

GROWING UP ON FILM

Film festival capitalizes on its growing reputation

By TY FORQUER

Entering its fifth year, the Capital City Film Festival is hitting its stride. Each year brings a little more experience, a little more credibility and a little more momentum to the festival — and it is starting to pay off.

Fifth Annual Capital City Film Festival

Thursday, April 9-Sunday, April 12 (see pullout section on page 17 for ticket prices, venue information and schedule)
capitalcityfilmfest.com

Co-founders Dominic Cochran and Jason Gabriel have raised the festival from infancy into the established regional festival it is today.

"We're not a toddler anymore," Gabriel joked.

With half a decade under its belt, the festival is establishing a reputation that makes it an easier sell to filmmakers.

"This year we had twice as many submissions as last year," Gabriel said. "Filmmakers are aware of our schedule, and we have a good network of directors and filmmakers."

"Film distributors are taking us more seriously," Cochran said. "We're really proud of the film lineup this year."

"It feels like we have more credibility," Gabriel added. "We get more notice."

Capital City Film Festival has no delusions of grandeur — this isn't Cannes or Toronto — but it has worked hard to establish itself as a solid, mid-tier regional festival.

"Filmmakers who didn't get accepted at Sundance begin to look locally," Gabriel said.

The festival is reaching out to other groups in the community to give attendees experiences beyond the film viewing. In addition to its continuing collaboration with Fusion Shows to present live music, it is teaming up with the Lansing Symphony Orchestra and Impression 5 Science Center to offer festival-goers something different.

Impression 5 will offer a free "Science of Cinema" program for kids Saturday morning.

"For five years, we've been trying to include something for kids," Cochran said. "Having Impression 5 on board is really exciting for us."

The program will include family-friendly movies and specially designed crafts and activities inspired by films.

The Lansing Symphony Orchestra also joins in the

festivities for the first time this year, presenting a free "Symphonic Cinema" concert Saturday evening.

"Since year one, we've tried to find ways to integrate music into the festival," Cochran said. "This year we decided to go for broke and reached out to the Lansing Symphony."

The symphony will present a program of classical music and film scores paired with clips from early silent films, including "Metropolis," "The Phantom of the

Highlights include "Slow West," an off-kilter western starring Michael Fassbender, and the much anticipated "Kumiko, The Treasure Hunter," a dark comedy based on the true story of a Japanese woman who, mistaking the movie " Fargo" for a documentary, sets off for South Dakota in search of a buried suitcase full of cash.

Even as digital networks make it increasingly easier to deliver entertainment to our laptops or smart phones, Gabriel believes that the theater experience has much to offer.

"Seeing these films on a big screen is miles ahead of watching on a computer monitor," he said. "It's a special experience."

Justin Weinstein, co-director of "An Honest Liar," appreciates the opportunity film festivals offer to connect with audiences.

"It's one of the most rewarding parts of filmmaking," he said. "We meet people all over the world who are enthusiastic film-goers."

In addition to connecting with audiences, film festivals give filmmakers a chance to network and connect with other artists.

"I met Tyler at a film festival," said Weinstein, referring to his co-director, Tyler Meason.

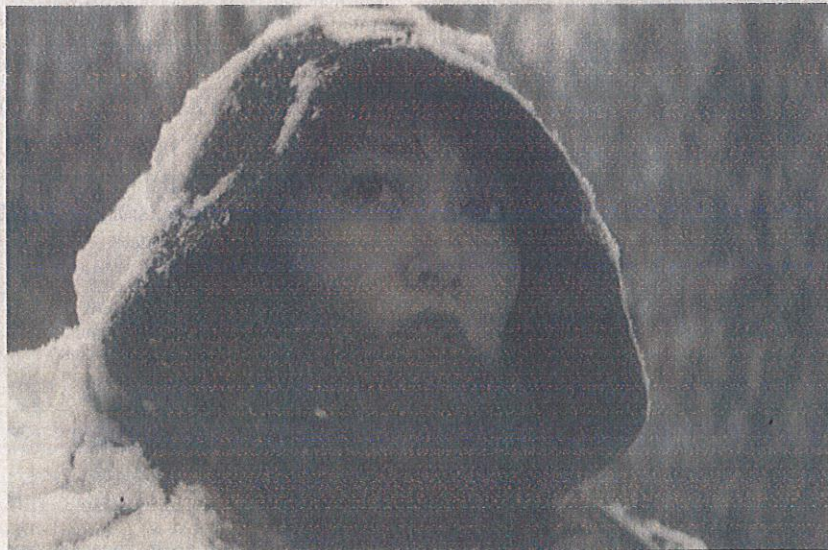
Stefan Haverkamp, cinematographer and executive producer of the cyber-thriller "Ratter," looks to smaller film festivals to combat the insularity often found in filmmaking.

"It's great to get really interesting feedback; it's almost like a focus group," he said. "You can tell if the topic is universal or only works in

one region. For example, you may shoot a romantic comedy in New York, and it may not connect with people outside of New York."

"Ratter" will have its Michigan premiere at the festival. Its only other screening was at January's Slamdance Film Festival, a younger, edgier counterpart to Sundance Film Festival. (Both festivals are held in Park City, Utah.) For Haverkamp, Capital City Film Festival's five-year track record made it an appealing target when the filmmakers looked for festivals to apply to.

"In the third or fourth year, festivals often have to change or redevelop themselves," Haverkamp said. "I tend to look for festivals that have been around a few years."



Courtesy photo

Academy Award nominee Rinko Kikuchi stars in "Kumiko, the Treasure Hunter," a darkly comedic odyssey based on one Japanese woman's actual journey to Fargo, N.D., in search of buried treasure.

Opera," "Dr. Jekyll & Mr. Hyde," "Faust," "Hunchback of Notre Dame," and more,

"To me, it's really exciting," said Lauren Hansen, a Lansing Symphony Orchestra violinist. "I remember going to a Buster Keaton silent film festival and seeing those films accompanied by an organist. It was really incredible. To see these films accompanied by a full orchestra, it's not something that's done very often."

Hansen assures festival attendees that the concert will have something for everyone, even if they are not die-hard classical music fans.

"People will recognize the melodies, even if they don't know the name of the pieces," she said.

Of course, the focus of the festival is the films, and this year boasts an impressive slate of cinematic treats.