

POSTED ON SEPTEMBER 17, 2008:

Film Fever

September an unofficial film festival month

By Travis Estvold

Movies today very rarely feel new or inspired. Even supposed summer blockbusters draw yawns at best and test my vomit reflex at worst. Green Day has a song that goes "Wake me up when September ends," and that's exactly how I feel about Hollywood's attempt to steal my hard-earned greenbacks during the hottest months of the year.



Belly

Except the song lyrics could be "Wake me up when September begins" because two of the coolest exhibitions of film in Idaho take place in this month of the sapphire stone and the morning-glory vine.

The first fest up is the Sun Valley Spiritual Film Festival, with film screenings, lectures and panel discussions. It takes place in Sun Valley and Hailey from Friday, Sept. 19, through Sunday, Sept. 21. A pair of doctors are headlining as keynote speakers to launch the festival.

SVSFF "explores different spiritual traditions and is a celebration of the human spirit through film," reads the description on the festival's Web site. That includes religion, but also so much more. Of the 30 films being featured, many thematic elements arise, including community, nature, humanitarianism, the environment and overcoming adversity.

In addition, an underlying motif of compassion surrounds the films this year. On Friday and Saturday, lecturers Dr. Rachel Naomi Remen and Dr. David Shlim will each speak on how the medical profession—and life in general—can be bolstered by the introduction to and further understanding of compassion.

The films in the festival range from a three-minute high-school senior project to some with runtimes longer than 90 minutes and will screen beginning Friday afternoon, continuing all day Saturday and all day Sunday. A complete schedule is available on the Web site, as are synopses of each title and maps to the venues. Admission prices are \$8 per film and \$15 for lectures and the opening reception. All-inclusive passes cost \$135 and allow holders into every screening and event.

Every film has its own appeal, but a few may be standouts. Canadian offering *The Other Side of the Door* makes light of how it feels to be a Mormon missionary going neighborhood-to-neighborhood spreading the word. *A Jihad For Love* is "the world's first feature documentary to explore the complex global intersections between Islam and homosexuality." And *Divided We Fall: Americans in the Aftermath* follows one college student's trip around a post-9/11 United States in search of stories pertaining to one of our most noted national crises.

"There is something for everyone with this year's program ... films and speakers that explore our questions about why we are here on earth, what is our purpose in life, how can we make a difference," says Mary Gervase, SVSFF executive director.

In her pitch for the festival, Gervase says, SVSFF offers "films and Q and A's that inspire, charm, challenge, entertain ... and in our beautiful fall countryside."

Perhaps not as ethereal, but just as inspiring, a second festival takes place in Boise the following weekend. The Idaho International Film Festival begins Thursday, Sept. 25, and runs through Sunday, Sept. 28.

While the Sun Valley festival seeks to uplift the spirits, IIFF places an emphasis on making the experience relevant for Gem State filmmakers. In addition to the many films available for viewing, several workshops will educate future Idaho film directors on how to chase government grants, work with green screens and produce films with little to no budget.

"The festival was designed for Idaho filmmakers to show them what was possible in independent film," festival director Bruce Fletcher says.

In addition, he says, "It's like a weekend retreat for film people."

Many of each year's IIFF films are Idaho- and Northwest-specific, like Kevin Gonzalez's *Pappy Boyington Field*, a documentary about an effort to have Coeur d'Alene's airport renamed after a heroic WWII veteran. Jon Jost's pair of films *Homecoming* and *Over Here* surround a Newport, Ore., family with two sons—one amounting to very little domestically and another who is in the service "over there."

Local husband and wife production team Chad and Cecilia Rinn, who have had entries in IIFF the last four years, are screening two of their projects this year and both rave about their involvement with the festival.

"To me it represents everybody having a voice worth hearing, not just the wealthy or Hollywood connected," Chad says.

Many of these voices are global ones, as films arrive in Idaho from Croatia, Indonesia, South Africa and Sweden, among other countries. Still, some pictures remain independent while featuring actors who have starred in their fair share of overtly

Hollywood fare—Brad Dourif, Curtis Armstrong, Fairuza Balk, Miranda Richardson and Donald Sutherland to name a few.

Fletcher says the goal of the festival is to provide an array of films that are "all things to all people," meaning any psychographic slice of the population should find a title that appeals to them.

He also laughs when talking about the late-night selections.

"The general rule is: 'The later at night the film plays, the weirder it'll be.'"

During the course of IIFF, downtown Boise becomes the "Film Festival Village" as Bardenay and Red Feather host the opening and closing night galas; the Egyptian, Edwards Boise Downtown Stadium 9 and The Flicks theaters house screenings; and various other locales act as venues for seminars. Fletcher calls the village "a hopping mad place of filmmakers and filmgoers."

Prices range from \$6 for matinees to \$10 for opening and closing night films. The Everything Pass runs \$100 and procures VIP admission to all screenings as well as entry and free beverages at the opening and closing night gala parties. Tickets can be purchased online or at their respective venues, and a full schedule of events and film synopses are available at idahofilmfestival.org.

Many directors and special presenters will be on hand at screenings for both film festivals, meaning opportunities for discussion and commentary will be abundant. At both festivals, movie goers are bound to see something eye-opening, heart-rending or blood-curdling—or a mixture of all three.

If you're an Idahoan and a movie fan, and have grown a bit tired of silly superheroes, revolting romances and curiously commonplace comedies, September is the month to get out and reinvigorate your inner film buff—if not your spirit and soul. The Sun Valley Spiritual and Idaho International film festivals, now in their fourth and sixth seasons, respectively, are annual treats. And a final bonus: Gervase and IIFF managing director Toni Gillette are having a tete-a-tete soon to discuss offering an additional collaboration of the two festivals this winter.

*SVFF, Sept. 19-21, Sun Valley. For more information, visit svspiritualfilmfestival.org.
IIFF, Sept. 25-28, Boise. For more information, visit idahofilmfestival.org.*

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