

NewFilmmakers: A 10 Year Retrospective

BY SERGIO ZACIU · AUGUST 22, 2017



Image Courtesy of NFMLA

Tucked away in the back of Sunset Gower Studios lies the office of NewFilmmakers Los Angeles, a monthly film festival that has spent the past 10 years facilitating the discovery and growth of young, fresh talent. From film school alumni to Asian and European independent filmmakers, the monthly event's mission statement is to help nascent talent navigate through the minefield of Hollywood bureaucracy. It's a noble cause and one that has already begun showing its effects in the industry, from the success of the Nicole Kidman-starring Sundance drama *STRANGERLAND*, to its filmmakers' continued success in the television industry.

Sophia Takal, whose *GABI ON THE ROOF IN JULY* screened at a NFMLA September 2010 showcase, later went to direct last year's critically lauded *ALWAYS SHINE*. Camille Stochitch got her industry start through NFMLA, shortly after graduating from AFI in 2014 with her Student Academy Award winning film, *INTERSTATE*. Hanelle Culpepper screened her film *THE BRIDE* for NFMLA in 2013, paving the road for her to direct episodes of *CRIMINAL MINDS*, *GRIMM*, *CASTLE*, *HAWAII FIVE-0*, *HOW TO GET AWAY WITH MURDER*, and more.

The list of notable alumni goes on. But what has become clear is NewFilmmakers continued commitment to diversifying the entertainment industry; not an easy task, mind you. This is why 2017's upcoming September showcase is so interesting. Not only does this represent a decade-long stint in the backyard of Hollywood, but a partnership series with the Academy of Motion Picture Arts & Sciences, focusing specifically on Hispanic and Latino filmmakers. Along with presenting partners SAG-AFTRA and NALIP, the annual InFocus: Latino and Hispanic Cinema event boasts a lineup as diverse as ever.



Image Courtesy of NFMLA

Larry Laboe, co-founder and executive director of NFMLA, says, "Los Angeles is a true global destination for storytellers. Our goal is to support Los Angeles's history and future of being a place for international stories, cultures, and points of view." This becomes doubly important in light of the recent events in Charlottesville. Director Jorge Ossio Seminario, whose film *XX* will be screening in September, states that, "it brings joy to my heart that the words *latino* and *hispanic* will be displayed proudly in the [historic Linwood Dunn] theatre while [...] neo-Nazis still senselessly march on."

With films hailing from the USA, Cuba, Spain, Peru, Guatemala, Venezuela, and Mexico, the event will host President Pro Tem of the California State Senate, Kevin De León, and the Los Angeles Film Critics Association President (LAFCA) Claudia Puig, among others. What makes all of this so enticing is that unlike LA's premiere annual festival—whether it be AFI Fest, LA Shorts Fest, LA Film Festival, Hollyshorts or Sundance NEXT Fest, NFMLA is specifically concerned with a political end goal here. Not only is this a facilitation for the prospective careers of budding new talent, but an opportunity to vocalize what exactly Hollywood should be gearing up for: an era distinguished by the America of today.

As our geopolitical climates continue to be in a perpetual state of change, it only feels apt that festivals on a micro level begin to adjust accordingly. The Hollywood system has enforced a status-quo of Caucasian-male-led filmmaking. And while these voices continue to be relevant, they don't cover half the cultural melting pot that has come to define the United States, and Hollywood in turn. While movements in the industry have certainly begun to address this issue—Patty Jenkins's *WONDER WOMAN* comes to mind, as does the Academy Award's continued effort for diversification, culminating in the sensational Oscar win for *MOONLIGHT* as best picture—it's essential that more festivals tackle the politics of the industry head on.

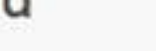


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About this politically charged era of filmmaking, Laboe stated that, "We're focusing our efforts on increasing the number of filmmakers that we support from geographically underrepresented locations worldwide. For the September showcase, it's extremely powerful to have one of the most internationally known and respected institutions for cinema arts supporting an emerging, independent crop of diverse filmmakers from around the world. The Academy's support of these filmmakers at such a critical point in their professional filmmaking careers truly shows their commitment to fostering the next generation of storytellers"

That isn't to say there isn't room for film festivals that view cinema as a purely artistic medium—AFI Fest seems to have their feet firmly planted in that domain—but it's an undeniable truth that festivals have accumulated the stigma of being an elitist gathering, far outside the price point of the average consumer. Which is why it's so exciting that an all-night pass to NFMLA's September showcase is only \$15. No longer is a festival's requisite crowd industry experts and Newport Beach retirees. NFMLA is making room for film enthusiasts young and old across the board. Consequently, their partnership with the Academy only furthers the potential for a new sort of festival melting pot: an opportunity for Angelenos to make their voices heard, and hopefully be noticed by those with the power to support them.

Sergio Zaciu



"When I make love, I realize eating steak was the preferable alternative."

Sergio is the Crossfader Film Editor and a film connoisseur from Romania. He pretends to understand culinary culture enough to call himself an LA foodie, but he just can't manage to like scallops.