

CODA TRIUMPHS AT OSCARS AS SMITH SLAPS ROCK ON STAGE

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Top honours: Best female actor winner Jessica Chastain, right, with Troy Kotsur and Ariana DeBose, winners of best supporting role awards. AFP/DAVID LIVINGSTON

Deaf family drama *CODA* won best picture honors at the Oscars on Sunday, the first ever triumph for a streamer, in a ceremony that was overshadowed by best actor-winner Will Smith striking comedian Chris Rock on stage for making a joke about his wife.

Seeking to reassert its relevance, the Academy Awards gala was packed with big musical performances and three wise-cracking woman hosts — but will enter the history books for the shocking Smith-Rock altercation, which changed the mood of the night before the final prizes were announced.

CODA, a feel-good indie drama starring deaf actors in lead roles which had been presumed a longshot for Hollywood's biggest prize until very recently, pulled off a remarkable late surge to emerge triumphant.

The film bagged the historic prize for Apple TV+, a relative newcomer in a streaming market dominated by rivals like Netflix.

"Thank you to the Academy for letting our *CODA* make history tonight," said producer Philippe Rousselet.

Jessica Chastain won best actress for *The Eyes of Tammy Faye*, in which she played a real-life televangelist who became an unlikely champion for LGBTQ community. "We're faced with discriminatory and bigoted legislation that is sweeping our country... in times like this, I think of Tammy and I'm inspired by her radical acts of love," she said.

But Tinseltown's biggest night was dominated by a shocking moment in which Smith — who won best actor for his work on "King Richard" — slapped Rock on stage, before returning to his wife Jada Pinkett Smith and shouting profanities.

Rock, presenting the best documentary prize, had compared Jada's tightly cropped hair to Demi Moore's appearance in the film "G.I. Jane." Jada suffers from alopecia, a condition causing hair loss.

The moment left stunned viewers questioning if it had been scripted or genuine.

But when he returned to the stage to accept his award, a tearful Smith lamented "people disrespecting you" in Hollywood, and apologized to the Academy "and all my fellow nominees."

Smith, who plays the father of tennis greats Serena and Venus Williams in *King Richard*, added: "Art imitates life. I look like the crazy father, just like they said about Richard Williams."

Los Angeles police said they were aware of the incident but that Rock had not filed a police report. The Academy tweeted that it "does not condone violence of any form."

The Power of the Dog won the best director award for Jane Campion. She is only the third woman to do so in Oscars history.

Kenneth Branagh triumphed for best original screenplay for his childhood-inspired *Belfast*. Ariana DeBose won best supporting actress for *West Side Story*, " and Disney's *Encanto* was named best animated feature.

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