

Back on the big screens

Film journalist Sean Wilson provides the lowdown on Film festivals for early 2022: Sundance, Berlinale and Hong Kong



Following a turbulent two years for the cinema industry, the regular film festival circuit is now back in full swing. These festivals span the globe and act as the ideal opportunity to raise exposure and awareness for new movies in the marketplace. As the A-listers line the red carpet, behind the scenes, buyers will bid on the distribution rights for the hottest new titles. It’s glitz, glamour and dollar wrangling all rolled into one.

Coverage of the annual film festival circuit is inevitably dominated by the likes of Cannes (soon to reach its 75th year), Venice (turning 78), Toronto, Telluride and London. However, there are a myriad film festivals from across the world that favour an intriguing spectrum of titles, from indie-spirited gems to striking foreign language debuts. Sundance is one of the longest-running and most celebrated of all film festivals. It was established by the Oscar-winning actor/director

Robert Redford in Utah in 1978, and was named after his character from the classic 1969 Western comedy *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*. Sundance has acted as a platform for countless low-budget indie gems ranging from Steven Soderbergh’s *Sex, Lies and Videotape* (1989) to Jordan Peele’s *Get Out* (2017), which went on to win the Oscar for Best Original Screenplay. Although Sundance 2022 hasn’t confirmed its line-up (at the

time of writing), it is among several film festivals to respond to the post-COVID world. The Hollywood Reporter (THR) indicates that the movies showing at Sundance 2022 will be streamed in-person and online, making for a dynamic and democratically accessible hybrid model. The organisation says it’s seeking to design “a safe and accessible festival where our audiences and artists can come together to celebrate and discover new work, and each other.” The festival runs from the 20th to the 30th of January in Park City and Salt Lake City. It has also enlisted, reports THR, “seven independent art house cinemas across the United States to showcase a specially curated selection of festival films from January 28th to January 30th.” Sundance London, the UK extension of the original American film festival, will be taking place from the 9th to the 12th of June at the Picturehouse Central cinema. Sundance London, which will mark its 10th anniversary in 2022, has effectively expanded the independent movie marketplace to both sides of the Atlantic. [sundance.org](#)

Above: The Egyptian Theatre in Utah **Top: Sundance founder Robert Redford on the red carpet for *The Company You Keep* with Shia Lebeouf in 2012**



Above: Ryan Reynolds, Daniel Bruehl and Helen Mirren at the 65th Berlinale **Below: George Clooney the year before at *The Monuments Men* premiere**

Over in mainland Europe, the prestigious Berlinale in Berlin, Germany is about to celebrate its 72nd year. Germany’s premier film festival sees top-drawer art house titles compete for the coveted Golden and Silver Bear trophies, the former acting as the best film award and the latter as the grand jury prize. Recent triumphs at the Berlinale have included Wes Anderson’s Japan-set stop-motion animation *Isle of Dogs*, and Eliza Hittman’s urgent abortion-themed drama *Never Rarely Sometimes Always*. Berlinale 2022 runs from the 10th to the 20th of February and will be, reports Variety, an in-person event. That said, “the European Film Market (Feb. 10-17), the Berlinale Co-Production Market (Feb. 12-16), Berlinale Talents (Feb. 12-17) and the World Cinema Fund will focus on on-site offerings and will also provide online formats.”

In addition, “the Berlinale Series Market (Feb. 14-16) will host a selection of market screenings and a conference discussing high-end series.” [berlinale.de](#)

Finally, the Hong Kong International Film Festival (HKIFF) returns in its 46th year. One of the oldest film festivals on the Asian subcontinent, the global reputation of the HKIFF was built on the pioneering work of programming Asian films and its retrospectives when Asian and Hong Kong cinema were not well known to the international community. Built on a solid

reputation for programming, the HKIFF became the model for many subsequent film festivals around the region. The HKIFF bills an impressive reach that includes 280 titles from 50 countries in 11 major cultural venues. The competition is split into multiple categories: Young Cinema Competition (Chinese Language), Young Cinema Competition (World), Documentary Competition, Short Film Competition and FIPRESCI Prize. HKIFF 2022 runs from the 31st of March to the 11th of April. [hkiff.org.hk](#) In the devastating wake of COVID-19, can film festivals re-assert their relevance and attain a new level of global reach via hybrid models of engagement? If so, then 2022 may well be another watershed moment in the history of the motion picture industry. ■

