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**Grand Jury and Audience Award Films Announced  
at 27th Sonoma International Film Festival March 24, 2024  
*Festival Reaches New Milestone on Attendance***

**Grand Jury Award, Best Narrative Feature | Goodbye Julia  
Stolman Audience Award, Best Feature | The Teacher Who Promised the Sea**

**Grand Jury Award, Best Documentary Feature | Invisible Nation  
A<sup>3</sup> Audience Award, Best Documentary | Call Me Dancer**

**Grand Jury Award, Best Live Action Short Film | ILY, Bye  
Grand Jury Award, Best Documentary Short Film | A Part of You / Made Me Whole  
Again**

**Grand Jury Award, Best Animated Short Film | Bug Diner  
The McNeely Audience Award, Best Short Film | Save the Cat**

Sonoma, CA March 24, 2024—Luminaries such as Golden Globe®-winner Beau Bridges, actor/director John Cameron Mitchell, actor Scoot McNairy, chef Susan Feniger, musician Rob Garza of Thievery Corporation, and more than 150 filmmakers, distinguished press, and industry guests converged on the award-winning wine country film festival March 20-24.

The five-day festival showcased more than 100 films, including World, U.S., and Bay Area premieres, in addition to multiple award-winning and critically acclaimed films. Twenty-five countries were represented in this year's lineup of 43 narrative features, 16 documentary features, and 49 short films. The festival also achieved a historic milestone in attendance and new pass holders; surpassing last year's high-water mark.

## FILM HIGHLIGHTS:

- Opening Night - U.S. Premiere of Thomas Napper's **Widow Clicquot** starring Haley Bennett
- The Centerpiece Film - Ethan Hawke's **Wildcat** starring Maya Hawke
- The Closing Night Film - Luc Besson's **Dogman** starring Caleb Landry Jones
- The World Premiere of **Extremely Unique Dynamic** directed by Harrison Xu, Ivan Leung, and Katherine Dudas, was showcased as one of the festival's Gay-La Spotlight films.
- A Closing Night Special Presentation of Pablo Berger's Academy Award®-nominated film **Robot Dreams** was held at Sonoma Academy's brand new state-of-the-art Community Performing Arts Center in Santa Rosa.
- The Bay Area premieres of star-studded films include Thea Sharrock's **Wicked Little Letters** (Olivia Colman, Jessie Buckley); Tony Goldwyn's **Ezra** (Bobby Cannavale, Rose Byrne, Robert De Niro, Vera Farmiga, Whoopi Goldberg, Rainn Wilson); Daina O. Pusic's **Tuesday** (Julia Louis-Dreyfus), Gilles Legardinier's **Mr. Blake At Your Service** (John Malkovich, Fanny Ardant); Giorgio Diritti's **Lubo** (Franz Rogowski); Bertrand Bonello's **The Beast** (Léa Seydoux, George MacKay); Bob Byington's **Lousy Carter** (David Krumholtz, Olivia Thirlby); and Stephen Soucy's **Merchant Ivory** (Emma Thompson, Helena Bonham Carter, Vanessa Redgrave, Hugh Grant), amongst other great films such as **Housekeeping for Beginners**, **Evil Does Not Exist**, **Carol Doda Topless at the Condor**, and **Ghostlight**.

## TRIBUTES:

Award-winning actor **Beau Bridges** was presented with the SIFF Lifetime Achievement Award. As part of the tribute to the actor and his illustrious 40-year film and television career, Beau Bridges participated in an on-stage conversation with the Los Angeles Times film critic **Katie Walsh**, followed by a 35th Anniversary screening of **The Fabulous Baker Boys**.

Award-winning chef **Susan Feniger** was presented with the SIFF Culinary Excellence Award at a special dinner and screening event featuring the Bay Area Premiere of director **Liz Lachman's Susan Feniger. Forked** and a multi-course dinner curated by Feniger.

## GRAND JURY FILM AWARDS:

**Grand Jury Award | Best Narrative Feature:  
Goodbye Julia (Mohamed Kordofani | Sudan)**

**Special Mention: Hesitation Wound (Selman Nacar | Turkey)**

**Narrative Feature Grand Jury:** Rosa Bosch (Begin Again Films), Tyler Coates (The Hollywood Reporter), Rebecca Fisher (Magnolia Pictures), Jason Hellerstein (Sideshow), and Julie Huntsinger (Telluride Film Festival).

Jury Statement from the Narrative Feature Grand Jury:

“We commend the festival for its impressive selection of narrative features and unanimously select Goodbye Julia as the best film. An outstanding first feature from Mohamed Kordofani, anchored by two stellar performances from Eiman Yousif and Siran Riak, Goodbye Julia provides a glimpse into a culture and region that’s underrepresented and underexplored in contemporary cinema. We also must give special mention to Hesitation Wound, a brilliant accomplishment from an up-and-coming auteur in Selman Nacar.”

**Narrative Feature Competition Films:** Blaga’s Lessons (Stephan Komandarev | Bulgaria), The Blue Star (Javier Macipe | Spain), Dear Jassi ( Tarsem Singh Dhandwar | India), Goodbye Julia (Mohamed Kordofani | Sudan), Hesitation Wound (Selman Nacar | Turkey), Puan (Maria Alché and Benjamín Naishtat | Argentina/Brazil), Rosalie (Stéphanie di Giusto | France) and Snow Leopard (Pema Tseden | China).

**Grand Jury Award | Best Documentary Feature:  
Invisible Nation (Vanessa Hope | USA)**

**Documentary Feature Grand Jury:** Thelma Adams (film critic), Matthew Carey (Deadline), Eugene Hernandez (Director of the Sundance Film Festival), Jannette Napoli (ITVS), and Rob Williams (Participant).

Jury Statement from Documentary Feature Grand Jury:

“2024 is shaping up to be a sobering year. Democracy seems to be at risk. "Invisible Nation," Vanessa Hope's cogent, clear-eyed, entertaining film reveals Taiwan as a dynamic nation standing at the forefront of the global fight for democracy.”

**Documentary Feature Competition Films included:** And So It Begins (Ramona S. Diaz | USA), Farming While Black (Mark Decena | USA), Invisible Nation (Vanessa Hope | USA), Let The Canary Sing (Alison Ellwood | USA), The Most Remote Restaurant in the World (Ole Juncker | Denmark), and Mourning in Lod (Hilla Medalia | Israel).

**Grand Jury Awards | Best Short Films:**

**Short Film Grand Jury:** Tabitha Jackson (Former Sundance Director, co-host of *The*

*Film That Blew My Mind* podcast), Selin Sevinc (Bend Film Festival), and Andy Spletzer (Seattle International Film Festival).

All 49 Official Selection short films competed for the following awards:

**Best Live Action Short | *ILY, Bye* (Taylor James | USA)**

For this audacious filmmaking debut, towering central performance, and a script that is funny as fuck (hell), we'd like to grant the award for **best short film in the Live Action category** to *ILY, Bye* by Taylor James.

**Best Documentary Short | *A Part of You / Made Me Whole Again* (Destyn Fuller-Hope and Andrew Wonder | USA)**

For its effective and economical storytelling in a cinematic expression of love. We'd like to grant the award for **best short film in the documentary category** to *A Part Of You Made Me Whole Again* by Destyn Fuller-Hope and Andrew Wonder.

**Best Animated Short | *Bug Diner* (Phoebe Heart | USA)**

For a shocking and memorable use of puppet porn and humor, we'd like to grant the award for **best short film in the animation category** to *Bug Diner* by Phoebe Heart.

**AUDIENCE FILM AWARDS:**

**The Stolman Audience Award for Best Feature**

**The Teacher Who Promised the Sea (Patricia Font | Spain)**

1st Runner-up: *Ghostlight* (Kelly O'Sullivan, Alex Thompson | USA)

2nd Runner-up: *Ezra* (Tony Goldwyn | USA)

3rd Runner-up: *Wicked Little Letters* (Thea Sharrock | United Kingdom)

4th Runner-up, *Mr. Blake At Your Service!* (Gilles Legardinier | France)

**The A3 Audience Award for Best Documentary**

**Call Me Dancer (Leslie Shampaine and Pip Gilmour | India)**

1st Runner-up: *Let the Canary Sing* (Alison Ellwood | USA)

2nd Runner-up: *UnBroken* (Beth Lane | USA)

3rd Runner-up: *Copa 71* (Rachel Ramsay, James Erskine | United Kingdom)

4th Runner-up: *Merchant Ivory* (Stephen Soucy | USA)

**The McNeely Award for Best Short Film**

**Save the Cat (Jordan Matthew Horowitz | USA)**

1st Runner-up: *Abundance: The Farmlink Story* (Owen Dubeck | USA)

2nd Runner-up: *Terminally III* (Chris Cole | USA)

3rd Runner-up: *Baby Gay* (Arielle Frances Bagood | USA)

4th Runner-up: Lunchbox (Anne Hu | USA)

#### **OTHER FESTIVAL SPECIAL EVENTS & COMMUNITY PROGRAMS:**

- A live episode of the highly successful “The Film That Blew My Mind” podcast, with co-hosts Sundance Director Emeritus John Cooper and former Sundance Director Tabitha Jackson featured guest John Cameron Mitchell.
- An Industry Panel on The Future of Film included panelists Marcus Hu (Strand Releasing), Anne Thompson (Indiewire), Jason Hellerstein (Sideshow), Eugene Hernandez (Sundance Film Festival), Brian Brooks (Cinetic Marketing), Dennis O’Connor (Film Marketing & Distribution consultant) and was moderated by Rosa Bosch (Begin Again Films).
- SIFF Food Insecurity Awareness Initiative: Festivalgoers were encouraged to make cash donations throughout the festival, with a portion of matched funds from SIFF, PG&E, and KHR McNeely Family Fund designated for the Redwood Empire Food Bank and the California Restaurant Alliance-Restaurants Care.

#### **[SIFF 2024 Press Kit Materials](#)**

#### **About Sonoma International Film Festival**

The Sonoma International Film Festival is a 501(c)3 organization dedicated to promoting the best in independent film and filmmakers from around the world, inspiring savvy film lovers, and introducing the power of film to student filmmakers. Blending a program of international film, food, wine, and fun, SIFF hosts its annual festival each March, as well as year-round events and special monthly screenings. Ginny Krieger is the Executive Director, Carl Spence is the Artistic Director, and Dr. Kevin W. McNeely is the Director Emeritus.

The five-day festival is curated by Artistic Director Carl Spence, along with senior programmers Amanda Salazar (Narrative Feature), and Ken Jacobson (Narrative Documentary), and shorts programmer Oscar Arce Naranjo.

SIFF’s signature initiative--the Media Arts Program started at Sonoma Valley High School in 2002--introduces students to film by providing ongoing support so they may explore their creative pursuits. SIFF has given more than \$800,000 in resources to the program since its inception, with hundreds of students to date graduating through the program, in addition to providing full college scholarships annually to deserving students.

The Sonoma International Film Festival is supported year-round by Sustaining Sponsor KHR McNeely Family Fund, and Official Airline, Delta Air Lines. SIFF2024 Festival Premiere Sponsors include Chihuly Studio, Cogir Senior Living, Dolby, Gloria Ferrer, Jak W, Merrill Lynch, Northern California Public Media, the San Francisco Chronicle, and

Sebastiani Vineyards & Winery.

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