

Stony Brook Film Festival 2015 preview: What to see

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Muna Otaru in Julia Hart's "The Keeping Room," directed by Daniel Barber. Photo Credit: Draffhouse Films

Stony Brook Film Festival launched 20 years ago with a program that included Elia Kazan's classic "A Face in the Crowd." According to festival director Alan Inkles, things didn't go so well. During the movie's final, climactic scene, the projector bulb lit the film on fire.

That wouldn't happen today. For one thing, the festival no longer uses film -- it's all digital -- and for another, Inkles gets too many submissions to make room for old movies. "We've slowly built up to getting bigger audiences and higher-profile films," says Inkles, who is also director of the Staller Center for the Arts, the festival's home base. "I think word got out in the industry. Now, people know us as a great place to play their film."

A new sponsorship from Island Federal Credit Union, which will provide \$75,000 per year for the next 10 years, should help the festival increase its advertising, pay to bring in visiting filmmakers and keep down ticket prices, which remain the same as last year.

Below are several highlights from this year's festival, which begins Thursday. Most features are accompanied by at least one short film. All screenings take place after noon.

THE MAN FROM ORAN (Thursday at 8) The opening-night film stars writer-director Lyès Salem as one of several young men trying to navigate a post-independence Algeria. Salem, who will attend the

screening, says his movie was inspired by Sergio Leone's "Once Upon a Time in America." In French and Arabic with English subtitles.

THIS ISN'T FUNNY (Friday at 9:30) For more proof that women are conquering comedy, check out this film about a socially anxious stand-up comic (Katie Page) who meets the daydreaming manager of a juice bar (Paul Ashton). The two stars wrote the movie; Ashton directed it.

JACKIE & RYAN (Saturday at 9:30) A romantic drama starring Katherine Heigl as a washed-up country singer who meets a traveling busker (Ben Barnes).

NUMBER ONE FAN (Monday at 9:15) A divorced beautician (Sandrine Kiberlain) gets a surprise when her favorite pop star (Laurent Lafitte) shows up at her doorstep with an unusual request. Variety called Judith Herry's debut feature "an exceptionally well-polished French thriller." In French with English subtitles.

THE CHALLENGER (Tuesday at 8:45) A Bronx auto mechanic (writer-director Kent Moran) falls on hard times and reluctantly returns to boxing. His trainer is played by Michael Clarke Duncan, of "The Green Mile," in his final screen role.

PROJECTIONS OF AMERICA (July 22 at 7) A documentary about the U.S. Office of War Information, whose 26 short films introduced an idealized America to newly liberated populations during World War II. Narrated by John Lithgow.

THE KEEPING ROOM (July 23 at 9:30) During the Civil War, three Southern women -- two white sisters and a black slave -- must defend their home against rogue Union soldiers. The cast includes Hailee Steinfeld, Sam Worthington and Brit Marling ("Another Earth").

BEST OF ENEMIES (July 24 at 7) A documentary on the 1968 televised debates between conservative icon William F. Buckley Jr. and progressive firebrand Gore Vidal. Directors Morgan Neville and Robert Gordon make the case that these intellectual heavyweights -- whose sparring verged on street-brawling -- gave birth to modern punditry and changed America's political discourse.

THE PASSION OF AUGUSTINE (July 25 at 8:30) The closing-night film, set in the 1960s, takes place at a Quebec convent school whose classical music program is threatened with extinction. Lysandre Ménard plays a hip new student with unconventional ideas. Directed by Léa Pool. In French with English subtitles.

WHEN | WHERE Thursday through July 25 at Stony Brook University's Staller Center for the Arts.

TICKETS Individual films are \$10; passes are \$85.

INFO 631-632-2787, stonybrookfilmfestival.com