



The Good Girls

# THE GLOBAL SHOWCASE OF FILMS

Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF) is one of the early predictors of the Oscar race—but also an important platform for world cinema.

SARAH NAFISA SHAHID

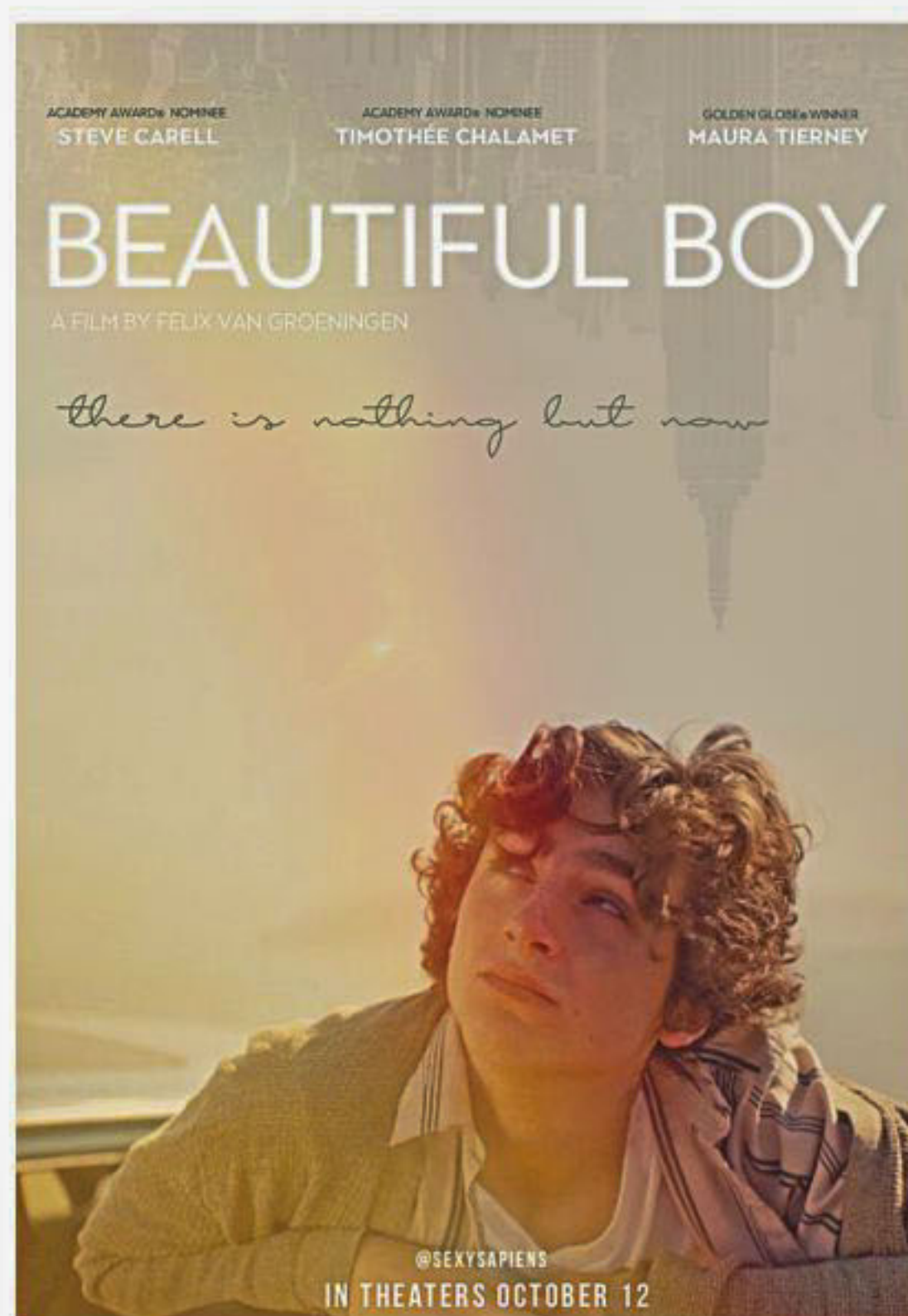
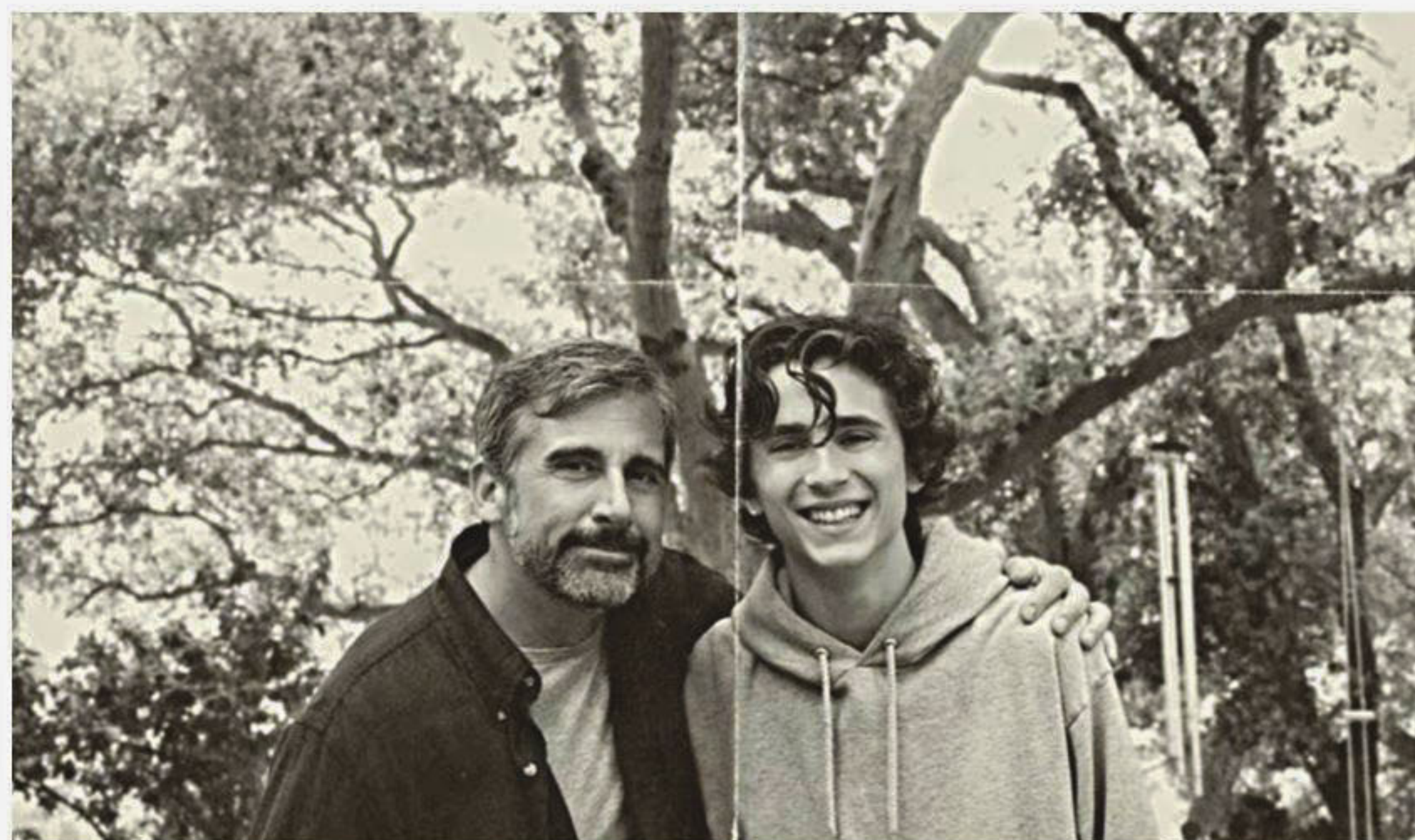
The last trimester of the calendar year is possibly the most exciting time for film lovers—prestige release season! The season opens with Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF), which has premiered and showcased contenders such as *La La Land*, *The Imitation Game*, and *Room*. Especially of interest is its People's Choice Award section which has gone on to discover Best Picture winners such as *American Beauty* in 1999, *Slumdog Millionaire* in 2008, and *Moonlight* in 2016.

This year too, the festival anticipated films that may catch Oscar buzz such as Bradley Cooper's directorial debut *A Star Is Born* and Damien Chazelle's Ryan Gosling-starrer biopic *First Man*. But the People's Choice Award went to Peter Farelly's *Green Book*—a fictional retelling of the racism faced by an African-American jazz musician, played by Mahershala Ali, touring the American South with his Italian-American bouncer, played by Viggo Mortensen. The first runner up (and personally what I had thought would win) was *Moonlight* director Barry Jenkin's second film, *If Beale Street Could Talk*, based on James Baldwin's novel of the same name.

However, apart from the prestige releases, TIFF is also a platform for experiencing an array of exceptional films that display new cinematic feats—regularly overshadowed by big-budget Academy favourites. So, here's a roundup of other films screened at TIFF that may not make it to the awards but should definitely make it to your watch-list:

## BEAUTIFUL BOY

Timothée Chalamet stars as a tormented



Beautiful Boy

teenager whose meth-addiction spirals his middle-class family into an abyss of sorrow, rage, guilt, regret, and hope. Steve Carell plays a confused father who is devastated when he learns about his son's problem and is willing to go to any length to get him back to as he remembers him—a sweet, loving, innocent young boy. The film follows father and son's journey as they battle the circular, often disheartening, patterns of recovery and relapse.

Based on a memoir, Belgian director Felix van Groeningen's English language debut crafts the paradox of helplessness and expectations of parenthood on-screen with a moving soundtrack by the Icelandic post-rock band Sigur Ros. Mature and complex performances by Chalamet and Carell strike the perfect overtone of a father-son relationship. Both actors build on their reputation of Oscar-nominated performances and

brighten the screen with the softness and struggle of family bonds. Despite addiction being a central story arc, the film's strength lies in the delicateness and restraint with which the story depicts men, both father and son, during this vulnerable and tumultuous phase of their lives.

## MANTO

Nandita Das' biopic of the progressive writer Saadat Hasan Manto is a critical and emotional look at Partition through the writer's stories and essays. Played by Nawazuddin Siddique, Manto is committed to speaking the truth and only the truth. The story begins in Bombay, with glimpses of early Bollywood, where Manto used to write scripts, and follows the protagonist through post-Partition communal violence, migration, obscenity trials, and consequently, alcoholism.

Even though the biopic lacks the realism and provocativeness of Manto's writing, Das seamlessly incorporates his most-famous stories and essays with a surrealism that is equally stirring and curious. Literary feats such as "Thanda Ghosht", "Khol Do", and the famous open letter to Nehru, are weaved wonderfully into the majorly linear storytelling.

What is obvious about the biopic is that it imagines Manto's writing and his life's story keeping the contemporary in mind—while it talks about the past, it speaks to the present ethno-religious nationalism on the rise all over South Asia. Using flat colours of grey and brown, Das employs a traditional

Continued to page 11