

The 10 Best Movies at Sundance 2022

From a fuck-you-patriarchy revenge tale to a deep-dive docs on radicals, riots and Cosby — these were the movies that made the festival exciting, vibrant and vital this year

By **DAVID FEAR** 



The usual prep for Sundance involves a good deal of packing (warm coats, snow-ready boots, a dozen thermals and a lot of Theraflu) and several weeks of intense physical training (wind sprints to better catch fast-moving shuttles, long stairmaster sessions for those screenings at the fourth floor Library theater, extreme-cold endurance tests for long waits to enter the Eccles). This year, the suitcases sat gathering dust in the corner and the regimen was simpler: Practice opening your laptop. Now, close it. Repeat several times a day. Press remote button on, press remote button off. Complete reps of standing up quickly from couch, then sitting back down again. Do six sets of lunges designed to help you quickly close the door when family or roommates start talking loudly during a quiet moment in a documentary about genocide.

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You could decorate your living room with fake Park City shuttle stops, cardboard cut-outs of fellow fest-going comrades and a mock set-up of the Yarrow Hotel bar, and it still wouldn't feel like the film festival that many longtime attendees know and love. But desperate times, desperate measures etc., and after experimenting last year with a virtual version of its annual event, the fest now has this Sundance-at-home thing down to a science. Thanks to the cancelling of in-person screenings in the Utah resort town courtesy of the Omicron surge, the usual post-premiere discussions and the sense of community so vital to film festivals — and this one in particular — may have been shunted to text pokes and DM nudges. The sense of discovery, however? That was *very* much present and accounted for.

Meet the Cyber-Sundance 2.0, same as the old Sundance: It was still possible to check out scrappy character-study dramas (*A Love Song*, which gives the amazing Dale Dickey and Wes Studi the showcase they so richly deserve) and quirky comedies that might sell for a song (like Cooper Raiff's *Cha Cha Real Smooth*, which **Apple picked up for \$15 million** and reminded folks that every generation gets the *Garden State* it deserves). Edgy, provocative conversation starters like Lena Dunham's sex-positive *Sharp Stick* and the similar, more book-club-friendly *Good Luck to You, Leo Grande* got folks hot and bothered, though not always in that order. It was a strong year for docs, whether you liked them served straight, no chaser or in a more anything-goes experimental vein. You had your choice of dipping into the story of the radical feminist activists who ran an underground abortion network in either the original nonfiction recipe (*The Janes*) or an extra-crispy celebrity dramatization (*Call Jane*). If viewers timed it right, they could go straight from a Rebecca Hall thriller (*Resurrection*) into not one but two Regina Hall joints (*Honk for Jesus. Save Your Soul.* and *Master*).

And, just like the previous in-person editions of Sundance, there were a handful of films we saw that thrilled us, moved us, shook us, inspired joy and anger and sorrow, and gave us hope for a medium that's suffered the slings and arrows of outrageous misfortune over the past few years. The temptation has been to make "Movies: Well, We Had a Good Run!" the de facto tagline for cinema in 2022. Virtual or not, the festival demonstrated that there's still a boundless sense of urgency, vibrancy and creativity left in the art form, as well as a strong reminder that not all movies wear superhero capes. Here are the 10 best movies we saw at Sundance 2022, from a fuck-you-patriarchy revenge tale to a doc on volcanologists in love.

Blood

A widow (Carla Juri) is trying to put her life back together while on a business trip in Japan; a musician (Takashi Ueno), who met her and husband years before, acts as a sort of unofficial tour guide. A bond begins to develop between the two, though she's unsure whether she's ready to let go of the past. The Ozu vibes are strong in this one, but Bradley Rust Gray is a Sundance veteran — along with his longtime collaborator and life partner Soo Yong Kim, the writer-producer-director helped bring *In Between Days* (2006), *For Ellen* (2012) and *Lovesong* (2016) to the festival — and his look at love and grief feels like a throwback in the best possible way. It's exactly the sort of unassuming, quietly observant film that you would have caught at the fest 10 or 20 years ago. And in a moment when human connection feels like a rare currency, this tender slice-of-life practically doubles as a salve.