

# **Stony Brook Film Festival**

*Growing more in popularity each time around,  
the Stony Brook Film Festival turns 20 this summer*

The 20<sup>th</sup> Annual Stony Brook Film Festival presented by Island Federal Credit Union takes place at the Staller Center for the Arts, Stony Brook University, July 16-25, 2015. The Stony Brook Film Festival maintains high standards for filmmakers and audiences alike.

For one, unlike many other film festivals, the Stony Brook Film Festival shows each movie only once. Taking advantage of their unique 40' screen, 1,000+ person theater (one of the largest venues of the film festival circuit), in 2015 Stony Brook Film Festival will exhibit 34 films from around the world over the course of the 10 days. Of the total films, 19 are full-length feature or documentary films, while 15 of them are shorts lasting under an hour. The 20<sup>th</sup> Annual Stony Brook Film Festival presents one World premiere, eight U.S. premieres, eleven East Coast premieres, and nine New York premieres.

What makes the Stony Brook Festival particularly unique is the popular format that pairs short films with features. Each evening, full-length films and shorts are presented in combination to create one larger, 5-6 hour viewing experience. Films are not separated in any way by category, genre or type so that a comedy short may precede a feature of more dramatic content.

The result for the viewer is a well-rounded evening of film, touching on a variety of topics tuning into a variety of sensibilities rather than simply a hodge-podge of film.

## History of the Festival

In 1995, the Staller Center Managing Director, Alan Inkles started the Film Festival as a means to keep the Staller Center active during the summer. During autumn, winter and spring, the Staller Center performance season offered a variety of live entertainment such as ballet, theatrical performances, concerts and even acrobats.

The decision to start offering film was born from simple logic. Film, as Mr. Inkles says, “is the art of the 20<sup>th</sup> century” yet it was the one thing Staller wasn’t offering. Summer then, was the perfect time to start. The 1,000+ seat theater was already in place, so Inkles and his team searched out the biggest screen they could find and had the projection booth built. - (The Staller family originally funded the booth and projectors, and now a fully updated digital system and a 40-foot screen for projection is in place in the theatre. “Films for Campus + Community” continues film offerings in the fall and spring semesters, offering movies that may have had limited theatrical releases as well as popular films.) Even early on, Inkles & company weren’t sure what they’d be showing, much less how or when, but the vision of Stony Brook as a milestone in film viewing was well underway.

Inkles endeavored to initiate the Staller Center screen by favoring classics and art films for the first Stony Brook Film Festivals. Much to their surprise, the Inkles crew found the task harder done than said. Due to changes in filming technology and theater advancements, obtaining classic prints of movies was so difficult as to be impossible at times.

The first Stony Brook Film Festival was a montage of Spielberg’s films with the exception of *ET* and *Jaws*. Evidently neither of these 35mm prints was readily available

and Stony Brook, as a small and growing film festival, simply lacked the funds to acquire them. Nonetheless, the Festival was able to attract approximately 1,000 viewers over the two to three weeks in which the Staller Center screen showed ten films.

The following fall, Staller Center began to include movies during the school year. The goal at that point was to enhance public awareness of the venue as a movie theater. Movies shown then, as is the case now, would span genres from blockbuster to art film, satisfying the gamut of movie-goers' tastes.

The second year of the Festival enjoyed better luck, particularly in the classics department. *On the Waterfront* and *The Pawnbroker* were two that were shown and began to draw the attention of acclaimed actors, including Rod Steiger and Patricia Neil, who made appearances at the Festival.

Over the course of those first few years, Inkles strategically developed the Festival's reputation by offering a palette of films that would attract locals as well as discerning movie fans and filmmakers. Still, problems arose in securing either the films or members of the film to appear at the same time for an authentic film festival experience.

Inkles decided to rethink his festival. He began to travel the circuit of festivals to watch and learn. By 1999, Inkles was set on focusing the Festival on all new movies only. Joining forces with the Long Island Film Festival, Stony Brook benefited from a mutually favorable relationship for the better part of two years, after which both parties had sufficiently cemented their identities and goals and took to their own ventures.

Inkles began by making trips to L.A. to meet with producers and "start shaking the trees" for movies of commendable caliber to be exhibited at the Stony Brook Festival.

Meeting with filmmakers from film markets around the country and placing “Call For Entry” ads were other methods Inkles employed to tap into alternative contemporary films.

For the 20<sup>th</sup> Annual Stony Brook Film Festival, Stony Brook received more than 700 submissions of features, documentaries and shorts. Recently, the reputation of the Stony Brook Film Festival had yielded the Festival Sundance-like numbers, with close to 15,000 attendees. As a result, audiences can expect to enjoy U.S. premieres of films at the Festival and some of the best new independent films available. For the filmmakers, the experience of watching their films in front of nearly 1,000 people is riveting.

Thus the road Stony Brook has traveled so far has been a fruitful one. By maintaining an audience-conscience attitude, Inkles has created an atmosphere that filmmakers want to be a part of. As for the studios, Stony Brook’s reputation of showing outstanding films has studios calling Inkles for Stony Brook’s Print Source (that’s film lingo for a movie’s bio and contact info) to find out what Stony Brook has come up with for the festival.

### **How The Festival Works**

Between the Call for Entries online, word of mouth among filmmakers, and sales agents from around the world, many submissions arrive with the hope of being in the Festival. The ratios of types of movies vary, with no set barometer for measuring what Stony Brook will wind up with. Quality is all important, with the best acting, best stories, and outstanding production values making the cut. Inkles’ personal commitment to the Festival can’t be stressed enough. “I really owe it to the Festival,” he says about his resolve in viewing every submission. In addition to relying on his own sense of quality

filmmaking, Inkles is not too proud to take the advice of his staff as well. By the time the schedule is made, the hundreds of submissions have been culled to create a ten-day festival.

Sound competitive? It is incredibly so. Inkles proudly admits that there have in fact been films that were turned away by Stony Brook that later played at major festivals around the world. "I want you to earn your slot on this screen," Inkles affirms. Considering the honor of inclusion, and the special limitations inherent in the festival, who could blame him?

Guest filmmakers and stars are often in attendance, and those involved in the films often come out for the festival as well. Directors of the films are usually on-hand to introduce their movies and give backstories on the film. After the viewing, the audience is able to engage with representatives of the films (such as directors, cast or producers) in a question and answer session. At the end of most screenings, audiences vote for the films in competition, rating them based on their personal reaction.

The competitions are for essentially four awards: Jury Award - Best Feature, Audience Award - Best Feature, Jury Award - Best Short and Audience Award - Best Short. A Grand Prize is sometimes awarded for a film that receives unparalleled responses from jurors and audience alike in all areas, or for a Best Director hailing the same. Typically, all the shorts are in competition for the two awards, and features that have not been signed to a deal by a U.S. distributor compete for Audience Choice and Jury awards. A small cadre of jurors concur on picks for Jury Feature and Jury Short.

## **What to Expect**

The first night, traditionally a Thursday, is Opening Night. One film is featured at 8:00 pm, without a short film included. Following the same format as the other nights, the director introduces the film, and a question and answer session between audience and cast follows the viewing. The Opening Night Party for 2015 is being held in the Paul W. Zuccaire Gallery on the first floor of Staller Center, where a Vintage Film Poster exhibition will be seen. (Posters are from Chisholm Larsson Gallery in NYC.)

The following nine days are composed of a mosaic of features and shorts, with many director's intros and Q&As. The second Thursday usually marks the final night of competition. Winners are notified either that night or the following morning (based on time zone) only telling them that they have won a prize. Arrangements are made for winners to arrive in Stony Brook Friday or Saturday afternoon.

The Closing Night, the second Saturday of the festival, features a single film, including the director's intro and a Q&A wrap-up. The Closing Night Awards Ceremony and Reception follows. For the 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary year, the reception will be held at the Hilton Garden Inn on the Stony Brook University campus. At the awards ceremony, which has been hosted by John Anderson film critic and writer for many years, both winners and attendees learn of their award. The following day, Inkles and crew start thinking about next year's Festival.

## **The Man Behind the Screen**

Not only is he the Director and Founder of the Stony Brook Film Festival, but Alan Inkles is also Director of the Staller Center for the Arts. With the Staller Center for

over 30 years, Alan Inkles gained the acumen needed for the Stony Brook Film Festival by organizing an International Theater Festival at Staller for almost 10 years.

Starting his academic career at Cal State Northridge, Inkles pursued his ambition of becoming an actor. Inkles was picked up by agent Mary Grady, mother of Don Grady (*My Three Sons*) and Lani O'Grady (*Eight is Enough*), who also represented Scott Baio and other TV personalities. Notwithstanding his success with TV pilots and commercials, Inkles moved back to New York to take up more serious acting, at which point he endeavored to finish his degree in Theater Arts at SUNY Stony Brook, meanwhile acting Off-Broadway and at local theaters.

During performances of "Romeo and Juliet" at Theater Three in 1985, in which Inkles played Romeo, he suffered a leg injury. By the time the show closed, Inkles was temporarily unable to continue acting due to the injury. The then Director of the Staller Center offered him a part-time position to manage the theater.

Within two years, the Provost approached Staller Center's director to begin a summer series, who in turn approached Inkles. Realizing that American theater would be too expensive for Staller to achieve, Inkles conceptualized an International Theater Festival. Securing grants, traveling the world, guaranteeing corporate sponsorship, and acting as INS liaison for international performers would be among the many tasks Inkles would undertake to insure the success of the Theater Festival that lasted for almost a decade.

By 1992, the Theater Festival fell to shortened funding. Despite packed houses, the Festival's livelihood waned as it could not support itself under the summer sun and declining subscriptions. For two to three years thereafter, some live acts were booked for

individual events, until finally Inkles & Co came up with the Stony Brook Film Festival as their next mission.

### **The Goods**

In the past 19 years the Stony Brook Film Festival has shown over 850 films and shorts. 420 are features, and there have been more than 380 shorts, with 45 documentaries. 200 New York Premieres, 98 East Coast Premieres, 48 US Premieres and 41 World Premieres have been in the mix.

These include films from over 53 different countries, including 595 produced or co-produced in the United States, and more than 190 of them have been directed by women. During this time the Festival has given over 130 awards and have hosted more than 300 special guests.

Included in the many premieres of the Stony Brook Film Festival over the past 19 years are the New York premiere of the Abbie Hoffman biopic *Steal This Movie* (2000) starring Vincent D'Onofrio and Janeane Garofalo, the East Coast premiere of Terry Green's *Almost Salinas* (2001) starring John Mahoney and Virginia Madsen, the East Coast premiere of Alan Rudolph's *The Secret Lives of Dentists* (2002) starring Campbell Scott and Hope Davis, and the East Coast premiere of writer, director and star Zach Braff's *Garden State* (2004) which also featured Natalie Portman and Peter Sarsgaard. The New York premiere and first film of director Daniel Barnz (*Won't Back Down, Cake*) was *Phoebe in Wonderland* (2008) starring Elle Fanning, Patricia Clarkson, Felicity Huffman and Bill Pullman. The New York Premiere of *Lightbulb* (2009) with

Dallas Roberts and Jeremy Renner, the East Coast premiere of Bruce Beresford's *Mao's Last Dancer* (2010) with Bruce Greenwood and Kyle MacLachlan, the New York premiere of Andrew Bowler's Oscar-nominated short *Time Freak* (2011) starring Michael Nathanson, and the New York premiere of the award-winning documentary *Blackfish* (2013) which details the controversial captivity of killer whales at SeaWorld made an impact on audiences. *The Cake Eaters* (2008) directed by Mary Stuart Masterson with Kristen Stewart, Aaron Stanford, Bruce Dern, Elizabeth Ashley, Jayce Bartok and Melissa Leo introduced Stony Brook audiences to known actors as well as actors beginning their careers.

Other highlights from past Festivals at Stony Brook include *Zaytoun* (Stephen Dorff), *Two Lives* (Liv Ullman), *AKA Doc Pomus*, *The Blitz*, *Aurora Borealis* (Donald Sutherland), *Children of Glory*, *The Deep End*, *Emotional Arithmetic* (Susan Sarandon), *The Grey Zone* (Harvey Keitel), *Heavens Fall* (Timothy Hutton), *Late Bloomers* (Isabella Rossellini), *The Little Traitor* (Alfred Molina), *Off the Map* (Joan Allen), *Resistance* (Julia Ormond), *The Rocket Post*, *Sonny Boy*, *Swimming Upstream* (Geoffrey Rush), *Tickling Leo*, *For My Father*, *Mozart's Sister* and *Almanya*.

### **The Price**

For the summer of 2015, the 20<sup>th</sup> Annual Stony Brook Film Festival has unique features, documentaries and shorts in abundance. A festival pass is only \$85 and gives access to all movies and the right to bypass ticket lines before performances. The Opening Night Party is only \$25 and includes desserts and beverages, with festival filmmakers and actors attending to mingle with fans. The Closing Night Awards Reception is \$25, with hors

d'oeuvres and drinks included. Individual tickets to films are \$10, \$8 for seniors and \$5 for students. A limited number of Gold Passes are available for \$225. The Gold Pass includes reserved seating in the filmmakers' section and tickets for Opening and Closing Night parties. For more complete information, tickets, or a full schedule of films and viewing times visit [www.stonybrookfilmfestival.com](http://www.stonybrookfilmfestival.com) or call 631-632-ARTS [2787].

*Based on the 2003 article by Nada Marjanovich  
Update by Julie Rulon Greene, Stony Brook Film Festival, 2015*