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Quality makes the cut at Mount Shasta film festival

By **Jim Dyar, D.A.T.E. Editor**
October 6, 2005

Really excellent films are rarely the creations of big studios, which are shooting for as wide an audience as possible. That kind of bland, homogenized, corporate-driven drivel (advertised on Taco Bell soda cups) normally takes its audience nowhere.

Great films are also rarely the creations that emerge from a vast sea of young, well-intentioned, first-time filmmakers. Most of those directors need a few more years of sharpening the blade before their art really cuts to the heart of something special.

Mount Shasta International Film Festival director Jeffery Winters understands both those truths. He kept them in mind during the past 12 months while making selections for his second-annual festival, set for Friday through Sunday at venues in Mount Shasta and Weed.

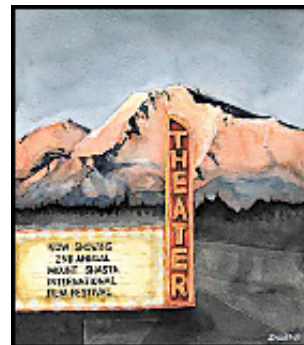
"I've been watching films and writing about films for a lot of years in my life and it's just really critical to bring this town the best you can bring them," said Winters. "You can't start a film festival and just have mediocrity."

In its second year, the festival has grown to 32 films from last year's 20. At least seven filmmakers will attend the event to take part in question and answer sessions following their films. The directors will also be on hand for a Filmmakers Symposium set for 1:30 to 3 p.m. Sunday at the College of Siskiyou Ford Theater in Weed.

Shown during the festival will be 17 documentaries and 15 feature films. They range from contemporary fare, such as the 2005 Academy Award-winning documentary "Born Into Brothels," to classics like the 1961 musical "West Side Story."

The films hail from all parts of the globe. The documentary "The Beauty Academy of Kabul" follows a group of hairdressers from the Western world descending upon Kabul, Afghanistan, as it opens its first post-Taliban beauty school. The feature film "Le Grand Voyage" tells the story of a young man obligated to drive his father from Southern France to Mecca (through Italy, Serbia, Turkey, Syria, Jordan and Saudi Arabia).

"I try to chose documentary films that really catapult people into different cultures and really different points of view," said Winters. "The documentaries are really mesmerizing. The other type of film is feature length film. With feature films, fiction films, I brought in a lot of foreign films that are recent and won awards around the world. We screened them and they're really great stories."



Painting by Steve Jacobs / Record Searchlight

In its second year, the Mount Shasta International Film Festival has expanded to 32 films from last year's 20. Seven directors will be on hand to answer questions and discuss their work.

If you're going

• **What:** Mount Shasta International Film Festival featuring 17 documentaries and 15 feature films

• **When:** Friday through Sunday (see www.shastafilmfest.com for full schedule of films)

...and he selected them and they're really great stories.

To select work for this year's event, Winters traveled to film festivals across the country and talked to filmmakers and festival directors. He asked them for lists of their favorite films then started soliciting the work directly from producers.

Winters avoided using the company Withoutabox.com, which he said supplies the majority of independent film festivals with their movies. He didn't have time (or the desire) to sit through hundreds of films, most that he probably wouldn't show.

"Last year, our first year, my wife and I went through at least 85 horrible films," Winters said. "They were really rank, amateur films. We were brain dead from the process."

Winters still had to pass on several films that weren't appropriate for the festival, but his grass roots technique landed some great work, he said.

Having several directors on hand to discuss their films, will greatly enhance the overall experience of the festival, Winters added.

Among the filmmakers planning to attend are Curt Dowdy from the mountaineering documentary "High Ambitions in the Himalaya"; Dottie Leroux from the Mali-based documentary "Tuaregs and Toubabs"; Isaac Solotaroff from the documentary "Visioning Tibet"; Michel Horvat from the documentary on gay adoption in American "We Are Dad"; Judy Irving (and documentary subject Mark Bittner) from the San Francisco film "The Wild Parrots of Telegraph Hill"; and Ron Vignone from the American independent feature film "Say I Do."

"Here you have a film, and it's fascinating, and all of the sudden you're given a chance to interact with that person (who created it) and ask them questions," Winters said. "Your participation in the whole artistic process is just totally enhanced. It really means a lot, I think, to gain the insight of what this artist went through."

Dowdy's mountaineering film follows six climbers as they face hardships and challenges of judgment and character on the world's sixth-highest peak, 27,000-foot Cho Oyu. One of the climbers on the expedition is 61-year-old John Taske, who survived a 1996 tragedy on Mount Everest by turning back 200 meters from the summit. The incident was made famous in the best-selling book "Into Thin Air."

"I don't think anybody can approach a journey like this without at some point, and perhaps multiple points along the way, confronting our own limitations," said Dowdy, by phone from Los Gatos. "What my film attempts to do is be an honest portrayal of what it's like to attempt an 8,000-meter peak."

Dowdy, 44, gave up a well-paying job in the Silicon Valley technical field to pursue his passion for climbing and filmmaking. He said he tried to bring heart to genre of films that are often "testosterone and adrenaline driven." It shows at 6:30 p.m. Saturday at the College of the Siskiyous' Ford Theater.

"I like to think of my film as more introspective," he said. "It's more the honesty that one comes in contact with when they attempt to do something that's really hard. The learning is as large as the endeavor."

In addition to the Ford Theater, films will be shown Friday through Sunday on three screens at Mount

• **Where:** Coming Attractions Theatre in Mount Shasta and College of the Siskiyous' Ford Theater in Weed

• **Tickets:** \$10 for individual films, \$10 for Sunday filmmakers symposium. Available by calling (800) 344-0436 before 3 p.m. today or starting at 10 a.m. Friday at Coming Attractions box office.

• **Information:** Complete list, description and schedule of films at www.shastafilmfest.com

Shasta's Coming Attractions Theatre (118 Morgan Way, take the Central Mount Shasta exit from Interstate 5).

A free opening night gala will take place at 8:15 p.m. Friday at Rare Images Gallery (216 N. Mt. Shasta Blvd.) in Mount Shasta. A free film, "The Five People You Meet in Heaven" will be shown at 3:30 p.m. Sunday at the Ford Theater.

Advanced tickets can be purchased by called (800) 344-0436 before 3 p.m. today. On Friday, the Coming Attractions Theatre box office opens at 10 a.m.

Winters said between 1,000 and 1,200 people attended last year's festival and he's hoping to be more successful this year.

"I'm just trying to offer everybody really great stuff," he said.

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