



Film festival in Charleston hopes to inspire, entertain

Thursday, April 24, 2008

Drum roll, please.

Summer Spooner had a scant 24 hours of turnaround time between completing her fourth year as managing director of the Beverly Hills Film Festival and hitting the ground running as director of the inaugural Charleston International Film Festival, which unspools May 1-4 at the Terrace Theatre.

The fact that Spooner and her business partner, College of Charleston graduate Brian Peacher, already had established the framework for the program last fall, and had a corps of volunteers and advisers helping to flesh out the proceedings — expediting promotion, sponsorship and community outreach — didn't make matters any less urgent.

Pressure-cooker "heat" and last-minute details are a way of life even for the most organized of festival chiefs, but Spooner sounds as relaxed as she is enthusiastic.

Asked what theme the new festival might embody, she says simply, "New and exciting, because we have a lot of East Coast premieres and a couple of world premieres, fun after-parties, charity screenings and great networking opportunities. But there is no one set theme, except to say we intend to have no emotion left untouched."

The Charleston International Film Festival, a 501(c)3 nonprofit, was founded "to bring audiences together through the art and science of film."

Showcased will be six feature films and a host of shorts, documentaries and animated fare, submitted from around the United States (with a sizable local contingent) and from shores as distant as the United Kingdom, Spain and Japan.

"We want to entertain and inspire people, and hope to help strengthen the film industry in South Carolina as well," says Peacher.

Opening night's showcase is the "red-carpet sneak preview" of debut director Gregory MacKenzie's "**Camille**," starring Sienna Miller, James Franco, David Carradine, Scott Glenn and Ed Lauter, to be shown following the 7 p.m. East Coast premiere of the film short "Pivot," featuring veteran stage and screen character actor Ron Rifkin.

"Camille" is characterized as a twisted honeymoon adventure involving a young couple — one a petty thief hoping to escape to Canada, the other his parole officer's niece — on their way to Niagra Falls.

Also on tap are the feature-length pictures "**Osso Bucco**" (May 3), a drama with Illeana Douglas; the East Coast premiere of "**Left/Right**" (May 2), a coming-of-age

comedy/drama written and co-directed by star Matthew Wolfe; "**Crazy**" (May 2), a drama from director Rick Bieber inspired by the life of the guitarist Hank Garland; "**Stiletto**" (May 3), Nick Vallelonga's tale of a female assassin and her crime boss lover, starring Stana Katic, Tom Berenger, Tom Sizemore, Michael Biehn, Diane Venora and Kelly Hu; and "**On the Road with Judas**" (May 4), writer-director J.J. Lask's "film based on a novel, written by a writer, played by actors, about the real characters and the actors playing those characters in this story." Got that?

The screening schedule is broken into blocks, with a ticket price of \$8 per block. Festival passes are available at the Terrace Theater box office or online at www.charlestoniff.com.

"I think that by doing the screenings in blocks, people attending get to see a greater variety of work," says Spooner. "Those who love shorts will get to see them in groups. And pairing features with shorts mixes it up. What we offer (the balance between feature-length and short films) will change every year based on what comes in."

Among the locally made films on view, as well as those films employing Charleston talent — comprising 11 features and shorts in all — Brad Jayne's "**Song of Pumpkin Brown**," will be screened as part of a short films block on May 4, and the feature "**Left/Right**" sports a role for Charleston DJ Sean McKenna. Dr. Howard Kingkade, associate professor of English, theater and speech at the University of South Carolina at Lancaster, penned the original script for "**Hole in the Paper Sky**" (May 1), starring Jessica Biel and Gary Marshall. Also look for the local documentary "**Jonathan Green's Seeking**" (May 3) from director Charles Allan Smith.

Of special note is the May 3 benefit screening of writer-director Abderrahmane Sissako's "**Bamako**." A courtroom drama and a portrait of everyday life in Mali, the film is a broadside exposing the negative impact on Africa of policies adopted by institutions, such as the International Monetary Fund. Sponsored by the College of Charleston's Center for the Documentary and the Africa Book Collection Club, all proceeds from the screening will be used to send donated textbooks to students in Africa.

Screening May 4, and sponsored by the Boys and Girls Club of Trident Area, is Helen Hood Scheer's documentary "**Jump!**", the story of the World Championship of jump roping. On the fourth and final night of the festival, there will be an awards ceremony in the Gold Ballroom at the Francis Marion Hotel, where it will also announce the winner of its first screenplay competition. The awards gala will be held in honor of Hearts of Hope Foundation Inc. (www.heartsofhopefoundation.com)

For a complete schedule of screenings, after-parties and workshops, visit www.charlestoniff.com.

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