

A Grasshopper Film Release

zi

A film by Kogonada



2026 / 99 min. / USA, Hong Kong / In English, Cantonese, Mandarin w/ English subtitles

World Premiere: Sundance Film Festival 2026

Booking

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Press

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Synopsis

In Hong Kong, a young violinist named Zi (Michelle Mao) struggles with her memory while enigmatic visions of her future self haunt her. She meets a stranger named Elle (Haley Lu Richardson), whom she recognizes from these visions. Together, they spend the day walking Hong Kong's streets and are soon joined by Min (Jin Ha), a researcher at the local neurology center. As the day turns to night and night turns to dawn, Zi must reconcile the increasingly overlapping realities of her past, present, and future selves. The latest feature from Kogonada, the acclaimed director of *AFTER YANG* and *COLUMBUS*, *ZI* is a beguiling meditation on memory, time, and human connection.

Production Notes

Time is relative. We spent three weeks together in Hong Kong, but it felt like three years. Not because of hardship but abundance. Every day was singular and full. We were making a film on the run, free from the constraints of convention, in a city that had its own profound sense of temporality. In pursuing ZI, we were chasing what this city embodied, a feeling of time unbound by linearity, a past that was always present in the future.

We were also chasing ourselves.

In many ways, we were all Zi and Elle and Min. Transitory misfits. Strangers. Out of sync. Why were we here in the first place? Why did we agree to meet on the other side of the world without funding from a studio or financier?

Many of us were coming out of larger projects, and we longed for something more intimate, more personal, more spontaneous. We resisted outside funding. What we valued more than funding was freedom. We knew the only way to have the latter was to have full ownership. So we made a decision to split everything seven-ways.

We would have freedom and responsibility to make the film we wanted in the way we wanted.

We prioritized intuition over logistics. We welcomed the unexpected, we refused to be dictated by preordained schedules.

Time is money, they say. But time is also the art of cinema. Time is the medium. Time is what we capture and shape. Sculpting in time is how Tarkovsky described it. To reduce time to money is to succumb to the dominant rhythm of capital. The act of cinema is to reclaim time. To make it central. To be attuned to what it reveals. In this way, cinema is an act of resistance. Or should be.

That was our impulse. Let's meet in Hong Kong. No outside funding. No "time is money" ethos. We had a beginning, a middle, an end, but it was always non-linear, and it was always about the search for what we might find beyond a script, the search for a temporality that captured a truth

about our own existence. More than any story or narrative, it was the search for ZI in this city, and for time itself, that we privileged above everything else.

*Some facts: we took three days to find the actual geography for our film. It was important to us that it would mostly be walkable. We tried to limit ourselves to one take a day. If we wanted another take of a scene, we waited until the following day or later. An ongoing script was being written daily. Some scenes were created in the moment. Everyone took on multiple roles. Each day was a collaborative dance.

Director's Statement

ZI is a movie I needed to make in the way we made it. It is the kind of film that made me love films, not as a product or some vehicle for storytelling, but as a way to experience time and being.

When I was younger, movies were a thrilling way to distract myself from the weight of existence — that feeling I would have when things were too quiet. Some called this feeling “boredom” but for me it was more haunting, more dreadful. I loved movies because they allowed me to escape the spectre of nothingness that I felt in the mundane. They were an antidote to the ordinary.

Later in my life, I encountered films from other parts of the world that would have a profoundly different effects on me. They would not offer escape but rather a deeper sense of what I was trying to escape. A feeling of time and existence. Film as a sensory form of engagement where content seemed secondary, too slight and loosely constructed to be worthy of attention.

What to make of this kind of cinema? It was like tasting a foreign dish for the first time. It was unfamiliar, a little off-putting and bland. However, I couldn't deny the lingering sensation that stayed with me. Did I even like it? Was it good? I didn't know. But the depth of aftertaste brought me back again and again until it became the cinema that I craved. In these films, form was not subservient to content. Indeed, it was a form that gave pleasure and meaning.

I can't tell you how many times I've rewatched SANS SOLEIL and HIROSHIMA MON AMOUR simply for the pleasure of their construction. Every cut mesmerizes. The relationship between image and time. The discontinuity that coheres. The rhythm and asynchronicity of modern life. It is the same reason I rewatch Ozu although his films could not be any more different than Marker and Resnais.

The construct of these films are not merely pleasurable but also deeply moving. Not intellectually but experientially. And existentially. There is something fundamental about cinema as a temporal form that resonates deeply in these films. For me, cinema is a medium of time, not merely a delivery system for storytelling but a medium capable of engaging us intrinsically as temporal beings. I don't think it's too much to say that this kind of cinema changed me forever. ZI is my past catching up to my future. It is a pursuit, a desire, a need.

*On the music of Ryuichi Sakamoto: I had the privilege of working with Sakamoto-san on a previous film (AFTER YANG). His music has had a profound impact on me but also his life as an artist. After his passing, I felt his absence deeply. ZI is dedicated to his memory. My desire was to incarnate the emotion and feeling of some of his lesser known experimental work that he was making after his diagnosis. The film itself explores themes in his music during this period.

Director's Bio

Kogonada is a writer and director. He also produces, edits, and essays.

Credits

Written and Directed by	Kogonada
Produced by	Chung An, Christopher Radcliff, Benjamin Loeb, Kogonada, Haley Lu Richardson, Michelle Mao, Jin Ha
Starring	Michelle Mao, Haley Lu Richardson, Jin Ha
Cinematographer	Benjamin Loeb (FNF)
Editor	Kogonada
Sound Designer	Eugenio Battaglia (MPSE)
Co-producer	Ken Hui
Location Sound Recordist	Bone Chan
Additional Cinematographer	Sheldon Chau
Production Associate	Bonny Chan
Colorist	Christian Wieberg-Nielsen
Sound Effects Editor	Humberto Corte (MPSE)
Foley Artist	Javier Ivan Perez
Foley Recordist	Susana Cuevas, Henry Martins
Additional Cast	Valerie May Richardson. John Shea

Dedicated to Ryuichi Sakamoto (1952-2023)