

FY 2020-2021 Virginia Film Festival Annual Report

2020 Film Festival by the Numbers

The 33rd annual Virginia Film Festival presented **over 170 films and events** in a hybrid virtual and drive-in format over 5 days from October 21-25, 2020, with **more than 11,000 streams, and over 680 vehicles attending ten drive-in screenings** held at Dairy Market in Charlottesville and Morven Farm in Albemarle County, and ticket sales revenue of **\$60,170**.

Notable Films

- The 2020 Festival kicked off with two sold-out Opening Night Drive-in screenings of ***One Night in Miami***. The film marks the directorial debut of Regina King, stars Leslie Odom Jr. as Sam Cooke, and is based on Kemp Powers' stage play of the same name. The film was introduced by UVA President **Jim Ryan**.
- The Centerpiece Film was the highly anticipated ***Ammonite***, directed by Francis Lee, and starring Kate Winslet as the noted 19th Century British paleontologist Mary Anning and Saoirse Ronan as a woman sent to work and convalesce with Anning by the sea.
- The Festival closed with a sold-out drive-in screening of critically acclaimed and newly-crowned Virginia Film Festival Audience Award-winner ***Nomadland***, introduced by UVA Executive Vice President and Provost Liz Magill. The film stars Frances McDormand and is directed by **Chloé Zhao** who also accepted VAFF's inaugural **American Perspectives Award for Outstanding Achievement in Cinema** in a message broadcast prior to the film.
- The Festival presented Spotlight Screenings of impactful documentary films: ***All In: The Fight for Democracy***, a timely investigation on the racist practices of voter suppression; Sundance Grand Jury Prize winner ***Boys State*** following 1,100 high school civics students for a mock government exercise at the annual Texas Boys State competition; ***When My Time Comes***, an examination on the option of medical aid in dying; and ***Never Too Late: The Doc Severinsen Story*** including a discussion with the longtime *Tonight Show* bandleader.
- VAFF **Audience Award Winners** included *Nomadland*, *They Ain't Ready for Me*, *We Got This*, and *The First*. The 2020 **Programmers Award Winners** included *Dinner in America*; *Hamtramck*, *USA*; *Moneybag Head*; and *Call Center Blues*. The **Reel South SHORT Award** winner was *Lipstick and Leather*.

Featured Guests

- Four-time Academy Award nominee **Annette Bening** participated in a conversation with author and Turner Classic Movies host **Ben Mankiewicz** about some of her many unforgettable performances.

- **Vince Gilligan**, the creator of Emmy Award-winning series *Breaking Bad* and its current sequel *Better Call Saul*, joined his producing partner on the two series, **Mark Johnson** to discuss their record-breaking collaboration. It's a collaboration that began at the inaugural Virginia Film Festival in 1989, where Johnson presented Gilligan with the Governor's Screenwriting Award for his script for *Home Fries*, which went on to star Drew Barrymore. The conversation was moderated by UVA English Professor William Little, who teaches an annual course on *Breaking Bad*.
- Groundbreaking actress **Linda Hamilton**, known for portraying one of the most iconic action hero characters, Sarah Connor in *The Terminator* Franchise, talked about her life and career in a special conversation with UVA President **Jim Ryan**.
- Actor, writer, director and four-time Academy Award nominee **Ethan Hawke** was joined by award-winning author **James McBride** for a conversation around *The Good Lord Bird*, the new Showtime and Blumhouse TV series based on McBride's book, in which Hawke portrays abolitionist John Brown. The conversation included **Joshua Caleb Johnson**, who co-stars in the series, executive producer and showrunner **Mark Richard**, and costume designer **Amy Andrews Harrell**.
- The multi-talented actor **Leslie Odom, Jr.** joined the VAFF for a conversation about his role as the legendary Sam Cooke in our Opening Night Film *One Night in Miami*, the remarkable career launched by his Tony Award-winning performance in *Hamilton*, and more. The conversation was moderated by Soraya McDonald, culture critic for *The Undefeated*.
- The Festival welcomed an array of artists and subjects from the film and television worlds, including award-winning filmmaker and Charlottesville native **Nicole Kassell** (*Watchmen*), noted NPR host and Peabody-award winner **Diane Rehm** (*When My Time Comes*), prominent film composer **Thomas Newman**, longtime *Tonight Show* bandleader **Doc Severinsen** (*Never Too Late: The Doc Severinsen Story*), and former Obama and Reagan White House photographer **Pete Souza** (*The Way I See It*).
- Overall, the Festival programmed 43 discussions and engaged with over 160 guest artists, community experts, and UVA faculty to participate together in introducing and discussing our films.

Programming Team

This year, the VAFF full-time programming staff, including Festival director **Jody Kielbasa** and program manager **Chandler Ferrebee**, were supported by a team of guest programmers including UVA assistant professor of New Media and indigenous artist and filmmaker **Federico Cuatlacuatl**; filmmaker and programmer **Joe Fab**; UVA assistant professor of Cinema and international film scholar and curator **Samhita Sunya**; and Washington Jewish Film Festival director **Ilya Tovbis**.

University Partnerships

The 2020 Festival engaged with **36 UVA faculty and staff** and **10 UVA alumni** to participate in introductions and discussions as filmmakers, discussants, and moderators in our film program. In addition, we worked directly with **5 UVA students** as filmmakers or arts administration interns. And finally, we collaborated with **16 Departments and Programs** to create, host, and promote our programming to the UVA Community.

The **Transborder Blackness and Indigeneity** film sidebar, curated by UVA Assistant Professor of Studio Art **Federico Cuatlacuatl**, included three films capturing the rich culture, struggles, and lives of the people of Mexico, all directed by women filmmakers. The films examine and reflect on identity: from multi-generational attitudes in *Tote Grandfather*, to tackling the “invisibilization” of Mexico’s African heritage in *Jamaica y Tamarindo*, and featuring five afro-descendant women whose stories expose racism, resistance through the processes of self-acceptance, and strategies for transcending stereotypes in *Negra*.

Curated by UVA Assistant Professor of Cinema **Samhita Sunya**, the **Middle Eastern and Southeast Asian** film sidebar showcased four films that take place across the Middle East and South Asia, themed around the role of religion in everyday life. *You Will Die at Twenty* is a poignant coming of age story set in a Sudanese village, about a young man whose death at twenty is prophesied by a sheikh at his birth. *Filmfarsi* is a fast-paced essay film that showcases an incredible collage of lost-and-found footage that illuminates the complexities of “filmfarsi,” the wildly raucous Iranian popular—and populist—cinema banned after the 1979 Islamic Revolution. *Eeb Allay Ooo!* is a dark comedy-drama, inspired by migrant workers contracted by the Indian government to scare monkeys (held to be sacred kin of the Hindu monkey-deity Hanuman, and therefore not killable), which remain a nuisance in the vicinity of the Rashtrapati Bhavan presidential compound in New Delhi. *Nasir* is a tender, realist film that invites us to walk in shoes of a Muslim man who works in a fabric shop in contemporary South India, amidst the backdrop of intensifying majoritarian Hindu nationalism.

The Festival partnered with **UVA Korea Society** to present three films from South Korea: *Bori*, a heartwarming family drama about an 11-year-old girl who lives in a sea village and is the only hearing family member, portraying a message of acceptance while tackling themes of identity and belonging; *Lucky Chan-Sil* offers the story of a passionate woman and the people around her, all ordinary and struggling with life in their own ways; and Hong Sangsoo’s *The Woman Who Ran*, which earned him the Silver Bear for Best Director at the 70th Berlinale, finds the celebrated Korean auteur using his characteristic humor and grace in mining universal realities from everyday interactions. The series was supported by the UVA Korea Society and the Korea Cultural Center, Washington, D.C.

In partnership with **The Miller Center**, the Festival presented ***Statecraft: The Bush 41 Team***, a documentary detailing President George H.W. Bush's personal relationships with foreign leaders, diplomatic skills, and years of experience in national security affairs. The screening was

followed by a discussion with the film's director Lori Shinseki, former National Security Council staff member Philip Zelikow, and former Governor of New Hampshire John Sununu, moderated by The Miller Center's **Bill Antholis**. VAFF and The Miller Center also partnered on a discussion with Former Obama and Reagan White House photographer **Pete Souza** on the new documentary *The Way I See It*, in which Souza shares iconic and behind-the-scenes photos, and remembrances from his time seeing, living, and shooting history in the making, in a special conversation with former Deputy Secretary of Labor **Chris Lu**.

In partnership with **UVA Center for Politics**, the Festival presented *All In: The Fight for Democracy* an informative and engaging documentary, in which Stacey Abrams is joined by several scholars and legal experts as they trace the history of the right to vote, and investigate racist practices of voter suppression and how these barriers continue to disenfranchise predominantly non-white voters today. UVA Center for Politics' Larry Sabato moderated a discussion with director **Lisa Cortes** and VA **Congressman Bobby Scott**. VAFF also partnered with the Center for Politics to present *Boys State* a political coming of age style documentary following the escalating tensions that arise within a riveting high school gubernatorial race. The presentation included an introduction by U.S. **Senator Tim Scott**, a discussion with former VA **Governor Terry McAuliffe**, and a discussion with filmmakers **Jesse Moss** and **Amanda McBaine**, and subject **Steven Garza**, also moderated by Sabato. The screening and discussions were also presented as VAFF's 2020 School Screening for area middle and high school educators and students.

In a partnership with UVA's stunning **Morven Farm** in southeastern Albemarle county, the VAFF brought audiences together for safe and socially-distanced drive-in movies each night of the five day Festival. The films included Opening Night Film *One Night in Miami* introduced by UVA President Jim Ryan, *Ammonite*, *MLK/FBI*, *Gunda*, and Closing Night Film *Nomadland* introduced by UVA Vice President and Provost Liz Magill.

Community Partnerships

The Festival partnered with **Light House Studio**, a youth filmmaking nonprofit studio in Charlottesville, to present fourteen films by Charlottesville youth filmmakers.

The Festival partnered with **VPM - Virginia's Home for Public Media** to present *Heard* a documentary capturing the inspiring stories of four people who grew up in "the projects," surviving and thriving in spite of and often because of the challenges they've had to overcome. Now they're giving back to their home communities and trying to make a better life for those who come behind. The screening included an introduction by VPM Executive Producer Mason Mills, and discussion with filmmaker Martin Montgomery; and subjects TJ Thompson, Von Johnson, Cotina Brake, Gwendolyn Harris, and Demonte Cosby; moderated by UVA's Division for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Communications Director Lorenzo Dickerson.

For the first time this year, the VAFF partnered with **Reel South**, to present the Reel South SHORT Award. Reel South is a cooperative documentary series between the South's PBS member stations, including Virginia's VPM. The award honors outstanding achievement in Southern documentary short-form at film festivals across the South. This year's Reel South SHORT Award winner at the Virginia Film Festival was *Lipstick and Leather*, directed by Amy Oden, which explores the "alt-drag" community in Washington, D.C. and how these performers are spreading their influence across the east coast

Outreach & Education

The VAFF offered UVA full-time enrolled students access to the Festival's 2020 Virtual Program through UVA Art\$. The Festival issued 473 free Art\$ Student Passes to UVA Students.

This year, the VAFF's Outreach & Education program engaged area middle and high schools by presenting a free virtual School Screening of *Boys State*. Five area schools signed up to participate. In addition to the discussions and introductions available in our overall program, UVA Center for Politics Youth Leadership Initiative Director of Instruction Meg Heubeck introduced the film. The program also included a discussion guide covering themes in the film like democracy; civil engagement; civil discourse; race & politics; and gender, masculinity, and identity.