

MM

25 BEST FILM FESTIVAL INVESTMENTS: 2011

WHERE TO GET THE MOST BANG FOR YOUR ENTRY FEE BUCK

After years of emotional and financial strain, your film—at long last—is finished. So you submit it to a few film festivals, sending off two DVDs, some promo stills and an entry fee that you probably can't afford. But what good is your film if no one sees it?

When your film eventually gets accepted into a fest, you make the trek to the festival (on your dime, of course), do a post-screening Q&A with the audience, hand out some postcards and maybe get a few audience members to sign up for your mailing list. You drink a little too much at the closing night party, then head home. Rinse, repeat.

For every festival horror story—"I wasn't allowed into my own film's screening!" "The projectionist accidentally played the audio from *Troll 2* over my sensitive costume drama!" "The festival director's kid threw up on my poster!"—there are hundreds of festival experiences that are... lackluster. Not disastrous, mind you, but not exactly the kind that will advance your career.

Worthwhile festivals are out there, though, as this year's list of 25 film festivals worth the entry fee attests. Some of the lauded fests even have

a specific enough focus to ensure your film won't get buried between a dystopian sci-fi character study and an experimental film composed of archival footage of ducks (see LA Comedy Shorts). Others offer maximum exposure for a minimal (read: zero-dollar) entry fee (Environmental Film Festival). Here, then, are MM's 2011 picks for 25 festivals worth your time, money and effort.

AUSTIN FILM FESTIVAL

www.austinfilmfestival.com

Sure, writers have plenty of screenwriting competitions to take part in, but how many opportunities do they get to network with their fellow scribes instead of slaving away in secrecy? The Austin Film Festival offers one opportunity; at this Texas fest, the writer is king! Whether you're itching to write the next season of "The Office" or a modern-day *Casablanca*, AFF offers cash prizes of up to \$5,000 in eight writing categories for both film and television. And it all happens in a traditional, screening-fueled festival setting where some of the world's most successful writers are also in attendance and ready to mingle.

BIG APPLE FILM FESTIVAL

www.bigapplefilmfestival.com

New York is the apple of this fest's eye,

where founder Jonathan Lipp says "the primary focus is the New York filmmaking community." Each year BAFF presents a series of awards—including the NY Emerging Talent Award, the Golden Apple Award and the Spirit of New York Award—to influential individuals from the local indie moviemaking community. Golden Apple recipient (and noted actor) Alan Cumming says the BAFF is "not just an excuse for swag, but a place where film, filmmakers and those who love them experience life outside the mainstream."

BOULDER INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL

www.biff1.com

Documentary moviemakers, take note: When your film gets screened at Colorado's BIFF, audience involvement doesn't end when the lights come up. Through its unique Call 2 Action program, BIFF does its part to mobilize Boulder's socially-conscious citizens to take action. "We have dedicated a major portion of our yearly efforts to build a system that takes the social consciousness that these films raise and carry it out of the theater and into the world," says the fest's executive director (and documentarian in her own right), Robin Beeck. "Talkback sessions and stations of groups associated with the topics covered are located in our tent at the crossroads of the festival,



CUCALORUS FILM FESTIVAL

danabrawleyphoto.net

enabling people to come together and offer ideas and assistance to overcome problems addressed in our films.”

BUFFALO NIAGARA FILM FESTIVAL

www.buffaloniagarafilmfestival.com

Taking place against the stunning backdrop of New York's Buffalo-Niagara region (which includes Niagara Falls), the BNFF stands out not only for its breathtaking location, but also for its willingness to support industry professionals and newcomers alike. “We want to get these films noticed,” states festival founder Bill Cowell.

CLEVELAND INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL

www.clevelandfilm.org

In its 35th year, this Ohio festival's main goal is promoting film as an outlet for education and growth among individuals. The festival is famously pro-women, pro-gay, pro-minorities and pro-Cleveland. Its founders also value the artistic and cultural merits of a film above its blockbuster appeal. “We do everything in our power to make sure that our audience learns something along the way,” says executive director Marcie Goodman.

CONEY ISLAND FILM FESTIVAL

www.coneyislandfilmfestival.com

Cannes may have the French Riviera, but Coney Island has got bumper cars!

For moviemakers accepted to CIFF, the entry fee gets you two all-access passes to the festival, plus free rides on Coney Island's iconic Wonder Wheel and the El Dorado Bumper Cars. There are practical benefits too, like feedback on submitted films (if requested). “Whether you've made your film for a few dollars or millions, you have an equal chance of being selected,” promises festival director Rob Leddy.

CUCALORUS FILM FESTIVAL

www.cucalorus.org

Festival schedules can be pretty overwhelming, what with the constant networking and awards anxiety. Cucalorus is different. The non-competitive festival emphasizes the importance of connecting with fellow artists, all in the relaxed environs of Wilmington, North Carolina. “Every artist needs inspiration and support,” says festival director Dan Brawley. “Cucalorus champions socially significant filmmakers and fiercely supports young artists.” Plus, since more than 50 percent of all ticket sales go back to the moviemaker, there could be a payday in it for you.

DC SHORTS FILM FESTIVAL

www.dcsff.com

In addition to providing tours of our nation's capital, the DCSFF offers movi-

emakers complimentary housing, grub, transportation and seminars. But the standout benefit is its feedback system. “After the judging process, DC Shorts provides direct feedback from the judges to every filmmaker through our online review system, in which your scores and comments can be viewed,” says festival director Jon Gann.

ENVIRONMENTAL FILM FESTIVAL

www.dcenvironmentalfilmfest.org

For moviemakers whose films tackle environmental topics (the 2011 theme is energy and the environment), the EFF is an invaluable platform to get your message out. So what will it cost to get your film out to the fest's attendees? How about nada! To ensure the highest-quality programming, EFF eschews a formal submission process in favor of a more casual one; like-minded moviemakers need only e-mail a synopsis of their film and its running time for programming consideration.

FORT LAUDERDALE INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL

www.fliff.com

Just because you're a teenage moviemaker doesn't mean you can't play with the big guys. FLIFF, which is celebrating its 26th year, accepts entries in three categories: Professional, Collegiate and High School. High schoolers can submit their short films and get

their feet wet on the festival circuit while still living under mom and dad's roof. And yes, entry fees are in accordance with a teenage income: \$10 for those submitted before July 1st, as opposed to a \$45 fee for professional moviemakers.

FULL FRAME DOCUMENTARY FILM FESTIVAL

www.fullframefest.org

Full Frame's Garrett Scott Documentary Development Grant, awarded yearly to two first-time doc-makers, gives its winners the opportunity to be mentored by documentary moviemakers and attend master classes and film screenings at Full Frame, held annually in Durham, NC. Just where can such esteemed mentoring take you? When grant winner Robin Hessman's *My Perestroika* screened at Full Frame in 2010 (after having debuted at Sundance), Hessman won Full Frame's Filmmaker Award.

HAYDENFILMS ONLINE FILM FESTIVAL

haydenfilms.com

The grand prize at Haydenfilms, one of the premier online film festivals, is \$25,000, but cash isn't the only benefit of submitting to this festival. "The festival grants filmmakers the opportunity to create the maximum hype for their submissions by utilizing the connectivity of the Internet, along with the physical screenings of traditional festivals," says

Erin Thomas. "When filmmakers submit to us, their work can be viewed by anyone who joins haydenfilms.com. These members can comment on the film and provide feedback for filmmakers." Which means the world is your audience.

INDIE MEMPHIS FILM FESTIVAL

www.indiememphis.com

Memphis is known for its music, but it's not exactly lagging in the film department: Since 2007, Indie Memphis has seen fest attendance double. Maybe it's because the fest combines the city's two most popular art forms. "Indie Memphis connects filmmakers to the live music scene that pulses through the city," says executive director Erik Jambor. "More than 100 musicians performed at last year's film festival... providing visiting filmmakers with an eclectic sampling of the Memphis' current music scene and a potential soundtrack for their next project."

KANSAS CITY FILMFEST

www.kcfilmfest.org

Having only been established in 2009, the Kansas City FilmFest may seem like a festival newcomer. But the fest came about when two already well-established events—the KC Jubilee Film Festival (which concentrated on short local films) and FilmFestKC—merged. The foothold each of those

organizations had in Kansas City's cultural scene means increased public awareness for the KCFF, and twice the support and promotion from festival staff.

LA COMEDY SHORTS FILM FESTIVAL

www.lacomedyshorts.com

It's great when you're able to mix business with pleasure on the film festival circuit. At the Los Angeles Comedy Shorts Film Festival, it's mandatory. Don't let the fest's celebrity karaoke or beer pong events fool you—this fest is about business. “Our sponsor Atom.com has the show AtomTV on Comedy Central and selects films straight from our festival to air on Comedy Central,” says festival director Jeannie Roshar. “In addition, all LACSFF films get to compete in a special version of Atom's World Famous Cash-Money Internet Comedy Tournament, where the winners go on to win additional cash prizes.”

NORTHWEST FILM & VIDEO FESTIVAL

www.nwfilm.org

The benefits a moviemaker receives from the Northwest Film & Video Festival don't end when the awards are handed out. The festival is just one branch of the Northwest Film Center and, according to festival manager Thomas Phillipson, “The festival maintains a dialogue with all the filmmakers who enter and is always looking for opportunities to support them, recommend them and screen their work in the Northwest Film Center's other exhibition programs.” This includes the Best of the Northwest Tour, which sends selected shorts from the festival to play all across the Northwest, with the profits going to the moviemakers.

OMAHA FILM FESTIVAL

www.omahafilmfestival.org

It's easy for horror directors to feel underappreciated on the festival circuit. There are genre festivals devoted exclusively to horror, sure. But if a slasher film is competing against an inspirational biopic, well, the latter film has probably got the edge. The Omaha Film Festival does have award categories for shorts, documentaries and features... but then there's the award for Best OFF the EDGE Film, created specifically for horror films. *Midnight Son*, the 2010 winner, about a loner who develops a craving for human blood, proves that no amount of fake blood should prohibit you from winning some festival hardware at a non-genre fest.

ROME INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL

www.riff.tv

Believe it or not, there are festivals out there created with the sole purpose of making a quick buck off the efforts of those moviemakers who have yet to ink a distribution deal. So when a fest like RIFF comes around—one that is run on a completely volunteer basis—you know this is a group doing it for the best reason: A pure love of great cinema. A little dose of southern hospitality does hurt either. “Our legendary southern hospitality continues to amaze our guests,” says executive producer Harry Musselwhite. “Where else

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could a closing night party assemble on the porch of an antebellum southern mansion as leaders, volunteers and guest filmmakers toast another successful film festival season?"

RURAL ROUTE FILM FESTIVAL

www.ruralroutefilms.com

Some great movies have focused on the highs and lows of city life. Huge crowds, second chances, psychotic taxi drivers. With how prevalent city-based movies are, it's nice to have a New York film festival like Rural Route, which chronicles the highs and lows of rural life. Hollywood may want all the car chases and explosions you can fit into one film, but RRRF appreciates those moviemakers with a more subtle sensibility.

SEATTLE INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL

www.siff.net

You're bound to find more than a few films to pique your interest out of the 400-plus movies shown annually at the Seattle International Film Festival. This festival is all about audience participation; the audience votes for the winners of the Golden Space Needle Awards for Best Feature, Doc, Short, Director, Actor and Actress. So don't leave your huckster hat at home!

SEDONA INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL

www.sedonafilmfestival.com

Eco-conscious moviemakers will appreciate the SIFF's Sustainable Film Series, which features films that explore nature or environmental subject matters. The festival itself has also gone green, promoting recycling at its event and only using environmentally-friendly products.

SOUTH BY SOUTHWEST FILM FESTIVAL

www.sxsw.com

It's impossible to overstate the "cool" factor at SXSW, an Austin, Texas event that partners with some of the biggest names in moviemaking—like IFC—to promote this event that is one part movies, one part music, one part digital and all parts awesome. For newcomers in particular, the fest's nonstop panels and educational seminars are worth the price of admission for a compressed film school experience.

TRUE/FALSE FILM FESTIVAL

www.truefalse.org

Columbia, Missouri's True/False Film Fest is all about the craft of documentary moviemaking, and how docs can explore (and blur) the line between truth and fiction. According to the festival's "Co-Conspirators" Paul Stutz and David Wilson, "The best nonfiction filmmakers today stand with one foot in the world of journalism and another in that of art." and True/False audience members are passionate about both.

WHISTLER FILM FESTIVAL

whistlerfilmfestival.com

This snow-capped Canadian festival offers some hefty

prizes: Best International Feature will earn a \$10,000 prize while Canada natives can take home \$15,000 for Best Canadian Feature (which is a healthy return on the fest's \$20 to \$40 submission fees).

WOODS HOLE FILM FESTIVAL

www.woodsholefilmfestival.org

While most fest attendees are (rightfully) focused on the film they've already got in the can and are ready to screen, the founders of this fest know it's just as important for attendees to be thinking about their next projects. "We create a festival atmosphere in which filmmakers are the focus and they can thrive through their relationship to some of the best audiences in the world, as well as through the opportunities to meet and work with each other," says festival director Judy Laster. "We have had a number of success stories of filmmakers who met at the festival who have gone on to work together on their subsequent projects."

FILM FESTIVAL GUIDE

ALBUQUERQUE FILM FESTIVAL

www.abqfilmfestival.com

The 2011 Albuquerque Film Festival will honor actor/artist Dean Stockwell, the fest's Dennis Lee Hopper Award recipient, with a retrospective of his work. AFF looks for sci-fi, comedy, animation, documentaries (especially lost technology and conspiracy theories) and music docs, Webisodes and TV pilots. It will show cult and classic cinema and any other film that moves programmers to tears or laughter, but appreciates the film that can accomplish both. The fest offers select moviemakers transportation and hotel accommodations at the Hard Rock Hotel and Casino ABQ.

AOFF FESTIVAL

www.aoffest.com

Voted one of MM's 25 Festivals Worth the Entry Fee, AOFF boasts celebrities, industry insiders, huge parties, symposiums, parties and more than \$100,000 in prizes in 2010.

BAREBONES INTERNATIONAL FILM & MUSIC FESTIVAL

www.barebonesfilmfestivals.org

Come and enjoy the history, culture and art of Muskogee, Oklahoma as you attend top-quality independent films, script readings and networking events. Barebones rolls out the red carpet for its Renaissance Faire-themed Bonehead Awards Gala, live musical performances and movie premieres. Explore a WWII submarine, castle and home of the Oklahoma Music Hall of Fame. Friendly people are here to welcome you to the world's friendliest film festival.

BIG BEAR LAKE INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL

www.bigbearlakefilmfestival.com

A nonprofit organization dedicated to showcasing the emerging talent of screenwriters and independent moviemakers.

BIG ISLAND FILM FESTIVAL

www.bigislandfilmfestival.com

BIFF celebrates independent narrative filmmakers and their films with the showing of features and shorts, food and beverage events, awards, celebrities, Hawaiian music and culture.

BLACK MARIA FILM & VIDEO FESTIVAL

www.blackmariafilmfestival.org

Since 1981, the BMFVF, an international juried competition and award tour, has been fulfilling its mission to advocate, exhibit and reward cutting-edge works.

BYRON BAY FILM FESTIVAL

www.bbff.com.au

BBFF screens for 10 days in beautiful Byron Bay, the first place in Australia to receive the sun, providing you with the opportunity to experience a truly distinctive festival. BBFF provides a platform for independent filmmakers locally, nationally and from around the world. Located just a short stroll from the beach, this popular event offers many free workshops and events for filmmakers and screens a diverse and dynamic range of films from around the world. Awards include Best Film, Documentary, Short Film, Dramatic Feature, Cinematography, Surf Film, Animation, Experimental Film, Environmental Film, Music Video & Best Young Australian Filmmaker.

CFC WORLDWIDE SHORT FILM FESTIVAL

www.shorterisbetter.com

North America's largest short film festival showcases the best shorts from around the world, with the 2010 event culling its 33 programs down from more than 4,000 submissions.

DOCUTAH

www.docutah.com

DOCUTAH blends the attractions of breathtaking Southern Utah with a love of documentaries. The fest welcomes student submissions and provides master class seminars and filmmaker panels for students and documentarians.

FIRSTGLANCE FILM FESTIVAL

www.firstglancefilms.com

FirstGlance Film Fests are the premier, truly indie festivals in North America, presenting two annual events—one in Philadelphia and one in Hollywood—two short online contests and an annual short and feature screenplay competition.

FLATLAND FILM FESTIVAL

www.flatlandfilmfestival.com

Cultivates an appreciation for independent film, video and digital moving image expression.

FLORIDA FILM FESTIVAL

www.floridafilmfestival.com

Accredited by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, the FFF welcomes more than 25,000 guests each year and plays host to more than 100 moviemakers.

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HAWAII OCEAN FILM FESTIVALwww.hawaiioccanfilmfestival.org

Named one of *MM*'s 20 Coolest Fests, the Hawaii Ocean Film Festival features films about marine resources, ocean recreation and our cultural connections to the sea.

HIGH DESERT SHORTS INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVALwww.highdesertshorts.com

Provides a showcase for both veteran moviemakers and budding talent in Pahrump, Nevada, one hour west of Las Vegas.

HILL COUNTRY FILM FESTIVALwww.hillcountryff.com

A three-day independent film fest in the heart of the picturesque Hill Country in Fredericksburg, Texas.

HOLLYSHORTS FILM FESTIVALwww.hollyshorts.com

Ranked by *MM* as "one of the top film festivals worth the entry fee," the seventh annual HSFF will take place August 11-18, 2011 in Hollywood. HSFF will feature a marquee opening night, short, Webisode, music video, documentary, commercial and feature film screenings, industry panels and exclusive parties. Grand jury prizes include a total of \$20,000 in post-production services courtesy of Company 3 for the winners of Best Short Film and Best Director. HSFF awards over \$40,000 in cash and prizes.

INDIE GRITS FILM FESTIVALwww.indiegrits.com

Held each year in Columbia, SC, Indie Grits brings together the best low-budget moviemakers in the Southeast for five days of great films, live music and other events.

INTERNATIONAL FAMILY FILM FESTIVALwww.iffilmfest.org

The IFFF is a competition for feature, short and student films, and feature and short screenplays.

LAFEMME INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVALwww.lafemme.org

LaFemme International Film Festival is a dynamic Los Angeles event highlighting the work of talented women moviemak-

ers, animators and game creators. "By Women, For Everyone" is the fest's mantra guiding filmmakers throughout the festival's program. La Femme programs features, docs, shorts, commercials, music videos, games, animation and more. Panels, parties and networking events take place at Hollywood hotspots, and the fest's connections are exceedingly valuable.

MYRTLE BEACH FILM FESTIVALwww.myrtlebeachfilmfestival.com

MBIFF, a truly independent fest, has quickly become one of the most significant independent film festivals for the independent artist. Politics and favorites do not play here, only great films!

NEW HAMPSHIRE FILM FESTIVALwww.nhfilmfestival.com

Presents the best in recent independent cinema from the region, nation and world in Portsmouth, New Hampshire.

PALM SPRINGS INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVALwww.psfilmfest.org

PSIFF is one of the largest film festivals in North America, welcoming 130,000 attendees each year for its lineup of new and celebrated international features and documentaries.

RED ROCK FILM FESTIVALwww.redrockfilmfestival.com

Held beneath the majestic red mountains of Zion Canyon, this festival retreat celebrates the art of film every November with a film market, filmmaker hiking excursions, premieres, screenings, workshops and panel discussions.

SIDEWALK MOVING PICTURE FESTIVALwww.almovingimage.org/sidewalk-fest.html

Since 1999, moviemakers from around the world have come to Birmingham to screen at Sidewalk and have been thrilled to discover enthusiastic crowds.

STARZ DENVER FILM FESTIVALwww.denverfilm.org

The flagship event of the Denver Film Society, the SDF is an 11-day roster of international screenings, red carpet premieres and awards ceremonies.

STONY BROOK FILM FESTIVALwww.stonybrookfilmfestival.com

Having a film at Stony Brook is a career highlight for many moviemakers because of the 1,000-seat packed theater, large screen, quality of the screening and comfortable accommodations.

THIN LINE FILM FESTIVALwww.thinlinefilmfest.com

The fifth annual Thin Line Film Fest will be held February 9-19, 2012 at the historic Campus Theatre in Denton, Texas. As Texas' only documentary film festival, TLFF strives to feature the best, newest and most relevant documentary films from around the world. Past Texas premieres include *GasLand*, *The Most Dangerous Man in America* and *Troubadours*. Accommodations and most travel are provided to accepted filmmakers. Best Feature Documentary receives a \$10,000 Panavision credit, with \$5,000 for the Best Documentary.

TORONTO URBAN FILM FESTIVALwww.torontourbanfilmfestival.com

Recently named one of *MM*'s 20 Coolest Film Festivals, the Toronto Urban Film Festival (TUFF) is unique in North America. This public film festival reaches 1.3 million daily commuters with an eclectic mix of silent film, animation and experimental one-minute shorts.

TRAIL DANCE FILM FESTIVALwww.traildancefilmfestival.com

Trail Dance is the perfect opportunity for indie moviemakers to present their work to a supportive audience in a competitive environment that rewards creativity and excellence in a variety of industry-specific pursuits.

WILLIAMSBURG INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVALwww.willifest.com

This Brooklyn fest provides a platform for the creative visions of today's emerging artists.

WORLD FEST-HOUSTONwww.worldfest.org

WorldFest has six master classes, world premieres, receptions, a festival club, the Remi Awards Gala Dinner, a Texas BBQ and sailboat Regatta on Galveston Bay with a VIP tour of NASA and Space Center Houston! **MM**