

Monsters, Cappuccinos, and Bill...Oh My!

Hardacre 2008 Fields Diverse Mix of Indie Films

With the summer movie season in full swing, overpopulated with sequels and superheroes, the little Hardacre Film & Cinema Festival is quietly making its mark on the indie film scene with its 11th installment on August 1st and 2nd. Regarded as the first of its kind in Iowa, the Hardacre fest is known for bringing top-notch, cutting-edge films to Eastern Iowa via the small city of Tipton (pop.3,200).

After a year's hiatus and leadership shake-up in 2006, the festival came back better than ever in 2007 with a powerful lineup. The 2008 festival promises to be even better, says Festival Director Travis Alden. "I was amazed by the depth and quality of the films we received this year," he says. "It was very difficult to narrow down the field."

The competitive nature of the festival is part of what makes the Hardacre appealing to filmmakers, according to Alden. The festival is extremely selective, especially for a small festival, so simply being chosen is an honor itself. "This year we're showing only about 12% of the films that were submitted. It's very competitive." notes Alden.

"In my experience, the festival just gets better with each passing year," said Will Valet, a five-time volunteer and jury member with the festival. "We bring a diverse set of films and filmmakers from all over the world to Tipton, and this year's audience will get to experience a great and unique selection they couldn't get anywhere else."

The 2008 schedule includes seven feature films and 15 shorts, all but one of which will have some sort of premiere at the Hardacre. "We have five World Premieres this year, which is outstanding." Alden says. "It's really a testament to the reputation that Hardacre has. Filmmakers want their films to premiere here." In addition to the World Premieres, this year's festival also has one U.S. Premiere, four Midwest Premieres and eleven Iowa Premieres; ensuring that these films are extremely fresh and new for the audience.

"From a documentary about live action 'World of Warcraft' role playing games where social misfits dress up as monsters to a short film about eating roadkill for supper, there's something to suit everyone's tastes at the Hardacre," says Alden. "We select films that not only entertain – they really invoke further discussion and stimulate the thought process."

Friday night's highlights include "Fix", an award-winning narrative feature where the film's actors shoot the film in first-person perspective. Inspired by true events, "Fix" is a one-day odyssey through the Los Angeles underground where two documentary filmmakers, Bella and Milo, race to get Milo's brother Leo from jail to rehab by 8pm. If he doesn't make it, he goes back to jail for three years. To top it all off, they must raise the \$5,000 required for Leo to be admitted to rehab.

Variety Magazine describes "Fix" as "Brash, cool, and energetic....a wild ride". Legendary film auteur Oliver Stone hails "Fix" director Tao Ruspoli as "A bold new style and talent". Hardacre juror and Iowa City indie filmmaker Tommy Haines says: "Fix' is what independent filmmaking should be; raw, original and innovative! Shawn Andrews ("Dazed and Confused") has a fun and energizing screen presence as Leo that is not to be missed!"

Other opening night highlights include "Outsource", a visually stunning matrix-esque sci-fi short; "Moonboy", a gritty yet emotionally uplifting animation; "Bresson & Adeline", a beautifully shot student film where two young children struggle with the fact they were never born; and a dark, piercing narrative called "The Loneliest Place On Earth", by St. Louis filmmaker Cody Stokes. "It's a beautiful, intimate and powerful look into the life of a dying man in need of a human connection." notes Haines.

Admission to any of the Hardacre's three programs, Opening Night, Saturday Day or Closing Night, is only \$6 each. Or, an all-festival pass can be purchased for \$15. Films on Friday begin at 6:00pm. On Saturday, screenings will run all day; from 9:00am through 11:00pm.

The daytime program kicks off with “Against The Wind”, a short piece about coming to terms with growing older, created by New York filmmaker and Hardacre alum Dan Masucci. “Greetings From The Shore”, the most mainstream of this year’s selections, anchors the morning program with its strong ensemble cast. “It’s a feel-good, coming-of-age picture,” says Alden. “Think of it as ‘Dirty Dancing’ set on the Jersey Shore.”

“Lights”, a 30-minute film directed by Idaho filmmaker Mark Hitz, is a story told all in black and white stills. It follows a young couple who remain residents of an unnamed city that has lost all its power, residents, and life. The film’s tagline is: “At night, when the lights start coming on, a howling rises from the city.”

After lunch, a couple of shorts precede “This American Gothic”, a feature documentary by Iowa City filmmaker Sasha Waters Freyer. The film not only presents the community of Eldon, Iowa – where the house in the famous Grant Wood painting “American Gothic” is located – it explores how many small rural towns must grasp onto anything they can in order to remain viable. “Sasha’s documentary is extremely relevant for anyone living or originally from a small town,” notes Alden. “Increased urbanization is forcing many small towns to search for their identity – and in some cases, fight for survival.”

Following “This American Gothic” is something new for the Hardacre. The festival is hosting a documentary filmmaker roundtable panel discussion, where directors will discuss their films in a more in-depth way than a simple question and answer session can allow. Alden is thrilled with the offering. “The quality of documentaries we received this year was jaw-dropping. It’s obvious that docs are really making a name for themselves in our current cinemascape, even to mainstream audiences.” The committee wanted to focus on the craft of documentary filmmaking, giving the artists an opportunity to explain the process to the audience.

“The docs we are screening will be featured, of course, but we’ll have a couple of other filmmakers at the table who are at different points with their films.” Alden says. “We’re still finalizing arrangements, but an announcement of the panelists is coming soon.” This panel is free and open to the public – no ticket is required.

The panel is scheduled to last 90 minutes and will be followed up by the Closing Night program. “L’Amie De Zoe”, a short animation based on a French children’s book of the same name, precedes one of the festival’s marquee features. “The Perfect Cappuccino”, directed by San Francisco filmmaker Amy Ferraris, is a quirky yet thorough study of the resurgence of small, independent coffee shops in the U.S. It follows Ferraris’ quest to find her ideal coffee drink that she fell in love with while in Italy somewhere in the American sea of fast-food-type coffee houses.

“‘The Perfect Capuccino’ is a delicious blend of content and craftsmanship...just like the concoction the film seeks.” notes juror Andrew Sherburne. The film will enjoy its World Premiere at the Hardacre.

After an hour-long supper break, the festival returns with “Kings”, an Irish drama spoken largely in the actors’ native Gaelic. Starring the easily-recognizable Irish actor Colm Meaney (“Star Trek: The Next Generation”) this ensemble cast depicts a group of long-time friends who reunite after one of their own suddenly dies. Although the mood is often somber, the film strikes a chord with anyone who has felt that time simply passes by too quickly. “The acting in this film is amazing,” says Alden. “Kings” was Ireland’s official nomination for the 2007 Academy Awards.

Rounding out the closing night program is “I F*cking Hate You” about a desperate last-ditch attempt to save a relationship; and “Alpha School”, a short sci-fi animation by two Lisbon High School students, showing a dismal look into the future of modern day schools.

The festival’s finale is the World Festival Premiere of “A Friend Indeed: The Bill Sackter Story” by Iowa City’s own Lane Wyrick. This powerful documentary introduces us to Bill who, after 44 years in an institution, was taken in by then 20-something Barry Morrow – the Oscar-winning writer of “Rain Man”. Using never before seen archival footage and touching personal recollections, Morrow and others who knew Bill describe his zest for life and unfaltering generosity. “It really makes you take a step back,” Alden says. “It brought me to tears.”

"A Friend Indeed" was unanimously suggested as the festival's finale, notes Alden. Filmmaker Lane Wyrick will be in attendance to speak afterward about the film. Haines emphatically calls the film "A must see".

Travel plans are currently being finalized with filmmakers, as having them in attendance is one of the festival's strengths. Each filmmaker is given the opportunity to participate in a question & answer session after the film screens, which is part of what keeps audiences coming back year after year.

"Stop thinking about going to the Hardacre Film and Cinema Festival and just do it!" says Iowa City resident Wendy DeCora. "As a first-time attendee in 2007, I can't believe I waited so long to go. It was fantastic, filled with a wide range of films to delight any serious film fan."

For the complete schedule and more information, see the Festival's website at www.hardacrefilmfestival.com or contact festival staff at hfcf@tiptoniowa.us or 563-886-6350.