



NEW RELEASES

Anora

Anora

Directed by: Sean Baker
Production Company: Cre Film
Presented by: FilmNation Entertainment
Executive Producers: Ken Meyer, Clay Pecorin, Glen Basner, Alison Cohen, Milan Popelka
Produced by: Alex Coco, Samantha Quan, Sean Baker
Co-producer: Liz Siegal
Unit Production Manager: Olivia Kavanaugh
Production Supervisor: Rhyan Elliott
Production Co-ordinator: Erin Coco
Production Accountant: Patricia Beaury
Location Manager: Ross Brodar
Post-production Supervisor: Alex Coco
Production Consultant (Las Vegas Unit): Charles J. Akin
1st Assistant Director: Liza Mann
2nd Assistant Director: Sofia Blanco
Script Supervisor: Albert Rudnitsky
Casting by: Sean Baker
Additional Casting: Samantha Quan
Casting Associate: Emily Fleischer
Written by: Sean Baker
Director of Photography: Drew Daniels
Helicopter Camera Operator: Michael Belardi
B Camera Operator: Mika Altskan
Steadicam Operator: Sawyer Oubre
Chief Lighting Technician: Chris Hill
Key Grip: Harrison Rusk
Key Grip (Las Vegas Unit): Steve Forbes
Still Photographer: Augusta Quirk
Visual Effects: KGB Stúdió
Special Effects Co-ordinator: Brian Schuley
Editor: Sean Baker
Assistant Editor: Matthew Miller
Production Designer: Stephen Phelps
Art Director: Ryan Fitzgerald
Set Decorator: Christopher Phelps
Set Dresser: Raph Fineberg
Prop Master: Kendra Eaves
Construction Co-ordinator: Colin Phelan
Costume Designer: Jocelyn Pierce
Assistant Costume Designer: Jonie Bertin
Make-up Department Head: Annie Johnson
Hair Department Head: Justine Sierakowski
Music Supervisor: Matthew Hearon-Smith
Anora Dances Created by: Mikey Madison, Kennady Schneider
Sound Designer: John Warrin
Production Sound Mixer: Boris Krichevsky
Production Sound Mixer (Las Vegas Unit): Alex Altman
Re-recording Mixer: Andy Hay, John Warrin
Supervising Sound Editor: Andy Hay, John Warrin
Dialogue Editor: Jesse Pomeroy, Nick Pavey
Sound Effects Editor: D. Chris Smith, Adam Kopald
Foley Artist: Guy Francoeur, Oliver Snook
Foley Mixer: Jo Caron
Stunt Co-ordinators: Manny Siverio, Christopher Colombo, Roberto Lopez
Movement Consultant for Ms [Mikey] Madison: Kennady Schneider
Helicopter Coordinator: Alex Coco
Consultants: Luna Sofia Miranda, Andrea Werhun, Sophia Carnabucci
Russian Language Consultant: Albert Rudnitsky
Accent Consultant: Nike Doukas
Cast:
Mikey Madison (*Anora*, 'Ani')
Mark Eydelshteyn (*Ivan*)
Yura Borisov (*Igor*)
Karren Karagulian (*Toros*)

A certain minority of viewers has at times imagined a version of *Pretty Woman* (1990) in which Richard Gere's car does not pull up near Julia Roberts' sensitive striver Vivian, but next to Laura San Giacomo's Kit, Vivian's salty, obscurely heartbreaking best friend. Perhaps director Sean Baker is one of us. His fantastic, Palme d'Or-winning screwball-tragicomedy, *Anora*, plays like a dizzy homage to, and then a breakneck evisceration of, the whole *Pretty Woman* fantasy machine, electrified by a central character whose jaw-jutting attitude and brittle worldliness make her a Brighton Beach crazy-mirror Kit, raised to the power of a sweet smile that actually communicates 'Just gimme my money, already.' For all its megawatt charm, *Anora* is not a fairytale. It's a Cinde-fucking-rella story.

Anora (instant superstar Mikey Madison), her Brooklyn accent so *laaawng* and narrow it's like she's sucking all her vowels through a straw, dislikes her name and insists on going by Ani instead. This makes the film's title both a gentle rebuke and an affirmation – and this is hardly the first time that Baker has displayed an uncanny knack for loving even those aspects of his characters that they cannot love about themselves. Not that Ani appears too constrained by shame otherwise: in the Manhattan strip club where she struts her stuff, trading quips and catty insults, as appropriate, with the other girls, Ani is among the best and most confident stuff-strutters of them all.

As Drew Daniels' miraculously un-sleazy camera tracks down a lineup of fishnet-clad behinds gyrating in slo-mo under the anthemic sentimentality of Take That's 'Greatest Day' (a cut as inspired as Baker's frequent invocation of *NSYNC's 'Bye Bye Bye' in 2021's *Red Rocket*) Ani writhes atop client after client during one packed shift. These boozed-up, horny men might be buying her body, but what they're paying for is the flirty chatter, the eye contact, the pretty strands of glitter she has woven into her hair. It doesn't matter that this simulacrum of intimacy is a transaction. While she's on the clock, Ani takes pride in faking it so real.

Still, she's on a break and therefore reluctant when her boss asks her to go look after a Russian kid who's flashing a fat wad in one of the booths (Ani can understand Russian, though she's shy about speaking it). But Ani hits it off with the stratospherically spoiled yet endearing Vanya (terrific find Mark Eydelshteyn) and soon he's paying her for sex and proposing she moves in to his absent oligarch parents' gated McMansion for the week, in return for \$15,000. Days of vigorous humping, PlayStation and druggy hangouts ensue. Vanya flies Ani and his hedonistic entourage to Vegas on his family's private jet, and there, in that unrealst of cities, mid-coitus, he suggests they get married. Ani asks him repeatedly if he's serious. He insists he is, partly so that he'll be able to stay in the US against the wishes of Mom and Dad, but also because his easy charm matches her pragmatic optimism, and they have fun together that could go on forever and ever, right? Ani returns to New York with a ring on her finger and a shotgun-chapel marriage certificate in her hand, labouring under the delusion that this time, this amazing once-upon-a-time, she's faked it so real she's made it real – or at least, she's going to battle very fucking hard to make it so. This Cinderella will bring her diligent pre-transformation work ethic into her luxurious post-transformation life.

Vache Tovmasyan (*Garnick*)
Luna Sofia Miranda (*Lulu*)
Lindsey Normington (*Diamond*)
Darya Ekamasova (*Galina Zakharov*)
Anton Bitter (*Tom*)
Vlad Mamai (*Aleks*)
Maria Tichinskaya (*Dasha*)
Ivy Wolk (*Crystal*)
Aleksey Serebryakov (*Nikolai Zakharov*)
Paul Weissman (*Nick*)
Emily Weider (*Nikki*)
Vincent Radwinsky (*Jimmy*)
Brittney Rodriguez (*Dawn*)
Sophia Carnabuci (*Jenny*)
Ella Rubin (*Vera*)
Ross Brodar (*mansion day guard*)
Zoë Vnak (*Rachel*)
Morgan Charlton (*Sunny*)
Nazar Khamis (*Vlad*)
Charles Jang (*Vegas hotel manager*)
Lana Svidonovich (*Toros' wife*)
Masha Zhak (*Tatiana's hostess*)
Sebastian Conelli (*tow truck driver*)
Irina Finogeeva (*bartender*)
Mariano Orozco Arango (*Pearl*)
Artyom Trubnikov (*Michael Sharnov*)
Michael Sergio (*judge*)
Charlton Lamar (*court guard*)
Mickey O'Hagan (*divorce centre clerk*)
USA 2024
139 mins
Digital

A Universal release

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But the news filters back to Russia, and Vanya's enraged parents sic their hassled local fixer Toros (Karren Karagulian) onto their errant son along with his two goons: clumsy, bumbling Garnick (Vache Tovmasyan) and quietly bemused Igor (Yura Borisov, superb breakout from 2021's *Compartment No. 6*), whose stealthy admiration for Ani's spirit mirrors our own. Because until this point *Anora* has been a delicious whirlwind of night clubs, hotel suites and high-end malls, of Vanya doing the *Risky Business* (1983) slide across the polished floors of his house and Ani waking up each morning to the expansive ocean view from the bedroom window. But from here on, Baker finds an even higher gear of antic comedy and chaotic drama, driven especially, after Vanya ungallantly takes flight, by Ani's unexpectedly tenacious tooth-and-nail determination to hang on to a life and a marriage that only she believes is rightfully hers to fight for. In the first half of *Anora*, we liked Ani a lot. In the second half, we grow to love her unconditionally, like Baker does.

It makes the emotional wallop of the film's very last scene land with extraordinary force. Baker, always among the most principled, socially aware and humane of American indie filmmakers, is a master of the abrupt yet satisfying *coup-de-grâce* tone-shift. But where the endings of *Red Rocket* and *The Florida Project* (2017) both unexpectedly swerve into fantasy for characters mired in a messy reality, here the finale takes a different trajectory, right down the middle between happily-ever and happily-never after. By turns swoony, funny, panicky and sad, this is the director's most vivid creation yet. If fairytales are for princesses and Julia Roberts, *Anora* is for Ani and Kit and all the non-fictional sex workers to whom Baker dedicated his Cannes win, who live in the real world where no one rescues anyone, let alone gets rescued right back.

Jessica Kiang, *Sight and Sound*, November 2024

Accepting the Palme d'Or for *Anora*, a joyous Sean Baker confessed he wasn't sure what to do next, having reached the goal he'd had for the past 30 years. It's not wholly surprising that a confirmed cinephile like Baker would consider Cannes his ultimate achievement. Yet it felt telling that one of the greatest American independent filmmakers currently working would prize the Cannes mantle of high art above all, rather than the Hollywood prestige of an Oscar or a Sundance seal of approval (which he garnered years ago when 2015's *Tangerine* premiered there).

By that light, the win represents an apotheosis of the contemporary American indie, one generation after the laurel for Gus Van Sant's death-trip *Elephant* (2003). But more particularly it recognises Baker's rare devotion to portraying with real cinematic verve Americans hustling to survive – in a style that does justice to these characters' drive to live. Baker's lively, colloquially detailed depictions of struggle depart from many other American indies which feel burdened by an apparent need to underline their sense of responsibility. It helps that he has a hard-to-beat success rate with casting discoveries, whether picking unknowns and little-knowns or seeing actors flourish under his direction. As *Anora*, Mikey Madison (a star of FX's comedy drama *Better Things*, 2016-22) lights up the room as an exotic dancer, keeping her eyes on the prize with her wealthy puppyish client, Ivan (Mark Eydelshteyn), while also falling in love. Set in outerborough New York locales, the film's antic energy feels straight out of post-Depression screwball comedies, which, like this one, bustle ahead with an implicit fear of the wolf at the door.

Nicolas Rapold, *Sight and Sound*, July 2024

Programme notes and credits compiled by Sight and Sound and the BFI Documentation Unit

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