

HIGHGATE FILM SOCIETY
Season 2024-2025

19 September 2024

PAST LIVES

Korea/US 2023, 105 mins (Dir. Celine Song) starring Greta Lee, Teo Yoo, John Magaro.

Nora and Hae Sung, two deeply connected childhood friends, are separated when Nora's family emigrates from South Korea. Two decades later they meet again in New York for one fateful week as they confront notions of destiny, love and the choices that make a life in this heartrending modern romance. Celine Song's first feature film is the work of a master storyteller with deeply genuine human emotions. Brilliantly acted, it is a very adult love story. It uses the bonds between sensitively sketched central characters to support deep observations on the human condition. Selected by many critics as best film of 2023, it won several awards including 3 Baftas and 2 Academy Awards.

17 October 2024

PERFECT DAYS

Japan/Germany 2023, 120 mins (Dir. Wim Wenders) starring Koji Yakusho, Tokio Emoto, Arisa Nakana, Aoi Yamada, Yumi Aso.

Hirayama works as a public toilet cleaner in Tokyo's upscale Shibuya ward, across town from his modest home east of the Sumida River. He is a man of few words and great tranquillity. He seems content with his simple life. He follows a structured everyday life and dedicates his free time to his passion for music and books. More of his past is gradually revealed *through* a series of unexpected encounters.

Wenders makes Hirayama's life so mundane, that the slightest change becomes an immense piece of action. His lack of a backstory makes him all the more enigmatic, and his relationships with others all the more compelling. Watching the film becomes like a meditation as Hirayama finds beauty and serenity in the most unexpected places.

Brilliantly acted by Koji Yakusho, the great Japanese actor, whose soulfulness fills the empty spaces of Perfect Days. He won Best Actor at the 76th Cannes Film Festival in May 2023, where it competed for the Palme d'Or and won the Prize of the Ecumenical Jury.

14 November 2024

ROSE

Denmark 2022, 106 mins (Dir. Niels Arden Oplev) starring Sofie Grabol, Lene Maria Christesen and Anders W. Berthelsen.

The story of two sisters, Inger and Ellen, on a highly anticipated coach trip to Paris and how their relationship is challenged. When Inger announces her struggles with mental health to the group, the sisters are faced with pity from some and discrimination from others. In Paris it soon becomes clear that Inger has a hidden agenda concerning a figure from her past. Rose is a film about love and care for each other in spite of our differences and about not judging a book by its cover. The film is emotional yet has many comedic moments especially in the interactions with the other passengers. It takes a unique look at mental illness and is poignant, funny, and real. The director based the film in part on his own family experience.

5 December 2024

THE DISCREET CHARM OF THE BOURGEOISIE

France 1972, 102 mins (Dir. Luis Bunuel) starring Fernando Rey, Stéphane Audran, Jean-Pierre Cassel, Paul Frankeur, Delphine Seyrig, Bulle Ogier, Milena Vukotic.

The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie is a dreamlike comedy-drama film directed by the Spanish-born Luis Buñuel (1900-1983) from a screenplay he co-wrote with Jean-Claude Carrière.

From his time at university Bunuel was close friends with both the poet and dramatist Garcia Lorca and the painter Salvador Dali. Like many other early leaders of the Surrealist movement his work gives expression to what then were the recent psychoanalytic insights of Sigmund Freud and the social and economic ideas of Marx. A dinner party which does not go as the guests or the audience might reasonably expect allows Bunuel to expose the pretentious vacuity of the bourgeoisie and the destabilising influence of our unconscious fears. The film was both a critical and commercial success. It won the Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film, and BAFTA Awards for Best Actress in a Leading Role (Audran) and Best Original Screenplay (Buñuel, Carrière).

16th January 2025

IO CAPITANO

International co-production: Italy/Belgium/France. 2023, 121 mins (Dir. Matteo Garrone) starring Seydou Sarr, Mustapha Fall. Filmed in Senegal, Mali, Italy

Longing for a brighter future, two Senegalese teenagers embark on a journey from Senegal to Italy, to escape poverty. However, between their dreams and reality lies a labyrinth of checkpoints. The dangers of the Sahara Desert, the vast waters and perils of the Mediterranean Sea, and the horrors of the Libyan detention centres. A contemporary and harrowing Odyssey, featuring non-professional actors. Superb photography. Awards: 26 wins and 30 nominations. Academy Awards, USA. Io Capitano (2023). 2024 Nominee Oscar. Best International Feature Film. Italy.

27 February 2025

THE BLUE KAFTAN

Morocco 2022, 123 mins (Dir. Mariam Touzani) starring Lubna Azabal, Saleh Bakri and Ayoub Missioui.

A middle-aged tailor and his wife find their relationship challenged by the arrival of a handsome new apprentice. Halim and Mina run a traditional kaftan store in one of Morocco's oldest medinas and, to keep up with demanding customers, they hire a talented young man as an apprentice. Slowly Mina realises how much her husband is moved by his presence. A love story shaped by surprising contours, the film surveys the human hidden heart with compassion and grace. The beautiful photography captures the mood of the film. Morocco official entry for best international feature film for Academy Awards.

2023.

27th March 2025

NOSTALGIA

Italy 2022. 157 mins. (Dir. Mario Martone) starring Pierfrancesco Favino, Francesco di Leva, Tommaso Ragno

After 40 years of absence in Egypt, Felice, now married and Muslim, returns to his hometown Naples to look after his ageing mother. He rediscovers the places, the codes of the city and a past that eats away at him. He decides to work with the local priest Luigi who is helping to prevent young Neapolitans from becoming involved with the Camorra. He tries to reunite with his childhood friend Spasiano who has meantime become the elusive local criminal kingpin. Terrifically shot, fine acting. A bittersweet gangster drama, a love letter to Naples.

24 April 2025

THE ZONE OF INTEREST

UK 2023, 105 mins (Dir. Jonathan Glazer) starring Sandra Hüller, Christian Friedel, Ralph Herforth, Max Beck and Lilli Falk.

This extraordinary film tells the true story of how, in 1943, the commandant of Auschwitz, Rudolf Höss, and his wife Hedwig, strive to build a dream life for their family in a house right next to the concentration and extermination camp he helped create. Höss takes their five children out to swim and fish, and Hedwig spends time tending the garden. Locals handle the chores, and the murdered Jews' belongings are given to the family. Beyond the garden wall, gunshots, shouting, and the sounds of trains and furnaces are audible. One day Hedwig's mother comes to visit and is impressed with the house, but concerned with the proximity of the camp. She leaves unannounced after seeing the burning crematorium at night.

Glazer wired the whole house with cameras, so no cameramen were there in front of the actors. The sound is really important because you don't see the atrocities in the camp, you hear them as a background noise. It's almost like there is another film, just beyond the edge of the film. It's a very dark, bleak chilling soundscape. Glazer built the house which the film takes place in, and the garden, right next to the original house, and made it identical to the original house and garden.

The film won two awards at the 96th Academy Awards in 2024: Best International Feature, The first Academy Award for Best International Feature for a non-English British Film and Best Sound. It also won the Grand Prize at the 2023 Cannes Film Festival and Film of the Year, Director of the Year, and ALFS Award at the 2024 London critics Circle.

29th May 2025

AMA GLORIA

France 2023, 84 mins (Dir. Marie Amachoukeli-Barsacq) starring Louise Mauroy-Panzani, Ilça Moreno Zego, Abnara Gomes Varela, Arnaud Rebotini

Cléo (six-year-old Louise Mauroy-Panzani) lives with her widower dad Arnaud and her nanny Gloria in Paris. She loves her father, but Gloria is the emotional centre of her world, and when Gloria must return to her home in Cape Verde to attend to her own family, Cléo is heartbroken – and desperate to be reunited.

Six-year-old Louise Mauroy-Panzani is an extraordinary child actor. Full of personality with her tangle of curls and thick glasses, she is able vividly to convey the range of emotions of a small child in an astonishing performance.

The nanny is played by Ilça Moreno Zego, who is a real nanny from Cape Verde whom Amachoukeli met in the street when she was out casting, and Gloria's backstory is adapted from Ilça's story.

The film alternates between Paris and Cape Verde showing the stark contrast between the two worlds that Gloria navigates. In Paris she works for a privileged family who respect her, but doesn't fully appreciate her sacrifices. In Cape Verde, she reconnects with her culture, and her family, looking after her own children.

12th June 2025

CAIRO CONSPIRACY

Egypt 2023 120 mins (Dir. Tarek Saleh) starring Tawfeek Barholm, Fares Fares, Mohammad Bakri

Adam, the son of a fisherman, is offered the ultimate privilege to study at the Al-Azhar University in Cairo, the epicentre of power of Sunni Islam. Shortly after his arrival in Cairo, the university's highest ranking religious leader, the Grand Imam, suddenly dies and Adam soon becomes a pawn in a ruthless power struggle between Egypt's religious and political elite. Fine performances, sophisticated script and interesting insight into the life of Egypt's most prestigious university. There are also themes of ethical choices, family, sacrifice, exploitation, hope and human nature. A daring, thought-provoking, philosophical film.