

Phoenix Film Festival will cater to film makers, movie fanatics



By Lily Lieberman | 04/02/13 9:00am



(Photo courtesy of Michael Brilliant)

The Phoenix Film Festival “was one of those crazy 4 a.m. ideas,” founder and alumnus Chris LaMont said.

The idea turned out to be anything but fleeting, as the festival has been running for 13 years. It has been named one of The 25 Coolest Film Festivals by MovieMaker Magazine.

“I was working on a project, and I thought, ‘How great would it be if there was a film festival here that I could send my short film to?’ Which led to, ‘Well, why isn’t there a really awesome film festival here in Phoenix?’ LaMont said. “Someone said, ‘Well, why don’t you be the one who starts it?’”

In its first year, 3,000 people attended the festival, proving to “ourselves, our supporters and the city of Phoenix that people were interested in a real film festival,” LaMont said.

The 2013 Phoenix Film Festival will screen more than 150 films at the Harkins Scottsdale/101 from April 4 to April 11 to more than 23,000 attendees. Opening weekend, the theater will show films on seven screens beginning at 9 a.m. and the screenings will continue well into the night.

LaMont is teaching four classes this semester at the School of Theatre and Film. One of his goals for the festival is for it to be interactive; a place where directors, actors and students can gather to discuss filmmaking.

"That's the real big difference from going to the movies and going to a film festival," LaMont said. "You go to movies, and then you go home, but at the film festival, after the movie the lights come up, and the director is there or actors are there, or even the writer or the producer."

Andrea Beesley-Brown, director of the horror and sci-fi portion of the festival, also emphasizes the interaction during the festival. On Sunday, April 7, panels will be available during the day to discuss everything from costuming to special effects.

Some of the competition filmmakers will be coming from out of town to the festival to participate in a Q&A; on the last day of opening weekend.

"If you're just at the festival and kind of hanging out, it's easy to approach the different filmmakers," Brown said. "They're usually really excited that people are interested."

Opening Night

Along with a cocktail party, opening night will include a screening of "The Spectacular Now," directed by James Ponsoldt and starring well-known actors like Shailene Woodley, Mary Elizabeth Winstead and Miles Teller. A familiar story, Sutter Keely is a charming high school senior who seems to have it all with no plans for the future. After being dumped by his girlfriend, the budding alcoholic awakes on a lawn to find Aimee Finicky standing over him. Her 'nice girl' characteristics and dreams of the future are a sharp contrast to Sutter's "delusion of a spectacular now," and naturally these two opposites attract.

The film, which was shown at Sundance a few months ago, is an accomplishment for the festival, proving how much this festival is regarded by independent studios.

LaMont encourages everyone to peruse the films entered in the festival.

"The festival is programmed so there is something for everyone," he said. "It's not an elitist thing. It's just a big film party. If you find one movie you like, you'll probably find something else in the program you like, too."

Films to Watch

"The Kings of Summer," a coming-of-age comedy about three teenage friends who run away from home to spend a summer in the woods living off the land, premiered with rave reviews at the 2013 Sundance Festival.

One of the foreign film nominees from the Oscars this year, "Kon-Tiki" is the story of legendary explorer Thor Heyerdahl's epic 4,300-mile crossing of the Pacific Ocean in a balsa wood raft in 1947.

"Down and Dangerous," a film successfully funded via the website Kickstarter, follows Paul Boxer, a cocaine smuggler who must ultimately choose between his life in the trade and his integrity. The story is inspired by one of the filmmaker's father, who had a brief career as an independent smuggler.

Nervous you'll see a dud? Don't be.

"The film festival watches a whole bunch of bad movies that we don't think are good enough" LaMont said. "We watch 1000 movies and wheedle that down to 150 great ones."

The festival also features films geared toward science fiction, psychological thrillers and horror.

"We have one we are pretty excited about called 'Errors of the Human Body.' It's all about human genetics and follows a world renowned clinician for Molecular Cell Biology & Genetics who discovers a conspiracy among his colleagues," Brown said.

Brown also cites “The Ghastly Love of Johnny X” as a must-see at the festival. “A kind of a sci-fi '50s throwback,” the musical number draws influence from sci-fi B-list movies (“imagine leather jackets and pompadours”) and was shot on the last black and white film stock that Kodak ever produced.

The Closing Night movie, “Stuck in Love,” features Greg Kinnear, Jennifer Connelly, Lily Collins, Kristen Bell and Logan Lerman in a touching comedy-drama about a successful novelist whose obsession with his ex-wife has sent his perplexed family into a tailspin.

ASU Film

Two ASU students have entered “The Muse” into the Arizona short films category. Brian Kiefling, a film student as well as a police officer with ASU for 15 years, wrote and directed the psychological thriller about a young woman who lands a job and takes a bet with her co-workers. Locked in a vault she experiences the mysteries of an old children's hospital, where vengeful nurse haunts the premises.

“The Muse” was shot in the basement of the Community Services building, where there truly used to be a children's hospital

“I was telling the history of the building while I was giving a tour to Ear Candy (a non-profit music charity), and I was pointing out the cold storage area, the furnace, and the crematorium. There were two members of Ear Candy that freaked out. That fear instilled was my inspiration,” Kiefling said.

That night, he went home and typed out the basic premise with the “hairs on his arm standing up,” and recruited film and media production junior, Matt Chesin as producer of the film.

Chesin's passion for the technical prompted him to find the location, put the crew together, and handle casting, sound and filming. The nine-minute short was filmed in two days with a combined pre- and post-production of five months.

Create your own schedule

The Phoenix Film Festival has affordable options for students, such as a Flex Pass, which includes four individual screening tickets to any four films for \$30. Each individual screening is \$12.

Reach the reporter at lily.lieberman@asu.edu

Correction: Because of a reporting error, the film festival was said to run from April 4 to April 8. The festival continues through April 11.

Subscribe to Pressing Matters

Get the best of State Press delivered straight to your inbox.

RELATED STORIES