

# New documentary cloaks anonymous sources in 'face doubles'

PARK CITY, Utah, Jan 27, (AP): In documentaries, anonymous sources have often been reduced to a shadowy, voice-distorted figure – or worse, a pixelated blur. But a new documentary premiering Sunday at the Sundance Film Festival has, with the aid of advanced digital technology, gone to greater lengths to preserve the secrecy of its sources while still conveying their humanity.

"Welcome to Chechnya", directed by David France, is about an underground pipeline created to rescue LGBTQ Chechens from the Russian republic where the government has for several years waged a crackdown on gays. In the predominantly Muslim region in southern Russia ruled by strongman Ramzan Kadyrov, LGBTQ Chechens have been detained, tortured and killed. France, the filmmaker behind "How to Survive a Plague" and "The Death and Life of Marsha P. Johnson", worked in secrecy with the Russian LGBT Network, a group formed to help save gay Chechens and find them asylum abroad. But France had a dilemma. He couldn't reveal the identities, or the faces, of his main characters. Their lives depended on staying anonymous. Yet France still wanted to faithfully show the trials they were enduring. That meant none of the old methods of cloaking anonymous sources would work.

"They were dehumanizing," France said in an interview. "I believe one of the reasons we haven't been hearing about this ongoing crime against humanity in the south of Russia is because we haven't been able to hear from the people and see the people who have suffered this unspeakable torture. When the only testimony of a crime of this magnitude comes from people who are behind a curtain, it lacks the empathy of the public that this story truly deserves." France didn't know how he would resolve the issue,

but he promised those he shot that he would somehow disguise them. After searching and testing a range of approaches, France settled on a novel one: In "Welcome to Chechnya", the faces of all the LGBTQ Chechens have been replaced using artificial intelligence. It's a little like the documentary answer to "The Irishman" or a more altruist version of a "Deepfake".

### Algorithms

The faces seen in "Welcome to Chechnya" belong, in fact, to 22 volunteers whose faces were superimposed on the people in the film. Most of them are LGBTQ activists in New York. The "face doubles" were shot on a blue screen stage and converted into algorithms that, with machine learning, could digitally mask the subjects of the film. Different voices were substituted, too. "Nobody had ever really attempted this before," said France. "And most people said it was impossible. It turned out it was pretty close to impossible but not impossible."

The technology was developed by software architect Ryan Laney. And its implementation was decided through a study organized by Dartmouth College professor Thalia Wheatley, an expert in brain sciences. She showed 109 students different visual effects options of "Welcome to Chechnya" to determine which one conveyed empathy the best and avoided an "uncanny valley" effect. (Another less successful option was using filters to render the film's individuals cartoon-like caricatures.)

Still, adding the face doubles throughout the film was a grueling, months-long process that only concluded a week before the premiere of "Welcome to Chechnya", which HBO will release in June. "The Irishman", by comparison, altered its actors' faces in highly planned scenes

with carefully orchestrated camera movement. France's documentary was full of erratic movements of both camera and people.

Every step of the way, France and his editors worked on encryption drives, and never let their original footage with real faces touch the internet or even a computer that had previously been connected to the internet. They edited in what France calls a windowless bunker in Los Angeles.

### Also:

**MADRID: Pedro Almodovar's** "Pain and Glory" swept the top prizes at the Spanish Film Academy's Goya Awards, including best picture, best director and a best actor victory for **Antonio Banderas**.

"Pain and Glory" is nominated for an Academy Award in the best international film category. Almodovar is hoping to claim his third Oscar in two weeks. The film, which is considered the most personal for the 70-year-old Almodovar, also won best original screenplay, best original music, best editing and a best supporting actress prize for **Julietta Serrano**.

"I realized that I was writing about myself and the past (and) I wasn't sure if I should continue and open myself up to such a degree, but I did, and now I am very happy," Almodovar said at the awards gala held in **Malaga** on Saturday.

Banderas had been nominated on five previous occasions for a Goya but had never won other than the honorary Goya for his career in 2015.

Two films about the 1936-39 Spanish Civil War were also recognized.

**Alejandro Amenabar's** "While at War" won five awards, mostly in the technical categories, while the award for best actress went to **Belen Cuesta** for her role in "The Infinite Trench".

Film

## Variety



Billie Eilish (left), and Finneas O'Connell pose in the press room with the awards for best album, best engineered album and best pop vocal album for 'We All Fall Asleep, Where Do We Go?', best song and record for 'Bad Guy', best new artist and best producer (non-classical), at the 62nd annual Grammy Awards at the Staples Center on Jan 26 in Los Angeles. (AP)

## Music

'We didn't make this album to win a Grammy'

# Eilish, Finneas win big at Grammys

LOS ANGELES, Jan 27, (AP): The edgy, avant-pop album that siblings Billie Eilish and Finneas created in a small bedroom made a big splash at the 2020 Grammy Awards, winning 11 honors for the musical family.

"When We All Fall Asleep, Where Do We Go?" – created in the musicians' Los Angeles home – helped Eilish win the top four honors, including album, song and record of the year, along with best new artist. The 18-year-old is the youngest artist to achieve the feat and the first to do so since Christopher Cross did in 1981.

Finneas – who co-wrote, produced and engineered the album, walked away as Sunday's top winner with six. Eilish won five honors.

"We didn't write a speech for this because we didn't make this album to win a Grammy. We didn't think it would win anything ever. We wrote an album about depression and suicidal thoughts and climate change and being the bad guy – whatever that means – and we stand up here confused and grateful," Finneas said onstage.

Together, they also won best pop vocal album, while Finneas' individual honors included producer of the year (non-classical) and best engineered album (non-classical).

"This is my first Grammys. I never thought this would happen in my whole life," Eilish said. "I genuinely wanna say I am so grateful and I only wanna say that I am so grateful."

"This is to all the kids who are making music in the bedroom today – you're going to get one of these," Finneas added.

The bedroom where they created magic was brought to life when they hit the stage and performed "When the Party's Over", which featured Finneas on keys and Eilish singing in a soft, pitch perfect tone.

Los Angeles, where the show was held, had a central theme at the show Sunday: hometown heroes Nipsey

Hussle and Kobe Bryant, a global icon, were honored and celebrated at the show.

The Grammys kicked off with a performance in honor of Bryant, who died hours before the awards along with his daughter and seven others. And later in the show Hussle's collaborators and friends, including DJ Khaled, John Legend, Meek Mill, Kirk Franklin, Roddy Ricch and YG, gave an all-star tribute to the man who died last year.

Lizzo won three honors, including best pop solo performance for "Truth Hurts" and two R&B awards.

"Hold on one second," she said, catching her breath. "Thank you to the academy. This is really (expletive) sick."

### Goals

Lizzo was among the mix of newcomers and well-known acts who reached their goals of winning their first-ever Grammy Awards on Sunday, which also included Tanya Tucker, J. Cole, DJ Khaled, Eilish, Lil Nas X, Billy Ray Cyrus, Michelle Obama, Sara Bareilles, Rosalia, 21 Savage and Tyler, the Creator.

"To my mother, you did a great job raising this guy," Tyler, who won best rap album, said to his mom, who was onstage and crying by side.

More crying took place Sunday.

Hussle also posthumously won his first pair of Grammys on Sunday.

Filmmaker Ava DuVernay introduced the performance, which featured band players, background dancers and Legend wearing traditional Ethiopian and Eritrean clothing in honor of Hussle's African roots. Mill performed a new song called "Letter to Nipsey" while others joined together for "Higher", which won best rap/sung performance.

"This is for Nipsey Hussle. This is for hip-hop," said DJ Khaled, who collaborated on the song with Legend

and Hussle, whose family stood onstage.

"We all love him. We all miss him. It's terrible that we had to lose him so early," Legend said. "We've seen some tragedy today and last year... let's hold each other tight."

Demi Lovato, who has mostly taken a break from the public since focusing on her recovery after reportedly overdosing in July 2018, gave a stirring, vocally top-notch performance that earned her a standing ovation. She was so emotional that she had to restart the song as a teardrop ran down her cheek.

Camila Cabello's performance of "First Man" – a song dedicated to her father – also induced tears. Cabello walked off the stage to her dad's seat to finish singing the song in front of him, while he teared up. Audience members were emotional, too, including Gwen Stefani.

Ariana Grande had a lengthy performance – probably to make up for the drama that surrounded her axed performance last year. Run DMC joined forces with Aerosmith to rock the Grammys stage, while Usher, Sheila E. and FKA twigs paid tribute to Prince.

Lil Nas X brought the story of "Old Town Road" to life by performing alongside the artists who helped the song stay at No. 1 for 19 weeks through various remixes, including BTS, Mason Ramsey, Diplo and the track's main co-star, Billy Ray Cyrus.

Veteran rapper Nas then joined Lil Nas X for a new song, shouting out Bryant at the end: "Kobe, we love you."

A dark cloud loomed over ceremony since the Recording Academy announced it had put its recently hired CEO, Deborah Dugan, on administrative leave for misconduct. Dugan and her lawyers fired back at the academy, claiming that the awards show is rigged.

But no mention of Dugan was directly made during the three-plus-hour show.

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# Features

ARABO TIMES

TUESDAY, JANUARY 28, 2020

**PARK CITY, Utah:** "Boys" trumped "Gentlemen" in movie theaters over the weekend as **Will Smith** and **Martin Lawrence's** "Bad Boys for Life" easily remained the top ticket seller over newcomer "The Gentlemen".

The third "Bad Boys" film, coming 17 years after "Bad Boys II", sold \$34 million in tickets in its second weekend, according to studio estimates Sunday. The R-rated action comedy from Sony Pictures, which cost about \$90 million to make, has grossed \$120.6 million in two weeks domestically. Second place went to **Sam Mendes' "1917"**, which added theaters in its fifth week of release to keep pace with its Academy Awards momentum. The film grossed \$15.8 million over the weekend to bring its North American total to \$103.9 million. Worldwide, it's taken in \$200.5 million.

It was a good weekend for "1917". On Saturday night, Mendes took the top prize at the Directors Guild Awards, solidifying the World War I tale as the clear Oscar front-runner and Mendes as the favorite for best director. (AP)

**NEW YORK:** **Salma Hayek** is apologizing for promoting a controversial new novel, **Jeanine Cummins' "American Dirt"**, without actually reading it.

"American Dirt", published Tuesday, tells the story of a Mexican woman and her 8-year-old son fleeing to the US border after numerous family members are murdered in drug cartel-related violence. The heavily publicized book has been praised by **Stephen King** and **Ann Patchett** among others and was chosen by **Oprah Winfrey** for her book club. On Saturday, it ranked No. 4 on Amazon.com's bestseller list.

But numerous Mexican-American writers have called "American Dirt" an ill-informed narrative about Mexico that reinforces stereotypes. Cummins, a non-Mexican, even acknowledged in an author's note that she had reservations about

writing the novel. She has said she wanted to personalize the issue of immigration and be a "bridge" between different worlds.

Earlier this week, Hayek had posted a picture of herself on Instagram holding the book, and she praised Winfrey for "giving a voice to the voiceless & for loving harder in response to hate." But after facing criticism online, the



Smith



Hayek

Mexican-American actress pulled back Friday, writing that she was unaware of any controversy. (AP)

**MALIBU, Calif:** **Pamela Anderson** has married movie producer **Jon Peters**.

Anderson and Peters married recently in a private ceremony in Malibu, California, a representative

for Anderson has said.

It's the fifth marriage for both the 52-year-old model-actress and the 74-year-old film producer, who recently reunited after first dating more than 30 years ago.

Anderson's husbands have included rocker **Tommy Lee** and rapper **Kid Rock**. Peters' former wives include actress **Lesley Ann Warren**, and he was once in a long and high-

profile relationship with **Barbra Streisand**. Peters was a producer on Streisand's 1976 version of "A Star Is Born" and the 2018 remake, along with dozens of other films including 1989's "Batman" and 1999's "Wild Wild West".

Anderson starred on television's "Baywatch" and in several films, and has made frequent appearances in magazine. (AP)