

## George Clooney, Brad Pitt, Daniel Craig, Angelina Jolie, Monica Bellucci among stars to sail into Venice Film Fest

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Venice, the city on water, may be an engineering marvel whose construction on lagoons and canals began in the fifth century. But actually, its fame came sailing after Shakespeare wrote his gripping play in 1596-7. The Merchant of Venice was romantic and intriguing, capturing hearts and catapulting the city to wondrous heights.

Interestingly, today Venice is not so much known for its Rialto Bridge, Saint Marks Square, or the gondolas as it is for its film festival, which runs every autumn. This year, the 81st edition will begin rolling on 28 August. And a carnival-like atmosphere will prevail for the 11 days of the festival, held on the island of Lido, just across the lagoon from mainland Venice.

Dozens of boats would bring in celebrities from around the world. A press report says that Lady Gaga, Joaquin Phoenix, Julianne Moore, Tilda Swinton, Angelina Jolie, Daniel Craig, Adrien Brody, Felicity Jones, Cate Blanchett, George Clooney, Brad Pitt, Monica Bellucci, Michael Keaton and Jenna Ortega will be among the talents who will walk the red carpet to showcase their movies. These have for some years now used the festival as a springboard for the Oscar campaigns. It is right to presume that the Academy Awards season begins with the Lido.

One of the highlights of the festival this year will be Todd Phillips' sequel to his 2019 Venice Golden Lion winner, *Joker 2: Folie à Deux*. The first, *Joker*, had Lady Gaga and Phoenix. The sequel will compete for the Golden Lion with a plot that will take off from where the first part ended to show Arthur Fleck (Phoenix) awaiting trial for the five murders he had committed. In prison, he would meet the perverted Harley Quinn (Lady Gaga).

Another Golden Lion competitor will be Luca Guadagnino's William S. Burroughs' adaptation, *Queer*, where Daniel Craig essays an American expat living in Mexico and trying to get over heroin addiction. Many of us would be curious to see how the former 007 would act in this work. The festival chief, Alberto Barbera, said Craig's was "the performance of his life."

Also part of the competition will be Pablo Larrain's Maria Callas biopic *Maria*, starring Angelina Jolie in the title role. She would portray the famed diva alongside Pierfrancesco Favino, Alba Rohrwacher, Haluk Bilginer, and Kodi Smit-McPhee. *Maria* follows the life story of the world's greatest opera singer during her final days in 1970s Paris.



This is the latest Larrain film to open in Venice after *El Conde* for which he won the Best Screenplay trophy. *Spencer*, starring Kristen Stewart as Princess Diana, and Jackie, with Natalie Portman as Kennedy Onassis, debuted at the festival. All three movies went on to clinch at least one Oscar nod.

We then have the Spanish master, Pedro Almodóvar (*Volter*, *All About My Mother*, *Strange Way of Life*), arriving at the Lido with his latest drama, *The Room Next Door*, starring Julianne Moore and Tilda Swinton. The director's *Parallel Mothers*, which premiered at Venice in 2021, got its lead star, Penelope Cruz, the best actress in the Volpi Cup. And she was magnificent as a single mother raising a child against so many odds.

Mexico's legend Alfonso Cuarón (*Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, *Great Expectations*, *Roma*) will be back in Venice with a *Disclaimer* made for Apple TV+ series with Cate Blanchett and Kevin Kline headlining it. Blanchett gets into the character of an investigative journalist trying to expose some of the darkest secrets.

Another television drama would be *M. Son of the Century*, chronicling Mussolini's power-packed years.

American actor and filmmaker Brady Corbet will also be on Lido with

*The Brutalist*, which chronicles 30 years in the life of László Tóth, a Hungarian-born Jewish architect who survived the Holocaust. Adrien Brody will play him.

Also on the festival's hot competition list is Australian director Justin Kurzel's *The Order*, starring Jude Law and Nicholas Hoult in a story about the titular white supremacist organisation that operated in the 1980s.

From the Netherlands, director Halina Reijn (*Bodies, Bodies, Bodies*) will launch his erotic thriller *Babygirl*, featuring Nicole Kidman, Antonio Banderas and Harris Dickinson. This will also play in competition.

Brazilian auteur Walter Salles (*The Motorcycle Diaries*, *On the Road*) will offer *I'm Still Here*, his first feature in over a decade. This will reunite Salles with his Oscar-nominated Central Station star, Fernanda Montenegro. *The I'm Still Here* film follows the true story of Eunice Paiva, a mother of five who takes to activism after her husband is captured by the military junta in Brazil in the 1960s.

The Jon Watts-directed action comedy *Wolfs* will follow George Clooney and Brad Pitt in this American adventure as they attempt to cover up a high-profile crime.

Legendary French helmer Claude Lelouch (*A Man and a Woman*) will fly

into Venice with his ensemble comedy, *Finalement*, about a man who takes a road trip that changes his life.

Italy has five entries in competition in different genres helmed by directors of different genders and generations.

There will be a couple of Arab titles: Tunisian director Mehdi M. Barsaoui's drama *Aïcha*, about a woman who flees from her small town life after surviving a bus accident, and Palestinian helmer Scandar Copti's *Happy Holidays*, set in modern-day Israel, where a minor accident in Jerusalem triggers a chain of events.

Egypt returns to the festival after more than 10 years with *Seeking Haven for Mr. Rambo*, a first feature by Khaled Mansour that talks about a young man forced to confront his fears and rediscover himself when he goes on a journey to save his dog and best friend.

The festival will kick off with Tim Burton's *Beetlejuice Beetlejuice*. *Beetlejuice Beetlejuice* is the helmer's follow-up to his 1988 comedy-horror classic, in which Michael Keaton returns as the foul-mouthed, shape-shifting ghoul. Winona Ryder, Catherine O'Hara, Justin Theroux, Monica Bellucci, Jenna Ortega and Willem Dafoe also star in this hotly anticipated opening title.

India is absent from this list. Yes, finally, it must be said. Barbera has done it again by not only picking some really hot titles but also retaining the festival as a launching pad for the Oscar race.

The festival will wind up on 7 September.

The writer is a senior movie critic and author who has covered the Venice Film Festival for over two decades. He will be back on the Lido this year.

### The full lineup is as follows:

#### COMPETITION

*The Room Next Door*, Pedro Almodóvar (Spain)  
*Campo di Battaglia*, Gianni Amelio (Italy)

*Leurs Enfants Après Eux*, Ludovic Boukherma, Zoran Boukherma (France)

*The Brutalist*, Brady Corbet (U.K.)

*The Quiet Son*, Delphine Coulin, Muriel Coulin (France)

*Vermiglio*, Maura Delpero (Italy, France, Belgium)

*Sicilian Letters*, Fabio Grassadonia, Antonio Piazza (Italy, France)

*Queer*, Luca Guadagnino (Italy, U.S.)

*Love*, Dag Johan Haugerud (Norway)

*April*, Dea Kulumbegashvili (Georgia, France, Italy)

*The Order*, Justin Kurzel (Canada)

*Maria*, Pablo Larrain (Italy, Germany)

*Trois Amies*, Emmanuel Mouret (France)

*Kill the Jockey*, Luis Ortega (Argentina, Spain)

*Joker: Folie à Deux*, Todd Phillips (U.S.)

*Babygirl*, Halina Reijn (U.S.)

*I'm Still Here*, Walter Salles (Brazil, France)

*Diva Futura*, Giulia Louise Steigerwalt (Italy)

*Harvest*, Athina Rachel Tsangari (U.K., Germany, Greece, France, U.S.)

*Youth – Homecoming*, Wang Bing (France, Luxembourg, Netherlands)

*Stranger Eyes*, Yeo Siew Hua (Singapore, Taipei, France, U.S.)

#### OUT OF COMPETITION — FICTION

*Beetlejuice Beetlejuice*, Tim Burton (U.S., U.K.) — Opening Film

*L'Orto Americano*, Pupi Avati (Italy) — Closing Film

*Il Tempo Che Ci Vuole*, Francesca Comencini (Italy, France)

*Phantomsia*, Lav Diaz (Philippines)

*Maldoror*, Fabrice Du Welz (Belgium, France)

*Broken Rage*, Takeshi Kitano (Japan)

*Baby Invasion*, Harmony Korine (U.S.)

*Cloud*, Kurosawa Kiyoshi (Japan)

*Finalement*, Claude Lelouch (France)

*Wolfs*, Jon Watts (U.S.)  
*Se Posso Permettermi Capito II*, Marco Bellocchio (Italy)  
*Allégorie Citadine*, Alice Rohrwacher, JR (France)

#### OUT OF COMPETITION — SERIES

*Disclaimer*, Alfonso Cuarón (U.K., U.S.)

*The New Years*, Rodrigo Sorogoyen Del Amo, Sandra Romero, David Martín De Los Santos (Spain)

*Families Like Ours*, Thomas Vinterberg (Denmark, France, Sweden, Czech Republic, Norway, Germany)

*M: Son of the Century*, Joe Wright (Italy, France)

#### OUT OF COMPETITION - NON-FICTION

*Apocalypse in the Tropics*, Petra Costa (Brazil)

*Bestiari*, Erbari, Lapidari, Massimo D'Anolfi, Martina Parenti (Italy, Switzerland)

*Why War*, Amos Gitai (Israel, France)

*2073*, Asif Kapadia (U.K.)

*One to One: John & Yoko*, Kevin Macdonald, Sam Rice Edwards (U.K.)

*Separated*, Errol Morris (U.S., Mexico)

*Israel Palestine on Swedish TV 1958-1989*, Göran Hugo Olsson (Sweden, Finland, Denmark)

*Russians at War*, Anastasia Trofimova (France, Canada)

*Twist/Things We Said Today*, Andrei Ujica (France, Romania)

*Songs of Slow Burning Earth*, Olha Zhurba (Ukraine, Denmark, Sweden)

*Riefenstahl*, Andres Veiel (Germany)

#### HORIZONS EXTRA

*September 5*, Tim Fehlbaum (Germany)

*Vittoria*, Alessandro Cassignoli, Casey Kauffman (Italy)

*Le Mohican*, Frédéric Farrucci (France)

*Seeking Haven for Mr. Rambo*, Khaled Mansour (Egypt, Saudi Arabia)

*La Storia Del Frank e Della Nina*, Paola Randi (Italy, Switzerland)

*The Witness*, Nader Saevir (Germany, Austria)

*After Party*, Vojtech Strakaty (Czech Republic)

to be continued...