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Star panel to discuss moviegoing in an evolving marketplace

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Changing audience tastes, the rise of streaming platforms and post-COVID doldrums are among the challenges faced by the filmmaking industry as it navigates the evolving landscape of traditional moviegoing.

But as moviemakers adapt, optimism remains, despite troubling headlines and disappointing box office numbers in 2025. To unpack the details, UC Santa Barbara's Carsey-Wolf Center is hosting "[Connectivity: Moviegoing and Film Exhibition in Flux](#)," a discussion among industry experts from 2-4 p.m. on Saturday, Nov. 22 at the Pollock Theater. The event is free and open to the public; [reservations are recommended](#).

The panel includes Oscar-nominated filmmaker Jason Reitman (who directed "Juno," "Up in the Air" and "Saturday Night," among other feature films), Maggie Mackay (executive director of the nonprofit Vidiots Foundation), filmmaker and UCSB alum Brad Silberling ("Casper" and "Moonlight Mile") and exhibition strategist Jackie Brenneman, founding partner of The Fithian Group.

“There’s no doubt that streaming services and COVID impacted theatrical moviegoing,” said Ross Melnick, the center’s interim director, who will moderate the discussion. There have been other factors, as well, including industry strikes by writers and actors in 2023–24 and marketplace confusion surrounding movie release dates that differ theatrically and online.

However, Melnick added, “We have also seen huge theatrical blockbusters,” including the Barbenheimer simultaneous release of “Barbie” and “Oppenheimer” films in 2023. Plus, the popularity of anime — animation films produced in Japan — is at an all-time high, particularly among younger audiences.

“Audiences want both originality and familiarity,” Melnick said, “and theaters that are tuned into audience tastes are doing quite well. While there is definitely superhero fatigue, horror films continue to outperform, anime is rising exponentially in popularity, and original titles like ‘Sinners’ are breaking through.”

“Also,” he added, “people are flocking back into theatres to see their old favorites — this is a new golden age for repertory theaters like Vidiots in Los Angeles.”

How today’s theater operators are tapping emerging cinephilia to rebuild audiences will be among many topics up for discussion. With insight, Reitman and Silbering are among the more than two dozen filmmakers who purchased the historic Fox Village Theater in Los Angeles, with the goal of preserving the landmark and maintaining it as a cultural institution for filmgoing. This week, Reitman and Rick Nicita, chair of American Cinematheque, announced a new partnership for programming the theater’s forthcoming Village Directors Circle, scheduled to open in 2027.

The event is part of the center’s Connectivity programming to examine the ways people use media to connect with ideas and one another, from the shared experience of moviegoing to the collective bonds forged through storytelling and public dialogue.

For more information, visit carseywolf.ucsb.edu.

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