

Don't blink

Festival films are six minutes or less

By Jeff Mucciarone

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At six minutes or less, whether a film in the Short Short Story Film Festival succeeds is largely dependent on the film's depth rather than its length, said Toni Pennacchia, creative director for MergingArts Productions.

"We often use the slogan, 'Short attention spans welcome,' and I think that's true," Pennacchia said. "You may not love every film. ... If you don't [like a film], five minutes later there will be another film on."

The festival, which features three dozen short films split between two 80-minute categories — Heartstrings and Headtrips — will take place Friday, Nov. 16, and Saturday, Nov. 17, at New Hampshire Technical Institute in Concord. The Heartstrings program screens Friday at 6 p.m. and Saturday at 7 p.m.; Headtrip films screen Friday at 8 p.m. and Saturday at 9 p.m. Pennacchia and festival co-organizer Paul Elsnau will be on hand to discuss films.

"When you see the films ... I don't think the five-minute cut-off is a barrier," said Stephen Ambra, who coordinates a weekly film series at NHTI. "It really helps the filmmaker focus ... they have to do the best work they can within the time span. The films are like diamond hard and crystal clear."

Ambra said he's had inquiries from people in New Hampshire and Maine and is expecting to draw people from all over.

"It was phenomenal," Ambra said of the festival held at Red River Theatres in Concord two years ago. "It's hard to imagine so many great films and they're all under five minutes. ... They're just so compelling."

The festival, which began in 2007, received submissions from every continent except Antarctica. Typically, organizers have received lots of submissions from Ireland, but this year the top two countries were Germany and Spain. Submissions also came from countries in Asia, Australia and the Middle East. One thing that makes this festival unique, Pennacchia says, is that it does not charge submission fees.

This is the third year the festival will take place in New Hampshire. Pennacchia said she and Elsnau regularly visit family in New Hampshire and discovered Red River Theatres and the NHTI Film Society in their search for creative things to do.

"We see that there is an interest and audience for independent, classic and international film in areas like Concord and Manchester," Pennacchia said. "However, the area is not over-saturated like in bigger cities like Boston."



The Short Short Story Film Festival features films that are six minutes or less. Belgium film *Rewind* will screen during the festival at NHTI in Concord.

Red River Theatres hosted the festival in 2008 and 2010. This time around, Pennacchia opted to partner with the NHTI Film Society to screen the festival at the Sweetney Auditorium at NHTI. NHTI hosts a regular film series on Friday evenings, as well as the Manhattan Short Film Festival, which took place earlier this fall.

"Since they had an audience that was already looking for short films from all over the world, it seemed like it would pair well with our festival," Pennacchia said.

The Heartstrings category does not necessarily mean all the films are "happily ever after love stories." "One person's heartstrings might be a more traditional sentimental piece," Pennacchia said. "But Heartstrings can also be loss. ... It could be more of the tear-jerking kind of film in Heartstrings."

The German film *Olgastrasse 18* portrays moments in a lifetime through inanimate objects: "It gives you that slice-of-life feel," Pennacchia said. The French-Canadian film *Dying Without a Sound* deals with a woman coping with the loss of three friends while contrasting their deaths to her life. A Brazilian documentary, *Transition*, focuses on someone hired to mourn for people.

In past years, many Headtrip films fell into the horror realm. This year the category's films are better classified as strange, Pennacchia said. *Rewind*, deals with time travel, while *Symphony of Fools* centers marketing a bobblehead doll. *The Applicant* highlights a job interviewee who provides bizarre responses to mundane questions.

"In certain countries, they've made it so that short film is really an art form," Pennacchia said.

Where: NHTI, Concord

When: Friday, Nov. 16, and Saturday, Nov. 17. The Heartstrings program screens Friday at 6 p.m. and Saturday at 7 p.m.; Headtrip films screen Friday at 8 p.m. and Saturday at 9 p.m.

Tickets: \$5; visit mergingarts.org