



28TH ANNUAL
FLORIDA FILM
FESTIVAL

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Are They Films

“Let’s go to the movies.”

“*Let’s rent a movie.*”

“Let’s stream a movie.”

“*Let’s binge-watch (insert series title).*”



or Movies?

Regardless of your answer, you'll want to watch plenty of both at Enzian's annual Florida Film Festival, now celebrating 28 years of movie fan fun.

BY DINA HERNANDEZ

How we watch movies has changed, but our love of movies hasn't. In fact, the "average American" watches more than 5,000 movies in their life. Ready to add to your quota? Check out Florida Film Festival, where "One Ticket Is All It Takes."

The 28th annual festival, sponsored by Enzian and running April 12-21, brings some 180 feature and short films ("shorts") to screens at Enzian in Maitland and Regal Cinemas Winter Park Village. The emphasis is American

independent movies. Since its inception in 1992, the festival has grown from 300 submissions to more than 2,000 entries, 16 award categories and Oscar-qualifying status.

"We always think we'll never be able to top the year before," Programming Coordinator Tim Anderson says. "But I'm always amazed by the caliber of what we find and what the filmmakers make."

The tradition of excellence continues in 2019 despite changes at Enzian. January brought Henry Maldonado's retirement as board president, though

he remains a board member; and the resignation of Executive Director David Schillhammer, who left to be executive director of Brevard Symphony Orchestra. These departures followed Enzian's decision last August to cancel plans to expand from one to three screens.

Accessible Art

"One Ticket Is All It Takes" emerged as this year's festival slogan to encourage people to discover the festival for the first time.

"We have a retention rate of about 70

A Sampling of Recent Florida Film Festival VIPs



Romany Malco Jr.



Ellen Burstyn



Blake Jenner

percent,” Marketing Manager Valerie Cisneros says, adding that there are about 22,000 expected festival attendees. “We’re proud of that, but there’s still room to attract more people.”

Results of a Facebook poll indicated that the most common obstacle to attending was an assumption that the festival is expensive and exclusive.

“But tickets start at \$12,” and everyone is welcome, Cisneros says. “Twelve dollars is all it takes to be part of this culturally important event in your community.”

Ticket options range from individual tickets and passes — “a VIP way of experiencing the festival,” Cisneros says — to packages, which feature graduated

discounts: five tickets for \$55, 10 for \$105 and 20 for \$200.

Natural Selection

The Florida Film Festival experience includes about 12 movie screenings a day — some of which are shorts programs consisting of multiple films in 90-minute blocks — in addition to the fabled opening-night party; panel discussions; celebrity events; and opportunities to mingle with filmmakers, celebrities and fellow fans at Enzian’s Eden Bar. The event requires months of planning and thousands of man-hours. The film-selection process alone takes about six months.

Programming Director Matthew Curtis formed three-person screening committees last summer. Most screeners are local, and all have film expertise. They spent months watching and rating dozens of movies in their assigned competition category — narrative features, documentary features and shorts, narrative shorts, animated shorts, international features and international shorts. Subcategories include music, food, Florida, family friendly, midnight/horror and avant-garde films. The festival opened for submissions last August, and every entry was screened by a committee member. Among the submissions, screeners noted trends such as technology, #metoo, wildlife, immigration and President Trump.

“It’s a huge process, a huge endeavor, and I’m eternally thankful that people volunteer to participate,” Curtis says.

In January, each committee selected its best titles for the festival. This meant, for example, choosing just 10 narrative features from among the 200 submitted. First, screeners averaged their scores for each movie, eliminating the lowest-ranking films. Next, they determined which movies they unanimously agreed should be included. Then came the fun part — discussing, debating, arguing and “falling on their swords,” as Curtis says, to complete the list of titles in the category. The narrative-shorts selection meeting is notoriously demanding each year, running 10 to 12 hours as screeners whittle a field of 650 submissions to 28 to 30 titles.



Film enthusiasts mix and mingle during 2018 FFF Opening Night.

Winning Florida Shorts

The Florida Film Festival's Florida Shorts program highlights the best short films that are made, produced, about or take place in Florida. These include Enzian's "Best of Brouhaha" Grand Jury and Audience Award winners.



COURTESY ENZIAN (4)

Pam Grier

"It's grueling, and I love it, and I don't know why," screener and Orlando-based L.A. Film School instructor Charles Sutter says.

The result is 10 days of viewing pleasure — drama, fantasy, comedy, gritty reality, avant garde — with most films making their premiere at the festival. "Spotlight" films are on the schedule as well; these movies already are scheduled for release.

The Envelope, Please

The festival culminates with its Awards Bash, conferring grand jury, special jury and audience awards on the chosen few. Three awards set recipients on the path to possible Academy Award nomination: Best Narrative Short, Best Animated Short and Best Documentary Short. Winning a grand jury award at an accredited festival is one of just three ways a short can be considered for nomination.

"We are the only Academy Award-accredited film festival in Florida," Curtis says, "and one of only a couple dozen in the world to be accredited in all three categories. We've worked really hard to achieve that, and it's a great affirmation that what we do is excellent."

For more information on the 28th annual Florida Film Festival and to purchase tickets, visit enzian.org. **OAM**

Writer Dina Hernandez is a regular contributor to Orlando Arts Magazine.

GRAND JURY WINNER



Saving Blockbuster

Written/co-directed by Wesley Hayes; co-directed/produced by Alex Ullom; Florida State University; 13 min., 39 sec.

Three filmmakers travel to one of the last surviving Blockbuster Video stores to wage war against the biggest players in entertainment. It goes horribly wrong.

AUDIENCE AWARD WINNER



That's It

Co-written/co-directed/produced by Nikki Willson; co-written/co-directed by Jimmie Roberts; co-written by Elijah Edmunds and Chris Greene; Full Sail University; 6 min., 8 sec.

A young woman is nervous about her first sexual experience and gets advice from her eccentric aunt.