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Film Festival Highlights Unique Worldwide Productions

By Sophie Braccini



Comedies from the U.S. or Ireland, thrillers and kids' movies, dramas from England, Egypt or France, documentaries from the East Bay or Africa - whatever your interest, you can see it at the 19th annual California Independent Film Festival, beginning Sept. 8 and running through Sept. 14 in Moraga, Orinda and San Francisco.

Every year the movies, documentaries and shorts in competition for an award at the CAIFF offer a wide variety of high-caliber productions as the festival grows in notoriety. This is a major Lamorinda cultural event, with some innovations in the format of the screenings that transport moviegoers to faraway expeditions, without leaving home.

The opening night movie at the CAIFF is the poignant "Miles." Photos provided

The festival opens this year on Thursday, Sept. 8 with an American comedy/drama, "Miles." The

opening night is also a social occasion in Moraga and has sold out in previous years. Director Nathan Adloff will share in the celebration with his young actor, Tim Boardman. The movie is partly autobiographical and tells the story of Miles, who challenges social codes in his Midwest town to get to college. The movie will be preceded by a short anime from Australia, "The Story of Percival Pilts," and both features are for all audiences.

At 6 p.m. there will be a celebration in the theater with appetizers and drinks, immediately followed by the two movies' screenings. After "Miles," Adloff and Boardman will answer questions.

"This year we are presenting a short movie before every feature film," says the festival's cofounder Derek Zemrak. He adds this is a way to introduce audiences to the charm and creativity of shorts. As during previous years, certain presentations are entirely dedicated to short movies, including the popular best-of the Saporos shorts from Japan.

Zemrak is always happy to note that some directors who debuted a short just a few years back are now coming back with full features. Siobhan Devine from Canada is returning with "Birdwatcher," a beautiful story of redemption and forgiveness, after featuring a short a few years ago.

"It's very interesting to see the progress in their work and career," Zemrak says.

One important change this year is that the films will be shown in Moraga and Orinda, with no overlap, so everyone can see all the movies if they desire. Previous years, with features shown at the same time in different theaters, hard choices had to be made. This year, while the opening is in Moraga, the festival will be at the Orinda Theatre all day on Friday, Sept. 9, and switch days throughout the weekend. The awards and the Saporos shorts will be presented in the evenings at the Rheem Theatre on Sept. 13 and 14.

Films will also be shown at the Castro Theater in San Francisco all day on Saturday.

Also part of the festival are the creators contests, such as the The Iron Film Makers, where teams

have 24 hours to create a film on a given theme; or the second edition of the Composer Contest, a competition to write a music score for a given short film. Zemrak launched the music competition two months ago via the internet and received 147 submissions from all over the world. The winners of both competitions will be featured during the festival.

"We called this edition of the festival 'something for everyone from around the world,'" says Zemrak. Each year he and his team try to get the best independent and interesting films for the Lamorinda audience. Program detail and tickets are online at www.caiff.org.

For Your Viewing Pleasure

There are a total of 10 feature films in the festival, besides "Miles."

"The Red Maple Leaf" is a thriller with Martin Landau and Robert Loggia;

"The Innocents" is a touching human drama from France set in 1946 that has received unanimous reviews in Europe (and 93 percent positive on Rotten Tomatoes);

"Despite the Falling Snow" from England is a romantic spy story in time of the cold war;

"Beat Beneath My Feet," also from England, is a story of rock 'n' roll renaissance;

"The Birdwatcher" from Canada tells the story of a mother reconnecting with her own mother in dramatic circumstances;

"Kepler's Dream" from England also tells of family ties and secrets from the point of view of 11-year-old Ella;

"Beijing New York" from Canada takes the viewer between the two cities as the film's central character has to choose which one to call home and which man to love;

"After Words" from the U.S. is a romantic comedy developing in Costa Rica with wonderfully talented Academy Award-winner Marcia Gay Harden;

"Kikoriki: The Legend of the Golden Dragon" is a children's feature from Russia, a delightful and beautifully made animation, fun and in English.

The festival's documentaries have always been very strong and varied. They include:

"Trailhead, a surprising discovery of Oakland's redwoods, just 10 minutes from Lamorinda;

"The World We Live In" is part of a series that will make audiences sing, think and cry.

There is also a feature about Norman Lear and short productions. The shorts are grouped by theme from "Make Us Laugh" to "Crimes and Misdemeanors" and "Love and Friendship." -S. Braccini



In "Trailhead," discover Oakland's gateway to the redwoods

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