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CAIFF celebrates independence - one filmmaker at a time

By B. B. Kaye



2016 Iron Filmmaker third-place winners (from left), Milla, John, Zane, Tamara, Tina and Keira Elliott of Orinda, submitted a fourth entry this year in the CAIFF Iron Filmmaker Competition.

days and three theaters."

Full-length feature films, animation, and shorts in nearly every category - comedy, horror, drama, suspense, sci-fi, mystery, thriller and western, as well as wide-ranging documentaries on scientific, biographical, ecological, and social subjects - will play on big screens at the Rheem Theatre, the Orinda Theatre, and the Castro Theater in San Francisco during the 10-day event.

Entrants from around the globe enter the festival's annual Iron Filmmaker Competition. They are given a theme, a single line of dialogue, a prop, and a scant 24 hours to write, cast, direct, shoot, add music and credits, edit, and submit a three-minute movie. This year's given dialogue is "Marriage is just a fancy word for adopting an overgrown child who cannot be handled by their parents anymore," the prop a ring, and the theme is, "Did I say I do?" Ouch.

Orinda residents John and Tina Elliott, with their four children, Zane, 7, Keira, 11, Tamara, 13, and Milla, 15, submitted their fourth entry this year. In 2016 they won third place with a comedy titled "All In A Day's Work."

John is an electrician by day, and teaches the trade to electrical apprentices and journeymen by night. Tina works three jobs - mom, bookkeeper, and costumer. "She has made hundreds of costumes, and recently won an award at the D23 Expo (Official Disney Fan Club)," John Elliott said.

"One day out of the year we can pretend we're filmmakers," he said. "Teamwork is crucial. You have to acknowledge a team leader and establish different jobs. The first few times we tried to be democratic, but people get their creative juices flowing, and if it doesn't work with everyone else their feelings get hurt. You have only 24 hours for everything, including script; we always build a script - and try to have fun with it. There's a lot to do to make that three minutes, and if you're even one second over, it's disqualified! Time management is everything. We're always right down to the wire submitting to Dropbox. Our daughters spearheaded our Iron Filmmaker movie this year. Only Milla and Keira are in it. They insisted on a horror/suspense drama."

This year's top Iron Filmmaker entries will screen at 10 a.m. Sunday, Sept. 10.

Major film-world figures will present work throughout the event. Helen Hunt, multiple award-winning actress, screenwriter and director, will host a VIP reception at 5:30 p.m. Saturday, Sept. 9 at Cine Cuvee. Animation Night will have special guest, Dave Mullins, director of the latest Pixar short, "LOU," at 8 p.m. Tuesday, Sept. 12, and there will be a VIP reception and conversation with acclaimed television and film actor and producer Zachary Quinto at the Castro beginning at 6 p.m. Saturday, Sept. 16.

The Sapporo International Short Film Festival, honored guests at CAIFF for 10 years, will showcase eight award-winning films from around the world, and Zemrak's personal 20 favorite short films from CAIFF's own 19-year history will be screened in three parts over the festival schedule. (See story on page B7.)

Movies by independent filmmakers from as far off as Iceland, Japan, Germany and England will be shown in Lamorinda for the annual California Independent Film Festival, Sept. 7-16 in Moraga, Orinda and San Francisco. The festival has grown steadily over its 19-year history, beginning with a modest 28 films and a turnout of about 150 in 1999, and this year anticipates that an audience of over 6,000 will come to see over 80 films.

CAIFF gives filmmakers working without the largesse of a major studio the one thing most difficult to achieve for unknowns: an audience. It's a chance to have their work noticed and maybe, just maybe, create enough interest to break into a big-time career in film entertainment.

Festival founder Derek Zemrak said, "I wanted to give people in the Bay Area someplace to screen their movies. Being a filmmaker, I know how difficult it is. The first year, we showed movies in a conference room at the Hilton in San Francisco. Now, we spread it over 10

This is year four of CAIFF's Film Scoring Competition. Two-hundred seasoned and aspiring composers from around the world were given the same short film, "Mono," with the original score removed, and carte blanche to create a new one. Five award-winning television and film professionals will select from the top five finalists at 10 a.m. Saturday, Sept. 9 at the Rheem Theatre.

The first of an Annual California Playwright Competition has been introduced to the festival this year. Four plays will be performed live onstage Monday, Sept. 11 at 4:45 p.m. in the Rheem Theatre. Audience members will get to vote for who will be CAIFF 2017 Playwright of the Year.

"When we began, people only had access to 35 millimeter film cameras, or maybe they could rent a RED camera for \$10,000. Now, people can get their hands on a 4K cinema camera for not a lot of money. We've seen a big increase in quality over the years," explained Zemrak. "You meet a lot of people and make friends (through the festival). Some you'll never see again, and some you'll have been the first to see before they hit the Big Time. Come and enjoy!"

For the full California Independent Film Festival schedule and for tickets, visit caiff.org.

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