

Desire, revenge and redemption



By [Daniel Derksen](#)

23 Feb 2018

Conflict thrives in films released this week: A teenager discovers the heady beauty of awakening desire over the course of a summer that changes his life forever in the emotionally challenging *Call Me By Your Name*; a mother is pushed to the edge by her daughter's unsolved murder in the rousing *Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri*; the turbulent bond between a mother and her teenage daughter is explored in *Lady Bird*; a feckless and directionless young man unravels the mystery shrouding the death of Vincent Van Gogh in the masterful animated film *Loving Vincent*; a career assassin is given a chance at redemption after his employer brings him back to life temporarily in *24 Hours To Live*, and the emotional conflict of tragic romance is expressed in the Met Opera's *Tosca*.

Call Me By Your Name

This new film by Luca Guadagnino is a sensual and transcendent tale of first love, based on the acclaimed novel by André Aciman. It's the summer of 1983 in the north of Italy, and Elio Perlman (Timothée Chalamet), a precocious 17-year-old American-Italian, spends his days in his family's 17th-century villa transcribing and playing classical music, reading, and flirting with his friend Marzia (Esther Garrel). Elio enjoys a close relationship with his father (Michael Stuhlbarg), an eminent professor specialising in Greco-Roman culture, and his mother Annella (Amira Casar), a translator, who favours him with the fruits of high culture in a setting that overflows with natural delights. While Elio's sophistication and intellectual gifts suggest he is already a fully-fledged adult, there is much that yet remains innocent and unformed about him, particularly about matters of the heart. One day, Oliver (Armie Hammer), a charming American scholar working on his doctorate, arrives as the annual summer intern tasked with helping Elio's father. Amid the sun-drenched splendour of the setting, Elio and Oliver discover the heady beauty of awakening desire over the course of a summer that will alter their lives forever.

While his films are praised for their eroticism, Guadagnino doesn't depict sexuality gratuitously. "Sex on screen can be the most boring thing to watch," he says. "In general, if the lovemaking is a way to investigate behaviour and how this behaviour reflects the characters, then I'm interested. But if it's only about the illustration of an act, I'm not interested."

Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri

A darkly comedic drama from Academy Award-winner Martin McDonagh. After months have passed without a culprit in her

daughter's murder case, Mildred Hayes (Academy Award-winner Frances McDormand) makes a bold move, commissioning three signs leading into her town with a controversial message directed at William Willoughby (Academy Award nominee Woody Harrelson), the town's revered chief of police. When his second-in-command officer Dixon (Sam Rockwell) - an immature mother's boy with a penchant for violence - gets involved, the battle between Mildred and Ebbing's law enforcement is only exacerbated.

The film is, says McDonagh, the most tragic he has written so far yet it is also a search for hope. "The starting place is quite sad, but there's a lot of comedy in it and hopefully it's quite moving in parts as well," he reflects. "I guess that's the way I see life. I see the sadness in certain aspects, but my tendency is always to try to temper that with the bright side, with humour, however black it may be, and with the struggle against hopelessness."

Lady Bird

Greta Gerwig reveals herself to be a bold new cinematic voice with her directorial debut, excavating both the humour and pathos in the turbulent bond between a mother and her teenage daughter. Christine 'Lady Bird' McPherson (Saoirse Ronan) fights against but is exactly like her wildly loving, deeply opinionated and strong-willed mom (Laurie Metcalf), a nurse working tirelessly to keep her family afloat after Lady Bird's father (Tracy Letts) loses his job. Set in Sacramento, California in 2002, amidst a rapidly shifting American economic landscape, *Lady Bird* is an affecting look at the relationships that shape us, the beliefs that define us, and the unmatched beauty of a place called home.

“Generally with films about teenage girls, the story centres around one boy: the prince charming, the answer to all of life’s problems. And I don’t find life to be like that at all,” says Gerwig. “Most women I know had infinitely beautiful, incredibly complicated relationships with their mothers in their teenage years. I wanted to make a film that put that at the centre, where at every moment you feel empathy for both characters. I never wanted one to be ‘right’ and the other to be ‘wrong’. I wanted each to be painfully failing to reach each other, and I wanted to reward their ultimate love at the end. To me, those are the most moving of love stories. The romance between a mother and daughter is one of the richest I know.”

Loving Vincent

If there’s one film that transcends its uniqueness, it’s Dorota Kobiela and Hugh Welchman’s *Loving Vincent*, the world’s first fully oil painted feature film that brings the paintings of Vincent van Gogh to life to tell his remarkable story.

Every one of the 65,000 frames of the film is an oil-painting hand-painted by 125 professional oil-painters who travelled from all across the world to the *Loving Vincent* studios in Poland and Greece to be a part of the production. As remarkable as Vincent’s brilliant paintings, is his passionate and ill-fated life, and mysterious death.

A masterful animated drama about the life of painter Vincent van Gogh, and in particular, the circumstances of his death.

Says Welchman and Kobiela: “We want audiences to feel moved by Vincent’s story and to come out with a desire to discover more about his work and his life. We wanted to offer up a new visual approach, and we hope that our audience will enjoy having seen something a bit different from most of the films they will see.”

24 Hours To Live

Ethan Hawke leads the international cast in this high-octane actioner penned by Zachary Dean and based on Ron Mita and Jim McClain's original script.



American action film *24 Hours To Live* shot in Cape Town

Daniel Dercksen 22 Feb 2018



It follows Hawke's career assassin who is given a chance at redemption after his employer brings him back to life temporarily, just after being killed on the job. Headline cast alongside Hawke includes Chinese actress Xu 'Summer' Qing, Paul Anderson, and Rutger Hauer.

Making his feature directorial debut is Brian Smrz, whose vast body of experience as a second unit director for major Hollywood productions including *X-Men: Apocalypse* and *Fantastic Four*.

Tosca

Puccini's melodrama about a volatile diva, a sadistic police chief, and an idealistic artist has offended and thrilled audiences for more than a century, and now The Met Opera's *Tosca* (from 24 February for limited screenings) presents a sumptuous new production. Soprano Sonya Yoncheva stars in the title role of the Met's new production of Puccini's *Tosca*. Tenor Vittorio Grigolo is Cavaradossi, baritone Željko Lučić is Scarpia, and Emmanuel Villaume conducts Sir David McVicar's sumptuous new staging. Don't miss the highly acclaimed production

A bonus for ardent fans is the intermission content that includes live interviews with stars Željko Lučić, Sonya Yoncheva, and Vittorio Grigolo, a discussion with Met Chorus Master Donald Palumbo, a feature on designer John MacFarlane's evocative sets and costumes, a visit to a live rehearsal of Rossini's Semiramide, which stars soprano Angela Meade, and sneak peak of the next Live in HD transmission, Donizetti's L'Elisir d'Amore (from 10 March).

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Daniel Dercksen has been a contributor for Lifestyle since 2012. As the driving force behind the successful independent training initiative The Writing Studio and a published film and theatre journalist of 40 years, teaching workshops in creative writing, playwriting and screenwriting throughout South Africa and internationally the past 22 years. Visit www.writingstudio.co.za

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