

Heroes and nocturnal animals

 By [Daniel Derksen](#)

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A divorced couple discover dark truths about each other and themselves in the riveting mind-bender *Nocturnal Animals*; a young hero reveals the true face of heroism in Billy Lynn's *Long Halftime Walk*; a teenage hawker from Mamelodi becomes a human rights legend in the local film *Kalushi*; a team of explorers fight to escape a primal Eden in which humanity does not belong in *Kong: Skull Island*; and The Bolshoi Ballet's *The Sleeping Beauty* will delight fans of classical ballet.

Nocturnal Animals

This is a haunting and mind bending romantic thriller of shocking intimacy and gripping tension that explores the thin lines between love and cruelty, and revenge and redemption. Amy Adams and Jake Gyllenhaal star as a divorced couple discovering dark truths about each other and themselves. Boldly exploring the psychological and emotional sea changes of men and women living – or trying to live – their own truths, *Nocturnal Animals* is the second film from writer/director Tom Ford, following the acclaimed and award-winning *A Single Man* (2009).

In seeking to tell this tale that is not only a story-within-a-story, but also an exploration of human desire, ambition and indulgence, Ford realised that he would be exercising both his directing and screenwriting skills to an even greater degree than with his first film.

Ford confides, “One of the themes of the film that hit home personally for me was the exploration of masculinity in our culture. Our heroes Tony and Edward do not possess the stereotypical traits of masculinity that our culture often expects yet in the end they both triumph. As a boy growing up in Texas, I was anything but what was considered classically masculine, and I suffered for it. I empathise with the characters of Tony and Edward, and their perseverance speaks to me.”

Gyllenhaal, upon initially reading Ford’s screenplay, found himself “profoundly moved, and shook, by it. The script communicated, in a lot of ways, what it feels like to have a broken heart. It’s also about how we want to be perceived and how we present ourselves to other people – so then, who are we really, what is someone’s real truth? I feel that Tom is at war with the idea of aesthetic over honesty, and that filmmaking is a medium in which he can express this.

Billy Lynn’s Long Halftime Walk

The film is told from the point of view of 19-year-old private Billy Lynn (Joe Alwyn), who, along with his fellow soldiers in Bravo Squad, has been hailed as a hero and brought home for a victory tour after a harrowing Iraq battle. Through flashbacks, culminating at the spectacular halftime show of the Thanksgiving Day football game, the film reveals what really happened to the squad – contrasting the realities of the Iraq conflict with America’s celebration back home

In a world obsessed with hero worship, where we only adulate glory and eminence, and forget about the person behind the idol, Ang Lee gives us a pleasant satirical view of what it takes to be trapped between being a hero and a person.

During a time where American patriotism is rebooted and the mighty dollar rules, and the War in Iraq has become a stale memory, Billy Lynn’s Long Halftime Walk is a socially relevant film that shows how revered heroes – on the sports field, music world, cheer leaders, or in battle during war – become adulated puppets on a string.

Kalushi

Kalushi: The Story of Solomon Mahlangu is based on the true story of a 19-year-old hawker from Mamelodi township selling veggies to help support his family, avoiding the rioting at school, and train-surfing with his friends, and who somehow becomes a political icon. Through this film we get to see him transform from an average hawker to a human rights legend. Sacrificing his short life through a brutal death in the hands of South Africa’s apartheid police has made Mahlangu a celebrated struggle hero in the revolutionary fight for freedom.

South African filmmaker, Mandla Walter Dube, makes his feature directorial debut with the human drama Kalushi: The Story of Solomon Mhlangu.

“Our movie follows the journey of this young man who, at the outset, is not at all involved in the politics of South Africa and was not involved in the student uprising on June 16, 1976. He was trying to make a living as a hawker on the streets of Mamelodi and on the trains in Pretoria. When he had the hero’s call, he refused it, and then, something tragic happens to him which changes the entire course of his life. When we are hit with adversity we have to start making certain decisions to help us change. You are either going to change or change is going to change you.”

Kong: Skull Island

The producers of Godzilla reimagine the origins of one the most powerful monster myths of all in this compelling, original adventure from director Jordan Vogt-Roberts. It tells the story of a diverse team of scientists, soldiers and adventurers (Tom Hiddleston, Samuel L. Jackson, Brie Larson) uniting to explore a mythical, uncharted island in the Pacific, as dangerous as it is beautiful. Cut off from everything they know, the team ventures into the domain of the mighty Kong, igniting the ultimate battle between man and nature. As their mission of discovery becomes one of survival, they must fight to escape a primal Eden in which humanity does not belong.

First unleashed more than eight decades ago, King Kong has thundered off the big screen and into our world with a force that echoes through our collective consciousness still. Now the time has come to restore the crown of the greatest movie monster myth of all.

Kong is the seminal big-screen badass and continues to resonate as everything from a living tempest of nature's fury to an avatar for our own primal selves. Actor Tom Hiddleston suggests, "Kong embodies the internal clash between our civilised selves and the place in our consciousness that still has a very real sense of something bigger than ourselves. How do you reconcile this massive creature who is both a terrifying force of nature and a sentient being with an intelligence that is different from ours, but no less sophisticated?"

The Sleeping Beauty

This is the third of three iconic ballets with music by Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky to be screened in cinema from the Bolshoi Ballet stage in Moscow, which releases on Saturday, 11 March for limited screenings. With choreography by Yuri Grigorovich, the ballet stars the Bolshoi's prima ballerina Olga Smirnova in the title role as Princess Aurora, with Semyon Chudin dancing the role of Prince Désiré. Also dancing in the production are Alexei Loparevich as the Evil Fairy Carabosse, Yulia Stepanova as the Lilac Fairy, Vitaly Biktimirov in the role of Catalabutte, Artemy Belyakov as Bluebird and Anastasia Denisova as Princess Florine.

On her 16th birthday, a curse by the evil Carabosse causes the beautiful Princess Aurora to fall into a deep slumber for 100 years. Only the kiss of a prince can awaken her...

In this resplendent and magical classic of The Sleeping Beauty, the Bolshoi dancers take the audience on a dream-like journey through this classic fairy tale complete with jewelled fairies, a magical kingdom, a youthful princess and a handsome prince in this purest style of classical ballet. The Bolshoi's sumptuous staging with its luxurious sets and costumes gives life to Perrault's fairy tale unlike any other. This ballet is a must-see!

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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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