



NEW RELEASES

A Night of Knowing Nothing

Winner of the Golden Eye for Best Documentary at Cannes 2021, *A Night of Knowing Nothing* is the bold and distinctive feature debut from acclaimed shorts filmmaker Payal Kapadia. Framed by fictional, unsent letters to a forbidden lover by a female film student at the Film & Television Institute of India, of which Kapadia is an alumna, the film evokes the intimate and personal effects of the political climate in contemporary India on its youth.

Kapadia combines her own material, work shot by fellow students as well as found footage in a skilful blend of word and image, charting the fractious relationship between a nation's youth, its rigid caste structures, its families and its far-right government. This immersive and spiritual work makes for an electrifying feature debut.

Director's Statement

We began shooting in 2017. Ranabir [Das, producer] and I started to document life around us, and through that we started documenting our friends.

Over the years, we shot extensively – parties, birthdays, or just long afternoon naps. We were not always sure of what we were doing but because it was amongst people we knew well, the shooting process was intimate and casual.

Some time passed and there was still no real sense of what the film would be. All we had were the memories that we were collecting with our borrowed camera and sound recorder. Through these documentations and testimonies from our friends, their dreams, memories and anxieties, an image of a section of the youth began to emerge.

As we began to put some sequences together, some of our friends gave us footage that they had shot in other universities. They shot it because they had a pressing need to document, but like us, they were unsure what they wanted to do with it. We began to find more and more of such footage – rushes borrowed from friends, old family archives and virtual videos off the internet.

Our collected images became an ever-growing archive of memories – memories of the time that we had lived and witnessed. Soon, even the footage we had shot began to feel as if it were 'found', perhaps as a time capsule of our own past. We began to devise a narrative to connect all of these seemingly unrelated images.

The narrative we chose was a love story. Love in India is often wrought with caste, class and religious differences. The film finds its form in letters, written by a young woman at the university to her estranged lover. They have been separated by his parents who don't approve of their relationship. Through these letters that span many years, we get a sense of a section of the youth who are caught in both personal struggles as well as larger social struggles, as they deal with the drastic changes that take place around them. Perhaps this is why we chose the title, *A Night of Knowing Nothing*. It's like a long, unpredictable night, where we are all in the dark on what to expect next. The title was also 'found' on the walls of a university, scribbled under a flickering tube light by an unknown poet.

The film uses an amorphous form, grainy, black and white footage that creates a sense of nostalgia. But it is not nostalgia for the past, because in no way do we believe that the past was better. It is nostalgia for the present – our current times that have forced many of us to respond to the circumstances around us. Maybe it is a nostalgia for the romantic ideal of being young and conscientious – to fight for a more fair and equal society.

A Night of Knowing Nothing is our homage to the public university system in India. For centuries, certain sections of Indian society have been denied access to education. The public university system was designed to correct these historical wrongs. Although it may not have always succeeded in doing so, as caste and other discriminations still exist within its inherent structures, public universities still potentially provide spaces for true freedom, both physical and intellectual, where nothing is sacrosanct and everything needs to be questioned. This is the freedom that we need to strive for, for the future generations to come, so that young people who have access to it can free themselves from the society that binds them.

The film is a long dream, told from the point of view of a gentle, feminine voice.

Acclaim for ‘A Night of Knowing Nothing’

‘A vivid portrait of revolt and oppression, love and pain, and philosophical thought threatened by nationalist agenda.’

Siddhant Adlakha, *IndieWire*

‘A haunting lo-fi meditation on memory, social class and political protest.’

Jordan Mintzer, *The Film Verdict*

‘An oneiric, sensory and imaginative journey documenting being young in contemporary India.’

Mateusz Tarwacki, *Eye for Film*

‘Payal Kapadia’s extraordinary debut feature *A Night of Knowing Nothing* is a hypnotic essay about the loss of innocence and the spark that inspires one to fight.’

Pat Mullen, *Point of View Magazine*

‘Beautifully dispatched through its entanglement of formal hybridity, Payal Kapadia’s *A Night of Knowing Nothing* burrows her contemplative sensibility into the archiving of a contemporary reality.’

Zachary Goldkind, *In Review Online*

‘An essential film that marries formal inventiveness with the events surrounding the political and social upheaval under Modi’s increasingly nationalistic and authoritarian India through the eyes and experiences of young Indians in public universities.’

Aditya Shrikrishna, *News Nine*

‘Kapadia is bold in striking a balance between intimate fabulation and the documentation of these expansive events, always retaining a hold on the former even as her film tilts increasingly towards the latter.’

Erika Balsom, *Cinema Scope*

Production notes

A NIGHT OF KNOWING NOTHING

Directed by: Payal Kapadia

©: Petit Chaos, Another Birth

A film produced by: Petit Chaos

In co-production with: Another Birth

With support from: Nouvelle-Aquitaine Film Workout

With support from/a grant for this film was generously provided by the:

Sundance Institute Documentary Program

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Bertha Fund, Ciclic-Région Centre-Val de Loire

With the support of: Région Nouvelle-Aquitaine

Presented by: Petit Chaos

International Sales: Square Eyes

Producers France: Thomas Hakim, Julien Graff

Producer India: Ranabir Das

Post-production Manager: Neel Mani Kant

Written by: Payal Kapadia, Himanshu Prajapati

Script Consultant: Neel Mani Kant

Photography: Ranabir Das

Editing: Ranabir Das

Editing Consultant: Clément Pinteaux

[Sound] Mixing: Romain Ozanne

Sound Editing: Moinak Bose

France/India/USA/Netherlands 2021©

97 mins

An ICA Cinema release

The screening on Sun 3 Apr 17:50 features a Q&A with director Payal Kapadia

NEW & RE-RELEASES

The Worst Person in the World (Verdens verste menneske)

From Mon 28 Mar

Paris, 13th District (Les Olympiades)

From Mon 28 Mar

Hive

From Tue 29 Mar

Cries and Whispers (Viskningar och rop)

From Fri 1 Apr

A Night of Knowing Nothing +

From Fri 1 Apr (+ Q&A with director Payal Kapadia on Sun 3 Apr 17:50)

True Things

From Sat 2 Apr

Playground

From Fri 15 Apr (+ Q&A with director Laura Wandel on Thu 21 Apr 18:10)

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