

~ Life in LAMORINDA ~

21st California Independent Film Festival opens Aug. 24

By Sophie Braccini



"Angels in Our Midst" plays Tuesday Aug. 28 at 6 p.m. Rheem Theatre

Image provided

Now in its 21st year, this year's California Independent Film Festival will open again at the Rheem Theatre – something that had been quite improbable until just a few months ago – and will be held in a completely refreshed performance hall, with opening night bringing Lamorinda's movie buffs together for an evening of celebration before viewing a modern fairy tale from Austria, "The Salzburg Story." Continuing through Aug. 30, both at Rheem and at the Orinda Theatre, the festival will show movies, short films and documentaries from around the world, inviting the community to meet with cinematic art professionals and open their minds to a world of creativity.

CAIFF is one of the most unique cultural experiences offered in Lamorinda with a full week of productions from the across the U.S. and around the world, many of which are not yet released in this country. Derek Zemrak and partner Leonard Pirkle manage the two local movie theaters and are film makers themselves, so when they start screening submissions for the festival with their committee, up to a year in advance, they think about entertainment, diversity, surprises, and also which filmmakers and actors to invite who will give the audience an inside and exclusive view of the movie world.

At opening night, Austrian director Alexander Peter Lercher will come to Moraga along with lead actress Kelly Bishop – a Tony Award winner and "Gilmore Girls" star. Austrian-born and raised, Lercher lived in London and California. He created what he calls a cross-cultural romantic drama where two people from different cultures learn from each other. "The Salzburg Story" will take American viewers into another world.

After the glitter and sequins of opening night settle, during the weekend and the following week the festival will offer dozens of other features, such as "Up To Snuff," which is a journey into the life of American composer W.G. Snuffy Walden. "Hunting Lands" is an American movie about the redemption of the veteran turned recluse; a Japanese documentary, "Nourishment for the Japanese Soul" or "Itadakimasu" explains why happiness is found at the dinner table (a world premiere); and the American documentary "Angels in Our Midst" tells the story of World War II American nurses in the Normandy invasion and European theater; and many more films will be showcased.

Another not-to-be-missed portion of CAIFF are the short films, including the "Ties To The Bay" series that features Lafayette in a 10-minute film that explains how in this city the schools are great, the property values are sky-high, and the quality of life appears unsurpassed – yet looks can be deceiving. The festival will also feature a Canadian short films series that includes humor, mystery and more surprises.

The festival also provides an opportunity for budding professionals to compete and stretch their creativity. The public chooses the winner of the second playwright composition competition, and each year the Iron Filmmaker and soundtrack competitions attract submissions from around the world.

A festival would not be complete without awards and receptions. The 21st CAIFF will honor Doug Jones with a Lifetime Achievement Award and Leonard Maltin, one of the world's most respected film critics, with the Golden Slate Award. Many of the

festivities will take place at Cine Cuvée, the charming wine bar next to the Orinda Theatre.

Go online for information about the CAIFF program and how to purchase tickets at www.caiff.org.

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