

# MILL VALLEY FILM FESTIVAL<sup>48</sup>

2025  
OCT 2-12

## MEDIA ALERT

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## MVFF48 Triumphs, Announces Audience Award Winners Over 42,000 Attendees, 68 Premieres, and Global Cinema Highlights HAMNET NAMED MVFF'S OVERALL AUDIENCE FAVORITE



October 13, 2025 (San Rafael, CA) – Today, the 48th Mill Valley Film Festival (MVFF48) has announced the winners of its Audience Awards after officially wrapping on Sunday, October 12. With 11 days of extraordinary film, artistry, and community, this year's festival drew over 42,000 attendees from across the Bay Area, presenting them with an extraordinary selection of films, tributes, panels, and special events featuring world-renowned filmmakers and talent, emerging creative voices, and thought-provoking stories from 40 countries.

Overall, MVFF48 screened 139 films, including 68 premieres, 77 features, and 62 shorts, with 52% of the lineup directed by women and nonbinary filmmakers. MVFF Education reached over 6,000 students nationwide through virtual programs, in-person screenings, and school visits across Marin County, San Francisco, and the East Bay.

### FULL LIST OF MVFF 2024 AUDIENCE FAVORITES

MVFF Overall Audience Favorite

**HAMNET**

Chloé Zhao

Audience Favorite | Independent Cinema

**IT WAS JUST AN ACCIDENT**

Jafar Panahi

Audience Favorite | World Cinema

**CALLE MÁLAGA**

Maryam Touzani

Audience Favorite | US Cinema

**HONEYJOON**

Lilian T. Mehrel

Audience Favorite | Documentary

**ANDRÉ IS AN IDIOT**

Tony Benna

Audience Favorite | Family

**AKIKO, THE FLYING MONKEY**

Viet Helmer

Audience Favorite | Active Cinema

**FOREVER YOUNG**

David Donnelly

Audience Favorite | Mind the Gap

**HAPPY BIRTHDAY** (narrative)

Sarah Goher

**STEAL THIS STORY, PLEASE!** (documentary)

Carl Deal, Tia Lessin

Audience Favorite | ¡Viva el cine!

**VALENTINA**

Tatti Ribiero

**Other awards given during MVFF this year include:**

**2025 MVFF Awards**

MVFF Award, Acting | Jessie Buckley, *Hamnet*

MVFF Award, Acting | Tonatiuh, *Kiss of the Spider Woman*

MVFF Award, Acting | Joel Edgerton, *Train Dreams*

MVFF Award, Acting | Zoey Deutch, *Nouvelle Vague*

MVFF Award, Filmmaking | Jafar Panahi, *It was Just an Accident*

MVFF Award for Lifetime Achievement | Spike Lee

**2025 Mind the Gap Awards & Prizes**

Mind the Gap Award for Filmmaking | Eva Victor, *Sorry, Baby*

Mind the Gap Award Acting | Rose Byrne, *If I Had Legs I'd Kick You*

Mind the Gap Creation Prize | Tatti Ribeiro, *Valentina*

Mind the Gap Creation Prize Honorable Mentions | Elaine Epstein, Lilian T. Mehrel

The festival opened with five at-capacity screenings of Chloé Zhao's deeply moving *Hamnet*, starring Jessie Buckley, who was recognized during a Spotlight—and a sixth sold-out screening of *Hamnet*—with the MVFF Award being presented to Buckley not only for her exceptional performance in *Hamnet* but her contributions to contemporary cinema at large. With the Oscar-winning director and Oscar-nominated star in attendance, Opening Night reaffirmed MVFF's commitment to showcasing the best of world cinema in the Bay Area. The festival wrapped up with HIKARI's delightful new comedy-drama *Rental Family*, starring Brendan Fraser (*The Whale*, MVFF45).

Oscar-winning director Spike Lee, who received the MVFF Award for Lifetime Achievement, was met with a massive, enthusiastic crowd of fans and film enthusiasts both outside and inside the Smith Rafael Film Center before his tribute. The event was presented by longtime friend and collaborator Delroy Lindo (*Da 5 Bloods*, MVFF43). Other festival highlights included at-capacity Spotlight programs for Zoey Deutch, Joel Edgerton, and Tonatiuh, all of whom received MVFF Awards prior to screenings of their latest films—*Nouvelle Vague*, *Train Dreams*, and *Kiss of the Spider Woman*, respectively. The latter film, which spotlighted Tonatiuh, also included a live discussion with director Bill Condon (*Gods and Monsters*, MVFF21).

This year, Rose Byrne, who gives a career-best performance in *If I Had Legs I'd Kick You*, and Eva Victor, who made their stunning directorial debut with *Sorry, Baby*, received the festival's Mind the Gap Awards, while first-time director Tatti Ribeiro received the coveted Mind the Gap Creation Prize for her remarkable hybrid film, *Valentina*. Acclaimed Iranian director Jafar Panahi experienced visa delays and was not able to attend the screening of his new film, *It Was Just An Accident*, in person, but producer Phillipe Martin was present for a timely Q&A, with the film ultimately winning an MVFF Audience Award.

With world premieres of several major films, as well as screenings of 14 World Cinema titles that have been selected as their respective countries' Academy Award submissions, MVFF48 once again affirmed its place as a premier destination for filmmakers and film lovers alike.



Photos: Top Row (L-R) Jessie Buckley, Courtesy Focus Features; Tonatiuh, Courtesy Roadside Attractions; Joel Edgerton, Courtesy Netflix; Zoey Deutch, Courtesy Netflix; Jafar Panahi, Courtesy Neon  
Bottom Row (L-R) Spike Lee, Courtesy A24; Eva Victor, Courtesy A24; Rose Byrne, Courtesy A24; Tatti Ribeiro, Courtesy "Valentina"

“The 48th Mill Valley Film Festival was a resounding success by every measure,” said **Mark Fishkin, Founder and Director of the Mill Valley Film Festival**. “Attendance reached its highest levels since 2019, and audiences responded with immense enthusiasm to the caliber and diversity of this year’s films. From the emotional impact of Chloé Zhao’s awards contender *Hamnet* to the joyful humanity of HIKARI’s *Rental Family*—featuring Brendan Fraser in a luminous turn that captivated more than a thousand filmgoers—the festival reminded us why cinema matters.

First-time feature filmmakers were especially inspiring, proving that the next generation of storytellers is crafting work that resonates across cultures and generations. Taiwan’s Oscar submission, *Left-Handed Girl* and *Lucky Lu*, shot in New York by a Korean-Canadian director, both struck a chord with audiences and demonstrated the global vitality of independent film.

Our State of the Industry panel, featuring veteran producer Ron Yerxa (*Little Miss Sunshine*), echoed this spirit of renewal—underscoring the resilience of theatrical exhibition and the opportunities ahead. Overall, the festival radiated joy and optimism—a powerful reminder of film’s enduring ability to connect and inspire our community.”

**Zoë Elton, MVFF Director of Programming**, added, “This year is an affirmation of the power of cinema, with films from so many cultures and perspectives connecting us to this moment in time. It’s amazing how stories open hearts and minds and remind us of who we are. That spirit was alive throughout the Festival—from *Yanuni*, part of our Active Cinema initiative with guest Indigenous chief and climate justice leader Juma Xipaia, to *¡Viva el cine!*’s opening film, the Brazilian drama *Secret Agent*, a story that resonates across time and place.

Our equity initiative *Mind the Gap* reached a milestone, celebrating its 10th anniversary with honorees Eva Victor and Rose Byrne—two artists whose work challenges and inspires us to think and feel differently. The *Mind the Gap Summit*, with *Democracy Now!*’s Amy Goodman delivering a powerful keynote among the Mill Valley redwoods, truly captured the heart of what this Festival is about.

And to honor masters like Jafar Panahi and Spike Lee this year was extraordinary. Both continue to push the boundaries of cinema and deepen its impact in ways that stay with us.”

**CAFILM Education Director Angela Colabella** said, “This year, we witnessed what happens when young people are given full access to the power of cinema. Nearly 1,500 more students than last year joined us at the festival, and filmmakers brought their stories directly into Bay Area classrooms, sparking dialogue, curiosity, and creativity. Watching students encounter films that reflect both their own lives and worlds far beyond their own reminds me that the future of storytelling is in extraordinary hands. These young audiences are engaged, insightful, and unafraid to ask big questions. In a time when hope can feel fleeting, their energy and openness offer a beautiful reminder: the next generation isn’t just watching films, they’re learning how to shape the stories that will define our future.”

**Local filmmakers** were also celebrated, with premieres like Tony Benna’s *André is an Idiot, Brother Versus Brother* by Ari Gold, *Diamond Diplomacy* by Yuriko Gamo Romer, Dan Geller and Dayna Goldfine’s *Everywhere Man: The Life and Times of Peter Asher*, and Mill Valley resident Tatti Ribeiro’s *Valentina*.

The Festival’s Active Cinema section showcased films that not only reflect the world—they challenge it. United by a commitment to social and environmental justice, these works inspired audiences to think critically, feel deeply,



and take action. This year's lineup included *Arrest the Midwife* by Elaine Epstein, which examines the prosecution of midwife Liz Catlin and the broader crisis in U.S. maternal healthcare; David Donnelly's *Forever Young*, an exploration of the science, technology, and ethics of extending human life; Geeta Gandbhir's Sundance-winning *The Perfect Neighbor*, a powerful look at race, fear, and Florida's "Stand Your Ground" laws; *The Ramba Effect* by Claire Sandberg, documenting an Asian elephant's 2,550-mile journey from captivity to freedom; Nathaniel Lezra's *Roads of Fire*, an unflinching view of global migration and human resilience; and Richard Ladkani's *Yanuni*, an urgent investigation into the perilous politics of the Amazon rainforest.

For the 10th anniversary of MVFF's *Mind the Gap* gender equity initiative, we celebrated the bold, boundary-breaking work of female and nonbinary filmmakers whose voices continue to push cinema—and society—forward. This year's program kicked off with the *Mind the Gap Summit*, a dynamic half-day of conversations and master classes led by visionary artists and changemakers including **Ellie Foubmi** (*Our Father, the Devil*, MVFF46), **Elaine Epstein** (*Arrest the Midwife*), **Christine Turner** (*Sun Ra: Do the Impossible*), and trailblazing journalist **Amy Goodman** (*Steal This Story, Please!*). Other highlights included the \$10,000 *Mind the Gap Creation Prize*—awarded to **Tatti Ribeiro** for her stunning hybrid film *Valentina*—and a packed 10th Anniversary Dance Party featuring DJ Lady Ryan of the Golden State Valkyries. Bold. Joyful. Unstoppable. *Mind the Gap* continues to expand the frame of inclusion and ignite change through film.

The ¡Viva el cine! initiative celebrated the vibrancy and diversity of Ibero-American cinema, featuring films in Spanish and Portuguese, as well as Latinx and Latin American stories from around the world. Showcasing films that reflect the depth of these cultures, the program offered a space where history, identity, and imagination converge. Highlights included *Runa Simi* from Peru, a moving portrait of language and resilience; *The Message* from Argentina, a powerful exploration of family and faith; *Honeyjoon* and *The Luminous Life* from Portugal, both rich in emotion and visual poetry; *The Secret Agent* from Brazil, a taut and inventive political thriller; and *The Mysterious Gaze of the Flamingo* from Chile, a visually stunning allegory of innocence and fear.

MVFF48's **Family Films** program offered something for audiences of all ages—a lively mix of adventure, imagination, and heart. This year's lineup included animated wonders like *Arco* and *Akiko, the Flying Monkey*; inspiring tales such as *Hola Frida* and *Animal Farm* (featuring the voices of Seth Rogen, Woody Harrelson, Kathleen Turner, and Glenn Close); and engaging short film programs including *Animation Nation*, featuring work from UCLA and CSU Long Beach, and *Tomorrow Is Forever*, a youth-produced showcase of creativity and courage. A festival favorite, The Hoopla, brought the magic to life with pony rides, a petting zoo, balloon art, face painting, and Shake Shack treats—making MVFF48 a celebration of cinematic adventure and community fun for kids and kids-at-heart alike.

For over 30 years, **CAFILM Education** has brought the magic of the festival directly to students, engaging thousands of K–12 learners across the Bay Area and nationwide. This year, CAFILM Education welcomed back educators and students for the 48th Mill Valley Film Festival with free in-theater matinees at the Smith Rafael Film Center in San Rafael and the Sequoia Cinema in Mill Valley, plus online streaming via the MVFF Education platform. Programs included narrative features, documentaries, and shorts curated for young audiences, often accompanied by filmmaker Q&As. The popular *Filmmakers Go to School* initiative connected students directly with directors, writers, and producers for engaging, real-world conversations, while free curriculum materials—lesson plans, discussion guides, and film-analysis tools—helped teachers extend the experience into the classroom. Serving grades 1–12 and college students, MVFF Education continued to inspire creativity, spark dialogue, and empower the next generation of filmmakers.



Jon M. Chu & Andrew Stanton ©Tommy Lau Photography



Delroy Lindo and Spike Lee ©Tommy Lau Photography

A few standout moments this year captured the creative energy and star power of MVFF48. The *Jon M. Chu Masterclass*, moderated by Oscar-winning filmmaker Andrew Stanton (*Finding Nemo*, *WALL-E*), offered an inspiring look into Chu's dynamic career—from *Crazy Rich Asians* and *In the Heights* to *Wicked* and the highly anticipated *Wicked: For Good*—as they explored the artistry behind his visually stunning work, his collaborative process, and his commitment to authentic representation on screen. Another highlight was *A Tribute to Spike Lee*, honoring the trailblazing filmmaker with the MVFF Lifetime Achievement Award. In a riveting on-stage conversation with longtime collaborator Delroy Lindo, Lee reflected on his extraordinary career—from *Do the Right Thing* and *Malcolm X* to *BlacKkKlansman*, *Da 5 Bloods*, and his latest project, *Highest 2 Lowest*—celebrating his fearless storytelling, cultural impact, and lasting influence on generations of filmmakers. Both events embodied the spirit of MVFF48: celebrating artistry, craft, and the transformative force of film.

A heartfelt thank you to all the filmmakers, audiences, and partners who helped make this year's festival a success. We look forward to seeing you at MVFF49!

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**About Mill Valley Film Festival**

Presented by the California Film Institute (CAFILM), the 48th Mill Valley Film Festival runs October 2-12, 2025. MVFF is a significant cultural cinema event in the San Francisco Bay Area. It has gained international recognition for its commitment to showcasing exceptional films, supporting emerging talent, and fostering creative dialogue. Over the years, it has hosted renowned filmmakers, actors, and industry professionals, further establishing its reputation as the West Coast launch pad for many Academy Award®-winning films and a hub for cinematic excellence.

**About the California Film Institute**

The California Film Institute (CAFILM) is a non-profit organization dedicated to advancing film and media arts through acclaimed programs like the Mill Valley Film Festival and DocLands Documentary Film Festival. CAFILM Education provides students of all ages with opportunities to learn about the world through the art of film and filmmaking. Our premier independent theater, the Christopher B. Smith Rafael Film Center, engages over 275,000 guests annually with compelling cinema and storytelling on pressing social, environmental, and cultural issues. Additionally, CAFILM now owns and operates the Sequoia Cinema, reinforcing our commitment to preserving cinematic heritage and access to fine films locally. The organization relies on the generosity of its community; the invaluable support from our sponsors, foundations, donors, and members ensures our ability to continue expanding and sustaining our vital programs. Join us in celebrating, exploring, and championing the art of film. For more information, visit [cafilm.org](#).

**Supporters | Mill Valley Film Festival**

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