

The Indian Express, India

Oscars make history, quietly, with transgender nominees

With the nominations for trans actress Daniela Vega's film and transgender director Yance Ford's documentary *Strong Island*, Oscar 2018 marked a breakthrough for transgender filmmakers.

By: AP | New York | Published: January 24, 2018 3:52 pm

[[Photo](#): Daniela Vega and Yance Ford's films have been nominated for the 90th Academy Awards.]



Oscar nods for women and minorities drew many of the headlines in Tuesday's nominations, but this year's Academy Awards also mark a breakthrough for transgender filmmakers.

Yance Ford, the director of the documentary *Strong Island* and a trans man, became the first transgender filmmaker nominated for an Oscar. His film, a Netflix release about Ford's investigation into his brother's 1992 murder, was nominated for best documentary.

Sebastian Lelio's *A Fantastic Woman*, Chile's Oscar entry, was also nominated for best foreign language film. It stars Daniela Vega, a trans actress, as a transgender singer mistreated in the aftermath of her boyfriend's death.

Alluding to those nominations, as well as those for films featuring prominent gay characters such as *The Shape of Water*, *Call Me By Your Name* and *Lady Bird*, GLAAD applauded the Oscar field.

“It’s a big day for LGBTQ-inclusive films at the Academy Awards. Films like *The Shape of Water*, *A Fantastic Woman*, *Lady Bird*, and *Call Me By Your Name* not only have complex, detailed, and moving portrayals, but prove that audiences and critics alike are hungry for stories which embrace diversity,” said Sarah Kate Ellis, GLAAD president and CEO. “These important stories move the needle forward on LGBTQ acceptance at a time when media images are often the front lines for marginalized communities.”

Some had hoped Vega would become the first transgender actor nominated. Hollywood has come under increasing criticism for celebrating trans stories played by non-trans stars, while failing to cast transgender actors.

Hilary Swank (*Boys Don’t Cry*), Jared Leto (*Dallas Buyers Club*), Eddie Redmayne (*The Danish Girl*) and Felicity Huffman (*Transamerica*) have all garnered Oscar nominations for trans roles, with Swank and Leto winning. But the transgender stars of Sean Baker’s 2015 film *Tangerine* escaped Oscar notice, too, though the film’s Mya Taylor won an Independent Spirit Award.

Lelio said Tuesday he sees *A Fantastic Woman* as a love story “that happens to happen to a transgender woman.”

“For me, it has always been a film about the limits to our empathy,” Lelio said. “About what we are willing to allow from others, where we draw the line in terms of which people are legitimate or which acts of love are legitimate or not.”

Transgender people have been nominated in other Oscar categories. The composer Angela Morley received two nods, for 1974’s *The Little Prince* and 1976’s *The Slipper and the Rose*.

Most recently, singer Anohni, formerly known as Antony and the Johnsons, became the first transgendered performer ever nominated. She collaborated with J. Ralph on the nominated song *Manta Ray* for the documentary *Racing Extinction*. But when the category’s other nominees — Lady Gaga, Sam Smith, the Weeknd — were given performing slots during the 2016 broadcast, Anohni was not, and she opted to boycott the ceremony.

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