AFTER HOURS
FILM SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER
AUGUST 17, 2026
THROUGH
SEPTEMBER 14, 2026

Monday, August 17, 7:30 pm

Reviewed by Alissa Wilkinson | New York Times | Not Rated | 98 mins.

"Steal This Story, Please!" chronicles the life and career of the "Democracy Now!" host as it argues against corporate ownership of the news media.

Stop any random person on the street, and I'd wager they'd agree — no matter their spot on the political spectrum — that America needs a lot more independent journalism. It's easy to see that the consolidation of media ownership by a handful of corporate conglomerates since 1996, when the Telecommunications Act deregulated the industry, has not been good for the press.

But I often wonder how many Americans know what the phrase "independent news media" actually means, let alone how much gumption, drive and tolerance for risk-taking is required to work in independent news media. The new documentary "Steal This Story, Please!" (in theaters) is ostensibly a profile of one such reporter: Amy Goodman, the investigative journalist who hosts the progressive news program "Democracy Now!" Yet the directors Tia Lessin and Carl Deal widen the film's frame, making an impassioned argument for opinionated journalism that operates outside corporate media structures.

Goodman's life story provides the backbone for the film, stretching back to her family's history fleeing pogroms and persecution in Eastern Europe. Her family is where, she says, she first learned to always ask tough questions and stand on her principles. Through interviews with Goodman and her collaborators, "Steal This Story, Please!" recounts events she has covered, including the 1991 East Timor massacre, Sept. 11, the 2016 oil pipeline protests in North Dakota and many more.

The film tracks the development of "Democracy Now!" as a news show — first on radio, then TV and the internet — and also explores how the American news media became centralized and controlled by a few large companies, and what the results of that have been.

Goodman's career is fascinating on its own merits, and the film is full of footage of her doggedly chasing down politicians and sources who clearly would prefer to control their own story. But more important, the movie gradually explores the fundamentals of journalism that she believes in and passes on to colleagues — for instance, as one collaborator puts it, "Speak to the people at the target end of the bomb." In other words, look for the story that challenges the official narrative, and tell that one.

Early in the film, Goodman is referred to as both an activist and a journalist. That isn't the position of every independent news outlet. But it's true that perspective colors the story reporters see, and thus tell; being aware of that doesn't mean you're not still seeking to unearth the truth, and that's how Goodman views it. "Steal This Story, Please!" makes a strong case that a plurality of independent outlets and more journalists, not fewer, are vital to a healthy democracy — and that without a revitalization of the independent press, we may lose the ability to discern the truth altogether.

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An Autumn Summer

Monday, August 31, 7:30 pm

Reviewed by David Fowlie | Keeping it Reel | Not Rated | 98 mins.

"An Autumn Summer" is one of those films that leans into experiences and memories rather than offering a narrative or character arc, and that will be a strike against it for some. But it's actually one of the film's strengths. The convincing, immersive ways in which writer/director Jared Isaac captures the waning days of summer in his directorial debut are impressive. You don't have to be familiar with the geography or have had a similar experience to the young characters in this story to relate to that feeling when the days spent with your friends are numbered. "An Autumn Summer" captures those bittersweet, uncertain feelings when we know adulthood is looming.

It's summer 2010, and Kevin (Mark McKenna, "Sing Street" and "Overlord") and his girlfriend Cody (Lukita Maxwell, "Shrinking" and "Backrooms") are spending the last month of summer at his family's lakeside cottage in Northern Michigan. They're joined by two of their close friends, Jared (Jun Yu) and Martin (Julian Bass), and Kevin's parents, Marylou (Louise Barnes) and Steve (Tony Horton, of P90X fame), with no particular agenda in mind except to hang out for what will likely be the last time before the four friends go off to different colleges. Whether they are on a boat on Lake Michigan, hiking in the woods or the sand dunes, sitting around a bonfire, or just chilling out at the cottage, they make long-lasting memories.

The four eighteen-year-olds we follow in "An Autumn Summer" may not realize that the time they spend is precious, but viewers definitely do. We can relate to that uncertain feeling of saying goodbye to our teen years. Maybe you didn't spend your summer days after high school at your friend's family getaway at the lake, but there were days spent with friends where you felt these were the best days.

That's the main vibe you pick up from watching Isaac's film, which certainly feels like a project born of personal recollection. That feeling makes sense, considering Isaac himself was eighteen back in 2010, and he's drawing inspiration from his own memories of spending time with friends in Michigan at that age. It was a time when TikTok and Instagram weren't as all-consuming or prevalent as they are now, and teens weren't on their phones nearly as much. Therefore, it's a good year to set this story in, when the characters are free from today's distractions found in the palm of your hand, and the setting is also different from where each character hails from. This is where each of them can not only spend time together, but also experience this place together.

This is a hangout movie aimed at recapturing a specific time in life, without a specific narrative to drive it. While that may not sit well with certain viewers, I found myself absorbed by engaging characters and immersed in the idyllic environments. Much of that is credit to a talented ensemble and the impressive skills of cinematographer Brandon Somerhalder, Isaac's longtime friend. He has an uncanny knack for capturing the summer visuals we cherish in our memories: from sun-soaked days to the placid lakeshore at dusk, to the lush colors of the dense woods, and even the freedom and glee felt while riding a bicycle on an open country road. These visuals of "An Autumn Summer", along with Mehrnaz Mohabati's observant sound design and Christiana Laine's meticulous production design, culminate in a surprising visual experience.

Admittedly, my interest in "An Autumn Summer" was piqued when I noticed it starred Lukita Maxwell, who's caught the attention of anyone who's watched Apple TV's "Shrinking". She's great here as Cody and has palpable chemistry with McKenna's Kevin, and together they exude a noticeable comfort and ease. You can tell these two understand each other, and while their future together is uncertain, the time we spend with them is convincing. Some viewers may find there's not enough going on with this couple, since we don't see much in the realm of arguments or friction, but that's only because that's what we're used to. Seeing a young couple who communicate pretty well and aren't smothering or insecure with each other is kind of rare and quite refreshing.

There's also an accepting comfort level conveyed by Kevin's parents, which may seem a little different, possibly forced for some viewers. Marylou and Steve embrace Kevin's friends as if they are their own kids, and that's something I can definitely relate to, having such adult figures in my youth. It's a reminder that sometimes a "found family" sneaks up on you or just naturally happens, even when you're not even looking for one.

There's much to appreciate in "An Autumn Summer", as long as you allow it to pull you in as a viewer. It may not be everyone's nostalgia, but there is nevertheless a universal relatability here that sneaks up on you. Isaac excels at replicating his own experiences, knowing they are worth capturing and sharing.

"An Autumn Summer" aims for a nostalgic, intimate portrait of young love and the bittersweet end of adolescence, but for long stretches it struggles to hold the audience's attention. It's an admirable endeavor that intuitively captures the lazy days of summer with fondness and warmth.

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THE STRANGER

Monday, September 14, 7:30 pm

Reviewed by Zhuo-Ning Su | The Film Stage | Not Rated | 122 Mins.

François Ozon Finally Gives Albert Camus' Novel Its Cinematic Due.

Nobel laureate Albert Camus is one of the most consequential thinkers and writers in the French language, having created absurdist characters and worlds that reflect a view on human existence which remains hauntingly unique. His debut novel The Stranger has seen two notable cinematic adaptations since its publication in 1942: once by Italian maestro Luchino Visconti (1967), most recently by Turkish director Zeki Demirkubuz (2001, under the title Fate). A fellow Frenchman has finally stepped up to revive Camus' words for the big screen as they had originally sounded; perhaps not coincidentally, it proves the most faithful, hypnotically evocative version.

Premiering in Venice competition 58 years after Visconti's film did the same, François Ozon's take on the material makes few changes to the story. Meursault (played by Benjamin Voisin) is a young man living in French-Algeria. He has an office job, frequents local restaurants and otherwise keeps to himself. We quickly notice something quite strange about Meursault when he learns that his mother has passed away. After a look at the telegram bearing the bad news, he continues smoking, shaves, and goes about the rest of his day as if nothing had happened. His demeanor becomes even more jarring when he travels to the rural care home to attend his mother's burial. Among sobbing inhabitants, the son of the deceased seems not only perfectly composed but positively puzzled by the emotions he's witnessing around him. After returning to Algiers, Meursault starts an affair with ex-coworker Marie. When both of them join Meursault's neighbor at a friend's beach house, a run-in with an Arab man ends in Meursault's killing of this literal stranger. In the ensuing trial, judge, jury, and spectators try to figure out the unfeeling monster standing in front of them before passing judgment on his fate.

The most crucial thing that Ozon's film gets right are the moral, indeed philosophical considerations that build its central character. As technically impressive as Visconti's version was, powered by Marcello Mastroianni's empathetic, hot-blooded performance, it operated on a fundamental misunderstanding of the source. Meursault is not supposed to be empathetic or hot-blooded; every time Mastroianni pulls at your heartstrings with those earnest, teary eyes, it's undermining Camus' chilled, quietly shocking worldview. Demirkubuz course-corrected with his 2001 adaptation, but may have erred slightly in the opposite direction, causing the protagonist to come across as clearly antisocial if not downright disturbed. What makes Meursault such a remarkable creation lies somewhere between those extremes.

Far from being crazy, he is clear-headed, observant, capable of lucid intellectual debates. At the same time, he rejects leading a life guided by sentiments, faith, or established ethical codes. His relationship with Marie is one of physical attraction: he desires her while considering the notion of love meaningless, and tells her as much. He makes no effort to defend himself in court—not because he regrets what he's done, but the prospect of being executed doesn't seem all that bad to him. The moment of his true enlightenment arrives when he sits in death cell, feeling finally at one with the "tender indifference of the world."

Thanks in large part to Voisin's superb, carefully calibrated performance, The Stranger gets all of that right. With the exception of a late scene involving a chaplain, Voisin's portrayal of Meursault is characterized by utmost restraint. He never raises his voice and his face seldom betrays notable emotion. Yet there's nothing robotic or hollow about this performance. You can tell it is informed by an understanding of the character that goes beyond the page. In the guileless, matter-of-fact way he agrees to marry Marie—not out of love, but because he doesn't care either way—you see the lack of cruelty in a man whose words can be so hurtful. When Meursault is confronted with the prosecutor's relentless attacks in court, the fleeting look (not of indignation but confusion) reveals someone who's almost too innocent for this world.

Ozon's direction captures the complexity of a text that seems simple at first glance. On the one hand, it puts you firmly inside the protagonist's head, offering a keenly subjective, first-person perspective; on the other, a sense of distance and alienation permeates his film. This feeling of being both incredibly close to and always at one remove from what's happening beautifully recreates the experience of reading Camus' masterpiece. Shot in elegant black-and-white by Manuel Dacosse, The Stranger has a timeless look, a dream-like quality that keeps one on their toes. On top of this gorgeous scenery, Fatima Al Qadiri's curious, at times ominous score reinforces the impression that something is amiss inside the pretend-paradise.

The only additional story beat that Ozon introduced in his adaptation focuses on the sister of the victim. While Camus' novel very much casts her as a passive presence who inadvertently sets off the chain of events that leads to the murder, the new film asks us, through two brief but impactful scenes, to consider her side of the story. The film's final shot, in particular, reminds one of the racial/colonialist tensions bubbling in the background and adds another quiet, eloquent layer to Camus' reflections on indifference and futility.

In French and Arabic with English subtitles.

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Anim8, the After Hours Film Society's 22nd Annual Student Film Festival, is available online for viewing! Culled from 71 entries from 11 countries around the world, this special program showcases the top-rated films from students of all ages. Watch from the comfort of your home and celebrate this new wave of cinema! Go to afterhoursfilmsociety.com/student-film-fest and enjoy.

And, while you are on the site, please take a look at our call for entries for the 2026 Anim8 Student Film Festival! Students of any level through Graduate are eligible. The application is available on FilmFeeway.com/Amim8. The deadline is June 14 with an option for late entries through July.

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"A lot of fearless gumption – and one giant finger to the man."
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Monday, August 17 at 7:30 pm

"A lovely reminder of the fleeting nature of both summer and youth."
–MacGuffin or Meaning

Monday, August 31 at 7:30 pm

"One of Ozon's most strikingly beautiful films to date…incredibly stylish, a shimmering monochrome affair."
–Deadline

Monday, September 14 at 7:30 pm

The After Hours Film Society is partially supported by a grant from the Illinois Arts Council.