



ACADEMY AWARDS ANALYSIS

Originals rule the night

2026 Oscars signal a bold shift in Hollywood power play

SUHAS SISTU

The 2026 Academy Awards may well be remembered as the night originality triumphed over formula—and as a defining moment for Warner Bros. Discovery in a rapidly evolving Hollywood landscape.

Studio chief David Zaslav sounded less like a corporate executive and more like an auteur evangelist as he celebrated a staggering haul of 11 Oscars. Leading the charge was “One Battle After Another,” which dominated with Best Picture and multiple major awards, alongside “Sinners” and “Weapons”.

The common thread? All three were original films—an increasingly rare gamble in an industry long reliant on sequels and franchises. Zaslav’s emphasis on creative risk paid off. By backing filmmakers like Ryan Coogler, Michael B. Jordan, and Paul Thomas Anderson, the studio doubled down on storytelling over IP familiarity.

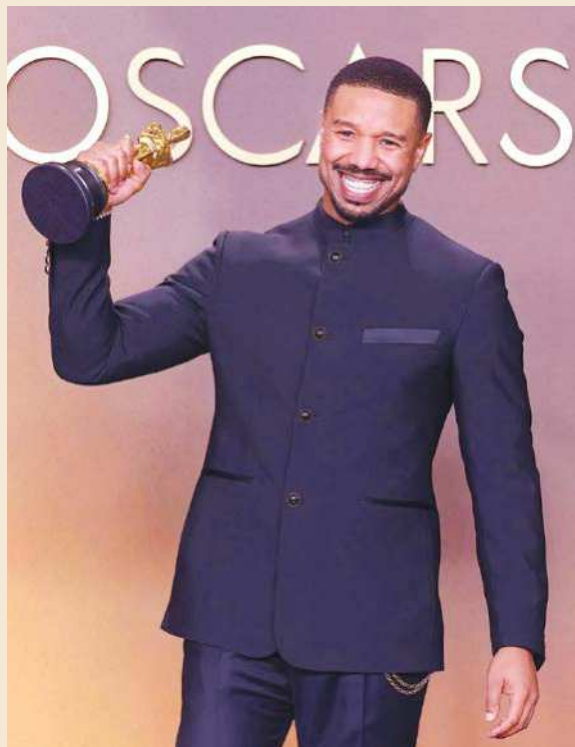
Coogler’s deal for “Sinners,” granting him long-term creative ownership, now looks like a blueprint for future filmmaker-studio partnerships. What makes this victory even more striking is the path these films took. Unlike traditional Oscar contenders, none relied on the festival circuit to build

prestige. Following the precedent of “Oppenheimer,” these films proved that awards momentum can be built outside Cannes, Venice, or Telluride—potentially reshaping awards season strategies.

On the acting front, the night balanced predictability with intrigue. Jessie Buckley’s Best Actress win for “Hamnet” was widely expected, but the Best Actor race saw a late surge from Michael B. Jordan, whose dual performance in “Sinners” captured industry attention at just the right moment. His win—following a strong showing at the SAG Awards—highlights how timing and narrative can influence Oscar outcomes as much as early buzz.

Meanwhile, Sean Penn quietly entered elite territory with a third acting Oscar for “One Battle After Another,” joining legends like Meryl Streep and Daniel Day-Lewis. His absence from the ceremony echoed a bygone era when skipping the Oscars was not uncommon—offering a subtle reminder of how awards culture itself has evolved.

Beyond Warner Bros. Discovery’s dominance, Netflix matched its own record with seven wins, driven by Guillermo del Toro’s “Frankenstein” and the visually electrifying “KPop Demon Hunters”. The streaming giant’s contin-



ued success underscores its growing parity with traditional studios, even as theatrical first-releases made a strong case this year.

The ceremony itself, hosted by Conan O’Brien, struck a confident balance between spectacle and sincerity. With an elegant stage design and minimal interference in acceptance speeches, the show leaned into authenticity—allowing political commentary, emotional appeals, and spontaneous humor to coexist. Notably, a rare tie

in the Live Action Short category added a touch of unpredictability, handled with effortless charm by presenter Kumail Nanjiani.

Yet, even in celebration, the Oscars weren’t without controversy. Omissions in the In Memoriam segment—particularly icons like Brigitte Bardot and Alain Delon—sparked quiet criticism, reminding audiences that the Academy’s choices are as scrutinized as its winners.

Ultimately, the 2026 Oscars reflected an industry at a crossroads. With block-



PROUD MOMENT

In a heart-warming moment for Telugu cinema lovers, legendary actor Kota Srinivasa Rao was remembered at the 98th Academy Awards. The iconic performer was honoured in the prestigious “In Memoriam” segment, celebrating global cinematic legends who passed away. Kota’s inclusion in this elite list is a proud recogni-

tion of his immense contribution to Indian cinema, where he acted in over 700 films across multiple languages. Alongside him, veterans like Dharmendra and B. Saroja Devi were also honoured. This tribute stands as a fitting salute to a truly irreplaceable talent, making it a proud and emotional moment for fans.



buster mergers looming and streaming platforms reshaping distribution, the night’s biggest takeaway

was clear: bold, original storytelling still has the power to dominate both the box office narrative and

the awards stage. As Hollywood looks ahead to its 99th Academy Awards, one question lin-

gers—can this momentum for originality sustain itself, or was this a rare, golden exception?



Anirudh joins hands with Universal Music India for global label expansion

In a major boost for India’s independent music scene, Universal Music India has announced an exclusive partnership with Albuquerque Records, the newly launched label by star composer Anirudh Ravichander. As part of this collaboration, both entities will release future pop and hip-hop tracks by Anirudh and upcoming artists signed under Albuquerque Records. The first release under this partnership is scheduled for early April, featuring Anirudh himself. The alliance aims to amplify Anirudh’s global reach while creating a platform for emerging talent from South India. Over time, Albuquerque Records is expected to evolve into a hub for new-age pop and hip-hop artists from the region. Anir-

udh, who made his debut with the viral hit Why This Kolaveri Di, has built an impressive career with over 13 billion streams across 770+ tracks. Known for chartbusters like Hukam and Vaathi Coming, he remains one of the most influential composers in the South Indian music space.

Industry leaders highlighted that the partnership will further strengthen India’s presence in global music markets, particularly in fast-growing genres like pop and hip-hop.

Anirudh expressed excitement about nurturing independent voices through his label, while Universal Music India reaffirmed its commitment to taking Indian music to international audiences through strategic collaborations like this.

‘Rakasa’ gears up for grand release with strong distribution deals

The upcoming fantasy-comedy Rakasa is building solid momentum ahead of its theatrical release, securing a major distribution deal in the Telugu States. The film’s regional theatrical rights have been acquired by Sri Lakshmi Narasimha Movie Makers, reflecting strong confidence from trade circles in its box office potential.

Expanding its reach further, the film is set for a wide international rollout. Overseas distribution will be managed by Atharvana Bhadrakali Pictures, with releases planned across more than 350 screens in key territories such as the United States, United Kingdom, Europe, Canada, and Australia. Additionally, Prathyangira Cinemas will oversee distribution in North America and the UK. Premieres overseas are scheduled for April 2, 2026, ahead of its global release on April 3.

On the non-theatrical front, the film has locked



significant deals, with streaming rights acquired by Netflix and audio rights by Saregama Music. These partnerships further strengthen its commercial prospects.

The film’s promotional content has also gained

impressive traction online. Its teaser and songs, including “Rapappa” and “Padhe Padhe,” have crossed notable viewership milestones, indicating strong audience interest in the soundtrack composed by Anudeep Dev. Starring Sangeeth Sobhan

and Nayan Sarika, and directed by Manasa Sharma, Rakasa blends romance, humor, and fantasy. Backed by Pink Elephant Pictures in association with Zee Studios, the film is steadily shaping up as a promising entertainer this summer.

Priyanka Chopra channels ‘Mandakini Vibes’ at Vanity Fair Oscars Party 2026

Global icon Priyanka Chopra turned heads with a bold and elegant fashion statement at the Vanity Fair Oscars Party 2026, effortlessly bringing “Mandakini vibes” to the red carpet.

The actress arrived alongside her husband Nick Jonas, and the couple exuded charm and sophistication. Priyanka stunned in a shimmering gold gown that perfectly accentuated her silhouette. The outfit featured a daring backless design and a sleek, body-hugging fit, adding a touch of high-fashion drama. She completed her look with soft wavy hair and radiant makeup, enhancing her confident and glamorous presence.

Nick Jonas complemented her style in a classy beige tuxedo paired with a crisp

white shirt and a black bow tie. His timeless look added balance to Priyanka’s bold ensemble, making them one of the most stylish couples at the star-studded event. Walking hand in hand, their chemistry and elegance stood out effortlessly, drawing admiration from fans and fashion watchers alike.

On the professional front, Priyanka continues to expand her global footprint. She was recently seen in Bluff and is now gearing up for a major Indian project, Varanasi. In the film, she will reportedly portray the character Mandakini alongside Mahesh Babu, under the direction of S. S. Rajamouli, further raising excitement among fans.



‘Youth’ team promises energetic entertainer

The Tamil youth-centric entertainer Youth is all set to make its way to Telugu audiences with a grand theatrical release on the 26th of this month. Featuring Ken Karunaas, Anishma Anil Kumar, Suraj Venjaramoodu, Priyanshi Yadav, and Meenakshi Dinesh in key roles, the film is being released in Telugu by E2C, headed by producers Vineeth and Sandeep.

Promoted with the tagline “Come with your gang, no age limit,” the film has already generated buzz through its energetic promotional campaign.



A lively freshers’ meet event further amplified excitement, with several industry personalities expressing confidence in the film’s content.

Cinematographer Suriya Balaji praised the producers’ promotional approach, while

music director Sinjith Yerramilli shared his happiness about contributing to the film’s soundtrack. Filmmakers like Sai Marthand and Venkatesh Maha highlighted the film’s engaging narrative and youthful vibe, predicting strong

reception among Telugu audiences.

The cast also expressed optimism, with Priyanshi Yadav and Meenakshi Dinesh urging audiences to support the young team. Actor-director Ken Karunaas described the film as a fun-filled entertainer with emotional depth, promising it will connect with both youth and family audiences.

With positive early buzz, vibrant music, and a relatable storyline, Youth is expected to strike a chord as it hits Telugu screens on the 26th.

‘Sarke Chunar Teri Sarke’ lyrics from ‘KD: The Devil’ faces backlash

Hollywood’s reputation for progressive storytelling is once again under scrutiny, as a newly released song from KD: The Devil has triggered widespread criticism online.

The track, “Sarke Chunar Teri Sarke,” features popular actress Nora Fatehi, known for her chart-topping dance numbers. While the song follows the familiar “item number” template with glamorous visuals and stylised choreography, it is the lyrics that have drawn sharp reactions from audiences.

Social media platforms have been flooded with comments condemning the wording of the song, with many

users calling it vulgar and disrespectful towards women. A particular line from the track has gone viral, intensifying the backlash and prompting debates around the portrayal of women in mainstream cinema.

Several netizens have also questioned the responsibility of the film’s makers and performers in approving such content, especially at a time when the industry is striving to promote more inclusive and sensitive narratives.

KD: The Devil, starring Kannada actor Dhruva Sarja, is being positioned as a high-octane action drama. The controversial song was released as part



of its promotional campaign. However, instead of generating excitement, the strategy appears to have backfired, drawing criticism and reigniting discussions about outdated tropes in commercial films.