

Inaugural Stratford Winter Film Festival coming this February

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A new festival is coming to town just in time to pull us out of the winter blues that inevitably hit in February each year.

The Stratford Winter Film Festival (SWFF) is the brainchild of a trio of transplants who bring with them a broad skillset that they feel ready to take on this project. The three men, Leslie Marsh, Craig Sangster, and Bruce MacInnes, who have been here a few years now, found that there wasn't much going on in town during the winter, particularly February, so they brainstormed what they could do to bring together something the community could embrace.

"We all enjoy films; it was really born out of what we could pull off in terms of something we could do in February when there's not a lot to do that would stimulate a certain amount of business that everyone could get a hold of and be predominately indoors, use accommodations and things like that. It's not that we are film experts or festival experts; we just landed on some-

thing we thought we could do," explains Sangster.

In the short term, they are hoping to sell six hundred passes and pair up with local businesses to cross-promote stimulating more seasonal business for the Festival weekend.

In the first year, they will work out the mechanics of ticket sales, social media promotion, curating films, and the many other details that need attention in the six months it takes to put it together.

The theme of SWFF is music, food, and history. "Many people come to Stratford for the food; music? Well, we could use more music and musical-related stuff because Stratford has a great history in music. And history, it's an old part of Canada, and Stratford is proud of its history, so we are trying to have as broad an appeal as possible," said Marsh. "Certainly, these are things we are passionate about and reasonably well versed in and have opinions on, and they have a broad appeal. We want to appeal with as many as possible, so they are safe categories," MacInnes adds.



The films are being curated with a collective and cooperative approach. The group has solicited various businesses and stakeholders for what they thought were their favourite films in each category.

From these twenty or so solicitations, they have curated a master list and, from there, will choose the ten or twelve that will be showcased during the weekend of February 9 to 11. "We're trying to have a universal appeal for the first year as a kind of proof of concept, but certainly, we are doing this for the audience. Here's something

we would like to share. I can tell you in my family, there are a couple of kids; they're teenagers. There are so many movies from years ago that I would like them to see that I wish they had seen. So, this is the kind of stuff we're putting in the festival so that a family from Toronto or Kitchener or Stratford will come because there's a film they want to share," said Sangster.

While SWFF may contribute to the cultural scene in Stratford, it is with the community in mind that the trio endeavours to bring an opportunity to create meaningful memories. "We

would love SWFF to become a platform to showcase local talent for filmmakers, but that's not year one. We will concentrate on community first and work out the details," said Sangster.

The Festival will be held in five different venues over the three-day weekend. These include Revival House, Avondale Church, Grayson Mills, Factory 163 and Little Prince Cinema. Passes cover all three days and cost \$99 each.

For more information, ticket purchases and Film announcements, please visit the website stratfordwinterfilmfestival.ca.

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