

Oscar-nominated shorts tell deeply emotional tales

Written by By Glenn Kay For the Sun
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The Oscar Nominated Shorts is available on the ShortsTV app.

As a young movie enthusiast, it was always frustrating to watch the Oscars and see categories featuring smaller titles that were difficult to locate. Over the years, the situation has improved dramatically. Today, there are packages being released that allow curious viewers to sample shorts online and on the big screen. The works being featured are always exceptional and it is truly wonderful to see them all with relative ease.

This year the tradition continues as ShortsTV will be presenting all the Oscar-nominated animated, live-action and documentary shorts on their site (some of the categories will also be available to screen at Landmark theaters that are operating).

So, for those interested to learn about what is being offered (or who want to get a sense of what each short is about for their betting pools), here is a rundown of what you can expect to see in these packages. I've addressed each specific entry in alphabetical order.

ANIMATED SHORTS

As always, the Animated Shorts category offers an entertaining selection of creative tales on a wide variety of subjects. It's a difficult chore to engage and move audiences in a brief amount of

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time with animated images, but most of these films do it with ease. In general, the grouping this year is a little more somber than in years past, but whether one is a fan of drama or comedy, the selection is still worth anyone's time.

BURROW (US) follows a rabbit who wants to create a perfect, isolated den. But after the lead character begins digging, problems quickly arise. Not only is the ground filled with other animal homes, but there's a rather large and potentially dangerous water source nearby. This leads to a comic and chaotic scenario and a nice message about joining in with others and helping the community at large. It's a zippy and sweet Pixar production and has the appearance of a traditionally animated 2D film, which ends up giving the short a fresh and distinctive visual style.

OPERA (US/KR) is a wild and imaginative short that slowly unveils a strange, but relatable triangle-shaped world, detailing the various lives and mechanizations working within. As the camera pans, one sees familiar elements of this home and its operation. The movie gets darker as it progresses, quietly critiquing the organization and design of both their world and ours in the process. This little gem is incredible to watch on a big screen, drawing the eyes to various little areas and scenarios as the camera slowly moves around.

LIVE-ACTION SHORTS

As you might have imagined, the Live-Action film category is somber this year. However, several shorts tell their stories in unique and interesting ways that help effectively deliver the various themes being addressed.

Set in New York, **FEELING THROUGH (US)** follows a young man named Tereek (Steven Prescod), as he wanders the city at night without a place to stay. He crosses paths with Artie (Robert Tarango), a blind and deaf man needing assistance getting home. Together, the two form a friendship as they attempt to communicate with each other. They end up making a lasting impression on one another despite their very brief time together. The short is well-acted and the characters make an impression, resulting in a sweet and moving little film.

THE LETTER ROOM (US) is a fascinating tale of a prison guard (Oscar Isaac) whose job involves reading and clearing incoming mail for inmates. In the process, he ends up becoming involved in the personal lives of the convicts. When one message arrives from a significant

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other suggesting that she may partake in a suicide pact, the guard must decide whether to intervene. This is an interesting effort that examines and discusses the unexpected messages and intentions behind correspondence and how they can be misinterpreted.

In ***THE PRESENT (PS)***, a Palestinian father (Saleh Bakri) decides to head across a border checkpoint with his young daughter (Miriam Kanj) in order to pick up an anniversary gift for his wife. It's a horrific experience as they are questioned and mistreated by an Israeli border guard. The return trip is even worse as the hours pass and the pair tries to get their bulky gift back home. This tale effectively shows the degradations an average family must endure on a regular basis to obtain the necessities of life and complete simple errands.

TWO DISTANT STRANGERS (US) is another effective tale that will probably make a big impact on Academy voting members. It follows a young man named Carter (Joey Bada\$\$) who is stopped by a racist cop (Andrew Howard) while leaving his girlfriend's apartment. After being shot, Carter awakens and must repeat the same traumatic events. As the story progresses, Carter attempts all sorts of different approaches to try to escape with his life. While the general concept may remind one of the feature *Groundhog Day*, the powerful subject matter and unexpected plot turns make this drama stand out.

WHITE EYE (IL) manages to tell its entire story using a single shot that follows the central character (Daniel Gad) after he discovers his stolen bicycle on a neighborhood street. He attempts to get help from the police and those around him, so that he can unlock it, but after encountering all sorts of procedural roadblocks, begins to consider if the effort is worth all the trouble. It's another tense and impressive short.

DOCUMENTARY SHORTS

And of course, the Documentary selections are remarkably informative. As you might have guessed, these clips all deal with traumatic and horrible events, so viewers should be prepared for some heavy material.

COLETTE (US) follows an elderly woman who served in the French resistance as a young girl during WWII. After losing her brother during the conflict 80 years ago, she heads to Germany for the first time ever to visit the concentration camp where he lost his life. It's an emotional

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journey as Colette explains her reasons for staying away, how she helped her family fight against the Nazis and how she feels while visiting the site where her brother's life was taken. Old photographs are also displayed to show the horrors the prisoners endured. Overall, the movie makes a strong impression.

A CONCERTO IS A CONVERSATION (US) takes viewers to Los Angeles and details a young and successful African-American composer as he meets with his cancer-stricken grandfather to learn as much family history as he can in the time they have left. The patriarch details living in the South and escaping to California to start a new and better life. He details how he was able to get around hurdles and ultimately succeed. It's a very pleasing tale as the composer starts to realize just how influential his grandfather was in his own life.

The 2019 Hong Kong citizens stood up to protest against the growing power and influence of mainland China. Their actions are detailed in ***DO NOT SPLIT (NOR/US)***. The filmmakers capture stunning footage from the middle of the protests and show conflicts between different factions and the police. You'll also see a group of students being boxed in at Hong Kong Polytechnic University's campus as they try to fend off armed police forces. We see everything up to and through the current pandemic (which has caused a pause in the protests). The documentary shows viewers what it feels like to be in the middle of the bedlam and, for this reviewer, is one of the strongest films of the batch.

HUNGER WARD (US) photographs intimate details of the humanitarian crisis in Yemen. Military strikes have left the country in ruins and starvation is running rampant among the population. The short displays the work of managers and practitioners in a hospital that treats the most severe cases of child malnutrition. It's tragic to watch the fates of some of these infants and the images of them suffering is truly disturbing to witness. We also see the toll the work takes on the physicians and the unwarranted blame that falls on them despite all their efforts to help. This is another powerful feature.

Finally, ***A LOVE SONG FOR LATASHA (US)*** is a Netflix release. It tells the true story of a young woman who was unjustly shot in South Central Los Angeles by a gun-toting store owner while she was attempting to purchase some orange juice. Her sister remembers her experiences with the teenager and describes her sibling's dreams and aspirations that were suddenly ended by the terrible act.

While every viewer will likely have their own individual favorites, all the shorts in the three

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recommended collections are expertly made and most certainly worth checking out if you have the time.

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