

[Click Here to Print This Article](#)

September 23, 2009

Idaho International Film Festival keeps it local

Proving ground for filmmakers has helped develop the culture of making movies in the Gem State

BY DANA OLAND - doland@idahostatesman.com

Proving ground for filmmakers has helped develop the culture of making movies in the Gem State

Yes, films from 14 countries will screen in Boise over the next four days, but there also is a strong emphasis on Idaho films and filmmakers.

That is a main part of the Idaho International Film Festival's mission, says programmer Bruce Fletcher.

"We're not Sundance. We're not a market festival," he said. "We're like the minor leagues, where the best and brightest at this level come to move up to the majors. I like to think of this as a grad school for the local talent pool who will go on to L.A. and have a bigger career."

While it's difficult to track the economic impact of the festival, the event is culturally significant. Filmmakers get to show their work and make connections that might lead to films with larger budgets.

And though the number of Idaho films shown at the festival has stayed about the same, the quality has improved noticeably, Fletcher said.

The festival will kick off Thursday with a gala showing of "Drawing with Chalk" at the Egyptian Theatre and an after-party at Beside Bardenay.

Over four days, the festival will screen more than 50 films, from horror/sci-fi to political dramas, dark comedies and documentaries, including 14 shorts and three features with local connections.

IDAHO'S FILM SCENE IS STILL GROWING

A few years ago, Boise supported two film festivals, this one and the True West Cinema Festival, which folded in 2008. The Idaho International Film Festival is the only one in the Treasure Valley.

In fact, at one time, the state supported 10 festivals. Now there are about five, including last weekend's Sun Valley Spiritual Film Festival, says Peg Owens, marketing specialist for the Idaho Film Office and Tourism Board.

Idaho's film industry has been experiencing a slow burn. For several years, there has been a movement to build the industry and attract a Hollywood production to the state.

In 2006, the Idaho Legislature passed the film incentive bill - a 20 percent rebate to film productions with a budget of more than \$200,000 that hire at least 20 percent of their crew from Idaho. It has yet to be funded.

Still, there are two larger-budget films being made in the state by Idaho natives: Jay Pickett and Gary Hollie's "Soda Springs: The Movie" being shot in Emmett, and "Buhl, Idaho," being filmed in Buhl by writer/director Jaffe Zinn and starring Scott Glenn and Alison Elliott.

Zinn had a short shown at the True West Cinema Festival and was in Wes Malvini's "The Seven Sins of Daniel Tucker" at the Idaho Film Festival in 2006. It was at the True West that Zinn met Heather Rae, an award-winning Boise-based filmmaker who is producing his movie. They will begin filming it in Buhl in late October.

"Having a festival here helps build the culture. It makes it seem possible that you can do this here," he said. "It brings together a lot of local talent and it's a great atmosphere to bounce ideas around."

IT'S STILL ABOUT THE AUDIENCE

For fans of independent cinema, the Idaho International Film Festival is your one chance to see some of these films, Fletcher said.

"They're not going to be playing at the multiplex anytime soon," Fletcher said.

Which is the point of the festival. Idaho filmmakers such as Buhl's Wes Malvini and Boise's Andrew Ellis and Tim Okun can show their features next to those of British filmmaker Adam Mason and American director Scott Storm, both of

whom have films that are hits on the film-festival circuit.

"Networking is a big thing," Malvini said. "We've made lots of friends through the festival, people who say they want to work with us."

For Ellis, who has shown a short or a feature at each of the past seven Idaho International Film Festivals, interactions with his peers from around the world made a difference in his creative life.

"It was illuminating to talk with filmmakers from out of town and find out that they were not so different from us," Ellis said. "To hear what they were going through was very reassuring."

There are things you can learn from showing your film on a big screen before an audience that you can't learn any other way. That's something Clint Jackson is looking forward to with his first submission.

Jackson grew up on a Meridian dairy farm and studied film at Brigham Young University. He moved back to Idaho in 2005 to start his video production company in Meridian.

He has taken the festival's workshops over the past few years and now has made a narrative short film. "Hard Ride to Hope," a 10 minute-apocalyptic Western that he shot in one day outside Kuna. He hired rodeo cowboys as actors because they could ride.

"Seeing it at the Egyptian will be the big payoff," he said.

Tony Okun's feature-length documentary about minor league baseball, "Time in the Minors," will screen twice. Okun struggled in Los Angeles for 10 years before moving to Idaho in 2007 to focus on documentary film.

"It's special to have it shown here in our new hometown," Okun said.

Okun said he is looking forward to the questions after his film shows. "I love talking about film and finding out what people think," he said.

Dana Oland: 377-6442