

## Discover the 2017 Oscar Short Film Nominees

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Rating: **4.0/5.0**

CHICAGO – One of the more overlooked set of nominees at Academy Awards time is two categories for Best Short Film – Live Action and Animated. The 2017 nominees are packaged as two presentations that are currently screening in Chicago at the Landmark Century Centre Cinema.

Historically, the short film – both in live action and animated forms – were part of the early tradition of movie exhibition. In the days before television, movie theaters would show the newsreel, the short film and of course “cartoons” before a main feature, and that tradition only petered out when audience tastes shifted around the 1950s, and television took over the exhibition of cartoons. The live action short languished in near anonymity, banished to film festivals and rarely shown to the general public. The age of the internet has revived the form substantially (in both categories), and their availability have garnered enough interest to exhibit the presumed “best of the best” – Oscar edition – in theaters once again, albeit in limited markets.



The 2017 Oscar Nominated Short Films

*Photo credit: Shorts HD/Magnolia Pictures*

Below is a short description of the films in each category, ranked by order of preference. The overall two presentations are given a generic four out of five ranking, not as an average of their relative scores, but as a catch-all for how scattered the film subjects can be, and the connection that was experienced. If I were to rank the joy of going to the movies and viewing the 2017 Oscar shorts, it would be solid perfect score. Note the national origin of each short, for the cultural elements of different countries are part of the trip.



#### 2017 Oscar Nominated Short Films – Live Action

**“La Femme et le TGV”** (France, Directed by Timo Van Gunten and Giacun Caduff)

There is the cinema dream of authentic life in this film, as directors Gunten and Caduff use the magic of visuals to create a purpose for a lonely widow, whose main activities involve waving to a bullet train that goes past her house twice a day, and grumpily running her legendary-but-dying bakery business. The film is reminiscent of the French New Wave in its delicacy, with atmospheric treats throughout, and a magnificent hangdog performance by Jane Birkin.

**“Timecode”** (Spain, Directed by Juanjo Giménez)

This is the type of film that might have you thinking, “why hasn’t someone thought of this before?” Well, it needed the twist that director Giménez provided, as two bored security guards (Nicholas Ricchini and Lali Ayguadé) start leaving notes as they relieve each other on their shifts. The result of these notes combines the footage of the modern security camera with the human need for expression. The film also has a killer punch line.



Jane Birkin in 'La Femme et le TGV

Photo credit: Shorts HD/Magnolia Pictures

**“Mindenki” (Sing)** (Hungary, Directed by Kristof Deák and Anna Udvardy)

Girl power is the theme in this emotional tale of how adults tend to ruin childhood, based on a true story. Young Zsófi (Dóra Gáspárvalvi) is the new kid in school, who longs to be in the award-winning kids choir. Although anybody can be in the group, the director Miss Erika (Zsófia Szamosi), has a different path for the singers she considers sub par. When Zsófi befriends Liza (Dorka Hais), the two plan a countermove against the adult authority, while developing their own friendship toward each other. Childhood is depicted accurately, with all of the pain, confusion and moments of purity.

**“Silent Nights”** (Denmark, Directed by Aske Bang and Kim Magnusson)

Immigration is the theme for the last couple of shorts, and this film takes place in Denmark around Christmas, where a Salvation Army volunteer named Inger (Malene Beltoft Olsen) falls for an African immigrant named Kwame (Prince Yaw Appiah). Their star-crossed love is tested by the environment of disapproval and Kwame’s poverty. Although telling and symbolic regarding European’s attitudes toward the immigrant situation, the short narrative structure contains too much plot, which gets in the way of everything else.

**“Ennemis intérieurs” (The Enemy Within)** (France, Directed by Sélim Azzazi)

The second immigrant-themed short has more of a straightforward story line, but also has many elements that have been explored before. Najib Oudghiri and Hassam Ghancy portray an interrogator and applicant, in this case an Algerian national applying for French citizenship. The film builds through the question-and-answer tenseness, eventually leading to an on-camera interview. Although set in 1996, it had the hindsight to the paranoia and cruelty that Muslims currently suffer, as they seek to define “home.” Most intriguing is the clash between questioner and applicant, as they are cut from the same background.



**2017 Oscar Nominated Short Films – Animated**

**“Blind Vaysha”** (Canada, Directed by Theodore Ushev)

Wonderfully symbolic, and visually striking, this entry from the Great White North uses a woodcut art style to animate what seems like an old folk tale. Vaysha is a girl who is born with a different vision in each eye, the left one sees only the past, and the right one sees only the future. Considered blind by her village, the girl grows into womanhood frustrated by these two opposing sights. I first saw this at the Chicago International Film Festival as a member of their Short Animation jury, and it had the same power upon further review.



A Frame from the Animated Short 'Blind Vashya'

Photo credit: Shorts HD/Magnolia Pictures

**“Pearl”** (USA, Directed by Patrick Osborne)

Creatively set only in motor vehicles, the story of a little girl who grows into a musician – inspired by her itinerant father – is touching and modern. In a scant six minutes, director Osborne tells this story, set against the landscape of the American dream. It also is a lesson of being who you are, but also landing upon the responsibilities of parenthood and its rewards. The combination of emotions and modern animation make this a must see.

**“Pear Cider and Cigarettes”** (UK/Canada, Directed by Robert Valley and Cara Speller)

This is the longest short (great oxymoron) at 35 minutes, and is an epic tale of two countries, a long-time friendship and an unforgettable character who influences everything. The story of Techno and his friend Robert unfolds over many years in Canada and eventually China, where Techno awaits a liver transplant after years of a hard life and harder drinking. As his fate is revealed, his life becomes a centerpiece of analysis, in which nothing stands in Techno’s way, until it does. Beautifully rendered, and touchingly real, despite the animated nature of the characters.

**“Borrowed Time”** (Canada, Directed by Andrew Coats and Lou Hamou-Lhadj)

Canada seems to be in the midst of an animation revolution, as this third nominee comes from that particular mix of cultures. This is actually American in legend, set in the late 1800s West, as a typical lawman of the era makes a journey to the point where his life changed forever. The film uses its distinctive character design to full measure, evoking the lost era in the story of a father and son at the edge of their destiny.

**“Piper”** (USA, Directed by Alan Barillaro and Marc Sondheimer)

The entry from Walt Disney Studios and Pixar Animation was actually shown, old fashion style, before the feature film “Moana.” Exquisite in character design, it tells the story of a just-born sandpiper bird, learning the ways of the cruel but inviting world. Created by the top animators in the country, with the full support of a strong studio, the art of realism is so present that nature is now getting true competition. This is truly sumptuous on the big screen.

*The 2017 Oscar Nominated Short Films – split into Live Action and Animated presentations – are currently at the Landmark Century Centre Cinema, 2828 North Clark Street, Chicago. See local listings for additional theaters and show times. For more Chicago information, [click here.](#) [26] Not rated, although the animated “Pear Cider and Cigarettes” would be an “R” rating if it was so judged.*



[27]

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