

# News Article

## Student Film Garner Wins, Festival Honors

Senior Collin Nelson is making waves in the high school short film community!

Recently, Nelson won Outstanding Achievement in Directing from the Calabasas Film Festival for his film, "The Last Liftoff." He competed against student filmmakers from local high schools, including Viewpoint, Agoura, Chaminade, Calabasas High, El Camino Real Charter School, and Louisville.

"The Last Liftoff" is a short film about astronaut Tom Alden (played by professional actor Justin Bruening), who has an impending mission on the horizon. The story follows his final attempt to try and reconnect with his daughter (played by junior Aria Walters) before it's too late.



The film has also won 13 awards and has been accepted as the official selection at 23 film festivals.

(Watch the film [here \(https://vimeo.com/showcase/10410637/video/828398961\)](https://vimeo.com/showcase/10410637/video/828398961)).

Nelson has had a heart for theatre since he was young, but his passion for filmmaking started his freshman year at Oaks Christian School, where he fell in love with directing. The Institute of Arts and Innovation (IAI) is one of the big reasons he enrolled here. He felt the excitement of collaborating with other artists from all disciplines.

"The inspiration for this film came from my favorite David Bowie songs: "Life of Mars," "Space Oddity," "Ashes to Ashes," and "Rock & Roll Suicide." The character of Tom is a direct reference to the Major Tom character in Bowie's songs, and I wanted to play off of that and find my own story in this character and his struggle to connect with other people and his dilemma of what to place value on in his life," Nelson shared.

For "The Last Liftoff," Nelson had many hats to wear besides the director. He also wrote, co-produced (along with his High School Performing Arts Teacher Joey Scott), handled all production design, edited, and did sound design, among many other things!

"My favorite part about making this film was seeing my ideas translated from the page to the set and the shoot. I especially loved seeing the two professional actors bring the characters I created to life," said Nelson.

Nelson states that Scott is his favorite mentor and confidant. With all the different projects that Nelson has worked on throughout his high school career, he would not have been able to do it all without Scott, whose selfish dedication, attention, and time for not just Nelson but all of the IAI students.

"He has shown me how to have grace under fire, and he constantly encourages me and allows me to make mistakes but learn from them, as well," states Nelson.

"I spent 35 years as a TV/film producer, and all that led me to Oaks and these great students. It is my calling. I believe that! Mentoring these talented storytellers is an honor and my joy," says Scott, "What makes Collin unique is his unlimited passion and energy. Once a story starts brewing in his mind, he is unstoppable. You can see it in his eyes; he overflows with thoughts and ideas. It is impossible not to hitch a ride with him from then on. I've seen his focus, enthusiasm, and work ethic grow.

During his time here, he has gone through the Film/Television IAI pathway and taken other IAI classes, such as Acting for the Camera, which helped him understand how to direct film actors. Nelson has also been in the cast for musicals, plays, and Comedy Sportz for the last four years.

He is thankful to OCS Director of Film Andrew Christopher for taking him and his class to the Sundance Film Festival, where they studied and learned the craft of filmmaking. Having opportunities to interact with professional filmmakers as a high school student was invaluable.

Nelson is now putting his energies into his capstone. The capstone is usually reserved for seniors, but Nelson wanted to hit the ground running last year as a junior, which no one had done before. Current juniors are taking the initiative and working on their senior capstones this year.

Now, in his senior year, Collin is co-directing film IV's current feature film, which uses actors and musicians from IAI.

Christopher says, "It was so fun to watch Collin come alive during the creation of "The Last Liftoff." It was such a personal project for him. He took so much pride in every rewrite and every frame during the filming and editing. I'm not surprised it's having so much success. I'm proud of him."

Here is a list of all the awards he has received for his heartfelt film:

- Calabasas Film Festival Outstanding Achievement in Directing, High School
- LA Film Awards, June 2023 Best Indie Short & Best Young Filmmaker Award
- Indie Short Fest, July 2023 Outstanding Achievement Award Young Filmmaker (Male)
- Independent Short Awards Honorable Mention for Best Young Filmmaker
- Best Shorts Competition Award of Merit, Special Mention
- IndieFest Film Awards Award of Merit, Special Mention
- The Brightside Film Festival Best Film Drama High School
- Indie X Film Festival Honorable Mention for Best Young Filmmaker
- EB Indie Film Festival Cub Award Best High School Film
- Oniros Film Awards Finalist





- Sky Arts Film Festival Best High School Short Film
- UK Student Film Festival Special Mention