



Published October 26th, 2022

CAIFF 2022 - Beloved film festival returns to Orinda Theatre

By Sophie Braccini



CAIFF Program Director Efi Lubliner, right, with theater co-owner Derek Zemrak at the Orinda Theatre. Photo Jeff Heyman

It has been three years since Lamorinda experienced its own live film festival. The 23rd California Independent Film Festival will include a lineup expertly designed to bring families, movie buffs, classic film lovers, and others back to the silver screen, and experience exciting and glamorous events, close to home.

Comedies, drama, family movies, sing-alongs, documentaries - 24 acclaimed movies from 20 different countries, four U.S. premieres, seven Bay Area premieres and seven Contra Costa County premieres will be shown in the span of just one week, with no movie overlapping another. The breadth is vast and the program director guarantees that "there is no lemon" in the 2022 CAIFF.

Opening night is Nov. 10 at the historic Orinda Theatre. This year Derek Zemrak, co-owner of the theater, has given Efi Lubliner the program director's job. Lubliner had been part of the Jewish Film Festival for many years, and he is the co-director of the International Film Showcase that brings celebrated

foreign films monthly to Orinda. Lubliner breathes movies; for years he has been attending film festivals and negotiating with distributors, which has given him access to acclaimed movies, new and old.

The film chosen for opening night is India's selection for the 2023 Oscars, "The Last Film Show." The movie that has just been released in India tells the coming of age story of a young boy who is all consumed by his love of movies. It is the semi-biographical story of director Pan Nalin. The storyline is somewhat reminiscent of "Cinema Paradiso," the 1988 Oscar winner from Italian director Giuseppe Tornatore. Nalin said in an interview to DNA India that "Cinema Paradiso" was one of the greatest films he ever saw, and even when he watched the film, he felt there were certain scenes the director might have stolen from his own life. But these are two very different movies, with "The Last Film Show" painting a family and social environment that are unique, and giving a magnificent portrait of resilience with a very young child pursuing a dream.

As it is opening night for the CAIFF, the evening will start with a party at the Orinda Theatre catered by local Indian restaurant, Safran. Zemrak had decided to put the festival on hold during the COVID shutdown because he believes that the experience of the live audience getting together and sharing their enthusiasm can never be matched by an online event. He was proud to indicate that sponsors and donors are back to support the artistic endeavor.

After opening night the other films should continue to attract a wide range of viewers. Lubliner and Zemrak wanted to revive the tradition of offering free family movies during the weekend's matinees. The first is an animated musical comedy, "Cats Don't Dance," and the animator, Mark Dindal, will be at the festival to answer questions. On Sunday the festival is offering the musical-comedy-medieval-romance "The Court Jester" with a young Angela Lansbury and Danny Kaye.

Acclaimed foreign films have the lion share of the lineup. "Perfect Strangers" from Israel or "Heroic Losers" from Argentina are examples of the comedies that Lubliner loves so much. He adds that comedies are really best enjoyed in the theater, on the big screen, feeling the amusement and hearing the laughter of your fellow movie goers. "Perfect Stranger" was initially an Italian film with such an intriguing storyline that Lubliner had been chasing it for years trying to get distribution. Now it has been produced and adapted in 20 different countries and finally the festival program director was able to get the Israeli version.

Several directors will be able to come to Orinda to answer questions from the audience. It will not be the case of Iranian director Mohammad Rasoulof, whose film, "A Man of Integrity," won the "Un Certain Regard" prize at the Cannes Film Festival in 2017. Rasoulof is currently incarcerated at Evin prison in Iran, which burned on Oct. 15 after a clash between police and inmates; he is reportedly still alive. Rasoulof was sentenced to jail for propaganda against the system since "A Man of Integrity" talks about oppression and what one has to do to survive.

The festival also features some remarkable documentaries such as "The Boys" that tells the adventures of the Sherman brothers who created so many unforgettable musical scores for films such as "Mary Poppins" or "The Jungle Book." Lubliner adds that there is a lot of music in the festival such as the pianist who will play live during the presentation of the incredible 1922 classic film "Nosferatu;" or the fun sing-along event scheduled for the movie "Grease."

Other examples of the exciting diversity of the 2022 CAIFF are "The Night of the 12th," a mystery/crime movie from France, "Fire of Love" - a true story documentary about two volcanologists, "Voodoo Macbeth" - Shakespeare in Harlem; the true story of "The King of Laughter," "Hallelujah" telling the story of Leonard Cohen, and more. Lubliner encourages all to check the website (CAIFF.org), trusting that if one is interested in a topic, the experience will not disappoint.

Closing night has been reserved for the Hungarian movie "Bet on Revenge." Lubliner says that despite the aggressive title this is a sweet movie where the real story of a horse intertwines with a wonderful love story. The director Gabor Herendi will join the audience on Zoom from Hungary.

Lubliner declares that he is a believer in the great movie theater. With a festival designed to impress, he and Zemrak wish to bring back the Lamorinda audience and beyond to the silver screen. Program, tickets and details at CAIFF.org

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