

Drive My Car wins Oscar award for best international film

By Andrew Dalton
The Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — The emotional epic from Japan, *Drive My Car*, won the Academy Award for best international feature film last month.

Director Ryusuke Hamaguchi's film became the fifth from Japan to win the Oscar, the first since *Departures* in 2008.

The win for the three-hour journey through grief, connection, and art spawned its own mini-drama when Hamaguchi took the stage at the Dolby Theatre to accept it. He paused for applause, and the show's director then started the music to cue him to leave the stage, but he objected.

"I'd like to thank all the members of the academy for having us here," Hamaguchi said, then thanked the distributors of the film for bringing it to the United States.

"Just a moment," he said, to laughs from the audience. He then thanked his actors, "especially Toko Miura, who drove the Saab 900 beautifully in the film," and paused again for applause. Another



EMOTIONAL EPIC. Director Ryusuke Hamaguchi, right, accepts the award for *Drive My Car*, from Japan, for best international feature film at the Oscars on March 27, 2022 at the Dolby Theatre in Los Angeles. Hamaguchi's film became the fifth from Japan to win the Oscar, the first since *Departures* in 2008. (AP Photo/Chris Pizzello)

and Norway's *The Worst Person in the World*, which some observers predicted might pull of an upset.

Drive My Car, based on a short story from novelist Haruki Murakami, centers on a theater actor, Yusuke Kafuku, played by Hidetoshi Nishijima, directing a multilingual production of Chekhov's *Uncle Vanya*. Still mourning the death of his wife, Kafuku leads the cast in rehearsals where the actors sit and read their lines flatly, ingesting the language for days before acting it out.

The films of the 43-year-old Hamaguchi, who also released the anthology film *Wheel of Fortune and Fantasy* last year, are acclaimed around the world, but he was not widely known in Hollywood before a win for best screenplay at the Cannes Film Festival last year started to bring attention to *Drive My Car*.

musical cue followed, and Hamaguchi tried to restart yet again, but he was led off stage.

Many on social media decried what they regarded as the disrespectful treatment of the director in the moment.

With four Oscar nominations, including the first best picture nomination for a

Japanese film, and several early wins in awards season that made it appear to be a best picture frontrunner, no one was surprised by the win for *Drive My Car*.

But it beat a strong field of critics' favorites and crowd pleasers, including Italy's *The Hand of God*, Denmark's *Flee*, Bhutan's *Lunana: A Yak in the Classroom*,

In a blistering Oscar short film, Riz Ahmed finds catharsis

By Jake Coyle
The Associated Press

NEW YORK — Of all this year's Oscar nominees, one would be hard pressed to find a more potent film than *The Long Goodbye*. It's blisteringly visceral, harrowingly violent, and desperately urgent — all in under 12 minutes.

The Long Goodbye, directed by Aneil Karia, starring Riz Ahmed, and written by both, won the best live-action short at last month's Academy Awards. The film is initially naturalistic, immersed in the pre-wedding preparations of a South Asian family in suburban England. The concerns are familiar. Where a chair should go. Who wrote "Blinded by the Light."

But Ahmed's character spies out the window unmarked vans of masked white militants arriving outside. Daily life is violently interrupted. They soon begin rounding up people and executing the men. The nightmarish scene culminates in a furious monologue performed while staggering down the street by Ahmed, quoting from his song, "Where You From" — a passionate testimony of cross-cultural identity.

"Now everybody everywhere want their country back," Ahmed says into the camera. "If you want me back to where I'm from then, bruv, I need a map."

To Ahmed, *The Long Goodbye*, which is streaming on YouTube, channels his own fears while drawing from current clashes for immigrants and migrants against rising swells of racism draped in nationalism.

"In post-Brexit Britain, we were feeling this rising drumbeat of xenophobia all around. And it starting to feel a little bit deafening. You get to the point where you've got to grab someone and say, 'Do you hear this? Are you feeling this? Am I having a panic attack?'" Ahmed said in an interview from London. "Aneil and I wanted to urgently tell a story about this, to spill our feelings, to unearth our nightmares, and put them out into the world."



POTENT SHORT. This image shows Riz Ahmed in a scene from the Oscar-winning short film, *The Long Goodbye*. The film is blisteringly visceral, harrowingly violent, and desperately urgent — all in under 12 minutes. (SomeSuch and Left Handed Films via AP)

The scenes that play out in *The Long Goodbye* appear more like those that might occur in more remote global corners. But to Ahmed, the film reflects both the day-to-day emotional reality of diverse peoples in increasingly divisive western democracies, and the on-the-ground actuality in other places.

"Really, where this story takes places is within our psyches. But it also takes place within our ancestral memories," says Ahmed. "It takes place in Ukraine right now. It takes place in India, with the pogroms last year. It takes place in Myanmar. It's taken place in the United States. It's taken place in Bosnia."

The Long Goodbye wasn't the only Oscar nominee to wrestle with these issues — or the only one Ahmed is connected with. Ahmed is also an executive producer on *Flee*, the animated documentary about an Afghanistan migrant's twisting path to a new life in Denmark and, ultimately, to self-acceptance. *Flee* was the first movie

ever nominated for best documentary, best animated film, and best foreign language film.

"*The Long Goodbye* is about identity, home, and belonging. And *Flee* is about identity, home, and belonging," says Ahmed. "The conversation of our times seems to be about identity, home, and who belongs where."

Ahmed made history last year as the first Muslim nominated for lead actor, for *The Sound of Metal*, in which he played a drummer losing his hearing. This year, the short categories were among the eight awards handed out an hour before the telecast. While the academy pledged to honor each winner during the broadcast, the decision has been heavily criticized by some in the industry. Ahmed says regardless of whether he had a film nominated in one of the eight categories, he wishes they were presented live during the telecast.

"The (Oscar) community is about recognizing the elders and also uplifting the newcomers," says Ahmed. "So often the shorts category is where the new talent cuts their teeth. Aneil Karia is a name that will ring out for years to come."

The 39-year-old Ahmed, who was born in Wembley outside London to Pakistani parents, has often rapped about his complex feelings around identity and about making his way "in this business of Britishness." "Maybe I'm from everywhere and nowhere," he raps in "Where You From."

Ahmed has worked with USC Annenberg Inclusion Initiative researchers to highlight how Muslims are often marginalized or stereotyped in film and television. Out of 8,965 speaking characters identified across 200 top-grossing films released between 2017 and 2019, just 1.6% were Muslim, but 30% were perpetrators of violence.

Though its second half turns abruptly violent, the fleeting family scenes early in *The Long Goodbye* are enough to constitute something rarely captured in mainstream film — a Muslim family simply existing. While Ahmed grants *The Long Goodbye* and *Flee* are very tied to the current moment, he also sees them as reflecting an eternal struggle — one that can also be heard in the Lin-Manuel Miranda-penned "Dos Oruguitas," the *Encanto* ballad and immigration parable that was nominated for best song at the Oscars.

"Stories about refugees, stories about intolerance, films like *The Long Goodbye*, films like *Flee*, are confronting us with questions that on some level, no matter who we are, are always asking ourselves," says Ahmed. "That's why I think these are timeless stories. You look at the Aeneid. Aeneas is kicked out of Troy. It's ransacked and he's a refugee."

"He went on to found Rome, by the way. Not bad for a refugee," adds Ahmed, chuckling. "Maybe up there with Apple and Steve Jobs, a Syria refugee."

But if *The Long Goodbye* seems grim, it's also stirring in its clarion defiance, sounded straight at the camera. In its radical shifts, Karia's film, itself, breaks free of convention.

"When you tell your story, you're sharing your experience with someone," says Ahmed. "You're putting yourself out there to connect. And when other people connect with that experience, man, that is hope. Hope is connection."

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Wastewater monitoring helps Oregon Health Authority track COVID-19 spread.

More than 40 wastewater treatment plants across Oregon provide samples once or twice a week for COVID-19 virus testing.

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Health