



ENTERTAINMENT

Thursday, February 14, 2013 - Tacoma, WA

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Tacoma Film Festival offers medley of genres

Through Oct. 11, Tacoma is bathed in the creative world of its seventh annual film fest, where imagination lets rip on screens all around town. But it isn't just a chance to see films you haven't seen before. It's also a growing catalyst for new films made here in the Puget Sound area.

BY ROSEMARY PONNEKANTI; STAFF WRITER

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A fish-thrower who falls in love. A palace guard who can't stay awake. An iPhone that takes its owner on an adventure. Yep, we're back in the creative world of the Tacoma Film Festival, where imagination lets rip on screens all around town. But the seventh TFF isn't just a chance to see films you (and most other people) haven't seen before. It's also a growing catalyst for new film made right here in the Puget Sound area, supporting indie filmmakers with local showcases and workshops, encased in a week of morning-to-night movies.

"Our dedication to local filmmakers sets us apart (from other festivals)," says festival director Emily Alm. It isn't just words. Like last year's, this year's festival features two days (Monday and Tuesday) of nearly 30 local films, including two screenings of the Grit City Flicks (short films by Tacoma makers), one of North Sound Shorts and a couple of local features. Some of them, like "Good Night Guard" (about a Buckingham Palace guard who struggles to stay awake) are repeated during other shorts events like Family Shorts (noon Oct. 6), Documentary Shorts (12:15 p.m. Sunday) and Animated Shorts (12:30 p.m. Sunday). Others, such as "Out on a Limb" (about David "Squirrelman" Csaky's eviction from his Seattle treehouse) and "The Mountain Runners" (the 1911-13 Mount Baker marathon story) have their own screenings on those days.

"It's a great way for us to further pursue our mission of connecting our community to film, and to support the many local filmmakers who live in and around Tacoma," Alm says.

Or, in some cases, former Tacomans who now make films elsewhere. Linda Palmer is one of those: The L.A.-based filmmaker grew up attending Whitman Elementary, Stewart Middle and Yelm High schools, and says that the Tacoma Film Festival – which has seen attendance more than double over the last two years – is one of the things that makes the town way more culturally attractive than it used to be.

"It feels like a really artsy community," says Palmer, "and that encourages more creative people to go to school there, hone their craft there." Palmer, who premiered a film back at the 2007 festival, will be at the premiere of her new romantic comedy, "Halloween Party," at 5:45 p.m. at SOTA. Filmed in Long Beach, it takes a voyeur's-eye view of a Halloween party through the multiple cameras that the obsessive host has set up around the house.

"There are a lot of antics – people say to me, 'How come I don't get invited to

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parties like that?" Palmer jokes. "But there's also a message about not judging people, when a high-maintenance friend brings a homeless guy as a date."

The film's soundtrack has achieved quite a following in its own right, Palmer says, and she's hoping folks will come in costume like a Halloween-themed "Rocky Horror" screening. The home crowd is part of why she chose to premiere the film here.

"If you can take a festival where you can pull a crowd, that's great," she says.

A free filmmaking workshop by Warren Etheredge (10 a.m. Sunday) and entrepreneur discussion (8:15 p.m. Tuesday) fill out the offerings for local makers.

The festival's other big goal, says Alm, is supporting "underdog" indie films that haven't broken into the big time yet, many of them with premieres today.

"I like bringing things people haven't heard of but are definitely worth being shown," she says. Among Alm's picks are "Francine" (4 p.m. today, 2:30 p.m. Sunday) about a woman (Melissa Leo) who's reclaiming her life after prison – "it's really subtle but dramatic," Alm says; "Pilgrim Song" (6 p.m. today and Oct. 7) about a laid-off music teacher who finds peace hiking; "Lemon" (3:45 p.m. Saturday), a story of an ex-con-turned-poet that Alm says is "a common story told in a fresh way"; and the closing film "Do-Deca-Pentathlon" (6:30 p.m. Oct. 13), a SXSW selection recounting the Olympics-style competition between a pair of brothers.

Of course the films go beyond the local and the unusual: There's animation, family shorts, drama, comedy, horror and documentary from all corners of the globe.

This year's festival also sees around 50 percent of the filmmakers in attendance, plus new items such as a wine tasting alongside the film "Boom Varietal"; a visit by cartoonist Jen Vaughn, featured in "Cartoon College"; and the festival's awards announced at a Sunday evening screening.

Passholders will also get a new bonus: access to free food at the hospitality area in The Grand Cinema.

Turns out you don't need an iPhone (or a fish-thrower) to take you on an adventure in Tacoma this week. All you need are a couple of film tickets.

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A medley of local films

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Film fest kicks off

It might sound foreign, but "The Taiwan Oyster" is an American road movie with all that genre's classic themes. The opening night film for the Tacoma Film Festival was shot in Taiwan, but its protagonists are American expatriates whose quest to find themselves turns instead into an epic "Weekend at Bernie's" odyssey with one of their friend's bodies after hijinks go tragically wrong.


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