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Published January 5th, 2011

The California Independent Film Festival Finds a Home in Moraga

By Andrea A. Firth



Left to right: Derek Zemrak, Sam McAlpine, Beau Behan, Casey Pirkle, Scott Byer, Leonard Pirkle
Photo Andy Scheck

The California Independent Film Festival (CAIFF) is entering an auspicious year in 2011-the 13th annual festival will be held at the New Rheim Theatre in Moraga from January 28th through February 3rd.

"It's definitely lucky 13 for us," says Beau Behan, the Program and Promotion Director for the CAIFF, displaying his wide, warm grin-a smile that moviegoers in Moraga have come to know over the past six months. In June the CAIFF Association took over the management of the theater, which was teetering on the brink of permanent closure; Behan was appointed General Manager, and the Festival was relocated.

After moving to a couple of different East Bay locations when the Festival got started in the late 1990's, then eight years in Livemore and last year in Orinda, the CAIFF hopes to have found a permanent home in Moraga. "We are excited to introduce the town to the world of independent film, and to show everyone that this art deco theater house is a true gem," says Behan.

Over 80 films will be screened during the weeklong festival, which is expected to attract two to three thousand moviegoers. The star-studded event includes independent, foreign, and mainstream movies, along with shorts,

documentaries, and instructional films. "The Festival tries to cover everything," says Behan, "We cover a number of film genres. It's international. And we provide many opportunities for the attendees to interact with and ask questions of the filmmakers and actors. There is something for everyone."

Main Events-What's Not to be Missed

Opening Night. Get your camera ready to see celebrities and filmmakers up close and personal on the red carpet. The CAIFF opening night event will feature cast and crew members from the film *The 5th Quarter*-an inspirational drama, which centers around a young man's drive to succeed following the tragic death of his brother, starring Aidan Quinn, Andie McDowell, and Ryan Merriman.

Iron Filmmaker is Back. The popular Iron Filmmaker event will showcase the efforts of up-and-coming local writers, directors, videographers, and actors. Last year, Lamorinda filmmaking teams came out on top taking first and third place honors in this contest, which challenges filmmakers to create a 3-minute movie on a specific theme in 24 hours. Contestants are encouraged to go to the CAIFF website to register to participate; the first 30 entries will be accepted. Films must include the "secret ingredients" that all participants will be given at the kick-off meeting on the morning of Saturday, January 22nd, and must be submitted by 11:00 a.m. on Sunday, January 23rd. All of the Iron Filmmaker films will be shown on the big screen in the main theater on Saturday the 29th starting at 10:00 a.m.

The Gala Slate Awards. On Sunday the 30th, film enthusiasts are invited to attend the CAIFF Gala Slate Awards. Brunch will be served on the stage of the main theater and films will be recognized in a variety of categories. (Fans can attend the brunch and/or the award ceremony alone). Actor Lou Diamond Phillips, well known for his portrayal of Ritchie Valens in the film *La Bamba*, will be presented with a Maverick Award. And Shirley Jones, the star of several films including the musicals *Oklahoma* and *Music Man*, will receive a Lifetime Achievement Award. Most middle-aged (and older) Lamorinda moms will fondly recall watching Jones as the multi-tasking, singing, bus-driving mother of five in the television sitcom *The Partridge Family* and probably wonder today where she got all the energy! The film *Oklahoma* will be shown in the main theater following the awards ceremony.

Try a Short. Throughout the week, the Festival will also showcase a number and variety of movie shorts, films from three to thirty minutes in length. "Shorts are the nucleus of independent film making. It is often the vehicle for independent film makers getting started," says Behan.

The Closer. The final night of the Festival (Thursday, February 3rd) will feature the winning Shorts Showcase and the film *Mayor Cupcake*-the story of a hard-working cupcake-maker who is inadvertently elected mayor of a small town burdened with debt. Moviegoers will have another chance to catch the celebrity buzz and ask questions of the film's star Lea Thompson, who gained film fame in the *Back to the Future* series and on the television sitcom *Caroline in the City*.

"The whole community is rallying behind us. I think it is going to be a great success worthy of its 13th year," says Behan, who is keeping busy with the final preparations leading up to the Festival. "I hope the Festival will

provide another opportunity to put Moraga on the map," he says, revealing his ubiquitous smile and adding, "We have found a home."

California Independent Film Festival 2011
Main Events-What's Not to be Missed

Saturday, January 22nd 10:00 a.m.-Iron Filmmaker Kick off
Sunday, January 23rd 11:00 a.m.-Iron Filmmaker Submission Deadline

Friday, January 28th
5:00 p.m.-Opening Night Red Carpet Reception
6:30 p.m.-The 5thQuarter in the main theater

Saturday, January 29th
10 a.m.-Iron Filmmaker Showcase

Sunday, January 30th
11:30 a.m.-Gala Slate Awards and Brunch
2:30 p.m.-Oklahoma in the main theater

Thursday, February 3rd
5:30 p.m.-Closing Reception
7:45 p.m.-Mayor Cupcake and Winning Shorts Showcase screening

For the complete CAIFF 2011 line up go to www.caiff.org. Tickets for all of the films and showcases are available online at the CAIFF website or at the theater. Advance purchase is advised for the opening night screening of The 5th Quarter, the Slate Awards, and closing night film Mayor Cupcake.

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