



PREVIEW

The Brutalist (70mm presentation)

The Brutalist

Director: Brady Corbet
Production Company: A24
Producer: Brady Corbet
Written by: Brady Corbet, Mona Fastvold
Director of Photography: Lol Crawley
Editor: Dávid Jancsó
Production Designer: Judy Becker
Costume Designer: Kate Forbes
Music: Daniel Blumberg
Music Supervisor: James A. Taylor

Cast:

Adrien Brody (*László Toth*)
Felicity Jones (*Erzsébet Tóth*)
Guy Pearce (*Harrison Lee Van Buren Sr*)
Joe Alwyn (*Harry Lee*)
Raffey Cassidy (*Zsófia*)
Stacy Martin (*Maggie Lee*)
Emma Laird (*Audrey*)
Isaach de Bankolé (*Gordon*)
Alessandro Nivola (*Attila*)
Ariane Labed (*older Zsófia*)
Michael Epp (*Jim Simpson*)
Jonathan Hyde (*Leslie Woodrow*)
Peter Polycarpou (*Michael Hoffman*)
Maria Sand (*Michelle Hoffman*)
Salvatore Sansone (*Orazio*)
Zephan Hanson Amisshah (*teenage William*)
Charlie Esoko (*young William*)
Orban Levente (*Hungarian refugee*)
Benett Vilmányi (*Binyamin*)
Péter Deutsch (*Rabbi Zunz*)
USA-UK-Hungary 2024
215 mins (including 15min interval)
70mm

Courtesy of Universal Pictures

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The end titles of Brady Corbet's new film *The Brutalist* unroll to the unlikely needle drop of 'One for You, One for Me' by Italian pop duo La Bionda. The 1978 disco hit smacks of deliberate and triumphant irony. After all, if there were ever a contemporary filmmaker who refuses to do one for himself and one for the studio, it's Brady Corbet. With his latest, an epic drama about an immigrant architect arriving in America, he completes a trilogy of films, each of which – his debut *The Childhood of a Leader* (2015) and *Vox Lux* (2018) – have premiered at the Venice Film Festival, and each portraying enigmatic individuals plunging into the fray of history.

In this instance, the individual is László Toth (Adrien Brody), a damaged man who has survived the Holocaust and fled to the United States. We first see him making his way to the deck of a ship to look upon his new home. From his point of view, the Statue of Liberty appears to be upside down: the first indication that this story of immigration and survival, assimilation and ambition is going to be skewed; that perspective – fittingly for an architect – is going to be everything. He travels to Pennsylvania where he's taken in by a cousin, Attila (Alessandro Nivola), who has married an American and converted to Catholicism.

When Attila's furniture company secures a commission redesigning a rich man's private library, Toth uses his Bauhaus training to create a space which is modern but also protective, shielding the books from the light. His vision catches the attention of the library's owner, Harrison Lee Van Buren (played with reptilian ease by Guy Pearce), a racist millionaire who employs Toth to build a community centre to honour his recently departed mother.

Toth writes letters to his wife Erzsébet (Felicity Jones) in Hungary while he attempts to adjust to this new life. Though they are eventually reunited, along with Toth's niece Zsófia (Raffey Cassidy), their family unit is one broken by the trauma of persecution and imprisonment. Erzsébet is in a wheelchair and Zsófia refuses to speak. Toth himself is impotent and addicted to heroin, which he indulges in with his friend, Gordon (Isaach de Bankolé) a man he befriended on a breadline.

At a length of just over three and a half hours – including overture and intermission – the film might seem like a big ask, but Corbet's story never sprawls or meanders. It's long because its subject is vast; it takes time to explore the depths of its characters. Spanning several decades, it maintains a brilliant sense of specificity throughout, captured with the shallow focus of Lol Crawley's inventive 35mm cinematography. Whether it's the febrile atmosphere of a Philadelphia jazz club, or the dark wood and velvet of Van Buren's mansion, the camera confidently roams a lived-in reality that's miles apart from the polished vintage nostalgia of historical dramas such as *The Crown* (2016-2023). In one stunning sequence, the scene shifts to the marble quarries of Carrara in Italy where a combination of the sound design – we hear every crackle and rumble – and the elemental beauty of the rock combine to make moments of pure cinema.

IN PERSON & PREVIEWS

TV Preview: Cunk on Life + Q&A with

Diane Morgan and Charlie Brooker

Thu 5 Dec 18:00

Missing Believed Wiped 2024 Session 1:

The Complete and Utter History of Britain

+ intro by Sir Michael Palin

Sat 7 Dec 12:10

Missing Believed Wiped 2024 Session 2:

Basil Brush and Friends

Sat 7 Dec 15:00

Sir Richard Eyre in Conversation

Sun 8 Dec 15:00

Iris + extended intro by Sir Richard Eyre

& Dame Judi Dench

Sun 8 Dec 17:30

TV Preview: Woman of Stone – A Ghost Story

for Christmas + Q&A with director Mark Gatiss

+ cast

Mon 9 Dec 18:30

Reece Shearsmith Presents: Ravenous

Fri 13 Dec 20:40

Mark Kermode Live in 3D at the BFI

Mon 16 Dec 18:30

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There's a tinge of Ayn Rand's *The Fountainhead* to the plot, a novel name-dropped more than it is read, with its misunderstood artist battling misfortune with the fickle patronage of the wealthy. (Early John Dos Passos feels like an inspiration as well.) But Corbet and his fellow scriptwriter and partner Mona Fastvold, like Toth building Van Buren's community centre for his own secret ends, turn the myth of the great man into a story of failure and decline: the trauma of history reenacting itself.

Toth's designs have a brutality – his concrete oblongs and slabs are ominous as tombstones. He yearns for simplicity that is at odds with the mess of his life. 'The best description of a cube is the cube itself,' Toth says, but a cube can be so many things: a puzzle, a room, a prison cell, ice in a drink. And Corbet's film is similarly slippery as an exploration of art and commerce (there is even a history of Pennsylvania here), as well as a meditation on Jewish identity.

The film is dedicated to Scott Walker, who scored *The Childhood of a Leader*, and so it's fitting that the music by Daniel Blumberg plays a similarly muscular and boisterous role to Walker's earlier score. Bold American filmmaking like this will invite comparisons with Paul Thomas Anderson's *There Will Be Blood* (2007) and *The Master* (2012), as well as perhaps King Vidor's great silent film *The Crowd* (1928), but it is also entirely Corbet's own distinctive voice and vision. Toth is played with a kind of broken gusto by Adrien Brody, offering by far his best work in years. Likewise, Felicity Jones provides Erzsébet with wit, determination and ultimately a dignity carved by survival.

In *The Brutalist*, the artist suffers, but not for art: he suffers simply what history inflicts. Corbet's film is a grandiose edifice, but he is as interested in the crumbling foundations as the soaring heights.

John Bleasdale, *Sight and Sound*, bfi.org.uk, 3 September 2024