Here's what's on at the cinema this December

By Daniel Dercksen

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There are some thrilling and captivating films, documentaries, live theatre and opera for everyone to escape into during December in South African cinemas and streaming platforms...

1 December

After a Black Friday riot ends in tragedy, a mysterious Thanksgiving-inspired killer terrorizes Plymouth, Massachusetts – the birthplace of the holiday. Picking off victims one by one, the seemingly random revenge killings soon become part of a larger, sinister plan.

It is based on Roth's fictitious trailer of the same name from *Grindhouse* (2007), it is the third feature-length adaptation of a fictitious Grindhouse trailer after Robert Rodriguez's *Machete* (2010) and Jason Eisener's black comedy *Hobo with a Shotgun* (2011). It is directed by Eli Roth, from a screenplay written by Jeff Rendell and a story by Roth and Rendell. With Patrick Dempsey, Ty Olsson, Gina Gershon, Gabriel Davenport.

“*May December* explores one of the great talents of the human species: our colossal refusal to look at ourselves,” says director by Todd Haynes. Despite what began as a shocking affair, then 36-year old Gracie (Julianne Moore) and 13-year old Joe (Charles Melton) now lead a seemingly picture-perfect suburban life some 20 years later. Their domestic bliss is disrupted when Elizabeth (Natalie Portman), a famous actress, arrives in their tight-knit community to research her upcoming role as Gracie.

As Elizabeth ingratiates herself into the everyday lives of Gracie and Joe, the uncomfortable facts of their scandal unfurl, causing long-dormant emotions to resurface. The screenplay was crafted by Samy Burch, based on a story by Burch and Alex Mechanik. Loosely inspired by the story of Mary Kay Letourneau.

8 December

The Inseparables is a fun buddy adventure following the misadventures of a runaway puppet with a boundless imagination and an abandoned stuffed animal toy in need of a friend. Based on an original idea by Joel Cohen and Alec Sokolow, the Oscar-nominated writers of *Toy Story*, it follows the misadventures of Don, a runaway puppet and, DJ Doggy Dog, an abandoned stuffed animal toy in need of a friend. Don and DJ Doggy Dog cross paths in Central Park and pair up against all odds for an epic adventure of friendship in New York City. The film was penned by Bob Barlen and Cal Brunker

Based on the extraordinary character at the centre of Charlie and the Chocolate Factory, Roald Dahl's most iconic children's book and one of the best-selling children's books of all time, *Wonka* tells the wondrous story of how the world's greatest inventor, magician and chocolate-maker became the beloved Willy Wonka we know today. The film is an intoxicating mix of magic and music, mayhem and emotion, all told with fabulous heart and humour.

Starring Timothée Chalamet in the title role, this irresistibly vivid and inventive big screen spectacle will introduce audiences to a young Willy Wonka, chock-full of ideas and determined to change the world one delectable bite at a time—proving that the best things in life begin with a dream, and if you're lucky enough to meet Willy Wonka, anything is possible.

It is directed by Paul King (writer/director of the *Paddington films), who co-wrote the screenplay with Simon Farnaby, based on a story by King. It tells the origin story of Willy Wonka, a character in the 1964 novel Charlie and the Chocolate Factory by Roald Dahl, featuring his early days as an eccentric chocolatier.*

From legendary director John Woo and the producer of John Wick comes *Silent Night*, a gritty revenge tale of a tormented father (Joel Kinnaman) who witnesses his young son die when caught in a gang's crossfire on Christmas Eve. While recovering from a wound that costs him his voice, he makes vengeance his life's mission and embarks on a punishing training regimen in order to avenge his son's death.

Full of Woo's signature style, *Silent Night* redefines the action genre with visceral, thrill-a-minute storytelling.

15 December

The 20th Anniversary re-release of *Love Actually* is one of the best Christmas romances of all time, it follows the lives of eight very different couples in dealing with their love lives in various loosely interrelated tales all set during a frantic month before Christmas in London, England. The film was written and directed by Richard Curtis.

An A-list cast includes Hught Grant, Emma Thompson, Chiwetel Ejiofor, Keira Knightley, Colin Firth, Bill Nighy, and Liam Neeson.

Dream Scenario is a wickedly entertaining comedy about how ‘going viral’ can be a total nightmare. Hapless family man Paul Matthews (Nicolas Cage) finds his life turned upside down when millions of strangers suddenly start seeing him in their dreams. But when his nighttime appearances take a nightmarish turn, Paul is forced to navigate his newfound stardom.

A laugh-out-loud, razor sharp comedy starring a never-better Nicolas Cage as Paul Matthews — husband, father, and remarkably unremarkable everyman who becomes a literal overnight celebrity when strangers around the globe suddenly start dreaming about him. But as his newfound fame takes an unexpected turn, Paul must do whatever it takes to prove to the world that he’s anything but the man of their dreams.

Anthony Davis's groundbreaking and influential opera *X: The Life and Times of Malcolm X*, which premiered in 1986, arrives at the Met at long last. Theater luminary and Tony-nominated director of Slave Play Robert O'Hara oversees a potent new staging that imagines Malcolm as an everyman whose story transcends time and space.

An exceptional cast of breakout artists and young Met stars enliven the operatic retelling of the civil rights leader's life. Baritone Will Liverman, who triumphed in the Met premiere of Fire Shut Up in My Bones, is Malcolm, alongside soprano Leah Hawkins as his mother, Louise; mezzo-soprano Raehann Bryce-Davis as his sister Ella; bass-baritone Michael Sumuel as his brother Reginald; and tenor Victor Ryan Robertson as Nation of Islam leader Elijah Muhammad. Kazem Abdullah conducts the newly revised score, which provides a layered, jazz-inflected setting for the esteemed writer Thulani Davis's libretto.

In selected cinemas: 15, 16, 17, 19 December 2023.

Read more about the Met Opera Season

22 December

Directed by Academy Award winner Taika Waititi (*Jojo Rabbit, Thor: Ragnarok*) and based on a true story, *Next Goal Wins* follows the American Samoa soccer team, infamously known for their brutal 31-0 loss in 2001. With the World Cup qualifiers approaching, the team hires down-on-his-luck, maverick coach Thomas Rongen (Michael Fassbender) hoping he will turn the world's worst soccer team around in this heartfelt underdog comedy.

This holiday season, Illumination, creators of this year's record-shattering *The Super Mario Bros. Movie*, and the blockbuster *Minions, Despicable Me, Sing and The Secret Life of Pets franchises, invites you to take flight into the thrill of the unknown with a funny, feathered family vacation like no other in the action-packed new original comedy, Migration.*

The Mallard family is in a bit of rut. While dad Mack is content to keep his family safe paddling around their New England pond forever, mom Pam is eager to shake things up and show their kids - teen son Dax and duckling daughter Gwen - the whole wide world. After a migrating duck family alights on their pond with thrilling tales of far-flung places, Pam persuades Mack to embark on a family trip, via New York City, to tropical Jamaica.

As the Mallards make their way South for the winter, their well-laid plans quickly go awry. The experience will inspire them to expand their horizons, open themselves up to new friends and accomplish more than they ever thought possible, while teaching them more about each other - and themselves - than they ever imagined.

A reluctant king who must defy expectations to defeat the darkest ancient powers deep within the sea, Jason Momoa is Aquaman in *Aquaman And The Lost Kingdom*, an all-new chapter in the Aquaman mythology. A grand-scale adventure and action-packed journey above and below sea with astonishing visuals of epic scale, it is a story of the bonds of brotherhood and unexpected allies coming together to forge a new destiny.

Having failed to defeat Aquaman the first time, Black Manta, still driven by the need to avenge his father's death, will stop at

nothing to take Aquaman down once and for all. This time Black Manta is more formidable than ever before, wielding the power of the mythic Black Trident, which unleashes an ancient and malevolent force.

To defeat him, Aquaman will turn to his imprisoned brother Orm, the former King of Atlantis, to forge an unlikely alliance. Together, they must set aside their differences in order to protect their kingdom and save Aquaman's family, and the world, from irreversible destruction.

29 December

After an amazing first date, Bea (Sydney Sweeney) and Ben's (Glen Powell) fiery attraction turns ice cold – until they find themselves unexpectedly reunited at a destination wedding in Australia. So they do what any two mature adults would do: pretend to be a couple in the romantic comedy *Anyone But You*.

When an environmental crisis sees London submerged by flood waters, a young family is torn apart in the chaos in *The End We Start From*. As a woman and her newborn try and find their way home, the profound novelty of motherhood is brought into sharp focus in this intimate and poetic portrayal of family survival.

This British survival film directed by Mahalia Belo and starring Jodie Comer, with Benedict Cumberbatch, Katherine Waterston and Mark Strong. It is adapted by Alice Birch from the novel of the same name by Megan Hunter.

It is the summer of 1957. Behind the spectacle of Formula 1, ex-racer Enzo Ferrari is in crisis. Bankruptcy threatens the factory he and his wife, Laura built from nothing ten years earlier. Their volatile marriage has been battered by the loss of their son, Dino a year earlier. Ferrari struggles to acknowledge his son Piero with Lina Lardi. Meanwhile, his drivers' passion to win pushes them to the edge as they launch into the treacherous 1,000-mile race across Italy, the Mille Miglia. Michael Mann's *Ferrari* stars Adam Driver and Penelope Cruz.

Celludroid Sci-Fi / Fantasy / Animation Film Festival

This dimension defying festival features classics and short films from around the galaxy (which you're unlikely to see anywhere else), both in cinema at The Labia Theatre (Cape Town) and streaming across South Africa. The festival takes place from 1 – 10 December.

Official website: www.celludroid.net

Recommended viewing on the streaming platforms

Netflix

On the film front two families reckon with a looming disaster that grows more terrifying by the minute, forcing everyone to come to terms with their places in a collapsing world in the Apocalyptic thriller *Leave the World Behind* (8/12). *Maestro* (20/12) is a towering and fearless love story chronicling the lifelong relationship between Leonard Bernstein and Felicia Montealegre Cohn Bernstein. A love letter to life and art, Maestro at its core is an emotionally epic portrayal of family and love. When a colony on the edge of the galaxy finds itself threatened by the armies of the tyrannical Regent Balisarius, they dispatch a young woman with a mysterious past to seek out warriors from neighbouring planets to help them take a stand in *Rebel Moon — Part One: A Child of Fire* (22 /12). In the spring of 1945 at the mysterious Ongseong Hospital in Gyeongseong, an entrepreneur and a sleuth fight for survival and face a creature born from human greed in the series *Gyeongseong Creature* (22/12). In the heist film *Berlin* (29/12) only two things can brighten a dark day: The first is love. The second is stealing a fortune.

Showmax

In the dark comedy *Die Onderonsie (The Quarrel)* (1 /12) five ex band-mates come together for their annual reunion, a dead body stirs up suspicion and violence among the friends. With tjommies like these, who needs enemies? New allies are forged and old enemies resurface in *Fast X* (4/ 12). But everything changes when Dom discovers that his own 8-year-old son is the ultimate target of Dante's vengeance. *The Amazing Maurice* (7/12) follows a sassy, street-smart ginger cat, his band of rats and pied-piper friend Keith, who swindle villagers with a staged rat plague. Channing Tatum is back in *Magic Mike's Last Dance* (25/12) when a wealthy socialite (Salma Hayek) lures him with an offer he can't refuse.

Disney Plus

From acclaimed writer-director, James Mangold comes *Indiana Jones and the Dial of Destiny* with Harrison Ford reprising his iconic role as the whip-smart archaeologist one last time for a thrilling, globe-trotting adventure (1 /12). *The Shepherd* is a new series that is holiday-themed for the season. It features a pilot flying home on Christmas Eve whose radio and power cut out over the North Sea. The live-action action Percy Jackson and the Olympians follows the titular character as he learns that he's a demigod and embarks on a quest that might mean saving the world, the series will debut new episodes weekly on the streamer. (20/12)

Read more about the latest and upcoming films.

ABOUT DANIEL DERCKSEN

Daniel Dercksen has been a contributor for Lifestyle since 2012. As the driving force behind the successful independent training initiative The Writing Studio and a published film and theatre journalist of 40 years, teaching workshops in creative writing, playwriting and screenwriting throughout South Africa and internationally the past 22 years. Visit www.writingstudio.co.za

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