

AWARDS



Filmmaker Oliver Stone accepts the IFP 'Tribute' Award at the 26th Annual Gotham Independent Film Awards at Cipriani Wall Street in New York. — AP/AFP photos



Actor Anya Taylor-Joy accepts the "Breakthrough Actor" Award for her performance in the film "The Witch".



Actor Aziz Ansari accepts the 'Made in New York' Award.



Actress Katie Holmes speaks at the 26th Annual Gotham Independent Film Awards.

'Moonlight' shines brightest at Trump-focused Gotham Awards



Writer - director Barry Jenkins speaks after receiving the 'Best Screenplay' Award for the film 'Moonlight'.

At a Gotham Independent Film Awards overshadowed by the election of Donald Trump, Barry Jenkins' coming-of-age drama "Moonlight" shined brightest. A celebrated film about a boy growing up gay, black and poor in Miami, "Moonlight," virtually swept the night, taking best feature, best screenplay, a special jury award for best ensemble and the audience award. The Gothams, which honor independent film, are essentially the kick-off to Hollywood's long awards season.

Monday night's ceremony, hosted in Manhattan by Keegan-Michael Key, also served as the first opportunity for the film industry - or at least a sizable chunk of its more East Coast, indie contingent - to formally gather since the election. It gave much of Hollywood (which overwhelmingly backed Hillary Clinton) a chance to commiserate over drinks, try out punchlines and make a rallying cry for art's political power. Key, half of the former Comedy Central duo "Key and Peele," opened, with deadpan sarcasm, with what he said was a 4-week-old monologue.

Visibly shocked

"Ladies and gentlemen, we are so grateful that we live in a country that celebrates diversity," said Key. Later, he gave up the guise and spoke earnestly. "Our voices need to be heard now," he said. It was fitting then that "Moonlight" dominated the evening. The string of awards had the cast - which features newcomers Trevante Rhodes, Ashton Sanders and Alex R. Hibbert playing the young protagonist in three chapters - frequently dancing arm-in-arm while

the Gotham crowd stood to applaud.

Though "Moonlight," based on Tarell Alvin McCraney's play, has some big-name backers (Brad Pitt's Plan B produced it), Jenkins played the role of the underdog. "When I made this film, I thought five people would watch it," Jenkins said. In limited release, the low-budget "Moonlight" has already made \$8.5 million, making it one of the year's biggest indie hits. Other top awards went to Casey Affleck, who won best actor for his performance in Kenneth Lonergan's "Manchester by the Sea," and Isabelle Huppert, whose turn in Paul Verhoeven's "Elle" took best actress over favorites such as Natalie Portman ("Jackie") and Annette Bening ("20th Century Women"). The French actress, visibly shocked, said she had been told the Gothams were very American in outlook, and so her chances were slim.

"I feel so American tonight," chuckled Huppert. "I feel good. I feel really good." Others sounded less enthused about their country and the president-elect who resides about 70 blocks to the north of Monday's awards. Oliver Stone, one of the night's four tribute honorees (the others were Amy Adams, Ethan Hawke and producer Arnon Milchan), gave a relatively muted speech, but told filmmakers in attendance: "You can be critical of your government. We've forgotten that." Damian Lewis, the British actor, presented the audience award with a tweak for the electoral college.

Small panels

"The film that receives the most votes ... is the winner," said Lewis with arch emphasis. "It's a brilliant idea." A number of expected Oscar contenders weren't nominated by the Gothams, which select their indie-centric nominees from small panels of industry figures and critics. Absent were late arriving studio releases like Denzel Washington's "Fences" and, most conspicuous of all, Damien Chazelle's Los Angeles musical "La La Land." That \$30 million production (perhaps a bit too pricey for indie qualification), is seen by many as the best picture front-runner.

But Oscar season is just getting started. A string of critics groups will announce their picks this week. And the biggest jolt to the race may have already come via the election. How Trump's victory will affect the mood of Hollywood - will academy members lean toward sunny escapism or more timely social dramas? - has already been one of the season's biggest questions. The Gothams, presented by the Independent Filmmaker Project, aren't historically a good Oscar predictor. But their last two top film picks, "Spotlight" and "Birdman," did go on to triumph at the Academy Awards. — AP



Actress Margot Robbie presents at the 26th Annual Gotham Independent Film Awards.



Writer - director Barry Jenkins, center, accepts the Best Feature Film Award with the rest of the "Moonlight".



Director Roxy Toporowich speaks after receiving the deep euphoria Calvin Klein Spotlight on Women Filmmakers 'Live the Dream' grant at the 26th Annual Gotham Independent Film Awards.



Actress Cate Blanchett presents The Film Tribute Award.



Actress Winona Ryder presents at the 26th Annual Gotham Independent Film Awards.



Actor Ethan Hawke speaks after receiving The Film Tribute Award.