Aspen Shortsfest

Presented by Aspen Film
April 8 – 13, 2014
Info: www.aspenfilm.org
Tickets: www.aspenshowtix.com
$15 GA / $12 members /$10 students

Tuesday, April 8

PROGRAM ONE
7 p.m.
Wheeler Opera House
Filmmaker Q&A to follow

Wednesday, April 9

FILMMAKER TALK BACK
Noon
The Red Onion
Free

PROGRAM TWO
5:30 p.m.
Wheeler Opera House
Filmmaker Q&A to follow

PROGRAM THREE
8:30 p.m.
Wheeler Opera House
Filmmaker Q&A to follow

Thursday, April 10

FILMMAKER TALK BACK
Noon
The Red Onion
Free

PROGRAM FOUR
5:30 p.m.
Wheeler Opera House
Filmmaker Q&A to follow

PROGRAM FIVE
8:30 p.m.
Wheeler Opera House
Filmmaker Q&A to follow

Friday, April 11

FILMMAKER TALK BACK
Noon
The Red Onion
Free

PROGRAM SIX
5:30 p.m.
Wheeler Opera House
Filmmaker Q&A to follow

PROGRAM SEVEN
8:30 p.m.
Wheeler Opera House
Filmmaker Q&A to follow

Saturday, April 12

FILMMAKER FORUM:
Crowd-Sourced Filmmaking and Collaborating from Afar
Noon
Wheeler Opera House
Free

SPECIAL PRESENTATION
Writing for the Screen: How to Create Characters and Keep Your Friends
3:30 p.m.
Wheeler Opera House
$10

FAMILY FUN
5 p.m.
Crystal Theatre, Carbondale
For age 7 & up

PROGRAM A
7:30 p.m.
Crystal Theatre, Carbondale
Filmmaker Q&A to follow

PROGRAM EIGHT
5:45 p.m.
Wheeler Opera House
Filmmaker Q&A to follow

PROGRAM NINE
8:30 p.m.
Wheeler Opera House
Filmmaker Q&A to follow

Sunday, April 13

FAMILY FUN
2 p.m.
Wheeler Opera House
For age 7 & up

PROGRAM B
5 p.m.
Crystal Theatre, Carbondale
Filmmaker Q&A to follow

PROGRAM C
7:30 p.m.
Crystal Theatre , Carbondale
Filmmaker Q&A to follow

Short Cuts

Filmmakers bring diverse perspectives to Aspen Film's Shortsfest

BY ANDREW TRAVERS, TIME OUT WRITER

Stumped

In a single Aspen Shortsfest program — each running about 100 minutes, made up of films 3 to 27 minutes in length — you may find a revelatory documentary, be moved by heartrending drama, laugh yourself to tears at a clever comedy, and see fantastic animation on the big screen.

This year's Shortsfest, presented by Aspen Film, running Tuesday, April 8, through Sunday, April 13, includes stories on all seven continents, and from more than 30 countries. The filmmakers include established masters of the short form and ambitious up-and-coming writers and directors. The festival, now in its 23rd year, has become an international showcase for the best of short filmmaking, and a proving ground for the leading auteurs of tomorrow.

Three shorts that premiered at Shortsfest last year were nominated for Oscars, and festival alumni Destin Cretton's debut feature, "Short Term 12," became a 2013 critical darling. In February, "Whiplash," a feature about a New York music school expanded from a short that won the BAFTA award at last year's Shortsfest, won both the audience and grand jury prizes at Sundance. The win made it one of the most buzzed-about projects in Hollywood.

The filmmakers behind some of this year's most highly anticipated shorts spoke with *Time Out* about their movies, their processes, and the advantages of keeping it short.

'Native Silence'

An unsparing look at the modern struggles of Native Americans, "Native Silence" is an eye-opening documentary.

The film, by former Aspenite Jane Wells, looks at the long-term effect of 20th-century government policy on native peoples. Federal programs separated one-third of native children from their parents, into non-native homes, between 1947 and 1961. The film focuses on Ojibwe and Lakota women in Minnesota, and traces how being separated from home life has contributed to native girls' exploitation in the sex trade and epidemic levels of addiction, suicide and domestic abuse in their communities.

Wells discovered the story while researching another documentary on sex trafficking in Minneapolis.

"I realized that that the story of native women and girls was so distinct and had so many separate elements that I wanted to tell their story, and didn't want it to get lost in a bigger American story," she says.

She found that the modern crisis in native communities is the effect of forced adoptions but also a manifestation of the genocide and colonization of earlier generations.

Returning to Aspen, Wells encourages locals to remember that our valley was once home to the Ute people.

"Whether you're in the Wheeler Opera House or on Main Street, this was their sacred land," she says. "We ought not to just honor the beauty of it, but honor the people whose land it really is."

The film plays during Wednesday's 5:30 p.m. program at the Wheeler Opera House in Aspen and 5 p.m. Sunday April 13 at the Crystal Theatre in Carbondale.

'The Lion's Mouth Opens'

A tense and poignant 15-minute emotional journey, "The Lion's Mouth Opens" follows Mariana, a young actress, for 24 hours as she awaits a potentially devastating medical diagnosis.

The documentary from Lucy Walker, who made last year's acclaimed feature about snowboarder Kevin Pearce, "The Crash Reel," is a deftly executed piece of filmmaking. It doesn't reveal the disease that Mariana may have until its final moments, and focuses on conversations between her and her friends in the day before the diagnosis, turning the film into a powerful study of fear and friendship.

"I liked the intensity of this short period and felt going on that journey with her organically was the most powerful way to do it," Walker says.

Mariana reached out to Walker, having seen some of her other work, and asked her to help share her plight with the world.

"I was moved by the love around her and her desire to help other people," says Walker. "It's so inspiring to other people facing all kinds of challenges. I joke with Mariana that I channel her spirit when I'm coping with difficult moments."

"The Lion's Mouth Opens" plays in Wednesday's 8:30 p.m. program.

'Pony Place'

A hilarious look at the technological generation gap, "Pony Place" features a young girl attached to her tablet while on vacation with her grandparents, playing a horse-farming game that shares its title with the film.

When the girl leaves the tablet with her grandparents so they can look after her digital horse farm, they're overwhelmed.

The fictional 10-minute short, says director Joost Reijimers of the Netherlands, was inspired by a true story from his father's life partner.

"I thought it was hilarious and immediately knew it would make a great story for a short film," Reijimers wrote in an e-mail.

The movie gets many of its laughs out of the animation in the game, as the digital farm goes to hell in the grandparents' hands. Reijimers worked with an animation company in Amsterdam to get it right, with inspiration from real games like "FarmVille" and "Hay Day."

The anecdote is nicely suited to the short form, and won over audiences at its premiere at the Dutch Film Festival.

"Nothing beats a thousand people laughing out loud at something you spent months creating," Reijimers says. "Many people told me they recognized their own parents in the main characters, of which I'm very proud. When it comes to comedy, making fun of something by ridiculing it is easy. The trick is to have your audience care about the people in your story."

"Pony Place" is in Thursday's 5:30 program in Aspen and Sunday, April 13 at 7:30 p.m. in Carbondale.

'Fingerplay'

At last year's Shortsfest, Mauro Mueller's "A World for Raul" won the Best Student Film award. The short was a disturbing tale of a sexual power play between young men, set in a landscape of economic disparity in Mexico.

Recently graduated from film school at Columbia University and now running an independent production company with three friends in New York, Mueller returns to Shortsfest with another dark and hard-hitting short about sexual power and morality, "Fingerplay."

The film centers on an aging Swiss couple whose household is shaken when a young and mentally disabled relative comes to stay with them.

"I'm just interested in this power play," says Mueller, who has written a feature version of "Fingerplay" and is now at work on a different feature-length film. "And often there is a sexual aspect to it. I'm drawn to dramas, and a lot of times you don't see these kinds of stories."

"Fingerplay" is featured in the Friday, April 11, program at 8:30 p.m. at the Wheeler.

'Stumped'

Following a young filmmaker hit by a rare illness who loses all four of his limbs, "Stumped" is proof of the limitless possibilities in short film.

In just 10 minutes, this moving documentary includes belly-laugh moments, devastating drama and an inspiring story arc.

Its high-spirited subject, Will Lautzenheiser, moves home to Boston after losing his arms and legs to a bacterial infection. As part of his rehabilitation, he takes to the stage at ImprovBoston to perform a stand-up routine that's an extreme blend of tragedy and comedy.

"I can no longer masturbate," one joke goes. "I have to ask someone else to lend a hand."

The movie follows him over 21 months, and by the end Lautzenheiser is seen taking steps with a walker and prosthetics.

Austin-based filmmaker Robin Berghaus went to film school with Lautzenheiser at Boston University, and a faculty member there alerted her of his situation. She says her former classmate was energized to make the film.

"Being a filmmaker, and having to halt his career, that was devastating to him," she explains. "So collaborating on this documentary was a way for him to stay creative."

Berghaus encouraged him to try stand-up as they began the project, and found he was confident in his routine and had a tremendous stage presence.

She's continuing to follow Lautzenheiser's story, and considering a follow-up documentary focused on the prospect of him receiving leg and arm transplants.

"Stumped" plays in the Saturday, April 12, program at 8:30 p.m. at the Wheeler.

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Native Silence

Pony Place

The Lion's Mouth Opens