The 2026 San Luis Obispo International Film Festival Announces Competition Winners

"If I Go Will They Miss Me" and "A Life Illuminated" Take Top Honors in Narrative and Documentary Competitions

San Luis Obispo International Film Festival Logo

SAN LUIS OBISPO, CA, UNITED STATES, May 5, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Now in its 32nd year, the San Luis Obispo International Film Festival (SLOIFF) announced the winners in its competition categories at an award ceremony at the Fremont Theater. The top honors in the George Sidney Independent Film Competition went to If I Go Will They Miss Me for the Best Narrative Feature and A Life Illuminated for Best Documentary Feature. Juried awards were given in the following categories: Narrative Feature, Documentary Feature, Short Narrative, Short Documentary, Music Video, Episodic, Horror, Central Coast Narrative Feature, Central Coast Narrative Short, and Central Coast Documentary Short. SLOIFF is an Oscar® qualifying festival in the category of "Documentary Short Subject."

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>
> *SLOIFF Executive Director Skye McLennan*

With over 8,000 attendees, the festival ran from Thursday, April 23 through Tuesday, April 28. Additional screenings were added throughout the festival to accommodate overflow audiences.

Festival highlights included two Spotlight Presentation: Craft in Focus Awards, honoring actors Haley Joel Osment and Britt Lower. The feature film, How To Date Again, featuring Haley Joel Osment, went on to win SLOIFF's "Best Narrative Feature" audience award.

The feature documentary, Y Vân: The Lost Sounds of Saigon, won two audience awards – Best of the Fest and Best Feature Documentary. The Strawberry, which was shot entirely in San Luis Obispo County, was named the Best Central Coast Film in the juried awards, as well as Best Overall Film from the Central Coast in the Audience Awards.

Interior of the Fremont Theater and its stage. Credit Brittany App

Britt Lower at the San Luis Obispo International Film Festival. Credit Brittany App

"The spirit of independent film was alive and thriving at the festival this year, and the festival continues to be a beacon of light and creativity on the scenic Central Coast," said SLOIFF Executive Director Skye McLennan.

The 2026 category winners in the George Sidney Independent Film Competition, Audience Awards, and the new Dolce Vita Award are as follows. For full information about the winning films, please visit slofilmfest.org

George Sidney Independent Film Competition:
Best Narrative Feature: If I Go Will They Miss Me, (Walter Thompson-Hernandez,Director)
Best Documentary Feature: A Life Illuminated (Tasha Van Zandt, Director)
Best Narrative Short: Vultures (Dian Weys, Director)
Best Documentary Short: A Man Who Takes Pictures Of Flowers (Yoo Lee, Director)
Best Music Video: Animus Ingus (Yu-Ming Huang and Rui Wang, Directors)
Best Episodic: One For The Team (Rain Valdez, Director)
Best Horror Film: Benny's Second Birthday (R.J. Glass, Director)
Honorable Mention – Short Narrative: What If They Bomb Here Tonight (Samir Syriani, Director)

Central Coast Filmmaker Showcase:
Best Central Coast Narrative Feature: The Strawberry (Kyle Plummer and Carlos Plummer, Directors)
Best Central Coast Narrative Short: May I Put You On Hold (Ash Blodgett, Director)
Best Central Coast Documentary Short: The Other Roe (Wendy Eley Jackson, Director)

Audience Awards:
Best of Fest: The Strawberry (Kyle Plummer and Carlos Plummer, Directors)
Best Narrative Feature: How To Date Again (Matt Flanders, Director)
Best Narrative Short: My Only Friend Is A Robot Named Beans (Anika Kan Grevstad, Director)
Best Documentary Short: The Right Fil (Nicolas Collins and Max Mollring, Directors)
Best Music Video: The Thought of Me (Elliot Peters, Director)
Best Central Coast Narrative Short: Mi Vida. Mi Futuro (Andres Quintero, Director)
Best Central Coast Documentary Short: That's So Drag (Jenny Gosnell Director)

Dolce Vita Award:
Everything Must Go (Tiffany So, Director)

Newly established this year, the Dolce Vita Award is a partnership between the San Luis Obispo International Film Festival (San Luis Obispo, California) and the Noci Film Festival (Noci, Italy). The award recognizes an emerging American director whose work the Noci Film Festival believes will resonate with Italian audiences, while fostering artistic exchange, and increased visibility for emerging voices between Puglia, Italy and California.

ABOUT SAN LUIS OBISPO INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL
Celebrating its 32nd anniversary in 2026, the San Luis Obispo International Film Festival is a six-day annual event, showcasing creative, diverse, and impactful works from around the world in a wide variety of venues, from the city's classic art deco Fremont Theater to the SLO Film Center at the vintage Palm Theatre. Named to MovieMaker Magazine's "25 Coolest Film Festivals" list, and USA TODAY's 10Best Readers Choice Awards, the 2026 festival runs from April 23-28. SLOIFF is an Academy of Motion Picture Arts & Sciences Qualifying Festival in the category of "Best Documentary Short."

Located halfway between Los Angeles and San Francisco, San Luis Obispo with its laid-back vibe and serene natural beauty is the perfect setting for this highly regarded annual film celebration. Filmmakers rave about the warmth and engagement that is so much a part of the SLO Int'l Film Festival experience, as do the industry pros and film critics who are fast discovering the fest's thoughtful audiences and unique programming sensibility.

Ann Flower
Ann Flower Communications
email us here
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