

TwilightRoom Expands Film Festival Coverage to AFI FEST 2026 as Hollywood Prepares for Awards Season

Founder Devin Esser to cover the American Film Institute's 40th festival, featuring 157 films from 50 countries and 10 international Oscar submissions

SAN DIEGO, CA, UNITED STATES, October 19, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- With 10 official international Oscar submissions, 157 films representing 50 countries and major premieres from some of cinema's most influential filmmakers, AFI FEST 2026 is bringing the global film industry to Hollywood from October 21-25. Independent film criticism platform [TwilightRoom](#) will cover the American Film Institute's milestone 40th edition, marking the fifth major festival in the publication's expanding coverage since its launch earlier this year.



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Devin Esser, Founder

Founded by critic and editor Devin Esser, TwilightRoom has built its festival reporting from SXSW and Tribeca to Fantasia and Fantastic Fest, covering independent discoveries, international cinema and the filmmakers influencing contemporary storytelling. AFI FEST presented by Canva adds a particularly consequential chapter as Hollywood turns its attention toward the 2027 Academy Awards.

"Film festivals give us an early look at the stories that will shape the cultural conversation," said Esser. "AFI FEST is especially compelling because it brings together

filmmakers who have defined cinema for decades with emerging voices who may define its future. That's exactly the intersection we want TwilightRoom to explore."

Ahead of the festival, Esser has published "[The 18 Most Anticipated Releases of AFI FEST](https://twilightroom.com/most-anticipated-releases-afi-fest-2026/)", TwilightRoom's guide to the 18 films covered across the festival, including a run of awards-season contenders arriving with their reputations already built. The preview includes the four red-carpet premieres and 14 screenings from this year's lineup that are considered essential viewing.



Read TwilightRoom's AFI FEST preview here: <https://twilightroom.com/most-anticipated-releases-afi-fest-2026/>

Held at the historic TCL Chinese Theatres, this year's festival opens with the U.S. premiere of "Wildwood," Travis Knight's stop-motion fantasy from LAIKA, and includes red-carpet premieres of Peter Berg's "The Mosquito Bowl," Peter Farrelly's "I Play Rocky" and Brad Bird's animated neo-noir "Ray Gunn," featuring the voices of Scarlett Johansson and Sam Rockwell.

The international program includes new work from acclaimed directors Werner Herzog, Asghar Farhadi, Ryūsuke Hamaguchi, Mike Leigh and Céline Sciamma. Among the festival's 10 official Best International Feature Oscar submissions are Japan's "All of a Sudden," South Korea's "Possible Love" and Austria's "Rose," offering audiences an early opportunity to consider films that could figure prominently in the coming awards season.

The festival's reach extends beyond feature films. Its Short Film Competition is recognized by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences as a qualifying event for the Live Action, Animated and Documentary Short Film categories. AFI FEST is also a qualifying festival for British short-film awards consideration through BAFTA and the British Independent Film Awards, giving emerging filmmakers a meaningful pathway to international recognition.

That emphasis on discovering and developing talent reflects the American Film Institute's nearly six-decade commitment to cinema. Established in 1967, AFI helped pioneer the preservation of American film history and founded the AFI Conservatory, whose alumni include David Lynch, Rachel Morrison and Matthew Libatique.

"There's a tendency to focus on the biggest names and the films already generating awards buzz," Esser said. "But some of the most important discoveries happen outside those conversations. We want to give readers a reason to seek out those films, understand the creative choices behind them and recognize the filmmakers taking risks."

TwilightRoom's AFI FEST reporting will examine notable premieres, international cinema,

documentaries and emerging filmmakers, with reviews, curated recommendations and editorial analysis published through its website, newsletter and social media channels. The publication's growing festival presence comes during its inaugural year. Since debuting publicly at SXSW in March, TwilightRoom has developed an editorial voice focused on substantive criticism, accessible analysis and the cultural significance of film and television. Its coverage includes feature reviews, festival reporting, Criterion deep dives, recurring rankings and television analysis.

AFI FEST 2026 runs October 21-25 at the TCL Chinese Theatres in Hollywood. TwilightRoom's coverage begins October 21 at www.twilightroom.com, where readers can also subscribe to the publication's free newsletter.

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About TwilightRoom

TwilightRoom is an independent film and television criticism platform founded in 2026 by critic and editor Devin Esser. The publication offers thoughtful reviews, festival reporting, rankings and cultural commentary designed to help audiences engage more deeply with contemporary cinema and television. Its coverage spans independent and mainstream releases, international filmmaking and major film festivals. Visit www.twilightroom.com.

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