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CENTER STAGE

 CANADIAN EDITION

Rob "Scratch" Mitchell

From Jet Fuel to Film Sets,
a Maverick Carving Out
Canada's Next Great Stories

SASKATCHEWAN'S CINEMATIC SURGE

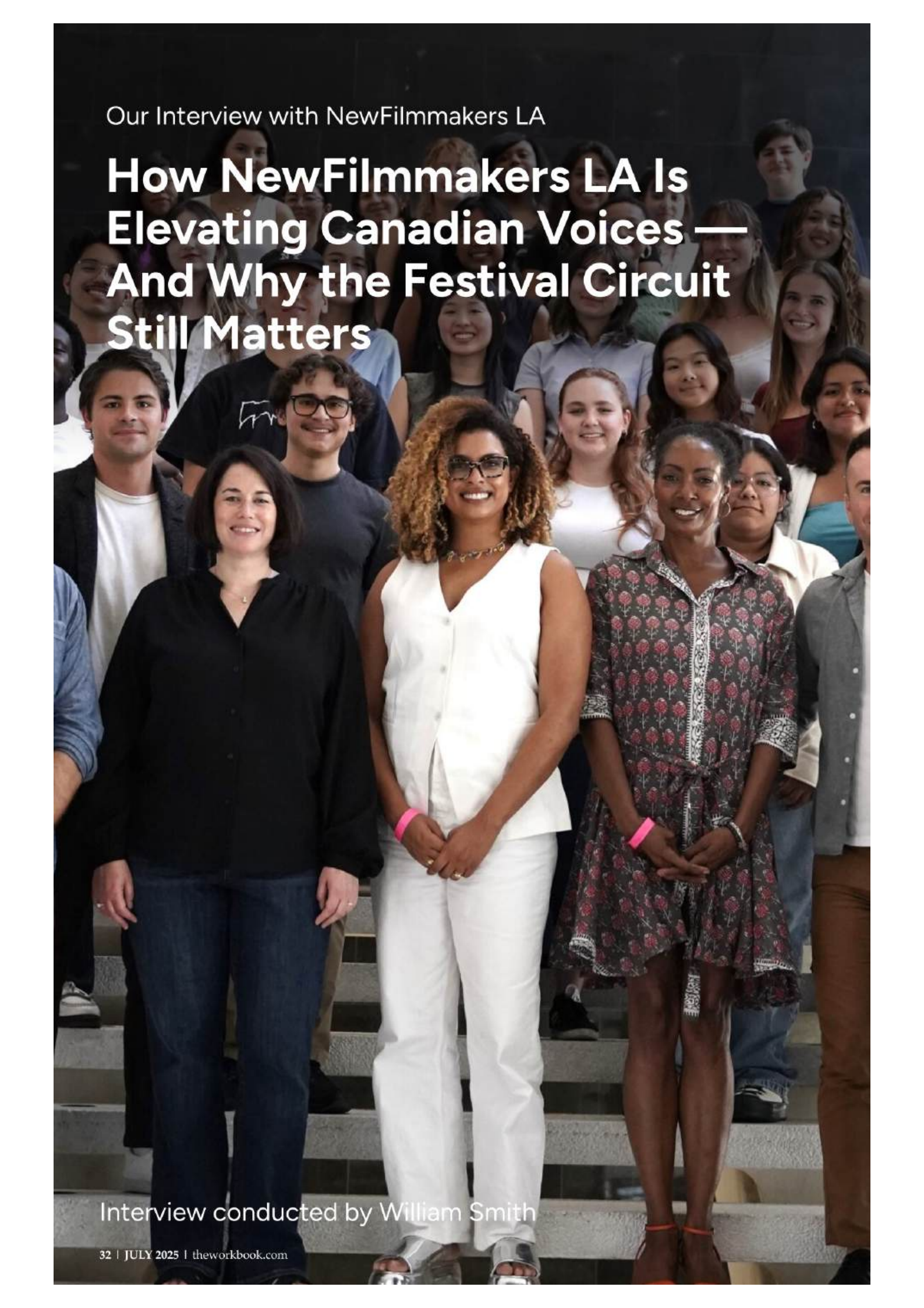
WHY THIS CANADIAN PROVINCE IS
THE INDUSTRY'S BEST KEPT SECRET

BLUE RODEO DOCUMENTARY

HOW COREY RUSSELL AND CREAM FILMS
ARE MAKING CANADA'S BIGGEST STORIES
UNMISSABLE

SURREY'S ISAFF

HOW ISAFF IS FUELING CANADA'S
SOUTH-ASIAN CREATIVE SURGE



Our Interview with NewFilmmakers LA

How NewFilmmakers LA Is Elevating Canadian Voices — And Why the Festival Circuit Still Matters

Interview conducted by William Smith



NEWFILMMAKERS LA

In the heart of Los Angeles, where studio-driven buzz often dominates the cultural conversation, NewFilmmakers Los Angeles (NFMLA) continues to hold space for the kinds of voices Hollywood often overlooks. With its monthly programming focused on underrepresented filmmakers and global storytelling, NFMLA has quietly become one of the city's most impactful film organizations. This summer, that spotlight turned north with the festival's annual Canadian film showcase, a multilayered celebration of the nation's cinematic identity and creative force.

A Platform for Underrepresented and International Voices

NFMLA isn't just another festival, it's a year-round ecosystem for filmmakers looking to break into or advance within the industry. Founded with the goal of providing visibility and access for underrepresented creators, the festival brings together a blend of local Los Angeles filmmakers and international talent, offering a vital bridge into the notoriously insular Hollywood system.

"We were founded to be a more accessible, community-driven gathering space within a city that can be overwhelming," says Bojana Sandic, the festival's programming director for the past eight years. "We want to be that place where filmmakers — especially those coming from abroad — can find a welcoming entry point into Los Angeles."

Canada in Focus: A Cultural and Creative Exchange

NFMLA's Canadian Cinema program has evolved into one of the organization's signature spotlights, thanks to longstanding partnerships with the Canadian Consulate, Telefilm Canada, and Québec's cultural attaché in Los Angeles. "This initiative predates me," Sandic shares. "But it has grown so much over the years, and this year's cohort of Canadian filmmakers was truly exceptional."

This year's showcase featured a slate of powerful, diverse stories — from narratives about domestic abuse and generational trauma to lighthearted comedies and stories of personal healing.

“What we try to do is reflect the entire emotional and cultural spectrum of Canada,” Sandic says. “We’re seeing really strong, multilayered work across the board, including a recent rise in very sharp, character-driven comedy.”

Beyond the Screen: Creating Industry Access

One of the festival’s most powerful tools is its curated industry access program. In the week leading up to each monthly festival, NFMLA organizes virtual meetups between filmmakers and industry professionals — ranging from agents and managers to producers and development execs.

“These aren’t formal pitch meetings,” Sandic clarifies, “but they are informational sessions that get filmmakers in the room, introduce them to people they might not otherwise meet, and help them understand what the industry is looking for.”

Participants also get to vote on which type of reps or executives they’d most like to connect with — whether they’re aiming to turn a short into a feature, break into documentary, or find distribution support.

This structure is particularly helpful for international filmmakers, including those from Canada, who may not be able to spend weeks networking in L.A. “Having that virtual component really extends the reach of what we can offer,” she adds.

Why Canadian Filmmakers Should Look Beyond Borders

For Canadian filmmakers used to the festival circuits of Vancouver, Toronto, or Montreal, submitting to a U.S.-based festival might seem counterintuitive, but Sandic makes a compelling case for why a presence in Los Angeles still matters.



“L.A. is a hub of concentrated opportunity,” she says. “It’s a numbers game — the density of industry professionals here is unmatched, and when you attend through a festival, you’re not just another face at a networking mixer — you’re coming with a film that speaks for you.”

She also notes that co-productions between Canada and the U.S. remain strong, and NFMLA’s spotlight can help catalyze those partnerships. “We’ve even been able to program American filmmakers into Canadian festivals through this relationship — it’s very much a two-way street.”

Building Long-Term Relationships, Not One-Off Screenings

NFMLA prides itself on fostering long-term relationships with its filmmakers. Once a creator is part of the NFMLA family, they’re supported through additional opportunities — whether that’s grant recommendations, invitations to other festivals, or return programming through partner events.

“It’s not just about the one night your film plays,” Sandic says. “It’s about how we help you navigate what comes next.”



Their NewNarratives Grant Program — open to any filmmaker with an official festival selection (not just NFMLA) — provides direct support for future projects. “Even if we didn’t program someone’s film, we want to support their journey,” she emphasizes.

“There are just too many good films we have to pass on. This is another way we can keep working with those voices.”

How the Festival Landscape Is Changing — and Why It Still Matters

For filmmakers just beginning to think about submitting to festivals, the landscape can feel daunting. But Sandic encourages a thoughtful, strategic approach — and, when possible, direct experience.

“There are so many types of festivals,” she says. “The big tentpole ones get the headlines, but smaller, mission-driven or industry-focused festivals like ours can offer a more tailored, hands-on experience.”

We only program about 20 films a month, so we're able to work very closely with our creators."

Each kind of festival serves a different purpose: major fests offer visibility, industry buzz, and sometimes award-qualifying prestige. Smaller festivals may provide personal connections, meaningful mentorship, or focused access to collaborators.

"Your festival strategy should match your goals," Sandic advises. "Are you trying to find an audience? A funder? A co-producer? Knowing that can help you decide where to put your energy."

A Community That Extends Beyond the Festival

For filmmakers, students, and film fans alike, NFMLA also offers monthly virtual panels, available to the public and included with an annual membership. These events feature everything from case studies with working filmmakers to behind-the-scenes conversations with studio founders or production executives.

"It's about demystifying the process," Sandic says, "we want aspiring creators to hear directly from people who are just a step or two ahead in their journey. That kind of advice can be so grounding — and so motivating."

With the film world in flux and the rise of digital distribution reshaping traditional gatekeeping, the role of festivals is evolving. But for NFMLA — and for the Canadian filmmakers they've spotlighted — the power of community, conversation, and visibility still reigns.

"Festivals are still where connections are made," Sandic says. "And for a filmmaker, sometimes just being in the right room — with the right story — is all it takes."





NEWFILMMAKERS LA



UPCOMING EVENTS

August 23rd, 2025 – Monthly Film Festival | InFocus: International Animation
September 20th, 2025 – Monthly Film Festival | InFocus: Latinx & Hispanic Cinema
October 18th, 2025 – Monthly Film Festival | InFocus: Veteran Cinema
November 14th, 2025 – DocuSlate Documentary Film Festival Day 1
November 15th, 2025 – Monthly Film Festival | InFocus: Indigenous Cinema
November 16th, 2025 – DocuSlate Documentary Film Festival Day 2
December 13th, 2025 – Monthly Film Festival | InFocus: Middle Eastern & Arab Cinema

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ACTRA Toronto is a proud sponsor of IN FOCUS: Canadian Cinema at NewFilmmakers LA. Events like this help spotlight the incredible performers and creators who make Ontario, and all of Canada, a place built for film and ready for the world. It's about opening doors, building relationships, and ensuring our members' talent is seen, celebrated, and supported on a global stage.

ACTRA Toronto

