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Sundance News: â??Fighting the Systemâ?? Emerges as Major Theme in 2022 Lineup

Description

Posted by Larry Gleeson

Having watched Adam McKayâ??s latest film, *Donâ??t Look Up*, I am pleased to report the emergent theme â??Fighting the Systemâ?? for the upcoming Sundance Film Festival, slated for January 20th to the 30th, 2022.



DOWNFALL: The Case Against Boeing reflects a Festival-wide-observed theme of challenging authority.

By Vanessa Zimmer

Two years of hunkering down in the face of a worldwide pandemic, battered almost daily by political divisiveness and racial strife, tends to make one rebellious.

It makes sense, then, to see that defiant spirit reflected in the 2022 Sundance Film Festival program lineup â?? as well as a tendency for filmmakers to experiment during the lockdown with different ways of telling their stories, often crossing genre lines in the process.

â??The films we saw this year were really made against the odds, under challenging circumstances, (with filmmakers) being inventive in how theyâ??re telling their stories, in the way they explore intimacy, just creating films in a way that is imaginative,â?• says Kim Yutani â?? the Festivalâ??s director of programming since 2018 â?? in a Zoom interview. Yutani, who started out programming short films for the Sundance Institute 15 years ago, is quietly passionate about the 2022 lineup.

Festival programmers, who this year painstakingly whittled down 3,762 feature-length submissions to the final 82 selections â?? and that doesnâ??t count Shorts, Midnight, and other film categories; total submissions were 14,849 â?? strive to create a balanced slate of films each year. Under Yutaniâ??s direction, this team seeks films that are meaningful and inspiring, in addition to being simply entertaining.

â??We want films that entertain because itâ??s a *festival*,â?• Yutani stresses. â??I go to festivals to be entertained, but also to have those very significant, meaningful momentsâ?¦ where the conversations are inspired by the films that we are seeing, the filmmakers we are discovering, the work that is launched at Sundance that we will continue to talk about throughout the year â?? through, hopefully, awards season.â?•

She adds that last part with a broad smile because she knows what sheâ??s talking about. Yutani has seen Sundance-supported films like *Judas and the Black Messiah*, *The Father*, and *Promising Young Woman*, and their casts and crews, perform strongly in countless awards competitions, including the Oscars.

Below, dive into some of Yutaniâ??s initial observations about the 2022 Sundance Film Festival lineup.

Fighting the System



Thandiwe Newton stars in Godâ??s Country*.*

As the 2022 lineup came together: â??One of the themes that we saw emerge this year was around fighting the system,â?• Yutani said. â??And that felt very connected to the times weâ??ve been living through.â?•

From the pursuit of democracy to the battle over control of womenâ??s bodies â?? â??and also just calling into question institutions, corporations, these big establishmentsâ?• â?? that theme surfaced time and again across the 82 feature films, both fictional and documentary, Yutani says.

Examples:

- ***DOWNFALL: The Case Against Boeing*** (Premieres), a Rory Kennedy documentary that explores two deadly Boeing 737 crashes and looks at â??the cost of human life through corporate greed,â?• says Yutani.
- ***Godâ??s Country*** (Premieres), which finds a Black college professor, played with intensity by Thandiwe Newton, consistently undermined and fought prejudice at every turn.
- ***Master*** (U.S. Drama), also portraying racism in an academic setting, follows three Black women at an elite New England university. It enfolds a supernatural element, which leads us to the next theme Yutani observes in the 2022 films:

Genre-Blending



FINAL CUT *imagines what could happen when real zombies infiltrate a zombie movie.*

Typically, the Festivalâ??s Midnight section showcases horror and psychological thrillers, and it will at the 2022 Festival as well, but some of those elements infiltrated other categories in lively fashion. â??It seems to me that artists were experimenting and looking at how they were telling their stories by using genre tropes,â?• says Yutani.

Examples:

- ***FINAL CUT*** (Premieres), a â??delightful film about making a low-budget zombie movie,â?• as Yutani describes it. â??Itâ??s kind of a love letter/romp to filmmaking.â?• BÃ©rÃ©nice Bejo is entertaining: â??I have never seen her quite like this, giving roundhouse kicks, a very physical performance, very funny performance,â?• says Yutani.
- ***Resurrection*** (Premieres), a suspenseful film starring Rebecca Hall as a single mother haunted by her past. â??It goes off the rails in the best possible way,â?• quips Yutani.

First-Time Sundance Directors



First-time feature-film director Reid Davenport shot I Didnâ??t See You There *from the seat of his wheelchair.*

Thirty-nine of the 92 feature-film directors, or 42%, in the lineup are directing their very first feature film. â??That really speaks to the nature of discovery at Sundance,â?• Yutani says, and offers proof that Festival programmers are always looking for new and provocative voices.

Examples:

- ***Leonor Will Never Die*** (World Drama), by Filipina director (and screenwriter) Martika Ramirez Escobar, is a film hilariously described as the story of a retired filmmaker who falls into a coma after television land on her head and becomes the action hero of her unfinished screenplay. Essentially, this is also a â??love letter to filmmaking,â?• says Yutani.
- ***The Cow Who Sang a Song Into the Future*** (World Drama), by Chilean director (and co-screenwriter) Francisca Alegria, a film described by Yutani as an ambitious project that imagines a world where the dead come and go with the living â?? and which â??speaks very meaningfully about the environment.â?•

- ***Honk for Jesus, Save Your Soul*** (Premieres), by director and screenwriter Adamma Ebo, a mockumentary that â??takes a hilarious look at Black religious institutions,â?• with strong performances from Sterling K. Brown and Regina Hall, according to Yutani.

- ***I Didnâ??t See You There*** (U.S. Documentary), in which Reid Davenport tells a first-person story from his wheelchair; it is â??powerful,â?• â??emotional,â?• and â??inventive,â?• says Yutani.

- ***When You Finish Saving the World*** (Premieres), an â??exciting debut filmâ?• by Jesse Eisenberg and starring Julianne Moore. Eisenberg has been at the Festival before as an actor, but never before as a director (and screenwriter).

- ***Sharp Stick*** (Premieres), by Lena Dunham, the story of a naive 26-year-old woman living on the fringes of Hollywood. Dunham has been a producer and actor at the Festival, but she appears for the first time as a Sundance director (and screenwriter) at the Festival in 2022 . â??Itâ??s exciting to see (Dunham) come back as a major voice in independent cinema,â?• says Yutani, adding with a laugh: â??She takes us into a gray area, challenging audiences â?? as is her way.â?•

Strong Biographical Documentaries



Fellow comedian Amy Poehler tells the story of Lucille Ball and Desi Arnaz in Lucy and Desi*.*

The Festival typically screens several films about real people, and 2022 brings in documentaries on some of todayâ??s brightest and most controversial. â??These characters who are part of the public consciousness, we want to have deeper dives, to understand them more,â?• says Yutani.

Examples:

- ***jeen-yuhs: A Kanye Trilogy*** (Premieres), a documentary, by Clarence â??Coodieâ?• Simmons and Chize Ozah, with never-before-seen footage from 21 years in the life of musical icon Kanye West
- ***The Princess*** (Premieres), a documentary, by Ed Perkins, on Princess Diana that challenges much of what we think we know about the peopleâ??s princess
- ***La Guerra Civil*** (Premieres), Eva Longoria BastÃ³nâ??s documentary on the legendary rivalry between boxers Oscar De La Hoya and Julio CÃ©sar ChÃ¡vez
- ***Lucy and Desi*** (Premieres), a documentary directed by actor and comedian Amy Poehler that testifies not only to Lucille Ballâ??s influence on comedy but also to her acute business sense

â?? as well as the position of power attained by the Cuban-born Desi Arnaz. The film is featured on opening night in Salt Lake City.

- ***We Need to Talk About Cosby*** (Premieres), a documentary by comedian W. Kamau Bell that examines the public and private persona of comedian and actor Bill Cosby, who was abruptly released from prison this summer after his sexual assault conviction was overturned.



(Sourced from Sundance blog)

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