

## ROMA (2018)

- Released on November 21st, 2018
- 2 Hours 15 Mins
- \$ (estimated) Budget
- Directed by Alfonso Cuarón
- Written by Alfonso Cuarón
- Esperanto Filmoj, Participant Media
- Rated R for graphic nudity, some disturbing images, and language
- The film premiered at the 75th Venice International Film Festival in August 2018.
- The film had its North American premiere at TIFF in Toronto in September 2018.

## QUICK THOUGHTS

- Marisa Serafini
- Mina Wahab

## DEVELOPMENT

- The film is dedicated to "Libo," who is the family servant on which the central character was based.
- Alfonso Cuarón has been talking about making this film since 2006.
- Colonia Roma is the neighborhood in Mexico City where the film takes place. It is a district located in the Cuauhtémoc borough of Mexico City just west of the city's historic center.
- In 2017 the Cannes Film Festival decided not to let films done exclusively for Netflix or other streaming services participate in the festival, stating that Cannes wants to preserve the traditional way of watching and making films. In 2018 Netflix announced a boycott of the festival, and Roma instead went to the Venice festival. One of the filmmakers who supported Netflix was Alfonso Cuarón. He has stated on several occasions that festivals and academies should appreciate films made for streaming services.
- Netflix acquired the distribution rights for the film in spring of 2018 in a deal including theatrical distribution.
- One of his primary reasons for doing this was because foreign language films do not usually get adequate distribution. By releasing it on Netflix, Alfonso Cuarón knew Roma (2018) would potentially play to its widest audience.
- First film to be distributed primarily by a streaming service (Netflix) to be nominated for the Academy Awards for Best Picture and Best Director. This feat challenges the Academy's years long bias against the non-theatrical distribution model of Netflix and other streaming platforms.
- Roma takes place between Thursday, September 3rd, 1970 and Monday June 28, 1971.

## HISTORY

- **The Corpus Christi Massacre** or **El Halconazo** (*The hawk strike*, so called because of the participation of a group of elite Mexican army soldiers known as *Los Halcones*) was a massacre of student demonstrators during the Mexican Dirty War in Mexico City on June 10, 1971, the day of the Corpus Christi festival. Nearly 120 protesters were killed, among them a fourteen-year-old boy.

## WRITING (Alfonso Cuarón)

- The director wrote the script as a stream of consciousness experience and then shot his movie in continuity in a further improvisational manner. Only a handful of people were privy to reading the script. Cuarón allowed whatever came to mind to enter the drama. "But when I finished the

whole thing, I trusted that the narrative muscle that I have built throughout my career would take care of it," he said.

- "I allowed each scene to be as long as what felt right. Usually I'm very strict about page count and timings. Here I didn't care about that because we were dealing with so much randomness. I never gave instructions to the actors as a group but separately, and most of those indications were contradictory. I wanted accidents. I would not cut, I just let it roll."

### STORY/TOPICS

- Cuarón describes *Roma* as a following the year in the life of a middle class family in Mexico, particularly the maid Cleo and through her exploring wounds that were personal - family wounds. Then Cuarón realized these were wounds he shared with many people in Mexico; eventually coming to the conclusion **that this film was about wounds shared by humanity.**
- In a *Guardian Article*, Cuarón shared that Libo, the maid this film is a love letter to, "has seen this film 2-3 times. She likes it a lot. **She cries a lot. The beautiful thing is that when she cries it's not because of what is happening to her, it's because she's concerned about the children. She's not focusing on her own pain.**"

### CAST

- Each day, before filming, the director would hand the lines to his cast, attempting to elicit real emotion and shock from his actors. Each actor would also receive contradictory directions and explanations, which meant that there was chaos on set every day. For Cuarón, "that's exactly what life is like: it's chaotic and you can't really plan how you'll react to a given situation."

### YALITZA APARECIA (Cleo)

- Yalitza Aparicio's sister first spotted a casting call flyer and asked her sister to join her. As it turned out, her sister couldn't make it because she was pregnant so Yalitza decided to go anyway and found herself in the lead role.
- First-time actress Yalitza Aparicio was literally plucked from obscurity by writer-director Alfonso Cuarón. About to become a school teacher, she had 8 months to kill waiting for her test results, and because she had "nothing better to do" in the meantime she auditioned for Cuarón, totally unaware of who he was. The audition process stretched out over a year and, after much consideration, Alfonso chose Yalitza over 110 girls who had vied for the role.
- Yalitza Aparicio, like Cleo, didn't know how to swim.

### MARINA DE TAVIRA (Sra. Sofía)

- Established Mexican actress Marina de Tavira (Sofía) auditioned for three months without ever knowing who would be directing. She didn't learn that fellow Mexican Alfonso Cuarón was both writer and director until her 7th audition.

### DIEGO CORTINA AUTREY (Toño)

### JORGE ANTONIO GUERRERO (Fermín)

- Had been denied a U.S. visa on three separate occasions and missed previous award shows and screenings of "Roma." Not even letters from Netflix and director Alfonso Cuarón were enough to get him a visa sooner. According to the Los Angeles Times, Netflix worked with the U.S. Embassy in Mexico to obtain a non-immigrant visa for the actor.

## **DIRECTING** (Alfonso Cuarón)

- Alfonso Cuarón was the only person on set to know the entire script and the direction of the film.
- According to Alfonso Cuarón, ninety percent of the scenes represented in the film are scenes taken out of his memory.
- Cuarón calls Roma the "most essential movie" of his career.
- Roma was based heavily on Director Alfonso Cuarón's real life nanny, Liboria "Libo" Rodriguez, when he was a child. He is portrayed in the film by Carlos Peralta (Paco).
- "There are periods in history that scar societies and moments in life that transform us as individuals. Time and space constrain us, but they also define who we are, creating inexplicable bonds with others that flow with us at the same time and through the same places. Roma is an attempt to capture the memory of events that I experienced almost fifty years ago. It is an exploration of Mexico's social hierarchy, where class and ethnicity have been perversely interwoven to this date and, above all, it's an intimate portrait of the women who raised me in a recognition of love as a mystery that transcends space, memory and time."
- Director Alfonso Cuarón notably also thanks his fellow Mexican filmmakers, Gael García Bernal, Guillermo del Toro, Alejandro G. Iñárritu and Emmanuel Lubezki.
- Alfonso Cuarón becomes the first person in Oscar history to be nominated for the Academy Awards for both Best Director and Best Cinematography in the same year and for the same film. He received additional nominations for Best Original Screenplay and Best Picture for the film as well.

## **PRODUCTION/CINEMATOGRAPHY** (Alfonso Cuarón)

- The film was shot in chronological order.
- While Cuarón was shooting the film, he confirms that Gough was "doing a whole preparation of making sure that he became very, very familiar with the material." Gough chimes in, "I've got notebooks that just stack up with all thoughts and ideas while we just went through everything. Some of the takes we're dealing with are five minutes in length."
- Cuarón originally intended for the movie to be shot by Emmanuel Lubezki. Because of logistic reasons Lubezki couldn't proceed after he had already done some preparations. Also Cuarón didn't want to hire an English-language DP and have to translate his own experience, which is why he ended up as a cinematographer.
- The lengthy delivery scene in the hospital was only shot once. The doctors and nurses were real, not actors, hired to make the scene feel more authentic.
- Alfonso Cuarón decided to shoot on location in Mexico City instead of using a soundstage. This is one reason for the several appearances of airplanes, because according to Cuarón they had a plane passing by every five minutes.
- Alfonso Cuarón gathered 70% of the furniture in his home from different family members spread all around Mexico.
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- According to Emmanuel Lubezki, the scene blocking is very perpendicular to the lens (the actors move parallel to the camera and the shots are composed in Z axis rather than in X axis) to make the camera almost a consciousness revisiting the story, as though the camera knows something the actors don't. Alfonso Cuarón, on the other hand, counters this notion by stating that the position of camera is like "the ghost of the present that is visiting the past, without getting

involved, just observing, not trying to make a judgment or commentary" and adds that "everything there would be the commentary itself".

- Cleo's frenzied hospital delivery scene, in which she loses her baby, was done as a single shot and they got it in one take. Cuarón staged the run through with the professional doctors, nurses, and administrators to get the procedure right, but used a double for Aparicio. And when the actress shot the scene, she had no idea how it was going to end. "We kept the tail running with doctors and nurses talking about stuff, and she was crying and crying, and it broke my heart seeing her crying," Cuarón said. "And I yelled, 'Cut,' and I went to hold her. We were capturing her real reaction to that moment."

#### **EDITING/VFX** (Alfonso Cuarón, Adam Gough)

- The four-hour cut had to be trimmed, and Gough, who wasn't allowed to read the script until after it was shot, offered a uniquely fresh perspective, helping bring the final version to a more acceptable 135 minutes.
- Opens with a mesmerizing four-minute credit sequence: the mopping of a courtyard. The flow of foamy water establishes a rhythm as well as a cleansing metaphor about life and memory. "And that flow started to dictate the other stuff," said Cuarón, who served as editor with co-editor Adam Gough. "We went from one thing to the other, sculpting as we were going, moment by moment, following the flow."
- Paco (Carlos Peralta), his alter-ego, is saved from drowning by Cleo. That would tie together the flowing water in the opening with the heroic rescue from the strong ocean current at the end.
- A difficult scene editorially was the one where a distraught Cleo tells employer Sofia (Marina de Tavira) that she might be pregnant, fearing the loss of her job. "Ultimately, it was just having such good quality footage," said Gough. "There were 60 takes of that shot and four hours of coverage just for the master shot. From take to take, we had strong possibilities, but there were subtle options. It was just refining to get the most honest moment."

#### **SOUND/MUSIC** (Lynn Fainchtein)

- "It was mostly about choosing songs that were on the radio," says music supervisor Lynn Fainchtein, who worked closely with Cuarón, mining his childhood memories, as well as her own, and doing meticulous research into what different Mexican radio stations of the era were playing during the actual months represented in *Roma*.
- "All of the music is embedded in the story," "It's part of each scene." Much of that music comes from the radio, playing in the house, and in cars.
- There are 38 musical pieces in *Roma*, which range from a song by Juan Gabriel's first album to "I Don't Know How to Love Him," sung by Yvonne Elliman on *The Jesus Christ Superstar* soundtrack album, to British band Christie's 1970 hit "Yellow River," songs by José José and Javier Solís, and a track by Mexican rock group La Revolución de Emiliano Zapata: "It's the colors of what we were listening to as kids in Mexico in 1970," says Fainchtein, who produced the soundtrack together with Randall Poster.

#### **PROMOTION**

- While introducing the film at a screening at the New York Film Festival, Guillermo del Toro, who was also the president of the jury at the 75th Venice Film Festival which awarded the film with the Golden Lion, named *Roma* one of his top 5 favorite films of all time.
- Pedro Almodóvar endorsed *Roma* by naming it the best movie of 2018. He also described the film as "two hours from a master that sweep spectators away".

- First film to be distributed primarily by a streaming service (Netflix) to be nominated for and win in the major categories at the Golden Globes, including Best Foreign Film (win), Best Director (win) and Best Screenplay.

#### **BOX OFFICE - Released on Netflix December 14th**

Opened the Venice Film Festival August 30th, 2018

Opened in US Theaters: November 21st, 2018

- Domestic (as of Feb 12th, 2019): \$UNKNOWN \$90,000 - \$120,000 opening weekend in Theaters
- Foreign: \$UNKNOWN
- Worldwide: \$UNKNOWN
- theaters

#### **RECEPTION**

- RT: Tatometer: 96% Audience: 75%
- IMDB: 7.9/10
- Cinemascore: X
- Metascore: 96

#### **SEQUEL/LEGACY**