

# FILM INDEPENDENT SPIRIT AWARDS

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## **SATURDAY NIGHT LIVE'S MELISSA VILLASEÑOR ANNOUNCED AS HOST OF THE 2021 FILM INDEPENDENT SPIRIT AWARDS**

### **RAMP-UP TO 2021 CEREMONY TO FEATURE FILM INDEPENDENT'S DIRECTORS CLOSE-UP SERIES, MARCH 3 – APRIL 21**

**Awards Broadcast Exclusively on IFC and AMC+  
Thursday, April 22, 2021 at 10:00 pm ET**

LOS ANGELES (February 8, 2021) – Film Independent announced today that SNL's Melissa Villaseñor will be the host of the 2021 Film Independent Spirit Awards on April 22 — cue Villaseñor's much-imitated Owen Wilson impression: *"Ohhh, wow..."* The Spirit Awards are the nonprofit art org's primary fundraiser for its year-round slate of programs, which cultivate the careers of emerging filmmakers and promote diversity and inclusion across the film industry. One such program—the Directors Close-Up, an annual series featuring in-depth panel discussions with the year's most celebrated filmmakers — will be comprised of 100% Spirit Award nominee panelists for the first time ever.

"As someone who considers herself a pretty dependent person, I'm truly honored to host the Film Independent Spirit Awards," said Host Melissa Villaseñor, who in 2016 made history by becoming SNL's first-ever Latina cast member.

"We're thrilled to welcome Melissa Villaseñor into the club of smart, funny film lovers to host the Spirit Awards. The time to laugh has definitely arrived, and not a moment too soon," said Film Independent President Josh Welsh. "We're also excited to launch the Spirit Awards edition of the Directors Close-Up, our awards season program that celebrates and explores the art of directing, in both film and television."

Said Blake Callaway, Executive Director, IFC and SundanceTV, "Melissa and the unique circumstances of now will make this year's ceremony like no other. It will certainly be a departure from the past, but with Melissa, the chances of Dolly, Ariana Grande, Bjork, Gwen Stefani, Julie Andrews and Lady Gaga showing up have skyrocketed."

Past Spirit Awards hosts have included Aubrey Plaza, Nick Kroll and John Mulaney, Kate McKinnon and Kumail Nanjiani, Fred Armisen and Kristen Bell, Patton Oswalt, Andy Samberg, Joel McHale, Sarah Silverman, Samuel L. Jackson, Queen Latifah and John Waters, just to name a few. The show will be executive produced and directed by Joel Gallen of Tenth Planet Production for the seventh consecutive year. Shawn Davis returns as executive producer for Film Independent for his 19th year, Rick Austin returns as producer for his sixth year and Danielle Federico and Andrew Schaff also return as co-producers.

A comedic impressions expert, Villaseñor got her start as a semifinalist on *America's Got Talent*. When not onstage channeling the likes of Lady Gaga and Dolly Parton, Melissa can be found voicing characters in animated shows and films including *Toy Story 4* and *Ralph Breaks the Internet*; appearing as herself with Jerry Seinfeld in *Comedians in Cars Getting Coffee*; and in projects such as *Hubie Halloween*, *Barry* and *Crashing*, among others. She is currently working on her first book, a creative self-help journal forthcoming from Chronicle Books.

The 2021 Spirit Award nominations were revealed in a special video announcement on January 26, presented by guest emcees Laverne Cox, Barry Jenkins and Olivia Wilde. Best Feature nominees include *First Cow*, *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*, *Minari*, *Never Rarely Sometimes Always* and *Nomadland*.

Additionally, for the first time ever, this year's Spirit Award nominees will make up 100% of the panelists at this year's expanded Directors Close-Up series, Film Independent's perennial sellout event featuring in-depth panel discussions with the year's most celebrated filmmakers. This year, the entire program will be presented under the Spirit Awards umbrella.

Boasting a diverse, international lineup of 2021 Spirit Award nominees, the series will include nine sessions taking place over the course of two months, featuring the best directors from indie film, documentary and television—all streamed directly into your laptop, living room or mobile device.

Spirit Award Winners, who are selected by Film Independent Members, will be announced at the Spirit Awards on Thursday, April 22, 2021. In a one-time break from tradition, the ceremony will move from its usual spot as a live daytime event to primetime on Thursday, broadcast exclusively on IFC at 10pm ET. The Film Independent Spirit Awards are sponsored by Premier Sponsor IFC. FIJI Water is the Official Water. Getty Images is the Official Photographer. We are also honored to be partnering with the Association of National Advertisers' (ANA) SeeHer, the leading global movement for gender equality in media, advertising, marketing and entertainment and AMC Networks to further celebrate and act as a catalyst for accurate and meaningful representation in storytelling.

### **Want to vote?**

As always, winners are selected by Members of Film Independent. Members must be current by February 11 to receive full voting benefits, including access to nominee screeners. To join Film Independent and vote on the Spirit Awards, please visit [filmIndependent.org/join](https://filmIndependent.org/join).

To learn more about supporting Film Independent's mission and programs, contact Jennifer Murby at [jmurby@filmIndependent.org](mailto:jmurby@filmIndependent.org). For sponsorship opportunities, please contact Stephanie Terifay at [sterifay@filmIndependent.org](mailto:sterifay@filmIndependent.org).

To learn more about the Spirit Awards eligibility rules and regulations please visit [filmIndependent.org/spirit-awards/faq](https://filmIndependent.org/spirit-awards/faq).

### **ABOUT FILM INDEPENDENT**

Film Independent is the nonprofit arts organization that champions creative independence in visual storytelling and supports a community of artists who embody diversity, innovation and uniqueness of vision. Film Independent helps filmmakers make their movies, builds an audience for their projects and works to diversify the film industry. Film Independent's Board of Directors, filmmakers, staff and constituents are comprised of an inclusive community of individuals across ability, age, ethnicity, gender, race and sexual orientation. Anyone passionate about film can become a Member, whether you are a filmmaker, industry professional or a film lover.

In addition to producing the Spirit Awards, Film Independent produces Film Independent Presents, a year-round screening series for its members that offers unique cinematic experiences for the worldwide creative community as well as film lovers in the general public. Through annual screenings and events, Film

Independent provides access to a network of like-minded artists who are driving creativity in the film industry.

Film Independent's Artist Development program offers free labs for selected writers, directors, producers and documentary filmmakers and presents year-round networking opportunities. Project Involve is Film Independent's signature program dedicated to fostering the careers of talented filmmakers from communities traditionally underrepresented in the film industry.

The winners of the Film Independent Spirit Awards are voted upon by Film Independent Members. Membership is open to the public. For more information or to become a Member, visit [filmindependent.org](http://filmindependent.org).

## **ABOUT IFC**

IFC is the home of offbeat, unexpected comedies. Acclaimed series *Documentary Now!*, *Sherman's Showcase*, *Baroness von Sketch Show* and *Year of the Rabbit* air alongside fan-favorite movies and comedic cult TV shows. IFC is owned and operated by AMC Networks Inc., and available across multiple platforms. IFC is Always On, Slightly Off.

## **ABOUT AMC+**

AMC+ is the company's new premium streaming bundle featuring an extensive lineup of popular and critically acclaimed original programming from across AMC Networks' entertainment networks and a number of the company's targeted streaming services including Shudder, Sundance Now and IFC Films Unlimited, which feature content such as *Riviera*, *Creepshow*, *A Discovery of Witches* and *Boyhood*. Currently available to Amazon Prime Video Channels, Apple TV channels, Roku Channels, Comcast Xfinity, DirecTV, DISH and Sling TV

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