



IN PERSON AND PREVIEWS

# The Human Voice

+ Pre-recorded intro and Q&A with Pedro Almodóvar and Tilda Swinton

Madness and melancholy intersect to thrilling effect as Almodóvar reimagines Jean Cocteau's short play *The Human Voice* for an era in which isolation has become a way of life. Laws of desire become the rules of the game as Tilda Swinton's unnamed woman paces and panics in a glorious Technicolor apartment where décor offers a window into her state of mind. A short, sharp shot of distilled Almodóvar: passion, emotion, heartbreak, wit, and melodrama exquisitely bound up in a tale for our times.

**Maria Delgado, [bfi.org.uk](http://bfi.org.uk)**

Like machinery driving a dramatic artefact of clockwork precision, wrenches, bolts and tools of all shapes and sizes slide onto the screen for the credits of Pedro Almodóvar's latest creation, a half-hour free adaptation of Jean Cocteau's play *The Human Voice* starring Tilda Swinton.

Right from the start, this *Human Voice* strikes familiar chords with Almodóvar's work: its vibrant colour palette; Alberto Iglesias's music; a cameo from producer brother Agustín Almodóvar; even those credits, composed from items fit for an haute-couture hardware catalogue. Then there's the protagonist: a heartbroken woman caged in a red dress. We find Swinton's character on an empty sound stage, contemplating the void that her absent lover has left.

Almodóvar had already used *The Human Voice* (famously adapted by Roberto Rossellini in his 1948 anthology film *L'amore*, starring Anna Magnani) as a source of inspiration for earlier films like *Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown* (1988), with Carmen Maura playing an abandoned woman – a role echoing the one she had previously played in a stage version of Cocteau's play that featured in *The Law of Desire* (1987).

In Almodóvar's new take on the play, Tilda Swinton actually speaks the phrase 'the law of desire' – which fans will also recognise as inspiring the name of the director's production company El Deseo. In the new film, Swinton's character inhabits an apartment revealed as a film set – the fourth wall, and indeed the ceiling, removed in an overhead shot.

Her props: DVDs including Douglas Sirk's *Written on the Wind* and *All That Heaven Allows* (one of Almodóvar's classic references), books by authors including Lucia Berlin and Alice Munro (who inspired his 2016 film *Julieta*), a handful of sleeping pills, an axe to chop the empty suit of her lover, and Air Pods for the last phone conversation with the man who left her behind. She paces, as trapped and lost as the dog that follows her about, the animal seemingly as distraught as she at the loss of this invisible man whom we never hear.

It's Swinton's voice that reigns in this perfectly tailored space, carved with the delicacy of a Fabergé egg – her human imperfection filling the stage with life, not its imitation. Swinton offers a magnificent, fine-tuned performance as a melodrama heroine ready to take her grief in hand, triumphant in her desolation, finally ready to move on and rise – and not just metaphorically – like a phoenix from the ashes of her lost passion.

As much as it is Almodóvar's filmography in a nutshell, *The Human Voice* is also a promise of new beginnings, exploring the short format and shooting in English (his upcoming projects even include plans for a western). Maybe that's why, at the film's end, he frames the open door of the film set, letting us, and his heroine, out onto a wide world of new possibility.

**Elisabeth Cabeza, *Sight & Sound*, [bfi.org.uk/sight-and-sound](http://bfi.org.uk/sight-and-sound), 11 September 2020**

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## THE HUMAN VOICE

*Directed by:* Pedro Almodóvar

*Presented by:* El Deseo

*Producers:* Agustín Almodóvar, Esther García

*Written by:* Pedro Almodóvar

*Freely based on the play by:* Jean Cocteau

*Director of Photography:* José Luis Alcaine

*Editor:* Teresa Font

*Production Designer:* Antxón Gómez

*Art Director:* Maria Clara Notari

*Costume Designer:* Sonia Grande

*Make-up:* Ana Lozano

*Music:* Alberto Iglesias

## Cast

Tilda Swinton

Agustín Almodóvar

Spain 2020

30 mins

UK Distribution: Pathe UK

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## EVENTS & STRANDS

### Member Exclusives: Booksmart

Thu 20 May 18:10

**The Human Voice** + pre-recorded intro and Q&A with

Pedro Almodóvar and Tilda Swinton

Sat 22 May 15:00; Tue 1 Jun 18:20

**Woman with a Movie Camera: Rare Beasts**

+ Q&A with writer-director Billie Piper

Sat 22 May 17:15

**Sheffield Doc/Fest**

Fri 4 Jun 20:15

**Preview: Doctor Who: Dragonfire**

Sat 12 Jun 12:00

**Relaxed Screenings: The Reason I Jump**

Fri 18 Jun 14:30; Tue 22 Jun 18:10

**Woman with a Movie Camera: Wildfire**

Sun 20 Jun 18:40 (+ Q&A with director Cathy Brady); Mon 21 Jun 18:10;

Tue 22 Jun 14:40; Wed 23 Jun 20:50; Thu 24 Jun 14:45

## BAGRI FOUNDATION LONDON INDIAN FILM FESTIVAL

**LIFF Opening Night: WOMB (Women of My Billion)**

+ on stage Q&A with Srishti Bakshi and film critic Anna Smith

Thu 17 Jun 17:20

**My Beautiful Laundrette**

Fri 18 Jun 20:20

**The Warrior** + on-stage career interview with

writer-director Asif Kapadia

Sat 19 Jun 20:30

**Ahimsa: Gandhi the Power of the Powerless**

Sun 20 Jun 15:00

**Searching for Happiness...**

Tue 22 Jun 20:50

**Nazarband Captive**

Wed 23 Jun 20:45

**A'hr Kayattam**

Thu 24 Jun 18:00

**The Salt in Our Waters Nonajoler Kabbo**

Sun 27 Jun 15:00

## LONDON SHORT FILM FESTIVAL

**UK Competition 1: I Forgot More than You'll Ever Know**

Sat 26 Jun 21:00

**UK Competition 3: Close Quarters**

Fri 26 Jun 21:10

**UK Competition 2: The Double Life Of...**

Mon 28 Jun 17:45

**UK Competition 4: Lessons in Survival**

Tue 29 Jun 21:10

**UK Competition 5: The Devil's in the Details**

Wed 30 Jun 17:50

## TONGUES ON FIRE: UK ASIAN FILM FESTIVAL

**Opening Night: Raahgir The Wayfarers**

+ Skype Q&A with director Goutam Ghose

Wed 26 May 20:45

**Closing Night: The Beatles and India**

+ Q&A with directors Ajoy Bose and Peter Compton

Sun 6 Jun 15:15

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## NEW RELEASES & RE-RELEASES

### Ammonite

From Mon 17 May

### Sound of Metal

From Mon 17 May

### Nomadland

From Mon 17 May

### County Lines

From Fri 21 May

### First Cow

From Fri 28 May

### After Love

From Fri 4 Jun

### Fargo

From Fri 11 Jun

### The Reason I Jump

From Fri 18 Jun

### Nashville

From Fri 25 Jun

### Ultraviolence

From Sat 26 Jun

Sat 26 June 14:20 + Q&A with director Ken Fero and contributor

Janet Alder

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