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Film Clips

By Derek Zemrak



Monkey (voiced Charlize Theron) watches as Beetle (voiced by Matthew McConaughey) teaches Kubo (voiced by Art Parkinson) how to fish with a bow and arrow in animation studio Laika's epic action-adventure "Kubo and the Two Strings," a Focus Feature release. Credit: Laika Studios/Focus Features

Laika Entertainment, the talented stop-motion animation studio located in Hillsboro, Oregon, 967 miles from Hollywood, has produced four Oscar worthy films in the past seven years, including "Coraline" (2009), "ParaNorman" (2012) and "The Boxtrolls" (2014). Laika's latest movie is "Kubo and the Two Strings."

This time around, as in all Laika films, the lead character is a young child, Kubo (voiced by Art Parkinson, Rickon Stark from "Game of Thrones") whose peaceful world comes crashing down on him when he summons a revengeful spirit from the past. Kubo and his friends, the monkey and the beetle, join forces to unlock the secret legacy.

Two Oscar recipients, Charlize Theron and Matthew McConaughey, lend their voice talents to the film. Theron plays the wise Monkey and McConaughey is Beetle, the comic relief of the story. Kubo beholds a magical instrument, (yes, with two strings) that he uses to battle the Moon King and his minions to save his family. Along the way Kubo learns some of life's reasons; like why did he lose one eye and about his deceased father - a fallen samurai.

One may think that "Kubo and the Two Strings" is a Japanese folk tale but it is not. It has tales in myths for ancient Japanese culture but is an original story by Shannon Tindle and Marc Haimés. The movie is directed by Travis Knight who was the lead animator on "The Boxtrolls," "ParaNorman" and "Coraline." The animation is amazing, the scenery is stunning and should be seen on the big screen.

This film is rated PG because some parts may be too scary and complicated for very young children. Please respect the PG rating. "Kubo and the Two Strings" will earn Laika its fourth Best Animated Feature Nomination but it has one little thing in its way to winning the Oscar - Pixar.

The 19th annual California Independent Film Festival is just three weeks away, starting at 6 p. m. on Sept. 8 at the Rheem Theatre. Over 30 filmmakers from around the world will be attending the weeklong festival. Meet Ellen Gerstein, a Los Angeles filmmaker and see her short film "Come Away With Me."

Hope to see you at the festival and remember; CAIFF has "Something for Everyone from Around the World."

Filmmaker Spotlight: Ellen Gerstein

By Lindsay Pirkle, CAIFF Festival Director

I am Ellen Gerstein a Los Angeles filmmaker, member of Women in Film, the Alliance of Women Directors and The Actors Studio. My international award winning short film, "Come Away With Me," is an official selection at The California Independent Film Festival screening at noon on

Sunday, Sept. 11 in the Shorts Program C: Love and Friendship.

It is about an interracial couple, sweethearts in the 60s, who were torn apart by war and social pressure. The character Michael is a war hero suffering from PTSD and Alzheimer's. Michael is played by Charlie Robinson ("Mom," "Night Court," "Antwon Fisher," "Hart of Dixie"). I play Anne (recurring roles in "Shameless," "Whole Truth"). I also wrote the original song for my film "Come Away With Me Tonight." It is performed by Hollie Cavanagh from American Idol and features Luis Eric Gonzales from Earth, Wind & Fire on horns

My film was an all-female production. I produced, directed and acted, Julie Janata was co-producer and editor, Victoria Sampson (a CAIFF Alumni) did the sound design and Polly Morgan was the cinematographer. I love interviews and will be available before, during and after the film festival.



Ellen Gerstein

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