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Manhattan Short Film Festival to debut in Worcester with 10 shows starting Sept. 28



A scene from the short film “Fickle Bickle,” part of the Manhattan Short Film Festival series in Worcester [Submitted Photo]

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WORCESTER — From modest beginnings 20 years ago, the Manhattan Short Film Festival has become a worldwide phenomenon with more than 100,000 people attending screenings at more than 250 venues across six continents.

For the first time beginning Thursday, Worcester will be part of what has been called the “world’s first and only global film festival.”

And it will be happening in grand style as Preservation Worcester hosts the event from Sept. 28 to Oct. 8 at the Park View Room in the former Fire Alarm & Telegraph Building, 230 Park Ave. The festival opening gala at 6:30 p.m. Sept. 28 will include a silent auction, cocktails (cash bar), refreshments and live entertainment by Jennifer Antkowiak followed by the showing of the festival’s 10 films from nine countries. Then the festival program will be screened for the following 10 nights at the Park View Room starting at 7:30 p.m. with different guest hosts at each night, including Worcester City Manager Edward M. Augustus Jr.

Audiences in Worcester and every other location get to vote on the festival's best film and best actor, with the results announced at ManhattanShort.com at 10 a.m. Oct. 9.

The impetus for bringing the festival here comes from Harry Albert, event manager for Preservation Worcester.

Albert said he attend a screening of the festival's films last year in Wellfleet and was "blown away." But although the festival was also held in other Massachusetts communities, "Central Massachusetts wasn't represented," Albert noted, and never has been. "With all the colleges we have here, why haven't we?" Albert asked. "I'm bringing it here to expose folks to something unique and unprecedented in this city."

Albert will interview each of the guests hosts before the respective screenings.

All of the festival's 10 films have twists, and Albert is also bringing a good twist of his own to the program while the films are in Worcester. Net proceeds from the screenings will benefit Preservation Worcester. However, "not only do I want folks to buy a ticket, I want to bring them (the films) to folks who don't have the money," Albert said.

Manhattan Short Film Festival

When: Sept. 28-Oct. 8 (6:30 p.m. Sept. 28; 7:30 p.m. Sept. 29-Oct. 8)

Where: Preservation Worcester Park View Room, 230 Park Ave., Worcester

How much: Sept. 28 premiere and gala - \$60. Sept. 29 through Oct. 8 - \$15 in advance \$25 at the door. www.eventbrite.com/e/manhattan-short-film-festival-in-worcester-ma-tickets-36909698903?aff=efbevent

For more information: www.preservationworcester.org and www.ManhattanShort.com

That includes taking the program to senior living communities and the Worcester Senior Center, as well as Wachusett Regional High School in Holden. "The crown jewel in all of this is bringing them to the Worcester County Jail (and House of Correction in West Boylston)," Albert said.

Jail inmates have worked on Preservation Worcester's restoration of the Park View Room. "I thought it would be a great way to do something for them," he said.

Albert discussed the matter with Marc Lapierre, manager of inmate programs at the jail. "It's something different. We're always trying to be creative with what we can offer the population," Lapierre said.

Many people today "haven't seen short films, haven't seen foreign films, haven't seen subtitles," said Albert, a lifelong film lover.

He said he sent an email to Nicholas Mason, founding director of the Manhattan Short Film Festival, about possibly bringing the program to Worcester.

“He called me two hours later.”

The festival began 20 years with just over 300 people gathered in the Little Italy neighborhood of New York City to view some short films projected onto a screen mounted to the side of a truck. There was evidently good word of mouth. Mason has said the festival was created by the cinema going public.

This year’s Manhattan Short Film Festival received 1,615 entries from 75 countries. The 10 finalists that will be shown in the festival’s program are from the USA, Georgia, Italy, Latvia, New Zealand, Spain (two), Switzerland, Syria and the United Kingdom, and are all Oscar-eligible. Past finalists nominated for an Oscar include “SHOK” and “Bear Story.”

The 2017 films range in length from five minutes to 15 minutes. Here’s a quick snapshot of each in the order they will be shown:

“Do No Harm” (New Zealand) — Gangster thugs storm an operating room but the surgeon (played by Marsha Yuan) ferociously fights back. “He’s my patient,” she declares. To one of the stunned and bloodied thugs she says, “You are not my patient.” But why is the patient getting such exemplary medical care?

“Behind” (Spain) — A divorced mother is obsessed with the idea that her ex-husband is plotting to take her baby away from her. At least, that’s the opening premise as the film builds in paranoia, and horror.

“Fickle Bickle” (USA) — Left alone in a magnificent mansion after the forgetful owner goes on vacation, a plumber contacts his high school crush, knowing she’s always been a “gold digger.” She is impressed, but the plumber had literally better watch his step.

“Hope Dies Last” (United Kingdom) — A prisoner (Tarek Slater) working as a barber for the Nazis has a client clearly to be feared. Quietly (with no words) mesmerizing as director Ben Pryce makes every image and gesture count.

“Perfect Day” (Spain) — Today’s the day David hopes to close a \$10 million deal, but nothing will be quite what it seems as director Ignacio Redondo manipulates the action.

“Just Go!” (Latvia) — A young man who lost both his legs in a childhood accident comes to the rescue of the girl he loves when she is victimized by villains. Action packed with a real hero in actor Aleksandrs Ronis.

“Mare Nostrum” (Syria) — Pensive, sad and unsettling film by directors Rana Kazkaz and Anas Khalaf as a Syrian father walks with his daughter on a Mediterranean shore.

“Viola, Franca” (Italy) — In 1965 Sicily, Franca is being forced to marry her rapist to avoid becoming a pariah in her traditionalist community. But will she?

“In a Nutshell” (Switzerland) — A five-minute kaleidoscope of images.

“Eight Minutes” (Georgia) — Perhaps the best film for last. With the sudden news that the sun will disappear forever in eight minutes, the world panics. But an aging magician (Slava Natenadze) sees the opportunity to pull one more magical, if ironical, trick.

Guest hosts for the festival are: Sept. 29 — Lisa Condit (The Hanover Theatre); Sept. 30 — Julia King (film producer and director); Oct. 1 — Jennifer Agbay (Ballet Arts Worcester); Oct. 2 — Mike Covino; Oct. 3 — John Riccio; Oct. 4 — Paul Giorgio and Bernie Whitmore; Oct. 5 — Jason Clemence (Regis College); Oct. 6 — Nicole Watson (Nick’s Bar and Restaurant); Oct. 7 — Edward M. Augustus Jr.; Oct. 8 — Niki Luparelli.