



NEW RELEASES

Licorice Pizza

To call Paul Thomas Anderson's latest film, *Licorice Pizza*, meandering could be considered an understatement. On one hand, it feels like a river running lazy and low beneath the golden light of the California sun, but on the other, it has a hustler's energy, and there's a sense that anything could drift into view around the next bend. It's a yarn spun to occupy a space somewhere in the vicinity of the shaggy dog story or the picaresque, though neither descriptor quite hits the mark nor conveys the film's underlying intricacy. Foregoing any specific narrative thrust, it luxuriates in the drawing of vivid characters and a nostalgic, illusory, and multifaceted portrait of a recurring Anderson locale, the San Fernando Valley in California.

This is an almost folkloric evocation of the Valley in 1973, cobbled together from Anderson's own experiences, local legends, tall tales, and the reminiscences of producer Gary Goetzman, upon whom one of the central characters is partly based. It is a place where post-war prosperity is surging, bona fide movie stars rub shoulders with misty-eyed dreamers, and where a 15-year-old child actor, Gary Valentine (Cooper Hoffman) has the gumption to chat up the 25-year-old Alana Kane (Alana Haim) who works for the company taking his school photos. She's initially dismissive but is eventually disarmed by his cocksure insistence and performed maturity and ends up accepting his invitation for a drink, apparently despite herself. There is an inherent tension that comes with their age difference and while Alana won't countenance a romantic liaison with Gary, even with his vocal interest, they have an immediate connection that develops into a deeper affection.

While *Licorice Pizza* couldn't feel more distinct from Anderson's previous feature, *The Phantom Thread*, the two share a similar structure in that their drama is driven less by external plot and more by the constantly shifting dynamics of the central, oft-prickly relationship. The younger Gary's precocious business acumen and the older Alana's arrested development create persistent friction regarding who is the senior party in this partnership. Despite Gary's entrepreneurial endeavour – at 15 he somehow owns a PR firm, starts a waterbed company, and later a pinball emporium – he's also a goofy kid who can only order a coke when he takes Alana out for a drink. She, meanwhile, may begin the film feeling directionless but increasingly strains against her situation, desiring a seriousness of purpose.

In an essay about Anderson's *The Master*, Geoffrey O'Brien reflected on the director's preoccupation with a particular American disconnectedness that manifests as hyperactivity, 'as if keeping frantically busy could stave off a lurking sense of emptiness.' While *Licorice Pizza* could quite rightly be described as the director's sweetest and most upbeat film, this notion of staving off the emptiness seems to remain just as pertinent. An early scene with a casting agency suggests Gary's days of minor stardom are over, giving his otherwise delightful wheeling and dealing an added layer of poignancy. Equally, Alana's own forays into the professional world – through an acting gig and then as a volunteer for a political campaign – leave her just as lonely, bereft, or unsure, in a way Gary, even at his most exasperating, doesn't seem to.

The wider adult world often serves to ramp up the freewheeling energy of the film as it introduces its minor perilous elements. Sean Penn and Bradley Cooper excel in brief roles in bizarre, brilliant interludes that nod towards the glamour and danger of the looming Tinseltown. There's always a risk with such attention-grabbing cameos – Cooper and Penn are joined by the likes of Maya Rudolph, Harriet Sansom Harris, Benny Safdie, Tom Waits, and John Michael Higgins – that the audience will leave wishing they'd spent more time with the peripheral characters, but in this instance, they complement the leads perfectly. At points, they trigger protective responses in Alana and Gary, bringing them closer together, sometimes literally via a recurring running motif. This elevates, rather than distracts from, the central pair, and it helps that newcomers Haim and Hoffman both revel in the limelight. Able to range from gawky to sexy, confident to confused, worldly-wise to wide-eyed in a heartbeat, they're charismatic and each maintains their own idiosyncratic authenticity. While Anderson deftly balances pace, tone, and style, it's the charm of the central pair that makes the film so easy and joyous. It's perhaps a rare thing to say nowadays, but *Licorice Pizza* could stand to meander even more if it meant spending a little longer in its company.

Ben Nicholson, *Sight and Sound*, [bfi.org.uk/sight-and-sound](https://www.bfi.org.uk/sight-and-sound), 6 January 2022

Paul Thomas Anderson's ninth film – tenth if you count his exhilarating 2015 music documentary *Junun* – is the fantastical story of Gary, a guileless and endlessly confident young teenager played by Cooper Hoffman (the son of Paul's late friend and collaborator Philip Seymour Hoffman), and Alana, an older, edgier but not necessarily wiser woman played by Alana Haim of the band Haim (Anderson has directed nine of their videos). The character of Gary and many of the events in *Licorice Pizza* are either based on or embellished out of episodes from the wild life of one-time child actor and adolescent entrepreneur, now music/TV/film producer Gary Goetzman. Paul's film is like a series of *Arabian Nights* tales transposed to the San Fernando Valley and Hollywood in the early 70s, unspooling at the loose, breathable rhythm of Eric Clapton's 'Promises' or J.J. Cale's 1974 album *Okie*.

'I got to know Gary in my twenties, through Jonathan Demme,' said Paul. 'I loved Jonathan's movies, so I knew Gary's name as production manager and then as producer. More importantly, I knew his face from those movies, where he almost always had a bit part, usually as "Guido Paonessa", which is his cousin's name.' Goetzman was all of 16 when he met the 25-year-old Demme backstage at *The Ed Sullivan Show*, where he and the rest of the kid cast of the 1968 'family classic' *Yours, Mine and Ours* had come to perform a jaw-dropping promotional production number, lovingly recreated in *Licorice Pizza*. Goetzman can actually be credited with getting his decade-older 'protégé' started as a director, on a TV spot for LA politician Joel Wachs (played in the film by Benny Safdie) when he was trying to get construction halted on a Hollywood real estate development.

'Gary was essentially from where I was from, and we had people in common. My dad was friends with Bob Ridgely, great character actor, voiceover guy, and he was always in Jonathan's stuff. And if you shared Bob Ridgely in common it cemented your relationship. All the same, it took years before Gary started telling me the details of his life.' Did Goetzman really make a killing as the waterbed king? Did he and his girlfriend actually drop off a unit at the sumptuous home of a coke-fuelled Jon Peters (the Hollywood hairdresser-turned-producer/studio head, played by Bradley Cooper) and then coast their

truck down the hills in reverse because the tank was empty? Did his girlfriend really witness the spectacle of an ageing movie idol (Sean Penn) being egged on by a drinking buddy (Tom Waits) to do a motorcycle jump over a flaming pit on a golf course? Everything in the film has the ring of lived experience refracted through the fabulous prism of the tall, embellished Hollywood tale. The sense of shared lived adventure and elemental simplicity is an animating force in all good movies, I think, taking one form or another. In Paul’s best work it’s fully felt in every frame, and what doubles the wonder is the fact that the majority of his films have been period pieces.

At its core, *Licorice Pizza* is a romance of a particular kind, set to the stop-go-stop-go rhythm of a couple who keep postponing their coupling thanks to a string of misunderstandings, mistimings, and temperamental and emotional delusions – think the Astaire/Rogers films, *The Philadelphia Story* (1940) or *Sabrina* (1954). In this case, the couple is played by two charming, ingenious but untrained first-time actors who bring a lightning-in-a-bottle magic to every stand-off and narrow miss. ‘Somebody said it reminded them of this thing that happens on television. Sometimes, there’s this first season that’s just fantastic because there’s fresh new talent and they’re all stumbling around, not knowing what the hell is going on. Then the second season returns and everybody has a makeover and they’re rich and self-conscious... and all the fun has been sucked out of it. I would do Cooper and Alana a disservice to say that they didn’t know what they were doing. But sometimes I wish there were some alternative reality where you could take them, not even let them see this film emerge, and then get them right back on the floor to do what they do so well.’

Paul Thomas Anderson interviewed by Kent Jones, *Sight and Sound*, Winter 2021-2022

LICORICE PIZZA

Directed by: Paul Thomas Anderson
©: Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Pictures Inc
a Ghouardi Film Company *production:*
Presented by: Metro Goldwyn Mayer Pictures, Focus Features, Bron Creative
With the participation of the: State of California, California Film Commission
Executive Producers: Joanne Sellar, Daniel Lupi, Sue McNamara, Aaron L. Gilbert, Jason Cloth
Produced by: Sara Murphy, Adam Somner, Paul Thomas Anderson
Unit Production Manager: Sue McNamara
Production Supervisor: Demelza Cronin
Production Accountant: John Whitley
Location Manager: Michael Glaser
Post-production Supervisor: Erica Frauman
Archive Researcher: Deborah Ricketts
1st Assistant Director: Adam Somner
2nd Assistant Director: Trevor Tavares
Script Supervisor: Jillian Giacomini
Casting by: Cassandra Kulukundis
Written by: Paul Thomas Anderson
Director of Photography: Mike Bauman, Paul Thomas Anderson
Camera Operator: Colin Anderson
Still Photographer: Melinda Sue Gordon
Visual Effects by: Crafty Apes
Special Effects Supervisor: Elia P. Popov
Editor: Andy Jurgensen
Production Designer: Florencia Martin
Art Director: Samantha Englender
Set Decorator: Ryan Watson
Lead Graphic Designer: Dianne Chadwick
Property Master: William R. Potter
Costume Designer: Mark Bridges
Make-up Designer: Heba Thorisdottir

Hair Designer: Lori Guidroz
Titles: PictureMill, Scarlet Letters
Digital Intermediate Colourist: Mike Sowa
Score by: Jonny Greenwood
Score Performed by: London Contemporary Orchestra
Harmonica: Jonny Greenwood
Orchestra Conducted by: Hugh Brunt
Orchestration by: Jonny Greenwood
Music Supervisor: Linda Cohen
Choreography: Michael Arnold
Sound Mixer: Lisa Piñero
Re-recording Mixers: Christopher Scarabosio, David Acord
Supervising Sound Editors:
Christopher Scarabosio, David Acord
Stunt Co-ordinators: Brian Machleit, Craig Frosty Silva
For: Robert Downey Sr

Cast

Alana Haim (*Alana Kane*)
Cooper Hoffman (*Gary Valentine*)
Sean Penn (*Jack Holden*)
Tom Waits (*Rex Blau*)
Bradley Cooper (*Jon Peters*)
Benny Safdie (*Joel Wachs*)
Will Angarola (*Kirk*)
Griff Giacchino (*Mark*)
James Kelley (*Tim*)
Maya Rudolph (*Gale*)
Harriet Sansom Harris (*Mary Grady*)
John Michael Higgins (*Jerry Frick*)

USA/Canada 2021
133 mins

A Universal release

NEW RELEASES

Titane
From Sat 1 Jan
West Side Story
From Sat 1 Jan
Boiling Point
From Fri 7 Jan
Licorice Pizza
From Thu 13 Jan
Memoria
From Fri 14 Jan
Parallel Mothers (Madres paralelas)
From Fri 28 Jan

IN PERSON & PREVIEWS

Natural Born Killers
Fri 14 Jan 20:30
Fresh Meat 10th Anniversary: Q&A with cast and creatives
Sat 15 Jan 18:15
Mark Kermode Live in 3D at the BFI
Mon 17 Jan 18:10
Preview: The Souvenir Part II + Q&A with writer-director Joanna Hogg
Mon 17 Jan 20:30
Woman with a Movie Camera Preview: Amulet + Q&A with writer-director Romola Garai
Fri 21 Jan 18:00
African Odysseys presents: UK Premiere: A Bruddah’s Mind Cabeça de Nego + Q&A with director Déo Cardoso
Sat 22 Jan 14:00
Silent Cinema presents: South: Sir Ernest Shackleton’s Glorious Epic of the Antarctic + live score
Thu 27 Jan 19:00

RE-RELEASES

The 400 Blows (Les Quatre cents coups)
From Fri 7 Jan
South: Sir Ernest Shackleton’s Glorious Epic of the Antarctic
From Fri 28 Jan

REGULAR PROGRAMME

Member Picks: The Killing Fields
Wed 19 Jan 17:50
Art in the Making: Sacred Geometry + Q&A with artist Leila Dear
Thu 20 Jan 18:10
Seniors’ Free Matinee: HG Wells’ The Man Who Could Work Miracles + intro
Mon 24 Jan 14:00
Chinese New Year: An Autumn Tale + intro
Tue 25 Jan 20:15
Experimenta: The Surviving Films of Franciszka and Stefan Themerson + intro
Thu 27 Jan 18:10
Terror Vision: My Little Eye + intro by Mike Muncer, host of The Evolution of Horror podcast
Thu 27 Jan 20:30
Relaxed Screening: L’Enfant sauvage (The Wild Child) + intro and discussion
Mon 31 Jan 18:10

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