OF THE WORLD

DIRECTOR Brian Patrick Butler

DISTRIBUTOR [Charybdis Pictures](#)

GENRE Comedy, Sci-Fi, Horror

CAST Alexandra Slade, Nick Young

RATING Not Rated

RELEASE DATE November 22, 2021

DURATION 50 minutes

REVIEW DATE [April 25, 2022](#)

Review by Ally Ham

Brian Patrick Butler's *Friend of the World* is an evocative indie gem serving a little bit of science fiction, some dark comedy, and a healthy dose of body horror. Drawing inspiration from cult classics like *The Thing* and *La Jetée*, Butler contributes to the genre collection with this introspective and deceptively simple piece.

Alexandra Slade plays Diane Keaton (Yes, that is her actual name), a young filmmaker who wakes up in a war bunker at the end of the world. She frantically searches for a way out, maneuvering around lifeless bodies. The camera follows her with a deliberate sweep over a shot of still legs in high heels, a fleeting indication that no one expected anything like this bloody scenario.

The ensuing story is divided into chapters, the second of which is titled an ironic "Boy Meets Girl"; as it turns out, the following encounter is anything but a meet-cute. Diane soon finds she's not alone in the bunker, discovering a man who happens to be her polar opposite. General Gore (Nick Young) thinks he's something of a filmmaker himself, although his war propaganda is a far cry from Diane's artful images. Gore's straightforward outlook mirrors the black-and-white style of *Friend of the World*. He's the irascible, middle-aged, conservative, straight White man to Diane's calm, a young, liberal, gay Black woman.

Although Slade's and Young's performances felt at times incongruous with the other, it is their interactions that make this feature so engrossing. They are nuanced, and (thankfully) not portrayed as strictly evil and good. Still, we are caught with Diane in a state of emotional limbo concerning General Gore—somewhere in between respect and resentment.

Gore has the wisdom and resourcefulness to help Diane survive in this foreign world, after all; yet we cannot forget his partial responsibility in its very destruction. The film would be uniquely compelling if just focused on the dynamic of these two and the exigent questions their situation raises. Its psychedelic horror and gripping elements of mystery, however, elevate the feature's core purpose to new levels.

A provocative commentary on personal and environmental corruption, *Friend of the World* is sure to elicit visceral responses from viewers. Highly recommended for patrons seeking a genre-defying post-apocalyptic tale, this is a worthy addition to speculative fiction library shelves.

LIBRARY SHELVES:

This film would be welcome on library shelves that feature unorthodox science fiction, body horror, and independent films.



HIVE

DIRECTOR Blerta Basholli

DISTRIBUTOR [Kino Lorber](#)

GENRE Drama, World Cinema

CAST Yllka Gashi, Cun Lajci, Aurita Agushi

RATING Not Rated

RELEASE DATE November 9, 2021

DURATION 84 minutes

REVIEW DATE [June 15, 2022](#)

Review by Garrett Johnson

The foreign film *Hive* departs from a familiar world for most and plunges into the aftermath of the Kosovo War of 1999 and the world of Fahrije (Yllka Gashi). The audience is placed in the middle of the story's turmoil, as Fahrije must support her family—an aging father-in-law, her son, and her teenage daughter—despite the absence of her husband, presumably from the war. To help her family survive, Fahrije struggles to start a home-grown business making ajvar for a town supermarket.

While she strives to make ends meet, she also endures backlash from her community for her choice, which pits her against a patriarchal society that disapproves of her actions to start a business. As the story unfolds, the audience experiences Fahrije's fight not only to succeed with her business plans, but also her struggle to raise her family, maintain her dignity, and make peace with the absence of her husband.

Fahrije's continual battle against the male-dominated society predominates the film, reminding the viewer that, despite the progress for women's rights across the past century, there remains an antipathy against women breaking traditional gender roles. Fahrije chooses to get a license to drive so she can gather supplies and sell her ajvar.

When she takes the exam, she is the only woman testing; throughout the film, she is the only woman seen driving a vehicle at all, as driving is a man's work. Fahrije's endurance against the town gossip, petty misdemeanors, and vandalism throughout the film highlight her strength against adversity, a strength that is tested to the limits. Furthermore—and most importantly—this film involves the deep trauma of survivors of war.

Fahrije tries to make sense of her missing husband and how to establish a life without him for their family. When researchers try to help her resolve the case of her missing husband, she tells them, “It gets resolved for you; for us, it never will.”

While the war in Kosovo may seem resolved on paper for most of the world, the film states at the end that 20 years later, over 1,600 people are still missing in Kosovo, and those who remain must live with the trauma of the past. *Hive* is a powerful depiction of endurance through suffering which brings its audience into a world of unresolved trauma, all based on the true story of Fahrije Hoti, who started her own business with 50 widowed women.

LIBRARY SHELVES:

This could potentially be of interest to any institutions and /or academics focusing on history or international cinema. It would also be suitable for collections that examine post-war trauma.



THE LADIES ALMANACK

DIRECTOR Daviel Shy

DISTRIBUTOR [Planet Group Entertainment](#)

GENRE LGBTQ, Experimental Film

CAST Hélène Cixous, Josefin Granqvist

RATING Not Rated

RELEASE DATE July 17, 2017

DURATION 86 minutes

REVIEW DATE [June 8, 2022](#)

Review by Isadora Lambert

Daviel Shy's experimental film, *The Ladies Almanack*, explores a complex network of queer creative women in 1920s Paris.

The film is based on the 1928 self-published novel by Djuna Barnes, centering around the women in lesbian writer, Natalie Clifford Barney's, literary salon in Paris. A roman à clef, the novel details the experiences and relationships of real women, like, Radclyffe Hall and Romaine Brooks, through a thin façade of fiction.

In Daviel Shy's film, a large cast explores the personas of these women on their own terms. Makeshift costumes pay homage to the 1920s, with modern elements thrown in, like bedazzled bras, crop tops, or nameplate necklaces. The film's soundtrack is hypnotic, combing elements of house music with ethereal chanting. The soundtrack is often accompanied by dancing, employing modern dance styles. Despite its many modern elements, a deep respect for lesbian culture of the 1920s is clear throughout the film.

The Ladies Almanack is composed of vignettes organized by month, shown through title cards surrounded by vibrant collage. The experimental elements employed in *The Ladies Almanack* intensify its unique aesthetic. Shot on Super 8, images are vibrant as well as grainy. Audio is intentionally not synched to lip movements. Many scenes are meant to be enjoyed visually, meditating on the queer culture it is depicting, rather than merely reenacting it. The film and its source of origin are an important reminder that lesbian culture has existed long before the gay liberation movement of the 1970s, and that the fascinating queer culture in the 1920s is deserving of recognition.

LIBRARY SHELVES:

The Ladies Almanack would be a great introduction to audience members who want to learn more about this era of queer literature. It could also be a useful tool in experimental filmmaking classes. This film would be a welcome addition to any *Pride* collection, especially those that focus on films made by or about queer women.



LOTAWANA

DIRECTOR Trevor Hawkins

DISTRIBUTOR [Mammoth Media](#)

GENRE Drama, Adventure

CAST Todd Blubaugh, Nicola Collie

RATING Not Rated

RELEASE DATE February 3, 2022

DURATION 110 minutes

REVIEW DATE [January 14, 2022](#)

Review by Caroline Madden

Emmy Award-winning filmmaker Trevor Hawkins transfers the ecological wonder of his nature documentaries to the drama *Lotawana*, his debut feature film that he writes, directs, and edits. The lengthy opening montage depicts the tranquil lives of drifter Forrest (Todd Blubaugh) and New Zealander Everly (Nicola Collie) who live on a boat.

These lush nature scenes frame the perfect-looking couple in a breezy, beautiful world of crystal blue waters and cotton-candy skies. Within these scenes, Hawkins flexes his skill as an outdoor photographer. However, it gets a bit wearying watching such pretty people having the time of their lives. The first half of the film feels shallow and starts to drag, but it eventually unfolds into an incredibly moving tale of heartbreak.

In the second half of the film, Hawkins reveals that the languid pacing was a deliberate way of surprising the audience when the couple's bliss comes to a crashing halt after Everly discovers that she's pregnant. Having a baby is not ideal for their nomadic and minimalist lifestyle; it would mean their ongoing vacation would have to come to an end. They contemplate abortion but eventually decide to keep the pregnancy and excitedly prepare for their new lives together until the film takes a heartwrenching turn that culminates in a shocking ending.

Blubaugh and Collie have a compelling connection that intensifies the story's somber machinations and they convey their characters' tumultuous grief with a tender sincerity. *Lotawana* is a bittersweet portrayal of mourning and wanderlust. It has a painterly elegance that is absolutely breathtaking. This picturesque splendor offsets the protagonists' searing grapple with emotional trauma. The ending montage of roads not taken solidifies the devastating beauty of Hawkins' film. Editor's Choice.

LIBRARY SHELVES:

This film would be suitable for collections that deal with handling grief. The gorgeous cinematography of *Lotawana* would make it a compelling choice for screening events.



MIRIAM LIES

DIRECTOR Natalia Cabral, Oriol Estrada

DISTRIBUTOR [Pragda](#)

GENRE Drama

CAST Dulce Rodriguez

RATING TV-14

RELEASE DATE November 30, 2018

DURATION 90 minutes

REVIEW DATE [May 4, 2022](#)

Review by J. Zimmerman

Intimate and Colorful, *Miriam Lies* is an adolescent drama with an intense focus on its subject, Miriam (Dulce Rodriguez). Set in the Dominican Republic, the story begins a few weeks out from Miriam's quinceanera. During the preparations, Miriam tells a small lie to her friends and family: She's met a boy online named Jean-Louis, a potential suitor and guest of honor at her 15th birthday. Her friends and family assume he is a white European boy, perhaps the son of the new French ambassador. While she never states this aloud, Miriam never corrects her mother or friends.

We come to learn that Miriam struggles with gender, age, and race by watching her experience the actions and conversations of her friends and family. Her father, now divorced, is a black man and her mother is white. While naïve, she sees that part of their problem relates to race and, after some time, finds that her mother's family didn't want to accept a black man into the family. While the story itself is subtle and uncomplicated in many ways, it is intriguing to watch a young bi-racial woman navigate the intersections of her gender, race, and privilege.

The movie has an unwavering gaze on Miriam. Over 90% of the film is her face, her subtle reactions and tamped-down feelings on display as her family talks about her and others like her. Her mother's rich friends argue with 'the help' and seek to make sure "they don't feel like they have privileges." These characters are black and unnamed, often seen only in the background. We see Miriam pick up on this and issues of women, sexuality, and finance. We see her private worry, her stifled rage and confusion, and her hope that no one finds out she's lying about Jean-Louis.

While I commend the decision to focus on Miriam and the delicate, private nature of adolescence, I do think the unending focus on Miriam's face is a weakness of this film. We're never properly introduced to Miriam's family or friends beyond their out-of-shot lines and the setting is devastatingly underexplored. Beyond this issue, this movie is an outstanding drama and an intimate exploration of the complex inner world of a bi-racial teenager. *Miriam Lies* is highly recommended for coming of age film collections in public libraries. Editor's Choice.

LIBRARY SHELVES:

This could potentially be of interest to any institutions and /or academics focusing on gender studies, racial diversity, and intersectionality. This title would also be at home in coming-of-age collections.



NUDO MIXTECO

DIRECTOR Ángeles Cruz

DISTRIBUTOR [Pragda](#)

GENRE Drama, World Cinema

CAST Sonia Couoh, Myriam Bravo, Noé Hernández

RATING Not Rated

RELEASE DATE March 9, 2021

DURATION 91 minutes

REVIEW DATE [June 14, 2022](#)

Review by J. Zimmerman

Though often slow and pastoral, *Nudo Mixteco* is a modern and dynamic drama about the return of three people to the town of their birth, San Mateo. The film has some obvious segments where there is a focus on a single protagonist and story, though there is some intermixing of narratives and backtracking through time. Using some of the classic themes of Southern Gothic, each protagonist is brought home by some sudden family obligation: For Maria (Sonia Couoh) it is the death of her mother, Esteban (Noé Hernández) returns to see his long-estranged wife and child, and Toña (Myriam Bravo) must claim her daughter from her mother's care.

The theme of crossing paths begins as the funeral procession for Maria's mother passes the town square where Esteban and his wife Chabela (Aida López) make their private marriage issues public, then again as Toña and her mother join the funeral procession. These first few intersecting journeys become clear as they are revisited from Esteban and Toña's points of view. This pensive drama comes to a head for each of the main characters in their own time and ends in a display of beautiful cinematography.

The biggest issue I can find with *Nudo Mixteco* is the lack of a more common thread or interplay between the stories. The theme of crossing paths is there, but it doesn't come across as meaningful. The official English summation of this film does not do it justice; while there are portions dedicated to sexuality, the main theme lies more in the experience of people raised in rural places returning home after finishing school or seeking work to find the same financial problems and familial troubles that drove them away. It is Mixtecan Southern Gothic.

While there is a lesbian romance between Maria and Piedad (Eileen Yañez), this is not simply a queer film. Esteban and Chabela's story explores infidelity and spousal abuse and Toña's story centers around childhood sexual abuse. This content should be taken into consideration when making patron recommendations. That being said, the surprisingly dynamic camerawork and staging make this a must-see drama with striking color and intriguing dramatic elements. *Nudo Mixteco* is an excellent choice for drama and Spanish language collections in libraries.

LIBRARY SHELVES:

Nudo Mixteco would be an excellent option for Spanish language library collections. It would be optimal for collections centering on abuse and complex relationships.



THE OUTPOST

DIRECTOR Rod Lurie

DISTRIBUTOR [Screen Media Films](#)

GENRE Drama, History, War

CAST Orlando Bloom, Scott Eastwood

RATING R

RELEASE DATE August 18, 2020

DURATION 123 minutes

REVIEW DATE [February 3, 2022](#)

Review by Charles Cassady

Director Rod Lurie's Afghan war drama—based on Jake Tapper's nonfiction book *The Outpost: An Untold Story of American Valor*—should rank with another book/film property chronicling a recent military tragedy, *Black Hawk Down*, and that is high praise indeed. The 2021 US withdrawal from Afghanistan and its grim aftermath lends the item extra piquancy.

It is a dramatization of what became known as the Battle of Kamdesh in October 2009. Combat Outpost Keating is a US military encampment built at the intersection of three Afghan mountains, in an attempt to cease the overland flow of Taliban personnel and weapons from Pakistan. But at a frightening strategic disadvantage, the crucial pass is in a valley surrounded by high ground.

At the outset of the narrative, in 2006, arriving US soldiers nickname the spot "Camp Custer," in recognition that Taliban insurgents have the commanding heights for their sniper attacks—which indeed happen with regularity and increasing danger, as the lurking enemy gains better knowledge and weapons technology, and the good-neighbor relations with resident villagers deteriorates. Finally, the Taliban attacked in a massive force.

Scott Eastwood (son of Clint), Orlando Bloom, Caleb Landry Jones, and Milo Gibson (son of Mel) lead an excellent cast whose movie-star affiliations recede into a realistic ensemble of duty-bound young fighting men who realize they are in a very bad situation (politics becomes be largely irrelevant in this context).

Viewers will want to listen to filmmaker Lurie's commentary track, in which the director (and author, who attended West Point) describes the Bulgaria-based film shoot and the fidelity and respect he tried to bring to the material and the real-life veterans portrayed, and explains that for the alterations and speculations he made in re-creating real events he tried to seek approval from the families of survivors. In an especially poignant note, he memorializes his adult son, who died stateside while Lurie was still in the progress of completing the shoot.

Other locked-loaded disc extras are rehearsal footage and behind-the-scenes mini-documentaries. A highly recommended title that fell out of public view due to the lockdown of theaters during the COVID quarantines. A must-have for library collections specializing in war and history.

LIBRARY SHELVES:

This title would be ideal for academic collections focusing on war and history. The behind-the-scenes footage and commentary may be especially interesting to library patrons.



PELICANO

DIRECTOR Gustavo Letelier

DISTRIBUTOR [Amerinda Films](#)

GENRE Drama, Mystery

CAST Silvia Novak, Mario Olivares

RATING Not Rated

RELEASE DATE November 5, 2020

DURATION 90 minutes

REVIEW DATE [October 3, 2022](#)

Review by Kat Walsh

Pelicano is a story of a wife and mother in her sixties going rogue. What happens when an older adult desires adventures that put the unity of her family at stake? That's what the mystery drama directed by Gustavo Letelier tries to reveal. The plot is set in a 2008 Chilean coastal town where a greedy mother who is supposed to be a pillar of the family watches it collapse.

The film portrays the wicked life of Lucia (Silvia Novak), whose greed will stop at nothing to get what she wants. The film is an adaptation of the Swedish tragic play, "Wrath of Gods," and is narrated backward, employing the use of flashbacks.

Lucia is a mother of two adult children, Rebecca (Paula Edwards) and Antonio (Mario Olivares). She is married to Silverio (Ricardo Herrera). Rebecca's partner, Octavio (Benjamin Gorrone), is over-ambitious and cheats on her with her mother. Antonio is an alcoholic who constantly asks for money from his mother.

Lucia decides to live on her own terms without considering the other members of her family. Lucia's ailing husband catches her kissing Octavio during the wedding party of Rebecca and Octavio. Lucia laughs at Silverio and tells him she never loved him. She even confesses that Antonio is not Silverio's son but a result of one of her affairs.

This satisfying story of twisted family dynamics is told in reverse, full of surprising twists and turns that will have you discussing it for days to come.

LIBRARY SHELVES:

Pelicano would be an excellent choice for mystery and drama library collections. It may also be of interest to collections that focus on unconventional storytelling.



PLAYGROUND

DIRECTOR Laura Wandel

DISTRIBUTOR [Film Movement](#)

GENRE Drama

CAST Günter Duret, Karim Leklou, Maya Vanderbeque

RATING Not Rated

RELEASE DATE February 11, 2022

DURATION 72 minutes

REVIEW DATE [August 19, 2022](#)

Review by Ally Ham

The cacophony of children playing (and yelling, and fighting) permeates Laura Wandel's debut film, *Playground*—a stirring narrative drama about coming of age in Belgian primary school. The clamor never lets up around seven-year-old Nora (Maya Vanderbeque). Intimately tracking her at eye level, the camera isn't unconcerned with the background noise, but it is more invested in how these surroundings affect Nora—a fish out of water in one of the most formative periods of her life.

Before the events of this narrative drama, Nora had a quieter idea of life, safe and sequestered at home with her stay-at-home father, Finnigan (Karim Leklou). When she enters primary school, everything is loud, new, and overwhelming—except for the comforting presence of her older brother, Abel (Günter Duret). Abel is bullied when Nora interferes with his social standing, however. Now Nora must navigate the confusing sphere of primary school while being witness to Abel's traumas. How can she and her brother stay afloat when the rules are always changing?

When speaking of her inspiration for *Playground*, Laura Wandel said in an interview with Serge Kaganski, “The beauty of childhood is all poetry but also all cruelty.” In childhood, one experiences everything for the first time. Obstacles and social experiences that are second nature for adults are, for children, formative and even deeply traumatic. Standard childhood accomplishments (like Nora's tying a shoe) seem so monumental. And social rules aren't yet ingrained but must be learned and applied quickly in order to avoid a fate like Abel's.

When laid out so matter of fact, the themes Wandel explores may appear trite. But *Playground* crystallizes the cruelty, the poetry, the life-and-death largeness of childhood like no other coming-of-age film—expertly capturing an experience distant yet familiar to most who will watch.

Led by the striking young talent of Vanderbeque, *Playground* constructs one of the most affecting and sincere portrayals of childhood on the film scene today. A necessary addition for narrative drama collections, Wandel's coming-of-age film comes highly recommended. Editor's Choice.

LIBRARY SHELVES:

Public libraries should purchase Laura Wandel's *Playground* for coming-of-age, French-language, Belgium-setting, and narrative drama shelves. *Playground* would be well-suited for programming a film series about formative school experiences, taking its place alongside other coming-of-age films.



SWEET THING

DIRECTOR Alexandre Rockwell

DISTRIBUTOR [Film Movement](#)

GENRE Drama

CAST Lana Rockwell, Nico Rockwell, Jabari Watkins

RATING Not Rated

RELEASE DATE October 12, 2021

DURATION 91 minutes

REVIEW DATE [February 10, 2022](#)

Review by J. Zimmerman

Billie (Lana Rockwell) and Nico (Nico Rockwell) are siblings from a broken household in coastal Massachusetts. The film follows Billie most closely as they live through an eventful year. We are introduced to their father, Adam (Will Patton), as he struggles with his alcoholism. Eventually, things get so bad that he's placed in a mental hospital and the children must move in with their negligent mother, Eve (Karyn Parsons).

They go to the seaside for the summer with Eve's new lover, Beaux (M.L. Josepher), and find the adults are much like their father in their alcoholism. They are not, however, as kind or loving despite that. After several traumatic cases of abuse by Beaux, a seaside friend, Malik (Jabari Watkins), and Nico incapacitate the man and the three children escape to make their own way.

Shot in stunning black and white, *Sweet Thing* is heartbreaking, joyous, experimental, and all too real. The tight, intimate style this movie was shot in really helps you attach to the main characters very quickly and maintains that connection throughout the film. There is some excellent direction going on as these kids often acted as if there wasn't a camera in the room. It is a very holistic and human experience rife with pain and joy, though not in equal measure. Tough topics of child poverty, sexual abuse, police brutality, and familial negligence are just a few of the hard things that arise. Despite this, *Sweet Thing* has a beautiful and satisfying ending.

Color is used sporadically through the film to illustrate memory and warped reality. There are several moments of magical realism that really add to the imaginative quality of the film. Lana and Nico Rockwell's performances were incredible. They managed to show us the pure humanity of children even in the toughest times or hardest situations. Their joy and rage and fear and sorrow were realistic and believable. Any recommendation of this film should come with a clear content warning that it shows physical abuse and talks about sexual violence. It is a tough film to watch in many ways, but that is integral to its beauty and honesty. *Sweet Thing* is a bittersweet, heart-wrenching drama and is Highly Recommended. Editor's Choice.

LIBRARY SHELVES:

This intense title could potentially be of interest to any institutions and /or academics focusing on poverty, abuse, police brutality, and familial struggle.



UPPERCASE PRINT

DIRECTOR Radu Jude

DISTRIBUTOR [Big World Pictures](#)

GENRE Drama

CAST Ioana Iacob, Serban Lazarovici, Bogdan Zamfir

RATING Not Rated

RELEASE DATE May 17, 2022

DURATION 128 minutes

REVIEW DATE [August 22, 2022](#)

Review by Kevin Hall

There are dual narratives at play in the documentary *Uppercase Print*. One deals with the investigation of a graffiti artist who promoted democratic and pro-worker ideals in Botosani, Romania during the dictatorial rule of Nicolae Ceaușescu. The other details the onslaught of state-sanctioned educational and news propaganda of the same era. It makes for an eye-opening, disturbing experience.

Director Radu Jude adapts a stage play almost word-for-word for the first narrative. Written by Gianina Cărbunariu, the play details the case of high schooler Mugur Călinescu, who called for an end to poverty and for free trade unions through various graffiti artworks in Botosani. In response, Romania (going overboard, as Jude makes it clear) mobilized entire armies of informants who bugged phones and threatened youths to demand who was responsible. Mugur (portrayed wonderfully by Serban Lazarovici) is soon denounced and dies years later under enigmatic circumstances.

Then comes the agitprop. The juxtaposition of Mugur's story with the blatant propaganda machine of Romania during the time is enough to turn anyone's stomach. As Mugur and his family were being interrogated and abused, you see newsreel footage of jolly Romanians, acting like everything is fine under Ceaușescu.

At one point, a teleprompter malfunction interrupts three well-dressed presenters praising the country. Without having their lines fed to them, they stand in silence, having absolutely zero ideas on how to proceed. Jude produces a glimpse of two worlds, and *Uppercase Print* forces viewers to dig deeper into how a country can trick the outside world, shielding its malevolence.

LIBRARY SHELVES:

Academic libraries should select this film for students studying 20th-century politics, propaganda, and history.