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Film Festival Opens in Lamorinda This Weekend

By Sophie Braccini



Derek Zemrak and Leonard Pirkle are ready to roll out the red carpet for stars and guests at the California Independent Film Festival. Photo Andy Scheck

Oscar nominee Robert Loggia ("Jagged Edge," "Big," "An Officer and a Gentleman"), Charleene Closshey ("A Thousand Cuts"), and Jake Sandvig ("Easy A," "Sky High," "Weeds").

The casts and crews of films featured in the festival include many people who are well-known in the film industry, says Zemrak. "The independent films attract young professionals on their way up, as well as well-recognized professionals who want to support stories they believe in," he explains.

The film "Cas & Dylan" illustrates that idea perfectly, showcasing seasoned actor Richard Dreyfuss with talented young actress Tatiana Maslany. The two embark on an improbable and unexpected road trip across Canada that will make viewers feel better about humanity. The closing movie, "Putzel," is a sweet Jewish comedy that hints at Woody Allen's world. "Mom, Murder and Me" has action, mystery and is beautifully filmed in San Francisco.

But a film festival is about more than main feature films. Once again the CAIFF will feature thought provoking documentaries, some of them by our Lamorinda neighbors. Lafayette's Ellie Marks is the associate producer of "Mobilize," which presents the science, the facts and the debate regarding the link between cell phone use and brain tumors. Also showing is "Breathe in Life," the story of Laura Cryan Zellmer, a Moraga mom who was diagnosed as an infant with Cystic Fibrosis. The film is her letter to her son. (Read the related article in our archive, <http://www.lamorindaweekly.com/archive/issue0813/pdf/Two-Extraordinary-Lamorinda-Women-Direct-and-Produce-Two-CAIFF-Films.pdf>.)

Other documentaries include "Liv and Ingmar," the love story encompassing the 42-year and 12-film-long relationship between actress Liv Ullmann and master filmmaker Ingmar Bergman. Told entirely from Ullmann's point of view, this biopic of an extraordinary relationship is constructed as a collage of images and sounds from the timeless Ullmann-Bergman films, including behind-the-scenes footage, still photographs, passages from Ullmann's book "Changing," and Bergman's love letters to Ullmann.

In this election year, you will also want to see "True Son," the story of 22-year-old Michael Tubbs who decided in 2012 to run for the Stockton City Council to reinvent his hometown, building

What better way to kick off a wonderful weekend of fantastic films than to rub elbows with the films' stars, directors and producers? This year's California Independent Film Festival, Sept. 11-14 at the Rheem and Orinda theaters, and the Castro Theatre in San Francisco, will offer film enthusiasts more chances to mingle than ever before. The festival's main features have been purposefully steered toward feel-good, optimistic films, while several powerful documentaries will intrigue, inform, uplift, or simply break your heart - you can choose your emotion and run with it. And don't forget the shorts; as usual there will be unforgettable surprises.

"We chose movies that talk about relationships in a positive way," says CAIFF founder Derek Zemrak. "We heard what people said last year, and added more light-hearted films."

"An Evergreen Christmas" will be featured on opening night at the Rheem Theatre, Thursday Sept. 11. Some of the cast will be there, including

his campaign from the ground up. Also a beautiful documentary is "Thrown for a Loss: The Story of the 1963 Mallards," about the Pittsburg, Calif., Pop Warner football team headed to play in the 1963 national championships for the 12-14 age group, and have a pre-game breakfast with President John F. Kennedy at the White House. His assassination changed those plans. Team members attended Kennedy's funeral instead before going on to win the championship. Zemrak said that some of the players, as well as the director, plan to come to the showing of the movie.

"Citizen Hearst" tells the story of William Randolph Hearst, his empire and his impact on today's media - a fitting documentary for the Rheem Theatre since rumor has it that Donald Rheem, who was friends with Hearst, built this theater to rival his friend's in Hearst Castle. "Starring Adam West" will be a hit with anyone who loved him in "Batman." The eye-opening documentary focuses on the cruelty of Hollywood and the actor's real character.

And of course, a festival would not be a festival without shorts. Shorts are often the first films of young filmmakers who don't have budgets for full-length features. A short is an art form in its own right. In a few minutes, you have to tell a story, send a message, express a thought, and transmit a vision. It's like a short poem, the quintessence of a new talent. CAIFF presents the shorts in different categories: Relationships, Drama, Celebrity Shorts (celebrities often give a few days to young talent they believe in), Comedy, and East Bay Showcase. Each showing presents five to eight movies that are three minutes to a half-hour long.

Tickets and a complete program are available online at caiff.org. For those shows that might be sold out, up to 20 tickets will be available in the 'rush line' just before the start.

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