

May December

May December is a 2023 American drama film directed by Todd Haynes from a screenplay by Samy Burch, based on a story by Burch and Alex Mechanik. It stars Natalie Portman as an actress who travels to meet and study the life of Gracie, the controversial woman (Julianne Moore) she is set to play in a film—a woman infamous for the 24-year-long relationship with her husband Joe (Charles Melton), which began when he was 13 years old and she was 36.^[5]

The film was announced in June 2021, with Portman and Moore joining the cast. Filming took place in mid-2022 in Savannah, Georgia. It premiered at the 76th Cannes Film Festival on May 20, 2023, where Netflix acquired the North American distribution rights.

May December was released in select theaters in the United States on November 17, 2023, before streaming on Netflix on December 1, 2023. It received critical acclaim and various accolades, including four nominations at the 81st Golden Globe Awards and a Best Original Screenplay nomination at the 96th Academy Awards, and was chosen by the American Film Institute as one of the top ten films of 2023.

Plot

In 2015, actress Elizabeth Berry arrives in Savannah, Georgia, to research her upcoming role in an independent film. Elizabeth will be playing Gracie Atherton-Yoo, who, in 1992 at the age of 36, was caught having sex with 13-year-old Korean-American Joe Yoo, a schoolmate of her son Georgie, at the pet store where they both worked. During a prison sentence, Gracie gave birth to Joe's child. 23 years later, Gracie and Joe are married with three children: Honor, who is at college, and twins Charlie and Mary, who are about to graduate from high school.

Elizabeth interviews Gracie and Joe about their relationship. Visiting the pet store where the couple met and worked, Elizabeth sees the stock room where Gracie and Joe were caught having sex and reenacts the scene alone. She speaks with Tom, Gracie's first husband, and Georgie, who is now a

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Release poster

Directed by	<u>Todd Haynes</u>
Screenplay by	<u>Samy Burch</u>
Story by	<u>Samy Burch</u> <u>Alex Mechanik</u>
Produced by	<u>Natalie Portman</u> <u>Sophie Mas</u> <u>Christine Vachon</u> <u>Pamela Koffler</u> <u>Grant S. Johnson</u> <u>Tyler W. Konney</u> <u>Jessica Elbaum</u> <u>Will Ferrell</u>
Starring	<u>Natalie Portman</u> <u>Julianne Moore</u> <u>Charles Melton</u>
Cinematography	<u>Christopher Blauvelt</u>
Edited by	<u>Affonso Gonçalves</u>
Music by	<u>Marcelo Zarvos</u>

musician, and her defense lawyer. They portray Gracie in varying ways, depicting her as naïve and passive, but also show how destructive her actions were.

Joe engages in a private text conversation with an unnamed friend who shares his hobby of rearing monarch butterflies. At one point, he proposes they take a vacation together, but she rebuffs him by reminding him that he is married.

Elizabeth participates in a Q&A at the twins' high school and discusses the intimacy actors and crew members feel when shooting a sex scene. When Elizabeth says she enjoys playing morally-ambiguous characters, Mary is visibly offended.

At home, Charlie shares a cannabis joint with Joe, who reveals to his son that he has never tried cannabis before. High, Joe has a breakdown and weeps in Charlie's arms.

The family, accompanied by Elizabeth, celebrate the twins' graduation. At the restaurant, they have an awkward encounter with Tom, Georgie, and Gracie's old family. Georgie proposes that Elizabeth get him a job as a music supervisor on the film in exchange for details about Gracie's life; he claims that he read Gracie's diary and discovered that her older brothers had sexually abused her. Georgie also threatens that if not given the job, he will disparage the film to the press when it is released. Elizabeth gets a ride home from Joe.

Elizabeth invites Joe to her accommodation, where he gives her a letter Gracie wrote him early in their relationship. The two have sex, and Elizabeth tells Joe that he still has time to start a new life. Joe leaves once she refers to his experiences as a "story", saying that story is "his life". Joe tearfully confronts Gracie about the start of their relationship, wondering whether he was "too young". Gracie insists he seduced her, and repeatedly asks who was really in control.

The morning of graduation, one of Joe's butterflies emerges from its chrysalis. Later, the whole family watches Charlie and Mary graduate while Joe weeps alone in the crowd. As Elizabeth prepares to leave, Gracie tells her that Georgie fabricated the story of abuse by her brothers.

On the set of the film, Elizabeth films multiple takes of a scene depicting Gracie seducing Joe at the pet store. While the director is satisfied, she asks to film another take, insisting that the scene is "getting more real".

Production companies	<u>Gloria Sanchez Productions</u> <u>MountainA</u> <u>Killer Films</u> Taylor & Dodge Project Infinity
Distributed by	<u>Netflix</u> (United States and Canada) Rocket Science ^[1] (International)
Release dates	May 20, 2023 (Cannes) November 17, 2023 (United States)
Running time	117 minutes ^[2]
Country	United States
Language	English
Budget	\$20 million ^[3]
Box office	\$5.3 million ^[4]

Cast

- Natalie Portman as Elizabeth
- Julianne Moore as Gracie
- Charles Melton as Joe Yoo
- Cory Michael Smith as Georgie
- Elizabeth Yu as Mary Atherton-Yoo

- [Gabriel Chung](#) as Charlie Atherton-Yoo
- [Piper Curda](#) as Honor Atherton-Yoo
- [D. W. Moffett](#) as Tom Atherton
- [Lawrence Arancio](#) as Morris Sperber

Production

Development

Screenwriter [Samy Burch](#) outlined the script with her husband, Alex Mechanik, and completed the screenplay on [Memorial Day](#), 2019. Producer [Jessica Elbaum](#) came onboard after reading the screenplay.^[6] In June 2021, it was announced that Portman and Moore were cast in the film.^[7] Portman recruited [Todd Haynes](#) to direct.^[6] In September 2022, Melton joined the cast.^[8] In January 2023, it was reported that [Piper Curda](#), [Elizabeth Yu](#), and [Gabriel Chung](#) had joined the cast.^[9]

Filming

[Principal photography](#) took place in [Savannah, Georgia](#),^[10] and wrapped after 23 days in November 2022.^{[11][12]} Haynes' longtime collaborator [Edward Lachman](#) was initially going to serve as cinematographer, but was replaced by [Christopher Blauvelt](#) after injuring his hip.^{[11][10]} The script, which is set in Savannah, was originally set in [Camden, Maine](#).^[13]

Haynes said the film is partly inspired by the [Ingmar Bergman](#) films *[Persona](#)* (1966) and *[Winter Light](#)* (1963).^[14] While not a direct adaptation, he also stated that the [Mary Kay Letourneau](#) scandal "became very, very helpful to get very specific about the research, and we learned things from that relationship".^{[15][16]}

Music

[Marcelo Zarvos](#)'s score for the film is an adaptation and reorchestration of [Michel Legrand](#)'s music for *[The Go-Between](#)*.^[14] Haynes originally played Legrand's score on set and during editing for inspiration until eventually the team "ended up embracing so many aspects of the original score that Marcelo adapted and added original music to it and then re-orchestrated it."^[17] Legrand was credited along with Zarvos.

Release

In February 2023, [Sky Cinema](#) acquired the UK distribution rights.^[18] The film was selected to compete for the [Palme d'Or](#) at the [76th Cannes Film Festival](#),^[19] where it premiered on May 20, 2023.^{[20][21]} In May 2023, [Netflix](#) acquired the North American distribution rights at the [Marché du Film](#) for \$11 million.^[1] The film also screened as the "Opening Night Film" at the [2023 New York Film Festival](#) on September 29.^[22]

The film was released in select U.S. theaters on November 17, 2023, before streaming on Netflix in the U.S. and Canada on December 1.^{[22][23]} It was released by Sky Cinema in the United Kingdom on December 8.^[24]

Reception

Critical response

May December received critical acclaim.^[a] On the review aggregator website Rotten Tomatoes, 91% of 317 critics' reviews are positive, with an average rating of 7.9/10. The website's consensus reads: "Swaddling its difficult fact-based story in a blanket of campy humor, *May December* is a seductively discomfiting watch."^[37] Metacritic, which uses a weighted average, assigned the film a score of 86 out of 100, based on 53 critics, indicating "universal acclaim".^[38]

In his review following its Cannes premiere, Peter Debruge of Variety called *May December* an "endlessly fascinating movie" and added, "As layered and infinitely open-to-interpretation as any of [Haynes's] films, it's also the most generous and direct [...] The potential for passion, transformation and subversion hangs heavy in the air".^[39] David Ehrlich of IndieWire called the film "a heartbreakingly sincere piece of high camp that teases real human drama from the stuff of tabloid sensationalism", and praised Melton's "well-modulated and eventually rather moving performance" and Moore's "predictably sensational, soft-hard performance".^[40] The Guardian's Peter Bradshaw found the film "amusing and elegant [...] delivered with a cool, shrewd precision by Todd Haynes" and described Portman and Moore's performances as containing "a potent frenziedness".^[41]

Bilge Ebiri of Vulture called *May December* "very funny and light on its feet, but also a deeply uncomfortable movie", writing that Haynes "uses the trappings of camp to draw attention to the disconnect between what's happening onscreen and our response to it", and concluding: "It feels at times like the director himself [is] looking for the right tone with which to tell this story. He doesn't know exactly how to feel about all this. So he feels all the things, and makes sure we do, too."^[42]

Rolling Stone's CT Jones praised Melton's performance, noting his skill and physicality in the role. "It's an inscrutable well of interpersonal grievances, power imbalances, and history, a perfect breeding ground for sharp work from screen icons Portman and Moore, the latter in her fifth film with Haynes," they wrote. "But while the two are competing to see how much cringe and humor one can conceivably fit into a movie about sexual assault and grooming, there's Melton off to the side, quietly stealing the show."^[43]

Accolades

May December was ranked tenth in Sight and Sound's list of the 50 best films of 2023, out of 363 films nominated by 106 British and international participants.^[44] Some critics opined that there was an omission of acting nominations for Portman, Melton and Moore at the 96th Academy Awards,^{[45][46][47]} despite being nominated at other major awards associations.^{[48][49]} EJ Dickson of Rolling Stone cited the Academy's pattern to exclude actors of Asian descent and their lack of acknowledgement to performers under the age of 40 as the reasons Melton was not nominated.^[50]

Award / Film Festival	Date of ceremony	Category	Recipient(s)	Result	Ref.
<u>AACTA International Awards</u>	<u>February 10, 2024</u>	<u>Best International Supporting Actress</u>	Julianne Moore	Nominated	[51]
<u>AARP Movies for Grownups Awards</u>	<u>January 17, 2024</u>	<u>Best Supporting Actress</u>		Nominated	[52] [53]
<u>Academy Awards</u>	<u>March 10, 2024</u>	<u>Best Original Screenplay</u>	Samy Burch, Alex Mechanik	Nominated	[54]
<u>American Film Institute</u>	<u>December 7, 2023</u>	Top 10 Films	<i>May December</i>	Won ^[b]	[55]
<u>Alliance of Women Film Journalists</u>	January 3, 2024	Best Actor in a Supporting Role	Charles Melton	Nominated	[56]
		Best Screenplay, Original	Samy Burch	Nominated	
		Best Woman Screenwriter		Nominated	
		Grand Dame Award for Defying Agism	<u>Julianne Moore</u>	Nominated	
		Most Daring Performance		Nominated	
<u>Artios Awards</u>	<u>March 7, 2024</u>	Outstanding Achievement in Casting – Feature Studio or Independent (Drama)	Laura Rosenthal, Meagan Lewis, Rebecca Carfagna, Kimberly Ostroy	Nominated	[57]
<u>Astra Film and Creative Arts Awards</u>	<u>January 6, 2024</u>	Best Supporting Actress	Julianne Moore	Nominated	[58]
		Best Supporting Actor	<u>Charles Melton</u>	Nominated	
<u>Austin Film Critics Association</u>	<u>January 10, 2024</u>	Best Supporting Actor		Nominated	[59]
		Best Supporting Actress	Julianne Moore	Nominated	
		<u>Best Original Screenplay</u>	Samy Burch and Alex Mechanik	Nominated	
<u>Boston Society of Film Critics</u>	<u>December 10, 2023</u>	<u>Best Film</u>	<i>May December</i>	Runner-up ^[c]	[60]
		Best Director	<u>Todd Haynes</u>	Runner-up ^[d]	
		<u>Best Actress</u>	<u>Natalie Portman</u>	Runner-up ^[e]	
		<u>Best Supporting Actor</u>	Charles Melton	Runner-up ^[f]	
		<u>Best Original Screenplay</u>	<u>Samy Burch</u>	Runner-up ^[g]	
<u>Cannes Film Festival</u>	<u>May 27, 2023</u>	<u>Palme d'Or</u>	Todd Haynes	Nominated	[19]

<u>Capri Hollywood International Film Festival</u>	January 2, 2024	Breakthrough Actor	Charles Melton	Won	[61] [62]
<u>Celebration of Cinema & Television</u>	December 4, 2023	Breakthrough Performance Award		Won	[63]
<u>Chicago Film Critics Association</u>	December 12, 2023	<u>Best Picture</u>	Jessica Elbaum, Will Ferrell, Grant S. Johnson, Pamela Koffler, Tyler W. Konney, Sophie Mas, Natalie Portman, Christine Vachon	Nominated	[64]
		<u>Best Director</u>	Todd Haynes	Nominated	
		<u>Best Actress</u>	Natalie Portman	Nominated	
		<u>Best Supporting Actor</u>	Charles Melton	Won	
		<u>Best Supporting Actress</u>	Julianne Moore	Nominated	
		<u>Best Original Screenplay</u>	Samy Burch	Won	
		<u>Most Promising Performer</u>	Charles Melton	Won	
<u>Critics' Choice Movie Awards</u>	January 14, 2024	<u>Best Supporting Actor</u>	Charles Melton	Nominated	[48]
		<u>Best Supporting Actress</u>	Julianne Moore	Nominated	
		<u>Best Original Screenplay</u>	Samy Burch	Nominated	
<u>Costume Designers Guild Awards</u>	February 21, 2024	<u>Excellence in Contemporary Film</u>	April Napier	Nominated	[65]
<u>Dallas–Fort Worth Film Critics Association</u>	December 18, 2023	<u>Best Film</u>	<i>May December</i>	10th Place	[66]
		<u>Best Supporting Actor</u>	Charles Melton	2nd Place	
		<u>Best Supporting Actress</u>	Julianne Moore	5th Place	
<u>Dublin Film Critics Circle</u>	December 19, 2023	<u>Best Film</u>	<i>May December</i>	5th Place	[67]
		<u>Best Actor</u>	Charles Melton	9th Place	
		<u>Best Actress</u>	Julianne Moore	5th Place	
			Natalie Portman	6th Place	
		<u>Best Screenplay</u>	Samy Burch	3rd Place	
<u>Florida Film Critics Circle</u>	December 21, 2023	<u>Best Picture</u>	<i>May December</i>	Runner-up	[68][69]
		<u>Best Director</u>	Todd Haynes	Won	
		<u>Best Actress</u>	Natalie Portman	Nominated	
		<u>Best Supporting Actor</u>	Charles Melton	Won	
		<u>Breakout Award</u>		Runner-up	
		<u>Best Supporting Actress</u>	Julianne Moore	Nominated	

		<u>Best Original Screenplay</u>	Samy Burch	Nominated	
		Golden Orange	Alex Mechanik	Runner-up	
<u>Georgia Film Critics Association</u>	January 5, 2024	Best Picture	<i>May December</i>	Nominated	[70] [71]
		Best Supporting Actor	Charles Melton	Runner-up	
		<u>Best Original Screenplay</u>	Samy Burch	Nominated	
		Oglethorpe Award for Excellence in Georgia Cinema	Todd Haynes and Samy Burch	Won	
<u>Golden Globe Awards</u>	January 7, 2024	<u>Best Motion Picture – Musical or Comedy</u>	<i>May December</i>	Nominated	[49]
		<u>Best Actress – Motion Picture Musical or Comedy</u>	Natalie Portman	Nominated	
		<u>Best Supporting Actor – Motion Picture</u>	Charles Melton	Nominated	
		<u>Best Supporting Actress – Motion Picture</u>	Julianne Moore	Nominated	
<u>Gotham Awards</u>	November 27, 2023	<u>Best Screenplay</u>	Samy Burch and Alex Mechanik	Nominated	[72]
		<u>Outstanding Supporting Performance</u>	Charles Melton	Won	[73]
<u>Independent Spirit Awards</u>	February 25, 2024	<u>Best Film</u>	Jessica Elbaum, Will Ferrell, Grant S. Johnson, Pamela Koffler, Tyler W. Konney, Sophie Mas, Natalie Portman, Christine Vachon	Nominated	[74]
		<u>Best Director</u>	Todd Haynes	Nominated	
		<u>Best Lead Performance</u>	Natalie Portman	Nominated	
		<u>Best Supporting Performance</u>	Charles Melton	Nominated	
		<u>Best First Screenplay</u>	Samy Burch & Alex Mechanik	Won	
<u>IndieWire Critics Poll</u>	December 11, 2023	Best Film	<i>May December</i>	5th Place	[75]
		Best Director	Todd Haynes	5th Place	
		Best Performance	Charles Melton	5th Place	
		Best Screenplay	Samy Burch	1st Place	
<u>Los Angeles Film Critics Association</u>	December 10, 2023	<u>Best Screenplay</u>	Samy Burch	Runner-up	[76]
<u>Middleburg Film Festival</u>	October 22, 2023	Visionary Director Award	Todd Haynes	Won	[77]
<u>Mill Valley Film Festival</u>	October 16, 2023	Lifetime Achievement: Collaboration	Todd Haynes and Christine Vachon	Won	[78]

Montclair Film Festival	October 30, 2023	Director Award	Todd Haynes	Won	[79]
National Society of Film Critics	January 6, 2024	Best Director			2nd Place ^[h]
		Best Supporting Actor	Charles Melton	Won	
		Best Screenplay	Samy Burch	Won	
New York Film Critics Circle	November 30, 2023	Best Supporting Actor	Charles Melton	Won	[81]
		Best Screenplay	Samy Burch	Won	
New York Film Critics Online	December 15, 2023	Top 10 Films	May December	Won ^[i]	[82]
		Breakthrough Performer	Charles Melton	Won	
People's Choice Awards	February 18, 2024	The Movie Performance of the Year			Nominated
			Natalie Portman	Nominated	
San Diego Film Critics Society	December 19, 2023	Best Supporting Actor	Charles Melton	Nominated	[84]
		Best Supporting Actress	Julianne Moore	Nominated	
		Best Original Screenplay	Samy Burch	Nominated	
San Francisco Bay Area Film Critics Circle	January 9, 2024	Best Supporting Actor	Charles Melton	Nominated	[85]
		Best Original Screenplay	Samy Burch	Nominated	
Santa Barbara International Film Festival	February 10, 2024	Virtuoso Award	Charles Melton	Won	[86]
Satellite Awards	February 18, 2024	Best Motion Picture – Drama	May December	Nominated	[87]
		Best Actress in a Motion Picture – Drama	Natalie Portman	Nominated	
		Best Actor in a Supporting Role	Charles Melton	Nominated	
		Best Actress in a Supporting Role	Julianne Moore	Nominated	
		Best Original Screenplay	Samy Burch	Nominated	
Seattle Film Critics Society	January 8, 2024	Best Picture of the Year	May December	Nominated	[88]
		Best Actor in a Supporting Role	Charles Melton	Won	
		Best Screenplay	Samy Burch	Nominated	
Set Decorators Society of America Awards	February 13, 2024	Best Achievement in Décor/Design of a Contemporary Feature Film	Jess Royal and Sam Lisenco	Nominated	[89]
St. Louis Film Critics Association	December 17, 2023	Best Film	May December	Nominated	[90]

		<u>Best Director</u>	Todd Haynes	Nominated	
		<u>Best Actress</u>	Natalie Portman	Nominated	
		<u>Best Supporting Actor</u>	Charles Melton	Runner-up	
		<u>Best Supporting Actress</u>	Julianne Moore	Nominated	
		<u>Best Score</u>	Marcelo Zarvos	Runner-up	
<u>Toronto Film Critics Association</u>	<u>December 17, 2023</u>	<u>Best Supporting Performance</u>	Charles Melton	Runner-up ^[j]	[91]
		<u>Best Breakthrough Performance</u>		Runner-up ^[k]	
<u>Variety & Golden Globe's Breakthrough Artist Awards</u>	<u>May 19, 2023</u>	<u>Breakthrough Artist Award</u>	Charles Melton	Honoree	[92]
<u>Washington D.C. Area Film Critics Association Awards</u>	<u>December 10, 2023</u>	<u>Best Supporting Actor</u>	Charles Melton	Won	[93]
<u>Women Film Critics Circle</u>	<u>December 18, 2023</u>	<u>Best Actor</u>		Runner-up	[94]
		<u>Best Supporting Actress</u>	Julianne Moore	Runner-up	
<u>Writers Guild of America Awards</u>	<u>April 14, 2024</u>	<u>Best Original Screenplay</u>	Samy Burch	Nominated	[95]

Notes

- Attributed to multiple references:^{[25][26][27][28][29][30][31][32][33][34][35][36]}
- Shared with *American Fiction*, *Barbie*, *The Holdovers*, *Killers of the Flower Moon*, *Maestro*, *Oppenheimer*, *Past Lives*, *Poor Things*, and *Spider-Man: Across the Spider-Verse*
- Shared with *The Zone of Interest*.
- Shared with Christopher Nolan for *Oppenheimer*.
- Shared with Emma Stone for *Poor Things* and Sandra Hüller for *Anatomy of a Fall*.
- Shared with Mark Ruffalo for *Poor Things* and Robert Downey Jr. for *Oppenheimer*.
- Shared with Nicole Holofcener for *You Hurt My Feelings*.
- Tied with Christopher Nolan for *Oppenheimer*.
- Presented to multiple films.
- Shared with Robert De Niro for *Killers of the Flower Moon*, Robert Downey Jr. for *Oppenheimer*, and Glenn Howerton and *BlackBerry*.
- Shared with Dominic Sessa for *The Holdovers*.

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External links

- *May December* (<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt13651794/>) at IMDb
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 - *May December* (<https://www.metacritic.com/movie/may-december>) at Metacritic
 - *May December* (<https://www.netflix.com/title/81702955>) on Netflix
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