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'Navalny' Wins Oscar for Best Documentary Film

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Yulia Navalnaya accepts the Best Documentary Feature award. **Kevin Winter / Getty Images / AFP**

LOS ANGELES — “Navalny” won the best documentary Oscar at Sunday night’s Academy Awards ceremony in Hollywood, besting "All That Breathes," "All the Beauty and the Bloodshed," "Fire of Love" and "A House Made of Splinters."

The film, directed by Daniel Roher, follows an investigation by the journalist group Bellingcat and CNN Chief International Correspondent Clarissa Ward to discover who poisoned opposition politician Alexei Navalny with the nerve agent Novichok in August 2020.

"There's one person who couldn't be with us here tonight — Alexei Navalny, the leader of the Russian opposition, who remains in solitary confinement for what he calls — I want to make sure we get his words exactly right — Vladimir Putin's unjust war of aggression in Ukraine, " Roher told the audience as he accepted the golden statuette.

Navalny’s wife Yulia, who was on stage with children Dasha and Zakhar, sent a direct message to her husband. “Alexei, I’m dreaming of the day when you will be free,” Yulia said, “and our

country will be free. Stay strong, my love."

The documentary, produced by CNN films and HBO Max, follows Navalny during his recuperation in Germany following a poisoning attempt with the nerve agent Novichok that left him fighting for his life.

Embed:

> 'My husband is in prison for telling the truth' — Yulia Navalnaya, wife of imprisoned Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny, accepted the Oscar for Best Documentary Feature for 'Navalny' #Oscars pic.twitter.com/qehQjeCPZc
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> — NowThis (@nowthisnews) March 13, 2023

Combining original interviews with Navalny himself, his wife Yulia, daughter Dariya and close aides, "Navalny" also documents a journalistic scoop when investigative reporter Christo Grozev and his team manage to identify the men involved in the attempt on Navalny's life.

"Navalny" has already won multiple awards including a BAFTA Award for best documentary last month.

The 46-year-old Navalny, who has been held for the past two years at a maximum-security prison outside Moscow after an embezzlement conviction, has accused Putin of being behind the poisoning attack.

"My husband is in prison just for telling the truth. My husband is in prison just for defending democracy," Yulia Navalnaya said.

Reacting to the news, close Navalny associate Kira Yarmysh tweeted an imagined scenario in which her jailed colleague might learn about the award.

"Morning, Kovrovsky court. Camera with bars, video link. The lawyer tells Alexei that the film won an Oscar. I think this will be the most astounding victory announcement in history."

Activist art group Pussy Riot tweeted that Nalavany was the "first person to receive an Oscar while in solitary confinement."

However, there was also widespread criticism of the academy's decision. Many online commentators expressed outrage that Navalny has never apologized for numerous controversial statements over the years that many consider chauvinist and bigoted.

Others questioned why Navalny had been awarded an Oscar but Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky had not been allowed to address the ceremony by video link from Kyiv, as he reportedly wanted to.

AFP and Ali Sar contributed reporting.

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