



February 2021

## Sundance 2021 Introduction

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### Recommended Citation

Lyden, John C. (2021) "Sundance 2021 Introduction," *Journal of Religion & Film*: Vol. 25 : Iss. 1 , Article 1.  
Available at: <https://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/jrf/vol25/iss1/1>

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## Sundance 2021 Introduction

### Abstract

Introduction to the Sundance Film Festival 2021

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### Author Notes

John Lyden is Professor of Religious Studies and the Blizek Professor of Religion and Film at University of Nebraska-Omaha. He was been the Editor of the Journal of Religion & Film since 2011. He is the author of *Film as Religion: Myths, Morals, and Rituals* (NYU Press), and the editor of the Routledge Companion to Religion and Film and co-editor (with Eric Michael Mazur) of the Routledge Companion to Religion and Popular Culture. He also co-edited, with Ken Derry, *The Myth Awakens: Canon Conservatism, and Fan Reception of Star Wars* (Wipf and Stock 2018).



### **Sundance Film Festival 2021**

This year, for the first time, the Sundance Film Festival was held online due to the COVID-19 pandemic. But this did not slow things down: there were 14,092 submissions and 141 accepted projects, including 73 feature films and 50 short films, 44 countries represented, 39 first time feature filmmakers, and 68 feature world premieres. 35 of the feature filmmakers were women, and 32 were people of color.

The organization of the festival was impressive as always, and the daunting challenge of delivering this content online did not affect the quality or the accessibility. It is certainly a different experience watching Sundance films on one's computer at home, and we all missed being in the actual theaters in Park City—but with the filmmaker interviews, Q and A's, panels and other events recorded on Zoom and made available along with the films, it felt about as much like being there as you could ask. There was also a genuine feeling of celebration in these screenings, a recognition of the joy present in having pulled this all off. In fact, the Festival has announced that they reached

an audience 2.7 times larger than usual, with an estimate of some half a million viewers total. Viewers came from more than 120 countries and all 50 states. In addition, 40 satellite screens around the nation featured drive-in and socially distanced showings of over 20,000 people.

That feeling of excitement and joy carried over for me into the films I watched, as real faith, hope, and love could be seen in the stories and the ways in which they were told. Filmmakers have not fallen silent in this year of all years, but have taken seriously their responsibility to speak to the struggles of all of us to make sense of life, to find meaning, to carry on. A refugee tells his story for the first time; nuns fight for their rights to speak and teach; stories of love, acceptance, truth and justice are presented in live action or animated form. The old ones dream, and the young ones have visions.

We must again thank those who work so hard in the Sundance Press Office, assisting us in every way, and in particular, Lindsay Kwek and Spencer Alcorn.

Enjoy our reviews again this year. We hope you have the chance to see some of these films, and that next year we will return to Park City for another in-person Sundance Film Festival.