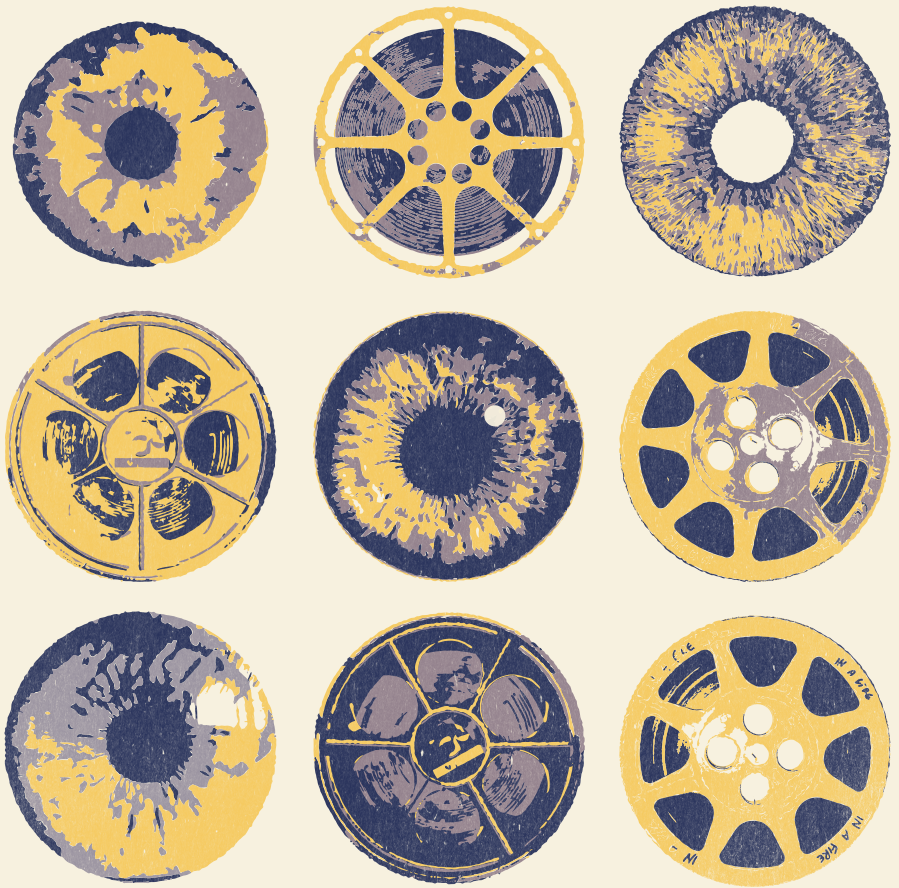


FIRST



LOOK 2026

FOCUS
FEATURES
A COMCAST COMPANY



WELCOME TO FIRST LOOK 2026!

Thank you for joining the School of Cinematic Arts in celebrating our next generation of innovative filmmakers! The compelling projects in this year's First Look showcase are stellar examples of the foundational values of SCA filmmaking: story, collaboration, determination, resilience. As you'll see, the results are impressive.

To those of you who provided emotional or financial support to these filmmakers during their SCA journey: A special thank you! We know you are our partners in helping make their professional dreams come true. Please continue to support them as they work towards building fulfilling careers. Our Office of Industry Relations, which puts on this showcase, will also be there to help them launch festival runs, perfect resumes and other application materials, and land their first jobs!

Congratulations to all the filmmakers whose names appear in the end credits. This is the beginning of another exciting period of your filmmaking careers.

Elizabeth M. Daley

Steven J. Ross/Time Warner Professor and Dean
USC School of Cinematic Arts

I firmly believe that film has been the major art form of the 20th century, and will continue to have a powerful influence on our culture and society. So please enjoy this exposure to the "Learning Exercises" of some of tomorrow's important artists. I'm proud to be a participant in this program.

MARCIA LUCAS

Sponsorship for this program is made possible by a grant from The Ohana Foundation, a private foundation funded by Marcia Lucas.

FIRST LOOK 2026 NOMINEES

INDUSTRY AWARDS

ANIMATION

So Be It
WALKIE
Feathers and Leaves

COMEDY

Dirty Fuzz
Nuns With Guns

DRAMA

You Look Like You've Seen A Ghost
Little Fierce Loong
Breathe, Brother, Breathe

DOCUMENTARY

Artificial Love
All of Us Girls
Songs They Buried

SOCIAL CHANGE

The Day You Find Your Name
Adelante Matador
Negro League Nights

GENRE

At What Cost?
Igor
Empty Lands

PANAVISION PITCH NOMINEES

Madison Hatchett: "Magnolia and Rhodes Do Murder"
Laura Colbert: "Gratuity"
Tianmi Zhang: "Mother of Mothers"
Uhoman Moltok: "Baby Bump"
Kiki Kuhakan: "How to Get a White Guy"

FACULTY AWARDS

OUTSTANDING DIRECTING AWARD

Ari Johnson: "Bury Me In Color"
Tyler Coon: "I Love You More Than Dinosaurs"
Daniel Chimes: "Dirty Fuzz"

OUTSTANDING CINEMATOGRAPHY AWARD (DOCUMENTARY)

Miley Luo: "All of Us Girls"
Andrew Bansal: "Songs They Buried"
Yaxin Mao: "Artificial Love"

OUTSTANDING CINEMATOGRAPHY AWARD (NARRATIVE)

Christy Chen: "Goldie"
Daeil Kim: "The Woman is Perfected"
Arman Khaghani: "The Things I Leave Behind"

OUTSTANDING EDITING

Martin Luna: "Dirty Fuzz"
Karim EIDin EIAly & Martin Luna: "Empty Lands"
Ann Anlan Tao & Lisa Ranran Hu: "Little Fierce Loong"

OUTSTANDING PRODUCING

Nicholas Grimaldi & Míngjūn "Maggie" Zhèng: "Igor"
Sonia Bhatia & Dhruv Patel: "Aayat"
Quinnolyn Benson-Yates & Arwen "Ziyu" Wang:
"Breathe Brother Breathe"

OUTSTANDING SCREENWRITING

Laura Colbert: "Black Seeds Continue to Grow"
Alexander Whitover: "Igor"
Adam Yuster: "Dr. Supernova's Evil Plan"

OUTSTANDING SOUND DESIGN

Jeffery Jiang & Tosin Omolola: "Songs They Buried"
Kevin McAuliffe: "I Love You More Than Dinosaurs"
Borna Moinpour: "You Look Like You've Seen A Ghost"
Kevin Remy & Linnan Liu: "Little Fierce Loong"

OUTSTANDING PRODUCTION DESIGN

Jordan Godburn: "Starman"
Tiger George: "I Love You More Than Dinosaurs"
Elise Frances Garner: "Goldie"



Watch USC First Look films at
industryrelations.usc.edu/register/

Invite Code: **FL2026USCSCAIR**

DRAMA

9

16:10

At her surprise 30th Birthday party, a woman is forced to confront her estranged mother and the childhood trauma that tore them apart.



Aayat

16:01

Aayat, a seven-year old local girl in Kashmir forms an unlikely friendship with a stern army officer, Lt. Vikram Singh which blossoms until Vikram realizes it was him that killed Aayat's father for being a suspected militant insurgent.



Breathe, Brother, Breathe

20:00

An asthmatic Iranian-American high schooler learns the trumpet to keep a precious friendship intact, reconnect with his emotionally distant family, and take control of his fragmented life.



Bug

10:42

A haunted woman confronts her father — a convicted serial killer — in order to extract the location of his final victim; only to find herself trapped in a game of memory, manipulation, and buried guilt.



Eulogy

12:26

Following the death of her mother, a young woman processes their tumultuous yet loving relationship as she struggles to write the eulogy the day of the funeral.



I Love You More Than Dinosaurs

14:55

Two childhood sweetheart's once-playful love is put to the test by the stresses of adulthood--exposing to them the funny and painful truth about needing to grow up... *Literally*.



If You Can Catch Me

11:43

After experiencing the loss of her boyfriend, Cadence finds trouble processing her grief. In order to get back to her old self, she needs to relive what happened and find peace to move on.



Little Fierce Loong

17:50

When two lonely children from vastly different worlds clash over a magical Chinese wooden dragon, their shared imagination takes them on a surreal journey that reshapes their beliefs.



Manongs

14:00

Set in 1965 California, an immigrant Filipino farm worker must decide whether to join NASA's Astronaut Program, or stay and strike with his fellow workers.



Rebound

17:37

When her best friend makes the girls' varsity basketball team instead of her, high school sophomore Julia must overcome her jealousy to maintain their friendship.



MODEL M!NORITY The Musical

17:46

Set in New York City, a meek Filipino woman is faced with the shocking news of a loved one's murder in a hate crime. She must then choose between ignoring the increasingly personal musical numbers or finally confront her feelings... and sing!



Perennials

16:57

After the death of his loving mother, a grieving middle-aged man risks fracturing his tight-knit Chilean Canadian family as he struggles to confront his deep grief and shame.



Starman

12:21

Stranded since an accident took the lives of his crew, a grieving astronaut contends with a newfound fear of leaving his station while attempting to fulfill a dying boy's final wish: to see space.



The Demon Core

27:23

A dramatization of the final days of Louis Alexander Slotin, the physicist who sacrificed his own life in order to save his colleagues during a criticality incident in 1946 involving a plutonium core known as The Demon Core.



The Things I Leave Behind

13:34

Needing to escape a WILDFIRE raging towards her home - young HAILEY must decide what she will take with her...and what to LEAVE BEHIND.



Wasabi

15:00

Following the death of her husband, a pregnant Senegalese writer moves in with her estranged Japanese mother-in-law, forcing them to confront their painful pasts and brewing tensions.



Why Frogs Cry in the Rain

12:56

As a devastating hurricane approaches their rural town, a stubborn daughter and her terminally ill father must decide whether to stay or leave before it's too late.



You Look Like You've Seen A Ghost

17:40

Following strange occurrences at his once-childhood home, Noah Lowell wonders whether a supernatural element may be at play, uncovering deep familial traumas and secrets beneath the mansion's coffered walls - forcing him to confront his own 'ghosts'.



COMEDY

Bury Me in Color

9:26

When two estranged sisters reunite for their mother's funeral, their opposing approaches to grief spark tension, leading them to rediscover the bond they thought they'd lost.



Clucky's

9:56

Mia, an overworked shift-leader at Clucky's (A Fried Chicken Fast-Food joint), is put to the test when a mysterious figure takes up residence in the restaurant bathroom while she's trying to keep the drive-thru moving.



DefCon 4

30:32

Sitcom Pilot: A disgraced 90's hip-hop group gets a second shot at fame when their old cringe video goes viral- if they can reunite with help from their lead singer's estranged daughter.



Dirty Fuzz

15:01

When an idealistic rookie cop accidentally shoots her corrupt partner in the slimy underbelly of Shit City, she must team up with a surprising crew of underworld characters to cover her tracks.



Dr. Supernova's Evil Plan

14:58

A supervillain father's evil scheme to destroy his arch-nemesis is jeopardized by an unexpected visit from his bubbly 10-year-old daughter.



FOR OLD TIME'S SAKE

13:58

An actor known only by his role as Tater Tot, the world famous human-size cat, has his personal life put on full display during a late night show interview, causing his reality to collapse as he confronts whether this is the role he still wants to play.



John

17:22

A Black female lawyer who disguises herself as a white man after mistreatment to navigate the corporate world with more privilege.



Just Friends

14:04

After getting double-dumped, two dorky best friends scramble to find dates to the school dance, but bubbling romantic feelings threaten to destroy their lifelong friendship.



Nuns With Guns

13:46

When three Nuns find out that their church is shutting down, they take matters into their own hands... by robbing a bank.



The Clark Family Road Trip

12:32

Two siblings and their mom embark on their annual family road trip, only this year they are bringing along their deceased father's ashes.



The Dead Matriarch's Jewels

17:41

Los Angeles. A Russian wake. A con man pretends to be a depressed young man's therapist to steal his dead grandmother's family jewels.



The Jobber

16:08

A naive luchador dreams of one day winning the championship belt like his father but is stuck wrestling as a racist gangbanger persona; he must now choose between pursuing the belt or staying true to his lucha libre roots.



ANIMATION

Blooky: The Book Who Wanted to Be Read

5:40

A brand-new little book gets lost in a vast library and journeys through every section in search of his rightful place among the shelves, only to discover that sometimes the most meaningful place isn't where you fit in best, but where you're needed.



Feathers and Leaves

5:58

An acorn adopted and raised by a blue jay dreams of flying—but as he grows, he must confront who he truly is, and where he truly belongs.



Fluff & Furious

3:43

A fluffy pup, inspired by its wild relative, sets out to prove it's more than just a soft fur ball.



Hertz

9:32

An astronaut and a want-to-be opera singer, a forgotten space theater, an unexpected encounter in the last moment of their life; the recovery of a past, and a bond through their swan song.



Sean the Baby

7:04

Three years old baby Sean explores his dreamworld with his dad to complete his potty training.



SIX

4:01

A werewolf breaks into the mansion of a renowned monster hunter to mourn the loss of a loved one, only to be confronted by the hunter and forced to fight for his life.



So Be It

7:28

Five senior LGBTQIA+ couples share their resilient love stories, reflecting on identity, aging, and love while offering younger generations inspiring role models.



WALKIE

4:53

While Dog and Cat can't make a commitment on what's for dinner, they fall into a totally surreal place where they must make a final decision in order to get through it.



DOCUMENTARY

All of Us Girls

22:57

As Yifeng opens up to her closest friends in late-night talks about sexual assault, shared vulnerability becomes the path to healing.



Artificial Love

22:52

A lonely man finds companionship in ChatGPT, leading to an unconventional romance that challenges the boundaries of love and what it means to be human.



Cringe

20:07

With just 5 weeks to gain 1000 subscribers, a documentarian revisits his childhood dream of becoming a YouTube star.



Never Never Land

25:00

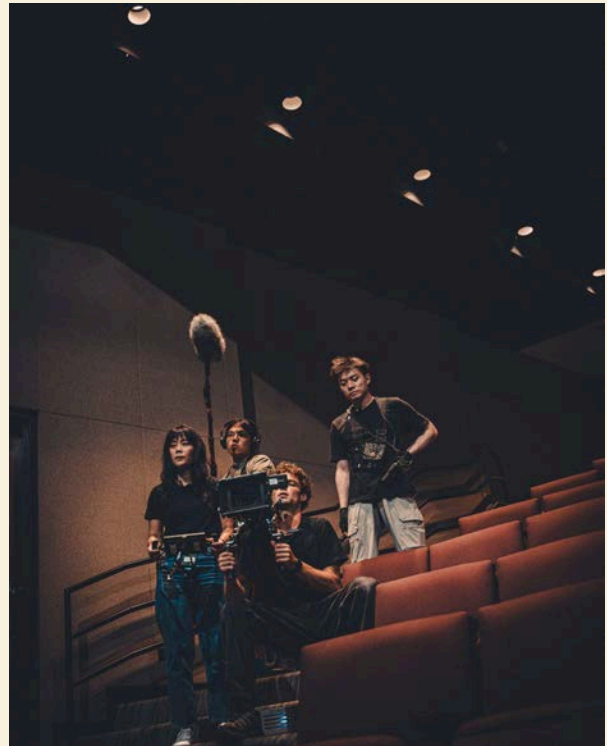
Through a worn teddy bear and a threadbare green sweater, the film explores how childhood objects hold memory and emotion, quietly helping us process trauma and endure the quiet struggles of everyday life.



Songs They Buried

24:52

After the 2021 military coup forces Burmese rock star R. Zarni into exile, he attempts to rebuild his life in America while struggling to keep his music and his identity alive, as the very country that shaped him tries to erase his existence.



SOCIAL CHANGE

Adelante Matador (Onward Matador)

22:22

After one of Mexico's most celebrated matadors legacy is at risk, his vengeance to get back into the arena is challenged when having to face the primeval traditions of bull fighting with modern times and estranged wife.



Black Seeds Continue to Grow

15:47

An idealistic yet overworked teacher discovers an unexpected connection to the past with a guarded 15 year old foster youth proving that kindness isn't just a gesture, it's a force for change that can echo across generations.



Hania's Home

16:00

When her daughter starts rejecting their heritage to fit into American life, her Pakistani mother must confront her own fears of losing family, identity, and the meaning of home.



Made in America

10:57

A migrant girl seeks to uncover the truth after her best friend's disappearance from a late-night factory shift.



Negro League Nights

13:01

In 1923, Doc Sykes, renowned pitcher in the Negro Leagues, takes a stand against discrimination when he's denied use of a shower room at Yankee Stadium.



The Day You Find Your Name

15:07

At the height of the Black Panther movement, a pregnant Afeni Shakur battles 189 felony charges, forced to defend herself in a trial that could cost her freedom and her unborn child's future.



GENRE

At What Cost?

18:56

In a drought-ravaged future, a scientist must choose between saving his addicted brother or protecting his pregnant wife after a government drug begins to turn his brother into something inhuman.



Empty Lands

17:25

When a soldier and his wife move into a state-subsidized house, the mystery of a missing daughter from the family who once lived there disturbs their domestic life.



Goldie

12:51

A washed-up clown in a 1930s circus fights to reclaim her spotlight—by any means necessary. Goldie is a dark, dazzling circus thriller about female ambition, identity, and performance.



Igor

13:48

A gothic romance centered on Victor Frankenstein's assistant, Igor, who's reconciling the horrific treatment he's received in his life because of his deformed appearance as he falls further and further in love with Victor.



Legacy

15:52

When a debt-ridden technician Charlie takes a high-stakes job at an illegal memory-wiping facility, she uncovers the preserved memories of a dying researcher whose final wish is to save a rare medicinal plant- Silver lilies. Charlie must choose to erase the legacy for profit or risk her future to preserve it.



MARY

14:04

In a world where blood with a specific gene mutation produces a psychotropic drug, Mary, a blood provider, attempts to escape the agency employing her before she and her closest friend die from a spreading disease.



The Woman is Perfected

17:11

An obsessive young woman refuses to leave a destructive relationship, not realizing that her futile desire for perfection has become more toxic than her codependence.





JURY MEMBERS





COMEDY - Adam Belanoff grew up in Chappaqua, NY, received his BA in English at Columbia and his MFA in Screenwriting from the USC School of Cinema-Television. As a writer and producer, Adam's credits include "Star Trek: The Next Generation," "Murphy Brown," "Partners," "Titus," and "Judging Amy." Adam also spent six years as a Writer/Co-Executive Producer of "The Closer." He most recently served as a writer and Co-Executive Producer of Sony and Fox TV's reboot of "Fantasy Island." In 2017, Adam was the recipient of Columbia University's I.A.L. Diamond Award For Achievement In The Arts.



DOCUMENTARY - Amelia Hanibelsz is an award-winning Executive Producer and Primetime Emmy-nominated Supervising Producer with over 20 years of international documentary experience. She is currently working on a deeply personal documentary called "Unpacking Grief", created in memory of her beautiful mum, Esther, who passed away earlier this year, and her father, Kenneth, who passed away 27 years earlier. As the CEO and Founder of Tell2C Productions, a collective of female filmmakers for change, Amelia is driven by the belief that storytelling has the power to connect us all. Having lived and worked in more than ten countries, she's built a career around stories that cross borders.



ANIMATION - Brian Doell is currently Executive Director of Physical Production at Sony Pictures Animation overseeing a new slate of animated Series. He is a 2005 graduate of the USC Film & Television Production program, and over the past 20 years he has worked in various roles at studios like Disney, Warner Brothers, and Netflix on projects that include TRON:Uprising, Gravity Falls, and DuckTales.



ANIMATION - **Daisy May West** is an animation filmmaker and producer whose work has spanned a variety of genres, animated mediums and audiences. Beginning her career as an animator, Daisy's work has played in festivals across the world as she partnered with creatives such as Isabella Rossellini, Australia's Bud Tingwell and companies like Levi's. Most recently, she produced DreamWorks' Spirit Riding Free (2017) and Kung Fu Panda: The Dragon Knight (2021). Daisy is now producing an animated adult series for Netflix based on the Wizards of the Coast game, Magic: The Gathering.



DRAMA - **Danielle Simon's** career is rooted in purpose and powered by storytelling. She is a graduate of Cleveland State University, earning a Bachelor's degree in Business Administration and a Master's degree in Education. She is also a proud member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. Danielle transitioned into the entertainment industry after her original web series captured the attention of a literary agent, opening the door to filmmaking. Danielle currently serves as Head of Distribution at FilmWorks Global, where she leads global initiatives designed to connect filmmakers with audiences worldwide.



SOCIAL CHANGE - **Jacques Thelemaque** is a long-time filmmaking veteran, both as a multiple award-winning writer, producer, and director and as co-founder and president of the Los Angeles filmmaking support organization, Filmmakers Alliance. He launched FA Productions in 2004, was Chief Community Officer of Withoutabox.com in 2005 and held that same position in 2018 at ConsciousGood.com. Jacques was a programmer for the Los Angeles Film Festival from 2011 until its end. He is currently building a new short film streaming platform called BURP, which will launch beta phase in early 2026.



GENRE - **Jason Lubin** is a manager-producer and the principal at First Story Entertainment, which he founded in 2018. The lit management company represents a diverse roster of talented writers and directors with fresh voices in all genres for Film and TV. The company's clients have been on the writing staffs of a plethora of shows, sold series to multiple networks, and directed films selected for the Sundance and Cannes Film Festivals. Jason also develops both feature film and television projects under the company's banner. A graduate of USC, Jason currently sits on the university's Board of Governors as the School of Cinematic Arts' representative and is a former President of the Trojan Entertainment Network.



DRAMA - **Kelley Kali** is an LA native, Howard University & USC School of Cinematic Arts Alumna, and has directed, written, and produced award-winning films. In 2023/2024 she finished directing two studio feature films, *Jagged Mind* for 20th / Hulu and *Kemba* a MPI and BET Original Feature Film. Kelley was selected as a recipient of the 2021 Academy Gold Fellowship for Women in directing and more recently she received the 2024 Amplify Award at Sundance Film Festival from the Sundance humanitarian partner, the Windrider Institute. Kelley's mission is to be a creator who addresses issues within marginalized communities by using the art of filmmaking.



COMEDY - After starting her career as an actress in Europe, **Laurence Schonberg** transitioned behind the camera and went on to co-found the Paris-based production and international sales company Other Angle Pictures in 2008. She has overseen the international sales of more than 100 films, spanning acclaimed festival titles and wide-reaching commercial successes, including the breakout hit "A Little Something Extra." In 2021, she relocated to Los Angeles to focus on developing English-language features rooted in French and European IP, with a particular emphasis on remakes and book adaptations.



DOCUMENTARY - **Mark Jonathan Harris** taught for 40 years at USC's School of Cinematic Arts, where he was a Distinguished Professor. In his long career as a filmmaker, he wrote, directed, and produced numerous award-winning documentaries, including three which won Oscars. He has also written five children's novels, three non-fiction books connected to his films, one collection of short stories, and a novel which will be published this fall.



ANIMATION - Since 2018, **Matt Kaszanek** has been the Director of the Animation Is Film Festival, a celebration of animation as a cinematic art form, presented in collaboration with GKIDS, the Annecy International Animation Film Festival, and Variety. Prior to AIF, Matt was a programmer at Film at Lincoln Center in New York, AFI Fest in Los Angeles, and the Chicago International Children's Film Festival in Chicago. As a distributor, Matt worked at Indovina Releasing. He resides year-round in Chicago.



SOCIAL CHANGE - **Matt Pifko** works in film acquisitions at Kanopy. He has been involved in distribution, production, and development at companies such as Protozoa Pictures and Warner Bros. Outside of his role at Kanopy, Matt works as a filmmaker and programmer. Most recently, he served as an associate producer on Charlie Kaufman's new film, "How to Shoot a Ghost", which premiered at the Venice Film Festival.



GENRE - **Max Geschwind** works in the Media Finance department, which focuses on packaging, sourcing financing for, and/or selling the distribution rights to independently financed films, at leading entertainment and sports agency Creative Artists Agency (CAA). Geschwind, who joined the agency in 2021, is a member of CAA Elevate, a state-of-the-art program for agents and executives in training. He graduated from the University of Southern California with degrees in Cinema and Media Studies and Political Science. Geschwind is based in Los Angeles.



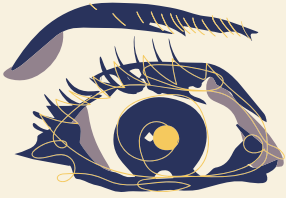
SOCIAL CHANGE - **Noel Braham** is an Emmy-nominated filmmaker and founder of the Micheaux Film Festival, one of the nation's fastest-growing multicultural film festivals. His work bridges cinematic storytelling and social impact. His latest feature, *Angel City*, starring Chris Kattan, draws from his personal journey and explores Hollywood, homelessness, and resilience. Noel has collaborated with brands including Sony, Amazon, and Apple, and is known for elevating emerging voices through purpose-driven storytelling.



DRAMA - **Selin Sevinç** is Managing Director in charge of Programming and Artistic Vision at Bend Film Festival in Bend, OR. Originally from Turkey, she trained as a filmmaker in the UK. She attended international festivals such as Cannes and Berlinale as a film critic, and served on juries at Aspen ShortsFest, Sonoma FF and Big Sky Doc FF, among others, and is an alumna of Berlinale Talents Screenwriters, Netflix/BANFF Media Festival, MIDPOINT Institute, and most recently the Stowe Story Labs as a screenwriter. Her latest script, *HOME SOUNDS*, is in development to be shot in Portland, OR.



COMEDY - After working in finance, **Shoko Takegasa** joined the Short Shorts Film Festival & Asia (SSFF & ASIA). In 2016 she became the programming manager and has participated in screenings and markets at international film festivals to promote the festival as well as the Japanese short films. From February 2021, she began working as Festival Director at SSFF & ASIA. She also worked for the Tribeca Film Festival as a short film screener, and participated in several festivals including an Oscar qualified film festival as a member of the jury.



OFFICE OF INDUSTRY RELATIONS

900 W. 34th Street

SCA 235

Los Angeles, CA 90089

Website: cinema.usc.edu/ir

Phone: 213-740-4432

Email: ir@cinema.usc.edu

INDUSTRY RELATIONS STAFF

Bonnie Chi - Assistant Dean, Industry Relations

John H. Mitchell Endowed Chair, Business of Entertainment

Jilmil - Office Coordinator

Sandrine Faucher Cassidy - Senior Director Talent Development, Festivals & Distribution

Lisa Fox - Director of Talent Development, First Jobs & The Edmond & Marielle Safra Director's Endowed Chair

Patrick Fritz - Assistant Director, John H. Mitchell Business of Entertainment

Derek Horne - Assistant Director for Distribution

Alyssa Katalyna - Special Projects Coordinator

Kellie Brook Malone - Assistant Director of Talent Development

INDUSTRY RELATIONS STUDENT WORKER TEAM

Smera Chandan, Eemaan Qadri, Samar Rahimi, Riya Gupta, Bianca Pomeroy, Christophe Merriam, Ali Prijono, Olivia Rose Keenan, BJ "Brennan" Hardy, Stewart Fenn, Max Libman

CREDITS FIRST LOOK 2026

Sandrine Faucher Cassidy - Executive Producer

Gina Denise Salemi - Producer: Awards Ceremony, Panavision Pitch, Focus Features Award, and Red Carpet & Reception; GFX Supervisor: sizzle reel, in-show GFX, digital program, website

Kellie Brook Malone - Co-Producer: Panavision Pitch and Red Carpet

Eemaan Qadri - Event Coordinator & Certificate Designer

Steven Fox - Sizzle Reel Editor

Eric Freiser - Panavision Pitch Mentor

Angie Canonizado - Program and First Look Designer

Luke Konopasky - First Look Website Designer

Apul Bhalani - Industry Relations Website Designer

Carell Augustus - Event Photographer

SPECIAL THANKS TO

Industry Relations Team

Smera Chandan, First Look Volunteer

BJ "Brennan" Hardy, First Look Volunteer

Desa Philadelphia, Communications And Development Writer

Christina Denning, Director of Alumni Relations

Stacey Lynn, Executive Assistant to the Dean

Ben Pola, Editor/Writer and Social Media Manager

Office of Communication & Public Relations

Andrew Leist, Manager, Theatre Services

Chelsey Young, Cinema Cataloguer Moving Image Archives

Dino Everett, Archivist Moving Image Archives

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