

La La and XXX



By [Daniel Derksen](#)

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There are four films opening this week: *La La Land* (nominated for 14 Oscars this year) takes off on an exuberant song-and-dance journey through a life-changing love affair between a jazz pianist and a hopeful actress; from local director Koos Roets (*Pawpaw vir My Darling*) comes the comedy-thriller *Hoener Met Die Rooi Skoene*; a successful New York advertising executive seeks answers from the universe when suffers a great tragedy and retreats from life in *Collateral Beauty*; and in *XXX: The Return Of Xander Cage* an extreme athlete turned government operative embarks on a deadly collision course.

La La Land

La La Land gloriously revives the musical genre with verve and vigour. The film begins as everything begins in LA: on the freeway. This is where Sebastian (Ryan Gosling) meets Mia (Emma Stone), with a disdainful honk in a traffic jam that mirrors all too well the gridlock they're each navigating in their lives. Both are focused on the kind of near-impossible hopes that are the lifeblood of the city: Sebastian trying to get people to care about traditional jazz in the 21st Century, Mia aiming to nail just one uninterrupted audition. But neither expects that their fateful encounter will lead them to take leaps they never could alone. The leaps they both make, towards each other and, conflictingly, into their grandest artistic dreams, creates its own quintessentially cinematic world of rapture in *La La Land* – one that with light, colour, sound, music and words takes a trip directly into the ecstasies of the happiness we chase... and the heartache of the passions we never get over.

Boy meets girl meets the up-ending aspirations of the city of stars – and they all break out of the conventions of everyday life as La La Land takes off on an exuberant song-and-dance journey through a life-changing love affair between a jazz pianist and a hopeful actress. At once an ode to the glamour and emotion of cinema classics, a love letter to the Los Angeles of unabated dreams, and a distinctly modern romance, the film reunites Ryan Gosling and Emma Stone, bringing them together with rising writer/director Damien Chazelle (the Oscar-winning Whiplash.)

“La La Land deals with something that’s really personal to me: how you balance life and art, how you balance reality and dreams and also, specifically, how you balance your relationship to your art with your relationships with other people,” says Chazelle.

“With La La Land, I wanted to do a love story and I also wanted to create a musical like the musicals that entranced me as a kid, but updated into something very modern. I wanted to explore how you use colour, sets, costumes and all these very expressionistic elements of Old School movie making to tell a story that takes place in our times.”

“La La Land is absolutely a love letter to the city,” says producer Marc Platt. “The way the film mixes two people leading very hip, modern lives with all these iconic Hollywood locales is unique. You get a feeling both of the romantic fantasy of the city and its grounding in real lives.”

Hoener Met Die Rooi Skoene

It’s not a children’s movie or a fairytale; neither a drama. It’s a thriller-comedy from renowned director and producer, Koos Roets (‘n Pawpaw Vir My Darling).

Bonnie (Lizz Meiring) is a receptionist at the internationally acclaimed De Waal Theatre Group. Whilst chatting away on the phone, as per usual, her boss, the successful, but unpopular businessman and impresario, Du Toit de Waal (Deon Lotz), is murdered. Bonnie discovers him on the office table behind her with a dagger in his back. She phones the police and then goes closer to the body to inspect the situation. And of course, she collapses, as she always does. She is woken by the flashlight of Constable Mickey Mentz (André Weideman), only to discover that the body is nowhere to be seen. The perfect setting for a “who did it?” murder mystery filled with unexpected moments of laughter, twists and turns, orchestrated by Bonnie, her parrot Napoleon and the irritable, flammable, moody inspector, Captain Hendrik Greyling (Louw Venter).

XXX: The Return Of Xander Cage

The third explosive chapter of the blockbuster franchise that redefined the spy thriller finds extreme athlete turned government operative Xander Cage (Vin Diesel) coming out of self-imposed exile and on a collision course with deadly

alpha warrior Xiang and his team in a race to recover a sinister and seemingly unstoppable weapon known as Pandora's Box. Recruiting an all-new group of thrill-seeking cohorts, Xander finds himself enmeshed in a deadly conspiracy that points to collusion at the highest levels of world governments. Packed with the series' signature deadpan wit and bad-ass attitude, XXX: The Return of Xander Cage will raise the bar on extreme action with some of the most mind-blowing stunts ever to be caught on film. D.J. Caruso (Disturbia, The Disappointments Room) directs the return to one of Hollywood's most successful spy-action franchises from a screenplay by F. Scott Frazier (based on characters created by Rich Wilkes).

"More than anything I want the audience to escape and to just have fun," says Diesel, "That's what this film is all about, but I also hope it inspires people to be their true selves and not be afraid to be wacky or unique."

Collateral Beauty

When a successful New York ad executive (Will Smith) suffers a personal tragedy and retreats from life, his friends devise a drastic plan to reach him before he loses everything. Pushing him to the very edge, they force him to confront the truth in surprising and profoundly human ways.

From Oscar-winning director David Frankel, this thought-provoking drama explores how even the deepest loss can reveal moments of beauty, and how the constants of love, time and death interlock in a life fully lived.

"The way you see the world, the way your heart opens and the way you relate to people after a tragedy can be very beautiful," observes screenwriter Allan Loeb, who is also one of the film's producers, "It can be transformative."

Will Smith, who stars as the central character, Howard, a man lost in grief, concurs. “The over-arching idea of collateral beauty touched all of us, that no matter how difficult your circumstances, there is something special happening right there; you just have to look for it to see it.” Citing the holiday classic ‘It’s a Wonderful Life’ among his favourites, and one of his inspirations for Collateral Beauty, he adds, “So many of the actors David approached first said yes. It was one of those times where we all got it; we all wanted to be a part of delivering this story to the screen.”

Returning to the themes of Love, Time and Death, Frankel says, “I don’t expect that people will necessarily come away with a deeper understanding of these profound ideas, but they might be moved to think about how it affects their own lives. We all have to grapple with the importance of these abstract notions, and that’s the heart of the movie.

“What I’m hoping is that we can give audiences a life-affirming, chest-swelling experience that takes them out of the everyday and gives them something to talk about,” he concludes.

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