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## How I Live Now | 2013 TIFF Review

SEPTEMBER 10, 2013 BY LEORA HEILBRONN



### There's No Place Like Home; Macdonald Pulled By Too Many Strings

This polished as his docu-work, Kevin Macdonald's fourth fiction feature is a little bit of a head-scratcher. As a war film set in the near future, where the enemy is unknown and adolescents must adapt to their war-torn environment without any adults to guide them, it succeeds. As a sweeping star-crossed love story wherein its teenaged heroine is guided by a telepathic passionate connection to her heart's desire and must find a path back to him, it also succeeds. The key drawback with *How I Live Now*, however, is that it so desperately yearns to be both, and flails as a result.



Following the blockbuster success of the *Twilight* franchise, studios ravenously picked up the film rights to every mildly successful dystopian teen novel ranging from the *Hunger Games* trilogy to the upcoming *Divergent* series. Last spring, however, brought Stephanie Meyer's *The Host* to the screen and its scathing response by critics and poor reception at the box office have left pundits questioning what exactly went wrong. A film based on the prize winning young adult novel by Meg Rosoff published years prior to Meyer's tome, appears to be a direct copycat of *The Host* on the surface (and not only because both film adaptations star the ethereal actress Saoirse Ronan). Both films center on an independent intense young woman battling an inner all consuming voice and outer looming war but finding solace in the arms of a brooding yet comforting young man (here played by the hulking George MacKay).

As novels, *The Host* and *How I Live Now* worked because their respective readership could follow the sustained voices in their heroines' heads (that of alien Wanda in *The*

### this month's IONCINEPHILE



Hannah Fidell  
"I absolutely had her in mind for this film when I was writing it and she was attached to the project basically from day one." [Read more](#)

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### Reviews

**Gravity | 2013 TIFF Review**  
September 14, 2013, [No Comments](#)  
★★★★★

**The Strange Colour of Your Body's Tea**  
September 13, 2013, [No Comments](#)  
★★★★☆

**Wadjda | Review**  
September 13, 2013, [No Comments](#)  
★★★★☆

**Four | Review**  
September 13, 2013, [1 Comment](#)  
★★★★☆

Host and Daisy's own insistent survival-centric internal voice in *How I Live Now*). Their teenaged angst, exacerbated need to live in the now, and misunderstood emotional flip-flopping are fleshed out easily in written form, while one can only watch a sulky teenaged girl on screen for so long before one's own mind starts to wander. Thankfully, both film adaptations were rescued to an extent by the captivating performance of their shared young leading lady.

Ronan has developed over the course of her filmography, from a determined troublemaker child Briony in *Atonement* to the eponymous ass-kicking tween [Hanna](#) (whose character paved the way for the Katnisses of current cinematic offerings for the teen crowd), to the violent yet compassionate Daisy in [Violet and Daisy](#), all the while enchanting audiences in each role with her piercing, knowing blue eyes, reminiscent of the equally hypnotizing Cate Blanchett. While her film choices have sometimes been puzzling, as with last year's *Byzantium* and the aforementioned *The Host*, she is consistently the most compelling reason to watch them all. Newcomer Harley Bird, playing cousin to Ronan's lead character Daisy, is also a revelation to watch. Her character's arc from precocious tyke to hardened young adult whose physical and mental suffering is heartbreakingly felt in her mature performance, recalls her costar Tom Holland's (disappointingly wasted in this film) award winning performance in last year's *The Impossible*.

Cinematographer Franz Lustig beautifully captures the rustic rural English countryside and scenic woods in which most of the film takes place and the film always feels grounded in a potential future reality. Central character Daisy spends the majority of the film wrestling with her dueling voices but eventually she finds her own true voice. *How I Live Now*, however, does not. In the end it falls apart due to its implausible conclusion (wholly straying from the source novel's finale) and never quite being able to capably balance between a war film and a tender love story, which may have to do with the trio of diverse scribes (Jeremy Brock, Penelope Skinner, Tony Grisoni) listed for the project.

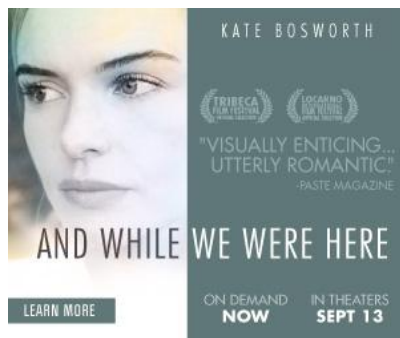
Reviewed on September 10 at the Toronto International Film Festival – Special Presentation Programme.  
101 minutes.



**About the author: Leora Heilbronn**  
View all posts by [Leora Heilbronn](#)

Leora Heilbronn is a Toronto-based writer for IONCINEMA.com who handles theatrical reviews, covers Toronto-based film events and handles IONCINEMA.com's monthly Book-to-Film Club/Feature. Top Films From Contemporary Film Auteurs: Almodóvar (*Volter*), Coen Bros. (?), Dardennes (*Lorna's Silence*), Haneke (*The Piano Teacher*), Hsiao-Hsien (*Three Times*), Kar-wai (*In the Mood for Love*), Kiarostami (*Certified Copy*), Lynch (?), Tarantino (?), Van Sant (*Good Will Hunting*), von Trier (*Melancholia*)

FILED UNDER: REVIEWS  
TAGGED WITH: 2013 TORONTO INT. FILM FESTIVAL, FOREIGN FILM REVIEW, KEVIN MACDONALD, SAOIRSE RONAN



## Interviews

**Interview: Lucy Mulloy (*Una Noche*)**  
September 14, 2013, [No Comments](#)

**Hannah Fidell's Top Ten Films of All Time List**  
September 1, 2013, [1 Comment](#)

**IONCINEPHILE of the Month: Hannah Fidell (*A Teacher*)**  
September 1, 2013, [1 Comment](#)

**Interview: Atiq Rahimi (*The Patience Stone*)**  
August 16, 2013, [No Comments](#)

## IN THEATERS

### 13 Sep

**Herb & Dorothy 50X50**

**Insidious: Chapter 2**

**Jayne Mansfield's Car**

**Mademoiselle C**

**Mother of George**

### 06 Sep

**99%: The Occupy Wall Street Collaborative Film**

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16 Aug



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JOBS



Lee Daniels' The Butler



Paranoia



You Will Be My Son

### 09 Aug



Elysium

### 07 Aug



Percy Jackson: Sea of Monsters

### 02 Aug



The Spectacular Now

### 31 Jul



Smash and Grab: The Story of the



The Smurfs 2

### 26 Jul



Blue Jasmine



Drug War



Frankenstein's Army



The Time Being



The Wolverine

### 19 Jul



Blackfish

Broken (2013)



Girl Most Likely



Only God Forgives



R.I.P.D.



Red 2



The Act of Killing



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<http://t.co/zlvnqTdvpc>

Sun Sep 15 18:56:03

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<http://t.co/4LiGzmVft4>

Sun Sep 15 18:40:41

Von Trier muse in Montreal

<http://t.co/PG7jbJ78oC>

Sun Sep 15 16:56:06

Dear @haosfilm - Athina Rachel Tsangari's 24 Frames Per Century is BRILLIANT. We don't misuse that word.  
Sun Sep 15 03:08:10

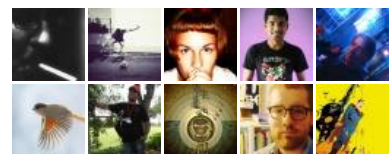
One reason to be weary of fall film fest season: SPC needs to get behind Before Midnight: Best Actress/Best Original Screenplay  
Sun Sep 15 03:06:10



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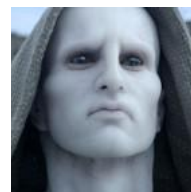
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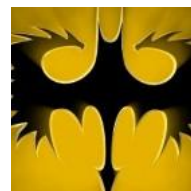
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'Prometheus' Sequel in Trouble?



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10 Terrible Mistakes That Almost Ruined Batman For Everyone



10 Actors Almost Cast As Batman Who'd Suffered Worse Than Affleck

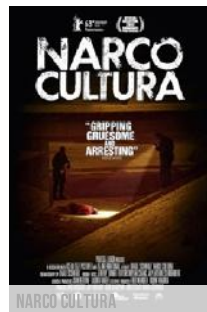
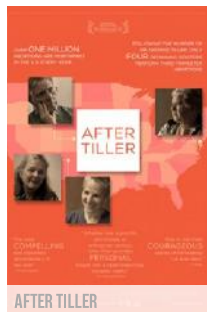
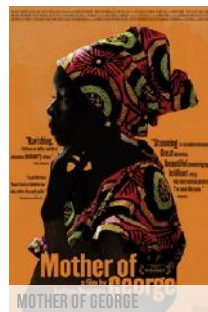


20 Sneaky End Credits Messages You Probably Missed



24 Shots That Total Ruined The Tone O Classic Movie Mome

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The Colony (2013)

The Face of Love

The Short Game

Zaytoun

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As I Lay Dying

Baggage Claim

Cloudy with a Chance of

Meatballs 2

Don Jon

Inequality for All

Metallica Through The Never

Morning

Muscle Shoals

On The Job

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The Wicker Man (1974)

Therese

We Are What We Are (2013)

10/04/13

A Touch of Sin

A.C.O.D.

Bad Milo!

Concussion

Five Dances

Grace Unplugged

Gravity

I Used to Be Darker

Parkland

Runner Runner

10/11/13

All the Boys Love Mandy Lane

Captain Phillips

CBGB

Escape From Tomorrow

Machete Kills

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And Pete

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Camille Claudel, 1915

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Seventh Son

The Fifth Estate

11/01/13

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Narco Cultura

12/20/13

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47 Ronin

August: Osage County

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Jack Ryan: Shadow One

Labor Day (2013)

The Invisible Woman

The Secret Life of Walter Mitty

12/27/13

Lone Survivor

11/15/13

The Necessary Death of Charlie

Countryman

Thor 2

11/22/13

The Hunger Games: Catching Fire

11/27/13

Old Boy (2013)

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11/30/13

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The

12/18/13

The Monuments Men

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