

**Monday, August 14, 7:30 pm**

Reviewed by Justin Chang | Los Angeles Times | Not Rated | 115 Mins.

The gripping, sobering French procedural “The Night of the 12th” begins with an admission of defeat: The ripped-from-the-headlines homicide case we’re about to observe, it tells us, will remain unsolved. And you desperately want it to be solved, given the particular monstrousness of the crime. In a scenic valley near Grenoble, a 21-year-old woman named Clara (Lula Cotton Frapier) is walking home late one night when a faceless assailant emerges from the shadows, douses her with gasoline and sets her ablaze. It’s a horrifying assault, deeply personal in its brutality — the killer whispers her name beforehand — and it haunts you, much as it haunts the investigators who spend weeks, months and ultimately years trying to earn Clara a measure of justice.

The director Dominik Moll (“With a Friend Like Harry ...,” “Only the Animals”), who wrote the script with his regular collaborator Gilles Marchand, introduces us to those investigators at the outset. Mere hours before the attack, a group of police detectives is celebrating a colleague’s retirement and welcoming his much younger replacement, Yohan (Bastien Bouillon). The scene plays at first like routine exposition; Yohan, the new head of the homicide unit, will be our eyes and ears on the investigation into Clara’s killing. But from the way Moll cuts through the crowd, I think he also means for us to scan the faces of Yohan’s colleagues, to register their boisterous, clubby energy and to notice, crucially but hardly surprisingly, that nearly all of them are men.

The same is true of the various creeps Yohan and his team will interrogate over the course of their long, frustrating investigation into Clara’s death. Nearly all of them were (or claim to have been) romantically involved at one point or another with the deceased, an attractive young woman with a seemingly unquenchable passion for life and love. That’s putting it more politely than some of the men do, whether it’s the former co-worker (Baptiste Perais) who describes Clara as a clingy side-piece or the smug domestic abuser (Pierre Lottin) who claims she liked it rough.

Clara, of course, is unable to defend herself against these characterizations, not all of which come from her potential assailants. “She went for freaks,” one cop says, an instance of slut shaming and victim blaming that inspires a sharp rebuke from Yohan. Played with keen intelligence and compelling restraint by Bouillon, Yohan represents a younger, more enlightened breed of cop: quick to empathize, slow to judge, reluctant to use force unless necessary. His older, more cynical partner, Marceau (Bouli Lanners, excellent), has fewer inhibitions and more paternalistic instincts: Disgusted by the

various men he’s interrogating and troubled by personal problems at home, he lashes out with a nothing-to-lose abandon that’s neither defensible nor dismissible.

“The Night of the 12th” (“La nuit du 12”) which swept France’s César Awards this year (it won six prizes, including for best picture and director), is thus both an engrossing detective story and something of an expansive sociological X-ray. Its persuasive, low-key realism has its roots in Pauline Guéna’s 2020 book, “18.3 — Une Année à la PJ,” about a year she spent embedded with criminal investigators in Versailles. But that realism also arises from Moll’s patience as a filmmaker, his desire to capture some of the drudgery and disillusionment of everyday police work and to show the emotional and psychological toll it takes on its most dedicated practitioners.

Working with cinematographer Patrick Ghiringhelli and editor Laurent Rouan, Moll tells the story with atmospheric sweep (the mountainside scenery provides a beautiful, desolate chill) and an unhurried flow. He has a way of infusing even standard procedural tropes — the scouring of the crime scene, the breaking of the news to devastated parents and friends, the endless stakeouts, dead ends and false leads — with an unexpected gravity and emotional power. Even the seasoned crime-fiction aficionado will be reminded here of not just the trauma of murder but also its invasive, disruptive power, the way it brings even tangential secrets into the open and turns the police into professional airers of dirty laundry.

What emerges from this particular case is an expansive study in collective misogyny — the kind of free-floating contempt for women that holds sway over Clara’s small hometown as well as this institution of ostensible law and order. The story’s timing is instructive: Most of it takes place in 2016, shortly before the rise of a #MeToo movement that, in Europe especially, will encounter both resistance and support. But by the time the story concludes three years later, some changes have clearly come to pass: Notably, it’s a female judge (Anouk Grinberg) who urges Yohan to reopen the case in 2019, something he undertakes with crucial assistance from a new colleague, Nadia (Mouna Soualem), one of the few female detectives in the homicide unit.

“Men kill, and the police are men,” Nadia says. “Odd, isn’t it?” It isn’t the only time “The Night of the 12th” spells out its themes and implications with blunt force, something it also does with its recurring shots of Yohan doing laps on his bicycle around a velodrome. If these moments veer toward the obvious, the movie admirably resists a conventional resolution. Its refusal to tie up loose ends has already inspired comparisons to Bong Joon Ho’s “Memories of Murder” and David Fincher’s “Zodiac,” two of modern cinema’s great cold-case classics. Moll’s movie doesn’t leave behind the same deep, implacable chill of those earlier works, but its lingering rage and sorrow are no less easy to wave aside.

. In French with English subtitles.

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## Monday, August 28, 7:30 pm

Reviewed by Michael Phillips | Chicago Tribune | Rated PG-13 | 106 Mins.

*"A delicate romantic triangle forms the year's most gratifying film so far."*

It's a rare movie that settles, quietly, into some part of your own experiences and memories without a speck of narrative contrivance gumming up your response to the story on the screen.

"Past Lives" is that rarity — modest, I suppose, in scope and budget, yet expansive in its three-part, 24-year unfolding of a friendship that keeps coming back (as Irving Berlin put it) like a song. Writer-director Celine Song's debut feature won't work for everyone, because nothing good ever does. But for those in tune with what it's saying and how it's saying it, "Past Lives" is a present-tense gem that bodes extremely well for Song's future.

Born in Korea, the filmmaker immigrated with her family to Canada when she was 12, then to New York City for graduate school in 2011. She wrote several plays, and early in the pandemic produced a widely admired online version of Chekhov's "The Seagull." "Past Lives" comes from her own life. Five years ago, Song's childhood friend from Seoul visited her in New York, and a scene from that real-life circumstance — three adults, sitting in a Manhattan bar, late at night, the woman between her sort-of ex and her husband — serves as the enticing prologue of "Past Lives."

It's divided into three chronological sections, with Song's interweave of flashbacks keeping things narratively intriguing for the audience. First, in Seoul, we meet 12-year-old Na Young (Moon Seung Ah) as a fiercely competitive student, her primary competition — and confidant and friend — being classmate Hae Sung (Leem Seung-min). Perhaps they will marry someday, Na determines. She thinks this taciturn boy is "manly," and that is enough. Then her family moves to Toronto. The kids now have a hole of indeterminate size in their respective hearts, where their time together formerly resided.

Twelve years later, Na Young is now Nora, played by the superb Greta Lee of "The Morning Show" and "Russian Doll." On her own in Manhattan, she Skypes with Hae Sung (Teo Yoo), now also 24. A random Facebook check has brought the two of them together

again, virtually. It's something, but what? The distance, spanning two continents, allows for a kind of nervous, isolated closeness. Yet they are at once remnants of who they were 12 years earlier, and pencil sketches of the adults they will become.

"Past Lives" gets along just fine without any substantive surprises or reveals. The third section of the story arrives around the midpoint, with Nora 12 years later. She has met and married a fellow writer, Arthur (John Magaro), and they live in the East Village. Hae Sung travels to New York for a visit, to "rest, enjoy, have fun," as he tells his skeptical friends over dinner back in Seoul. But "fun" isn't what we see on his face; it's more like a clenched brand of yearning, or romantic anticipation. Peace of mind, and of heart, remains a sometime thing until the rest of his story with Nora is written.

Lee builds the character of Nora carefully, grounding every moment in watchful perception and different degrees of patience. She's not a "type" but simply a dimensional presence. Largely, this is a three-person tale. Though Yoo makes Hae Sung an astutely judged mixture of worrier and dreamer, the script might've given him an extra scene or two to fully balance the triangle. On the other hand: It makes sense to keep Hae Sung at a remove. It's how Nora experiences him, emotionally and geographically, from the moment Nora/Na Young says goodbye to Hae Sung the first time, as preteens in Seoul.

The style of "Past Lives" favors clean, direct visual set-ups, and a sparing but striking use of close-ups. Lee and Magaro share a crucial late scene in bed, intimate in one way, fraught and wary in another; Arthur, the husband, knows his wife's feelings are being prodded in the direction of the Korean she used to be, which means some churn for the Korean-Canadian-American hyphenate she has become. This, the filmmaker is saying with tact and a lovely sense of empathy, is the stuff of life, especially an immigrant's life. "This is where I ended up," Nora tells Arthur in the bedroom scene, and it's one of many moments in "Past Lives" that speaks someone's truth without summarizing anyone's feelings, reductively.

Song's key filmmaking collaborators here include cinematographer Shabier Kirchner, who worked on Steve McQueen's fantastic, vibrant "Small Axe"; composers Christopher Bear and Daniel Rossen; and editor Keith Fraase, who worked on several of the shaggier Terrence Malick films of the 21st century. "Past Lives" is the everything-everywhere opposite of a recent-phase Malick project: tightly scripted, carefully attuned to what people actually say to each other, and what they don't, or can't. Nora embraces the concept of "in yun," which translates from Korean to English as fate, or destiny, or a hint of a soul connection. For some, the lack of melodrama or fireworks may prove an emotional deterrent in "Past Lives." For others, including me, the right movie makes you care and believe. And this is one of them.

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# SHOWING UP

**Monday, September 11, 7:30 pm**

Reviewed by Chase Hutchinson | Collider | Rated R | 108 Mins.

*"Beautiful yet bittersweet, this latest work from one of the great independent filmmakers of our time is also one of the best of the year."*

What is it to be an artist? The desire to create, no matter what form it takes, can be one of life's true joys just as it is one of its most crushing. You are able to make something where there once was nothing, shouting into the void of the world with your passion that comes to life via writing, filmmaking, or, as is the case in Kelly Reichardt's latest film *Showing Up*, sculpting. Specifically, it is the life of Michelle Williams's Lizzy in which all this is contained.



Though it is a film that is minimalist in the way that Reichardt remains most adept as she finds something dynamic in even the smallest of details, a greater sense of mirth crossed with melancholy emerges. To merely call it her funniest film would be a gross oversimplification, as there is a profound sadness woven throughout it while still being subtly silly. In everything from a quick cut to someone who is no longer there to the repeated stepping over of a dog in a doorway, everything comes to life with an understated yet still humorous disposition. It is an existential humor, delicately capturing the experience of being alive and the way there just never seems to be enough time for what it is we love. It is an experience that has the potential to lay you flat the more times that you cycle through it. While not as propulsive as many of Reichardt's past works, the simplicity of the story is brought to life with an attention to detail that makes for something distinct in her vast cinematic oeuvre.

This all begins and ends with Lizzy. She lives in Portland, Oregon and works in the administrative office of an arts school while preparing to open a new show of her sculptures. She has a cat and a landlord named Jo (Hong Chau) who, in addition to also being an artist, is a point of frustration for Lizzy as she has yet to fix her hot water. An early encounter between the two sees each seeming to talk past the other with Jo more interested in a tire swing than anything else. It results in a concluding punchline to the conversation that is perfectly timed, capturing the frustration that Lizzy has about the whole situation via her sudden absence. Reichardt, who also serves as editor on the film, is just so good at knowing when to cut for the maximum impact that the whole film really sings. Everything just flows together naturally, pulling us deeper and deeper into Lizzy's little corner of the world. When not defined by her working at her art, it is also about her reckoning with her family who all have their own relationships to her. She works for her mother Jean (Maryann Plunkett) which complicates their interactions. Her father Bill (Judd Hirsch) is a retired artist who is content to be just bumming around. However, it is the relationship Lizzy has with her brother that proves to be the most illuminating even as it remains fleeting just like all our lives themselves are.

Sean, played by John Magaro who Reichardt worked with on her 2019 film *First Cow*, is the character who is the most troubled. Though both her parents are largely unbothered by their son's isolation, Lizzy remains increasingly concerned about him. When she visits his home, Sean seems to be growing even more distant from the world around him. He bemoans that he can't watch television anymore, a slightly humorous complaint that takes on a more worrying edge when he explains that he believes his neighbors are behind it. As Lizzy tries to gently push back on this, he closes off even further and a sliver of resentment creeps into his tone. In a film more interested in explosive confrontations, this could easily devolve into a shouting match. Instead, Reichardt lets things play out with far more patience so it overflows with authenticity. This gives room for Magaro to really capture a character who is growing more and more lost just as someone is trying to extend a helping hand that may be too late.

For anyone who has ever been in such a situation, the pain and discomfort from such a moment can break you without warning. The way Williams, who is largely reserved throughout the entire film, embodies a quiet care for her brother is deeply affecting. You can see all of what she feels in everything from the manner in which she carries herself to the way her face will shift at a statement. The introduction of an animal that she begins to care for, a recurrent motif in Reichardt's films, shows how she is trying to make things better in the ways that she can to make up for all the ways that she can't. There is a rich familiarity that is built with this as it shows Lizzy when she is alone. She isn't lonely per se, often appearing to be most content when just given the chance to create, though there are moments where she seems like she wants someone to reach out to her as she puts herself out there via her art.



There are those that do, but there remains a sense of artistic disconnection that the film wades through. Most interestingly, it is Sean who gives voice to this in one key scene when he says that "you have to listen to what isn't being said." This statement, especially on a second watch, proves to be the most illuminating of the film. Just the moments where we get to sit with the simple yet beautifully shot scenes by Reichardt's longtime cinematographer Christopher Blauvelt carry with them a greater weight. They easily could pass by as being insignificant, but you soon come to see that everything is essential. All the glimpses we get of the students at the school, the art that is being constructed, and the particulars of this small community uncover what it is to be alive. While all film is an abstraction of life, there is something that feels just so naturalistic and enthralling to how Reichardt approaches this story. The plot matters less than the emotional experience, itself a form of creation about what it means to create and the way we try to make sense of the troubles in our lives at the same time. The film is simply about being, cutting through all the noise as Sean said to hear what it is that is really going on. Sometimes, life is just about showing up and being present.

*Please join us for our thought provoking post screening discussions!*



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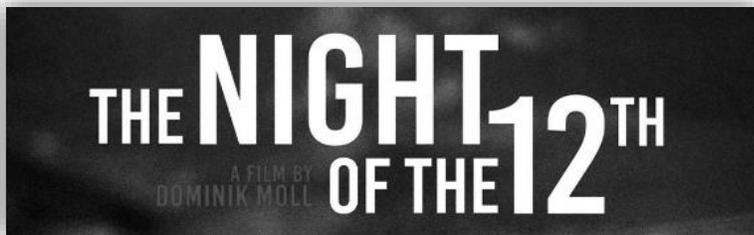
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"A taut and piercing thriller."

–*The Hollywood Reporter*

Monday, August 14 at 7:30 pm

"A soaring, decades-spanning romance that  
will make you catch your breath."

–*The Hollywood Reporter*

Monday, August 28 at 7:30 pm



"A hand-crafted wonder. . . a beautifully  
acted, expertly modulated film."

–*The Hollywood Reporter*

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