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Stony Brook Film Festival Announces Winners of the 31st Annual Festival Awards



STONY BROOK, N.Y. – July 25, 2026 – The **31st Annual Stony Brook Film Festival**, presented by Stony Brook Medicine, has announced the recipients of its 2026 Festival Awards.

This year's Festival welcomed directors, filmmakers, cast, and crew representing 36 exceptional independent films from around the world. Ten films and their team of filmmakers were honored for excellence in storytelling, directing, and independent filmmaking.

The remarkable quality of this year's selections prompted the Festival jury to present the **rare Jury Award for Directing**, an honor bestowed only a handful of times throughout the Festival's 31-year history. The 2026 Festival also featured one of its strongest showcases of American independent films, alongside acclaimed international cinema.

"Every year, this Festival gets better and better because the quality of the films selected continues to improve," said Alan Inkles, Director of the Stony Brook Film Festival. "This year's Festival featured one of the strongest lineups of American independent films we've ever presented, while also celebrating extraordinary filmmakers from around the globe. I'm incredibly grateful to our selection committee and to the filmmaking community for entrusting us with these remarkable films and for continuing to tell stories that deserve to be seen and shared."

Short Film Awards

The **Opening Night Short Film Award** was presented to ***The Doorman***, with director **Lily Ghazaryan** accepting the honor in person during the Festival Awards Ceremony.

The **Audience Choice Award for Best Short** was presented to ***This Conversation Has Been Removed***, directed by **Andrew Nolan** and written by **Mark Hennigan**. Although the filmmakers were unable to attend the awards ceremony, they participated in a standing-room-only post-screening Q&A during the Festival and later shared the following message after learning of their win:

"We are so completely honored to receive the Audience Award for Best Short... What made Stony Brook so special for us is how well attended it is, and how engaged the audience and the whole community feels. *This Conversation Has Been Removed* is a film about connection and really being present with those around you. Getting to see our short film in the incredible Staller Center, and hearing hundreds of people laugh along with our silly jokes, has been an absolute high point in our careers."

The **Jury Award for Best Short** was presented to ***Francine, East-West***, with director **Elvira Barboza** accepting the award in person.

Feature Film Awards

In a rare outcome, the **Audience Choice Award for Best Feature** ended in a tie between ***Anne Packard: An Artist's Resolve*** and ***Hungarian Wedding***. Producer **Stephen Kaiser-Pendergrast** (*Anne Packard: An Artist's Resolve*) and Director **Csaba Káel** (*Hungarian Wedding*) were both in attendance to accept their awards.

The **Jury Award for Directing** was presented to **Danny Madden** for ***Downbeat***. Unable to attend the ceremony, Madden shared the following statement:

"A directing award means a lot on this film, as the directing here also includes cinematography, editing, and sound design.... Thanks for having us, and for this recognition."

The **Spirit of Independent Filmmaking Award** was presented to **Richie James Follen**, director of ***Crystal Cross***, who reflected on the Festival experience during the awards ceremony:

"Going into a theater this big, I was very anxious, but it was the most people that this film ever screened to, and it was warmly received, and I'm so grateful. We made this movie with no money, so hopefully this Festival will inspire the powers that be to give money to make more movies like this."

The **Jury Award for Best Feature** was presented to ***A Mosquito in the Ear***, directed by **Nicola Rinciari**. Although unable to attend the ceremony, Rinciari shared this message:

"This film was made with so much love by an extraordinary cast and crew, and I'm deeply grateful to the jury for recognizing our work. Thank you to the entire festival team for welcoming us so warmly and for creating a space where independent films can connect with audiences in such a meaningful way."

2026 FESTIVAL WINNERS & PHOTOS.

About Stony Brook Film Festival: *The Stony Brook Film Festival, produced by the Staller Center for the Arts at Stony Brook University and presented by Stony Brook Medicine, is independently funded through philanthropic support from individual donors, corporate partners including Campolo, Middleton & McCormick, LLP, Strata Alliance, News 12, WLIW, Davidow, Davidow, Siegel & Stern, LLP, and Suffolk County.*

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