

Stratford Winter Film Festival returns for second year in February

LISA CHESTER

Times Correspondent

After what the founders have deemed a successful first year, the Stratford Winter Film Festival (SWFF) will be returning for the second year in February 2025.

"There were about 300 people plus walk-ins, so it wasn't quite our target we were after but we certainly weren't too disappointed for a first go," said Bruce MacInnis, one of the trio of founders along with Craig Sangster and Leslie Marsh. "Now, since we did learn some things, we will get out there earlier and hope to double that this year."

As this is the second year, they are not starting from scratch as they were with a far shorter timeframe for going from concept to execution in their first year. They have found different venues to counter those places that presented them with issues last year and the festival will be over four days instead of three.

"We're going to narrow down slightly larger places but we think we are going to be able to deliver a better experience in these places. So, instead of having our techs spread over five different places, we will be across three. The venues are St. James Church, St. Andrew's Church and

STRATFORD
WINTER FILM
FESTIVAL

Stratford Winter Film Festival returns for second year coming in February 2025.

the city hall auditorium," said Sangster.

The venues are all around 250-300 seating capacity so they will be quite suitable. There will also be partner sites, "Off SWFF" if you will, that will enhance the festival experience after the screenings. These Off SWFF sites will be partnering restaurants and bars downtown that will tie into the festival in their own unique way.

"Off SWFF will be at Relic, Café Buf-

fon (downstairs), The Little Prince and with our friends from last year, Foster's and Mercer among others we are in talks for partnerships like The Bruce," Sangster said. "We are trying to deliver everything that was good about last year's experience bigger and smoother."

There may be as many as a dozen films still to be determined over the four days beginning Thursday Feb. 14, Valentine's Day, and ending Monday Feb. 17, Family Day. Given the dates of the festival, the theme for this year seemed natural, "Love, Architecture and Family."

"One thing we want our guests to think about is you don't have to see everything. See the ones you want and go have a nice dinner. We want it to be that you have a pass you can see anything at these times and do what works for you," said Sangster.

"A piece of the messaging that we didn't do well last year is that I think people felt that it was a grind to see all nine films over the course of three days. It was a lot and some people toughed it out, but they felt it in the end. We certainly felt it in the end," added MacInnis.

This way, event goers can, with a pass, see the films that interest them and take in some of what Stratford has to offer in

the winter. As with last year, the trio is focused on promoting local business and wants to see people come to watch the films but also go to restaurants and hotels, and spend money in the stores.

"It's a civic enterprise. It's not about us, it's not about the festival particularly, it's a way in the depths of winter for generating business for people who stay open in the winter here, and they certainly need it," said Marsh.

The films are actively being curated and the organizers are collecting a wonderful selection themed around love, architecture and family.

For the February festival, there will be a dedicated bus to take pass holders from venue to venue. Given that it will be the dead of winter and there is limited parking at the venues, the bus will provide an excellent way to get around similar to the free bus service for Lights On Stratford.

Festival goers can also expect a different approach to passes in line with the desire to enhance the moviegoing experience where the model will be to buy passes by the day rather than a single pass for the entire festival weekend.

For more information, visit stratford-winterfilmfestival.ca.

Barry James Payne includes Stratford in latest tour dates

LISA CHESTER

Times Correspondent

Local musician Barry James Payne has been a busy guy, travelling around and playing in the likes of Windsor and London, with upcoming shows in Alberta and even Mexico. But luckily, locals can still catch him in two scheduled dates for shows in Stratford in next month.

The two shows couldn't be more different. For an evening of intimate music and storytelling, head to the Bunker Performance Lounge Oct. 3 to see Payne performing solo, a rare occurrence not to be repeated here in the near future. Opening for Payne will be Bobby Dove accompanied by Allison Corbett on fiddle.

"I'm going to be doing an opening set with them, then I will be doing a set solo. That's rare. Bobby Dove is great; they play all over Canada. They are real traditional country; think Hank Williams '50s and '60s music. The fiddle player is Allison Corbett from Newfoundland and has played with a ton of different people and just came back from a European tour," said Payne.

Playing solo is a very different gig for Payne.

"I have to choose my songs wisely. You want to have a connection with the audience. With a band, it's more of a rock show. This is more of a conversation with the audience. It is definitely more intimate, so I try to pull out songs I haven't played in a long time (and) tell a different story," he said.



(STEVE BAYNE PHOTO)

SAVE THE DATE

Catch Barry James Payne at his latest concerts giving two very different performances.

The tickets for the show on Oct. 3 are pay what you can with the hopeful suggestion of \$20 apiece. However, because this is the first time for Dove to play in Stratford, Payne hopes just to fill the room for them by giving attendees the option of paying what they can to make it accessible to all music

lovers.

Doors open at 6:30 p.m.

The next night, Friday Oct. 4, Payne will appear at Revival House with his wildly popular Blue Rodeo tribute band, Diamond Mine. The band is comprised of Eric Lundgren on electric guitar, Paul Aitken on

electric guitar and mandolin, Adam Plante on keyboards, Geoff Jarvis on bass, Craig Sharp on drums, Derrick Barnes on acoustic guitar, Greg Keelor and Jim Cuddy on vocals and Barry James Payne on acoustic guitar.

"We are over 50 per cent sold, so there is only about 40 tickets left. Revival House seats 120 and tickets are only \$25," said Payne.

As consummate professionals that never want to disappoint, Diamond Mine will be playing four new songs from the Blue Rodeo catalogue. Fans can expect to hear "Cynthia," "Photograph," "Outskirts" and "Heart Like Mine."

At Revival House, dinner is also available before the show, so Payne suggests buying tickets for Diamond Mine at stringbone.ticketspice.com/blue-rodeo-tribute-featuring-diamond-mine before calling Revival House to reserve dinner at 519-273-3424.

In the meantime, fans can hear from Payne through his playlists on Spotify, carefully curated in the genre of indie folk and Americana.

"I try to include some of my music to make it relatable. There's a lot of playlists that I've made over the years like Americana duets, Americana from Canada, Indie Folk for rainy days, Songs for the Road," said Payne.

While it is a little too soon for him to talk much about it, there is a notable show coming in November at Copperlight (Knox Church) that Payne is included in celebrating the music of Nick Drake. Save the date!