

Stratford event will screen a dozen films

Event will screen 12 films during four nights in February

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14 Dec 2024 CORY SMITH cosmith@postmedia.com

Stratford's Winter Film Festival is back for a sequel.

The theme for 2025 is Love, Family and Stuff People Will Like.

"We had so many great movies, and they didn't fit into one box," film festival chair Craig Sangster said. "We think we know our audience."

The 2025 edition will feature 12 films beginning Feb. 14 -- Valentine's Day -- and ending Feb. 17 - Family Day. Sangster, Leslie Marsh and Bruce Macinnis, encouraged by community feedback from the first winter film festival last year, decided to run it back a second

time.

"We had so many lovely emails thanking us for putting the effort in and making it happen," Sangster said. "We're presenting in the deep, dark winter in Stratford where things are quiet. We're trying to bring people out, from Stratford and out of town, and fill restaurants and hotels, enjoy some time in winter and a film festival."

This year's event has an extra day and will include three more movies at different venues across the city. All screenings at the Stratford city hall auditorium, St. James Anglican Church and St. Andrews Church will

be shown in the evening to avoid light pollution and allow guests to "have fun and explore Stratford during the day, and come in at night and get cosy and watch some movies," Sangster said.

Organizers also dedicated more resources to the technical team in an effort to correct audio issues that plagued the festival at times in 2024.

"We wanted to make it a higher quality experience for our patrons," Sangster said.

Last year's festival lost money, as expected, Sangster acknowledged,

but he's confident the not-for-profit venture can break even in 2025, especially after landing TD Bank as its lead sponsor.

"Contributions from companies like TD or some of the more substantial government grants (determine) whether an event like this can continue," he said. "Sure, we can pay for year one out of pocket, but if that continues and it's a significant amount of money, people with limited means like us aren't going to be able to run it anymore."

This year's slate of movies includes a 2021 documentary on legendary cookbook author and television superstar Julia Child, What's Love Got to Do with It?, a 2023 romantic comedy starring Lily James, Shazad Latif, Shabana Azmi, Sajal Aly and Emma Thompson about a documentary filmmaker who follows her childhood friend's journey toward an arranged marriage, and The Return, a retelling of Homer's Odyssey released in 2024 starring Ralph Fiennes and Juliette Binoche.

"Not everybody will like all 12, but

none will be horrible," Sangster said. "None of these will be movies you'd be embarrassed to take your mom to."

"This is a wholesome film festival. Everybody has had their fill of everything else, and this is refreshing."

For more information and tickets, visit stratfordwinterfilmfestival.ca.