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California Independent Film Festival Opens Tomorrow, Sept. 10

By *Sophie Braccini*



"Queen and Country" plays in Orinda on Saturday at 9 p.m. Photo provided

crowd.

As in previous years, the festival supports local filmmakers and also features great foreign films that have not yet been distributed in the United States until now. "This is the case for John Boorman's 'Queen and Country,'" says CAIFF president and co-founder Derek Zemrak. "Boorman was nominated four times for an Academy Award. This film picks up where Boorman left us at the end of the 1987 film 'Hope and Glory' and takes us on a partly hilarious, partly serious adventure as the little boy of 'Hope and Glory,' now a young man, trains for the Korean war." Zemrak said that he actively sought Boorman to get that movie; most of the other features are submitted and selected for CAIFF.

Other foreign films include the Vietnamese movie "Huong Ga - Rise," by director Cuong Ngo. The young director who shares his time between Vietnam, Canada and the United States is already well known for his films such as "The Golden Pin" and "Pearls of the Far East." This new movie is an explosion of colors, sensuality and violence, describing the rise of a female gangster. It is a powerful survival movie, with strong imagery. Not for everyone, but definitely edgy.

In the "sweet" department, CAIFF will feature two French movies. One from France, the unique romantic comedy "Love at First Fight" that won the Art Cinema Award at the 2014 Cannes International Film Festival and Best First Film at the César Awards (French version of the Oscars); and from Québec the delightful "Henri Henri," part "Amélie" and part "Forrest Gump."

"Henri Henri" could also be included in the "movies for the whole family" category, with the excellent Australian movie "Paper Planes," and "Gibby," a local film with its world premiere at the Orinda Theatre scheduled at 7 p.m. Sunday, Sept. 13.

"I already liked the movie when I realized that the producer was from Orinda," says Zemrak. "It has been shot entirely in the East Bay, at a high school in Martinez and a gym in San Ramon. The director is from San Francisco." A tween-delight, "Gibby" incorporates all the must-haves of the genre, with the cohort of mean girls, sports rivalry, plus, as an exogenous ingredient to stir it up and make it unique, a little devil of a capuchin monkey. "That monkey, Crystal, is probably the biggest star in the movie," adds Zemrak. "It starred in 'Night at the Museum,' 'Hangover 2' and

The excitement of a film festival, with its red carpet, stars arriving in limousines, and the flashing of camera bulbs, is something everyone should experience. While Lamorinda may not be as glamorous as Cannes or Venice, this year the California Independent Film Festival team is bringing the ingredients for over-the-top, world-class entertainment to the Rheem and Orinda theaters Sept. 10-16, offering movie buffs a unique opportunity to meet directors, producers and actors and ask behind the scene questions. There will be movies for everyone to love, from near and far, at this event that has become exponentially more popular every year.

On opening night Tab Hunter will be at the Rheem Theatre to present the documentary "Tab Hunter Confidential." Hunter, an American heartthrob from the '50s, will make the trip to Moraga to answer questions from the opening night

many others." Some of the youngsters are also rising Disney stars such as Peyton Meyer. Other feature films include the psychological thriller "Elephant Song."

The festival also features The Iron Filmmaker Competition, where participants who receive a subject have 24 hours to make a movie. The winners will be shown at 11 a.m. Saturday, Sept. 11 at the Rheem Theatre. And new this year is the Film Scoring Competition. "This group of inspiring composers each scored the same short film with their own original music score," explains Zemrak. "This was our first time, and we received more than 150 submissions." The best submissions will be aired at 1 p.m. Saturday, Sept. 12 in Orinda.

Shorts and documentaries have also been very well received in Lamorinda. "'Eleven' was directed by a true CAIFF alumni," says Zemrak. "George Retelas was an Iron Filmmaker contestant, then he had a short in our festival a couple of years ago and now he comes back with a full-length documentary." Retelas researched and found many of the men his grandfather served with in his torpedo squad on the Hornet 11 during WWII. Using actual footage and interviews, Retelas reconstructed their story.

Lafayette native Peter Kepler, who earned a performing arts degree at Saint Mary's College, will be co-starring in the movie "Writer's Cramp," which will be shown at 9 p.m. Friday, Sept. 11 at the Rheem Theatre. The movie recently won Best Feature Film at the Fort Meyers Beach Film Festival and Best Original Screenplay at the Manhattan Film Festival. Filmed entirely in San Francisco and on the Peninsula, "Writer's Cramp" also features Lamorinda actress Annie Scott Rogers, who plays Kepler's mother in the film.

And the festival would not be the same without the shorts, where directors give their all to show what they are about and to prove their mastery. If going to an independent film festival is about opening one's mind and plunging into an adventure, going to see a series of shorts is a perfect choice.

All tickets and many trailers are available on the CAIFF website at caiff.org. The bests of the festival will be played again on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday, Sept. 14-16 at the Rheem Theatre. These winners will be announced on the CAIFF website Sept. 10.

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