



IN PERSON & PREVIEWS

# Darren Aronofsky in Conversation

Academy Award®-nominated filmmaker Darren Aronofsky was born and raised in Brooklyn. Aronofsky heads Protozoa Pictures, based in Chinatown NYC.

His upcoming film *The Whale* for A24 stars Brendan Fraser, Sadie Sink, Hong Chau, and Samantha Morton.

Aronofsky wrote and directed 2017's *mother!* starring Jennifer Lawrence and Javier Bardem. Before that, Aronofsky made the 2014 box office hit *Noah* starring Russell Crowe, Jennifer Connelly, and Anthony Hopkins.

In 2010, Aronofsky received a Best Director Academy Award® nomination for his indie box office phenomenon *Black Swan* starring Natalie Portman, who won a Best Actress Academy Award® for her performance. 2008's *The Wrestler* starring Mickey Rourke won the Golden Lion for the best film at the Venice Film Festival. Previous to that were the acclaimed and award-winning films *The Fountain* (2006), *Requiem for a Dream* (2000), and *Pi* (1998).

As a producer under his Protozoa label, Aronofsky has been responsible for *Jackie*, which garnered three Academy Awards®; the documentary *Some Kind of Heaven*, which premiered at the 2020 Sundance Film Festival; artist Prune Nourry's docu-memoir *Serendipity*, which made its world premiere at the 2019 Berlin Film Festival; *Pacified*, which won the Golden Shell top prize at the San Sebastián International Film Festival; *Catch the Fair One*, which premiered at the 2021 Tribeca Film Festival where it won the Audience Award; and the documentary feature *The Territory*, which premiered at the 2022 Sundance Film Festival and won both the Audience Award and Special Jury Award for Craft in the World Cinema Documentary category.

He served as a producer on *The Good Nurse*, starring Jessica Chastain and Eddie Redmayne, and an adaptation of Octavia Butler's masterpiece *Kindred* from FX.

Aronofsky has executive produced the six-part docu-series *Welcome to Earth*, the Emmy®-nominated series *One Strange Rock*, and *Limitless* starring Chris Hemsworth for National Geographic.

His first book *Monster Club*, written for middle school readers, was published in September 2022.

## The Whale

Darren Aronofsky had wanted to adapt *The Whale* as a film ever since he first saw the play, written by Sam D. Hunter, nearly a decade ago. He was immediately struck by its intelligence, and the fearless way it interrogates the human condition without offering an easy answer.

Says Aronofsky, 'What I love about *The Whale* is that it invites you to see the humanity of characters who are not all good or all bad, who truly live in grey

tones the way people do, and who have extremely rich, intricate inner lives. They've all made mistakes, but what they share are immense hearts and the desire to love even when others are seemingly unlovable. It's a story that asks a simple but essential question: can we save each other? That feels important in the world right now, especially when people seem more than ever to be turning their backs on one another.'

'For me, this is what cinema is all about,' he continues. 'Through the power of emotion, a story like this can put us into the shoes of a man we might otherwise never even wonder about, and remind us that all the promise of love and redemption is there in every human existence.'

After its successful and buzzy Denver debut, *The Whale* moved off-Broadway in January of 2012 via Playwrights Horizons, where it garnered a cavalcade of awards, including the Lucille Lortel Award for Best Play, the GLAAD Media Award, and a Special Drama Desk Award for Significant Contribution to Theatre. It also sealed Hunter's growing reputation as a major dramaturge of these times, attuned to the intricacies of modern identity and the big, classical questions of spirit and existence.

Aronofsky caught the play in that early run in New York, fresh off the back of his last film and thinking about his next project. He was already established as a singular cinematic voice whose work defied categorisation. He began his career with the hallucinatory thriller *Pi*, before going on to adapt and direct the harrowing addiction fable *Requiem for a Dream*. The mind-melting sci-fi cult classic *The Fountain* was next, followed by two back-to-back forays into the psychological sports thrillers of *The Wrestler* and *Black Swan*. Though vastly different in subject matter and tone, Aronofsky's films (including the ones to come – biblical revisionist epic *Noah* and the searing eco-feminist parable *mother!*) shared a common thread as explorations into subjectivity, and the breaking of barriers between self and story.

Aronofsky knew very little about *The Whale* going in; he had bought tickets on a whim, intrigued by the title. It was only after the lights came up, in the afterglow of Charlie's journey, that he knew he had to get the rights to the show.

'I connected with the themes and ideas, and the way it found beauty in things our prejudices too often make inhuman,' Aronofsky says. 'It made my heart ache, it made me laugh, and I felt inspired by the bravery and grace each character finds. It took on a question I like to explore in my own work: how do you transport audiences inside of characters they never could imagine being? I didn't know then if it could be a movie, but I met with Sam and connected with him immediately.'

The instant bond between Aronofsky and Hunter set things into motion. Both agreed that Hunter should adapt his own work – the only problem was that Hunter had never written a screenplay. But encouraged by Aronofsky and his receipt of a MacArthur Genius grant, Hunter began to teach himself the form from scratch, studying cinematic language and working out how to transform his work from stage to screen. 'Sam is so incredibly gifted, I knew he'd find his way,' says Aronofsky.

***The Whale* production notes (courtesy of A24)**

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## DARREN ARONOFSKY

Born in Brooklyn, New York, USA

As director

### Film

2022 **The Whale** (+ prod)  
2017 **mother!** (+ scr)  
2014 **Noah** (+ prod/scr)  
2010 **Black Swan**  
2008 **The Wrestler** (+ prod)  
2006 **The Fountain** (+ scr/story)  
2000 **Requiem for a Dream** (+ scr)  
1998 **Pi** (+ scr)  
1994 **No Time** (short)  
1993 **Protozoa** (short)  
1991 **Supermarket Sweep** (short)  
**Fortune Cookie** (short)

### Television

2021 **Welcome to Earth** (episode: 'Descent into Darkness';  
+ exec prod)

## IN PERSON & PREVIEWS

**MilkTea Presents Better Luck Tomorrow**

+ virtual Q&A with Justin Lin

Sun 22 Jan 15:00

**Mark Kermode Live in 3D at the BFI**

Mon 23 Jan 18:30

**TV Preview: Nolly + Q&A with writer Russell T Davies, cast members**

**Helena Bonham Carter and Mark Gatiss, executive producer**

**Nicola Shindler and director Peter Hoar**

Thu 26 Jan 18:10

**Guillermo del Toro in Conversation: Animation for All**

Fri 27 Jan 18:00

**Film Sounds: A Conversation between**

**Mark Jenkin and Peter Strickland**

Sun 29 Jan 13:00

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## REGULAR PROGRAMME

**Art in the Making: News from Nowhere + intro by Rowan Bain,**  
**Principle Curator at William Morris Gallery TBC**

Thu 5 Jan 18:20

**African Odysseys: Hussein Shariffe: A Life Between Exile and**  
**Homecoming**

Sat 7 Jan 12:00-17:00

**Seniors' Free Matinee: UK Theatrical Premiere: Wild and Free, Twice**  
**Daily + Q&A**

Mon 9 Jan 14:00

**Silent Cinema: Metropolis + intro by Bryony Dixon, BFI Curator**

Sun 15 Jan 14:40

**Projecting the Archive: Thunder in the City + intro by Jo Botting, BFI**  
**Curator**

Tue 17 Jan 18:20

**Experimenta: Nation's Finest, Putting Down Roots and Birthing +**  
**Q&A**

Wed 25 Jan 18:15

**Relaxed Screening: The Hidden Fortress + intro & discussion**

Mon 30 Jan 18:00

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goes down.