

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

New Faces in Movies and TV

Elisa Leonelli · Wednesday, April 14th, 2021

While writing about movies and TV programs for international and domestic publications, as I have done for the past 45 years, I pay special attention to new actors that make an impression with their talent. During the year that started January 1, 2020, and that, after the closure of movie theaters due to the Coronavirus pandemic, was extended to February 28, 2021 for award consideration, the most impressive debut was that of Andra Day in *The United States vs Billie Holiday* directed by Lee Daniels, which earned her a Golden Globe as best actress in a drama from the journalists of the Hollywood Foreign Press. I wrote her [nominee's profile](#) and [a one-on-one interview](#) with this amazing singer turned actress. Please click on the links in red to read my articles listed in this roundup.



Anya Taylor-Joy (c) HFPA 2019

Before the lockdown, I had admired Anya Taylor-Joy in *Emma*, and written an interview for the Italian monthly *Best Movie*. After her stunning performance in the TV series *The Queen's Gambit*, I wrote [an interview](#) for the Golden Globes website, and [a profile](#) for Cultural Weekly, then, when she received two Golden Globe nominations, I wrote her [nominee's profile](#). She won as best actress for *Queen's Gambit*.

I had taken note that Vanessa Kirby won best actress at the Venice Film Festival for *Pieces of a Woman*, then, when I appreciated her acting in *The World to Come*, I wrote [an interview](#), a [nominee's profile](#), and an article about [Lesbian Romances](#).



Vanessa Kirby, Katherine Waterstone-The World to Come © Toni Salabasev

As an immigrant from Italy, after moving to the U.S. in my early 20s, I had to learn how to write in English (my first article, to accompany a Black & White photo essay, was [published in Westways in 1977](#)), so I have always sympathized with other oppressed groups, like women, African-Americans, Asian-Americans, Latinx and queer people, and I'm delighted to see more and more of their faces and storylines represented on screen.



Roberta Colindrez-Love Dick © Leann Mueller-Amazon

I absolutely loved Roberta Colindrez, when she joined the second season of *Vida*, the Latinx TV series set in Boyle Heights, so I wrote [an interview](#) for the Golden Globes website, and [another interview](#) for Cultural Weekly, where she explained her queerness. I quoted the two sisters from *Vida*, Mishel Prada and Melissa Barrera, in [my Village Blog](#), about the Catholic Church's condemnation of homosexuality and their friendships with queer people.

I noticed Zoë Chao in *The High Note* and the TV series *Love Life*, and when [I interviewed her](#), she confirmed that Asian-Americans consider themselves “people of color.” Her grandfather had immigrated from China, and on her father's birth certificate under race there was the letter Y for yellow.



Awkwafina (c) HFPA 2020

Awkwafina won a Golden Globe in 2020 as best actress in a drama for *The Farewell* by Lulu Wang, I had featured her in my article [Young Faces in 2018 Movies for Crazy Rich Asians](#). When I watched her autobiographical comedy series *Nora from Queens*, I wrote [an interview](#), where she talked about hatred and discrimination towards Asian-Americans.

I had mentioned Henry Golding in my article [CinemaCon 2019 Embraces Diversity](#), and when I saw him in *Monsoon*, after his film debut in *Crazy Rich Asians*, [I interviewed him again](#). I learned that one might feel out of place in his country of origin, after being raised abroad, which was also a theme in *The Farewell*.

While researching my annual article about Women Directors, of increasingly diverse backgrounds, I had seen *The Photograph* by Stella Meghie, where LaKeith Stanfield played the romantic lead opposite Issa Rae, so I was not surprised by his deeply felt portrayal of the FBI agent in *Judas and the Black Messiah*. I quoted him in [The FBI vs Black Power](#).



Daniel Kaluuya (c) Armando Gallo-HFPA 2018

I had included Daniel Kaluuya for *Queen & Slim* in [CinemaCon 2019 Embraces Diversity](#), and I quoted him in [Black Panthers in Movies](#) for playing Fred Hampton in *Judas and the Black Messiah*. The HFPA awarded him a Golden Globe as supporting actor.

I did not fail to notice Kelvin Harrison Jr. when he played Fred Hampton in *The Trial of the Chicago 7* by Aaron Sorkin, since I had listed him in [Young Faces in 2019 Movies](#).

I quoted Leslie Odom Jr. in my article about *One Night in Miami*, where he plays Sam Cooke. He was nominated for a Golden Globe as supporting actor. Regina King was nominated for directing. The Golden Globe went to Chloé Zhao, a Chinese director, for *Nomadland*, that won best picture drama.

I had featured Amanda Stenberg for *The Hate U Give* in [Young Faces in 2018 Movies](#), and wrote [her profile](#) for the TV series *The Eddy*. She mentioned Angela Davis as her inspiration.

I wrote about [two teenage actresses of color](#) in TV series, Lexi Underwood for *Little Fires Everywhere*, and Maitreyi Ramakrishnan for *Never Have I Ever*, where I quoted Mindy Kaling: “The history of Blacks and Latinos, Asians and Indians in this country is so different, but these three girls bond because they are not white.”



Cynthia Erivo as Aretha Franklin © Richard duCree-National Geographic

Cynthia Erivo is hardly a new face now, after *Harriet* by Kasi Lemmons, that I listed in my [2019 article on Women Directors](#), and I had featured her in [Young Faces in 2018 Movies](#) for *Bad Times at El Royale*. So I was delighted to devote an entire article to this incredibly talented actress and singer when she played [Aretha Franklin on TV](#).

Janelle Monáe, also a singer, had acted in *Hidden Figures* and *Harriet*. [I wrote her profile](#) for TV's *Homecoming* and an interview for the Italian bimonthly *Voilà*, where she defines herself “a queer Black woman in America.”

As an Italian, I could not fail to [write about the teenage actresses](#) of the TV series *My Brilliant Friend* from the novel by Elena Ferrante, Margherita Mazzucco and Gaia Gerace. I also quoted the young actors Jack Dylan and Jordan Kristine Seamon in [my article](#) about TV's *We Are Who We Are* created by Luca Guadagnino.

Another young actress I quoted in 2020 was Kaitlyn Dever for TV's *Coastal Elites*, after featuring her in [Young Faces 2019](#) for *Booksmart* by Olivia Wilde, a film I had highlighted in [Women Directors](#).



Zendaya (c) Armando Gallo-HFPA 2019

The latest actress I focused on in 2021 was [Zendaya](#) for *Malcom and Marie*, and TV's *Euphoria*, after writing about her in the Italian monthly *Best Movie*, and featuring her as [a young face of 2019](#), for *Spider-Man: Far from Home*. So I conclude with her words: "Hope is about believing in the good of the future, that we'll pass the baton and the young people will take it and do beautiful things with it."

Featured photo caption: Andra Day as Billie Holiday © Takashi Seida-Paramount

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