



DAILY SCREENS

Top 10 Festival Films of 2020 You Haven't Seen Yet

The best of the fests from Austin and beyond

BY RICHARD WHITTAKER, 8:00AM, FRI. JAN. 1, 2021



Every year, Austin's film festival highlight some of the best up-and-coming filmmakers. And every year, there are still some titles that haven't been widely released yet. With so many festivals switching to virtual formats, we've had more titles than ever to tantalize us, so here are 10 of the films we can't wait for you to see in 2021 and beyond.

1) *Jumbo*

Screened at: aGLIFF

Love is a many-splendored thing, and you never know when it will strike. Writer-director Zoé Wittock understands that you love who you love, and if they love you back you'll do anything you can to be with them. That's how it is with Jeanne (Noémie Merlant) and Jumbo, even if they have to overcome the bigotry and bias of Jeanne's small town, and her small-minded neighbors. But can a young woman and a fairground attraction find true love? Yes, fairground attraction. Absurd as it may sound, *Jumbo* is the sweetest romance of the year. Somehow Wittock, Merlant, and cinematographer Thomas Buelens make you believe that there's a place in this world for these two crazy kids, even if one of them is emotionally distant and the other is a few tons of steel. (Read our review [here](#).)

JUMBO Trailer VF



Odds you'll get to see it: You'll be able to take a ride on Jumbo in 2021 when it gets released by Dark Star Pictures.

2) *Rare Beasts*

Screened at: SXSW

One of the first and saddest casualties of the cancelation of SXSW. Billie Piper has seen the entertainment industry from all angles: child actor, pop star, a fandom favorite from her run on *Doctor Who*, and so much more. Now she's channeled all that resume into her directorial debut, a freewheeling look at celebrity and motherhood, relationships and stardom. But this is no maudlin *A Star is Born* introspection: Piper's smart, wild, weird, and acerbic depiction of making your way in "the business" is *L.A. Story* by way of Harold Pinter.

Clip from Rare Beasts



Odds you'll get to see it: No word yet, but Piper's name and her unique, fascinating voice should guarantee a proper release.

3) *Fugitive Dreams*

Screened at: Austin Film Festival

In 2002, Jason Neulander directed Caridad Svich's *Fugitive Pieces* at Austin's Hude Park Theatre, a strange and elegiac tale of two drifters traversing the United States of Limbo. Nearly two decades later they reunited to rewrite it as *Fugitive Dreams*, with those two rail riders lost in a nowhere that is both period piece and blisteringly

modern. (Read our review [here](#), and our interview with director Jason Neulander, "[Riding the Rails From Stage to Screen](#)," Oct. 16.)

Fugitive Dreams - official teaser



Odds you'll get to see it: No word on a release date yet for this wonderful, strange trip into America's everbroken, everhealing heart.

4) *Murder Bury Win*

Screened at: Austin Film Festival

Board games have been on everyone's mind during the lockdown, but have you ever thought where they came from? Michael Lovan gets into the surprisingly cut-throat world of design and IP theft in *Murder Bury Win*, as three schlubs with a dream and some handmade pieces have to playtest their game about getting away with murder when they end up with a very real body on their hands. (Read our review [here](#), and our interview with the director, "[here](#).)

Murder Bury Win - teaser trailer



Odds you'll get to see it: With a bundle of awards from festivals around the world, this is definitely on distributor's radar.

5) *The Capote Tapes*

Screened at: aGLIFF

Few figures straddled all the contradictions of the 20th century like Truman Capote. Bon vivant, true crime author, gossip, Southern gentleman, New York libertine, confidante to the upper classes and the ultimate outsider. Documentary *The Capote Tapes* catches all those facets of the ultimate self-saboteur, and even reveals a few more that he hid - yes, Truman Capote, doting surrogate father. (Read our interview with documentarian Ebs Burnough, "[Ebs Burnough Plays *The Capote Tapes*](#)," Aug. 5.)

THE CAPOTE TAPES - OFFICIAL TRAILER - AVAILABLE ON DIGITAL JAN 29



Odds you'll get to see it: Great. *The Capote Tapes* will be released as a virtual cinema title via Altitude on Feb. 5.

6) *Bloodthirsty*

Screened at: Fantastic Fest

Amelia Moses unleashed a double-fanged assault on horror this year with her two radical reinventions of the creature feature. Neo-vampire drama *Bleed with Me* took a bite out of Other Worlds, but she made her local debut with *Bloodthirsty*, a savage look at the beast within as a musician desperate to get over the sophomore

album blues (Lauren Beatty) finds that the influence of super-producer Vaughn (Greg Byk) goes deeper than just a few chords. Chilling, bleak, and undoubtedly the first cries of a new voice in horror that will be impossible to ignore. (Read our interview with the filmmaker, "[The Creatures of the Night Make Beautiful Music in Bloodthirsty](#)," Sept, 24.)



Odds you'll get to see it:

7) *Lapsis*

Screened at: SXSW and Other Worlds

The age of supertechnology is not quite upon us. The days when every task can be performed by machines, and humans become completely redundant is not here yet. The irony is that it will take humans doing all the grunt work to get us to that point, all the while doing ever more mundane jobs that you can never quite work out what they do. *Lapsis* makes Dean Imperial the ultimate everyman as Ray, one of hundreds of low-paid workers out there unrolling cables across America. He doesn't know that he's an unwitting pawn in a grand conspiracy and, honestly, even if you explained it to him he may get lost. What's really important here is the merciless takedown of the gig economy, with Imperial perfect as a man out of his depth. (Read our review [here](#).)

Lapsis (2020) | Trailer | Dean Imperial | Madeline Wise | Directed by Noah Hu...



Odds you'll get to see it: Another one not to miss when Film Movement releases it on demand and in virtual cinemas on Feb. 2.

8) *The Boy Behind the Door*

Screened at: Fantastic Fest

The real-life friendship of filmmakers David Charbonier and Justin Powell pours out of this heartpounding thriller about two abducted boys fighting off the monsters who have stolen them from their homes. *The Boy Behind the Door* is as bleak as any chiller released this year (and with the traumatizing *Swerve* and soulcrushing *Hunter Hunter* on screens, that's a hell of a claim) but the resilience of childhood friendship gives it a heart that cannot be duplicated. (Read our review [here](#), and don't miss [our interview with the filmmakers](#).)

The Boy Behind the Door (2020) Exclusive Clip



Odds you'll get to see it: No definitive word on a deal yet, but a feature this much fun can't stay buried for long.

9) *The Block Island Sound*

Screened at: Fantasia

With *Underwater* and *The Beach House*, it was quite the year for aquatic angst, and this gritty tale of a seaside community under attack from the depths and the skies added blue collar despair to the equation. (Read our review [here](#).)

The Block Island Sound - Official Trailer



Odds you'll get to see it: Here's hoping. No solid word yet, but we'll be pulling on our waders for this one.

10) *For the Sake of Vicious*

Screened at: Fantasia

Reese Eveneshen and Gabriel Carrer are standouts among Canada's astounding low-budget genre scene, but the smash mouth pairing of the two in this hyperbrutal crime thriller makes for one of the gutsiest gut-punches of the last year. Think *Assault on Precinct 13* redux, as a crime lord's most merciless enforcers are sent to extract him from the house where he's being held captive by a heartbroken vigilante and his unwilling assistant. (Read our review [here](#).)

For the Sake of Vicious (2020) | Trailer | Lora Burke | Dorian Allen | Nick Smyth



Odds you'll get to see it: Still wrapping up an award-winning festival run.

Honorable Mentions

- *Bleeding Audio* (Played at Sound Unseen) The history of rock and roll is littered with the corpses of bands chewed up and spat out by the industry, and all too often it's done with a shrug and some vague excuses about band strife or some such nonsense. Documentarian Chelsea Crister goes a lot deeper with her history of Oakland pop-punkers the Matches, and really shows how callous the business really can be to a band that survives on its heart and its soul. (Read our review [here](#).)
- *How to Deter a Robber* (Screened at Fantastic Fest) Crime capers have never been so neighborly as in this delightful and dark story of burglars and homeowners getting out of their depth across Christmas. A grounded take on *Home Alone* shouldn't work, but Maria Bissell's perfectly awkward comedy of manners will steal your heart. (Read our interview with director Maria Bissell, "[How to Deter a Robber ... Politely](#)," Sept. 25.)
- *The Oak Room* (Screened at Other Worlds) Another fave from Canuxploitation stars Black Fawn, in this tricky crime drama about two men telling tales in a snowbound bar, and neither is telling the whole truth. (Read our review [here](#).)
- *Sweet River* (Screened at Other Worlds) Do our ghosts haunt us, or do we haunt them? One of the standouts in the sci-fi festival's Under Worlds' horror strand, this keening story of loss, and the secret devastation of an Australian community, unfurls its secrets before a resolution that speaks to letting go of your pain. (Read our review [here](#).)
- *Vicious Fun* (Screened at Sitges) OK, a little bit of a cheat, but Black Fawn's hysterical horror-comedy about a film nerd who accidentally staggers into a self-help group for serial killers is a bloody riot.

Now let's look at what happened with some of our favorites from the [2019 festival faves list](#):

- 1) *Synchronic*: Justin Moorhead and Aaron Benson have become master of the quirky cosmic genrebender, and no less so in their story of time travel, drugs, and the true history of New Orleans. *Synchronic* scored a limited theatrical release, and arrives on Blu-ray on Jan. 26. (Read our review [here](#), and make time for our interview with the filmmakers, "[Aaron Moorhead and Justin Benson are Synchronic](#)," Sept. 19, 2019)
- 2) *Around the Sun*: Who could possibly have known that Bernard le Bovier de Fontenelle's 1686 metaphysical tract *Conversations on the Plurality of Worlds* would make for a great romance set in parallel dimensions? Well, screenwriter Jonathan Kiefer did, and his playful rom com is on VOD now. (Read our interview with Kiefer [here](#).)
- 3) *The Vast of Night*: The Fantastic Fest phenom, a period *X-Files* that marked one of last year's greatest debuts, is on Amazon Prime now. (Read our review [here](#), as well as our interview with director Andrew Patterson, "[Gazing into The Vast of Night](#)," Sept. 24, 2019.)
- 4) *The Killing of Kenneth Chamberlain* : Tragically, no word yet on a release date for this Austin Film Festival dramatization of the 2011 death of a 68-year-old black man at the hands of trigger-happy cops. However, Morgan Freeman's Revelations Entertainment has picked up the cause: rightly so, because it speaks to the need for pulling police off of medical response calls that they are ill-qualified to handle

- 5) *Color Out of Space*: Nic Cage going full cosmic horror? Why not? This Lovecraft adaptation became a 2020 favorite, and is on VOD and Blu-ray now. (Read our review [here](#), then check out our interview with the director, "[Richard Stanley Sees the Color Out of Space](#)," Sept. 19, 2019)
- 6) *The Deeper You Dig*: The Adams-Poser family's home movies may be more ambitious than most anyway, but their lo-fi supernatural skincrawler bubbled over with creepy dread, and is available on VOD, streaming on Shudder, and Blu-ray. (Read our review [here](#).)
- 7) *Extra Ordinary*: This gloriously daffy Irish comedy about the world's most mundane exorcist got a limited release a year after its SXSW debut, and is on VOD and DVD now. (Read our interview with the star, "[Maeve Higgins Makes SXSW Ghost Comedy More Than Extra Ordinary](#)," March 10, 2019)
- 8) *The Mortuary Collection*: Ryan Spindell built a deliciously twisted anthology around his short film "The Babysitter Murders," and it's now streaming on horror specialty service Shudder (Read our interview with writer/director Spindell, "[Every Body Has a Story in The Mortuary Collection](#)," Sept. 21, 2019.)
- 9) *Omotenashi*: Sadly, no sign of this delightful story of a Japanese inn, and the three people who come together to save it, still hasn't made it to US screens. (Read our review [here](#).)
- 10) *Lake Michigan Monster*: Ryland Trew's gloriously silly zero-budget comedy about a Loch Ness-esque monster was released on Arrow. (Read our review [here](#).)

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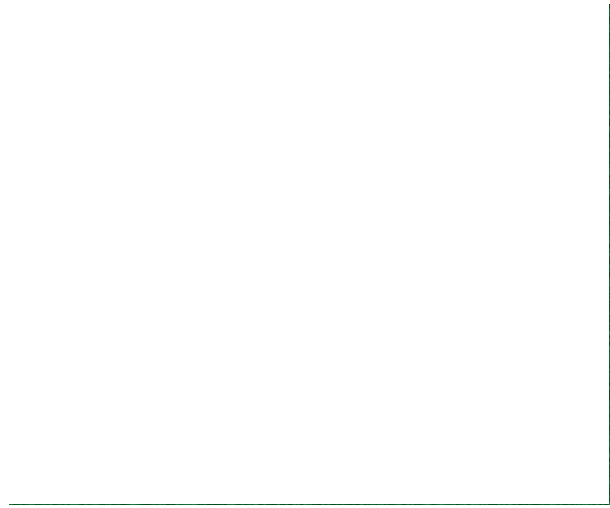
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