

The Illusionists

Written by Mark Shaffer

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The 11th Beaufort International Film Festival enters a new dimension with a groundbreaking partnership with USCB

With each iteration, the Beaufort International Film Festival seems to expand its scope and refine its mission. Festival runners, Ron and Rebecca Tucker, have long sought to integrate an academic aspect into the festival, more so since BIFF moved into the USCB Center for the Arts.

But even as the school developed the historic campus into an arts hub, the university showed little interest in active association with the film festival. The 2017 festival marks a significant change with the addition of the Film and Digital Media Symposium and finally marks a partnership between the Beaufort Film Society (parent of BIFF) and USCB.

“It establishes an educational component to our vision statement which is to entertain, enrich, and educate through film,” says Ron Tucker.

The day-long event is the brainchild of USCB Media Arts Professor, Chris Maraffi (above). Better known as Topher, the author, animator, and designer came to Beaufort in 2014 to develop the fledgling Media Arts curriculum. Discovering the film festival played a pivotal role in his decision to take the job.

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“This is something I actually envisioned before I came to Beaufort,” says Maraffi. “I interviewed right after the film festival and there were still posters up. And I thought, wow, Beaufort has an international film festival. That’s amazing. I knew it offered opportunities for what I wanted to build here.”

Maraffi and the Tuckers hit it off immediately. He’s judged the animation entries the last three years and sits on the BIFF Board of Advisors. Initiating a creative partnership between the University’s arts program and the film festival was always the plan.

“In all the other festivals I was invited to attend there was always this sort of academic conference,” he says, “particularly if it was on a university campus. It was a no-brainer to do this with BIFF.”

“Meeting with Topher a couple of years ago, we discussed how the Beaufort Film Society and USCB could partner in some type of Digital Media Program as part of the annual film festival,” says Ron Tucker. “We also discussed how students could work as volunteers for the festival and possibly serve as interns with the Film Society. At every film festival we had universities with major film studies coming into the Center for the Arts and showcasing their films as part of the Student Category of BIFF. Topher understood the value of a collaboration that would help nurture a fledgling program and kick start student interest.”

“Traditionally, the university has not been that involved with the film festival,” he notes. “There are some people on the other campus who don’t even know the film festival exists.” Maraffi’s been fighting to change this since he set foot in Beaufort, urging his students to volunteer and creating an intern program with the film society. This past year the university partnered with South Carolina Educational Television to utilize the old WJWJ Studio as a classroom and production facility and things began to change.

“This is all directly related to media and digital filmmaking, so it all kind of came together.”

The SCETV component literally opened the door for other departments to get involved in a variety of media projects. Maraffi sensed the timing was right to wrangle them all into the

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symposium.

“It helps the film festival because in order to grow they need something new, and the new thing is an educational component,” he says. “We can provide that as a university.”

The initial symposium is the proverbial toe in the water. The idea is to test things out, start small and build an annual event that adds an entirely new, cutting edge aspect to the film festival.

The first annual Film and Digital Media Symposium takes place Saturday, February 18 in a state of the art c



lassroom just down the hall from the auditorium. The day features a series of 40-minute talks by media professionals and educators followed by a short Q&A session. Each presentation is free and open to the public. Seating is limited to 25 attendees per talk on a first come, first serve basis and will be beamed to a corresponding classroom on the south campus.

Maraffi kicks things off with a talk on creating animated effects for a documentary on climate change. He's followed by local filmmaker, BIFF veteran and visual effects master, VW Scheich.

“Sometimes you don’t want to just see the movies, you want to see how they’re made,” says Scheich. “When I go to other festivals I take advantage of the workshops because you tend to meet some really cool filmmakers and learn some neat tricks that maybe you haven’t thought of before.”

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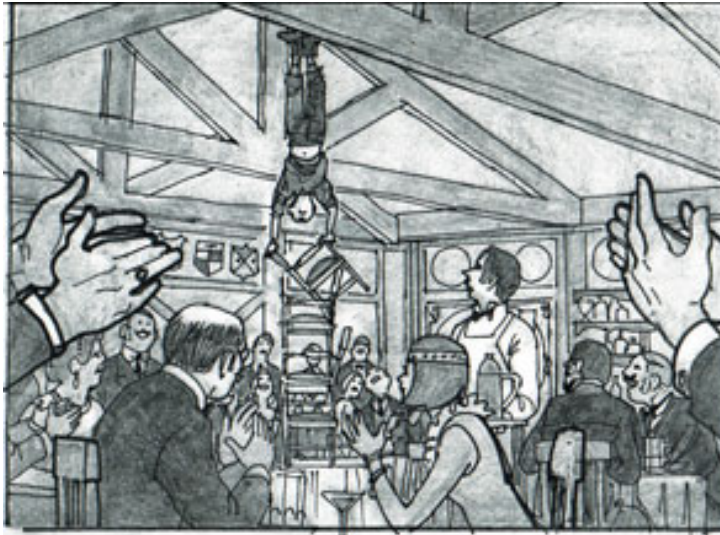
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Scheich's recent VFX credits include *House of Cards*, *Mad Max: Fury Road* and the remake of *Ben Hur* in which he "erased" the stunt drivers in the chariot race sequence. Last year his first directorial feature, *Interwoven*, won the Audience Choice Award at BIFF.

"I work with a lot of big visual effects movies," he says. "It's a challenge to get your independent vision done with your independent budget and compete with the quality we're used to seeing in these big blockbusters. How do you do that?"

Scheich's 2013



BIFF debut, *Wallenda*, won the short feature category and he'll dig into the process of creating the film's extensive effects shots during his talk.

"It all comes down to plan your shots and shoot your plan," he says. "If you approach visual effects the way it used to be done – we'll fix it in post-production – you're doomed. But if you plan the effects specifically for the shot – like a space ship landing or some guy's head exploding – with whoever's doing the effects, then you'll find if you move or don't move the camera in specific ways it's very doable and costs go way, way down just for that one little thing because it was planned it out in advance."

In today's digital world a massive part of that planning involves a process called

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Not all of the shots in the movie are as simple as the one above. Some of the more complex shots are shown in the following images.



The final shot in the movie is a complex shot that involves a man in a white suit standing in a room with a green screen background, looking up at a man in a brown suit who is holding a glass. A woman is visible in the background.



More information about the movie can be found at www.illusionists.com/symposium/index.html. The movie is a collection of short stories that are presented in a way that is both entertaining and educational.