

Silver screen silver anniversary

Friday, December 13, 2013

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Date: Friday, December 13, 2013



Darryl Macdonald, left, director of the Palm Springs International Film Festival, and chairman Harold Matzner look forward to the event's 25th anniversary Jan. 3-13.

Photo courtesy of Palm Springs International Film Festival

The Palm Springs International Film Festival and its accompanying awards gala have reached the 25-year mark, and this year's celebration of film will honor the past, and more importantly, offer a glimpse into the future of film.

In fact, the festival is known within the industry as the ideal launch for foreign language films, and is renowned for screening Oscar nominees. For example, the 2013 festival showcased 42 of the 71 films submitted by countries around the world for Oscar considerations.

The festival has such a sterling reputation for high-quality films and breakout works from directors on the rise, it has become a widely respected event within filmmaking's elite, yet is accessible both

to industry insiders and everyday film aficionados.

Launching pad for talent

The festival launched world or U.S. premieres of debut features from Alfonso Cuaron (*Gravity*, *Children of Men*), Baz Lurhman (*The Great Gatsby*, *Moulin Rouge!*), M. Night Shyamalan (*The Sixth Sense*, *Unbreakable*), and John Madden (*Shakespeare in Love*, *The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel*), so it can be expected that a major new filmmaker or two will arise from this year's collection of new directorial talent. A true "film-lover's festival," it brings a broadening of horizons, an introduction to ascendant talents, and an opportunity for a global community to explore new narratives.

The film-viewing banquet will begin on Jan. 3 and run through Jan. 13, with an expected 135,000 attendees viewing films on 15 screens throughout Palm Springs. With roughly 190 films from over 70 countries, this year's festival lineup will reflect a shift in global filmmaking towards more character-driven films, as opposed to genre-driven.

Additionally, according to the festival director Darryl Macdonald, "Standout trends among this year's films are themes of family, the effect of technology on our lives, and sensual pursuits — like food, romance and music."

In addressing the trend toward the more character-centric plots, he adds, "In general, the films are more personal, more complex in the stories they tell, and richer because of it."

The festival will offer a number of special programming sections, including the

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opening and closing night gala screenings, special presentations of great new films of special distinction (with each accompanied by their creative talents), and gala receptions open to the public.

There will also be "New Voices/New Visions," a competition section featuring 10 to 12 exceptional new filmmakers and their films, each marking their U.S. premiere at the festival. "Modern Masters" will showcase striking new works from award-winning and seasoned filmmakers working at the peak of their craft.

"Awards Buzz" is a broad selection of the strongest new films vying for this year's Best Foreign Language Film Oscar. "Ciné Latino" is the screening of two dozen hot, new films hailing from Spanish- and Portuguese-speaking countries, including recent award winners and bright new lights in the Ibero-American film world.

"True Stories" is a 30-film showcase of the best new documentaries from the world over. "World Cinema Now" is a sweeping overview of international cinema, featuring premieres, directorial debuts, and major award winners from this year's festival circuit. It is the festival's largest programming section, featuring over 90 new and celebrated works from a wide range of countries.

Anniversary showcase

And finally, in a celebration of the festival's 25th anniversary, "Deja View" will be a special programming section that showcases the festival's discoveries and new talent it has introduced to American audiences over the past two-and-a-half decades. The series will include a selection of films that were launched at the festival, won the Audience Award for Most Popular Film, and went on to win the Oscar for Best Foreign Language Film.

The showcase will also include debut films by directors whose now-brilliant careers were helped by the launch of their first films at the festival. The centerpiece of this celebration of 25 years of movie magic will be a free, outdoor screening of the festival's first winner of the Audience Award for most popular film, which then went on to win the Oscar for Best Foreign Film in 1990: *Cinema Paradiso*.

Awards gala

Just as exciting as the festival is its awards gala scheduled for Saturday, Jan. 4 at the Palm Springs Convention Center. Chaired by long-standing Gala Chairman James R. Houston, it will be produced by Richard DeSantis, who has produced the gala for the last decade. This year's gala again will feature an impressive 110-foot-long red carpet, with major media outlets from across the country and around the world represented.

And, according to Harold Matzner, Chairman of the Palm Springs International Film Festival, "This is the largest revenue-grossing production of any event in the desert, generating \$2.2 million."

The gala's high profile makes it a highly sought-after ticket. "All the expensive seats were sold out 2½ months prior to the event," Matzner says.

In what could be a foreshadowing of this year's Oscar nominations, this year's festival will bestow the Desert Palm Achievement Award to actress Sandra Bullock for her work in *Gravity* and to actor Matthew McConaughey for *The Dallas Buyers Club*, a true-story film for which he prepared by losing 40 pounds to play HIV-diagnosed Ron Woodroof.

The festival's Career Achievement Award will go to *Nebraska* star Bruce Dern, and acclaimed English director Steve McQueen will receive the Director of the Year Award for *12 Years A Slave*.

Past honorees include Brad Pitt, Leonardo DiCaprio, Cate Blanchette, Bradley Cooper, Ben Affleck, Daniel Day-Lewis, Charlize Theron, Clint Eastwood, Kate Winslet, George Clooney, Octavia Spencer, Sally Field, Colin Firth, Helen Mirren, Halle Berry, Glenn Close, Jennifer Lawrence, Amy Adams, Sean Penn, Nicole

Kidman, Jeff Bridges, Natalie Portman, Morgan Freeman and Anne Hathaway, among many others.

Signature sponsors for the gala are Mercedes Benz, Cartier and *Entertainment Tonight*, with longtime *ET* host Mary Hart emceeding the evening's festivities. The five underwriters for this year's Awards Gala are Helene Galen, James R. Houston, Donna MacMillan, Harold Matzner and JoAnn McGrath.

Immediately following the awards gala, the after party at the Parker Palm Springs promises to be memorable. Most of the honorees are expected to attend, along with presenters and other guests.

"The Parker Palm Springs every year supports us on this entire event, and they are so generous," Matzner says. "They give us suites for the honorees as well as the presenters. The interesting thing about the Awards Gala is that the presenters are as important as the honorees."

Whether it is the accessibility, its track record at discovering talent, or simply the beauty of the surroundings, the PSIFF continues to grow in popularity. Demand is so great that Matzner is negotiating to add yet another theater in Palm Springs for the 2015 festival.

The past 25 years have been stellar for the Palm Springs International Film Festival, with the next 25 years looking even brighter

If you go

When: Jan. 3-13

Where: 15 screens in 5 locations in Palm Springs

Information: 1-800-898-7256, www.psfilmfest.org

