

Tár

Tár is a 2022 psychological drama film written and directed by Todd Field. Cate Blanchett stars as Lydia Tár, a world-renowned conductor facing accusations of misconduct. The supporting cast includes Nina Hoss, Noémie Merlant, Sophie Kauer, Julian Glover, Allan Corduner, and Mark Strong. *Tár* premiered at the 79th Venice International Film Festival in September 2022, where Blanchett won the Volpi Cup for Best Actress. It had a limited theatrical release in the United States on October 7, 2022, before a wide release on October 28 through Focus Features.^[7]

Tár received critical acclaim, especially for Blanchett's performance and Field's screenplay and direction. It became the fourth film in history to be named the best of the year by the New York Film Critics Circle, the Los Angeles Film Critics Association, the London Film Critics' Circle as well as the National Society of Film Critics.^[8] It was named the year's best film by more critics than any other film released in 2022.^{[9][10]} At the 95th Academy Awards, *Tár* was nominated for six awards, including Best Picture and Best Director. Blanchett won Best Actress at the BAFTAs, Golden Globes, and Critics' Choice Movie Awards and was nominated at the Academy Awards and Screen Actors Guild Awards.

Plot

Lydia Tár is chief conductor of an orchestra in Berlin.^[a] She relies on Francesca, her personal assistant, to handle her schedule. While being interviewed by Adam Gopnik at *The New Yorker Festival*, Lydia promotes her upcoming live recording of Mahler's Fifth Symphony and book *Tár on Tár*. She meets with Eliot Kaplan, an investment banker and amateur conductor who co-founded the Accordion Foundation with Lydia to support aspiring female conductors. They discuss technique, replacing Lydia's assistant conductor Sebastian, and filling a vacant cello position in Berlin.

As a guest lecturer, Lydia holds a masterclass at Juilliard. She challenges a student named Max after they dismiss composer Bach as being a white heterosexual man, encouraging students to focus on the music, as opposed to immutable aspects of identity. Lydia anonymously receives a first edition of Vita

Tár



Theatrical release poster

Directed by	Todd Field
Written by	Todd Field
Produced by	Todd Field <p>Alexandra Milchan</p> Scott Lambert
Starring	Cate Blanchett <p>Noémie Merlant</p> Nina Hoss <p>Sophie Kauer</p> Julian Glover <p>Allan Corduner</p> Mark Strong
Cinematography	Florian Hoffmeister ^[1]
Edited by	Monika Willi ^[2]
Music by	Hildur Guðnadóttir ^[3]
Production companies	Standard Film Company

Sackville-West's 1923 novel *Challenge*. She tears out the title page, with a damning dedication written in *Romani* and embellished with a handdrawn *kené pattern*, then throws it and the book away.

Lydia flies back to Berlin, where she lives with her wife Sharon (who is *concertmaster* of the orchestra) and their adopted daughter Petra. Before a *blind audition* for the cello position, Lydia spots a young Russian candidate, Olga Metkina, in the bathroom. Lydia changes her scorecard to ensure Olga a spot in the orchestra and grants her a soloist position in the companion piece, *Edward Elgar's Cello Concerto*. Lydia's attraction to Olga causes her relationships with Francesca and Sharon to grow strained.

Krista Taylor is a promising young musician who has been *blacklisted* after getting on the bad side of her former mentor, Lydia. After sending desperate emails to Francesca, Krista kills herself and Krista's parents plan to sue. Lydia instructs Francesca to delete the emails and retain a lawyer. Lydia informs Sebastian of his replacement. Incensed, he indicates the orchestra is aware of her favoritism and that it suggests abusive behavior. Due to Sebastian's accusations, Lydia decides to not promote Francesca to assistant conductor.

Lydia is haunted by an increasing *sensitivity to sound*, vivid surreal nightmares, daytime hallucinations, chronic pain, and enigmatic patterned scribbles resembling those Krista once made. While jogging in the park, Lydia hears a screaming woman in the distance. While trying to complete a composition "For Petra", she is disturbed by the sound of a medical device next door, where her neighbor is caring for her dying mother. A manipulatively edited cellphone video of Lydia's Juilliard class goes viral and an article accusing her of sexual predation appears in the *New York Post*. Lydia urgently tries to reach Francesca who has resigned from her position and is now working with Krista's lawyers on their deposition. Furious, Lydia breaks into Francesca's home to find that it is completely empty and abandoned minus the proofs to Lydia's book *Tár on Tár* which Francesca renamed *Rat on Rat*. Lydia, accompanied by Olga, returns to New York City to attend the deposition in the lawsuit of Krista's parents and to promote her book; they are met by protestors. During the deposition, the plaintiffs ask Lydia about incriminating emails between Lydia and Krista which Francesca provided.

In Berlin, Lydia is removed as conductor due to the controversy. Furious over the allegations and Lydia's lack of communication, Sharon bars her from seeing their daughter. Lydia retreats to her old studio and grows increasingly depressed and deranged. She sneaks into the live recording she was supposed to conduct and tackles her replacement, Eliot. Advised to lie low by her management agency, she returns to her modest childhood home on *Staten Island*, where certificates of achievement bearing her birth name, Linda Tarr, hang on the wall. She tears up watching an old *VHS* of *Young People's Concerts* in which *Leonard Bernstein* discusses the meaning of music. Her brother Tony arrives and admonishes her for forgetting her roots.

	EMJAG Productions
Distributed by	<i>Focus Features</i> (United States) <i>Universal Pictures</i> (international)
Release dates	September 1, 2022 (Venice) October 7, 2022 (United States) March 2, 2023 (Germany)
Running time	158 minutes
Countries	United States Germany
Language	English
Budget	\$25 million ^[4]
Box office	\$29.2 million ^{[5][6]}

Sometime later, Lydia finds work conducting in the Philippines. Seeking a massage, the hotel concierge sends her to a brothel fronting as a massage parlor; the young women sit in a semicircle with numbers on their robes. A woman wearing the number 5, the same number as a famous symphony Lydia intended to play before her fall from grace, looks directly at Lydia, and Lydia rushes outside to vomit. She conducts the score for the video game series Monster Hunter in front of an audience of cosplayers.

Cast in order of appearance

- Cate Blanchett as Lydia Tár, a world-famous composer-conductor^[11]
- Noémie Merlant as Francesca Lentini, Lydia's assistant^[12]
- Adam Gopnik as himself, Lydia's interviewer at The New Yorker Festival^[13]
- Sylvia Flote as Krista Taylor, a former member of Lydia's fellowship program
- Sydney Lemmon as Whitney Reese, a fan of Lydia
- Mark Strong as Eliot Kaplan, an investment banker, amateur conductor, and manager of Lydia's fellowship program
- Zethphan Smith-Gneist as Max, a Juilliard student^[14]
- Alec Baldwin (voice only) as himself, interviewing Lydia on his podcast Here's the Thing
- Nina Hoss as Sharon Goodnow, a concertmaster and Lydia's wife^[15]
- Mila Bogojevic as Petra, Lydia and Sharon's daughter
- Julian Glover as Andris Davis, Lydia's predecessor
- Allan Corduner as Sebastian Brix, Lydia's assistant conductor
- Sophie Kauer as Olga Metkina, a young Russian cellist^[16]
- Lee Sellars as Tony Tarr, Lydia's brother



Nina Hoss, Noémie Merlant, Todd Field, Sophie Kauer & Cate Blanchett at the 79th Mostra Internazionale d'Arte Cinematografica della Biennale di Venezia

Production

It was announced in April 2021 that Blanchett would star in and executive-produce the film, which would be written and directed by Todd Field.^{[17][18]} In a statement accompanying the teaser trailer in August 2022, Field said that he wrote the script for Blanchett, and that he would not have made the film if she had declined it.^[19] In September 2021, Nina Hoss and Noémie Merlant joined the cast, and Hildur Guðnadóttir became the film's composer.^[20]

Filming began in August 2021 in Berlin.^[21] In an interview with The Guardian in October, Mark Strong revealed that he had finished filming scenes for the film.^[22] In November, it was reported that Sophie Kauer, Julian Glover, Allan Corduner and



The Dresden Philharmonic was used as a stand-in for Lydia Tár's Berlin orchestra.

Sylvia Flote had joined the cast.^[7] (Kauer is a British-German classical cellist who studied at the Royal Academy of Music.)^[23] All diegetic music was recorded live on-set, including Blanchett's piano playing, Kauer's cello, and the Dresden Philharmonic's performances.^{[24][25]}

Release

Tár had its world premiere at the 79th Venice International Film Festival on September 1, 2022,^[26] and had its first North American screening at the 49th Telluride Film Festival on September 3, 2022.^[27] It had a limited theatrical release on October 7, 2022, then expanded to wide release on October 28.^{[28][7]}

Music

A concept album was released on October 21, 2022, featuring Guðnadóttir's score with the London Contemporary Orchestra conducted by Robert Ames, as well as a rehearsal of Gustav Mahler's Fifth Symphony with Blanchett conducting the Dresden Philharmonic. Cellist Sophie Kauer plays Elgar's Cello Concerto on the album, backed by the London Symphony Orchestra conducted by Natalie Murray Beale.^[29] For the week ending November 5, 2022, the *Tár* concept album topped Billboard magazine's Traditional Classical Albums at number one, ahead of albums by the actual Berlin Philharmonic.^[30]

John Mauceri served as consultant on Field's script, helping inform the tenor and accuracy of Lydia Tár's comments on classical music and musicians.^[31]

Reception

Box office

Tár grossed \$6.8 million in the United States and Canada, and \$22.4 million in other territories, for a worldwide total of \$29.2 million.^{[6][5]}

In the United States and Canada, it made \$158,620 from four theaters in its opening weekend. The \$39,655 per-screen average was the second highest of 2022 for a limited release. In its second weekend the film made \$330,030 from 36 theaters. In its third weekend it made \$500,035 from 141 theaters, and there was speculation in the trades that *Tár* was an example that there was still a place for "adult-minded fare".^{[32][33][34]} However, once *Tár* expanded to 1,087 theaters in its fourth weekend, leaving the limited specialty house run for the multiplex, it made only \$1.02 million, finishing 10th.^[35] In its second week of wide release, it made \$729,605 (marking a drop of 30%).^[36]

Some commentators attributed the poor U.S. domestic box office performance to the film's subject matter alienating a general audience,^[37] while others noted a larger trend in U.S. domestic art houses, 40% of which had permanently shuttered during the COVID-19 pandemic, struggling to regain their core 40–70 year-old audience, an audience more prone to health concerns and still hesitant to return to the cinema.^{[38][39]} The New York Times argued that the \$25 million production budget of the film^[40] "plus marketing costs" was not justified, as *Tár*, and similar highbrow films from established filmmakers like Paul

Thomas Anderson's *Licorice Pizza*, Guillermo del Toro's *Nightmare Alley*, and Steven Spielberg's *The Fabelmans*, "failed to find an audience big enough to justify their costs".^[41] However, *Tár* performed stronger than expected overseas, taking in 78% of its overall box-office.^[42]

Home media

The film was released for VOD on November 15, 2022, followed by a Blu-ray, DVD, and 4K UHD release on December 20.^[43] By March 9, 2023, according to Samba TV, the film had been streamed on Peacock in 458,000 households in the US since the Oscar nomination announcement on January 24. JustWatch also reported it to be, by February 21, the third most-streamed Best Picture nominee in Canada.^{[44][45]}

Critical response

On Rotten Tomatoes, 91% of 348 critics' reviews are positive, with an average rating of 8.3/10. The website's consensus reads, "Led by the soaring melody of Cate Blanchett's note-perfect performance, *Tár* riffs brilliantly on the discordant side of fame-fueled power."^[46] Metacritic, which uses a weighted average, assigned the film a score of 93 out of 100, based on 59 critics, indicating "universal acclaim".^[47]

Owen Gleiberman in his Venice Film Festival *Daily Variety* review wrote:

Let me say right up front: It's the work of a master filmmaker ... Field's script is dazzling in its conversational flow, its insider dexterity, its perception of how power in the world actually works ... *Tár* is not a judgement so much as a statement you can make your own judgment about. The statement is: We're in a new world.^[48]

A. O. Scott of *The New York Times* writing from the Telluride Film Festival and later from the New York Film Festival stated:

I'm not sure I've ever seen a movie quite like *Tár*. Field balances Apollonian restraint with Dionysian frenzy. *Tár* is meticulously controlled and also scarily wild. Field finds a new way of posing the perennial question about separating the artist from the art, a question that he suggests can only be answered by another question: are you crazy? We don't care about *Tár* because she's an artist. We care about her because she's art.^{[49][50]}

Justin Chang for the *Los Angeles Times* regarded the film as:

"Both a superb character study and a highly persuasive piece of world building", stating that the director's "storytelling draws no artificial distinction between the big and the small, the important and the mundane; everything we see and hear matters."^[51] *Tár* is irreducible, and it is great."^[52]



Cate Blanchett garnered widespread critical acclaim for her performance as Lydia Tár, earning a nomination for the Academy Award for Best Actress.

Alissa Wilkinson, writing for Vox, observed:

"Not to be hyperbolic, but it might be perfect. Todd Field has tuned his themes so brilliantly. You can't just half-watch *Tár*, it demands your full attention. That's the mark of good art, but it's a discipline so many contemporary films aren't willing to demand from audiences. And if you're honest with yourself, you don't just watch *Tár*; it watches you, too."^[53]

Reviewing the film for The Hollywood Reporter, David Rooney wrote:

Tár marks yet another career peak for Blanchett—many are likely to argue her greatest—and a fervent reason to hope it's not sixteen more years before Field gives us another feature. It's a work of genius.^[54]

Anthony Lane of The New Yorker stated:

To what extent she is a proven predator; how much she deserves to be preyed upon, in turn, by the gluttons of public indignation; and why, despite everything, she should enjoy our lingering sympathy in a way that a middle-aged man in her position would not: such issues will, no doubt, be aired and contested in due course. Field is wise enough to reserve judgment. It would be dead wrong, though, to consider *Tár* as a kind of op-ed made flesh.^[55]

Lane's colleague Richard Brody disagreed and argued in his capsule review that *Tár* was:

"a regressive film that takes bitter aim at so-called cancel culture and lampoons so-called identity politics" and laments Field's "absence of style" in filming the music. He accuses the film of "conservative button-pushing" with a narrow aesthetic, failing to achieve dramatic unity.^[56]

Additional reactions

Martin Scorsese presenting Field with the 2022 New York Film Critics Circle Awards Best Film of the Year, said,

For so long now, so many of us see films that pretty much let us know where they're going ... I mean, they take us by the hand and, even if it's disturbing at times, sort of comfort us along the way that it will be all okay by the end. Now this is insidious, as one can get lulled into this and ultimately get used to it, leading those of us who've experienced cinema in the past – as much more than that – to become despairing of the future of the art form, especially for younger generations. But that's on dark days. The clouds lifted when I experienced Todd's film, *Tár*. What you've done, Todd – is that the very fabric of the movie you created doesn't allow this. All the aspects of cinema and the film that you've used, attest to this ... conveyed through a masterful mise-en-scène, as controlled, precise, dangerous, precipitous angles and edges geometrically kind of chiseled into wonderful frame compositions. The limits of the frame itself, and the provocation of measured long takes all reflecting the brutal architecture of her soul – *Tár's* soul.^[57]

Paul Thomas Anderson presenting Field with the Director Medallion at the 75th annual DGA Awards said,

Every detail matters in this film. Nothing is not deliberate or full of intention. It's directed with such perfectly controlled mayhem and glee by Todd, it's really hard not to drool as another director. He made a film which for some years was considered a very dirty word, he made an *art* film. But it's art that's not fussy or pretentious. Just razor-sharp, pitch black, and hilarious. A very focused mirror held up to some of the worst of our human behaviors. It's also a blast.^[58]

In an interview with *The Sunday Times*, conductor Marin Alsop shared her dislike of the film, calling it "anti-woman", saying "I was offended: I was offended as a woman, I was offended as a conductor, I was offended as a lesbian. To have an opportunity to portray a woman in that role and to make her an abuser – for me that was heartbreaking."^[59] In response, Blanchett told BBC Radio 4, the film was a "meditation on power, and power is genderless", and that while her character shares similarities with Alsop, it is a complete work of fiction.^[60]

Writing in *The Guardian*, conductor Alice Farnham thanked Blanchett, Field, and the film for "taking up the baton for female conductors", and for normalising their image.^[61] Critic Emily Bootle also defended the film in the *i* newspaper writing: "This is a film about power [but] sometimes we have to tolerate grey areas."^[62] Film critics Mark Kermode and Simon Mayo also disagreed with the interpretation that *Tár* is "anti-woman."^[63]

Writing for *Time*, Stephanie Zacharek went further: "*Tár* doesn't offer anything as comfortable as redemption, and it asks us to fall in love, at least a little, with a tyrant. ... Lydia Tár ... knows that the power of a question is greater than that of a slogan."^[64]

Music professor Ian Pace discussed the issue in *The Conversation*: "It would be rash to assume that such a figure could never act in a predatory and exploitative manner. This is not just an issue of identity, but power and the opportunities it provides for the reckless."^[65] Conductor Don Baton (a pen name) in *City Journal* agreed.^[66]

Film critic John McDonald for the *Australian Financial Review* wrote: "Had it been a male conductor, the story would have been a cliché. Had it been a celebration of female power, it would have been no less superficial ... Field has taken the 'Maestro myth' that portrays the conductor as a kind of hypermale and shown that the same issues may apply to a woman."^{[67][68]} Several other conductors and musicians wrote in defense of the film.^[69]

In her critique for *The New York Review of Books* titled "The Instrumentalist", prize-winning novelist and professor Zadie Smith commended Cate Blanchett's performance,^[70] and the classroom scene at the Juilliard School was described by A. O. Scott as "a mini-course in the dos and don'ts of contemporary pedagogy."^{[71][72]}

Critic Amanda Hess wrote in *The New York Times*, "The online cancellation of an artistic giant can be a tedious subject, but in *Tár*, it acquires sneaky complications ... *Tár* offers up a work into which we can sublimate our own Schadenfreude and sympathy for abusers. Thanks to Blanchett's luminous performance and Field's puzzle-box storytelling, we are freed to obsess."^[73]

Film critic Howie Movshovitz,^[74] critic and essayist Philippa Snow (*ArtReview*),^[75] Murielle Joudet (*Le Monde*)^[76] and Guillaume Orignac (*Cahiers du Cinéma*) draw attention to the film's creative openness, allowing audiences to draw their own conclusions about its significance and meaning.^[77]

The New York Times columnist Michelle Goldberg argued that *Tár* is "a film about cancel culture, making it the rare piece of art that looks squarely at this social phenomenon that has roiled so many of America's meaning-making institutions ... *Tár* demonstrates that all this flux and uncertainty is very fertile territory for art. Hopefully its success – many are predicting it will win a Best Picture Oscar – will encourage others to take on similarly thorny and unsettled issues. Hysteria about cancel culture can encourage artistic timidity by overstating the cost of probing taboos. In truth, there's a hunger out there for work that takes the strangeness of this time and turns it into something that transcends polemic."^[78] Similarly, Ara Osterweil in *Art Forum* wrote, "Todd Field's brilliant character study (...) suggest(s) that the ritual excommunications of cancel culture may be as exaggerated as the generic fantasies enacted by *Tár*'s gamer audience."^[79]

Austrian musicologist and anthropologist Bernd Brabec alleged that part of Lydia *Tár*'s biography read aloud by Adam Gopnik mines his CV.^{[80][81]} In response, Brabec wrote an open letter^[82] to director Todd Field. In the letter, Brabec takes offence at the film mirroring particulars of his academic background and criticizes what he characterized as unfortunately minimal and shallow treatment of the Shipibo-Konibo people in the plot of the film. However, Amanda M. Smith, associate professor of Latin American and Culture at the University of California wrote in *ReVista*, the *Harvard Review* of Latin America, "Shipibo-Konibo cosmovision is not merely decorative in the film. It organizes the narrative's internal conflicts and reveals *Tár* as a tale of shamanic justice in a world where the Global North continues to take from the Global South."^[83]

Because the film was released in the United Kingdom a year after its U.S. premiere, *Tár* was included in *Sight and Sound*'s Best Films of 2023,^[84] and sat atop the polls of *New Statesman*^[85] and *Time Out*, with Phil de Semlyen of *Time Out* writing "Blanchett's Oscar-nominated performance has rightly earned the lion's share of plaudits, but the superb acting is buoyed by Field's subtly off-kilter visual style, lending the 'ripped from the headlines' narrative a hint of Kubrickian uncanniness."^[86] *The Guardian* also chose *Tár* as best film of the year, with critic Wendy Ide writing, "Todd Field's creation of the magnificent, monstrous fictional conductor Lydia *Tár*, inhabited down to the last shred of cruelty and ambition by the remarkable Cate Blanchett, is exceptional: a savage, slippery account of rampant narcissism brought down to earth."^[87] In April 2024 the historian Simon Heffer, expressing his opinion in *The Sunday Telegraph*, wrote *Tár* is "the finest American film of the century."^[88]

Retrospective lists

The March 2023 issue of *New York* magazine listed *Tár* alongside *Citizen Kane*, *Sunset Boulevard*, *Dr. Strangelove*, *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*, *The Conversation*, *Nashville*, *Taxi Driver*, *The Elephant Man*, *Pulp Fiction*, *There Will Be Blood*, *Roma*, and *In the Bedroom*, also directed by Field, as "The Best Movies That Lost Best Picture at the Oscars".^[89]

The March 2024 issue of *indiewire* listed *Tár*, and *In the Bedroom*, also directed by Field, as "Best Picture Nominees that Deserved to win the Oscar", stating, "Todd Field's portrait of the talent and ego of a world-renowned conductor is some of the most riveting and ambitious filmmaking in recent memory. *Tár* feels like a movie people will be talking about and debating long after the ceremony where it lost fades from memory."^[90]

Accolades

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External links

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 - Official screenplay (<https://variety.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/tar-screenplay.pdf>)
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