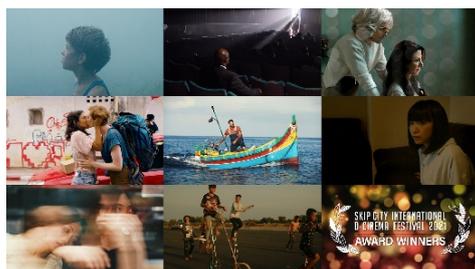


Winners of SKIP CITY INTERNATIONAL D-Cinema FESTIVAL 2021 announced!!

Luzzu, the Maltese film nominated for the first time, received Grand Prize

Both *Journey Beyond the Night* and *A Little Circus* received Best Picture by the Jury and the Audience Award by voting in each category

***Psychology Counselor* is the first short film to receive SKIP CITY AWARD**



Launched in 2004 in Kawaguchi City of Saitama Prefecture as a film festival to discover and nurture new talent, the 18th edition of SKIP CITY INTERNATIONAL D-Cinema FESTIVAL had been held from September 25 to October 3 virtually, and wrapped at the Closing Ceremony (YouTube Live) yesterday, Sunday October 3. Jury and Audience award winners were announced at the Ceremony.

Luzzu (Malta) directed by Alex Camilleri, received the **Grand Prize** in the **International Competition**. It's a drama about a man who is in agony to make his decision if he will choose the family fishery business or a better life to his family. Naoto Takenaka, the President of the Jury, commented, **"The director's perspective is not icky, but cool and hot. I think it is irresistible. *Luzzu* is a great film"**. This is the film to be nominated and received an award for the first time from Malta.

In addition, ***Rival*** (Germany, Ukraine) directed by Marcus Lenz, won the **Best Director**. The film is about a lonely battle of 9-year-old boy who travels from Ukraine to Germany where he does not know the language of.

Special Jury Prize is shared by two films. ***Cinema of Sleep*** (Canada), directed by Jeffrey St. Jules, is a thriller with full of twists and depicts an immigrant man who came from Africa to America and hit by an unexpected accident. ***Mitra*** (Netherlands, Germany, Denmark), directed by Kaweh Modiri, is a political suspense that the flames of vengeance flares in the mother's heart when she learns of the woman whose betrayal led to her daughter's death under the chaos in Iran in 1980s, 37 later in the Netherlands. Daisuke Shimura, a juror and the managing director of ZAZIE FILMS, said, "this year's Special Jury Prize was divided into two films because the judges' opinions were splitted. By all means, one of them should be selected, but since the two films have completely different approaches, so the two films receive the award at the same time". **Audience Award** went to ***Kiss Me Before It Blows Up*** (Germany) directed by Shirel Peleg, which is a romantic comedy about the wedding turmoil of a Jewish and German same-sex couple.

Psychology Counselor (Japan), directed by Zenzo Sakai, received the **SKIP CITY AWARD**, which is given to a director whose next feature project is highly anticipated from all Japanese nominated films through international and domestic competitions. The film is a disturbing psychological horror about the interaction between a counselor and a mysterious patient. **This is the first time for a short film to receive the SKIP CITY AWARD.**

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In the Japanese Film Competition, ***Journey Beyond the Night*** (Japan), directed by Takayuki Kayano, for the feature film category and ***A Little Circus*** (Japan, Cambodia), directed by Yoshiro Osaka, for the short film category, received both **Best Picture** by Jury and **Audience Award** by voting, respectively. **This is also the first time in history of the film festival that both films in the feature and short categories won the Best Picture and Audience Award at the same time.**

Award winners are as follows. Please kindly introduce the award winners to your readers.

International Competition Winners

Grand Prize

Certificate, trophy and cash prize of 1,000,000 yen are given.



Luzzu

<2021 / Malta / 94min.>

Director: Alex CAMILLERI

©Léo Lefèvre

Best Director

Certificate, trophy and cash prize of 500,000 yen are given.



Rival

<2020 / Germany, Ukraine / 96min.>

Director: Marcus LENZ

©Mila Tessaieva

Special Jury Prize

Certificate, trophy and cash prize of 150,000 yen are given.



Cinema of Sleep

<2021 / Canada / 105min.>

Director: Jeffrey ST. JULES

©Inferno Pictures



Mitra

<2021 / Netherlands, Germany, Denmark / 106min.>

Director: Kaweh MODIRI

©Jurje Rompa

Audience Award

*Determined by the votes received during the festival.

Certificate, trophy and gift product in Saitama are given.



Kiss Me Before It Blows Up

<2020 / Germany / 105min.>

Director: Shirel PELEG

©Fireglory Pictures GmbH

SKIP CITY AWARD Winner



Psychology Counselor

<2021 / Japan / 42min.>

Director: Zenzo SAKAI

©DrunkenBird 2020

*Given to a Japanese filmmaker, whose next feature project is highly anticipated.

*Certificate and trophy are given. The SKIP CITY AWARD grants the recipient free access to the audio and video facilities at Sai-no-Kuni Visual Plaza for a limited time.

Japanese Film Competition Winners

Best Picture (Japanese Feature category)

Certificate, trophy and cash prize of 300,000 yen are given.



Journey Beyond the Night

<2021 / Japan / 80min.>

Director: Takayuki KAYANO

©夜を越える旅フィルムパートナーズ

Best Picture (Japanese Short category)

Certificate, trophy and cash prize of 200,000 yen are given.



A Little Circus

<2021 / Japan, Cambodia / 27min.>

Director: Yoshiro OSAKA

©Yoshiro Osaka

*Determined by the votes received during the festival.

Audience Award (Japanese Feature category)

Certificate, trophy and gift product in Saitama are given.



Journey Beyond the Night

<2021 / Japan / 80min.>

Director: Takayuki KAYANO

©夜を越える旅フィルムパートナーズ

*Determined by the votes received during the festival.

Audience Award (Japanese Short category)

Certificate, trophy and gift product in Saitama are given.



A Little Circus

<2021 / Japan, Cambodia / 27min.>

Director: Yoshiro OSAKA

©Yoshiro Osaka

Comment from the prize winners and jurors

Director: Alex Camilleri, *Luzzu*

Receiving the Grand Prize recognition is such an achievement. I'm also receiving the gratitude with my amazing filmmaking team. We couldn't be happier than receiving the news that we did. There are lots of smiles coming out of Malta today. We made this film with a lot of love and a lot of faith. I believe that a small story from a very small place could travel great distances. Receiving this recognition only renews that faith for me. I believe in this universal visual language that really connects us through time across distances. I am accepting this award with a great deal of humility. I have learned so much about life and cinema from many great Japanese filmmakers. So this chance to share my own small step in the cinematic journey with the Japanese audience is really delighted for me. I only hope that in a couple more years, I might be able to share my next step with you again.

Naoto Takenaka, President of the Jury, Actor, Film Director

All films in the International Competition are really wonderful, but I am impressed with *Luzzu* the most. The color of the ships is beautiful. Firstly, the actors' performances are great. The style of acting is different from them in other films. They are real fishermen, but their acting is amazing. The protagonist's face is powerful, and so his face shapes the character naturally. Although he doesn't change his facial expression so much and his acting is minimal, the audience can understand his emotion. The scenes of the city, the harbor, and the night...I am stunned by those amazing scenes. Although the other films are really wonderful and great, *Luzzu* is the most memorable piece. This is my honest opinion. *Luzzu* is my favorite film anyway. It is the film which left a big impression on me. It's very difficult to summarize in one word, but the film is tough one. I think the film has an excellent touch. The director's perspective is not icky, but cool and hot. I think it is irresistible. *Luzzu* is a great film. Thank you very much.

Director: Marcus Lenz, *Rival*

I'm absolutely overwhelmed because I got this Best Director prize in a country so far away from my home. We worked really, really hard on this movie and it took 5 or 6 years to complete. I can feel that the storyline and emotional line are understood and the audience can follow them in a place it is almost the other place in the world. Thank you so much to the Jury, the audience and the festival who selected my movie. Right now I'm here in Canary Islands. The volcano is erupting and I'm filming this volcano eruption. This is full of energy and fire, and it's how I feel inside me with getting this prize. Thank you so much.

Keiko Funato, Jury, Alpha Violet, Co-CEO

Director Marcus Lenz's *Rival*, which won the Best Director, is a drama that depicts one reality of Eastern Europe vividly without any naivety or sweetness while the child is the main character. It shows the director's outstanding skill. On the other hand, I also think about the Oedipus complex, where the boy first falls in love with his mother. The boy's mother in the film is extremely charming, and the feelings of a rival-burning boy toward a middle-aged German who likes her are painfully conveyed. However, when there is no adult to protect him, the boy must inspire himself and walk on his own feet. Throughout the film, I was overwhelmed by his presence and unspoken claims. I think the film deserves the Best Director for lots of great elements including the child actor who played such a difficult role, the beauty of the images, and the sound effects. Congratulations.

Director: Jeffrey St. Jules, *Cinema of Sleep*

Our film is about an ability of cinematic communicate our common humanity across borders, across continents. I'm so happy that we are not able to travel to see you during this time but we can still share our film, our ideas, and our heart with you. And I'm so happy that we are still able to carry on this international cinematic conversation that we've been having through film festivals.

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Maggie Lee, Jury, Variety, Chief Asia Film Critic

Cinema of Sleep finds an inventive way to talk about the humanitarian crisis of refugees, by using the form of genre cinema. The film is full of clever twists and a touching surprise ending. It is also a homage to film classics that cinephiles will love.

Director: Kaweh Modiri, *Mitra*

I am very honored and pleased to just have learned that *Mitra* has been selected to the winner of Special Jury Prize at SKIP CITY INTERNATIONAL D-Cinema FESTIVAL for this year. I couldn't have been happier. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the festival for having us this year, of course to the Jury for selecting this film as a winner. I wish I could have been there and participated in person in this year to the festival. Unfortunately, this situation around the globe did not allow for that. Just yet, I hope for better times in near future where we can all celebrate this great art form in person, all together, in full cinemas.

Daisuke Shimura, Jury, ZAZIE FILMS, Managing Director

This year's Special Jury Prize was divided into two films because the judges' opinions were splitted. By all means, one of them should be selected, but since the two films have completely different approaches, so the two films receive the award at the same time. One of them is *Mitra*. It is a so-called revenge drama that connects the tragedy that occurred in Iran in 1982 with the present, which is 37 years later. The composition is very skillful and it is a powerful film that is drawn the audience into the story. This is Director Modiri's second feature film, but it has both profoundness and sophistication. I think it is a film that follows the genealogy of social suspense such as Asghar Farhadi's films, Atom Egoyan's *Remember*, and Costa-Gavras' *Music Box*. The four main characters are depicted as very shadowy and attractive characters without falling into stereotypes. Director Kaweh Modiri, I think he is a director I look forward to.

Director: Shirel Peleg, *Kiss Me Before It Blows Up*

I just got noticed that my film *Kiss Me Before It Blows Up* got the Audience Award from SKIP CITY festival. This is a great pleasure and honored to know that my film was so overseen by the audience in Japan. I never thought it would make it to Japan, so I'm really thrilled about it. Thank you so much. It's really fun to know that you enjoyed it. Thank you.

Director: Zenzo Sakai, *Psychology Counselor*

I am very honored not only to be invited to the film festival, which is full of wonderful films, but also unexpectedly to receive the award. *Psychology Counselor* has no statement or anything like that. I do not let characters or stories represent such values or ethics. Therefore, I hope that you will receive something completely different depending on the person who sees it or the timing of it.

Mizue Kunizane, President of the Jury, dongyu.inc, CEO, Producer

Director Zenzo Sakai is interested in "what is entertaining" and says that he likes to make films while enjoying discoveries and experiments of filmmaking. I feel that this work has a high potential to attract the audience by scooping out human heart, which has never been seen in Japanese horrors. I was really into it.

Director: Takayuki Kayano, *Journey Beyond the Night*

I feel afraid to receive this award, but first of all, I'm glad that I could report the great thing to the crew and cast members. Having received this award is the biggest event for *Journey Beyond the Night* and I feel that this is a kind of beginning, so I would like to continue to devote myself to it.

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Tom Mes, Jury, Japanese Film Researcher, Faculty of Keio University

The balance of the script is great. The film also manipulates the psychology of the audience. I am very stunned that the simple cinema expression made a strong impression to the audience. Congratulations to Director Kayano and all the staff and cast members of *Journey Beyond the Night*.

Director: Yoshiro Osaka, *A Little Circus*

It is unbelievable for me to receive two awards in the competition where only great films are gathered. This film was made by snuggling up to the Cambodian circus troupe, which is suffering from the Covid pandemic. The Cambodian Circus, which expresses the power and joy of living through the body, is dazzlingly strong and has full of smiles both on and off the stage. I made it with the hope that this energy could be conveyed to the Japanese people through this film. This award is the result of my encounter with the people who live beautifully and surrounded and supported me. I want to share this joy with everyone. Finally, I hope that the art of film will continue to be a vital force for people, and I am grateful to everyone involved in this festival and honored the filmmakers who aimed for this festival. I will replace it with the greeting.

Izumi Takahashi, Jury, Screenwriter

Congratulations to Director Osaka and the staff and cast members. I think it is a very meaningful film. Even though we can only see the news about major cities and areas where pandemic is worsened, the camera came to the birthplace of Cambodia circus, a town that has little connection to us, and I think the time to watch the film became to reflect on myself. It has full of energy and of dynamism. Director Osaka wants to convey the current state of this unfortunate circus school, and of course I hope this film will help, but more than that, I think "time of youth isn't defeated by Covid. The feelings that I want to do won't deaden". It isn't that the story of this Cambodian circus school is special, and it made me feel that the passion for something they love is stronger than Covid and also we adults can't give up either. While there are many films that draw the worries from a radius of 3 meters within a radius of 3 meters, I think that this film is the one that can be recommended for the Best Picture in the sense that the worries are drawn in contrast to the distant world. I'm really looking forward to what kind of subject Osaka will encounter next and what kind of perspective he will have.

Director: Takayuki Kayano, *Journey Beyond the Night*

I'm really honored. I am aware that I made something quite mysterious, so it's really encouraging and purely gratifying that many people enjoyed it. Thank you very much.

Director: Yoshiro Osaka, *A Little Circus*

I think it is because many people watched this film with an interest because it is a movie with the theme of the Covid pandemic. I myself have felt uncomfortable with a society where the news condemns and loses the truth under the pandemic. Therefore, I aimed to make this that is as true as I can see and know. The circus boys in the film do not consider the coronavirus to be evil, they have strong friendships and just continue to do what they can positively. The circus is still closed today, but they are still fine today. When the circus resumes, we can imagine them showing off their surplus energy on stage. It would be a great pleasure for those who watched this film to go to see their stage someday.

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Evaluations from the President of the Jury

Naoto Takenaka, President of the Jury, International Competition

I watched all 10 films. All of them are really excellent, and I have embraced each one. The actors' performances in the films are also very good, and I feel that each actor loves their movie and is firmly existing and breathing in the movie. All of them are fascinating and wonderful films. The director's gaze is also very, very sharp, yet gentle and beautiful. Because all films are great, I think I was not a good juror. Again, all are wonderful. I am looking forward to seeing your films again soon. Thank you very much.

Mizue Kunizane, President of the Jury, Japanese Film Competition

In the Japanese Film Competition section of SKIP CITY INTERNATIONAL D-Cinema FESTIVAL, various genres of films, including animation, are lined up. They are very interesting and entertaining. Among them, I received hope and strong energy from the movie that was filmed overseas in this pandemic. Director Shohei Imamura said, "I hope that you have seriously asked yourself how human beings are polluted, pure, shady, raunchy, gentle, weak, or humorous. In general, I want you to know how interesting human beings are, and think about yourself asking this question". In front of us, there is not only "I" and "you" but also a vast world, and human beings live. I would like you to think about the vast world and yourself, and then make your film consciously. I have great hopes for the success of those who aspire to make films, including those that did not receive an award this time. I think it was really hard for everyone to work under this pandemic. Good job indeed.

Message from the Festival Director

Tsutomu Tsuchikawa, Festival Director

Congratulations to the winners. This year again, the films are competitive, and there was a heated debate about the expression of various films. There was also the result that two films shared one award, but this is the best result through the jury's debate. We would also like to congratulate the winners of the Audience Awards for their support from a truly enthusiastic audience. And I hope that everyone who was not selected this time will do their best in the future. This year as well as last year, due to the Covid pandemic, the festival went online only. At the online Q & A, one director said, "I wanted to see my film on a big screen". Although I know it wouldn't come true, I feel sorry for the director. I really hope to see all the participants at this venue next year. Thank you very much.

*Image materials related to this release can be downloaded from the URL below.

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1OGILTq4dsjb1P48xDERbhw63_RbrUqnL?usp=sharing

*You can download the press materials of this festival, the image materials of all the screenings, the logo image of the festival, etc. from the following URL.

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1eHjsDJNiWAvKBVYcOoyU4R3Tb75zxsot?usp=sharing>

SKIP CITY INTERNATIONAL D-Cinema FESTIVAL 2021 Outline <The 18th>

Date: Saturday, September 25 - Sunday, October 3, 2021 (9 days)

Venue: Streaming website "CINEMA DISCOVERIES"

Organizers: Saitama Prefecture, Kawaguchi City, SKIP CITY INTERNATIONAL D-Cinema FESTIVAL Committee, Saitama Audio-Visual Volunteers

Website: www.skipcity-dcf.jp

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