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The International Film Showcase

By Sophie Braccini



Efi Lubliner Photo Sophie Braccini

Over the past four years, Efi Lubliner and Jo Alice Canterbury have brought excellent foreign films to the Orinda Theatre that could not be seen anywhere else in Contra Costa County, and sometimes even in the country, as part of the International Film Showcase. Using discernment, foresight and skilled negotiating with producers, the passionate duo has been able to bring a weeklong showing almost every month of films that sometimes ended up becoming Golden Globe or Oscar nominees. The fifth season will start with the showing of the Italian film "The Human Factor" beginning Jan. 30.

The passion for films, especially foreign films, radiates from Lubliner. A native of Israel, the Lafayette resident was nurtured by films from all over the world. "I grew up on movies by Buell, De Sica, Godard, Kurosawa, and Fellini," he remembers. He came to this country with the idea of becoming a film director and producer, and while he participated and led many projects, he couldn't make a big enough name for himself in the industry. So, instead, Lubliner made his living in the computer industry, founding EDC Computer Systems.

Movies continued to be part of his life, however, and he often attended foreign film festivals, like the Palm Springs International Film

Festival recently held Jan. 2-12. "There I would see great movies and I would tell my friends that I would let them know when the films would come to a nearby theater, but most never did!" he says.

Finding an American distributor is hard, explains Lubliner; not many are ready to bear the financial risk to take on a foreign film. Sometimes when he and Canterbury want to show a movie here, they have to go directly to the producer and try to negotiate.

"It does not always work," says Lubliner. "Sometimes the producers do not have the money to pay to get a rating or for the music rights." To get the recent Showcase movie "Tangerines" - a 2015 Golden Globe nominee which is short-listed for an Oscar - Lubliner met with Estonian producer Ivo Felt in Palm Springs last year and negotiated for months until he could get the movie through a Canadian distributor.

The film distribution industry is very structured and finding theaters that can stray from the regimented system is also hard. "We talked to Jim Sheehan when he was managing the Orinda Theatre," remembers Lubliner. The Orinda venue was a natural choice since Lubliner and Canterbury met while on the Lamorinda Film and Entertainment Foundation, a group that was formed to support the Orinda Theatre. A deal was made with Sheehan to show a movie once a month for a week. When the management team changed, the deal was upheld, but changed to eight times a year instead of 10. Leonard Pirkle with the Orinda Theatre explains that there are conflicts with the scheduling of films. "We have tried to address this by only having the series occur in those months that seem to have more available slots - less studio releases," he says, adding that the theater plans to continue showing the films.

The duo only selects movies they both love, but Lubliner says that he prefers films based on real stories that are not too avant-garde in the way they are filmed. "We are both volunteers; we work for the love of films and our reward is when people love what they've seen," he adds.

Lubliner would not say which movies were his favorites: "They were all interesting, and give an opportunity to discover different cultures," he says. He adds that besides "Tangerines," some of the highlights last year were the German movie "Two Lives" and the Japanese film, "Like Father, Like Son."

Lubliner and Canterbury are hoping they will be able to continue to bring these gems in Contra Costa County. The key is the location and the attendance. "We have an email list of 2,700 people; if folks want to receive the information about our movies, they can go to our website (internationalshowcase.org) and enter their address," says Lubliner.

A review of the movie "The Human Factor" is slated to be published in the Jan. 28 issue of Lamorinda Weekly.

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