

74th IFFMH: Announcing the award-winners – the top award goes to the social drama ›Nighttime Sounds‹ from China

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›**Nighttime Sounds**‹, directed by Zhongchen Zhang, has earned the 30,000-euro International Newcomer Award for the best film in competition. ›**Funeral Casino Blues**‹ by Roderick Warich received an honourable mention +++ The 15,000-euro Rainer Werner Fassbinder Award for the best screenplay has gone to Sophy Romvari for ›**Blue Heron**‹. +++ **Noah Sayenko** has received the 10,000-euro Young Actors Award for his performance in ›Rain Fell on the Nothing New‹. +++ The Young Jury has also honoured ›**Blue Heron**‹ with the Student Award, worth 5,000 euros. +++ ›**Sink**‹ by Zain Duraie has received the Ecumenical Jury Award, worth 2,500 euros. ›**Adam's Sake**‹ by Laura Wandel received an honourable mention +++ Sven Bresser's ›**Reedland**‹ has received the FIPRESCI Award. +++ The Audience Award, worth 5,000 euros, has gone to ›**Surviving Earth**‹ by Thea Gajić.



Still from ›Nighttime Sounds‹ | © 2025 HKIFF Collection

The award-winning films of the 74th International Film Festival Mannheim-Heidelberg were named and honoured during this evening's award ceremony at the Karlstorbahnhof Heidelberg. In addition to remarks delivered by members of the juries, speeches were given by festival director Dr Sascha Keilholz, State Secretary Arne Braun (MWK) and Dr Andrea Edel, head of Heidelberg's Office of Cultural Affairs, as well as the award sponsors Catharina Seegelken, managing director of the Manfred Lautenschläger Foundation; Juliane Lorenz-Wehling, managing director of the Rainer Werner Fassbinder Foundation; and Holger Scheel, managing director of the cbs consultancy in Heidelberg. At the presentation of the German Documentary Film Award at the IFFMH, remarks were shared by Kai Gniffke, general manager of SWR; Clemens



Bratzler, programming director at SWR; Carl Bergengruen, managing director of MFG; and Eric Friedler, director of the Haus des Dokumentarfilms – Europäisches Medienforum Stuttgart e.V.

The IFFMH's top award, the **International Newcomer Award**, worth 30,000 euros, went to ›**Nighttime Sounds**‹ by Chinese director and screenwriter Zhongchen Zhang, who accepted the award in person. This, his second feature film, uses impressively magical and poetic images to tell the story of a search for family connections and the fate of numerous women in rural China.

The **Young Actors Award**, presented this year for the second time across all sections and also awarded by the international jury, went to actor **Noah Sayenko** for his leading role in ›Rain Fell on the Nothing New‹, Steffen Goldkamp's neo-noir drama in the FILMSCAPES section. Sayenko plays David, a young man who tries to stay on the straight and narrow after being released from prison, but faces numerous obstacles to doing so. His performance spans a complex range of emotions, including sadness, vulnerability and a suppressed anger that could erupt at any moment. This was Sayenko's first appearance in a feature film.

A total of 16 first and second films by talented up-and-coming international directors competed for six awards in the ON THE RISE competition. Five of these awards are presented by four juries. There is also the Audience Award, whose winner is selected by the viewers. All of the award-winning films will be screened again by 16 November.

This year, in cooperation with SWR, the presentation of the **German Documentary Film Award** was also held during the award ceremony at the IFFMH. This award is granted in three categories by its own juries and award sponsors. The top award (20,000 euros) went to ›**Im Prinzip Familie**‹ by Daniel Abma, the music award (5,000 euros) to Clara Stella Hüneke for ›**Sisterqueens**‹, and the sponsorship award (3,000 euros) to Rand Beiruty for ›**Tell Them About Us – Über uns von uns**‹. The film that has earned the top award can be seen on 14 November at 6 p.m. in the IFFMH programme at the Gloria cinema in Heidelberg.

The entire team of the IFFMH would like to offer the award-winners our warmest congratulations. Festival director Dr Sascha Keilholz thanked the juries for their dedication and expressed his great satisfaction with this year's festival, given the many sold-out screenings and consistently enthusiastic feedback from international guests.

The juries made the following statements:

International Jury

Jury members: Christian Klandt, Dea Kulumbegashvili, Katalin Moldovai

International Newcomer Award – Best Director (30.000 euros)



›Nighttime Sounds‹

Director: Zhongchen Zhang (China)

The jury stated: “This is a film about loss which speaks through the visual beauty that contrasts with the suffering of an entire generation, the secrets of daily life and the hidden truth that fracture families and disrupt the innocence of childhood. Delicate and nuanced, this film grasps the passage of time and the way the past lives through the future as embodied memory. We hereby present the International Newcomer Award to ›Nighttime Sounds‹ by Zhongchen Zhang.”

Special Mention

›Funeral Casino Blues‹

Director: Roderick Warich (Germany)

The jury stated: “For its impressive ambition and a vision that transcends the boundaries and context of domestic cinema. The director captures the beauty and tragedy in the lives of young, sleepless dreamers who are trapped in circumstances that seem predestined, even though they relentlessly struggle to break free of them. This beautiful film speaks to loneliness and creates the space to find connections. We wish to say to the team of ›Funeral Casino Blues‹: Thank you for this film and for this vision of a subject that is difficult to talk about.”

The International Newcomer Award, the IFFMH’s top award, is sponsored by the Manfred Lautenschläger Foundation.

Rainer Werner Fassbinder Award – Best Screenplay (15,000 euros)

›Blue Heron‹

Screenplay and director: Sophy Romvari (Hungary, Kanada)

The jury stated: “This film surpasses the expectations of narrative cinema. While the script explores a deeply personal story and the struggles of one family, it speaks to the experiences of families around the world. The script makes you an active participant as the author tries to navigate her way through her memories. The film questions the mechanisms of a system that is unable to help people in need and the haunting sense of guilt that overshadows the family situation. We wish to give the Rainer Werner Fassbinder Award for best screenplay to ›Blue Heron‹ by Sophy Romvari.”

The Rainer Werner Fassbinder Award for best screenplay is sponsored by the Rainer Werner Fassbinder Foundation. The names “Fassbinder”, “Rainer Werner Fassbinder” and “RWF” (as words and logos) are registered trademarks of the Rainer Werner Fassbinder Foundation, Berlin.



Young Actors Award – Best Acting Performance (10,000 euros)

Noah Sayenko

›Rain Fell on the Nothing New‹ (Director: Steffen Goldkamp, Germany)

The jury stated: “In a film that tentatively explores the lostness of a generation – in a work that speaks of social coldness in a sparing, almost painfully honest language – a young actor carries the entire emotional weight on his shoulders. He stands at the centre of a bleak world that offers no escape, and yet he shines a light – a calm, uncertain, human light. He guides the film without ever dominating it. His performance is understated and, precisely in that simplicity, infinitely powerful. He doesn’t create a character; he reveals a human being. (...) And so it is a great pleasure and an even greater honour for us to present the Young Actors Award ... to Noah Sayenko for his outstanding portrayal of David in ›Rain Fell on the Nothing New‹ (...). He is not only the discovery of the year; he is proof that cinema is always at its strongest when one has the courage to truly show what one is capable of.”

The Young Actors Award is sponsored by the cbs consultancy in Heidelberg.

Young Jury

Jury members: Effi Armbrust, Firenze Leem, Sara Wasicsek

Student Award (5,000 euros)

›Blue Heron‹

Director: Sophy Romvari (Hungary, Canada)

The jury stated: “Over the past few days, we watched films that revealed very different ways of seeing the world. One stood out for the way it follows a filmmaker revisiting her childhood, trying to understand a brother whose presence defined her family. Through small fragments of memory and reflection from the present day, she reaches toward her younger self with care. The film’s honesty and emotional clarity spoke to us, especially as young viewers thinking about how our memories shape who we are. We are pleased to present the Student Award of IFFMH 2025 to ›Blue Heron‹ by Sophy Romvari.”

Ecumenical Jury

Jury members: Edgar Octavio Rubio Hernandez, Marcsi Tóth, Kjell Riise

Ecumenical Award (2,500 euros)

›Sink‹

Director: Zain Duraie (Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, France)



The jury stated: “A devoted mother of three who would do anything for her son, even if it means not facing the possible consequences of his mental illness. This Middle Eastern feature debut thoughtfully explores the complex dilemmas faced by families raising a child with special needs. A thrilling story filled with powerful scenes. The ecumenical jury, appointed by Interfilm and Signis, presents its award to the film ›Sink‹, directed by Zain Duraie.”

Special Mention

›Adam’s Sake‹

Director: Laura Wandel (Belgium, France)

The jury stated: “The complex network of social institutions often casts an impersonal gaze on individuals facing difficult situations. However, a nurse at work in a hospital finds a way to transcend this maze, gaining insight into a reality that remains concealed from others. This journey unfolds in a cinematic portrayal that emphasises compassion and hope. The special mention of the ecumenical jury is hereby awarded to ›Adam’s Sake‹ by Laura Wandel.”

FIPRESCI Jury

Jury members: Assiya Issemberdiyeva, Tereza Brdeckova, Britta Schmeis

FIPRESCI Award

›Reedland‹

Director: Sven Bresser (The Netherlands, Belgium)

The jury stated: “Beautifully and artistically crafted, this film unfolds through mesmerising, hypnotic imagery. It explores the complexity of human existence and modern life from a deceptively simple premise. Elemental forces shape its meditative and metaphysical rhythm, drawing us into a world that feels both intimate and universal. The protagonist’s inner struggle – between silent temptations and the hidden revelations of ageing – is portrayed with remarkable depth by a non-professional actor, Gerrit Knobbbe. The FIPRESCI jury presents its award to ›Reedland‹, directed by Sven Bresser.”

The Audience

Audience Award (5.000 euros)

›Surviving Earth‹

Director: Thea Gajić (United Kingdom)

This year’s Audience Award goes to the moving psychological drama ›Surviving Earth‹. Based on the experiences of her own family, director Thea Gajić tells the story of a man named Vlad, who is seeking a new life in Bristol with his Balkan band. Yet the shadows of his past – leaving his homeland due to the war in Yugoslavia and his drug addiction – take such a toll on him that he’s unable to



find his place in the world, and not even the love of his daughter Maria can save him. In every scene, you can sense the extent to which the director has put her soul into this impressive debut.

The 74th IFFMH is being held from 6 to 16 November.

Images

You can download images from our press area by using this link:

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About the IFFMH

With “New Film Experience” as its credo, the IFFMH has been venturing new, interdisciplinary perspectives on and through the art of film since 1952. This makes it the longest-running film festival in Germany after the Berlinale, and it continues to be a major platform for cultural, social and political dialogue. With each subsequent edition, the IFFMH, as a festival for the public in cinemas, invites festivalgoers to discover the rising stars of the international film scene as well as to follow the careers of established filmmakers and to become more familiar with film in the context of other art forms.

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The festival would like to thank its sponsors and partners.