Cultural Daily

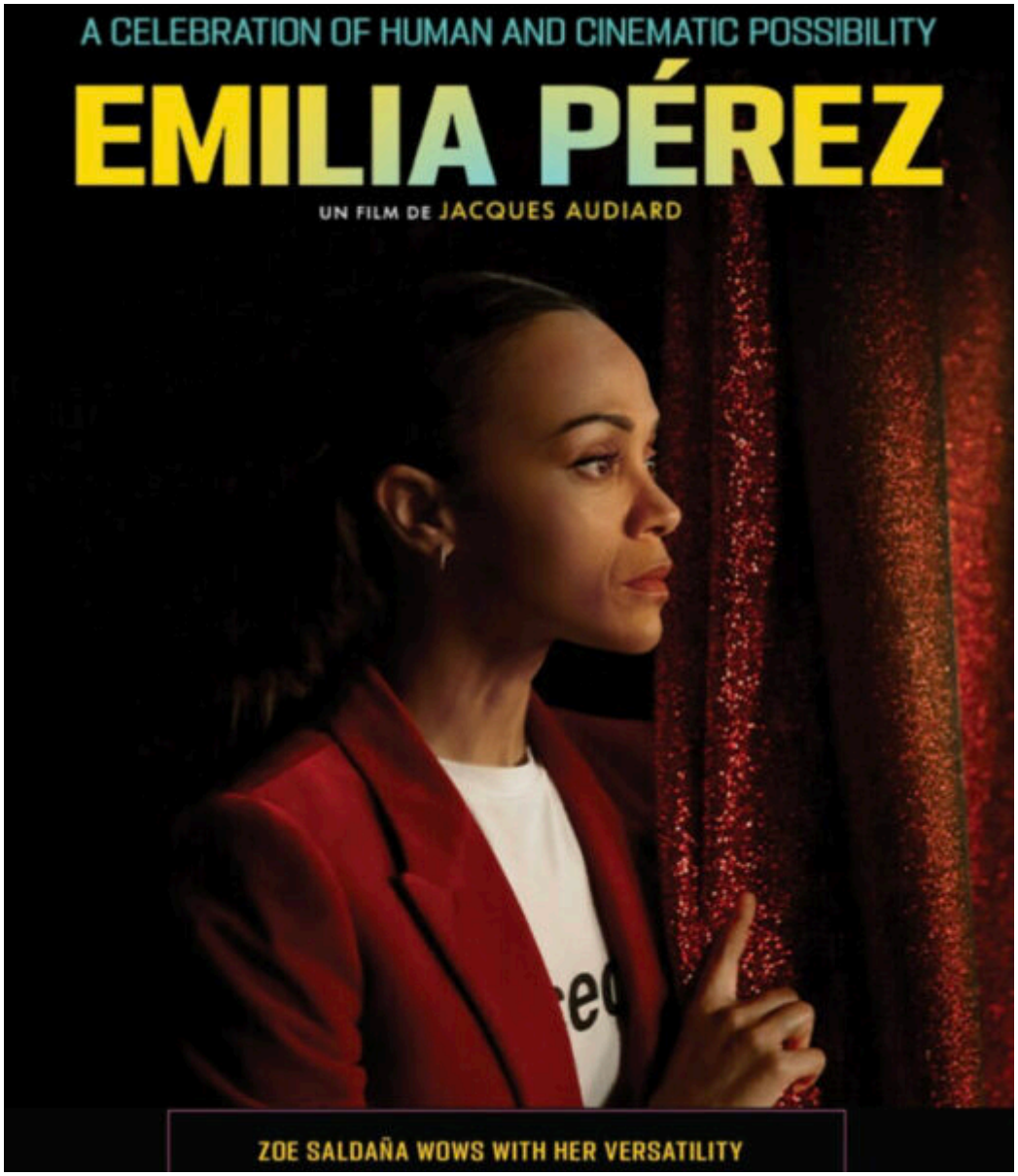
Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Zoe Saldaña

Elisa Leonelli · Monday, March 3rd, 2025

Zoe Saldaña (c) HFPA 2016

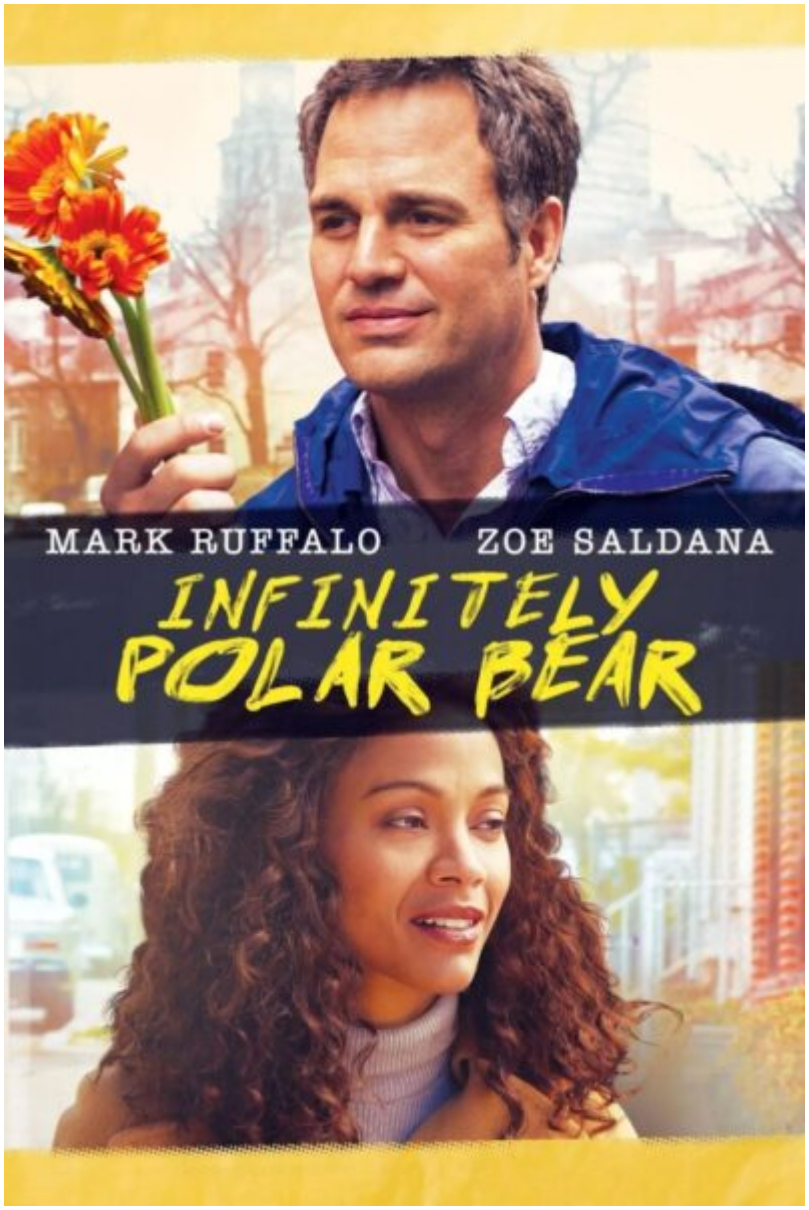
Zoe Saldaña won a 2025 Golden Globe as Best Supporting actress for *Emilia Pérez*, directed by Jacques Audiard, followed by numerous other awards including an Oscar. The movie won three more Globes out of 10 nominations, for Best musical or comedy, Best Non-English language, Best song *El Mal*, sang by Saldaña, music & lyrics by Clément Ducol, Camille, Jacques Audiard.



This is how the actress described her character of Rita, a lawyer born in the Dominican Republic who moved to Mexico City to study, hired by drug lord Manitas to assist in her transition: “She felt powerless, invisible, but had all this energy, knowledge and insight, and she’s desperate to put it somewhere.” So she accepts this “Faustian offer,” because she wants what her boss has, even though he’s “a total criminal.” It was the “opportunity of a lifetime” to be asked by the French director to play this role, in her own Spanish language, using her training as a dancer, and being tasked with singing at the same time. She identified with a Latina woman of color, because she had experienced that kind of discrimination, not so much growing up in the diverse neighborhood of Jackson Heights in Queens, New York (like Lin-Manuel Miranda), but when she moved to the Dominican Republic from age 10 to 17, after her father’s death, where she faced “issues like colonialism and colorism.” She stated that the thread among all the women in *Emilia Pérez* was their yearning for freedom and love and their journey to get there. Having been raised in a family of women, her two sisters, her mother and her grandmothers, she no longer wants to “unconsciously feed a system that has been designed to keep women separate,” because she understood that “when women band together, we are unstoppable. We are nurturers and selfless by nature.”

The Latina actress of Dominican and Puerto Rican descent became known for her motion capture performance in *Avatar* (2009) and *Avatar: The Way of the Water* (2022) by James Cameron, for playing Uhura in *Star Trek* (2009) and *Star Trek Into Darkness* (2013) by J.J. Abrams, and Gomora in *Guardians of the Galaxy* (2014) and sequels in 2017 and 2023, *Avengers: Infinity War* (2018) and *Avengers: Endgame* (2019).

As an entertainment journalist I interviewed Zoe Saldaña a dozen times since 2009. In 2010 I wrote this article for Best Movie, Italy.



Personally I prefer some of her performances in non-blockbuster movies, like *Infinitely Polar Bear* (2015) based on a true story, where she played a mother of two girls whose husband (Mark Ruffalo) was afflicted by bipolar disorder.

From Scratch

I was impressed by the heart-breaking TV series *From Scratch* (2022) that Saldaña starred in as an American woman who falls in love in Florence and marries an Italian man. She also co-produced with Cinestar, the company she founded with her sisters Cisely and Mariel.

In real life Zoe has been married to Italian artist Marco Perego since 2013, they have three sons: Zen, 8, twins Cy and Bowie, 10. Everyone in the family is multi-lingual, speaking English, Spanish and Italian.

Zoe Saldaña (Photo by Rebecca Sapp/SBIFF)

The entire family was present when Zoe Saldaña received an award at the Santa Barbara Film Festival on February

Zoe Saldaña (c) GG2025

In her acceptance speech at the Golden Globes, Saldaña thanked her fellow nominees: Selena Gomez (*Emilia Pérez*), Ariana Grande (*Wicked*), Margaret Qualley (*The Substance*), Felicity Jones (*The Brutalist*), Isabella Rossellini (*Conclave*), “You’re magic,” French director Jacques Audiard, “merci beaucoup,” and Karla Sofía Gascon, nominated as Best Actress at the Golden Globes and later at the Academy Awards, “No one other than you could have played Emilia Pérez. Eres única.”

Zoe Saldan?a © Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences

Toward the end of her Oscar acceptance speech, Zoe said: “My grandmother (Argentina) came to this country in 1961. I am a proud child of immigrant parents, with dreams and dignity and hardworking hands.”

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