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#CINEMAFORTHESENSES

Byron Bay Film Festival 6 - 15 October 2017

Local filmmaking talent: a crowded field

This Saturday's **Spotlight on Byron** features the impressive work of four Byron Bay locals. Films made by four other filmmakers based in and around Byron Shire have already screened at the festival – an indication of the depth and range of creative talent residing in the area. Many of them take advantage of the coastal town's sublime natural beauty, some celebrate the character of the place and the characters in it. Others reveal that danger can lurk, even in paradise.

The Church of the Open Sky

For many people, Byron Bay means surfing, and for many surfers the waves off the East Coast serve as a springboard into the waters of the world. Such a one is independent filmmaker Nathan Oldfield, a comparative old-timer on the local film scene whose latest work is a hymn to riding the waves wherever they can be found, whether it be Australia, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea or Sri Lanka.

You could say that Nathan, in common with many surfers, is something of an ocean obsessive, as shown by the titles of some of his earlier, award-winning works: **Lines from a Poem, Seaworthy, The Heart & The Sea** and **Gathering**.

For his new, feature-length release, Nathan enlisted others who are similarly smitten: pro-surfer, eco-activist (and Byron local) **Dave Rastovich**, eco-feminist **Lauren Lindsey Hill**, surf philosopher and board shaper **Tom Wegener**, along with **Belinda Baggs, CJ Nelson, Alex Knost, Johnny Abegg, Neal Purchase Jr, Jasson Salisbury, Devon Howard** and many others.

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 Nathan 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”.

With **Church**, he has certainly done that, communicating through stunning cinematography and music the joyful, universal and spiritual experience of riding the wave.

Undertow

The short film **Undertow**, having its World Premiere at BBFF 2017, tells us a lot about Byron Bay, including some of its dark undercurrents.

Peter Spann's film marries the postcard perfect beauty of the region with heavy themes of addiction, loss and resilience. It tells the story of surfer girl Bella on her first day out of rehab as she reconnects with friends and her troubled past. The film takes us on a journey around some iconic locations in Byron and explores the typical by-the-beach lifestyle Peter says is an important aspect of the film.

"While the themes in the film are universal to young people's experiences everywhere in the world, to me Byron was an essential part of the character," he says.

"Byron Bay Film Festival was the one we always wanted. We always said if we got selected, which we have, we wanted it to be a world premier there. While we have been accepted into other festivals, Byron was the one we were really excited about because Byron is really the home of this film."

Shot across a total of seven days and captured using the very best Arri camera technology, the film gives the region's natural beauty every chance to shine, however it is not the only reason Byron was first choice for the location.

The film comes out of a story of a girl he met in Byron, who came out of the water after being stung by something. "She asked me for help and so we wandered up and got some vinegar and put it on," he recalls.

They became friends and over time she revealed how she had been a part of the Byron Bay teenage elite crowd, then met a guy who was heavily into the party scene and together they spiralled down into heavier drugs.

Undertow's lead actor, 21-year-old Jacqui Purvis, has been onboard the project from the very beginning and said the challenge of playing such a complex character was what first attracted her to the role.

"For me the film is about relationships and how an addiction can take over in the sense that, for Bella and Jonny, it's not really about love anymore, it's about the fact that I'm (Bella) addicted to the connection, the relationship we've formed around drugs and how that connection with someone can take over your own self control," Jacqui says.

Some of the earlier versions of the script were much darker than the final cut of the film but for Peter "it wasn't about all that, it was about her resilience and about her coming back from it all".

Outback Rider

This is the record of a road trip with a difference – taking a Harley where it was never designed to go.

Country music artist Steve Grace had a dream of riding his motorbike from Byron Bay to the Birdsville Hotel in remote Outback Queensland, along the way telling the stories of the hardworking people he encountered.

Peter John directs the film, which shows Steve dealing with the extreme conditions of the 2015 drought that affected 80% of Queensland.

It features breathtaking visuals, confronting interviews, and the severe and harsh conditions endured by those living on the land.

Masa

Long-term Bangalow local Dominic de Salis is a young videographer and photographer and surfer who came to the area from New Zealand with his family in 2000.

His film, **Masa**, tells the story of Byron-based Japanese shaper Masami Yaguchi, known as Masa, who became infatuated with surfing at a time when it was seen as uncouth in Japan.

At a young age, Masa moved to Byron Bay to pursue his passion and has been here since.

Dominic has made other films, but says “this is my first crack at a narrative based documentary with more of a purpose”.

“It’s a nice story, about one of the individuals in the Byron tapestry who help make it such a rich place.”

He met Masa in the surf, and “liked his really cool style and vibe” and was impressed with his backstory.

Dominic grew up around photography and film. His dad Charlie was a filmmaker, and a great source of encouragement, he says.

Already screened

A shout out to the local filmmakers whose work has been shown ...

Ghost in the Machine

The collaborative team of Poppy Walker and Sophie Hexter are regular entrants in the Byron Bay Film Festival, chosen for the consistent high quality and imaginative boldness of their work.

The past few years have been prolific, seeing five films being made together.

Their most recent work, **The Ghost in the Machine**, looks at the “performance drawing” of Jeremy Hawkes, who suffers from early-onset Parkinson's Disease.

“We knew about Jeremy, and thought it would be amazing to do a re-imagining of a performance of his where he stops taking his medication and allows the tremors to take over his body and then draws free-form,” Poppy says.

“He was happy to come on board and it was quite a seamless process.

“Jeremy draws on a piece of invisible Perspex hanging in space, and it looks like he’s painting in air. It was a really delightful shoot.”

Speaking Through Colour

Darius Devas is a self-taught filmmaker who has never followed a set path, instead always creating opportunity from the world around him.

Speaking Through Colour is a beautiful film about a young Kenyan man now residing in Lismore who suffered brain damage at birth. Unable to speak, he expresses himself through wildly colourful paintings and gleeful dancing.

Mbatha attended the screening in Byron Bay with his mother and the audience were won over by his innocent and joyful demeanour, and huge smile.

Quack

Quack is the creation of writer, producer and director Nicole Sullivan from Ballina, set in the mangrove swamps around the area, where ducks live. Some see them as targets, others as living creatures that deserve to be cared for. In **Quack**, the two worlds meet

The two main actors, Miller Brand and Yasmin Honeychurch, both grew up and live in Lennox Head. Cameraman Mark Robertson is also from Lennox Head and has his production company One Vision there.

The remaining crew are from Byron Bay and the Gold Coast.

According to Nicole, Ballina Council was “very supportive – although at first a bit sceptical that there would be a youth cycling around town with shot gun”.

“I needed to arrange an armourer to make sure all was well and safe during the shoot. So for a little film it had a number of tricky elements, guns, drones, animals (little ducklings) and youth! But all went really well and I am so proud of how all involved worked so hard to bring together the quirky little local film **Quack** is.”

Consent

Last but not least is a dark short film from Clare Sladden, which imagines an internet date being used for a purpose few could conceive, but in today's world is eminently possible.

After meet online, a woman allows a virtual stranger into her home to fulfil an agreement.

Clare says she is deeply interested in writing and exploring strong, complex, funny, female characters: she aims to showcase leading female characters who are flawed and in some cases, deeply troubled. This time, however, has her heroine gone too far?

Clare is a nominee in the Byron Bay Film Festival's **Screenplay Award** for the very fine writing in the film, which she also produced and directed.

THE FESTIVAL

Now in its 11th year, BBFF spans 10 days in six venues, featuring over 175 independent films, and attracting filmmakers and film-lovers from all over the world. It is Australia's most loved regional film festival.

The 11th Annual Byron Bay Film Festival runs until **Sunday 15 October 2017** in multiple venues throughout Byron Bay and surrounding suburbs.

Closing Night Red Carpet Gala Event Saturday 14 October, Byron Bay Community Theatre.

Don't miss ***RUMBLE: The Indians Who Rocked the World*** – an illuminating feature on the immense influence of Native American musicians on mainstream music. Features an all-star line-up of commentators and music from Iggy Pop, Tony Bennett, Taj Mahal, George Harrison, Mildred Bailey, Aerosmith, Buffy Saint-Marie, Link Ray, Jimi Hendrix, Steven Van Zandt, Quincy Jones, Rhiannon Giddens, George Clinton, Quincy Jones, and many more.

Rumble is followed by the festival's big night – the culminating celebration of another great festival, including music, food, beverages, red carpet, glamour, and good times!

Join us for the hottest party in town!

Program and tickets available via www.bbff.com.au