Saturday, June 24, 2023



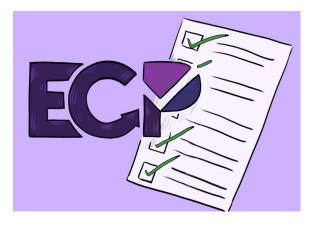
## The Berkeley Beacon



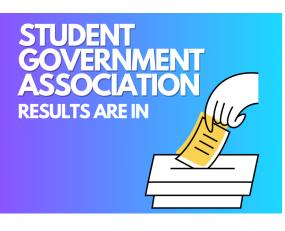
CAMPUS CITY TITLE IX SPORTS OPINION → ARTS LIFESTYLE OBITUARIES MAGAZINE ∩ PODCAST



Marsha Della-Giustina, founder of Emerson's broadcast journalism program, remembered as a 'legend'



ECPS Survey of Undergraduates finds funding and tuition should be the top priority for incoming president



Silvestrino elected to SGA presidency; other races announced last week



Gilligan says goodbye: an interim president's permanent farewell to Emerson



Campus organizations host Earthfest to reflect on sustainable strides

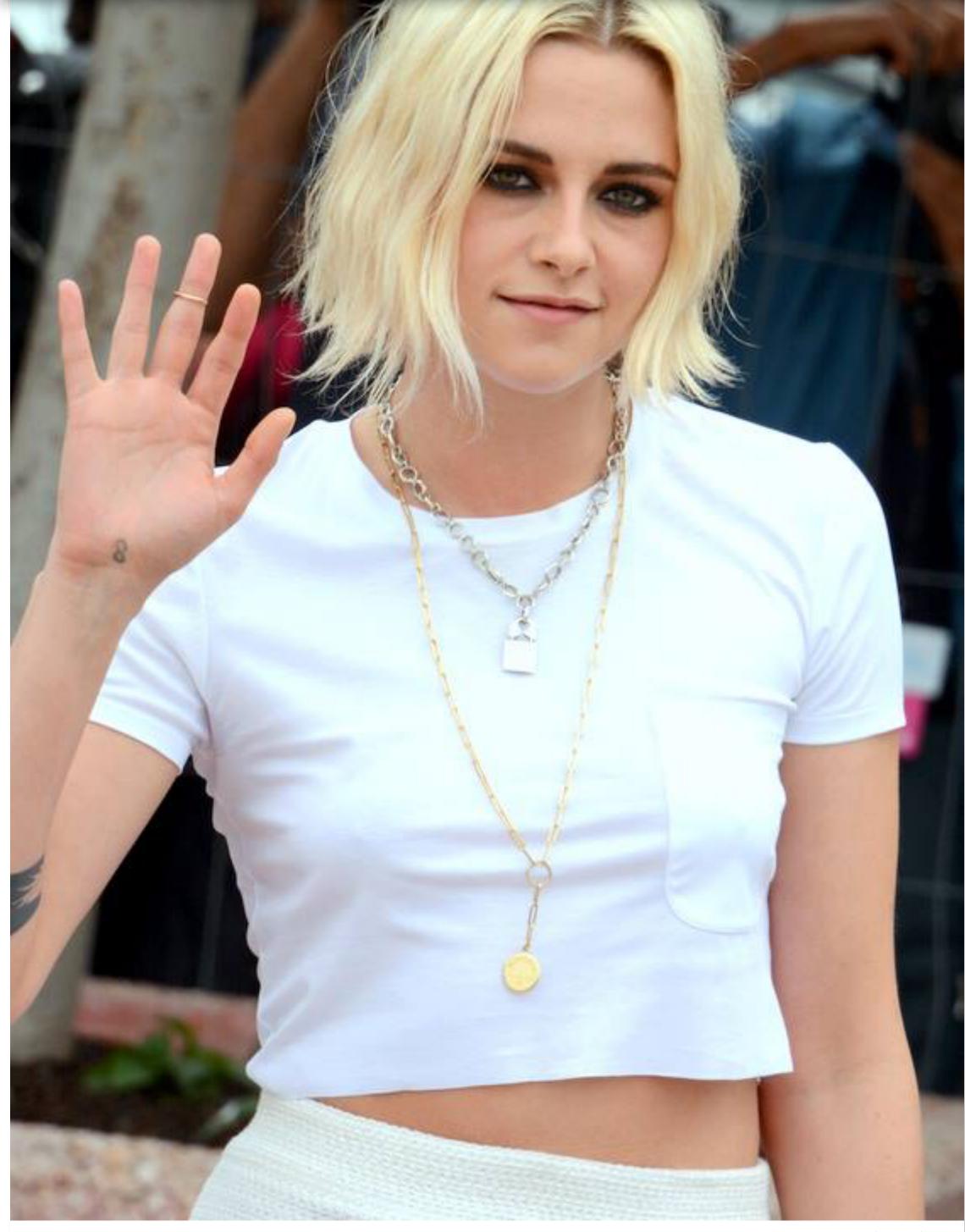


Photo: Picasa

Kristen Stewart, star of 'Spencer,' at the 2016 Cannes Film Festival. Photo credit: Georges Biard.

By <u>Abigail Lee</u>, Magazine Editor March 3, 2022

*Spencer*, shown Feb. 24 as part of the <u>Bright Lights Film Series</u>, decidedly shirks the characteristics of the biopic genre. Instead of acting as a realistic record of Princess Diana's life, director Pablo Larraín's approach is an exercise in

iconography— "a fable from a true story," as the opening title card states.

Bright Lights featured a moderated Zoom discussion after the screening with Annie Berman, whose documentary *The Faithful* will be screened Thursday, Mar. 3 at 7 p.m. *The Faithful* follows fanhood and devotion to three iconic figures: Pope John Paul II, Elvis Pressley, and Princess Diana. The two works were a wise pairing, as *Spencer* is as much about Diana's image as it is her life story, and therefore, concerned with audience perception.

The film takes place over Christmas weekend in 1991 at Queen Elizabeth's Sandringham Estate. At this point in her life, Diana—played by Kristen Stewart, who received an Oscar nomination for the role—is experiencing the intense pressures of being in the royal family that would eventually lead to her divorce. Haunted by media scrutiny and the knowledge of her husband's affair, she is insecure, angry, and showing signs of feverish instability. Diana faces numerous institutional traditions that are both absurd and demeaning, such as having to be weighed upon entry to, and later exiting, the estate.

Larraín's previous 2016 film *Jackie* depicts Jackie Kennedy in the aftermath of her husband's death, similarly leaning on a visual aesthetic of ceremony and excess to narrativize a woman who had to practice restraint. Here, the luxurious dinners and beautiful dresses become claustrophobic for Diana. She regurgitates those dinners, with her white tulle gown fanned out on the floor of the bathroom.

In fact, screenwriter Steven Knight's decision to limit the story to one weekend serves the evocation of Diana's image. The representation of Diana's bulimia is one of the many cultural references that the film depends on to portray Diana. The narrative of Diana as "the people's princess" is demonstrated through her love of fast food and *The Phantom of the Opera*. The character of Diana is pieced together through a collection of familiar facts. The film, while seemingly restricted, is synecdochal and tries to capture the essence of Diana's entire public status.

That image is what Diana finds most difficult. "There has to be two of you," says Prince Charles, played by Jack Farthing. "There's the real one, and the one they take pictures of." Diana's grapple with her identity is symbolized through an overindulgence into the iconography that would shape her legacy. Stewart, donning Diana's recognizable outfits, mimics the princess's walk and tendency to tuck her chin into her shoulder.

The decision to use symbols of Diana's image to tell a story about her struggle with said image can be seen as reductive. Some audience members may find that this loose interpretation of her story, which turns her life into something nearmythical through hallucinative sequences, is disrespectful. But the film is more about Diana's negotiation with her celebrity image than accurately capturing the real person.

Stewart's performance as Diana is incredible and keeps the film's ambitious, melodramatic nature grounded. The cinematography by Claire Mathon is breathtaking—the film should be lauded for its visual accomplishments alone. Jonny Greenwood's jazz-inflected score adds a layer of necessary panic to the scenes.

There is a non-linear montage toward the end of the film that shows Diana as a series of iconic images, dancing or running,

like a photograph brought to life. The scene encapsulates what makes the film so interesting by conveying Diana's inevitable reckoning with her image. It is a celebration of the person behind the image, but more significantly, an acknowledgement of the gap in between the two.

**Suggest a Correction** 

## Leave a Comment

**Abigail Lee, Magazine Editor** 



Q

ı↓ f Ƴ

>

Abigail Lee (she/her) is a sophomore journalism major from Hershey, Pennsylvania. She serves as the Magazine Content Managing Editor after working on the news team in Spring 2022. In addition to writing for the Beacon, she loves movies and mango slush boba.

