

'The Exiles' and 'Nanny' Win Top Prizes at Sundance

A documentary revisiting dissidents from the Tiananmen Square massacre and a horror film about an undocumented domestic worker took the U.S. Grand Jury prizes at the festival.

Jan. 28, 2022



Christine Choy in the directors Ben Klein and Violet Columbus's "The Exiles," which won the U.S. Grand Jury Prize for documentary at the Sundance Film Festival. Sundance Institute

The horror/drama "Nanny" from the first-time feature filmmaker Nikyatu Jusu nabbed the U.S. Grand Jury prize

at this year's Sundance Film Festival, which was primarily virtual for the second year in a row. The film about a Senegalese nanny working for a privileged family in New York City generated strong reviews and is still looking for distribution.

"The Exiles," about three exiled dissidents from the Tiananmen Square massacre in China, won the Grand Jury prize for U.S. documentary. "Utama," a Bolivian character portrait, nabbed the top award for world dramatic film, while the Indian documentary "All That Breathes" took the world documentary Grand Jury Prize.

Anna Diop in "Nanny," one of the standouts in this year's lineup.via Sundance Institute

"Cha Cha Real Smooth" nabbed the Audience Award in the U.S. dramatic competition just days after it sealed a \$15 million distribution deal with Apple — the biggest sale of the festival. The crowd-pleaser was written, directed by and stars Cooper Raiff in his sophomore effort. Dakota Johnson also stars.

In the documentary space, the surprise screening of "Navalny," which CNN and HBO Max will release later this year, won both the audience prize in the U.S. documentary competition and the Festival Favorite award. The film tracks the aftermath of the poisoning of Alexei Navalny, the Russian opposition leader and one of Vladimir Putin's harshest critics. Directed by Daniel Roher, "Navalny" debuted to rave reviews and brought additional attention to the dissident who has been jailed in a Russian prison for

over a year.

In his speech after winning the audience prize, Roher said he hoped the film would help people "learn about the courage it takes to bring down an authoritarian regime."

Other audience awards went to "Girl Picture" (World Cinema Dramatic), "The Territory" (World Cinema Documentary) and "Framing Agnes" (Next).

"Today's awards represent the determination of visionary individuals, whose dynamic work will continue to change the culture," said Joana Vicente, the chief executive of the Sundance Institute.

The festival made a last-minute decision to go virtual because of concerns over the highly contagious Omicron variant, and the awards were announced in a two-hour string of tweets, which included speeches from each of the winners.

"Whether you watched from home or one of our seven satellite screens," said the festival director, Tabitha Jackson, "this year's festival expressed a powerful convergence; we were present, together, as a community connected through the work."

In addition to Apple's purchase of "Cha Cha," other high-profile sales included two by Searchlight Pictures: the horror film "Fresh" from the director Mimi Cave and "Good Luck to You, Leo Grande," starring Emma Thompson as a

repressed widow who hires a sex worker. Both films will bypass theaters and debut on Hulu in the U.S.

Sony Pictures Classics picked up "Living," the remake of the Akira Kurosawa film "Ikiru" starring Bill Nighy as a civil servant who discovers he has a fatal illness; and IFC Films will release "Resurrection," starring Rebecca Hall, in theaters before it debuts on the streaming service Shudder.