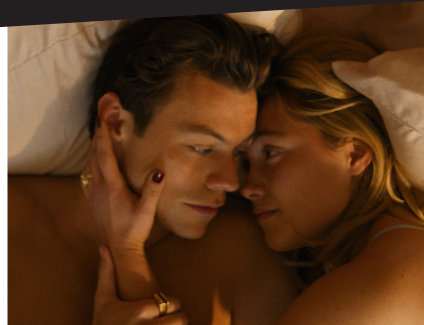




Scenes from *Don't Worry Darling*: Wilde (far left) with Pine; Styles and Pugh (below left); the director, below.

Back to the '50s

Playing mind games with America's known-for-conformity golden age



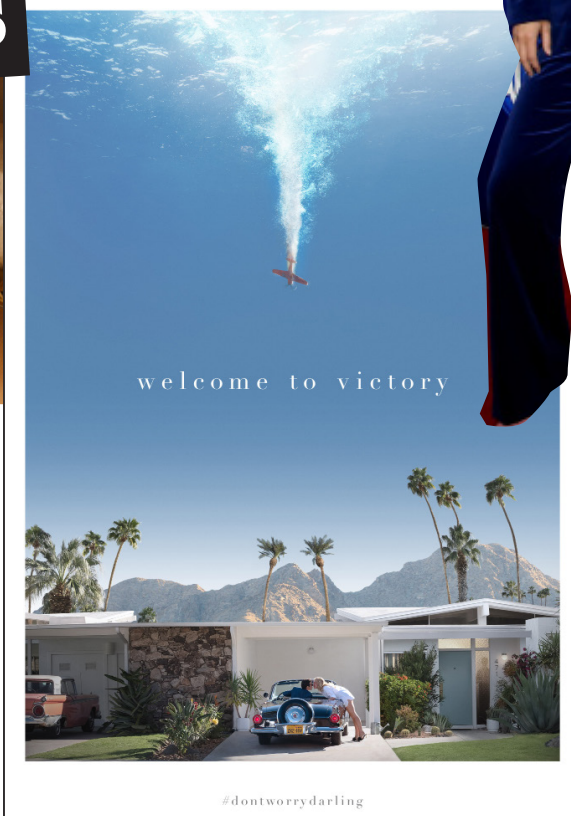
IN POP CULTURE, it's generally agreed that the emergence of three similar things in proximity signals a trend. If so, then the 1950s, perhaps the most contentious decade of the 20th century, is ready for its close-up.

Three of 2022's buzziest movies are set in those post-Second World War years, invariably depicted as innocent or sinister. There's director Baz Luhrmann's recently released biopic *Elvis*, director Andrew Dominik's steamy Marilyn Monroe portrait, *Blonde*, based on Joyce Carol Oates' 2000 bestseller and on Netflix Sept. 23, and director Olivia Wilde's *Don't Worry Darling*, opening in theatres Sept. 23.

Of these, Wilde's dazzling psychological thriller looks likeliest to embody all the famous – and infamous – elements of the era, which was de-

fined by the advent of television, drive-throughs, rock 'n' roll, abstract expressionism, raucous suburban dinner parties and, thanks to widespread advertising, the first glimmers of what would become known, several decades later, as FOMO (Fear of Missing Out).

In *Don't Worry Darling*, the hotly anticipated follow-up to Wilde's acclaimed 2019 directorial debut, *Booksmart*, she stars alongside English actress Florence Pugh (*Midsommar*), Chris Pine (*Star Trek*), and pop star-cum-actor Harry Styles, who became Wilde's paramour on set, with their 10-year age difference (she's 38 to his 28) fuel-



PHOTOGRAPHY, GABE GINSBERG/GETTY IMAGES (WILDE); EVERETT COLLECTION INC./ALAMY STOCK PHOTO (OZZIE & HARRIET)



Austin Butler as Elvis in the new biopic; (left) director Baz Luhrmann

ling much gossipy blather.

The plot of the film is considerably more compelling. Alice and Jack (Pugh and Styles) live among other blindingly attractive couples in Victory, a highly manicured and seemingly utopian 1950s-era desert community, where, by day, the men work for the top-secret Victory Project, while the women serve as *Stepford*-esque hausfraus. Everyone parties like banshees at night. This scenario is peachy, until Alice starts asking uncomfortable questions of the Victory CEO (Pine). Life in Victory swiftly and savagely unravels.

It's hard to imagine the film's concept working in any other decade but the 1950s, when the explosion of television



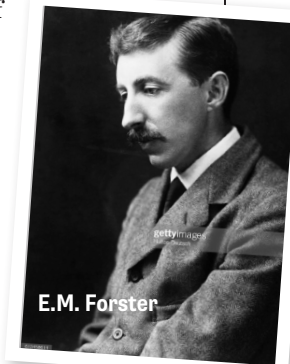
Ana de Armas (left) as Monroe in *Blonde*; author Joyce Carol Oates (right), director Andrew Dominik (below)



– and a handful of wholesome, aw-shucks shows like *Leave It to Beaver*, *Father Knows Best* and *The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet* – fomented a pervasive desire for conformity. Suddenly, people were trying to be just like their neighbours, not questioning the status quo from their cozy perches. Pugh's Alice would have been a pariah at the potluck.

Then again, people are people across millennia. “The 1950s get this rap as a very controlled, conservative era, when in fact it was incredibly debauched,” Wilde told *Vogue* about *Don't Worry Darling* in the January 2022 issue. “My grandparents on my mother's side loved to party.” Wilde also revealed that her film showcases a rarely seen “type of female pleasure.”

Styles stars in another film set in the 1950s, *My Policeman*, which highlights a then-illegal pleasure – gay sex – in a love-triangle drama inspired by English writer E.M. Forster's real-life romantic relationship with a bobby, whom he shared with his lover's wife. It arrives on Amazon Prime Nov. 4. Once again, we glimpse the nonconformity lurking beneath the surface of this seemingly chaste decade. —Kim Hughes



E.M. Forster



Styles (far right) with David Dawson and Emma Corrin in *My Policeman*