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#CINEMAFORTHESENSES
11th Annual Byron Bay Film Festival October 6-15
Making Waves: Surf Films at BBFF 2017

By Digby Hildreth

Whether there's chaos in those crushing waves or a sense of tranquility, a touch of foreboding or a call to adventure - the ocean is a matter of perspective. That much is clear when each year Byron Bay Film Festival puts together a program awash with surf films from home and abroad.

From the high impact sport of big wave riding to the cross-cultural journey through sea and self, this year's Surf Film category explores the ocean from every angle.



Heavy Water

***Heavy Water* (Michael Oblowitz)**

A certain highlight in this year's festival program is the world premiere of feature length documentary ***Heavy Water***, the latest from renowned South African filmmaker **Michael Oblowitz**.

The film takes a close look at surf-world royalty **Nathan Fletcher** and his relationship with big wave surfing, tracing his lineage back to his grandfather, one of the pioneers of Oahu's North Shore, and examining the consequences that Fletcher and his friends have faced in the pursuit of their passion for big waves.

A journey through the eyes of the surfing community that delves deep into the mind-set of the big wave culture and its roots, the film culminates in a never before done, next level performance that once again raises the bar of what is possible in surfing.

Oblowitz has directed and produced several critically acclaimed movies and videos. His early fine arts short films have been shown in the **Whitney Museum's *No Wave Cinema Series***. Previous films from Oblowitz have gained official entry to both the **Cannes** and **Sundance Film Festivals** and his iconic surfing documentary ***Sea Of Darkness* (2010)** won at film festivals throughout the world, including Byron Bay International Film Festival.

He will be in attendance for the **World Premiere** of *Heavy Water*.



Nate Fletcher

***The Church of the Open Sky* (Nathan Oldfield)**

The Church of the Open Sky is the latest feature length release from award winning independent Australian filmmaker and Byron Bay local **Nathan Oldfield**, creator of ***Lines From A Poem***, ***Seaworthy***, ***The Heart & The Sea*** and ***Gathering***.

Shot on location in Australia, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea and Sri Lanka, the film features **Dave Rastovich**, **Lauren Lindsey Hill**, **Tom Wegener**, **Belinda Baggs**, **CJ Nelson**, **Alex Knost**, **Johnny Abegg**, **Neal Purchase Jr**, **Jasson Salisbury**, **Devon Howard** and more.

This film is an inspired and endearing representation of the surfing experience, where all participants are worthy and welcomed - to learn, play and grow together - in inclusive, sacred playgrounds beneath *The Church of the Open Sky*.

Acclaimed Australian Novelist **Tim Winton** described Oldfield as “a filmmaker who wants a surf movie to say something important, to move us and make us grateful for the sea around us and the life within us”.

Over his 15-year filmmaking career Oldfield has seen his share of award success including Best Feature Film (San Diego Surf Film Festival), Best Feature Film (Berlin Surf Film Festival), Best Cinematography (Florida Surf Film Festival) to name a few.

Nathan’s photographs are regularly published in international surfing magazines and he was included in Surfing World Magazine’s ‘Fifty Most Intriguing People In Surfing.’

Maurice Cole: The First Wave

Maurice Cole: The First Wave is a well crafted short documentary that tells the compelling story of a gifted Aboriginal surfer’s battles with the law, mental health and himself.

From finding his place in the water from a young age to the time he spent in jail, Maurice’s inspiring tale is intertwined with stunning visuals that will not only have audiences mesmerised but will leave them with a real sense that through surfing one can overcome any obstacle.

***Undertow* (Peter Spann)**

Fresh out of rehab, all Bella wants to do is to make it through her first day clean.

But when her ex-lover, the mysterious Jonny, wants her back, Bella is straight into a burgeoning market business and life with her drama-seeking friends, a potential new love and a party that holds secret revelations of betrayal conspire to break her will.

After 20 years of corporate life and as a public speaker, *Undertow* director **Peter Spann** returned to his teenage passion of film, television and theatre in 2016, studying at Sydney Film School and Australian Film, Television and Radio School (AFTRS).

“Undertow has deep personal meaning for me,” Peter said.

“It is the story of a young woman I met on the beach on a long summer's day in Byron Bay. Her spirit, enthusiasm for life and resilience remains an inspiration for me.”



Undertow

***The Turtle's Pulse* (Mayra Castro)**

The Turtle's Pulse is a quaint sensory journey, a collage of coasts, beaches and waves from different countries that invites audiences to reflect on how nature makes us feel.

Director **Mayra Castro**, now a Byron Bay local, is a native of Santiago, Chile with Mexican roots. She studied film at Escuela De Cine De Chile, specializing in Production Design.

“I believe in wildness, kindness and human connection,” Mayra said.

“Always up to for an adventure, I find inspiration in nature, smiles and light”.

Masa (Dominic de Salis)

A short film based on the personal journey of Byron Bay-based Japanese shaper **Masami Yaguchi**. It follows the narrative of Masa who became infatuated with a culture in a time and place where surfing was perceived uncouth, and explores what drove him to move to a foreign country with an alien culture in pursuit of his passion.

Masa is directed by Byron Bay based freelance videographer and photographer **Dominic de Salis**.

Lumière (Tay Steele)

From Hawaii to Tahiti, *Lumière* takes us behind the lens of North Shore photographer **Amber Mozo**, to find what the ocean gives to her in spite of what it took away.

Director, writer and producer **Tay Steele** has spent the last three years honing his craft, working to establish himself as an up and coming filmmaker. He has been featured in several action sports magazines including SurferMag who said of his work, "In a time when the surf world needs fuller storytelling and fresh vision, Taylor (Tay) might just be that new face who brings it back around."

William Finnegan - Barbarian Days

Made by Byron Bay director **Darius Devas**, this is a short portrait of Pulitzer prize winning author and ardent surfer **William Finnegan**, narrated with excerpts from his memoir ***Barbarian Days***. Featuring **Rusty Miller**.

Rip Tide

A dramatic feature about which direction you're going to take.

Newly-18 American fashion model Cora (musician and **Disney** star **Debby Ryan**) has moved to an Australian coastal town to be with her favourite aunt. At first, she feels isolated, but soon romance and new friendships start to bloom, and Cora must decide between returning to the modelling career, or staying with the community that has welcomed her in.

Director **Rhiannon Bannenberg** grew up on the south coast of New South Wales with the ocean and surfing strong influences on her way of life.

"Rip Tide explores the beauty, power and freedom of a life shaped around the sea - tied in with love, courage and discovery," she says.

***Blue* (Karina Holden)**

From the beaches of Byron Shire, the ocean looks in pretty good condition. But we all know there's a bigger story, and the must-watch documentary *Blue* tells that story.

Half of all marine life has been lost in the last 40 years and by 2050 there will be more plastic in the sea than fish. 90% of the creatures living in Australian oceans occur nowhere else in the world, and have nowhere to go if we don't protect them.

Featuring passionate advocates for ocean preservation, and filmed in the seas surrounding Australia, Indonesia, the Philippines and the US, *Blue* looks at how the very nature of the ocean is being altered.

Australia is at a crossroads where it can be seen as a marine conservation leader. This is an urgent call to arms. And we have to move fast.

From the state of commercial fishing and practices such as shark finning, the plastic waste that clogs the oceans killing sea life, to the perilous state of the Great Barrier Reef that not only has to contend with the decimating effects of coral bleaching but also further threat from port expansions designed to facilitate the opening of the largest coalmining project in Australia's history, *BLUE* pulls no punches.

Filmmakers will be attending the festival.



Blue

The 11th Annual Byron Bay Film Festival is held on Friday 6 – Sunday 15 October 2017 in multiple venues throughout Byron Bay and surrounding suburbs.

Program is available on the website now.

Tickets are on sale now via www.bbff.com.au

End.

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