



Lisa Enroth, 41, an emergency nurse and film fan from Skovde, arrives to Hamneskar island, near Marstrand island, north west of Gothenburg, Sweden. — AFP photos



Swedish Sandra Fogel watches a movie alone among empty seats in a cinema hall during the Gothenburg Film Festival.



Passers-by walk in front of the entrance of the cinema Draken, where the Gothenburg Film Festival takes place.

Online Sundance opens to virtual ovation for deaf drama

The Sundance Film Festival, forced online this year by the pandemic, quietly opened to a virtual "standing ovation" for deaf family drama "CODA" Thursday. Taking its title from an acronym for child of deaf adult, "CODA" follows high-school teen Ruby (Emilia Jones) as she juggles her musical ambitions with her family's dependence on her to communicate with the "hearing" world. The first in-competition film to stream for remote attendees of the prestigious indie festival, it drew immediate rave reviews, with Variety calling it "tender, lively, funny, and beautifully stirring," and Deadline praising a "breakout performance" from Jones ("Locke & Key.")

"I would say it's the equivalent of a standing ovation," Sundance programming director Kim Yutani told the cast as she hosted an online Q&A immediately after its streaming premiere end-



In this file photo Emilia Jones attends Netflix's "Locke & Key" series premiere photo call at the Egyptian Theatre in Hollywood, California. — AFP

ed. The unusual debut is a world away from the flashy, red-carpet screenings and after-parties Sundance typically holds each January high in the Utah mountains, where Hollywood migrates to watch and cut deals for the coming year's hottest indie titles.

Sundance organizers have this year invited industry types to "trade in your snow boots for slippers," and created networking events for filmmakers to mingle with audiences in "avatar" based chat rooms and virtual-reality cinemas. "We had a choice to make—we could cancel or move the festival," said director Tabitha Jackson, opening the festival Thursday. "Or we could take a risk

Bernie's Mitten Maker Finds Manufacturer To Fill Order Deluge

A Vermont schoolteacher whose homemade mittens went viral after Senator Bernie Sanders wore them at President Joe Biden's inauguration has found a manufacturer to fulfill the resulting thousands of orders for her cozy gloves. "I have amazing news! I'm partnering with Vermont Teddy Bear to make Bernie's Mittens for EVERYONE!!" Jennifer Ellis tweeted Saturday, adding that some of the proceeds would benefit the Make a Wish Vermont charity. "I knew there had to be a way to get them to you—and I found it!!" the second-grade teacher said.

The 42-year-old had sent Sanders a pair of her mittens, made from repurposed wool sweaters and lined with fleece made from recycled plastic bottles, after he lost to Hillary Clinton in the 2016 Democratic presidential primary, as a consolation gift. Last year, as Sanders was running again for president, Ellis learned that he was wearing the mittens—"people were calling them his oven mitts"—but had lent them to someone



Artist Jonas Never (@never1959) paints a mural of Senator Bernie Sanders in Culver City, California. — AFP

else. Ellis said she was so touched that she sent Sanders another 10 pairs.

The senator's homely brown and beige mittens featured prominently in a photo from the January 20 inauguration showing Sanders sitting alone in a folding chair, bundled up and seemingly unimpressed with the pomp and circumstance. The image by AFP photographer Brendan Smialowski became the first viral meme of the Biden era, with the apparently aloof Sanders superimposed on everything from "Star Wars" scenes to Leonardo da Vinci's "The Last Supper." "Many, many of you have

SWEDISH FILM FESTIVAL OFFERS NURSE AN ISOLATED, ISLAND CINEMA FOR A WEEK

A front-line Swedish nurse is getting some COVID downtime with a week of private screenings of the Gothenburg film festival, in a former lighthouse off the country's west coast. More than 12,000 candidates from 45 countries applied to watch the festival's films in almost near isolation on an island 400 kilometers (250 miles) from Stockholm. The prize is a week viewing as many of the festival's 70 premieres as they like in a hotel in the former Pater Noster Lighthouse. But they will be in isolation and will have no access to their own computer or laptop.

The bright-red lighthouse, built on a tiny island off Sweden's west coast in 1868, is surrounded by a scattering of squat, red buildings originally built to house the lighthouse keeper's family. It can only be reached by boat or helicopter, depending on the weather. After a series of interviews and tests, festival organizers chose emergency nurse and film buff Lisa Enroth for the prize, in keeping with the 2021 festival's theme, Social Distances. Before boarding a small speedboat out to the island on the clear, chill winter's morning, Enroth said she had applied not only out of her love for the cinema, but also to seek respite from her hectic work as an emergency nurse during the pandemic. "It has been hectic, so it's a nice opportunity just to be able to land and to reflect over the year," she said.

Months working amid COVID crisis

Sweden, which has taken a light-touch approach to the pandemic compared to its neighbors, has been facing a stronger than expected second wave of the virus. So far, more than 11,500 people have died from COVID-19 across the country. Enroth works in the emergency ward of a hospital in Skovde in central Sweden. Since the start of the pandemic, her hospital's work caring for virus patients on top of their regular workload has been intense.

"We had a lot of COVID cases during this year and every patient that has

been admitted to the hospital has been passing through the emergency ward," she told journalists.

The organizers said they were surprised by the numbers of applicants for the prize but were confident they had chosen the right candidate—not only for her love of cinema. "She has also dedicated this past year in the frontline against the COVID-19 pandemic," the festival's creative director Jonas Holmberg said to AFP. "That's also one of the reasons we chose her".

Enroth will also have a tablet and headphones if she wants to watch films elsewhere on the island, which measures just 250 meters by 150 meters. With only one other person staying permanently on the island—a safety precaution—Enroth's only contact with the outside world will be through her video diary about the films she has viewed. The festival's films will be shown online and two venues in Gothenburg itself will allow screenings for just one person at a time. Holmberg, the festival's creative



Swedish Sandra Fogel awaits to watch a movie alone among empty seats in a cinema hall during the Gothenburg Film Festival.

Isolated screenings

Boarding the boat dressed in a thick survival suit, Enroth sped over the calm, icy waters, jumping off in the island's tiny harbor and disappearing into her lodgings. A screen has been set up in the lantern room at the top of the windswept island's lighthouse, offering a 360-degree view of the sea and coastline around. Another wide screen has been set up in one of the island's buildings.

Rebecca Hall explores biracial identity in personal debut 'Passing'

British actress Rebecca Hall on Saturday described how she drew on her own biracial identity to direct her first film "Passing", as it premiered at this year's online Sundance Film Festival. Adapted from Nella Larsen's seminal novel, the movie explores "racial passing," as two childhood friends of mixed racial heritage have a chance encounter in 1920s New York while both pretending to be white. "Vicky Cristina Barcelona" star Hall is the daughter of celebrated British director Sir Peter Hall and Detroit-born opera singer Maria Ewing, whose own father was Black.

"It was something in my family that was always known and not known—that my grandfather passed for white, and probably his parents were both African-American and passed for white also," said Hall. After several "evasive" conversations within the family about race, "I started to think about... how I present as this white-passing person, who has all of the privileges and am afforded that because of how I look," she added.

The movie is shot in black-and-white, which Hall said was a "conceptual choice to make a film about colorism... that drains the color out of it." It swaps the usual widescreen format for a tight 4:3 ratio, reflecting the repression both characters contended with from society and from within, as they try to find their place in the world. While Irene (Tessa Thompson) is embarrassed by her attempt to "pass," Clare (Ruth Negga) has disguised herself for years, with a wealthy and oblivious white husband but a yearning for her old community.

"I was so crushed by the psychological cost of feeling you have to make a decision to sever yourself from your community, and essentially from one's self, in order to survive," said Negga. "It's a paradox." The Hollywood Reporter praised Hall's "thoughtful, provocative and emotionally resonant" debut, while others criticized its slow pace, with the Guardian dubbing the film "elegant but inert."

'Grotesque ways'

Also tackling the motif of racial bias from a deeply personal perspective Saturday was the premiere of "Wild

Indian." The film explores the violence and trauma that has stalked generations of Native Americans, through the tale of two young Ojibwe boys who murder a classmate and must confront the truth decades later. Directed by Lyle Mitchell Corbine Jr., who is Native American, the film depicts violence and alcoholism among its lead characters, but places those behaviors within the context of the childhood abuse and racism they also face.



In this file photo taken Rebecca Hall attends the final season premiere event for Showtime's "Homeland" at MoMA in New York City. — AFP

"For a long time Hollywood has portrayed us in grotesque ways," said Michael Greyeyes, one of the film's many indigenous stars. "I felt safe to reclaim that kind of portrayal... in our terms." Also starring are Kate Bosworth and Jesse Eisenberg, who said playing a "metaphor... of the upwardly mobile white guy" as glimpsed by Greyeyes' character was a "vital kind of education that Americans should have." Top US indie film festival Sundance, co-founded by Robert Redford, typically takes place each winter in the Utah mountains, where multi-million-dollar deals are struck for many of the year's most coveted arthouse titles.

Due to the pandemic, all of this year's 72 feature films are making their premieres via online streaming, with the festival ending Wednesday. On Saturday, Apple announced it had won an intense bidding war for global rights to this year's festival opener "CODA." The movie, about a high-school teen who is torn between pursuing a music career and staying home to support her deaf parents and brother, drew a rapturous response from critics at Thursday's premiere. It reportedly sold for a Sundance-record \$25 million. — AFP