

NEW YORK FILM FESTIVAL



SEPTEMBER 17–OCTOBER 11, 2020

ABOUT • LINEUP • SPOTLIGHT • CALENDAR

LINEUP

25 of the most exciting new feature films from around the world

Lovers Rock

Steve McQueen
2020
UK
68 minutes

A movie of tactile sensuality and levitating joy, *Lovers Rock* is part of Steve McQueen's *Small Axe* anthology of decades-spanning films that alight on various lives in London's West Indian community. Here, McQueen, in an ecstatic yet no less formally bold mode, charts the growing attraction between Martha (newcomer Amarah-Jae St. Aubyn) and a brooding stranger (Micheal Ward) over the course of one night at a house party.

Nomadland

Chloé Zhao
2020
USA
108 minutes

Chloé Zhao's richly textured follow-up to her acclaimed *The Rider* recounts a year in the life of Fern (Frances McDormand), a stoic, stubbornly independent widow who, having spent her adult life in a now-defunct company town, repurposes an old van and sets off in search of seasonal work. Mixing professionals and non-actors, *Nomadland* is a road movie for our precarious times.

French Exit

Azazel Jacobs
2020
USA
110 minutes

English and French with English subtitles

Michelle Pfeiffer is entirely bewitching as an imperious, widowed New York socialite who, facing financial insolvency, relocates to a friend's empty apartment in Paris with her dyspeptic son, Malcolm (Lucas Hedges), and their mercurial cat, and begins to grimly plan for an impossible future. Azazel Jacobs's adaptation of the best-selling novel by Patrick deWitt is a rare American film of genuine eccentricity, with a brilliant central performance.

Atarrabi and Mikelats

Eugène Green
2020
France/Belgium
123 minutes

Euskara with English subtitles

The sacred Atarrabi and the profane Mikelats follow wildly divergent paths in Eugène Green's tale of two brothers, a modern-dress take on Basque myth perched on the line between earnest spirituality and sly satire.

Beginning

Dea Kulumbegashvili
2020
Georgia
125 minutes

Georgian with English subtitles

In her striking feature debut, Georgian filmmaker Dea Kulumbegashvili tells the devastating story of a persecuted family of Jehovah's Witness missionaries in a remote village from the perspective of a traumatized wife and mother.

The Calming

Song Fang
2020
China
93 minutes

English, Japanese, and Mandarin with English subtitles

In Song Fang's film of arresting beauty and tranquility, a young director makes her way around Japan, China, and Hong Kong after the dissolution of a relationship, presenting her work, engaging with friends and artists, and dealing with the realities of aging parents.

City Hall

Frederick Wiseman
2020
USA
272 minutes

In his latest kaleidoscopic look at the function and practice of community, policy, and civic engagement in American life, Frederick Wiseman trains his camera on the inner workings of the city of Boston to get at larger ideas about a country's steps toward inclusivity and social reform.

Days

Tsai Ming-liang
2020
Taiwan/France
127 minutes
Taiwanese

In one of Tsai Ming-liang's best and sparest works, Lee Kang-sheng plays a variation on himself, wandering through a lonely urban landscape and seeking treatment for a chronic illness; at the same time, a young Laotian immigrant working in Bangkok goes about his daily routine. The lives of these two solitary men eventually converge.

The Disciple

Chaitanya Tamhane
2020
India
128 minutes

Bengali, English, Hindi, and Marathi with English subtitles

Indian filmmaker Chaitanya Tamhane's much-anticipated follow-up to *Court* is a finely crafted labor of love set in the world of Hindustani classical music, starring singer—and remarkable first-time actor—Aditya Modak as a man living in Mumbai who tries to follow in the footsteps of his father and become a maestro in the Khayal raag music tradition.

Gunda

Victor Kossakovsky
2020
Norway
93 minutes

Victor Kossakovsky's remarkable, heart-breaking documentary uses natural sound design and crisp, pastoral black-and-white cinematography to immerse the viewer in the compassionate tale of a sow who lives on a farm in Norway.

I Carry You With Me

Heidi Ewing
2020
USA/Mexico
111 minutes

Spanish with English subtitles

Among the most emotionally resonant and innovatively conceived cinematic love stories in years, *I Carry You With Me* unexpectedly and brilliantly incorporates documentary elements into the tale of a burgeoning romance between two men who cross the border from Mexico to the U.S.

Isabella

Matías Piñeiro
2020
Argentina
80 minutes

Spanish with English subtitles

Never has Argentinian filmmaker Matías Piñeiro's art been more graceful or structurally complex than in his latest, in which he again uses a Shakespeare text to anchor a loose yet intellectually rigorous examination of life's loves, labors, and futile pursuits.

Malmkrog

Cristi Puiu
2020
Romania
200 minutes

French, German, Hungarian, and Russian with English subtitles

A turn-of-the-20th-century Christmas Eve gathering among five members of the European elite at an elegant Transylvanian estate becomes the setting for an increasingly intense succession of conversations in Cristi Puiu's pristine, sometimes terrifying vision of the simmering violence beneath the colonialist's veneer of politesse.

Mangrove

Steve McQueen
2020
UK
126 minutes

An epic piece of Steve McQueen's *Small Axe* anthology, *Mangrove* tells the true story of Frank Crichlow, the Trinidad-born owner of a café in Notting Hill who was arrested for protesting the police's intimidation and brutality. This is a vivid and gripping dramatization of these events and the resulting landmark 1970 court case of Crichlow and the other defendants, who came to be known as the Mangrove Nine.

MLK/FBI

Sam Pollard
2020
US
104 minutes

Throughout his history-altering political career, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was often treated by U.S. intelligence and law enforcement like an enemy of the state. In this virtuosic documentary, veteran editor and director Sam Pollard lays out a detailed account of the FBI surveillance that dogged King's activism throughout the 1950s and '60s.

Night of the Kings

Philippe Lacôte
2020
France/Ivory Coast/Canada/Senegal
93 minutes
Dioula, French, and Ivorian slang with English subtitles

Paying homage to the tradition of the *griot* in West African culture, this original vision from breakout Ivory Coast filmmaker Philippe Lacôte tells the story of a pick-pocket (Koné Bakary), newly arrived at a correctional facility in the Ivorian capital of Abidjan, who, in order to stay alive, must keep his fellow inmates entertained with wild tales over the course of a night.

Notturmo

Gianfranco Rosi
2020
Italy/France/Germany
100 minutes

Arabic and Kurdish with English subtitles
Oscar-nominated documentary filmmaker Gianfranco Rosi returns with an immersive work of nonfiction; shot over the course of three years along the borders of Iraq, Kurdistan, Syria, and Lebanon, *Notturmo* is a nighttime ramble through a region rocked and shattered by catastrophe and violence.

Red, White and Blue

Steve McQueen
2020
UK
80 minutes

In Steve McQueen's vivid adaptation of a true story set in the early '80s, John Boyega gives an impassioned yet nuanced performance as Leroy Logan, a member of the London Metropolitan police force who both witnessed and experienced first-hand the organization's fundamental racism.

The Salt of Tears

Philippe Garrel
2020
France
100 minutes
French with English subtitles

Handsome Luc (Logann Antuofermo) aggressively courts Djemila (Oulaya Amara) on a Paris suburb metro. But in veteran filmmaker Philippe Garrel's pinpoint precise and economically told moral tale, she isn't destined to be his one and only.

Swimming Out Till the Sea Turns Blue

Jia Zhangke
2020
China
111 minutes
Mandarin with English subtitles

In his evocative new documentary, Jia Zhangke gathers three prominent authors—Jia Pingwa, Yu Hua, and Liang Hong—in Shanxi province, where he grew up, to create a tapestry of testimonies about the drastic changes in Chinese life and culture that began with the social revolution of the 1950s.

Time

Garrett Bradley
2020
USA
81 minutes

The tireless 20-year campaign of Louisiana woman Fox Rich to secure her husband's release after he received a 60-year prison sentence for robbery becomes a delicate work of nonfiction cinematic alchemy in the hands of filmmaker Garrett Bradley.

Tragic Jungle

Yulene Olaizola
2020
Mexico
96 minutes
English, Creole, Maya, and Spanish with English subtitles

In the 1920s, Agnes (Indira Andrewin) escapes from the white British landowner she doesn't want to marry into the deep thickets of the tropical forest along the Rio Hondo River. Mexican filmmaker Yulene Olaizola immerses the viewer in a richly drawn, tactile experience that works as both a gripping adventure and a contemplative rumination on the brutality and splendor of nature.

The Truffle Hunters

Michael Dweck, Gregory Kershaw
2020
Italy/USA/Greece
84 minutes
Italian and Piedmontese with English subtitles

This revelatory, earthy documentary immerses the viewer in the forests of Northern Italy where dogs, accompanied by their elderly and often irascible human owners of modest means, seek the precious white Alba truffle

Undine

Christian Petzold

2020

Germany

90 minutes

German with English subtitles

German director Christian Petzold (*Phoenix*, *Transit*) injects a mythological element into a lush melodrama about a pair of star-crossed lovers—Undine (Paula Beer), a historian and museum tour guide specializing in urban development, and Christoph, an industrial diver—linked by an affinity for the water.

The Woman Who Ran

Hong Sangsoo

2020

South Korea

77 minutes

Korean with English subtitles

Divided into three casually threaded yet distinct sections, Hong Sangsoo's latest delight follows Gamhee—played by the director's regular collaborator Kim Minhee—as she travels without her husband for the first time in years, reconnecting with a succession of friends, on purpose and by chance.

SPOTLIGHT

“City Hall” Review: America Would Be a Better Place If Everyone Watched Wiseman’s 4.5-Hour Epic

by Eric Kohn, for Indiewire, Sep 18, 2020

Every Frederick Wiseman movie starts like a dare. Though the 90-year-old documentary legend has been chronicling social institutions ever since 1967's “Titicut Follies,” many of his projects casually drift through three or four hours of dense, layered portraits following the people behind vast organizational forces. Ironically, this has actually made his work even more valuable with time, and “City Hall,” which clocks in at four hours and 32 minutes, is no exception. As attention spans dwindle and the complex mess of American governance grows murkier than ever, Wiseman's immersive dive into Boston's city services ignores the pressure to dumb things down and marvels at the complexity of a system designed to make the world run right.

Subtext: Take that, Trump! Just as Wiseman's 2018 portrait “Ex Libris — The New York Public Library” served as a de facto repudiation of leaders who reject intellectual discernment, *City Hall* assails the corruption of American democracy by hovering within the sophisticated efforts on the other end of the equation. It's an understatement to say that Wiseman — who edits his own material — doesn't suffer fools gladly. Exhilarating and exasperating in equal measures, *City Hall* coheres into a rich tapestry of Boston in argument with itself.

Shot between 2018 and 2019, the movie finds Wiseman returning to his home state for the first time since 1989's “Near Death,” which focused on residents and workers at Beth Israel Hospital. Though the canvas is much wider this time, Wiseman has found a key access point to tie many disparate scenes together. Boston mayor Marty Walsh, who has held office since 2014, crops up throughout *City Hall* as a kind of aspirational voice of the people. In speeches to a diverse range of citizens and meetings with government workers, the verbose Irish-American leader shares his complicated story, wrestles with the city's failings on a wide range of topics, and pushes for the virtues of fighting for a better way forward.

But Walsh is less centerpiece than symbol in “City Hall,” as Wiseman roams through a range of offices, town halls, and breathless strategy sessions, all in service of a sprawling case for how government works. Open yourself up to the mentally daunting nature of the plunge, and *City Hall* amounts to a vibrant half-day hangout with democracy in action.

The proceedings start to look awfully dry in the opening minutes, when Wiseman allows a Powerpoint on the shortcomings of the city's \$3 billion budget to slowly unfurl, but then the steady rhythms and structure take hold. As usual, Wiseman eschews score in favor of a diegetic approach, but his meticulous

edits often amount to an engrossing visual symphony designed to string you along. Wiseman has profound reverence for these institutions, and while he starts with the cold, angular image of city hall itself, a series of well-placed shots and cuts travel across the city as a means of deconstructing the icy exteriors at hand.

Aided by cinematographer John Davey, Wiseman travels to rooms brimming with intellectual debates, bureaucratic red-tape frustrations, and inflamed communal passions. Cerebral moments slide into visceral and poignant exchanges: There are conversations about racial inequality and food shortage, Latinx representation, and gender dynamics, but also a gay wedding, a Thanksgiving event for disabled people, and police officers singing “The Star Spangled Banner.”

It’s an unpredictable journey, but every choice serves a larger whole, as *City Hall* reveals just how much — as one subject puts it — “the people who work for this city work for you.” And yet, as another employee says at a different point: “We do a particularly bad job of information and explaining.” The movie works overtime and then some to rectify that, introducing us to archivists, pest controllers, and food-kitchen volunteers, making the case that they’re all part of the same vast equation. He also dips into many of its flaws, most notably the extent to which Boston’s increasingly diverse population still seems to struggle with a white supremacy problem.

Wiseman hasn’t picked the most glamorous of subjects (we’re a long way from the cabaret spectacle of 2012’s “Crazy Horse”), but it’s a small wonder when his process takes old. At times he allows footage to unfurl for minutes on end, as his subjects ramble on, only to sneak in a savvy edit or montage that adds new layers to the process at hand.

The best example of this approach comes with an emotional Veterans Day gathering, which almost functions as a movie-within-a-movie — until Wiseman get arounds to the point, cutting from various wartime testimonials to antiquated paintings on the wall that stretch back through national history, from the Boston Tea Party to Washington crossing the Delaware. It’s a remarkable cinematic statement on the militancy at the root of colonial America that continues to impact modern-day society, and the sacrifices involved in keeping it tick.

Roll with the master plan and new layers continue to reveal themselves, though Wiseman’s editing is so intricate it often takes time to see the larger machinery at work. One set of exterior shots travels the city street, passing a parking attendant going about her work; maybe a half-hour later, we sit with a series of people contesting such tickets to mixed results.

When *City Hall* stumbles, it has less to do with daunting length than the occasional didacticism of his subjects. Though Walsh is the first to admit his failings (one monologue about his hard-drinking past hits hard), and his personal story resonates (he survived cancer as a kid), Wiseman is enamored of the guy to the point of hero worship; with no news footage or additional information about Walsh’s record as a public servant, we’re forced to take his self-congratulatory word for it.

Along similar lines, *City Hall* sometimes can’t help but seem like the world’s

longest after-school special, with a few too many sincere back-and-forths about civic duty. A lot of these speeches are compelling anyway, though given that quite a year has elapsed since Wiseman wrapped production, *City Hall* does feel a bit dated in terms of the challenges faced by its subjects. Wiseman would work wonders with a camera in the midst of the pandemic, but then again, this nonagenarian talent might be better off avoiding crowds for now.

Walsh may be the hero of “*City Hall*,” but Wiseman doesn’t sugarcoat the broader subject of Boston’s many struggles. His camera lands on passionate engagement throughout. The best prolonged sequence takes place at a combustible town hall meeting between Asian American entrepreneurs angling to open a cannabis shop in a poor neighborhood, and residents of said neighborhood dubious of that cause. The meeting doesn’t exactly address concerns that they might get squeezed out, but it shows the considerable effort involved in local action; relying on public servants can only do so much.

By the time *City Hall* arrives at its breathtaking final shots, Wiseman has crafted such an advanced case for understanding every aspect of local governance that it leads to the impression that America would be a better place if everyone experienced it. Through its hefty length alone, the movie acknowledges that government services are vast enterprises so hard to conceive that they often turn people off from the outset. Yet such aversion only serves to solidify its point. *City Hall* doesn’t just deserve an audience; it deserves a conversation. Even as Wiseman celebrates the sophistication of American ideals in practice, his movie illustrates just how hard they are to grasp.

CALENDAR

09/17:

5PM: The Truffle Hunters

8PM: Lovers Rock

09/18:

5PM: Nomadland, Mangrove

8PM: —

09/19:

5PM: Days

8PM: French Exit

09/20:

5PM: Atarrabi and Mikelats

8PM: The Salt of Tears

09/21:

5PM: Night of the Kings

8PM: Beginning

09/22:

5PM: The Calming

8PM: Time

09/23:

5PM: Notturmo

8PM: City Hall

09/24:

5PM: Days

8PM: Red, White and Blue

09/25:

5PM: MLK/FBI

8PM: The Disciple

09/26:

5PM: Gunda

8PM: Swimming Out Till the Sea Turns Blue

09/27:

5PM: Tragic Jungle

8PM: I Carry You With Me

09/28:

5PM: Isabella

8PM: Lovers Rock

09/29:

5PM: Atarrabi and Mikelats

8PM: Malmkrog

09/30:

5PM: Undine

8PM: —

10/01:

5PM: —

8PM: MLK/FBI

10/02:

5PM: Night of the Kings

8PM: Beginning

10/03:

5PM: Nomadland

8PM: Notturmo

10/04:

5PM: Red, White and Blue

8PM: The Calming

10/05:

5PM: I Carry You With Me

8PM: The Salt of Tears

10/06:

5PM: Swimming Out Till the Seas Turns Blue

8PM: Gunda

10/07:

5PM: Isabella

8PM: Time

10/08:

5PM: Tragic Jungle

8PM: French Exit

10/09:

5PM: City Hall

8PM: The Truffle Hunters

10/10:

5PM: Undine

8PM: The Disciple

10/11:

5PM: Malmkrog

8PM: —

ABOUT

Film at Lincoln Center is devoted to supporting the art and elevating the craft of cinema. The only branch of the world-renowned arts complex Lincoln Center to shine a light on the everlasting yet evolving importance of the moving

image, this nonprofit organization was founded in 1969 to celebrate American and international film.

Via year-round programming and discussions; its annual New York Film Festival; and its publications, including Film Comment, the U.S.'s premier magazine about films and film culture, Film at Lincoln Center endeavors to make the discussion and appreciation of cinema accessible to a broader audience, as well as to ensure that it will remain an essential art form for years to come.