



## Sundance Film Festival's Breakout Stars

by *Brandi Andres*

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Who will be the next Jennifer Lawrence—the awards season darling from last year's Sundance favorite *Winter's Bone*? *Brandi Andres* has this year's brightest stars, from an Oscar-nominated actress' teen sister to another Olsen.



### **Elizabeth Olsen: *Marcy Martha May Marlene*, *Silent House***

Image: Courtesy of Sundance

Elizabeth Olsen is stepping out of her twin sisters' spotlight. Until recently, the 21-year-old younger sibling of child stars Mary-Kate and Ashley Olsen had a resume filled with mostly Olsen twin-associated projects, including appearances in her sisters' 1990s direct-to-video series, *The Adventures of Mary-Kate & Ashley*. Olsen has since developed her talents in theater as an understudy both on and off Broadway and has been focused on completing her education at New York University's Tisch School of the Arts. And after two outstanding performances at Sundance this year—in *Marcy Martha May Marlene* and *Silent House*—Olsen's reputation in the industry has been revamped. Although she may be new to landing major film roles opposite Oscar-winning actors like Robert DeNiro—with whom she'll appear in the upcoming film *Red Lights*—Olsen's already being touted as the Sundance "It Girl" of 2011.



### **Anton Yelchin: *Like Crazy***

Image: Victoria Will / AP Photo

This 21-year-old Russian-born actor is not new to the big screen—he began acting at the ripe age of 9, appearing in *Along Came a Spider*, *Alpha Dog*, *Star Trek*, and playing the title character in the 2007 indie dramedy *Charlie Bartlett*. And while his face may look familiar, Yelchin's co-starring role in the Sundance favorite *Like Crazy*, which Paramount purchased for an impressive \$4 million, now establishes Yelchin as Hollywood's up-and-coming leading man. The film follows one long-distance couple's emotionally challenged relationship with Yelchin playing American student Jacob and Felicity Jones playing his British love-interest Anna. The movie also boasts Oscar-nominated actress Jennifer Lawrence (*Winter's Bone*) as Jacob's stateside other woman. Most impressive about Yelchin's performance of a heart-wrenched man is that it was improvised. The actors weren't given a script, just a 50-page breakdown—a challenge Yelchin was ready to tackle. "It was so heartfelt and so moving that I immediately wanted to do it," he told The Hollywood Reporter of *Like Crazy*. "And the prospect of doing an improvised film is just kind of magical."



### **Felicity Jones: *Like Crazy***

Image: Courtesy of Sundance

Relative newcomer Felicity Jones graduated to a new level at Sundance this year. Younger viewers may recognize the 27-year-old British actress as the snobbish Ethel Hallow in the U.K. transplant series *The Worst Witch* on HBO Family, and more recently, from her appearance in Julie Taymor's Disney adaptation of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. But with *Like Crazy*, Jones establishes herself as one of Sundance's leading ladies to watch. Playing opposite fellow breakout star Anton Yelchin in the script-less film, Jones transformed a dramatic outline into something more than just a realistic character. "I felt for the film to work we couldn't give 'performances,' in a traditional sense," Jones told MTV. "It had to be something more honest and more unaware." And she seems to shine giving just that. According to the New York Post's *Like Crazy* review: "The fragile, winsome Jones, who still has a slight air of childhood about her, has major star wattage."



### **Alex Shaffer: *Win Win***

Image: Courtesy of Sundance

If there ever were a modern day overnight success story, it's that of newcomer Alex Shaffer. The 17 year old auditioned for Tom McCarthy's *Win Win* after a friend texted him about the casting call. His grandmother did a little research, Shaffer's father sent in a picture, and the rest, as they say, is Hollywood history. Shaffer had Sundance audiences in awe with his character's rebel-with-a-cause attitude. He shines opposite Oscar-nominated actors Paul Giamatti (*Cinderella Man*) and Amy Ryan (*Gone Baby Gone*) as Kyle, who unexpectedly shows up to live with his wealthy grandfather. Already, Shaffer's powerful, yet understated performance in *Win Win* has garnered multiple rave reviews, but the teen star-in-the-making is not getting ahead of himself. "I'm definitely focused on acting right now," Shaffer told *The Daily Beast*. "I'd love to get involved in anything – movies, TV – I'm just trying to get to the next step."



### **Adepero Oduye: *Pariah***

Image: Courtesy of Sundance

This young Brooklynite (by way of Nigeria) graduated pre-med from Cornell University. But now, Adepero Oduye has found herself as one of Sundance's rising stars. In *Pariah*, Oduye gives a truly remarkable performance as Alike (pronounced Ah-lee-kay), a teenage lesbian who struggles with her identity and how she will come out to her conservative parents. It's actually the second time Oduye's raw talent has impressed at Sundance—and in the same project. In 2007, *Pariah* showed as a short film with Oduye in the same role and the Sundance Institute approached director Dee Rees about the opportunity to workshop the script as a feature film. Four years later, *Pariah* and Oduye have finally found their place in the spotlight. "People come up to me and make it a point to express what the film meant to them. I keep questioning why I'm overwhelmed," Oduye told [IndieWire](#). "It just reminds me of the power of film and why I chose this path of acting. If there's one word to describe everything, it's surreal."

### **Taissa Farmiga: *Higher Ground***

*Up in the Air* star Vera Farmiga didn't have to look far to find an actress to play her character's younger self in her directorial debut *Higher Ground*. "I always knew," Farmiga told New York Magazine of casting her 16-year-old, non-acting sister Taissa as the earlier version of the film's protagonist Corinne, a woman questioning her faith and love in the 1960s. "I just heard recently that my producers were freaking out that I cast her without auditioning her or putting her on tape." Taissa never had intentions or aspirations of following in her 37-year-old sister's Oscar-nominated footsteps, but Vera sees a bright future for her. "She's got something very special," her glowing big sister said. And unbiased reviewers saw that as well. "The film's true breakout star is Farmiga's own sister," reviewed ComingSoon.net. She "plays the younger Corinne so beautifully that the film never suffers during the substantial amount of time before the main star shows up."



### **Ezra Miller: *Another Happy Day***

Image: Victoria Will / AP Photo

Though Ezra Miller has had arcs on two well-received television series (*Californication* and *Royal Pains*), his breakout performance in Sam Levinson's directorial debut *Another Happy Day* has left Sundance audiences wanting more. In the dysfunctional family drama—also starring Ellen Burstyn, Thomas Haden Church, Demi Moore, and Kate Bosworth—Miller plays Elliot, Ellen Barkin's rehabbed son. The young actor has already earned acclaim from critics and Hollywood execs for his appearances in movies at the Tribeca Film Festival, including the 2009 Audience Award-winner *City Island*, opposite Julianna Margulies and Andy Garcia. His more-experienced co-stars may hold Oscar nominations and Emmy awards, but, according to The Hollywood Reporter, Barkin "has competition in Ezra Miller."



## **Brit Marling: *Another Earth*, *Sound of My Voice***

Image: Courtesy of Sundance

Brit Marling is a double threat—she's the first female to co-write, co-produce and star in two Sundance films (*Another Earth* and *Sound of My Voice*) simultaneously. While both movies examine love and relationships, each poses a unique look at a familiar film trope-- *Another Earth* deals with scientific discovery, while *Sound of My Voice* looks at a couple's sense of reality from within a religious cult. Marling's introduction to filmmaking came in 2004 when she took a leave of absence from studying economics and studio art at Georgetown University to join her friend, and co-filmmaker, Mike Cahill in Cuba to make the documentary *Boxers and Ballerinas*. After graduating valedictorian from the Ivy League school, Marling had a short stint as an investment-banking analyst at Goldman-Sachs. However, she soon moved to Los Angeles to pursue her true love—film. But Marling's academic prowess still shines through. "Writing scripts is a bit like a good economic proof," the actress, writer, and producer told The Daily Beast's Nicole LaPorte. "It's like, how can you tell a story with an economy, with the shortest number of words. A perfect proof is really beautiful, and so is a good screenplay. I don't know if I've written one, but I hope to one day maybe do that."

*Brandi Andres is an editorial assistant at The Daily Beast. She has worked as a travel show radio producer and also written for CBS Travel Editor Peter Greenberg. Prior to graduating UCLA in Women's Studies with disciplines in English and Communication Studies, she appeared in various films and television shows.*

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