



6 Canadian Directors to Watch: "Making Unsettling Films Which Challenge Ourselves"



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by **Etan Vlessing**

Two former actresses and a pair of still-photographer brothers are among the up-and-comers from the Great White North.



Canadian film has seen the emergence of a number of new directorial voices looking to follow Denis Villeneuve and Jean Marc Vallee into the mainstream.

Here are six filmmakers from the Great White North primed for success in 2018 and beyond.

Jason and Carlos Sanchez



Laurent Guerin

Allure, the debut feature written and directed by Jason, 36, and Carlos, 41, Montreal-based still photographers turned filmmakers, stars Evan Rachel Wood as a house cleaner with a dark past. Samuel Goldwyn Films plans a mid-March U.S. release.

Jason Sanchez says *Allure*, the first film he and his brother wrote and directed together, has been long in the making.

"We began our collaboration over 10 years ago as fine art photographs, exhibiting our work in museums and galleries around the world," he says.

It turns out the still images the brothers produced, while psychological portraits of people and places, had a strong cinematic feel. "The worlds we created in our photo work certainly translated to our film, in which we painstakingly crafted the composition and lighting of each scene along with our cinematographer Sara Mishara," Sanchez adds.

Sadaf Foroughi



Courtesy of subject

Born in Iran, Foroughi, 41, studied in France and settled in Montreal before writing and directing *Ava*, a coming-of-age drama that won the FIPRESCI critics prize at Toronto in 2017.

Foroughi sees herself in the long tradition of auteur filmmakers exploring different forms of personal expression. "Filmmaking for me is the communication medium where I live in harmony with my imagination and there is no limitation. I use my dreams and breathe them into my observation in order to re-create the world, the world which reflects my feelings and my struggles with my existence," she says.

Foroughi's scripts emerge after close introspection. "I

question myself, my values, my beliefs. I write and rewrite, create and re-create to develop and [grow] with. It is life itself and then, I believe if we are faithful to ourselves, as Bach says, you just have to hit the note at the right place, and the organ does the rest," she insists.

Shelagh McLeod



Courtesy of Jive PR + Digital

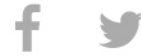
After establishing a career as an actress on U.K. TV, McLeod, 57, recently wrapped production on her debut feature, the Richard Dreyfuss- and Colm Feore-starring thriller *Astronaut*, shot just north of Toronto.

The actress-turned-director tells *THR* making *Astronaut* was a dream come true. "After a long career as an actress I stepped behind the camera. Breaking down a role and digging into what makes that character tick is second nature for an actor," she says.

McLeod also praised her cast on *Astronaut*. "The best directors I've worked with are patient, playful and supportive

as all the actors figure out their journey. You can research and practice your role all you like in your room, but then you have to perform on the spot, normally under great time pressure with little or no rehearsal. It can be a daunting and lonely experience. Shooting a film is all about collaboration," she adds.

Jackie English



Courtesy of GAT PR

After a string of acting credits, including CBS' *Beauty and the Beast*, English broke into the feature world with *Becoming Burlesque*, a Toronto-set drama about a young Muslim woman who embraces the world of burlesque dancing.

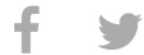
The indie, which stars *American Assassin* actor Shiva Negar in the lead role, is set in Toronto and reflects the Canadian city's diverse culture. "I also like to explore the commonality between seemingly disparate worlds, and the burlesque and hijabi worlds are both generally misunderstood," she says.

Becoming Burlesque also takes aim at the notion that both burlesque dancing and the traditional hijab headdress alter a

woman's power through clothing. "I wanted to reflect that that power is independent of dress, both sexual and conservative," English argues.

Her debut feature was also memorable for allowing the director to make a movie with dancers she knows well. "This movie was a particular joy because it was made with a group of dancers that I have worked with for years and I was able to capture and share their spirit on the screen," English adds.

Wayne Wapeemukwa



Courtesy of subject

Wapeemukwa, 27, won the best Canadian first feature prize at the 2017 Toronto film fest with his debut, *Luk'Luk'I*.

"Walking away from TIFF with the best first feature prize confirmed for my cast, crew and me that we were on the right track," he says.

He knew with *Luk'Luk'I* that big risks were taken. "Some worked, a lot didn't," Wapeemukwa adds.

But he insists the indie film world needs bold filmmakers: "I think that making unsettling films which challenge ourselves

and disturb our complacency are more important than ever in a world where people are making more walls than bridges."

His next project will expand on the themes tackled in *Luk'Luk'l*. "So far I'm calling the film *Afterlife*, but it could also be called *The Lamb and the Slaughter*: it's about a cult, and how our society is predicated on everyday violence," Wapeemukwa explains.

This story first appeared in the Feb. 7 issue of The Hollywood Reporter magazine. To receive the magazine, [click here to subscribe](#).

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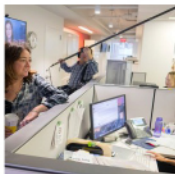
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