

50 Film Festivals WORTH THE ENTRY FEE

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2022 AMERICAN BLACK FILM FESTIVAL
AMBASSADOR ISSA
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QUESTIONS ON THE
RED CARPET

We believe in film festivals. And one of our favorite things at *MovieMaker* is when rising filmmakers tell us they decided what festivals to enter using the annual list you're about to read.

Every festival is a chance to see your film in the wild, with an open-minded audience filled with high hopes and no expectations. And it's a place to meet artists who are in the same campaign as you, for your individual films and film itself.

But given the sheer number of festivals out there, some very valuable and some not so valuable, we take very seriously the responsibility of choosing the ones we think are most deserving of your entry fees. We won't bother telling you that Sundance, SXSW, Cannes, Berlinale, Venice and the Toronto International Film Festival can launch your career — we assume you know that, since you're reading this. And we assume you know those festivals are among the hardest to crack.

In compiling the following list, we've tried to balance a good film's chances of getting in with the costs of attending, and a filmmakers' odds of earning sufficient recognition, connections, or prizes to justify the investment of entering. We give special attention to festivals that help cover your costs, and that have a track record of drawing attention from distributors who may want your film. There's also something to be said for memories: If a festival rejuvenates and inspires you, making you see your life and your art in a new way, isn't that worth more than a free hotel room or small cash prize?

We hope you enjoy this list, which once again includes slightly over 50 festivals. (We had a tie.) Festivals that are Academy Awards qualifying have an "A" next to their name, and those with screenwriting competitions have an "S." As always, not every festival on this list will be perfect for you — but at least one will be.

AMERICAN BLACK FILM FESTIVAL (A)

Miami Beach, Florida / June 14-18 /

abff.com

Now celebrating its 27th year, ABFF has established itself as one of the best supporters of rising Black filmmakers. Alums include 2023 festival ambassador Lena Waite, 2022 ambassador Issa Rae, and 2021 ambassador Halle Berry, who in 1997 received the first Rising Star Award. Other notable alums include Ryan Coogler, a past recipient of the HBO Short Film Award. The festival boasts a network of 100,000 alums, and features networking events hosted by BET and Amazon, among others. It's backed by founding sponsors Warner Bros. Discovery and HBO, so you know the industry turnout is impressive. One of its coolest opportunities is a pipeline program in which two actors are cast in an original cable series. Netflix's *Civil* was the opening night film at last year's festival, which also included presentations of *Our Father, the Devil*, among other films. A new addition this year is a competition in search of emerging Black podcasters.

PHOTO COURTESY OF ABFF

AMERICAN DOCUMENTARY AND ANIMATION FILM FESTIVAL (AMDOCS) (A)

Palm Springs, California / March 2024 / amdofilmfest.com

The desert festival about 100 miles east of Los Angeles is known for encouraging people to mix it up: Filmmakers are welcome to stay in the homes of festival supporters, and get many chances to meet with distributors, press and industry guests at all events. Its Film Fund Pitch Competition has helped sell films to HBO, PBS, MTV, Showtime and more. Other highlights include a tour of the world-famous Coachella Valley, and of course you'll see top-notch films: Recent screenings have included *Money and Happiness*, *A Mouth Full of Petrol*, and *Justice on Trial: People v. Newton*. Past honorees have included Oliver Stone, Dionne Warwick, George Takei, Joe Berlinger, Pierce Brosnan, Ed Asner and more. Winners receive trophies in several categories. Start planning for 2024, because as you

read this, AmDocs has just completed its 12th edition.

ATLANTA FILM FESTIVAL (A, S)

Atlanta, Georgia / April 20-30 /

atlantafilmfestival.com

Located in the No. 1 big city on our 2023 list of the Best Places to Live and Work as a MovieMaker, the Atlanta Film Festival has everything: a high-quality screenplay competition, distributors like Hulu in attendance, and generous assistance in helping filmmakers with travel, accommodations and local transportation. It's also known for very impressive cash and prize packages, totalling over \$100,000. You'll also get to check out regional premieres like the Sundance gem *Mija*. The networking and educational opportunities include the festival's Creative Conference, consisting of over 25 events, such as classes, panels, and conversations with notables like actress Antonia Gentry (*Ginny and Georgia*), producer/director Cherien Dabis (*Only Murders in the Building*, *Ozark*), actress Danielle Deadwyler (*Till*), and many more. It may be underway by the time you read this.

AUSTIN FILM FESTIVAL (A, S)

Austin, Texas / October 26-November 2 / austinfilmfestival.com

Celebrating its 30th anniversary this year, AFF is especially known for its prestigious screenwriting competition. It's a networking paradise even for introverts who can't stand networking. You'll meet like-minded potential collaborators/co-conspirators in workshops, in speed-meet sessions, and in line for movies and Q&As and breakfast tacos and barbecue. A can-do spirit abounds, and there's an electric feeling of camaraderie and optimism — Austin promotes a roll-up-your-sleeves mentality, free from the endless second-guessing of Hollywood. Also, the films are fantastic — last year's edition offered early looks at major titles like *Women Talking* (attended by Sarah Polley) and *The Whale* (attended by director Darren Aronofsky and writer Samuel D. Hunter). Rian Johnson Zoomed in for a Q&A about *Glass Onion*. We also dug daring breakthroughs like Sylvia Caminer's *Follow Her* and Ryan Dickie and Abigail Horton's opioid conspiracy comedy-thriller *Blow Up My Life*. It's not an easy festival to get into, but if you do, you'll get plenty of opportunity: A24, Focus Features and Amazon Studios are among the distributors known to attend, looking for new talent. As an added delight, the festival coincides with Austin's fabulous Día de los Muertos festival and parade.

BENDFILM FESTIVAL (A)

Bend, Oregon / October 12-15 (in-person); October 16-22 (online) / bendfilm.org

With a tough but not-impossible ratio of submitted-to-accepted films, Bend is known for strong curation and an intimate sense of community in a beautiful place known for ski resorts and magnificent trails. BendFilm offers relaxed networking with fellow filmmakers and top distributors like NEON, A24, Universal, Red Bull Media, Magnolia Pictures, NBCU, and Janus. It is also generous with airfare, lodging and ground transportation. Its latest edition screened festival darlings like *The Pez Outlaw*, *Corsage*, *Catherine Called Birdy* and *Navalny*, and featured shake-things-up panels with titles like *The Sexy Side of Filmmaking* and *Conquering Indie Filmmaking*. The event also features an annual IndieWoman of the

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Year Award, which most recently went to Tamara Jenkins. Guests can look forward to happy hours, parties and Bloody Mary brunches, but leave time to go walk around in the woods.

BENTONVILLE FILM FESTIVAL

Bentonville, Arkansas / June 13 - 18 / bentonvillefilm.org

Known for inclusion and transparency, Bentonville describes itself as the first and one of the only festivals to include an inclusion qualifier for its main program lineup, to ensure that underrepresented voices lead the program. It works closely with the Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media to make informed programming decisions, and its affiliation with Davis, who also chairs the festival, gives it a high profile. Bentonville draws distributors including Lionsgate, Paramount, Sony, Disney, Film Collective, Starz, Kickstart Entertainment and Cakestart Entertainment. Highlights include a filmmaker retreat where participants can learn and network with studio and development executives. The festival also offers several grants, including the See It Be It Filmmaker Grant, M&M's Filmmaker Grant, and the Molly Holtzinger Emerging Filmmaker Award in honor of the late filmmaker, podcaster and writer. It covers airfare for feature competition filmmakers, as well as lodging at the festival hotel, and offers local transport, food, hospitality, and special event access to all filmmakers. Recent screenings have included *Seven Faces of Jane* and *The Donut King*.

BIG SKY DOCUMENTARY FILM FESTIVAL (A)

Missoula, Montana / February 16-25, 2024 / bigskyfilmfest.org/

Big Sky goes big to help documentary filmmakers connect with audiences, press, distributors, executives and more. Its core is the five-day Doc Shop filmmakers' forum and industry conference, which is held in the middle of the festival and gives filmmakers many chances to align with peers and score one-on-one meetings with industry representatives. At this year's festival, held in February, Doc Shop focused on "Documentary and Education," covering equity

and accountability, media literacy, and legal considerations, among other areas. The conference culminates in the Big Sky Pitch, for 10 documentary feature works-in-progress, and the latest edition also included the IF/Then Shorts Pitch for five teams making documentary shorts involving nature. Distributors present have included POV, New Day Films, *The New Yorker*, ITVS, Bright West Entertainment, XTR, Disney Original Documentaries, America ReFramed and Field of Vision. The festival provides hotel and airport shuttles for all invitees, as well as lounges and events with food and drinks, and is designed to be very walkable.

BROOKLYN FILM FESTIVAL

Brooklyn, New York / June 2-11 / brooklyn-filmfestival.org

BFF is especially focused on boosting filmmakers who are on their first or second film, and crafts individualized approaches to help raise their profiles in one of the best places



on earth for making connections. Every film's team takes part in an interview with the festival's social media manager, for sharing throughout the festival, and the festival PR team introduces filmmakers to interviewers from big and small publications alike. Roughly 90% of filmmakers admitted to the festival attend in person and are invited on-stage for Q&As. The festival's respected BFF Exchange is a full-day of panels and pitch sessions designed to connect filmmakers with industry decisionmakers. Distributors in attendance have included Oscilloscope, 7th Arts, PBS, HBO, Gravitas Ventures, Vision Films, Icarus Films and Blue Fox. Festival winners receive prizes including software, drones and camera equipment, as well as free rentals of lighting equipment, cameras, studio spaces and post-production services, plus cash prizes. The thoughtful

program has yielded screenings like the animated, Oscar-nominated "My Year of Dicks," and the narrative feature *Signs of Love*, which sold to Blue Fox days after its 2022 BFF World Premiere.

BUSAN INTERNATIONAL SHORT FILM FESTIVAL (A, S)

Busan, Republic of Korea / April 25-May 1 / bisff.org

This widely loved festival celebrates its 40th year with its latest edition, which has one of the most cosmopolitan outlooks of any film event on the planet. Especially in the last decade, it has grown dramatically with an emphasis on global outreach and overseas partnerships. The Academy of Motion Pictures Arts & Sciences recognized its efforts in 2018 by making it Korea's first Oscar-qualifying festival (in the Live Action and Animated shorts categories), and it has since qualified for the BAFTA, Goya and Canadian Screen Awards. BISFF welcomes both Korean and international programmers, which adds to its vast reach. The festival is also generous with prize money, and in providing accommodations for invited filmmakers. In addition to the main festival, it offers summer and fall outdoor screenings called Moonlight Cinema, as well as BISFF Returns, a touring program of Korean cities. Last year's films included Mehrdad Hassani's "Adjustment," Lee Kyeong-won's "Nowhere Else," and Jonas Mekas' *As I Was Moving Ahead Occasionally I Saw Brief Glimpses of Beauty*.

The latter reflected the festival's spirit of adventure: at almost five hours, this retrospective of Mekas' works defies traditional notions of a short film.

CALGARY INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL (A)

Calgary, Alberta, Canada / September 21-October 1 / ciffcalgary.ca/

Attending this festival, or the next one on our list, is a great way to familiarize yourself with one of the fastest-growing film hubs in the world. Calgary is a regular on our list of the Best Places to Live and Work as a Moviemaker, and tied for the third-most livable city on the planet in the Economist Intelligence Unit's yearly rankings. (Vienna and Copenhagen came in first and second, respectively.) HBO's runaway hit *The Last of*

Us showcases its diverse locations, and best of all, Calgary is actively urging film professionals to relocate there. The festival gets high marks from attendees, scores lots of press attention, and helps with airfare and accommodations. It offers significant prize money, and has welcomed distributors like The National Film Board of Canada, Elevation Pictures and Gravitas Ventures, which has offered a right-of-first-refusal distribution deal to one jury award-winning film. Its Industry Week offers filmmakers many chances to showcase their work and make connections, and recent panel discussions included "Boom: How Do We Preserve the Good Times," which should tell you about the mood in Calgary these days. "I had a wonderful experience at the Calgary International Film Festival," says Sean McCarron, whose short film "Corvine" had its world premiere there. "It was my first festival and I was impressed with the festival team, the communication, and the programming. I will certainly be back to enjoy the festival regardless if I have a film in competition."

CALGARY UNDERGROUND FILM FESTIVAL

Calgary, Alberta, Canada / April 20-30 / calgaryundergroundfilm.org

CUFF gets very high marks from attendees — at least two of whom reported getting CUFF tattoos. The very devoted core staff, some of whom have been with CUFF since its founding 20 years ago, work hard so guests can feel like they're at the best party in town. All visiting filmmakers stay in the same hotel, and all films are shown in one cinema so guests get many opportunities to meet. And if anyone needs an icebreaker, CUFF offers the CUFFcade, an independent video arcade with free games curated by a staffer who is also a game designer. The festival offers airfare, hotel, and local transportation to invited filmmakers, who can also expect to eat and drink well thanks to food and drink vouchers, a filmmaker brunch, and gift certificates to local restaurants. They'll also enjoy custom cocktails, treats, and DJ sets before each film. The press opportunities are ample, and the latest edition of the festival featured XYZ Films' James Shapiro delivering a free presentation on distribution in the digital age. The winner of the festival's Best Canadian Short Award, sponsored by the Directors Guild of Canada, receives \$2,500, a mentorship, and a \$2,500 gift certificate from Canada's premier production services company, William F. White International, which offers the most extensive and advanced rentals in the country.

CAMDEN INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL (A)

Camden and Rockland, Maine / September 14-17 / pointsnorthinstitute.org/ciff/

You'll rarely find a more lovely convergence of time and place than a film festival on Maine's MidCoast in the dwindling days of summer. Held by the Points North Institute, which is dedicated to launching the next generation of nonfiction storytellers, this all-documentary festival has turned its somewhat remote location to its profound advantage by offering a tight-knit, inclusive, small-town setting — free from Hollywood distractions — where filmmakers and audiences can focus on craft and story. Its year-round mission includes the Camden/TFI Retreat, in partnership with the Tribeca Film Institute, as well as the North Shorts Grant & Residency, the North Star Fellowship, and the 4th World Indigenous Media Lab, among other programs. The festival helps invitees with airfare and lodging, and draws major distributors including National Geographic, Showtime Documentary Films, CNN Films, Netflix, ESPN, NBCU/MSNBC, Time Studios and Participant Media.

CANNES INDIE SHORTS AWARDS

Cannes, France / November 8-12 / cannesindieshortsawards.com

Located in the same celebrated town as another film festival you may be aware of, Cannes Indie Shorts has earned its own respect and acclaim for its thoughtfully programmed blocks, featuring more than 130 films from around the world. Held at the historic Olympia Cinema in the heart of Cannes, the festival is known for classes, Q&As, networking cocktails and live performances, as well as an opening-night gala dinner. The latest edition also included an interview point, where filmmakers could stop off for deep, thoughtful video interviews about their work that they can add to their press kits. Recently screened films have included the Oscar nominated "Take and Run." The festival covers airfare and hotel for 20 specially invited filmmakers, and all filmmakers, cast and crew receive VIP badges granting them access to the filmmakers lounge, appetizers, and full drink service. Recent panel discussions have included The Role of a Casting Director in the Making of a Film and Building a Character. It also offers cash prizes and collaborates with distribution companies including Salaud Morisset, La Luna, Next Film Distribution and Sacrebleu Productions.

CHICAGO INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL (A)

Chicago, Illinois / October 11-22 / chicagofilmfestival.com/

Marking its 59th year, this festival known for hospitality welcomes filmmakers from around the world to show them the best of Chicago, from walking architecture tours to deep-dish pizza. It offers airfare, lodging and local transportation for invited feature filmmakers, and lodging for invited shorts filmmakers, and connects guests with film students, enthusiastic audiences, and instrumental industry professionals. Distributors known to attend include IFC Films, Netflix, Disney+, Apple, A24 and United Artists. You'll also have press opportunities aplenty. Panels cover subjects from pre-production and financing to technical crafts and distribution, and last year's films included *Women Talking*, *The Whale*, *The Kings of the World*, and more. It's tough to get into, but the potential rewards are great.

CHILLIWACK INDEPENDENT FILM FESTIVAL

Chilliwack, British Columbia, Canada / November 18-20 (in-person); November 21-December 4 (online) / ciff.ca

A little over an hour from Vancouver, this festival in ever-booming B.C. is one of the smaller ones on our list, but stands out for its creative use of its gorgeous setting amongst lakes and parks. In addition to the usual mixers, parties and industry events, you can also join free brewery tours, river rafting excursions and hiking trips. (We suspect you'll forge deeper friendships on a raft than at a loud party.) Other opportunities include opening night trivia, podcast recordings, and panels that are recorded for filmmakers to share widely. The Canadian distributor Raven Banner offered a panel last year on selling your feature film, and conducted pitch sessions. Additionally, the festival offers small cash prizes to all winners and a \$50,000 in-kind ARRI camera package to help one standout filmmaker turn a script into a short film. (That short opens the following year's festival.) The festival also connects attendees with Overstory Media, a regional news group with a readership of about a million.

CLEVELAND INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL (A)

Cleveland, Ohio / April 3-13, 2024 / clevelandfilm.org

A crowd pleaser in every sense, CIFF is known for programming films that make a big emotional connection with fans, as well

PHOTO BY STEVE ADDINGTON PHOTOGRAPHY

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CLEVELAND
INTERNATIONAL
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as for giving back to the Cleveland community and offering one of the most generous prize packages of any festival. To make sure its screenings lead to tangible progress, it introduces creators to nonprofits that are devoted to the subjects of their films. It also offers programs and awards focused on BIPOC and LGBTQIA+ filmmakers. Its FilmSlam education program, meanwhile, integrates film studies into school curriculums, matching students in grades five through twelve with age-appropriate festival films. And about those prizes: In addition to generously helping invited filmmakers with airfare, lodging and local transportation, the festival last year handed out \$131,500 to recipients of 34 awards. Filmmakers can also look forward to a packed schedule of parties, networking events and press opportunities, and distributors in attendance have been known to include Gravitas Ventures and Firelight Media. The latest edition will have just ended by the time you read this.

CUCALORUS

Wilmington, North Carolina / November 15-19 / cucalorus.org

Cucalorus isn't about winning a competition, finding a distributor, or wooing industry insiders – it's about coming together to have fun and meet new friends who share your love of film. Based in one of the top small cities on our list of the Best Places to Live and Work as a MovieMaker, it generously provides airfare, lodging and local transportation to filmmakers who can expect to enjoy coffee, custom cocktails, trivia, massages — and zero velvet ropes. Each night ends at the backyard bar of pastel-painted community theater Jengo's Playhouse, where filmmakers and friends

gather around a bonfire. Last year's films included the work-in-progress *Poundcake*, by Onur Tukul, *Zoo Lock Down* by Andreas Horvath, and the world premiere of *The Devil's Stomping Ground*, by Jon Landau. Cucalorus doesn't give prizes or pit filmmakers against each other, because of its longstanding belief that competition sucks. So instead of writing acceptance speeches you can spend your free time in Wilmington looking for the real-life locales featured in movies from *The Black Phone* to *Blue Velvet*.

DEADCENTER (A)

Oklahoma City, Oklahoma / June 8-11 / deadcenterfilm.org

Named deadCenter because of its geographic location near the center of the United States, deadCenter also aims to be party central for the independent filmmaking scene in Oklahoma. With happy

hours, brunches and coffee meetups, the festival gives its array of filmmakers many chances to discuss the lessons they picked up at the festival's educational component, deadCenter University, or at the festival's distribution forum. Last year's featured Julia Ricci, senior programmer from Heartland Film Festival and Indy Shorts (both of which are coming up soon on this list) to talk with filmmakers about how to get into Academy-qualifying festivals. DeadCenter also sets up interviews with local media, and prides itself on giving filmmakers so many networking opportunities that they frequently end up working together. Its locations include Oklahoma's 21c, part of a chain of museum-hotels that combine cutting-edge art with a comfortable stay. Recent films included *Bad Axe* and the gravity-defying short "Warsha." The festival also keeps the celebration going year-round with its "Continuum" programming series.

ENERGACAMERIMAGE INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL (A)

Toruń Poland / November 11-18 / camerimage.pl

Given its astonishing guest lists — attendees have included cinematographers Roger Deakins and John Toll, directors Denis Villeneuve, David Lynch and Quentin Tarantino, and stars Richard Gere, Keanu Reeves and Jessica Lange — you might assume this cinematography-focused festival is impossible to get into. But EnergaCamerimage is dedicated not just to celebrating the established masters of cinematography, but passing on wisdom to the next generation. The festival draws wide attention from press and distributors — including Netflix, Warner Bros, Disney, Sony Pictures

Classics, HBO, and Amazon — because of its unique focus on films' visual, aesthetic and technical values, with a strong emphasis on international moviemaking. It makes travel easy by generously providing airfare, lodging and local transportation. As if you needed any more incentive, Toruń is known as the city of angels and gingerbread. Some of its key ingredients are found in the forests and fields near the city along the Vistula river. And the Toruń angel stands watch over the city, welcoming the best and most promising new artists behind the camera.

EVOLUTION MALLORCA INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL (S)

Palma de Mallorca, Spain / October 18-24 / evolutionfilmfestival.com

EMIFF is a constant, shining presence on our annual lists — it's also one of our 25 Coolest Film Festivals and 20 Essential International Film Festivals — because it so sunnily lives up to its mantra of "bridging cultures — bridging people." Its German-

born founder, filmmaker and actress Sandra Lipski, personifies that idea with her ties to her home country, Spain and Los Angeles, and welcomes people from across the globe to unite in their love of film in a famously laid-back, open-hearted environment that also happens to be jaw-droppingly scenic. Where else would you find *Triangle of Sadness* director Ruben Östlund doing a barefoot Q&A with Lipski, on a yacht, with Palma's iconic cathedral over his shoulder? He's one of many film icons, from Ana de Armas to Danny DeVito, who have let down their guard to bask in the beauty of the Balearic Islands, rubbing shoulders with everyone from seasoned veterans to first-time filmmakers from all over the world. In addition to *Triangle of Sadness*, last year's edition included screenings of *Corsage*, *La Maternal*, *Call Jane* and more. It also welcomes distributors like Netflix and Mubi, and recently signed a new partnership with a longtime collaborator, Centro de Formación Audiovisual,

which designates it as the festival's official film school partner and deepens the ties between the festival and film students. EMIFF generously provides travel, lodging and local transportation to invitees.

FANTASIA FILM FESTIVAL

Montreal, Quebec, Canada / July 20-August 9 / fantasiafestival.com

When the lights go down, the meows begin — just one of the weird, charming traditions at this outstanding festival focused on genre. Located in intoxicating downtown Montreal and spread across several loca-



SKINAMARINK
DIRECTOR KYLE
EDWARD BALL (L) AND
PRODUCER EDMON
ROTEA AT FANTASIA



SCENES FROM
THE RED CARPET
AT THE EVOLUTION
MALLORCA
INTERNATIONAL
FILM FESTIVAL

PHOTO COURTESY OF FANTASIA

TOP: PHOTO BY KEVIN INTHAVONG, COURTESY OF CIFF; BOTTOM: PHOTO BY THOR SCHOOF, COURTESY OF EMIFF

JIFF JULIEN DUBUQUE
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tions on the sprawling Concordia University campus, the fantastically curated Fantasia embraces everything from experimental horror to broad comedy to psychological exploration, with equal respect and affection. The *Skinamarink* phenomenon started at Fantasia when the Kyle Edward Ball film made its debut there last summer, and other daring, skillful big-swing Fantasia films last year included *All Jacked Up* and *Full of Worms*, *Country Gold*, *Please Baby Please* and *Sissy*. Other highlights included artist talks with John Woo and Kier-La Janisse. The international co-production market Frontières is accessible to all filmmakers and includes wonderfully inventive pitch sessions like no other — *Honeycomb* filmmaker Avalon Fast and her team built a campfire last year to lay out their vision for a future project. The festival helps with airfare, lodging and transportation, and distributors on hand include Sony, Amazon, Hulu, IFC, Mongrel Media, Shudder, XYZ and Arrow Films.

FANTASPOA INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL

Porto Alegre, Brazil / April 13-30 / fantaspoa.com

A stronghold of art, culture and intellectualism, Porto Alegre translates to “joyful harbor.” And Fantaspao is one of South American cinema’s preeminent ports of call. If you make a great film, you have a reasonable chance of getting into this genre-focused festival, which also helps selected filmmakers travel to the event, and with lodging and local transportation. While not known for attracting distributors, Fantaspao is a fantastic place to mingle with like-minded filmmakers, given the abundant lunches, dinners, and open bars for accredited guests, as well as classes and at least two official parties each year. Last year’s edition reached 250,000 spectators who attended events including debates, free lectures, and of course films, which they viewed both in-person and online.

FEMALE EYE FILM FESTIVAL

Woodbridge, Ontario, Canada / June / thefemaleeyefilmfestival.com/

Besides showcasing films and helping guests make crucial connections, FeFF provides actionable advice that filmmakers can invest in their projects. Its values include democratized storytelling, female authorship, and creative empowerment, and it aims to get your film to market and in front of audiences: Recent panels like Meet the Distributors help guests find the best

strategies to get their films seen, whether through a distributor, aggregator, or self-distribution. The festival also offers a script development program to help screenwriters discuss their projects in one-on-one sessions with several industry guests who take not just story but also distribution, casting, financing, production, and literary management into consideration. Female Eye also generously helps with airfare,



accommodations, transportation and per diems for invitees, while also paying screening fees. Other highlights include the closing brunch and an award ceremony in which 16 winners receive hand-welded, one-of-a-kind sculptures. The winner of the Live Pitch Session, meanwhile, receives \$2,500 in cash as well as help developing the project from industry executives. Feature winners receive \$5,000 equipment grants from William F. White.

FESTIVAL DU NOUVEAU CINEMA (A)

Montreal, Quebec, Canada / October 4-15 / nouveaucinema.ca

This very exclusive, very prestigious festival is the second on our list based in stirring, film-mad Montreal, one of the top big cities on our list of the Best Places to Live and Work as a Moviemaker. More than 50 years old, it welcomes more than 200 works from 60 different countries, including features, shorts and XR projects. Guests can meet with artists, film enthusiasts and industry representatives both in daily meetings and nightly parties. The fortunate filmmakers who are selected to attend compete for large prizes includ-

ing a \$15,000 rental and post-production services package for the winner of the national competition’s feature film Grand Prix, and \$30,000 in advertising services for the feature film that wins the national competition for the Prix de la diffusion Quebecor. Recent screenings included *Aftersun* and *White Noise*, and the festival is also known for musical and special-event programming.

FILMQUEST (S)

Provo, Utah / October 26-November 4 / filmquestfest.com

FilmQuest seductively blends a daring, boundary-devouring program with a giddily wholesome embrace of genre: Last year’s poster featured a He-Man figure with a tentacled cthulhu face, which captures the vibe perfectly. All of the films screen in one venue, an all-ages music club called Velour that cultivates an aura of wonder and mystery with its exposed bricks, red lights and, yes, velour galore. (It’s a few doors down from an old-timey ice cream parlor where Brigham Young University students double date over sundaes.) Because everyone sees the films in the same place, all attendees quickly develop a strong sense of each other’s styles and passions. The strong sense of egalitarianism extends to the way films are viewed: attendees sit in folding chairs, watching films that range from glorious fantasias suitable for kids to marvelously twisted creature features, while a rotating VIP section is held for the creators whose films are screening. The great filmmakers we met at FilmQuest this past fall are too numerous to list, but

PHOTO BY BARRY GORDIN. COURTESY OF HAMPTONS INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL

trust us, you’ve already seen them in the pages of this magazine, or will soon. If you haven’t been, this year’s 10th anniversary edition feels like the ideal time to go. Founder and director Jonathan Martin and his team have created something that feels as wild as the weirdest movies you’ve ever seen and as cozy as an ice-cream date.

GALWAY FILM FLEADH (A, S)

Galway, Ireland / July 11-16 / galwayfilmfleadh.com

Another of our 20 Essential International Film Festivals, this fleadh (Irish for festival, as you probably guessed) on Ireland’s enchanted western coast is a celebration of cinema that elegantly combines art and commerce. It champions and nurtures filmmakers in a relaxed environment, in a town that feels dreamy and timeless. With an inviting, not-insurmountable submission-to-acceptance ratio, it gives accepted filmmakers one of the best opportunities anywhere to impress over 60 European

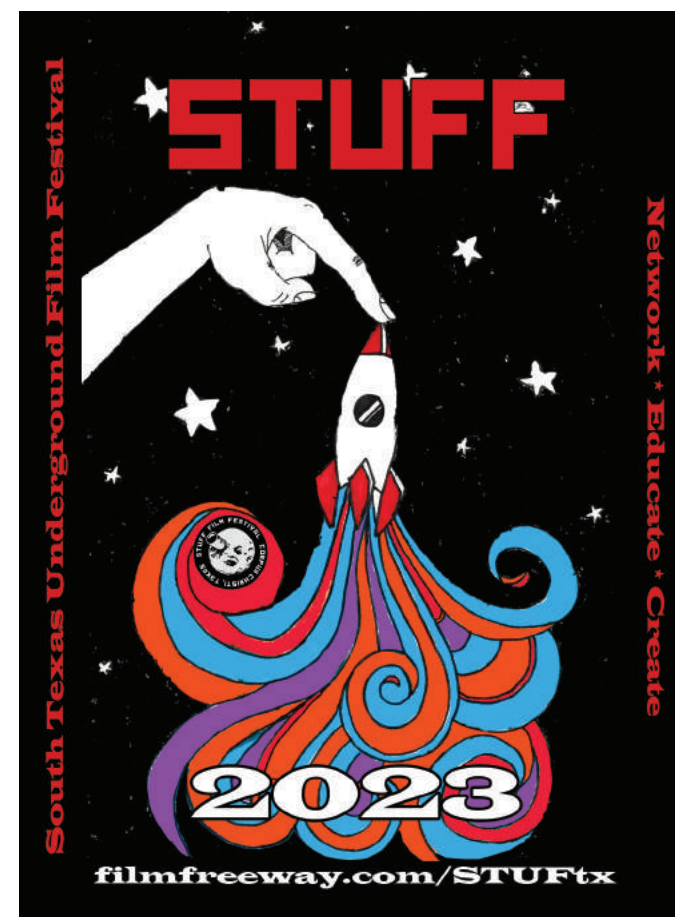
and international distributors and other decision-makers, including Fís Éireann/Screen Ireland, BBC Films, Lionsgate, Neon, RTÉ, XYZ Films, and many more. Opportunities to make friends include sponsored breakfasts, brunches, barbecues and parties, and by all means make time to wander out and explore the city’s vibrant pub life. Last year’s features included the documentary *Afghan Dreamers*, which won Galway’s award for Best Human Rights Film.

HAMPTONS INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL (A, S)

East Hampton/Southampton/Sag Harbor, New York / October 6-15 / hamptonsfilmfest.org

This is a very difficult film festival to get into, but if you’re accepted, go. It provides a rare opportunity to rub shoulders with major industry decision-makers in an idyllic, monied setting where you have at least a shot at meeting financiers, distributors

and others who can support your vision. The festival is fairly generous in covering travel costs for filmmakers, and serves as a terrific awards season kickoff: Last year’s event included screenings of *The Banshees of Inisherin*, *Aftersun* and *All That Breathes*, as well as the East Coast premiere of *The Whale*. Its highly respected “In Conversation With...” series has included such rarefied creatives as Martin McDonagh, Julie Andrews, Laura Dern, Stanley Tucci, Edward Norton, Steven Spielberg, Martin Scorsese, Alfre Woodard, Maggie Gyllenhaal, Kate Winslet and Steven Yeun. And last year’s panel experts included *Everything Everywhere All at Once* directors Daniel Kwan and Daniel Scheinert. Distributors in attendance have included A24, Amazon Studios, Cinetic, Discovery+, Focus Features, HBO, Hulu, IFC Films, Janus, Magnolia Pictures International, MGM, MSNBC Films, MTV Documentary Films, MUBI, National Geographic Documentary Films, Neon, Netflix, Oscilloscope, Searchlight Pictures, Sony Pictures Classics, and Showtime.



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HEARTLAND INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL

Indianapolis / October 5-15 / heartland-film.org

INDY SHORTS (A)

Indianapolis / July 18-23 / heartlandfilm.org/indys shorts

Heartland, which is focused on features, and its offshoot Indy Shorts, focused on shorts, do everything film festivals should do: They use major big-name projects to draw a spotlight that also shines on new discoveries — and in the process, make you fall in love with the host city. The stellar Heartland team books buzzed-about films like *The Whale* (starring Indianapolis-born Brendan Fraser) as well as new-discovery gems like Nick Richey's endearing feature *1-800-Hot-Nite* and documentaries like the skillful and essential *Juneteenth: Faith & Freedom* by Ya'Ke Smith and the oddball and utterly charming *Objects* by Vin Liota. If you don't know Indianapolis, the festival will open your eyes to a city on the rise, brimming with potential — cinematically and otherwise. Watch *It Happened One Weekend*, a Heartland film by local director Zac Cooper, and you'll find yourself shocked that more filmmakers haven't pointed their cameras at the city's stately Canal Walk, or its spectacular art-deco architecture. All of the screening venues are delightful, most notably the Living Room Theaters, a restaurant/bar/movie theater/cultural center located in the stunning Bottleworks District, a section of town so meticulously pretty it belongs

in a Wes Anderson movie. Heartland and Indy Shorts are also very generous with airfare, lodging, and other treats for filmmakers. And if all that's not enough, the city also has a towering monument to one of our favorite writers, hometown hero Kurt Vonnegut.

HOT DOCS CANADIAN INTERNATIONAL DOCUMENTARY FESTIVAL (A)

Toronto, Ontario, Canada / April 27-May 7 / hotdocs.ca

One of the most respected documentary festivals in the world, Hot-Docs is celebrating its 30th anniversary this year. It has a tough but reasonable submissions-to-acceptance rate, and those who attend can expect a serious-minded event filled with knowledge sessions, networking and marketing opportunities. The many top distributors known to attend include Participant Media, Sony Pictures Classics, Neon, Discovery+, Magnolia Pictures, Warner Bros., Apple, Disney, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation and A24. It offers many awards and generous prizes, and the festival also helps invited filmmakers with airfare and lodging. You'll also see some of the most-praised docs of the year — last year's screenings included *Navalny*, *Fire of Love* and *I Didn't See You There* — with especially thoughtful and engaged audiences.

INDIELISBOA

Lisbon, Portugal / April 27-May 7 / indielisboa.com

Situated in one of the most picturesque and affordable capitals in western

Europe, IndieLisboa is widely praised for its welcoming atmosphere, generous prizes, and focus on the future of cinema. It hosts at least five parties with each edition, drawing people from all over the city for its concerts and DJ sets. It also offers filmmaker-focused opportunities like character-writing labs, the chance to share your work with programmers, distributors and sales agents, and a showcase for recent Portuguese films. It also looks to younger generations with a family-focused IndieJunior program that holds its own picnic party, and a competitive section called Brand New for students or recent filmmakers. Recently screened films include Brazil's *Dry Ground Burning*, and invited filmmakers routinely receive help with airfare, lodging, local transportation, and a daily stipend. The prize package totals over \$40,000, and a slew of distributors attend, including HBO and Netflix.

INDIE MEMPHIS

Memphis, Tennessee / October 24-29 / indiememphis.org

The live, local music before screenings is enough to make this festival well worth the entry fee. But Indie Memphis also stands out for its filmmaker advocacy and emphasis on valuing artistic intent over big budgets. Filmmakers from Memphis and surrounding counties can submit for free, and enjoy highlights like the IndieTalks panels, which have included discussions such as Darlings of Fan Culture and After Weinstein. Other networking opportunities include the Black Creators Form, the Industry Brunch and speed meetings. All jury award recipients take home \$500 or \$1,000 in cash, and two Memphis-based filmmakers receive \$7,500 toward the cost of their next short film. Award recipients also receive a handmade trophy sculpted by Memphis artist Yvonne Bobo, and some grant recipients also receive in-kind production services. Memphis also generously helps with airfare, hotel accommodations, and airport pick-up for all feature film directors, as well as Lyft credits for getting around town. The well-chosen films screened last year included *Armageddon Time*, *Is That Black Enough For You?!*, *The Inspection* and *Our Father, The Devil*. Distributors known to attend include Netflix.

LOCARNO FILM FESTIVAL (A)

Locarno, Switzerland / August 2-12 / locarnofestival.ch

Located on the shores of Lake Maggiore at the southern foot of the Swiss Alps, this festival invites filmmakers to form new partnerships and reinvigorate their love of their art. Locarno supports films by connecting them with sales and distribution representatives, and is especially helpful to creators of auteur cinema in need of industry backing. It regularly welcomes industry representatives from more than 70 countries, and distributors including Netflix, MUBI, Pathé Films and more. Its multidisciplinary approach includes the Locarno Talks la Mobiliare, a series of conferences about the future and innovation, featuring guests from science and the arts. Locarno also offers quite generous prize packages. You don't have the best odds of getting into this festival, one of the most revered in the world, but if you're accepted, seize the opportunity.

LOUISIANA FILM PRIZE

Shreveport, Louisiana / October 19-22 / prizefest.com

A film festival like no other, the Prize, as it's locally known, includes 20 films shot in Louisiana, competing for up to \$50,000. (The winner earns that amount if the film is shot in Caddo Parish, located in northwestern Louisiana near the Texas and Arkansas lines, and \$25,000 if it's shot elsewhere in Louisiana.) But forget the money for a moment: As founder Gregory Kallenberg reminds the participants again and again — at tequila toasts, delicious meals, and panels on subjects like Louisiana tax incentives and how to break into the film industry — “You are the prize.” He means the real value of the festival is making lifelong connections with fellow filmmakers, and coming together to celebrate their art. It's very common to see the same names popping up across the credits of different films as the creatives support one another's projects. The cinematographer of one film may be the director and/or star of another. Combined with the Food Prize,

Music Prize, Fashion Prize and Comedy Prize, the event draws competitors and fans from all over the country to celebrate the best of all categories in a way that defies categorization. Because the films are shown in two separate blocks and you need to watch them all to vote for the winner, everyone who attends gets to know and appreciate each other's work, and the field is diverse in every sense. The youngest director last year was 14, others were middle-aged, and they spanned a wide range of backgrounds, beliefs and experience levels. If you're open-minded about where to shoot your next film, the Prize is a great incentive to bring it to Louisiana.

MAMMOTH LAKES FILM FESTIVAL (S)

Mammoth Lakes, California / May 24-28 / mammothlakesfilmfestival.com/

MLFF is known for making filmmakers feel right at home in this vacation hub known for skiing, hiking, natural hot springs, and every other kind of outdoor

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CHANDLER INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL

2024

TOP: PHOTO COURTESY OF HEARTLAND; BOTTOM: PHOTO BY CHRIS LYON, COURTESY OF LOUISIANA FILM PRIZE

50 Film Festivals WORTH THE ENTRY FEE

recreation you can imagine. Personal attention is a crucial part of its success: Festival officials communicate with invited guests for more than a month before they arrive, so everyone knows each other by the time they pick up their gift bags. All filmmakers stay at the same hotel, adding to the chances to meet and connect, and everyone also mingles at the filmmaker lounge and mixers, Q&As, and brunches attended by industry, jurors and press. Events are carefully planned around film screenings so you don't have to choose between watching films and talking about them. The comfortable backdrop sets the stage for adventurous viewing: Last year's opening-night film was *Fire of Love*, and other screenings included *The Civil Dead* and *Your Friend Memphis*. Distributors in attendance have included Indican Pictures, Amazon and Legendary Pictures.

NASHVILLE FILM FESTIVAL (A, S)

Nashville, Tennessee / September 28 - October 4 / nashvillefilmfestival.org/

Music City turns into Music and Movie City when the festival unrolls its blend of top-tier films and outstanding networking opportunities with top agencies, distributors and more. Last year's two-day creators conference included panels with topics including The Power of Latin Music In Media, Getting The Best Score For Your Film, and Virtual Content Creation. Past participants have represented the likes of HBO, *Rolling Stone*, Sony, Kino Lorber and Utopia, among others. Another highlight is the annual Music Supervisors Program, showcasing all the diverse musical stylings Nashville has to offer. You can also enjoy events at famed locales like the National Museum of African American Music, The Bluebird Café and Third Man Records. Additionally, United Talent Agency opened its doors last year for a pitch session for screenwriters seeking in-depth feedback from a panel of industry judges. The festival offers generous help with travel and accommodations, and last featured screenings including *Nanny* and *The Return of Tanya Tucker: Featuring Brandi Carlile*. The festival also hands out 25 awards, with cash prizes from \$500 to \$3,000, and the Narrative, Documentary and Animated Shorts category winners are eligible to submit their films for Academy Awards consideration.



A Q&A AT THE MAMMOTH LAKES FILM FESTIVAL

NEWFILMMAKERS LOS ANGELES

Los Angeles, California / Monthly / newfilmmakersla.com

NFMLA is a little different from the other festivals on this list because it's held monthly, and focuses each event on celebrating a wide range of often-underrepresented filmmakers. Known for deep and wide industry connections and impressive prizes — it handed out more than \$90,000 in cash awards last year — it is a regular checkpoint for some of the most acclaimed rising filmmakers in the world. Gabriela Ortega's "Huella," for example, played NFMLA before going on to Sundance, and Andrew Reid's "Black-out" screened with NFMLA before being picked up by Netflix and nominated for an NAACP award. *MovieMaker* also proudly co-presents detailed online interviews with almost every NFMLA filmmaker, and watching them on the NFMLA YouTube channel will fire you up with inspiration while providing insights into how you, too, can get a film into one of NFMLA's monthly events. The many benefits include meetings with industry professionals looking for breakthrough artists.

NEW HAMPSHIRE FILM FESTIVAL (A, S)

Portsmouth, New Hampshire / October / nhfilmfestival.com/

NHFF is a very well-organized festival in a wondrous setting with six state-of-the-art screening venues, waterfront dining, quaint shops, and beguiling hotels and inns, all within walking distance. The many opportunities for harborside chats and cocktail parties add to the appeal. The festival is very attentive to guests, some-

times pairing filmmakers with generous festival supporters who welcome them into their homes. Highlights include the annual comedy panel, which has included guests like Tim Herlihy, Mike O'Malley, Tom Bergeron, and Tommy Chong, as well as the Young Filmmakers Workshop, in which teenagers shoot short films over three days and premiere them at the closing night ceremonies. The festival also features a Women in Film & Television International panel. Distributors in attendance have included A24, IFC Films Oscilloscope Laboratories, Argot Pictures, Factory 25 Films, Fun City Editions and NoBudge, and several films last year picked up distribution deals soon after screening at the festival. Last year's screenings included *Close*, *Corsage*, *The Lost King* and *R.M.N.*



AN NFMLA PANEL

NEW ORLEANS FILM FESTIVAL (A)

New Orleans, Louisiana / November 2-12 / neworleansfilmfestival.org

NOFF's policy of transparency includes a Programming Practices document assembled by its 12-member programming team — which is as diverse as New Orleans itself. Available on the festival's Film Freeway page, it outlines values that include, "We counter extractive storytelling by championing regionalism and supporting the creative leadership of those closest to the stories being told," and "We create space for confrontational art and nontraditional artistic approaches." It regularly pays screening fees, helps with lodging when possible, and offers plenty of food at the VIP lounge, party and receptions. Last

TOP PHOTO BY LEW JONES, COURTESY OF MLFF; BOTTOM: PHOTO COURTESY OF NFMLA



(L-R) DIRECTORS JOHN WATERS AND JOHN CAMERON MITCHELL AND STRAND RELEASING CO-FOUNDER MARCUS HU AT THE PROVINCETOWN INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL

year's films included an opening night screening of *The Inspection*, an especially significant event because the festival has programmed past shorts by its director, Elegance Bratton. The fest closed with *Music Pictures*, a very New Orleans story about musicians Irma Thomas, Ellis Marsallis, Little Freddie King and the Tremé Brass Band, followed by live performances by many of the artists in the film. Industry representatives on hand have included Criterion, Black Film Archive, POV/American Documentary, ABC, Louisiana Public Broadcasting, ReelSouth, Black Public Media, Tessa Thompson's Viva Vaude, and I'd Watch That. And New Orleans is one of the top cities on our list of the Best Places to Live and Work as a Moviemaker.

NEWPORT BEACH FILM FESTIVAL (S)

Newport Beach, California / October 12-19 / newportbeachfilmfest.com/

The emphasis is on fun, glamor and discovery at this luxurious festival about an hour down the coast from Los Angeles. Guests combine screenings and red carpets with yacht parties and sunset receptions looking out at the Pacific. It draws a sparkling guest list of industry leaders, sales agents, top distributors, and press — in fact, one of its key partners is the *Los Angeles Times*. NBFF

is a regular predictor of awards-season success stories — its screenings last year included *The Banshees of Inisherin* and *All Quiet on the Western Front* — and it welcomes a sizable number of guild and Academy voters. The top-shelf distributors on hand have included Netflix, Searchlight Pictures, Magnolia, and Sony Pictures Classics. One of the best things about the festival is that as exclusive as it sounds, you have a reasonable chance of getting in if you make a great film, and NBFF generously helps invitees with airfare, lodging, local transportation, and more. It's hard to imagine a better scenario than partying with the most influential people in Hollywood at a leisurely distance from the stress of Hollywood. NBFF is also a jewel of the Orange County community, drawing over 58,000 attendees annually and giving back with a program that teaches underserved youth about cinema and filmmaking to open doors to creative careers.

PROVINCETOWN INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL (A)

Provincetown, Massachusetts / June 14-18

Exquisite taste in an exquisite place. The festival's emcee/patron saint John Waters used to jokingly celebrate bad taste, but this festival in Cape Cod's

LGBTQ+ mecca just keeps spotting great talents on the rise. Among recent stand-outs is Todd Flaherty, whose \$20,000 drag-queen platonic love story *Chrissy Judy* story was one of our favorite films of 2022. We were also awed by Antonio Marziale's "Star-fuckers," and gripped by Eli Powers' haunting "Skin & Bone." While Provincetown is particularly great at highlighting new filmmakers, it draws plenty of established stars as well: Besides Waters, last year's guests included Bowen Yang, who promoted *Fire Island*, and Jenny Slate, supporting *Marcel the Shell With Shoes On*. It's a near-perfect start-of-summer festival, set in a lively but not too-crowded coastal paradise surrounded by woods and sand dunes and serene beaches, with charming bed and breakfasts and unpretentious bars and restaurants all around.

SANTA BARBARA INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL (A)

Santa Barbara, California / 2024 / sbiff.org

This year's festival was held in February, but get ready for next year now: Santa Barbara is a beloved touchpoint during awards season because of the community's deep love of film, perfect distance from Los Angeles (it's a relaxing drive or train ride away) and endless Central Coast charm. The stellar 2023 guest list included Angela Bassett, Cate Blanchett, and Jamie Lee Curtis, but the festival is also committed to elevating new filmmakers, and the winner of its Panavision Spirit Award for Independent Cinema scores a camera rental package worth roughly \$60,000. Santa Barbara attracts top distributors, including Netflix, Sony Classics, Universal, Warner Bros. and Paramount. It's held in several theaters, but our favorite is the glorious Arlington Theatre, which welcomes 2,000 guests to gasp at its Mission-style majesty. It's one of the best places on the planet to see a movie. When the movies end, you can stroll down State Street to the beach, past some of the most charming coffee shops, restaurants, bars and shops you'll ever find.

50 Film Festivals WORTH THE ENTRY FEE

SANTA FE INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL

Santa Fe, New Mexico / October 18-22 / santafe.film

Based in the No. 1 smaller city on our list of the Best Places to Live and Work as a Moviemaker, Santa Fe blends an artistic spirit with natural wonder all around and understated elegance. Attending the festival is an excellent way to get to know a town that has inspired everyone from Georgia O'Keeffe to John Ford. Its sophisticated audience is hungry for new discoveries, foreign films, and filmmakers who take chances, and the festival rewards artists handsomely: SFiFF's Best Narrative Feature earns a \$90,000 prize package from Panavision and Light Iron, and SFiFF's Best Narrative Short receives a \$15,000 Panavision camera package. Key events include parties, industry panels, and workshops on acting, editing, and animation. Last year's acting workshop was led by Catherine Hardwicke, seen on p. 84 of this very magazine. SFiFF Student Day welcomes New Mexico students eager to meet visiting filmmakers to learn more about film careers, and distributors known to attend include Cohen Media Group and Cinema-Guild. The festival also provides full airfare and lodging for feature filmmakers, and travel stipends for short filmmakers.

SCAD SAVANNAH FILM FESTIVAL

Savannah, Georgia / Oct. 21 - 28 / filmfest.scad.edu

Located in another of the best smaller cities on our list of the Best Places to Live and Work as a Moviemaker, this festival



WES STUDI AND CATHERINE HARDWICKE AT THE SANTA FE INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL

impeccably balances the local community's love of cinema with Savannah College of Art and Design students' professional aspirations and desire to learn more about the art and business of filmmaking. It's always a star-studded affair — last year's 25th edition included stars Mia Goth, Jonathan Majors, Kerry Condon, Nicholas Hoult, Janelle Monae, Jenna Ortega and more, as well as directors Ron Howard

and JD Dillard — and the focus is always on providing insights into the craft. The festival is very generous with airfare, lodging, local transport and (very good) meals, and draws top distributors like Netflix, A24, Sony, Searchlight, Amazon, Dreamworks, Roku, MTV Docs and more. The film selection is outstanding, and last year included *The Banshees of Inisherin*, *The Whale*, *The Menu* and the world premiere of Netflix's *State of Alabama vs. Brittany Smith*. Other highlights include workshops, pop-ups and classroom visits, as well as parties aplenty. The festival gives off a seemingly boundless sense of purpose and optimism, and Savannah's stunning architecture means there's almost no better place for a stroll.

SCREAMFEST (S)

Los Angeles / October 10-19 / screamfestla.com

With a favorable submission-to-acceptance rate, generous help with airfare and lodging, and networking opportunities galore in the film capital of the world, Screamfest is a standout among genre fests. Distributors like Hulu, Amazon and Blumhouse have been known to attend, and the support for filmmakers doesn't end with the festival: Screamfest is devoted to supporting true independent horror year-round, working hard to get films seen by press and industry and sharing shorts year-round on its YouTube channel. It also has a top-tier PR team, and draws press attention with notable unveilings: The screenings last year included the world premieres of *Matriarch*, *Slayers* and *Deer Camp*. Additionally, its awards are among the coolest in the festival world: The Gold Skull trophy was designed by the great Stan Winston.

SLAMDANCE FILM FESTIVAL (A, S)

Park City, Utah / January 19-25 / slamdance.com

We can't do a better job of explaining Slamdance than its co-founder Peter Baxter, who elegantly details what makes a Slamdance film on the pages that immediately follow this list. We'll just add that this festival, which started as a Sundance alternative and has helped launch the careers of Christopher Nolan, Lena Dunham and Joe and Anthony Russo, among others, has a shockingly keen eye for talent, regularly finding the core brilliance in films that other festivals might

dismiss for coloring outside the lines. Among its recent discoveries are Ethan Eng (*Therapy Dogs*) and Tij D'Oyen (*Lollygag*) the most recent winners of the Russos' AGBO Fellowship, which includes \$25,000 and mentoring from the Russos. Recent distributors to attend include Amazon, ARRAY, Gravitas, Juno Films, Kino Lorber, MUBI, Netflix, Shout Factory and Utopia. Benefits of attending include access to the festival's Filmmaker Bible, featuring nearly three decades of accrued wisdom about Slamdance and earning press attention. This comes in addition to the festival's own excellent PR team.

TALLGRASS FILM FESTIVAL

Wichita, Kansas / October 5-8, 2023 / tallgrassfilm.org

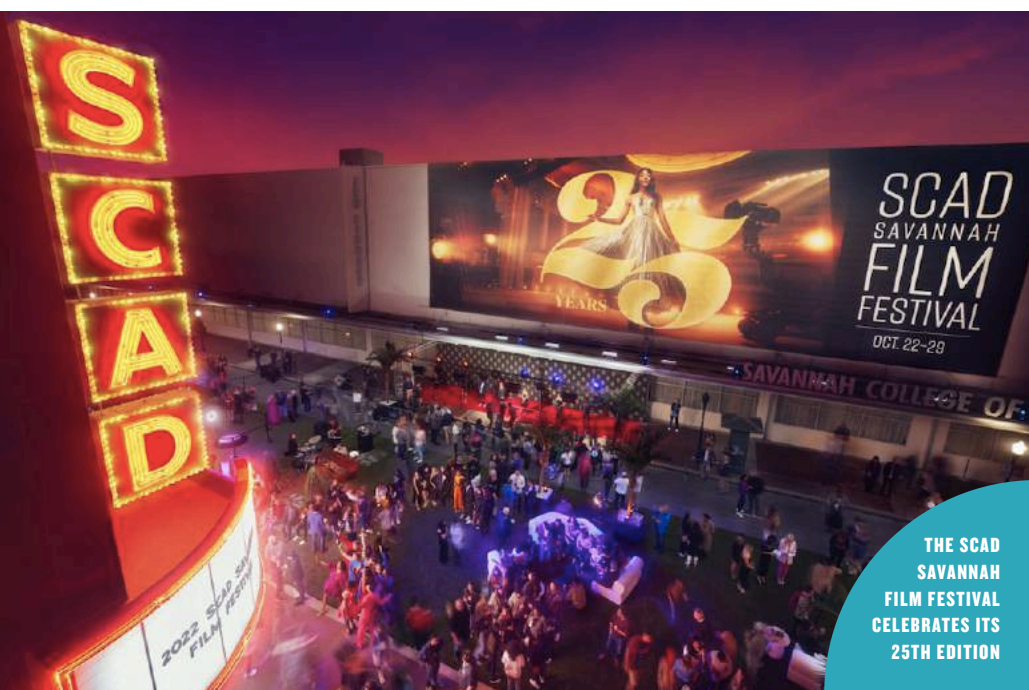
"Tallgrass was an amazing experience!" says moviemaker Nathan Emerson. "Our film *That Thing That Sound* screened at a 100 year-old theater and the local

museum put on an exhibit that correlated with the film! The hospitality was amazing, and filmmakers from L.A. and NYC all agreed the Midwest vibes made everyone comfortable and welcome." Embracing its "stubbornly independent" motto, Tallgrass is devoted to making every filmmaker feel welcome and essential. Highlights include parties, panels, and a red carpet, as well as a bus tour to get to know Wichita. Guests also visit media outlets for sitdown interviews about their work. Distributors known to attend include Cinedigm and Troma Entertainment. The largest prizes of \$5,000 go to the winners of the Gordon Parks, Female Filmmaker and Stubbornly Independent awards, while winners of other categories can receive smaller cash prizes. Last year's screenings included *Klondike*, *Hidden Letters* and *The Pez Outlaw*. The festival also offers airfare, lodging and local transport for feature filmmakers, and as much help as possible to shorts filmmakers.

TRIBECA FESTIVAL (A)

New York City, New York / June 7-18 / tribecafilm.com

You'll be hard-pressed to find another festival on this list with so much press attention and so many industry legends on hand. But if your film is excellent, you have at least a chance of getting into Tribeca. The festival, co-founded by Robert De Niro and Jane Rosenthal, features many of the best of the best, and last year's highlights included the world premiere of the acclaimed FX/Hulu series *The Bear*. Though it doesn't offer monetary prizes, you may claim the more important prize of finding someone to buy your film: The distributors on hand have been known to include A24, Amazon, Apple, Bleecker Street, Cinema Guild, FilmRise, Gunpowder & Sky, HBO, Hulu, IFC, Magnolia, Mubi, NBC Universal, Neon, Netflix, Oscilloscope, Paramount, Roadside Attractions, Samuel Goldwyn Films, Searchlight, Showtime,



THE SCAD SAVANNAH FILM FESTIVAL CELEBRATES ITS 25TH EDITION

TOP: PHOTO BY LINDA CARFAGNO, COURTESY OF SFiFF; BOTTOM: PHOTO COURTESY OF SCAD

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(L-R)
STUBBORNLY
INDEPENDENT JUDGES
MILAN KUMAR
CHAKRABORTY, AARON
HILLIS AND DAN MIRVISH
WITH WINNER H.P.
MENDOZA (HOLDING
CHECK), DIRECTOR OF
ATTACK/DECAY RELEASE

Shudder, Sony Pictures Classics, Utopia, Warner Brothers Discovery and Zeitgeist Films. Mingling at rooftop parties in Lower Manhattan, you'll feel like you're at the center of the world — and maybe you are.

TRUE/FALSE FILM FESTIVAL

Columbia, Missouri / February 29-March 3, 2024 / truefalse.org/

The festival aims to help filmmakers see nonfiction as a viable career path, not just a means to leap to fiction features, and puts its money where its mouth is with its admirable PAY THE ARTISTS! program that awards a \$1,000 honorarium to each visiting filmmaking team, in addition to covering travel, lodging, and meal expenses. T/F shakes up traditional documentary storytelling with a program called Synapses that includes storytelling over a campfire, a documentary game show, and more. It also collaborates with the University of Missouri's Murray Center for Documentary Journalism, which is on our list of the 40 Best Film Schools in the U.S. and Canada. While many distributors keep a close eye on True/False, the festival

in Poland's capital is known for hosting filmmakers on the rise — since its establishment in 1985, it has hosted the likes of Michael Haneke, Cristian Mungiu and Ashgar Farhadi. The last edition offered 171 live Q&A sessions, and the in-house FestiVi crew did interviews with almost 100 visiting filmmakers and shared them on YouTube. The 2022 festival invited many Ukrainian filmmakers, included Odesa International Film Festival competitors, and hosted Ukrainian panels and presentations. Other highlights include its FIPRESCI workshop for young journalists and film critics and an open workshop on the art of film editing. In addition to covering airfare, lodging, and local transportation, it offers many awards and more than \$30,000 in prize money.

WHISTLER FILM FESTIVAL

Whistler, British Columbia / November 29-December 3 / Whistlerfilmfestival.com

Refreshingly timed after the traditional crush of fall festivals, Whistler is perfectly positioned for prime skiing, awards-season screenings, and making deals. It features

says a majority of attendees indicate they attend to reconnect with the joys of making and watching documentaries.

WARSAW INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL (A)

Warsaw, Poland / October 6-15, 2023 / wff.pl

Also one of our 20 Essential International Film Festivals, this celebration

30 industry sessions at its industry conference and market, the Content Summit, and distributors known to attend have included VVS, Level Film, Vortex Pictures and Warner Bros. The staggering prize package includes \$35,000 in production services for the Power Pitch winner, and \$15,000 in cash and \$100,000 in in-kind production services for the winner of the Motion Picture Production Industry Association short film competition. Last year's screenings included *Pinocchio*, *White Noise*, *Bardo*, *Glass Onion: A Knives Out Mystery* and the world premiere of *Confessions of a Hitman*. The festival also provides lodging and local transportation for invited feature filmmakers.

WOODSTOCK FILM FESTIVAL

Woodstock, New York / September 27-October 1

Spread across Woodstock, one of the country's most beloved arts colonies, and the Hudson Valley towns of Rosendale, Saugerties, and Kingston, this festival's rise parallels the region's significant growth as a location of choice for high-minded projects from *A Quiet Place* to *Severance* to *The Whale* to *Poker Face*. A little over two hours from New York City, it draws impressive guests who last year included award recipients Ethan Hawke, Awkwafina, Debra Granik and IFC Films president Arianna Bocco. Its stellar jurors included Joe Berlinger (*Brother's Keeper*, the *Conversations With a Killer* series) and Barbara Kopple (*Harlan County, U.S.A.*, *Shut Up and Sing*). It also attracted top-tier films like *The Banshees of Inisherin* and *Triangle of Sadness*. But don't assume from its marquee names that it's impossible to crack: Woodstock offers a reasonable acceptance rate, as well as great press opportunities and exposure to distributors like IFC Films, Magnolia Features, Neon, Apple, and MTV Documentary.

PHOTO COURTESY OF TALLGRASS