



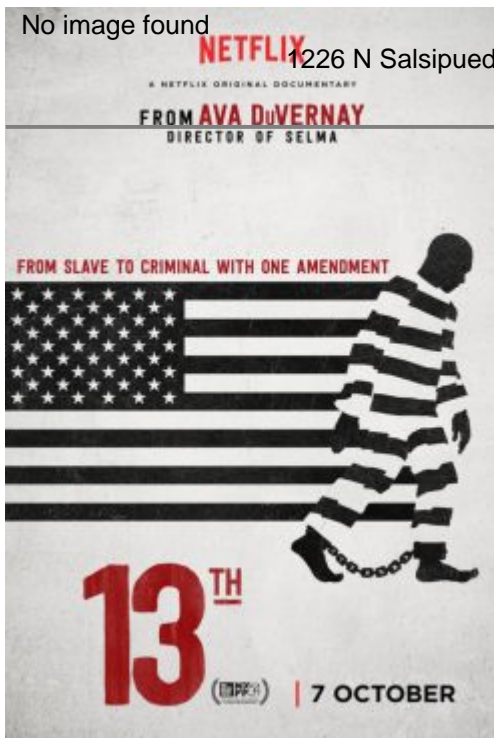
Oscars & The New York Film Festival: How Will The Big Apple Event Affect The Race?

Description

Posted by Larry Gleeson

By Pete Hammond

When the 54th annual New York Film Festival opened making history. Ava DuVernay's powerful *13th* which explores the history of race relations through the prism of prisons and the preponderance of young black and Latino men who make up a large part of their populations, will become the first documentary to open the Big Apple festival. It will also be the first one that will become available on television just a week later when it debuts on Netflix day-and-date with a limited theatrical release.



The choice of *13th* surprised many, as major Oscar contenders

normally fight to get that high-profile slot. By making this choice, NYFF has thrust the Netflix doc right into the awards-season limelight and perhaps propelled its chances to prevail in the nascent Best Documentary Feature race. Certainly NYFF has had its footprint in past Oscar seasons by debuting the likes of eventual Best Picture nominees *Hugo*, *Lincoln*, *Bridge of Spies*, *Her*, *Life of Pi* and *Captain Phillips*, to name a few. *Birdman*, an eventual Best Picture winner, played New York for its official North American premiere (even though it unofficially played Telluride at the time) and skipped the more awards-centric Toronto fest, causing lots of friction at the time between TIFF and Telluride.

Coming just two weeks after what is known at the fall festival trifecta of Venice/Telluride/Toronto, NYFF carefully has used its opening, centerpiece and closing slots as bait for Oscar-hungry contenders. With the unusual choice of *13th* as its opener and James Gray's *The Lost City of Z* a 2017 release not playing in this year's awards sandbox as the closer, the NY event risked losing some of the Oscar cred the other three fests have built up.



Cast of *20th Century Women* (Photo courtesy of A24)

The centerpiece film from savvy indie A24, Mike Mills's transcendent *20th Century Women* is a certain contender with a brilliant performance by Annette Bening as well as wonderful turns by Greta Gerwig and Elle Fanning as the influential women in the life of a young man somewhat reminiscent of Mills himself. The December release is sure to generate Oscar buzz once it premieres next week in New York.

After the official announcement of this year's NYFF lineup, the festival sprang two more contenders on awards watchers's most significantly the October 14 world premiere of Ang Lee's much-anticipated *Billy Lynn's Long Halftime Walk*, which will be shown in a groundbreaking format of 120 frames-per-second 4K 3D. It is an ultra-real process that no mainstream studio release has been exhibited in before and will be watched just as carefully for Oscar potential as the new film from a man who already has two directing Oscars for *Brokeback Mountain* and *Life of Pi*, as well as one for his 2000 Foreign Language Film winner *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*. For those of us stuck on the West Coast, studios usually offer up a simultaneous screening of this type of contender in Los Angeles, but not for *Billy Lynn's*. The process is so delicate, NYFF had to go to a specially equipped commercial theater in New York City instead of the fest's normal site of Alice Tully Hall.



Natalie Portman portrays Jackie Kennedy in Pablo Larrain's bio-epic, *Jackie*. (Photo courtesy of V)

Another film, just recently announced, is Fox Searchlight's *Jackie*, which will have its U.S. premiere at NYFF after a world premiere in Venice and North American launch in Toronto. The NYFF screening is sure to further Best Actress speculation for Natalie Portman's uncanny Jackie Kennedy in the film from Chilean director Pablo Larrain (who has his Foreign Language Film entry *Neruda* playing New York). Like *20th Century Women* it doesn't open until December, so a key festival slot like this keeps it front and center in the awards conversation that now is going in earnest.

This is a very long festival, running from tonight through October 16, but the actual number of movies being shown that hope to advance through the *also* very long awards season is rather small compared with, say, Toronto, which had nearly 300 movies on display. Several titles from this year's Cannes lineup — including *Aquarius*, *Elle*, *Toni Erdmann*, *Graduation*, *Julieta*, *Neruda*, *Paterson*, *Personal Shopper*, *Sierranevada*, *Staying Vertical*, *The Rehearsal*, *The Unknown Girl* and *I, Daniel Blake* — also show the impact that world-renowned film festival in the South of France always seems to have on this one in New York. Percentage-wise, it is a much higher number than Telluride or even Toronto poached from Cannes. Additionally, two very promising indie players will continue their fest exposure at NYFF: Sundance sensation *Manchester by the Sea* and A24's terrific *Moonlight*, which debuted at Telluride. Both also played TIFF.

All in all, the 54th edition of NYFF promises to be, as usual, a very arty affair that could be seismic in terms of Oscar impact, if that October 14 unveiling of Sony's big hope, *Billy Lynn's Long Halftime Walk*, ignites the race the way many think it could. Of course, it should be remembered that just last year another big, technically innovative Sony hope with *Walk* in its title tried to make a similar splash and sent some people running for the exits with vertigo. You never know.



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Category

1. Venice International Film Festival

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