



ART OF ACTION: CELEBRATING THE REAL ACTION STARS OF CINEMA

RRR

RRR

Director: S.S. Rajamouli
Production Company: DWV Entertainment
Producer: D.V.V. Danayya
Line Producer: M.M. Srivalli
Screenplay: S.S. Rajamouli, Sai Madhav Burra
Story: Vijayendra Prasad
Cinematography: Senthil Kumar
Editor: A. Sreekar Prasad
Production Designer: Sabu Cyril
Art Directors: Anil Jadhav, Nikolai Kirilov
Costume Designer: Rama Rajamouli
Music: M.M. Kreem
Cast:
Ram Charan
N.T. Rama Rao Jr
Ajay Devgn
Alia Bhatt
Olivia Morris
Shriya Saran
Ray Stevenson
Alison Doody
Samuthirakani
Makrand Deshpande
India 2022
180 mins (+ brief interval)
Digital

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John Wick All-Nighter

Sat 9 Nov 22:00 BFI IMAX

Stunt Saturday

Sat 16 Nov 11:00

The Stunt Man

Sat 16 Nov 17:50

The Art of the Action Trailer

Sun 17 Nov 13:50

Mission: Impossible All-Nighter

Sat 30 Nov 23:00 BFI IMAX

Woman Kings

Run Lola Run Lola rennt

Sat 26 Oct 18:30; Tue 26 Nov 20:50

Coffy

Sat 9 Nov 20:30; Thu 21 Nov 20:45

Executioners Yin doi hou hap zyun

Sat 26 Oct 12:30; Sat 23 Nov 20:45

Terminator 2: Judgment Day

Sat 26 Oct 20:20; Thu 7 Nov 18:00; Fri 29 Nov 20:20

The Woman King

Fri 1 Nov 18:00 (+ intro); Sat 30 Nov 20:10

Polite Society + Q&A with director Nida Manzoor

Sun 17 Nov 18:00

The Long Kiss Goodnight

Fri 22 Nov 20:35

Yes, Madam! Huang jia shi jie

Sat 23 Nov 18:30

S.S. Rajamouli's big-budget, reimagined history of two real-life 1920s Indian freedom fighters was a worldwide sensation on its release. From the opening one-man-versus-a-crowd dust-up, *RRR* (Rise, Roar, Revolt) is packed with outrageous, adrenaline-fuelled action sequences and mesmerising musical numbers, wrapped around a heartfelt and sweeping bromance. It's one of the best nights out at the cinema you could ever have.

Kimberley Sheehan, bfi.org.uk

Sensible objections mount up while watching *RRR*, but Tollywood director S.S. Rajamouli has a gift for batting them away like few filmmakers working on this scale today. His maximalist, mythopoeic 180-minute tale of the tortured bromance between two alpha males embroiled in India's fight for independence is certainly bloated and nationalistic. Its 1920s Raj-era British characters never rise above bland romance or boo-hiss caricatures. Playing one Governor Buxton and his wife, respectively, Marvel's Ray Stevenson and *Indiana Jones* veteran Alison Doody relish such plummy sadism as 'There's hardly any blood. Hit him harder!'

But that casting callback to Spielberg's event-movie heyday is your best clue to the storytelling confidence and showmanship with which Rajamouli unfurls this epic of nationhood. As with his two-film ancient-India saga *Bahubali* (2015/2017), *RRR* – 'Rise! Roar! Revolt!' – is a spectacle aimed at big rooms, a money-on-the-screen CGI-enabled action fantasy whose hyperreal violence is reminiscent of role-playing video games or the 'heroic bloodshed' mode of John Woo. When, in deep cover as an officer in the Indian Imperial Police, Alluri Sitarama Raju (Ram Charan) does solo battle against a vast crowd that's gathered to protest Buxton's casual abduction of a village girl, or when a ram-raiding truckload of wild beasts is unleashed as a Trojan horse of ferocious chaos at the governor's ball, Rajamouli's digital manipulations seem to bend space and time, while – crucially – still obeying their rules. As tigers leap and motorbikes are swung, the speed is modulated within the carnage of any given shot, slowing the heartbeat of the action before letting its pulse skip back to normal. It creates a hyper-presentness in the turmoil of the moment. Everything has a giddy digital elasticity.

In lockstep with this visual delirium, *RRR*'s priapic mythmaking around its leonine male leads risks being too much. As Rajamouli imagines a fictional friendship between these two historical figures – Raju and the contemporaneous revolutionary leader Komaram Bheem – he also deifies them with extra-human abilities, including preternatural strength, even an apparent ability to breathe underwater. But in place of the grinding self-seriousness of the western superhero picture, *RRR* boasts a kind of Olympian exuberance running through both its action and its musical sequences. One song gives a knowing, Greek chorus-style comment on the budding friendship, while the hyperventilating 'Naatu Naatu' number – filmed at the Mariinsky Palace in Ukraine mere months before the Russian invasion – sees the duo hypnotically out-dancing a gathering of British stuffed-shirts.

John Woo Focus

Red Cliff Chi bi

Sat 2 Nov 14:10; Mon 11 Nov 17:40

Red Cliff II Chi bi: Jue zhan tian xia

Sat 2 Nov 17:20; Tue 19 Nov 17:55

Face/Off

Sat 9 Nov 17:30; Mon 25 Nov 20:20

Broken Arrow

Thu 14 Nov 20:40; Sun 24 Nov 18:10

Hard Target

Sun 24 Nov 13:00; Wed 27 Nov 18:20 (+ intro by Ti Singh, BFI FAN season producer)

Bollywood

Main Hoon Na

Sat 26 Oct 14:45; Sat 23 Nov 14:30 (+ intro by BFI

Product Manager Zenobia Bharmal)

Dhoom: 2

Sun 27 Oct 13:50; Sun 24 Nov 14:50

RRR

Sun 27 Oct 17:20; Sat 30 Nov 14:40

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Rajamouli himself joins in the dancing in the closing sequence, just after the rubber stamp motif that full-stops all of his movies appears in the top right of the screen. 'An S.S. Rajamouli film', it certifies, and boy do we know it.

Sam Wigley, *Sight and Sound*, bfi.org.uk/sight-and-sound, 14 December 2022

S.S. Rajamouli on RRR

Easily the most internationally successful of the Tollywood – Telugu Hollywood – directors, S.S. Rajamouli has directed three of the five highest-grossing films at the Indian box office to date. One of those is his latest, *RRR*, an extravagant anti-imperialist epic with twists, turns and drama aplenty.

You voted for Kung Fu Panda [2008] in our decennial directors' poll. Is animation a big influence?

Two films that had a big influence on me were *Aladdin* [1992] and *The Lion King* [1994]. I never thought of them as animated features [per se] – they're great stories with fantastic characterisations. *Ben Hur* [1959] and *Braveheart* [1995] are big inspirations for me, but the impact *The Lion King* had on me is the same. No difference.

A lot of RRR's vivid image-making recalls early Russian cinema. Was that an influence?

I haven't seen any of the Russian films, but I have seen a lot of Hollywood films. That bigscreen, big-scale imagery had a big impact on me. It's not just about creating a grand conceit or image for people to ooh and aah at – there should be an emotion attached to it. As an audience, by the time you come to that image, you are already rooting for it. Keeping the audience in that state of mind is as important as getting a great image.

In your film, one of the heroes impersonates a Muslim, taken in by a kind Delhi family. That triggered a political backlash long before the film was even released. Did that come as a surprise?

Having made 12 films, my understanding is that if there is no backlash from any quarter, it means people are not paying attention to the film. The minute a film or moment starts getting recognition or traction, people will want to condemn it. In *RRR*, [one of the heroes] wears a skullcap and appears as a Muslim. One right-wing politician [Bandi Sanjay Kumar] threatened to burn down the theatre and beat me publicly if I didn't remove the shot. There were also many left-wing people who accused me of propagating Hindu nationalism. So there are those who don't have the patience to see why a particular character might be wearing a skullcap, and those who find excuses to perceive Hindu nationalism. These are extreme nationalists and pseudo-liberals, and I am happy to be neither.

What's excited you recently in Indian cinema?

The emergence of South Indian filmmakers as industry leaders. Films in not just Telugu but Kannada or Tamil are leading the way. I would pay even closer attention to Malayalam cinema – it has achieved a level of excellence that none of the other regional industries have so far.

Interview by Arjun Sajip, *Sight and Sound*, March 2023