

Six Months to Showtime

Written by Mark Shaffer
Tuesday, 16 July 2013 13:15

Countdown to the 2014 Beaufort International Film Festival



Each July Ron and Rebecca Tucker get the jitters. Six months after the curtain drops on the 2013 Beaufort International Film Festival, the two principal organizers are invariably afflicted with a case of the "What ifs?" Even though the festival continues to grow in both size and quality, each year the same nagging doubts come scratching at the door: What if we don't get enough submissions? What if no one comes? What if ticket sales are off? What if, what if, what if?

"We do get a little nervous this time of year," says Ron. "But we survive it." To paraphrase "Shakespeare In Love," somehow it all works out in the end. No one knows quite how. It's a mystery.

With half a year to go before the next festival big things are happening, including a possible return of feature film production to the area. The state's new and competitive film incentives package along with some strong persuasion by Mr. Tucker appear to have Beaufort poised to host not one but two films (see the "Route 65" sidebar). If all goes according to plan, these productions will look to hire local crew and talent. We'll keep you posted. In the meantime, we sat down with Ron to get an idea of what's in store for BIFF 2014:

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Mark Shaffer: What was the takeaway from the last festival?

Ron Tucker: I think the biggest thing was that the [USCB Center for the Arts] was the perfect venue for the people who want to come to the film festival. Through the survey that USCB did and the study we did ourselves, we found out that the film festival itself was marked on calendars. It was a destination event. It was all about people coming to Beaufort specifically to attend the film festival. It wasn't that they just happened to be in the area, they came for BIFF. As far as the movies were concerned, most comments were along the lines of "you guys just keep moving it up a notch. The movies keep getting better and better. Whatever selection process you have is working. Keep it up." The fact that we did not have a feature film this year wasn't missed. Unless we mentioned it, no one brought it up.



MS: And that was a quality issue as far as you and the screeners were concerned.

RT: It was. We had twenty-odd submissions for the Feature Film category, but none of them measured up to the same level as the films in the other categories. We weren't going to water down Features just to have a Features category. Hopefully, that won't be the case next year. We've already had a few submissions that look like they could play. One's actually a Russian film. So, it looks promising at this point.

MS: We're six months past the 2013 festival, six months away from the 2014 event. Every year

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we talk about this time and you're always a little, well, anxious about now.

RT: About this time I start to panic a little bit. It's human nature to procrastinate a bit, so people tend to wait to the last minute to get their submissions in. Our early bird deadline is July 31st. We've learned that every year our big surge is toward the final deadline, then we'll get a ton. Right now we've got about 25 submissions.

MS: It's also early in the season with a lot of unfinished films out there; a lot of equally panicky filmmakers trying to make submission deadlines.

RT: We've got promises from a whole bunch of people. We must really make it fun for the filmmakers to come here, because they go home promising that they're going to submit their next film to BIFF. We get a lot of repeat customers. There are a lot of past winners working on films right now.

MS: Features aside, it seems that some of the most important, thought-provoking and controversial films from the last few festivals have been documentaries.

RT: By far. I think documentary filmmakers do consider us a great venue for their films. Even the ones who didn't win have posted on their Facebook and Twitter accounts that if you can get into BIFF, try and attend, because it's a hard festival to get into. We don't have that many selections and we're limited in the time that we have to show the films, so we have to be a little more selective than some festivals.

We had a lot of local submissions last year that might have had a lot of local interest. But they paled in comparison to all the entries with a broader world interest. They were good films for locals and for people who knew that particular filmmaker, but on a grand scale, people from someplace like California aren't going to identify with it.

MS: The subject matter's just a little too inside.

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backyardhearts@filmsociety.org