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45. Oulu International Children's and Youth Film Festival, November 7th – 15th 2026

Adventures and Heartwarming Encounters

This year's festival program features many captivating and thought-provoking stories. Children's films take viewers on adventures through the most imaginative worlds and introduce them to a cast of utterly charming characters whose journeys are full of excitement. In the youth film section, viewers will get to know all aspects of young people's lives—with their joys and sorrows—through a selection of films that are both entertaining and thought-provoking.

"The festival celebrates the city of Oulu's European Capital of Culture year 2026 with films that touch on and address its main themes. Our programming collaboration with some of the world's most prominent children's film festivals, as well as with Finland's leading animation school, offers delightful short films especially for the youngest members of the family. The classics by animation master Jan Švankmajer will leave no viewer unmoved," says festival director Mika Anttolainen.

In Honor of the Capital of Culture Year – Towards a Better World

In honor of the Oulu2026 European Capital of Culture Year, the festival presents the "Towards a Better World" program, which offers plenty to see and reflect on for people of all ages. The films address topics such as the promotion of equality and human rights, multiculturalism, acceptance of diversity, and peace. The program includes a wide selection of feature-length and short films for many ages, as well as for anyone interested in a better world through film. Among the feature-length films on offer are the fast-paced action of the Slovenian film *Gaja's World – Follow Me*, the hard-hitting Canadian documentary *Amir, My Little Prince* and the poignant coming-of-age Australian drama *River*. Short film screenings, tailored to different age groups, offer a fresh perspective on the world from the viewpoints of both children and young people.

Wonderful Children's Films

In the world of children's movies, we once again follow brave, determined, and incredibly resourceful heroes as they navigate ever-changing situations. In the sunny Romanian-Bulgarian children's road movie *Atlas of the Universe* young soccer player Filip hits the road in search of his other soccer shoe; in the charming children's mystery *Pixie: The New Beginning* Hania, a girl and her friend try to befriend a mysterious pixie, and in the fantastic time-travel film *The Secret Floor*, viewers are transported to a turbulent past alongside the protagonist, Karli. The fast-paced action-comedy *Håkan Bråkan 003* takes viewers into a world of spies and mysteries, while the powerful children's drama *The Odyssey of Joy* follows its joy-seeking protagonist, Lis, on his journey.

This year's festival is brimming with animations, each one more stylish, atmospheric, and fast-paced than the last. Benjamin, a bat who loves to sing, takes us into his colorful, music-filled world in the children's film *Benjamin Bat*. The approach of Christmas is heralded by *Santa's Holiday*, based on the book by beloved Mauri Kunnas. Also set against a Christmas backdrop, preschoolers and elementary school-aged children will be delighted by Metsämarja Aittokoski's creation, the ever-adorable Pikkuli bird, in his first feature-length film for the whole family, *Pikkuli and the Starlight Reindeer*. On the short film

front, we encounter a dancing sock in the Finnish animation *Woollen Sock*, a cow unafraid of UFOs in the film *Ross-Well*, and even birds seeking a nap in the French animation *Loop*.

Youth in a Turbulent World

Finding oneself isn't easy in a world undergoing upheaval. The protagonists of the festival's youth films also come to realize this. The road movie *Tomorrow Somewhere by the Sea* is a touching coming-of-age story about friends on a road trip, while the Swedish film *Nipster*, which takes a hard-hitting look at the dark side of social activism, really turns the protagonist Chris's world upside down. In the film *Becaària* set in the 1970s, the protagonist Mario heads to the picturesque Alpine landscapes to clear his head. In the documentary *Niñxs*, which highlights the issues facing gender minorities, we meet the radiant Mexican girl Karla, while the film *Norheimsund*, which follows the Cuban Yaímita, offers a vivid look at the world of modern migration and dating culture.

Finnish expertise in youth cinema is showcased, for example, in the touching documentary *Forever With Me*, which explores questions of life and death; *Qipao*, which depicts the life of an adopted child; the heist film *Major Bag Alert*, set in the early 2000s, and *Puolanka Pussy Rally*, set in the pessimism capital of Finland, Puolanka. The poignant and unvarnished documentary *Island of Hope*, which explores growth and young adulthood, follows the journey of highly sensitive Nadja for a full six years.

Unique animations

The pride of Chemnitz—last year's European Capital of Culture—and Germany's largest children's film festival, SCHLiNGEL, is also featured this year in the program of our very own festival in Oulu in the form of a collection of animated short films. Perfect for the youngest members of the family, this collection features cats, squirrels, and even witches going on adventures in their own animated shorts. This colorful collection of short films has been curated from the best German children's shorts at SCHLiNGEL.

Czech animation is being presented in collaboration with the Zlín Film Festival, the world's oldest and largest festival of films for children and young people. These charming children's animations feature adventurers of all kinds, from elves to hedgehogs, while the youth-oriented films include thought-provoking elements such as a ghostly record player and downright devilish shoes. The film packages for both age groups have been curated from the most beloved short animations of the Zlín Film Festival.

The magic of animation can also be experienced in the festival's special program, "Jan Švankmajer: Master of Animation." The Czech master—who has served as an inspiration to Tim Burton, among others—will showcase his artistry in the cult film *Alice* (1988), which is aimed at a more mature audience and combines stop-motion animation and live-action and serves as a wild take on Lewis Carroll's familiar Alice story. A collection of short films showcases the diverse artistic styles and approaches found in Švankmajer's body of work from the 1960s through the 1990s. The short film program has been curated by Pavel Bednařík and will be accompanied by a brief lecture on Jan Švankmajer.

Freimi is a bottom-up animation association based in Turku that showcases Finnish expertise to animation enthusiasts. The animation packages aimed at children and young people introduce viewers to, for example, the terrifying vampire from the film *Fangs and Claws* and the headless knight from the film *Headless*. Freimi's short films are characterized by Finnish creativity and a diverse use of animation techniques. These delightful collections are also perfectly suited for adult audiences who appreciate fresh animation talent.

International and Finnish filmmakers attending the festival will answer audience questions during screenings, participate in the children's film forum, and be available for media interviews.

6. Oulu Children's Film Forum on Wednesday, November 11, 2026

Unique in Finland, the Oulu Children's Film Forum is an international event for film industry professionals and the general public that explores the current state and future of both feature-length and short films for children and young people. The morning program, conducted in Finnish, will showcase new Finnish films. The afternoon will feature an international segment conducted in English. Aino Isojärvi will serve as moderator.

The forum can be followed remotely via livestream. Participation is free. Additional information about the forum will be updated on the page <https://www.oulufilmfestival.fi/en/childrens-film-forum/>

Films in the Competition Categories and Special Programs

The Children's Film Competition features nine films, the Youth Film Competition features five films, the Finnish Film Competition features seven films, and the Best European Children's Short Film – ECFA Short Film Award – competition features six films. The ECFA Award for Best European Children's Film is presented to the best European children's film in the Children's Film Competition. The Better World Award is presented to an individual, organization, or community that has made outstanding contributions to the field of children's and youth film.

The international ECFA jury consists of Eva-Maria Schneider-Reuter from Germany, Sunniva Eir Tangvik Kveum from Norway, and Tiia Hyvälä from Oulu. Juha Rajamäki will serve as the judge for the Finnish competition. The children's jury consists of local children from Oulu, and—for the first time—an international youth jury made up of young people from both Oulu and Berlin, Germany.

In addition to the competition sections, the festival features many special programs. The Kaleidoscope is displayed on the silver screen, and thanks to the Nordic Junior Sessions collaboration network of Nordic children's film festivals, there are films from across the Nordic region. Films made by children and young people will be honored in the Frozen Nights competition. The diverse short film programs include dozens of films to delight audiences of all ages, starting from three years old.

More information about the awards and the juries: <https://www.oulufilmfestival.fi/en/awards-juries/>

Children's film competition

87 RUPEES INK PEN India 2025, directed by Ravi Nimbalkar
ATLAS OF THE UNIVERSE Romania, Bulgaria 2026, directed by Paul Negoescu
BENJAMIN BAT Netherlands, Luxembourg 2024, directed by Patrick Raats
HÅKAN BRÅKAN 003 Sweden 2025, directed by Ted Kjellsson
THE ODYSSEY OF JOY Kosovo, France 2025, directed by Zgjim Terziqi
PIXIE: THE NEW BEGINNING Poland, Czech Republic 2025, directed by Krzysztof Komander
THE SECOND DIARY OF PAULINA P. Croatia, Slovenia, Serbia 2025, directed by Neven Hitrec
THE SECRET FLOOR Austria, Luxembourg, Germany 2025, directed by Norbert Lechner
WHEN WE GIRLS GROW UP Brazil 2025, directed by Neli Mombelli

The ECFA Award for Best European Children's Film is presented to the best European children's film in the Children's Film Competition.

Youth film competition

BECAËRIA Switzerland 2026, directed by Erik Bernasconi
NIÑXS Mexico, Germany 2025, directed by Kani Lapuerta
NIPSTER Sweden 2026, directed by Sunniva Eir Tangvik Kveum
SKIFF Belgium, Netherlands, Sweden 2025, directed by Cecilia Verheyden
TOMORROW SOMEWHERE BY THE SEA Germany 2024, directed by Patrick Büchting

Finnish competition

GAP Finland 2026, directed by Malin Nyqvist
ISLAND OF HOPE Finland 2026, directed by Miikka Poutiainen
MARCO POLO Finland 2025, directed by Pinja Sormunen
PIKKULI AND THE STARLIGHT REINDEER Finland 2026, directed by Metsämarja Aittokoski
QIPAO Finland 2026, directed by Aada Paaso-Rantala
SANTA'S HOLIDAY Finland 2025, directed by Leevi Lemmitty
TICKLER Finland 2025, directed by Jenni Koljonen, Elina Mikkola, Anna Rohesalu, Juulia Niiranen

ECFA short film award

THE LEGEND OF THE HUMMINGBIRD France 2025, directed by Morgan Devos
LENA'S FARM: A VERY SPECIAL MEAL Croatia 2025, directed by Elena Walf
LOOP France 2026, directed by Mali Delepière, Flora Jacon, Alicia Salvi, Hongyi Liu, Saïd Saïd, Tristan Truphemus
THE NAUGHTY SEAT Great Britain 2025, directed by David Johnson
TICKLER Finland 2025, directed by Jenni Koljonen, Elina Mikkola, Anna Rohesalu, Juulia Niiranen
WHEN I GET RICH Netherlands 2025, directed by Lucas Camps

Venues

Films are screened at Valvesali Hall and the Cinema Studio, both of which are located at the Cultural Centre Valve, Hallituskatu 7, Oulu. Now that renovations at the Central Library Saari have been completed, screenings will return to the Pakkalan sali, located at Kaarlenväylä 3, Oulu. Festival info can be found in the lobby of Valvesali Hall during festival week. Tickets for screenings are sold at the Valve ticket office and through Ticketmaster.

Award Ceremony on Saturday, November 14, at 2:00 p.m.

The award ceremony will be held on Saturday, November 14, starting at 2:00 p.m. in the Valvesali Hall at Cultural Centre Valve, where the juries will present awards to the winners of the competition categories. Admission to the event is free! After the ceremony, the winner of the ECFA Short Film Competition will be screened in Studio; this admission to the screening is also free. The other award-winning films will be screened on Sunday in Studio starting at 12:00 p.m.

More information about the films and their creators is continuously updated at the following address:
www.oulufilmfestival.fi/en

You can also follow the festival on social media:

www.facebook.com/lastenjanuortelokuvienfestivaali
www.instagram.com/oulufilmfestival
www.tiktok.com/@oulufilmfestival

Accreditation

Media representatives and film industry professionals can get accredited for free at www.oulufilmfestival.fi/en/accreditation/ —there is no deadline.

Stills from the films can be found at: www.oulufilmfestival.fi/en/press/

Program details are subject to change.

More information:

Press, press@oufilmcenter.fi

Festival organizer:

Oulu Film Center. www.oulunelokuvakeskus.fi/oek

Villatehdas B-building, Pikisaarentie 15, 90100 Oulu