



# FUNDAY PREVIEW

Family friendly film screenings,  
activities and workshops



## ROBOT DREAMS

### What's it about?

Living a solitary life and longing for fun and excitement, Dog sends off for a robot friend. When it arrives, the two make an immediate connection and Dog's life is transformed. A trip to the park sees the two displaying disco dancing moves that Travolta could only dream of, but an unexpected event threatens their friendship. Told entirely without dialogue, *Robot Dreams* is joyful and thought-provoking in equal measure, skilfully delivering its message to young and old alike.

## 'Robot Dreams' reviewed

The robot of the title dreams of New York sidewalks and other robots and sunflowers who tap-dance; but mostly it dreams of its companion, an anthropomorphic dog it has been separated from and yearns to see again.

The film opens in an East Village apartment, where our melancholic pooch with a paunch is playing Pong by himself. Responding to an ad, Dog – the characters have no personal names – mail-orders a robot companion who, once assembled, brims with childlike naivety and good-natured exuberance.

Their first scenes together play out like a series of early dates: a trip on a row boat, a night in with *The Wizard of Oz* (1939), roller-skating in Central Park to Earth, Wind & Fire's 'September' (a song that will resurface as a plot device). Whether this is a friendship or a romance isn't the point; what matters is that they care for one another, and indeed that Robot is capable of caring like a living creature.

This blossoming comes abruptly to a stop after a misadventure leaves Robot paralysed and stranded on a fenced-off beach. Powerless to rescue it, Dog returns to a life of solitude in the city. From here, the film takes on a more episodic rhythm, each season bringing new experiences to Dog and new visitors to Robot's spot on the beach. But their bond endures in dreams, depicted in surreal sequences that reveal the characters' attachment to one another and shared fear of abandonment. We see more of Robot's dreams: poignantly, these are forever remixing the limited experiences it has had in its short life. The very fact that it can have dreams is perhaps the best proof that Robot is alive.

Not a word is spoken in the film. Writer-director Pablo Berger takes his cue from his source, Sara Varon's graphic novel, also dialogue-free. The effect is to make the relationship between the protagonists, who already lack the particulars of human appearance, even more universal.

Although this is Berger's first foray into animation, he directs with confidence. Characters and backgrounds are all clean lines and simple colour fills, and the schematic designs allow for some nice visual puns: in one sweet scene, Robot helps teach a hatchling bird to fly by arching and flapping the line of its mouth in imitation of wings. Fast, snappy editing propels the narrative. Shots are framed dynamically, ranging from close-ups that convey thoughts in the absence of words to extreme high-angle long shots, which emphasise Dog's and Robot's solitude. New York teems with a menagerie of animals – a busking octopus, a sunbathing proboscis monkey – amid which, once again, Dog often appears isolated.

Ultimately, *Robot Dreams* is a story about how swiftly and lastingly a bond of affection can mark a life, in which the protagonists just happen not to look human. The film strikes a very particular tone. It is easy to follow and entertaining in a way that speaks to children, but the emotions it deals with are adult ones. Wistfulness hangs in the air. The film is not effusive – nobody cries – but it is touching, especially as it approaches its unexpected ending. I loved it for that.

Alex Dudok de Wit, *Sight and Sound*, April 2024

### Robot Dreams

*Directed by:* Pablo Berger  
*©:* Arcadia Motion Pictures S.L., Lokiz Films  
A.I.E., Noodles Productions SARL,  
Les Films du Worso SARL  
*An Arcadia production*  
*A Lokizfilms production*  
*In co-production with:* Noodles Production,  
Les Films du Worso  
*In association with:* Elle Driver, Mama Films  
*With the participation of:* RTVE, M+, Canal+,  
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du cinéma et de l'image animée  
*In association with:* La Banque Postale Image 15  
*With the support of:* Europa Creative Media

*Executive Producer:* Sandra Tapia Diaz  
*Produced by:* Ibon Cormenzana, Ignasi Estapé, Sandra  
Tapia Diaz, Pablo Berger, Àngel Durández  
*Co-producers:* Sylvie Danton, Jérôme Vidal, Benoît  
Quainon  
*Line Producer:* Julián Larrauri  
*Associate Producer:* Yuko Harami  
*Written by:* Pablo Berger  
*Based on the Graphic Novel by:* Sara Varon  
*Animation Director:* Benoît Féroumont  
*Editor:* Fernando Franco  
*Art Director:* José Luis Ágreda  
*Character Designer:* Daniel Fernández Casas  
*Music:* Alfonso de Vilallonga  
*Sound Design:* Fabiola Ordoño  
*Supervising Sound Editor:* Fabiola Ordoño  
Spain 2023  
102 mins  
Digital

Courtesy of Curzon Film

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