Oscar-Qualifying 18TH ANNUAL SAN JOSE INT'L SHORT FILM FESTIVAL Announces Opening Night Films & Star-Studded 2026 Juries

Featuring 150+ films &80+ visiting filmmakers - Oct. 22 through Oct. 25 - Celebrating 18 Years of World-Class Short Films in the Heart of Silicon Valley



Poster.San Jose Int'l Short Film Festival 2026

SAN JOSE, CA, UNITED STATES, October 12, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- The San Jose International Short Film Festival (SJSFF) today announced its Opening Night lineup: six short films from five countries that will launch the festival's 18th edition on Thursday, October 22, at Cinemark CinéArts Santana Row. Leading the program are Panther Pat, the Slamdance Grand Jury Prize-winning documentary about the first woman to play professional football, and I Will Be Alright, the new film from Academy Award nominee Cyrus Neshvad (The Red Suitcase). They are joined by Signal (UK), We Were Here (India), Aftertouch (Netherlands) and The Piano (USA).

Opening Night begins with a red carpet at 6 p.m., followed by the 7 p.m. screening, a Q&A with visiting filmmakers and a 9 p.m. after-party. The Bay Area's only festival dedicated exclusively to short films then continues through October 25 with more than 150 shorts from around the world.

The festival also named its 2026 juries, led by Academy Award-winning producer Andrew Carlberg, Disney Legend Andreas Deja and director-actor Carlson Young (Scream: The TV Series), whose feature debut The Blazing World premiered at Sundance.

"Opening Night sets the tone for the whole festival, and this year we're opening with a Slamdance prize-winner, the newest film from an Oscar nominee and four more stories from

around the world that audiences will be talking about all weekend," said Bill Hargreaves, SJSFF Co-Founder and Festival Director. "Eighteen years in, San Jose has become a place where filmmakers from all over the world want their work to be seen, and being an Oscar-qualifying festival means our winning filmmakers have a real shot at Academy consideration, and we're proud to offer that here in Silicon Valley."

OPENING NIGHT FILMS
The six shorts on the 80-minute Opening Night program come from five countries and run from a true sports story and a refugee drama to a rescue on the railway tracks, a comic protest against automation and a family story told through music.
Panther Pat (USA, 12 min.), directed by Ashley Brandon. Winner of the Grand Jury Prize for Documentary Short at the 2026 Slamdance Film Festival and an official selection of the 2026 Tribeca Festival, the documentary mixes archival footage with stop-motion animation to tell the true story of Pat Palinkas, a schoolteacher who in 1970 became the first woman to play professional football when she took the field for the Orlando Panthers.

I Will Be Alright (Luxembourg, 18 min.), directed by Academy Award nominee Cyrus Neshvad (The Red Suitcase). A young woman who has fled Iran's regime disguises herself as the Statue of Liberty to earn a few coins.
Signal (UK, 13 min.), directed by Zak Jarvis. A railway signalman's routine night shift becomes a race to save a life when he spots Billy, a distressed young man trespassing


Film Still Photo - MISSED


Film Still Photo - RUBENSTEINS


Film Still Photo - THREE

on the tracks.

We Were Here (India, 14 min.), directed by Pranav Bhasin. In a crumbling Indian town, three retired men protest machines replacing human jobs by pretending to be household appliances.
Aftertouch (Netherlands, 15 min.), directed by Levi Verspeek. When a man asks his girlfriend to hit him, with consent, their ordinary movie night takes a dangerous turn.


Film Still Photo - ONE NIGHT

The Piano (USA, 8 min.), directed by Avery Kroll. A young girl sneaks out of bed to find her father playing the piano late at night. The bond they build through music lasts her lifetime, and after his death she passes their song on to her own son.
Filmmakers and guests will walk the red carpet beginning at 6 pm and join a Q&A following the screening, with the celebration continuing at the Opening Night After-Party at 9 pm.

THE 2026 JURIES
Two juries will crown this year's winners. The "Best of Fest" jury selects the festival's Best Short Film, which qualifies for Academy Award consideration. A dedicated Best Animation jury brings decades of experience from Walt Disney Animation Studios, Don Bluth Productions and the international independent animation scene. Between them, the jurors' work has been recognized by the Academy Awards, the Annie Awards, Sundance, SXSW and Tribeca.

"Best of Fest" Oscar-Qualifying Jury
Andrew Carlberg is the Academy Award- and Emmy-winning producer of Skin, winner of the 2019 Oscar for Best Live Action Short Film. Named one of Variety's "Hollywood's New Leaders," Carlberg produces across film, television, Broadway and Los Angeles stage. Credits include Sun Dogs (Netflix), Jennifer Morrison's directorial debut; Sundance selection The Blazing World; Neil LaBute's Some Girl(s) and Dirty Weekend; Broadway's Romeo and Juliet and Side Show; and ABC's Castle.

Carlson Young is a director, writer and actor who co-starred in two seasons of Scream: The TV Series. Her feature debut, The Blazing World, which she wrote, directed and starred in, premiered at the 2021 Sundance Film Festival. She directed Amazon's Upgraded, starring Camila Mendes and Marisa Tomei, and recently wrapped Trust, starring Sophie Turner.
Bonnie Discepolo is a filmmaker and actor whose Neo Dome won audience awards at SXSW, Series Fest and the Nashville Film Festival, plus jury prizes at Nashville and Woods Hole. Her acting credits include Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 3 and Shazam! Fury of the Gods.

John Trefry is a writer and producer whose narrative and documentary work has competed at more than 100 festivals, including SXSW, Tribeca and Raindance, with distribution partners including HBO. Credits include Souls of Totality(Tatiana Maslany), How to Be Alone (Joe Keery, Maika Monroe) and 5150 (Jovan Adepo, executive produced by David Oyelowo).

Best Animation Jury
Andreas Deja is a Disney Legend and the animator behind some of Walt Disney Animation Studios' most iconic characters, including Gaston, Jafar, Scar, Hercules and Lilo. Deja wrote to Disney at age 10 asking for a job and was hired in 1980, the start of a 30-year career at the studio. A leading historian of hand-drawn animation, he has authored books including The Nine Old Men. His 2023 directorial debut, the hand-drawn short Mushka, screened at SJSFF, so this year marks his return to the festival.

John Pomeroy is an animator, producer and character designer who worked on many of Disney's and Don Bluth's best-known films. After starting at Disney in 1973, he co-founded Don Bluth Productions, producing The Secret of NIMH and animating the laserdisc classic Dragon's Lair, recently spotlighted in Netflix's Stranger Things. He was directing animator and producer on An American Tail and The Land Before Time, then returned to Disney as supervising animator on Pocahontas, where he designed John Smith, and on Fantasia 2000.

David Chai is a two-time Annie Award nominee for Best Short Subject. His independent animated films have screened at more than 300 festivals worldwide, including Annecy, Ottawa International Animation Festival, Sundance and Cinequest, and in Spike and Mike's Festival of Animation. Chai's career spans television animation, commercials, educational software and independent film.

THE FESTIVAL
This year's 150+ official selections span documentary, drama, world cinema, comedy, science fiction and horror, animation and family-friendly shorts, from 2 to 30 minutes, including a number of World Premieres, West Coast Premieres and Bay Area films. More than 80 filmmakers from Spain, Italy, South Africa, Ireland and across the U.S. plan to attend and take part in Q&As after their screenings. Programmed blocks include The World Beyond (sci-fi), I've Got a Bad Feeling About This (suspense), Make 'Em Laugh and Make 'Em Laugh: After Dark (comedy), and three World Cinema blocks.
Audiences vote for their favorites throughout the festival. Winners, including the "Best of Fest" Best Short Film award, which qualifies for Academy Award consideration, and Best Animation, will be presented Saturday, October 24. Sunday closes with a screening of the "Best of the Fest" winners.
Ranked by MovieMaker Magazine among the Top 50 Film Festivals "Worth the Entry Fee," SJSFF has showcased Academy Award-nominated and BAFTA-winning shorts and has introduced Bay Area audiences to new filmmakers from around the world.

WHEN & WHERE
Thursday 10/22: Opening Night red carpet at 6 p.m.; screening at 7 p.m.; after-party at 9 p.m.
Friday 10/23: Screenings from 11 a.m. until late
Saturday 10/Oct. 24: Screenings from 11 a.m. until late; Awards
Sunday, Oct. 25: Closing day from 11 a.m., featuring "Best of the Fest" winners
Venue: Cinemark CinéArts Santana Row, 3088 Olsen Drive, San Jose, CA 95128

Tickets: VIP All Access Pass $175 (all screenings, Opening Night and after-party, VIP Lounge, Awards event, festival T-shirt); Day Passes $30 to $50; individual blocks $10 to $15. Available at sjsff.com/tickets.

ABOUT THE SAN JOSE INTERNATIONAL SHORT FILM FESTIVAL
Founded in 2009, the Oscar-qualifying San Jose International Short Film Festival is the Bay Area's only film festival dedicated exclusively to short films. Each October in the heart of Silicon Valley, SJSFF presents more than 150 shorts from over 24 countries, showing work by new and established filmmakers in every genre. Learn more at sjsff.com and follow @sjisff on Instagram and Facebook.com/SJSFF.

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