

## People &amp; Places

## Film

## Oscar buzz dead

## China clips wings of 'Hooligan Sparrow'

BEIJING, Jan 29, (AFP): Ye Haiyan, one of China's most prominent women's rights activists, huddled in her unheated apartment on the outskirts of Beijing, waiting to learn if the documentary that propelled her to international fame would receive an Oscar nod.

Last month, "Hooligan Sparrow", a documentary following her activism on behalf of sexually abused children, made a short list for the Academy Awards. Last week, local authorities killed her gas, water, electricity and Internet.

When she learned the film was not included among the final five nominees announced Tuesday, she breathed a sigh of relief.

"If many people started paying attention to me because of the film, I suspect I wouldn't be able to stay in China much longer," she said.

"I don't want to stand up and become an even more prominent dissident here."

Since 2012, Ye has gained a huge online following for shock-tactic human rights activism: working for free in a brothel to advocate for sex worker rights and making a tongue-in-cheek offer to sleep with a school principal who raped and pimped out his students in the southern island province of Hainan.

Her work drew the attention of internationally renowned Chinese artist Ai Weiwei, who posed nude with her in a controversial photograph.

But the spotlight also attracted the attention of the country's police, who ruthlessly persecuted the single mother for her role in organising protests over the school rape case.



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## Evictions

The director of "Hooligan Sparrow", New York-based Nanfu Wang, captured the drama of intimidation, detention and evictions Ye suffered in the summer of 2013, weaving the tense footage into a thriller-esque narrative.

The first-time director's documentary would have become one of only a handful of movies by a mainland Chinese filmmaker to ever be nominated for an Oscar.

Wang was disappointed the film was not included among the final five nominees.

"A nomination would have been big news in China — the kind of news that state censorship would struggle to manage," Wang said.

Greater exposure might mean greater protection for Ye from authorities bent on muzzling civil society, but it could also end in increased harassment, she said.

Wang has not returned to China since the film debuted, unsure of the consequences that might await her. Since President Xi Jinping took power in late 2012, authorities have carried out a brutal crackdown on civil society, which has seen hundreds of lawyers, activists and academics detained and dozens jailed.

"It's difficult to know for sure how the government will behave," she said.

Since the film's release, Ye has been forced to reevaluate her often sensationalistic tactics.

Things were "quite dangerous" for a while, she said, as the government upped its surveillance.

"After Hainan and Nanfu's film, I thought: 'My God, our country is so rotten. The authorities are capable of anything,'" she said.

"Before, I'd been so naive. I thought as long as I made noise, the government would hear me and change."

Living under constant scrutiny, she said, has forced her to find a balance between speaking out for her beliefs and keeping a low-enough profile to avoid becoming further entangled.

Her previous tactics, inspired by Western-style activism, fell on deaf ears in China, she said.

"People wouldn't listen to anything you said, thinking you'd been brainwashed by Western universal values," she said.

To change Chinese hearts and minds, she is going to "try to better understand people and find language that they can accept".

"I'm even willing to work with the Communist party," she added.

The government, however, does not seem interested in the offer: local officials have shut off her utilities in an attempt to drive her from her home, this time for posting an article about the party's founding father Mao Zedong.

After she criticised a small but vocal resurgence of praise for the leader whose failed policies killed tens of millions, government censors closed her social media accounts and local police threatened to lock her in her home if she did not leave.

"We might have to jump out the second-storey window," she said.

## Refuses

But while Ye may bend to the party's will, she refuses to break. She has turned her predicament into performance art, hanging a red lantern on her staircase for every day she goes without power.

"As long as they allow me a small space in this country to survive and speak, I won't leave or give up being a critic."

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Oscar-nominated Canadian filmmaker Denis Villeneuve spoke Saturday of his exasperation at the Academy overlooking Amy Adams's acclaimed performance in sci-fi thriller "Arrival".

The alien invasion drama, re-released in US theaters this week, has eight nominations for February's Oscars, including for best film and for Villeneuve's direction.

But Adams, widely expected to get a sixth Oscar nomination for "Arrival" — and perhaps another for "Nocturnal Animals" — was left off the list, leaving the trade press and many leading industry figures bewildered.

"I was very disappointed, because she is the soul of the movie. She was my biggest ally. She gave everything, she gave a tremendous, very complex performance," Villeneuve, 49, told AFP at the Producers Guild Awards (PGAs) in Beverly Hills.

Taking its cue from classics such as "Close Encounters of the Third Kind" (1977) and "Contact" (1997), "Arrival" was filmed in Villeneuve's native Quebec for a relatively small \$50 million.

Adams, 42, was universally lauded for her portrayal of Louise Banks, a linguist enlisted by the army after alien pods pop up worldwide, to help figure out what their occupants want.

The picture pairs Adams with fellow "American Hustle" star Jeremy Renner, playing against type as a shy, soft-spoken mathematician.



Nicole Kidman attends the 28th Annual Producers Guild Awards at The Beverly Hilton Hotel on Jan 28, in Beverly Hills, California. (AFP)

## Film

## 'Zootopia' bags animated movie award

## 'La La Land' wins PGA best film

LOS ANGELES, Jan 29, (Agencies): Dreamy musical "La La Land" took home best movie at the Producers Guild Awards on Saturday, putting it in the box seat for the much-anticipated Oscars next month.

The movie beat industry favorites and leading Academy Awards contenders including coming-of-age tale "Moonlight", stylish alien thriller "Arrival" and visceral family drama "Manchester by the Sea".

Damien Chazelle's whimsical tribute to Hollywood's Golden Age of musicals has 14 nominations going into February's Academy awards, including for best picture, best director and for its two stars, Ryan Gosling and Emma Stone.

Earlier in January it scooped seven awards at the Golden Globes, also considered a dry-run for the Oscars, the climax of Hollywood's awards season.

One of its supporting actors, singer-songwriter John Legend, used the spotlight to call on Americans to stand against President Donald Trump's immigration policies.

"We are the voice, the face of America. Our America is big, it is free and it is open to dreamers of all races, all countries, all religions," said Legend, 38, who has an Oscar and a collection of Grammys for his songwriting.

"Our vision of America is directly antithetical to that of President Trump and I want specifically tonight to reject his vision and affirm that America has to be better than that."

Legend's condemnation came after Trump signed a sweeping executive order to suspend the arrival of refugees for at least 120 days and impose tough new controls on travelers from Iran, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Syria and Yemen.

Hollywood heavyweights including Robert De Niro, Martin Scorsese, Dustin Hoffman, Casey Affleck, Amy Adams, Justin Timberlake, and Jeff Bridges were at the gala in Beverly Hills.

"Zootopia" won best animated picture, while ESPN's "O.J. Simpson: Made in America" won best documentary.

In the TV section, Nicole Kidman

gave the first trophy of the night to widely acclaimed "The People v. O.J. Simpson: American Crime Story" for best long-form show.

FX's series, a fictionalized account of the O.J. Simpson 1994 murder case, builds on the nine Emmys it picked up in September.

Netflix sensation "Stranger Things" won best episodic drama, a consolation after being shut out at the Golden Globes.

"Making a Murderer," the 10-part story of a man serving a life sentence for murdering a 25-year-old woman, was named best non-fiction show.

It became a word-of-mouth sensation for Netflix at the end of 2015, earning the network six Emmy nominations.

"Atlanta" followed its two Golden Globe wins with a PGA for best comedy, while "The Voice" took home the award for best competition series.

"Last Week Tonight with John Oliver" bagged best talk or live entertainment show for the second year in a row.

The PGA has a solid record of giving top honors to movies that go on to earn best picture honors at the Oscars — although last year's winner, "The Big Short", was beaten out by "Spotlight."

"I was asked to define what a producer does recently at a college and I said, 'a producer is impervious to rejection,'" "Hacksaw Ridge" producer David Permut, a veteran of some 40 movies, told AFP.

"You get 'no's all the time, a million 'no's, a sea of 'no's. All you need is one 'yes,' — one 'yes' from Mel Gibson to direct the movie, one 'yes' from Andrew Garfield, one 'yes' from Robert Schenkkan to say I love that true story and I want to write it, one 'yes' from a financier."

The Oscars ceremony is staged on Feb 26, hosted by late night funnyman Jimmy Kimmel.

Every PGA winner under this system had gone on to win best picture until last year, when "The Big Short" deviated from the pattern. However, over the last eight years, PGA nominees and best picture nominees have

differed by two-to-three films. This year was the first time since the implementation of preferential balloting that all best picture nominees were also nominated by the PGA.

The one PGA contender that didn't make the cut for Oscar was "Deadpool."

Full list of Producers Guild Award winners:

■ Milestone Award: Tom Rothman  
■ Norman Lear Achievement Award in Television: James L. Brooks

■ David O. Selznick Achievement Award in Theatrical Motion Pictures: Irwin Winkler

■ Stanley Kramer Award: Loving

■ Visionary Award: Megan Ellison

■ The David L. Wolper Award for Outstanding Producer of Long-Form Television: The People v. O.J. Simpson: American Crime Story

■ The Award for Outstanding Producer of Non-Fiction Television: Making a Murderer

■ The Award for Outstanding Producer of Competition Television: The Voice

■ The Darryl F. Zanuck Award for Outstanding Producer of Theatrical Motion Pictures: La La Land

■ The Danny Thomas Award for Outstanding Producer of Episodic Television, Comedy: Atlanta

■ The Award for Outstanding Producer of Live Entertainment & Talk Television: Last Week Tonight

■ The Award for Outstanding Children's Program: Sesame Street

■ The Award for Outstanding Sports Program: VICE World of Sports & Real Sports with Bryant Gumbel

■ The Award for Outstanding Digital Series: Comedians in Cars Getting Coffee

■ The Award for Outstanding Producer of Animated Theatrical Motion Pictures: Zootopia

■ The Award for Outstanding Producer of Documentary Theatrical Motion Pictures: O.J.: Made in America

■ The Norman Felton Award for Outstanding Producer of Episodic Television, Drama: Stranger Things.



Kristen Stewart visits Knott's Berry Farm during the Susan G. Komen #ScreamAgainstBreastCancer Initiative at Knott's Berry Farm on Jan 28, in Buena Park, California. (AFP)



Hayek



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## Variety

LOS ANGELES: "Split" is once again twisting its way to the top of the box office after beating out newcomers "A Dog's Purpose" and "Resident Evil: The Final Chapter" on Friday. The film, from Universal via its partnership with Blumhouse Productions, earned nearly \$8 million on Friday on its way to a \$25 to \$26 million second weekend at 3,199 locations.

"A Dog's Purpose," also distributed by Universal, but made by Amblin Entertainment and Walden Media, fetched \$5.3 million from 3,058 theaters to put it solidly in second for the weekend.

"A Dog's Purpose" met blowback when TMZ leaked a video showing a German Shepherd struggling during production. The video sparked outrage online and PETA called for a boycott, while the filmmakers have insisted that the clip did not accurately represent what happened on set.

Still, Universal canceled the film's intended premiere and press junket, and the situation dropped estimates for the film's opening weekend from as high as \$25 million before calls for boycott, to \$18 million on Friday afternoon. Now its opening weekend estimate stands closer to \$19 million. (RTRS)

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LOS ANGELES: The memorable freeway ramp dance sequence was shot in only two days with 150 dancers in 110 degree heat. "La La Land" producer Marc Platt recalled at Saturday's Producers Guild of America nominees panel.

"Shutting down the freeway didn't seem that impossible when I first read the Damien Chazelle's script," Platt told an audience of about 600 at the Saban Theatre in Beverly Hills. The event was held for the 10 nominated films for the PGA's Darryl F. Zanuck Award for top feature film production released in 2016.

"We closed the ramp between the 105 and the 110 freeways for a Saturday and a Sunday in September," Platt noted. "When we were done, Everyone was exhausted but no one wanted to leave so we were able to show the footage on monitors on the ramp to the 150 people applauding and crying." (RTRS)

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LOS ANGELES: Roadside Attractions and FilmNation Entertainment have bought

North American rights to "Beatriz at Dinner." The comedy debuted at this year's Sundance Film Festival, earning praise for

Salma Hayek's lead role as a holistic healer. Although written and produced before Donald Trump assumed the presidency,



Belgian scenario writer Thierry Smolderen and French cartoonist Alexandre Clerisse react after receiving the SNCF detective novel prize for their comic book "L'Éte Diabolik" on Jan 28, during the 44th Angoulême International Comics Festival (Festival International de la Bande Dessinée d'Angoulême). (AFP)

many critics also noted that the picture had a topical air. It follows Hayek's character, an immigrant from Mexico, as she faces off with a tough-minded real estate mogul and billionaire, played by John Lithgow. The parallels are difficult to miss. (RTRS)

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LOS ANGELES: Disney has released character posters for its upcoming live-action version of "Beauty and the Beast."

The ornate portraits give a closer look at each of the central characters in the film, including the human forms of many of Beast's servants — who were turned into living furniture as a result of the curse cast on Beast — including Ian McKellen's Cogsworth, Emma Thompson's Mrs Potts, Ewan McGregor's Lumiere, and Gugu Mbatha-Raw's Plumette.

The film is one of the most highly anticipated films of 2017. A trailer released in November netted 127.6 million views in just 24 hours.

Emma Watson plays the "beauty," Belle, while Dan Stevens portrays the Beast. Luke Evans and Josh Gad also star.

Disney's 1991 version was the first animated film to be nominated for a best picture Oscar. The title track won for best original song. Ariana Grande and John Legend will perform the song in the new movie. (RTRS)