

FILM



Editor's Choice

Notes on nihilism

Existential crises loom large over three of this summer's new releases. *By Paul O'Callaghan*

Anke Neugebauer

DON'T MISS

Apocalypse Now: Final Cut

For one day only, Francis Ford Coppola's psychedelic Vietnam war opus returns to the big screen in a glorious new 4K restoration, marking the film's 40th anniversary.

Jul 15

Thai Film Screenings

Cultural collective un.thai.tled presents two nights of Thai shorts this summer at Movimento.

The first, on **Jul 24**, explores gender and sexuality; the second, on **Aug 14**, shines a light on Thailand's often-marginalised ethnic minorities. Entrance to both is free.

EXBlicks x Asia Film Berlin: Cha Ji Ryang

Join us at Lichtblick Kino for a night of experimental short films by Korean multimedia artist Cha Ji Ryang, a fellow-in-residence at Berlin's ZK/U this summer.

Aug 17

Given Pixar Animation Studios' recent form with subpar sequels, you'd be forgiven for dismissing **Toy Story 4** as a cynical cash-grab. After all, it's been almost a decade since *Toy Story 3* brought the saga of young Andy and his sentient toys to a satisfying conclusion. Indeed, this new instalment gets off to a shaky start, with our plastic protagonists pondering the same existential question they grappled with last time: What purpose does a toy serve once it's been cast aside by its owner? But things take a compellingly strange turn when pre-schooler Bonnie, who inherited Andy's toy collection in the previous film, fashions a new companion out of a plastic spork and other household junk. Said creation, named Forky, is terrified by the notion of being a child's plaything, believing that he instead belongs in the trash. There thus follows an admirably off-kilter running gag in which the nihilistic utensil is essentially placed on suicide watch. The tone darkens further when wholesome cowboy Woody (Tom Hanks) finds himself trapped in an antique shop, hounded by ventriloquist's dummies intent on ripping out his voice box. It all whips by at such a frenetic pace, you'll likely be caught off guard by the devastatingly poignant final act, which sees multiple characters take

brave leaps into the unknown. This may not be the best *Toy Story*, but it's perhaps the most bittersweet.

Brady Corbet's audacious 2015 directorial debut *The Childhood of a Leader* was a chilly portrait of a fascist dictator's formative years. His bombastic follow up, **Vox Lux**, charts the unlikely rise of a millennial pop starlet named Celeste (Raffey Cassidy) before leaping forward in time to assess the psychological cost of her fame. The film is suffused with pitch-black humour – Celeste's big break comes about as a consequence of a school massacre, while Willem Dafoe's deadpan, Lars von Trier-esque voiceover narration holds everything together. But while these elements won't be to everyone's taste, a bigger stumbling block may be Natalie Portman's performance as the embittered older Celeste, who attempts a musical comeback while staving off a nervous breakdown. It's a far from subtle turn – think a coked-up Madonna at her most petulant and provocative. But show up expecting an unapologetically overwrought social satire rather

than a nuanced character study, and you may find much to love.

The young heroines of **Endzeit** (photo) certainly have inner demons to wrestle with, but their pressing concern is to survive a trip across rural Germany in the aftermath of a zombie apocalypse. Director Carolina Hellsgård (see interview page 20) makes this a worthwhile trip on numerous fronts. The film offers a strangely romantic vision of a world in crisis: the culling of the population has allowed nature to flourish, giving central duo Vivi (Gro Swantje Kohlhof) and Eva (Maja Lehrer) a gorgeous overgrown landscape to traverse. Refreshingly, the narrative is unwaveringly female-focused, from its sensitive exploration of sisterly guilt to a strange cameo from veteran Danish actress Trine Dyrholm as mother nature personified. And despite obvious budget constraints, the brief action sequences are consistently pulse-pounding. *Endzeit* may prove too light on plot for mainstream audiences, but it's one of the slickest German-language genre films we've seen in recent years. ■

Vox Lux ★★★★★ *Starts Jul 25* D: Brady Corbet (US 2018) with Natalie Portman, Jude Law | **Toy Story 4** ★★★★★ *Starts Aug 15* D: Josh Cooley (US 2019) with Tom Hanks, Tim Allen | **Endzeit** ★★★★★ *Starts Aug 22* D: Carolina Hellsgård (Germany 2018) with Gro Swantje Kohlhof, Maja Lehrer