

Nosferatu

Monday, November 11, 7:30 pm

**Featuring David Rhodes
on the Mighty Wurlitzer Organ**

Reviewed by Eddie Harrison | Film-Authority.com | Not Rated | 90 mins.

It's 100 years since Max Schreck donned the garb of the undead, or the Nosferatu to use a word claimed by Dracula author Bram Stoker. Except Nosferatu isn't an old Romanian word for vampires at all; it's more likely to be derived from the Greek word nosforos, which means disease bearing, and that's a theme that FW Murnau's classic horror film reflects in both narrative and visuals. Those who saw the film in 1922 would have been fresh from a global pandemic that would still have left them in fear; the sight of the repellent Count Orlok arriving on their shores on a ship full of rats would have struck a primal chord in masses who were likely to have lost loved ones amongst the 50 million killed by influenza.



Nosferatu is a tricky text, following broad themes if not exact details from Stoker's novel, but it's no less iconic for being something of an unofficial rip-off.

The only production of German-based Prana films, Nosferatu moves Stoker's action from London and Whitby to Germany, and sees estate agent Thomas Hutter (Gustav von Wangenheim) sent by his creepy boss Knock on a mission to Transylvania; his client Orlock (Schreck) wants to buy property nearby to Hutter and his wife Ellen (Greta Schröder). Hutter visits Orlock in his remote home in the Carpathian mountains, and gets trapped there while the vampire makes arrangements to post himself in his coffin to Ellen's vicinity in beautiful downtown Lübeck, having taken a shine to the photo of her that Hutter carries with him...

As a German film of the 20's, there is potential for anti-semitism here, but that's not borne out by Murnau's other work or personal life, so Orlock's hooked nose is probably just a successful effort to make him as grotesque as possible. That mission is accomplished; this vampire as a feral, otherworldly quality that makes him a genuine monster, reflected in a strange and haunting shot of Orlock standing in a rowing boat as it drifts across a river, carrying his own coffin under his arm like luggage. The other performances, including a genuine 1922 stripey cat, are various degrees of ripe, but that's the style of the time; in some way the primitive nature of the acting emphasises the film's credentials as the very first of many, many vampire films.



Stoker's novel has been adapted countless times; see Kim Newman's Daily Dracula feature to get a sense of just how many variations there are. But Murnau was a master film-maker, with his follow-up Sunrise one of the great works of cinematic art. Nosferatu is, however, better known and more influential, and with good reason; it's a fully realised version of the Dracula myth, and even today has the power to disconcert and create unease in a world struggling to reach the post-pandemic phase.

From his shadow to his gaunt face, the vampire Count Orlok in 1922's Nosferatu: A Symphony of Horror remains one of film's most spine-tingling creations.

Pre-Show Organ Concerts Return to After Hours Film Society!



Organist David Rhodes and the Mighty Wurlitzer Organ Concerts have returned, thanks to a generous grant from the JCS Arts, Health & Education Fund of DuPage Foundation. The organ lights up 30 minutes before the screening, so come early and enjoy the music!

TIVOLI THEATRE

5021 Highland Avenue | Downers Grove, IL
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Daaaaaali!

Monday, November 18, 7:30 pm

Reviewed by Alistair Ryder | Film Stage | Not Rated | 77 Mins.

At the time of year where every other film is a biopic chasing prestige respectability, we are lucky to have Quentin Dupieux, the prolific, serious-minded, silly filmmaker perfectly positioned to take a sledgehammer to the genre. His second 2023 feature has been described as a “real fake biopic” of Salvador Dalí but is best understood as a return to the heightened analysis of cinematic storytelling à la 2010 breakthrough *Rubber*—a movie which increasingly looks like the rare weak spot in a filmography equal-parts playful and thoughtful.

And don't be mistaken: despite casting several of France's finest character actors as the famed Spaniard, this isn't an I'm Not There-style tribute to the artist's spirit attempting an unconventional work in vein like theirs. Dupieux clearly has no interest in those sub-genres of the biopic, either, even if he does have a clear reverence for his subject. Instead his madcap romp manages to blow up all biopic expectations in the most winningly stupid ways imaginable; as with his other recent work, there is a more profound question lingering beneath the broad gags, but it's never written to feel like a grander thesis statement to distract from the comedy. If anything, the inherent silliness of the film exists to help further the exploration of the biopic genre's inherent failings, and whether any artist should allow someone else's voice to spin their story into their own words.

Daaaaaali! bares a closer resemblance to the later works of the artist's early collaborator, Luis Buñuel, through its central conceit, following a journalist (Dupieux regular Anaïs Demoustier) whose repeated attempts to record an interview with the eccentric artist keep falling through for all manner of bizarre reasons. At first he objects to the idea of being interviewed for a magazine, demanding to be seen on the big screen—when a filmed interview is arranged, he ends up crashing his car into the camera because he wants to park on set (which, it should be noted, is in the middle of a beach). There is very little in the way of distinction between any actors who play Dalí, which is no criticism; the writer-director keeps interchanging them at random, often in the middle of scenes, and they all uniformly hit the same broadly comic personification of the artist. He's a proud egomaniac who enunciates every syllable and frequently rolls out words longer than necessary, a man whose presence is felt long before he enters the room—something Dupieux lays bare in a delightfully nonsensical opening gag that sees him taking longer to walk down the corridor to his first interview than what is physically possible. Like most things in the director's world, the simple pleasures of his visual gags don't neatly translate to the

written word, so simply trust that this is among the hardest I've laughed at a film this year.

One thing the writer-director particularly excels at is hammering every hacky comedic conceit he can conceive into the ground, somehow achieving the impossible of making laughs consistently land where there should be groans. About a half-hour in, he reveals that some of the surreal events he's depicted were a Priest explaining his dreams to the artist over dinner, in the hope he'd create a new work inspired by them to auction off as a church fundraiser. It's very quickly revealed this dream explanation was also part of the dream, and suddenly Dupieux ends up spending most of the runtime repeating this same belabored rug pull, going from hilarious to annoying and then all the way back again by the end. Dalí's work frequently returned to depictions of dream imagery, and the filmmaker has a great time bringing this to life in ways that should theoretically make your eyes roll; it's less a tribute to the artist and more a reflection of how a bad biopic would depict the recurring obsessions in his art if played completely straight.

The increased blurring between dreams and the film's reality is Dupieux's invitation to not take anything we're seeing particularly seriously, making its narrative perspective so inscrutable—though still very accessible—that this aids the question of who should be an authorial voice when telling someone else's story. Within the film, Dalí ends up turning the camera towards the journalist, demanding she be the subject, revealing that the one telling the story doesn't have much of interest to add to the picture. It's easy to interpret this as Dupieux asking if any of us, including himself, really have anything insightful to offer when depicting more famous lives onscreen, and what gives any artist the right to think they're the ones who must tell a story which isn't theirs. After all, his film doesn't attempt to get under the skin of Dalí; he's an outsized caricature no matter which actor is portraying him, with a joke shop mustache the only thing they need to get into the role—a quietly scathing commentary on the use of prosthetics to embody real people. I imagine this was chosen to premiere out of competition at Venice because placing it alongside Bradley Cooper's deliberately showy take on Leonard Bernstein would only expose how reductive that unnecessary performance aid can be.

But the biggest takeaway from Daaaaaali!, as with all of Dupieux's recent work, might be that he doesn't expect us to ponder too much the questions he proposes. He's a very funny filmmaker—funny-haha, not arthouse funny—and I suspect he doesn't want to distract more than necessary from his delightfully silly simple pleasures. The festival screening I attended at London's lovely Curzon Mayfair had a poster for the impending UK release of the more conventional biopic *Dalíland* plastered outside. I suspect that while that film may have a more incisive approach to its subject, it won't offer as much food for thought as this, the stupidest film I have loved this year.

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Monday, December 2, 7:30 pm

Reviewed by Oliver Jones | Observer | Rated R | 91 Mins.

There are such a bounty of moments of breathtaking specificity and quiet poignancy in *Didi*—writer-director Sean Wang’s Sundance Audience Award-winning debut feature about a Taiwanese American kid growing up in the East Bay—that it is almost heartbreaking to delectate on just a few. But by centering on the start of the film and its conclusion, you realize Wang possesses not only a preternatural feel for the emotional jumble of boyhood, but also an astute understanding of both film structure and how to mine many layers of unforced truth from his troupe of talented actors. (The film also took home a Sundance Special Jury Award for Best Ensemble Cast.)



Kicking off with a bang, the film opens with Izaac Wang’s Chris—known to his junior high friends as Wang Wang and to his family as Didi (Mandarin for “younger brother”)—fleeing with ferocious glee from an exploding suburban mailbox that he has just filled with fireworks. Captured on a handheld video camera Chris has yet to make much sense of even under more controlled circumstances, we freeze on one of the few clear images in a jumble of blur: Chris’ deviously overjoyed face, braces gleaming like a Rolls-Royce grille.

Whether intended or not, the frozen image, heavily featured in the film’s marketing, is an exquisite reworking of the most iconic freeze frame in cinema: the final shot of a defeated Antoine Doinel in another impressive first film, Francois Truffaut’s *The 400 Blows*. But where that shot symbolized childhood’s final extinguishing, this image captures youth in its full incandescence and fury, blazing with chaos, possibility, and a wonder so vast that it feels a bit like terror.

Being that *Didi* takes place in August of 2008, Chris’ fumbling self-expression and discovery takes place less on the streets than in the yet uncharted territory of social media, which at that very moment was switching away from the loosey-goosey Myspace to the more grown-up Facebook.

Here is where Chris flirts for the first time, agonizing over which emojis should cap off the text messages he sends his crush (Mahaela Park); where he silently grieves when he loses top four status with his best

friend (Raul Dial); and where, in what is one of the most tender and excruciatingly prescient scenes of any film so far this year, confesses the agony and sadness he feels over the rapidly imploding state of his life to a sympathetic chatbot.

Meanwhile, he is at war with his sister Vivian (a wonderful Shirley Chen), who is about to leave home and begin a new life as an incoming freshman at far-off UC San Diego. When not dismissing his mother Chungsing (Joan Chen), he cruelly torments her, rolling his eyes at her “Asian-ness” when she disassembles her Big Mac and eats it with a knife and fork or when she uses an umbrella to keep off the sun.

The only household member with whom he peacefully coexists—mainly because she holds as much contempt for Chungsing as he does—is his beloved Nai Nai, played by Sean Wang’s real-life grandmother Chang Li Hua. (The film was shot—with exquisite clarity—in his childhood home in Fremont, California.)

As for the ending, I won’t give much away, but it takes place around the Wangs’ kitchen table, and centers on the remarkable faces of the film’s two featured actors, Izaac Wang and Joan Chen.

Izaac Wang—at 16 already an industry veteran having starred in 2019’s *Good Boys*, 2021’s *Clifford the Big Red Dog*, and provided a featured voice for Disney’s *Raya and the Last Dragon*—is revelatory. Swinging from bravado to vulnerability to comic desperation (such as when Chris attempts to impress his new skater friends by “Wu-Tanging” a joint at a party), he delivers a juvenile performance on par with Henry Thomas in *E.T.*

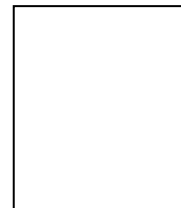
But the secret to the film’s poignancy and lasting power is the way Sean Wang conceives the character of Chungsing—an artist whose talent for and dedication to painting goes largely unnoticed both inside her house and in the contests she enters—and the manner in which the luminous Joan Chen plays her. The *Last Emperor* star cycles through regret, nervousness, resentment and an intense love for children whose lives she barely understands, all with such deftness that you don’t realize until it’s over that the film is as much about Chungsing’s potential artistic flowering as it is about Chris’.

In English and Mandarin with English subtitles.



It’s an impressive switcheroo befitting a film which, along with displaying a knack for the evocative detail, overflows with the kind of empathy that too often goes missing when filmmakers evoke their own origin stories. Sometimes the key to being a great artist is as simple as recognizing that you may not be the only one in the room.

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



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"A silent horror masterwork that continues
to chill."

—*The Guardian*

Monday, November 11 at 7:30 pm

"A Funny, Unpredictable Ode to the Spanish
Surrealist."

—*Slant Magazine*

Monday, November 18 at 7:30 pm



"A movie that will fill your heart with joy."

—*Playlist*

Monday, December 2 at 7:30 pm