

# In possible Oscar preview, 'Nomadland' wins at Spirit Awards

By Jake Coyle

Chloé Zhao's "Nomadland" won best feature at the 36th Independent Spirit Awards in a ceremony that turned the annual beach soiree into a virtual, mostly pre-taped event, and, possibly, an Oscar preview.

The Spirits, usually held in a giant tent on the Southern California coast, have sometimes been a laid back dress rehearsal for the Academy Awards. "Moonlight," "Spotlight," "Birdman" and "12 Years a Slave" all won at the Spirits before taking best picture at the Oscars the next day, though top winners ("The Farewell" won the Spirits' top prize in 2020) have diverged the last few years. But many of the same contenders overlapped this year, including "Minari," "Ma Rainey's Black Bottom," "Promising Young Woman" and "Sound of Metal."

And "Nomadland" has been on a steady march to the Oscars. The film's Spirit win follows others at the Golden Globes, the BAFTAs, the producers guild and the directors guild. Zhao also won best director Thursday at the Spirits, an honor she's heavily favored to win at the Academy Awards.

It was a fitting victory for Zhao's modest drama about rootlessness and community in the American West. Three years earlier on

the day of the Spirit Awards, Zhao and Frances McDormand first met to discuss the project.

Most of the other Oscar nominees went home with Spirit awards, too. Yuh-Jung Youn, the Academy Awards favorite, won best supporting female actor for "Minari." Paul Raci, the 72-year-old veteran working actor who's soaked up his moment in the sun, won best supporting male actor for "Sound of Metal." Emerald Fennell, the writer-director, of "Promising Young Woman," took best screenplay.

## Twist

In one twist, best male lead actor went to Riz Ahmed for his performance in "Sound of Metal" — an award that has usually gone this year to the late Chadwick Boseman for his final performance in "Ma Rainey's Black Bottom."

Carey Mulligan ("Promising Young Woman") took best lead female actor in the category that's perhaps most up for grabs at the Academy Awards. Previous awards have been split between Viola Davis ("Ma Rainey's Black Bottom"), McDormand and Mulligan.

Put on by the nonprofit Film Independent, the Spirits were hosted by Melissa Villaseñor of "Saturday Night Live" and broadcast Thursday night on IFC. The show, removed from the beach, did everything it could to virtually mimic the experience of the awards,

including grouping Zoomed-in attendees by table. Josh Welsh, president of Film Independent, called it "the first ever pants-optional Spirit Awards."

The nominees were especially diverse. None of the best feature nominees — "Nomadland," "Minari," "First Cow," "Ma Rainey's Black Bottom," "Never Rarely Sometimes Always" — were directed by white men. All of the directing nominees — Zhao, Fennell, Eliza Hittman ("Never Rarely Sometimes Always"), Kelly Reichardt ("First Cow") and Lee Isaac Chung ("Minari") — were women or people of color.

Nominees at the Spirits, the premier independent film awards, have to be made for less than \$22.5 million.

The Robert Altman Award, an honor for a film's ensemble, went to Regina King's feature film directorial debut "One Night in Miami..." the fictional account of a 1960s meeting of Muhammad Ali, Malcolm X, Sam Cooke and Jim Brown. The disability rights movement documentary "Crip Camp" won best documentary. Best first film went to Darius Marder's "Sound of Metal."

The Spirit Awards also this year began expanding into television. Among those winners was Michaela Coel's "I May Destroy You" for best new scripted series and for best ensemble in a new scripted series. (AP)

## Variety



This image released by Netflix shows Michael Potts, (from left), Chadwick Boseman and Colman Domingo in 'Ma Rainey's Black Bottom.' Boseman was nominated for Oscar Award for best actor in a motion picture drama. The 93rd Academy Awards will be aired live on Sunday at 8:00 pm EDT on ABC. (AP)

## Film

'Some of this year's changes are here to stay'

# Is this an 'Asterisk Oscars'?

By Jake Coyle

In 93 years of existence, the Oscars have been postponed by shootings — the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. and the attempted killing of Ronald Reagan — and by a flood, when 1938 rainstorms overwhelmed the Los Angeles River. Sunday's ceremony will be the first Academy Awards delayed by a pandemic.

After a year that erased movie titles from marquee and sent seismic shockwaves through Hollywood, the show is going on — two months later than usual, in a crowdless ceremony at Los Angeles' Union Station and with a batch of nominees that have barely played in movie theaters. The biggest box office of the best-picture nominees belongs to "Promising Young Woman" — a pandemic blockbuster with \$6.3 million in US ticket sales.

That this is all very strange goes without saying. Given such an unusual year, this year's awards have been called the "Asterisk Oscars." But there is reason to believe, and even to hope, that some of this year's changes are here to stay.

The broadcast, beginning 8 p.m. EDT Sunday on ABC after a red-carpet pre-show, will be the most transformed in decades. The show's producers, led by filmmaker Steven Soderbergh, are pledging an entire makeover, one perhaps long overdue for an institution resistant to innovation. They plan to treat the awards more like a movie, including shooting it in 24 frames-per-second, rather than the typical 30. Zooms are strictly forbidden. Instead, tested and quarantined maskless nominees will gather at the downtown train station, while satellite feeds connect others from around the world.

On the heels of a humbling year, the Oscars — usually a frothy night of self-congratulation — this year may feel more like a therapeutic rally for an industry in the midst of convulsive change.

Just the weeks leading up to the Academy Awards saw one of Los Angeles' most iconic movie theaters, the Cinerama Dome, along with ArcLight Cinemas, go out of business. When the Walt Disney Co. announced that it would delay "Black Widow" from May to July and open it both theatrically and on Disney+, cinemas shuddered. Adding to the sense of wholesale change was the news that Searchlight Pictures' Nancy Utley

and Steve Gilula — who have steered so many Oscar winners, including this year's best-picture favorite, Chloé Zhao's "Nomadland" — were stepping down.

"Even as the pandemic is winding down, I don't know that we're going to return to business as usual," said Darnell Hunt, dean of UCLA's College of Social Sciences, who studies Hollywood.

That's good news, too. 2020 saw, Hunt says, "profound diversity" unlike any year before. In a study released Thursday and authored by Hunt and Ana-Christina Ramón, researchers found that 42% of roles overall and 39.7% of lead roles in 2020 films were played by actors of color — roughly in line with US population demographics.

There are many caveats. Representation still lags behind the camera and among executives. With many of the biggest studio films put on hold, smaller, lower-budget films — many of them streamed — were much of 2020's atypical output. But the diversity of those films has also transferred to the Oscars. In recent years, the film academy — which this year extended eligibility by two months and to films that bypassed movie theaters — has made strides in expanding its membership. In the coming years, the academy will institute inclusion standards in the best-picture category.

## Record

A record nine of the 20 acting nominees are non-white. If Viola Davis ("Ma Rainey's Black Bottom"), Chadwick Boseman ("Ma Rainey's Black Bottom"), Yuh-Jung Youn ("Minari") and Daniel Kaluuya ("Judas and the Black Messiah") all win — as they did at the Screen Actors Guild Awards — it would be the first time people of color swept the acting awards, and a dramatic reversal from the recent years of "OscarsSoWhite."

More women are nominated than ever before. Two — Emerald Fennell ("Promising Young Woman") and Zhao — are nominated for best director for the first time. (Only five women have ever been nominated until now.) Zhao, the clear front-runner, is poised to be only the second woman to ever win the award, and the first woman of color.

Yes, it's an odd year. But with a class of widely admired films and roundly applauded nominees from groups that have historically been marginalized by the

academy, a sea change in Hollywood is set to stirringly take the stage.

"This is clearly a watershed moment for the Oscars," says Hunt. "It shows us what's possible. If you go for generations without ever acknowledging the actors, director and writers of color, it's hard to break out of that pattern. Now we're creating a whole new culture of what's Oscar worthy."

Streaming — "a different animal," says Hunt — has played a major role in making the film industry more inclusive. But it's also disrupted and morphed movie culture. The Oscar nominees, like most films in the past year, were watched largely at home in more solitary settings than the packed theaters that usually feed the buzz of Oscar season. "Nomadland" found its largest audience, after a theatrical run, on Hulu. Netflix leads all studios with 36 nominations. Movies are more widely and more easily accessible on streaming services, but their grip on popular culture is potentially less firm amid oceans of digital content.

According to a survey last month of 1,500 active entertainment consumers by the research firm Guts + Data, not many people are familiar with this year's Oscar nominees. Some 35% hadn't heard of any of the eight films up for best picture. Warner Bros.' "Judas and the Black Messiah" ranked highest with 42% awareness but only 12% had watched it. Sunday's lead-nominee, Netflix's "Mank," was unfamiliar to 82% of respondents.

You could chalk some of that up to people having their attention elsewhere during a global pandemic. But some believe cinemas are the missing link. On Sunday, Patrick Corcoran, vice president of the National Association of Theater Owners, hopes to see a connection between movies "and the movie theaters that make the experience of seeing movies so special."

"I think people already feel that," says Corcoran. "It's why the ratings for movie awards shows have fallen so precipitously this year — movie theaters are the missing element that drives the interest in movies and lifts their presence in the culture."

Award show ratings, along with everything else on linear television, had been declining before the pandemic. Last year's Oscar broadcast, in which Bong Joon Ho's "Parasite" triumphed, had the smallest US audience ever, with 23.6 million total viewers, according to Nielsen. (AP)

# Features

## ARABIC TIMES

SUNDAY, APRIL 25, 2021

**NEW YORK:** Rapper DMX will be mourned at a memorial with family and close friends at the Barclays Center in New York.

The memorial will be held for him at the arena in **Brooklyn** on Saturday at 4 p.m. EST. The event will be closed to the public and restricted to only close friends and family due to pandemic conditions.

Organizers said in a statement they will follow New York COVID-19 testing guidelines and protocols. The statement said that New York State limits indoor arenas to 10% capacity.

The ceremony will be live-streamed on DMX's YouTube channel.

No details were given about who may be appearing, performing or speaking.

DMX, whose birth name is **Earl Simmons**, died April 9 after suffering a "catastrophic cardiac arrest." He spent several days on life support after being rushed to a New York hospital from his home April 2.

The 50-year-old Grammy-nominated rapper delivered iconic hip-hop songs such as "Ruff Ryders' Anthem" and "Party Up (Up in Here)." He also starred in several films including "Belly" and "Romeo Must Die."

DMX was a father of 15 children. His funeral service will be held Sunday at 2:30 p.m. EST. It will be broadcast live on BET and the network's YouTube channel. (AP)

**LOS ANGELES:** Shock G, who blended whimsical wordplay with reverence for '70s funk as leader of the off-kilter **Bay Area** hip-hop group Digital Underground, has died. He was 57.

**Nzazi Malonga**, a longtime friend who served as head of security and helped manage the group, said the rapper-producer was found unresponsive Thursday in a hotel room in **Tampa, Florida**. Malonga said the performer, born **Greg Jacobs**, had struggled with drug addiction for years.

The group found fame with the Billboard Top 10 hit "Humpty Dance" in 1990, as Jacobs donned a Groucho Marx-style fake nose and glasses to become one of his many alter egos, Humpty Hump. He initially maintained the flamboyant Humpty was a separate person, doing in-character interviews and sometimes having his brother **Kent Racker** play the part. "Same Song" a year later served

as 2Pac's introduction to music fans, with Shock G handing the baton to the future megastar, who had been working as a roadie for Digital Underground: "2Pac, go 'head and rock this."

Jacobs was an introverted "technical wizard" adept at arranging samples who played keyboards and drums, said Digital Underground co-founder **Jimi Dright**,



DMX



Shock G

known as Chopmaster J. Dright met his future bandmate while buying equipment at a music store in **San Leandro, California**, where Jacobs was working.

**Big Boi, Chuck D, Snoop Dogg and Busta Rhymes** were among those posting online tributes to Jacobs, with many expressing pain after the deaths earlier in the month of rappers DMX and

Black Rob. "Our brother Shock G was a GIANT. There's not one aspect of what we do musically that this man has not influenced," wrote **Talib Kweli**.

"The Humpty Dance" invited an audience of awkward youth into hip-hop with its embrace of misfits and outcasts. "Stop whatcha doin' / 'Cause I'm about to ruin / The image and the style

that ya used to," Shock G rapped with lighthearted bravado. "I'm crazy / Allow me to amaze thee / They say I'm ugly but it just don't faze me."

"The Humpty Dance" spoke to all the people that were like him — the fat people, the unattractive people. If you moved like him, you could be whatever you want," said Malonga. (AP)