

# Van Der Merwe, Dunkirk, Nina Simone and Goya

 By [Daniel Derksen](#)

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This week real life is transformed into reel entertainment on the big screen. An LA newspaper reporter risks his life to save the lives of soldiers in the epic action thriller *Dunkirk*; in the local comedy *Van Der Merwe*, we get to know the man behind the classic jokes; Lord Mountbatten is tasked with overseeing the transition of British India to independence in the British-Indian historical drama *Viceroy's House*; the musical drama *Nina* captures the mesmerising songs and passionate politics that brought Nina Simone fame and fortune; and The Exhibition On Screen documentary *Goya - Visions of Flesh and Blood* explores in depth at Goya's eventful life spanning more than 80 years, exploring his artistic oeuvre and the latest in biographical research.

## Epic action with Dunkirk

In May 1940, Germany advanced into France, trapping Allied troops on the beaches of Dunkirk. Under air and ground cover from British and French forces, troops were slowly and methodically evacuated from the beach using every serviceable naval and civilian vessel that could be found. At the end of this heroic mission, 330,000 French, British, Belgian and Dutch soldiers were safely evacuated.

The group of soldiers is led by Corporal "Tubby" Bins (John Mills), stranded in France, and must make their way to the shores of Dunkirk in hopes of a rescue. Back in Britain, Charles Foreman (Bernard Lee), a newspaper reporter, desperately tries to raise awareness among the public of the horrible reality of the war. When the British navy calls for all civilian ships to aid in a rescue, Foreman takes out his own small boat and attempts to bring Tubby and his men home safely.

It is written, co-produced and directed by Christopher Nolan (The Dark Knight and Inception). Director Christopher Nolan gives us an in-depth look at the way he planned his intense World War II dramatic-thriller Dunkirk:

"I think people who know the story of Dunkirk, in particular, may be surprised by the intensity of the experience. It's a very suspenseful story and we really try to do justice to that. The pacing is relentless, and the story and action scenes are extraordinarily intense. I think the lean, stripped-down nature of that, and how fast it moves, and what it puts you through in this short space of time... I think it has a different rhythm that I've worked in before.

It's one of the great human stories, and it's one of the most suspenseful situations that I had ever heard of in my life. You have 400,000 men – the entire British army – trapped on the beach at Dunkirk. Their backs to the sea, home is only 26 miles away and it's impossible to get to. The enemy is closing in, and there's a choice between annihilation and surrender. I just think it's the more extraordinarily suspenseful situation," says Nolan.

## **Van Der Merwe – the Van, the Myth, The Legend**

In every country, there is a person who is the butt of all jokes. In Ireland it is Paddy, in Israel it is Hymie, in South Africa, that person is Van der Merwe...The film Van Der Merwe tells his story, with Rob van Vuuren stepping into the shoes of the man behind the jokes.

Set on the Van der Merwe farmstead, the story centres on Van's daughter Marike who returns home from a gap year in England with her new fiancé George, a British boy who is studying to become a doctor. This creates all sorts of problems and challenges for Van as he tries to come to terms with the fact that his daughter is marrying an Englishman. Van's father is strongly against this union of 'Brit and Boer' and implores Van to put an end to it. Van finds himself in a precarious situation with a difficult choice: risk the wrath of his father by condoning the wedding... or, obey his father, whose approval he so desperately wants, and risk losing his daughter forever. When the family of the English fiancé arrives on the farm, the fireworks really begin as the clash of cultures results in a number of side-splitting incidents and hilarious situations as we witness some classic Van der Merwe jokes played out in front of our eyes.

It is written and directed by Bruce Lawley.

## **Epical Viceroy's House**

The British-Indian historical drama Viceroy's House takes us into the home of the British rulers of India in Delhi in 1947 during the Partition of India.

The final Viceroy of India, Lord Mountbatten, is tasked with overseeing the transition of British India to independence, but meets with conflict as different sides clash in the face of monumental change. Downstairs in the servant's quarters, Mountbatten's new manservant, Jeet falls for the daughter's assistant, Alia and all manner of obstacles are put in their way, with Hugh Bonneville as Lord Mountbatten, and Gillian Anderson as Lady Mountbatten.

The 1947 Partition of India has always been part of director Gurinder Chadha's life. Though raised in West London, and born in Nairobi, Kenya 13 years after the controversial Mountbatten Plan struck a jagged line through the north-west of the freshly independent Union of India to create the Dominion of Pakistan, the British-Punjabi film-maker describes herself as someone who grew up "in the shadow of Partition".

The screenplay was crafted by Paul Mayeda Berges, Moira Buffini, and Chadha.

"David Lean has always been one of my favourite film-makers. I love those huge, epic-canvas British films. I think it's sad that we don't make those kind of epic, populist films as much because they somehow help define who we are as a nation. They tell us who we are by going back, looking at our history to understand our present. That is exactly what I wanted to

achieve here, to reach out to the broadest audience possible and remind them of this hugely important event that has been largely forgotten,” says Chadha.

## **Controversial biopic Nina**

Zoe Saldana stars as “High Priestess of Soul” in the story of one of the century’s most extraordinary talents, a 15-time Grammy nominee and Grammy Hall of Fame Recipient Nina Simone (Zoe Saldana). In this musical drama, Nina’s story unfolds, capturing her mesmerising songs and passionate politics that brought her fame and fortune.

Sadly, her later years were riddled with depression, alcohol abuse and isolation. Clifton Henderson (David Oyelowo), her loyal manager encouraged her to begin a courageous journey back to her music, and, eventually, herself. Nina rediscovers the meaning of her life and work, with courage, strength and one true friend.

Debuting feature writer-director Cynthia Mort has spent nearly her entire career until now in television, variously as a writer, director and/ or producer on the likes of Roseanne, Will & Grace and Tell Me You Love Me, while also writing Neil Jordan’s feature The Brave One.

## **Goya – Visions of Flesh and Blood**

The Exhibition On Screen documentary explores Goya’s eventful life spanning more than 80 years, exploring his artistic oeuvre and the latest in biographical research, as well as providing unrestricted access to the acclaimed exhibition Goya: The Portraits. The film builds a compelling portrait of the artist himself through insights from international experts, masterpieces from renowned collections and visits to the locations in which Spain’s most celebrated artist lived and worked.

The documentary is released from 29 July 2017 for limited screenings.

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## 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](http://www.writingstudio.co.za)

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