

Stratford Winter Film Festival promises something for everyone

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Times Correspondent

In the dark days of a February winter, the Stratford Winter Film Festival (SWFF) shines a light on gathering as a community to share the experience of film together. Rather than isolating indoors, this family friendly event offers something for everyone from Feb. 14-17.

Now in its second year, SWFF has landed a major sponsor in TD Bank, allowing for growth in offering twelve films over four days. Last year it was nine films over three days.

"It has absolutely moved the needle an enormous amount for SWFF. It has allowed us to know that certain things that would be in place and we could concentrate on the highest value that we could give to our patrons when they come," said co-founder Craig Sangster.

There was also a free community event sponsored by TD where a large group gathered at Stratford City Hall to watch *The Sound of Music* on the big screen and sing-a-long to the famous songs that accompany the film. The event was in partnership with Stratford Winterfest and was introduced by Mayor Martin Ritsma and TD Branch manager Caroline Kania.

"This was a way for TD to say, not only is their interest just for ticket buyers and SWFF, they also wanted to provide this



Who were these zany zebras that took to the streets of Stratford to raise awareness of SWFF? The three ze'bro's were none other than the co-founders and directors Craig Sangster, Leslie Marsh and Bruce MacInnis handing out promotional cards to amused shoppers downtown.

(LISA CHESTER PHOTO)

nice community event during Winterfest," said Sangster.

Feedback from last year has been taken into account and the film selections presented this year provide something for everyone, following in the themes of love, family, and "other stuff people will like."

"Last year we had a couple that were more avant garde or esoteric, like *32 sounds* and *End of Time* were very esoteric so we've stayed away from those kinds and we think that this year they are more approachable and less challenging," said co-founder Bruce MacInnis.

Films curated to support the themes be-

gan with suggestions from the distributor that were then whittled down. Reviews are checked, availability within the cinematic universe is confirmed. Lastly, the criteria of suitability for the SWFF audience quickly reduced the potential offerings to the current 12. The challenge laid in finding films people will like, have a personality that represents SWFF yet is also accessible to all.

The final offerings for the 2025 festival are five documentaries and seven feature films. The documentaries are *Immediate Family*, *The Eagle Huntress*, *Anselm*, *The Lost Leonardo* and *Julia*.

"I am looking forward to *Immediate Family* as everyone of a certain vintage knows the music but doesn't know the musicians behind it," said co-founder Leslie Marsh. The documentary follows the session musicians behind the recordings of some of the most famous music of all time.

The feature films are *I'm Your Man*, *What's Love Got To Do With It*, *12 Mighty Orphans*, *Red Dog*, *True Blue*, *The Return*, *Memory*, and *The Year Dolly Parton Was My Mom*.

"I like the *Return*, it's a 2024 film released Dec. 6 with star power in Ralph Fiennes. It's a classic Greek mythology story and I'm looking forward to it," said MacInnis. "We just want people to have a good time for a weekend and spend a little time and money in Stratford."

There are four options for passes for SWFF. First is the four day pass priced at \$150 giving access to all 12 films to the passholder. Second is a two day pass for Friday/Saturday for six films priced at \$80. Third is a two day pass for Sunday/Monday for six films priced at \$80 and finally, a one day pass for \$50 for three films. Passes can be purchased online at stratfordwinterfilmfestival.ca.

As a non-profit, SWFF is run primarily by volunteers. Volunteering is a wonderful opportunity to participate in this community event. Inquiries to help can be made by emailing volunteers@stratfordwinterfilmfestival.ca

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