

straints placed on them that mingled in their everyday lives. They could not get married to whites and also did not have the same opportunities as whites. It highlighted why Africans in France were aligned with the French Revolution to overthrow the *Ancien Régime* due to racial discrimination.

This movie shows the importance of using art and culture to dismantle oppressors as this is one of the most used and effective tactics in history. It was what ultimately led France to be successful in its revolution in 1789, as it was used as propaganda for the masses. The movie could not have used a better historical figure to display the French elite's true ideology of only caring for themselves. Instead Joseph Bologne eventually realizes he was a mere puppet to the elite. This film should be of interest to anyone who enjoys learning about art, music, history and especially the role of race in the French Revolution.

*Sebastian Arzola*

Ryan Coogler, director. *Sinners*. Proximity Media, 2025.

Black excellence means celebrating or achieving Black success in any field, to affirm Black identity. *Sinners* embodies the term as in just one year, it has won countless awards, most notably four Oscars and two Golden Globe Awards. The action horror film directed by Ryan Coogler follows identical twins Smoke and Stack in 1932, as they return to their hometown of Clarksdale, Mississippi only to encounter a supernatural threat. The central plot is driven by the Smokestack twins' dream of opening a juke joint (a bar with music and dancing) in their hometown. The plot is divided into three acts; the first revolves around the twins' search for talent and other necessities for the grand opening of the juke joint. The second act follows the grand opening, while the third act features the battle between the twins and main villain Remmick and his vampires.

Race plays a prominent role in the film due to the setting of the Jim Crow era South, with both subtle and overt reminders. The film has an overall theme of Black excellence and autonomy, using Blues music as the vehicle for these themes. It highlights music as an

important part of Black culture, that is responsible for connecting the past, future, and present. It is also the catalyst for why Remmick wants to turn everybody into vampires as he wants to take their music.

The film's strength lies in the first act, which is a historical drama where the audience gets to see the Jim Crow South through the Black lens. These scenes demonstrate that despite the oppressive laws and racism, Black people were able to have some form of autonomy and freedom. This is echoed with the Smokestack twins' dream of opening a juke joint, as it will provide a place for the Black community to call their own. However, the audience is also reminded of the brutal reality that Jim Crow brought. Delta Slim, a musician hired to play at the twins' juke joint provides a grim reminder to how fragile Black success was at the time. He recounts a time when a friend was lynched because the KKK found it suspicious that a Black man would have so much money. Another reminder of the South's racial reality presents itself in the form of sharecropping. A character named Cornbread is first introduced picking cotton and mentioning quotas. The scene's imagery harkens back to slavery with the focus on Black laborers working in a field. Then in the second act a patron is seen paying with a 'wooden nickel' which was a form of currency given by employers, in lieu of real currency, to their sharecroppers, trapping them into their own personal private economy. These scenes highlight the main strength of the film, that is, its capacity to create an authentic feeling of the era.

After the twins gather what they need, the second act begins, focusing on the grand opening of the juke joint where the rest of the film takes place. The film shifts from historical drama to action horror, with Remmick slowly turning the party goers into vampires. Throughout these scenes Remmick is used to create a parallel between Black and Irish. His use of folk music as a form of resistance against colonization, mirrors the main characters' use of Blues music. Religion also creates a parallel, with Remmick alluding to Christianity being forced upon Black people just like it was onto the Irish. These historical themes are seen in the end when the sole survivor, Sammie, the son of a preacher, leaves the church to become a musician. Thus, symbolically depicting the decolonization of Black culture through music.

Undeniably the film is not historically accurate, yet it succeeds at creating an authentic experience that transports audiences back into the complex world of the Jim Crow South. The film provides a look into a diverse South, spotlighting often neglected stories like that of Asian Americans, the Reconstruction era, and music as a tool of resistance in Black culture. Lastly, due to its core theme of race and historical setting, it has potential as a teaching tool for courses that center around race or the setting of the film. Overall, *Sinners* is a love letter to Black culture that celebrates Black excellence by highlighting how music was a tool used to overcome oppressive conditions while still preserving the culture. It will undoubtedly go on to shape people's mental image of the Jim Crow South.

*Christopher Ramires Beltran*

Cristina Comencini, director. *The Children's Train*. Palomar, Netflix, 2024.

A starving boy stares at a stoic but mournful violinist before he begins his performance. The film is about a violinist named Amerigo. He begins to remember his childhood after being informed that his mother Antonietta has died. We are then given flashbacks of his childhood in 1949 Naples. The film focuses on the children of Naples during the Second World War. It is also about the impact women in the Italian Communist Party (PCI) had during the Second World War and the post-war recovery. It was through the PCI that the efforts of women were needed but undermined by the rest of Italian society. The message of the film is that there is a need to break away from old ideologies to survive and find purpose.

The need for new a political framework started when women were laid off after the war. Women had agency but were forced to serve men and were under scrutiny. The PCI and its ideology functions as a form of political expression. Antonietta and her son are interviewed by the PCI to register for the *Treni Della Felicità* (trains of happiness) program. It consists of sending children from Naples to Modena. As the camera pans to the different women being interviewed, one of the women explains that she used to work in a