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Film Discussion Group
April 2019

Gloria Bell (dir. Sebastián Lelio, 2018)

On Camera

Gloria Bell: Julianne Moore: Oscar winner for *Still Alice* (14); my fave is *Safe* (95)
Arnold (boyfriend): John Turturro: He and Moore were hilarious in *The Big Lebowski* (98)
Peter (son): Michael Cera: *Juno* (07); worked with Chilean director Sebastián Silva
Anne (daughter): Caren Pistorius: *Slow West* (05); *The Light Between Oceans* (16)
Dustin (ex-husband): Brad Garrett: Multiple Emmy winner for *Everybody Loves Raymond*
Fiona (his wife): Jeanne Tripplehorn: 90s fixture: *Basic Instinct* (92), *The Firm* (93)
Hillary (mother): Holland Taylor: Stage/film/TV stalwart; first big movie in a decade
Vicky (best friend): Rita Wilson: BFF roles in *Sleepless in Seattle* (93), *It's Complicated* (09)
Melinda (coworker): Barbara Sukowa: Major career in Germany: *Hannah Arendt* (12), etc.

Off Camera

Director: Sebastián Lelio: *Gloria* (13); *A Fantastic Woman* (17); *Disobedience* (17)
Co-Writer: Alice Johnson Boher: NY- and LA-based monologist and stand-up comedian
Cinematography: Natasha Braier: *XXY* (07); *The Milk of Sorrow* (09); *The Neon Demon* (16)
Film Editing: Soledad Salfate: One of the few crew members who also worked on *Gloria*
Art Direction: Shannon Walsh: First dept-head credit; worked on TV's *Westworld* (16-)
Costume Design: Stacey Battat: Fourth collaboration with Moore, including *Still Alice*
Original Score: Matthew Herbert: Also scored *A Fantastic Woman* and *Disobedience*

Other films directed by Sebastián Lelio...

The Sacred Family (2005) – Debut feature about a Chilean man and his parents vacationing at their beach house, thrown into chaos by the son's rebellious girlfriend; now free on Amazon Prime

Christmas (2009) – Another intense love-triangle, as a teenage boy and girl in a rocky relationship discover a 16-year-old stranger inside one of their houses, and both become attracted to her

The Year of the Tiger (2011) – Filmed and set in the immediate aftermath of the 2010 earthquake that devastated Chile; follows a convict who escapes during the quake and seeks his way home

Gloria (2013) – The first, Chilean-made version of this story, and Lelio's worldwide breakout hit

A Fantastic Woman (2017) – Lelio won Chile's first Best Foreign Language Film Oscar for this story of a transgender woman (Daniela Vega) left alone when her older, male lover dies and his family, including his ex-wife, refuses to involve her in his burial or include her in his legacy

Disobedience (2017) – Our very popular May 2018 discussion topic, with Rachel Weisz and Rachel McAdams starring as two Orthodox Jewish women resuming an illicit affair

Other films you may enjoy if you liked *Gloria Bell*...

Alice Doesn't Live Here Anymore (1974) – An exemplary movie within the mid-70s bumper crop of female-driven Hollywood movies, starring Ellen Burstyn in her Oscar-winning role as a young widow and single mother who dreamed of success as a singer but has to settle for a while as a waitress in a Southwestern diner. Basis for the long-running sitcom *Alice*.

An Unmarried Woman (1978) – Another landmark from the same period, with Jill Clayburgh as a recent divorcée on New York's Upper East Side who gets involved with a tempestuous artist.

Hope Springs (2012) – Probably my favorite Meryl Streep movie and performance of the last 10 years, and one of the least-discussed. She and Tommy Lee Jones star as a husband and wife of 31 years who go into marriage counseling. Blends sadness and cheer the way *Gloria Bell* does.

Enough Said (2013) – Julia Louis-Dreyfus, in her only leading role in a movie, stars as a single mom preparing for her daughter's departure for college, around the same time she begins dating a man (James Gandolfini) who she doesn't realize is the ex of one of her new friends.

Facts about *Gloria Bell* you may appreciate...

Moore and Lelio met in Paris in 2015, after she had adored the original *Gloria* and its central performance. They expressed their admiration for each other before this meeting, but neither thought the other wanted to remake an existing movie. When they realized they were wrong, they each confided that they would *only* pursue a remake if the other was involved. ([IndieWire](#))

Lelio has offered three main reasons for accepting the offer to remake *Gloria*. One is his longtime idolatry of Moore. Another is the chance to apply new ideas about cinematography and sound he has gleaned over the last five years, as he has so successfully expanded his movie career. A third is the idea of revisiting this story amidst Hollywood's professed recommitment to show more women onscreen and depict their experience honestly. *Gloria* is in literally every frame of the film—hugely unusual, for any character in any movie. He wanted more viewers to *see* her. (Note, too, on the first page how many key creative roles on this film were filled by women.)

Julianne Moore is exactly six days younger than Paulina García, who played the lead in *Gloria*. Her version of the character may be five years older, given the time difference between the making of the two movies, but in most ways the two *Glorias*' experiences are largely the same.

John Turturro, a sometime director, hesitated to accept the part of someone audiences would have so many reasons to hate but was convinced by Lelio that, despite his many failings, Arnold really does think he is trying to do his best. He also wanted to work with Moore again and to support a movie that confronted middle-aged experiences and placed a woman at its center.

Julianne Moore has participated in several remakes, as diverse as *Far from Heaven* (2002, based on the Jane Wyman movie *All that Heaven Allows*), Stephen King's *Carrie* (2013, first filmed in 1976), the WW2 romance *The End of the Affair* (1999, made in the 50s with Deborah Kerr), a shot-for-shot remake of Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1998), and her next release, *After the Wedding*, a globe-spanning drama costarring Michelle Williams that is a new version of an Oscar-nominated Danish film from 2006. In her other upcoming film, she is Gloria Steinem.

Broad conversation topics...

Behavior vs. Acting: For much of her film career, Julianne Moore has been a go-to actress for parts that required a very specific, mysterious, or heightened style, like playing a woman with no interior life in *Safe* (1995), suffering from an unnamed disease; or having to play a porn actress giving terrible performances in movies but radiating maternal warmth in life in *Boogie Nights* (1997); or doing a lightly modern spin on the non-realistic acting of 1950s melodramas in *Far from Heaven* (2002). Recently, though, Moore [has said](#) that, especially as she gets older, “behavior is more interesting than ‘acting,’” insofar as plausible, real-life characters and situations excite her more than contrived scenarios. As you watched *Gloria Bell*, did you feel you saw her “acting”? Did some moments feel more “performed” than others, on purpose or not? Or did you feel Moore was slipping into the skin of a real person?

Perspective: Two of the most unusual qualities of Lelio’s scripts for *Gloria* and *Gloria Bell* are that 1) she is in every single scene, and nearly in every *shot*, and 2) that the other characters in the movie only see the parts of her life in which they participate, but probably know little if anything about the other plotlines. The audience, in other words, are the only people who actually *see* Gloria’s life in 360°. As you watched the film, did you feel you got to know Gloria “better” than most movie characters? Did certain aspects of her remain elusive?

Peripheries: By the same token, because of the film’s intense commitment to Gloria, even when she is just driving to work or folding her laundry, we know less about the lives of secondary characters than we would in a different script. Which other figures in the movie made you the most curious? When did shots or performances imply a nuance in a character or relationship that struck you as having a deeper, more complex history? (I, for example, was alert to the daughter’s marked physical discomfort around Gloria’s ex-husband. I still wonder about it.)

Differences between *Gloria* and *Gloria Bell*...

The Chilean Gloria has enough money, even living by herself, to hire a part-time housekeeper, who tells her the myth about cats and mice on Noah’s Ark that Gloria Bell hears from her waxing technician. This housekeeper is also who Gloria calls when she gets stranded at the Viña del Mar resort, which is *Gloria*’s equivalent for Caesar’s Palace in Las Vegas.

In addition to never meeting Gloria’s mother in the original movie, that version includes fewer scenes with her best friend (i.e., the Rita Wilson character in *Gloria Bell*). We also do not meet any of Gloria’s coworkers, including any corollary for Melinda, the friend who gets fired even after Gloria screams to the universe that she’s awesome. In fact, we have no idea in the original *Gloria* what type of work our heroine does. If you tally those changes up, *Gloria Bell* has clearly elected to give the character more close relationships with women.

One character we do meet in *Gloria* that we do not in *Gloria Bell* is the upstairs neighbor, who eventually comes down to Gloria’s apartment to fetch his hairless cat, who keeps escaping into her apartment. He’s in a relatively calm moment when they meet, and as he collects his pet with some embarrassment, we see that he, too, is a damaged person who’s trying his best.

In the original movie, the conversation between Gloria, her new boyfriend, and her married best friends was about the ongoing pain of many Chileans, still responding to the histories of injustice and genocide in their country, and hoping a new generation of leaders might be able to move the country forward without losing its specific identity. Once or twice in *Gloria*, we see or hear in the background that student-led protests are still demanding justice in the streets. Notably, all four speakers in that original conversation are expressing the same “side” of the issue, and getting along well. In the new, changed version, Turturro’s Arnold takes a different stance about gun control than the other three. This change is probably no accident, since Moore is heavily involved with Moms Demand Action, with the Parkland students, and other groups and organizations that are demanding stricter control of guns in the USA.

In the original *Gloria*, the daughter moves to Sweden to marry a skier and mountain climber, not a surfer. The scene in *Gloria Bell* where mother and daughter watch his big-wave videos and reckon with the fact that he “could die tomorrow,” as could anyone, is a new addition.

In a final, slightly surreal accent in *Gloria*, she wanders off into the jungly outdoor surroundings of the restaurant hosting her friend’s daughter’s wedding reception. She seems a bit higher in the Chilean version from that joint she smoked en route (after paintballing her boyfriend’s house) than Julianne Moore does in *Gloria Bell*. While roaming through the trees and bushes, Chilean Gloria encounters a pristine white peacock that immediately displays its entire, gargantuan fan of tail feathers. The bird and the woman lock eyes for a short, deep moment (is it really happening, or is this the pot?) before she returns to the party and dances.

Two more fun details about music...

Start: The first track we hear in *Gloria Bell* is Gloria Gaynor’s “Never Can Say Goodbye,” a big hit even if it’s not as famous as her monster smash “I Will Survive.” *Gloria Bell* is not all the way to being an “I Will Survive”-type gal, at least not at the start of the movie. (“Never Can Say Goodbye” might be a good title for a song about Arnold!) It’s also interesting that *Gloria Bell* changes the opening shot from the original *Gloria*. In the new version, we pan down from the ceiling to see Gloria below—and maybe we wonder if she’ll ever break through it?

Finish: “Gloria” itself was originally an Italian-language song and a big hit around much of the world in 1979. That’s the version that Gloria dances to at the end of the original movie. The Laura Branigan version that most Americans know better was a translation, with modified lyrics. One fun bit of trivia is that Branigan’s “Gloria” remained in the Hot 100 singles chart for a record 36 weeks, but two different songs kept it from reaching #1—like our heroine, it was more of a bridesmaid than a bride, but look how well it’s held up! In another neat wrinkle, this means that the remake of *Gloria* also ends with a remake of “Gloria.”