

## **Movie Magic: The 2nd Arena Theater Short Film Festival** **By Gary Levenson-Palmer and Carol Wilder**

Arena Theater's 2nd Annual Short Film Festival left an indelible impression on film enthusiasts near and far. Running Friday through Sunday, Nov. 8-10, the festival's six programs showcased diversity and artistry of short films from around the world. In just its second year, the festival has earned international recognition, making its mark on the film festival circuit.

### **Friday Evening: A Stellar Kickoff with "Close to Home"**

The festival opened on a high note Friday evening with "Close to Home," a collection of shorts celebrating local stories and talents. The turnout was so enthusiastic that additional seating had to be arranged—a rare occurrence in the theater's storied history. A standout was Annelise Jeske's "The Land," a captivating documentary about the back-to-the-land community in Point Arena, established in 1967 and still flourishing. Audience's excitement was palpable, as many recognized friends and neighbors among the film's subjects.

Another highlight was "Dago's Boot" by photographer-turned-filmmaker Paul Collins. In this charming short, Collins chronicles the life of a master boot cobbler from Honduras who has crafted footwear for some of Hollywood's biggest stars. The story's authenticity and Collins' untrained but insightful perspective sparked a lively Q&A, with Collins fielding questions from an attentive audience.

### **Saturday's Programs: An Emotional Journey**

Saturday offered three film programs, each transporting the audience to new worlds and perspectives. "Shorts from Afar," featured six films from international filmmakers. "Her Scents of Pu'er" from France was a beautifully shot tribute to the revered Chinese tea. "In My Skin," a visually arresting film about the power of flamenco dance for individuals with disabilities, brought a profound story of resilience to the screen.

"Punch Drunk," a dark comedy set in a Marseille café, stood out for its clever dialogue and one-take cinematography. "Neighbour Abdi," a brilliantly multidimensional Dutch film exploring Somali-born Abdi's past marred by war and crime, offered a sense of redemption. The emotional weight of these films was balanced by the next program, aptly titled "LOL," which kept the audience laughing with nine comedic shorts.

The "LOL" program delivered memorable laughs. "The Ballad of Tita & the Machine" tackled the theme of AI replacing human workers. "Dead Cat" perfectly captured the hilarity and honesty of family dynamics. The audience favorite seemed to be "Night Session," a comedic tour-de-force that had the entire theater in stitches.

Saturday evening's final program, "New Visions: Live Media Experimental Shorts," added a thought-provoking layer to the festival. "Eclipse" by Tania Hernandez-Velasco, a fictional piece about a toxic mutation in Monarch butterflies, blurred the lines between fact and fiction. Locally produced "More than One" showcased the voices of local women with authenticity and depth. Two live performances capped off the night: 99 Hooker with his unique blend of video and audio artistry, and Jeremy Rourke, who captivated the audience with his live animated projections.

### **Sunday: A Grand Finale of Thought-Provoking Films**

Sunday's screenings were the perfect high point of an unforgettable weekend. "Creatures Featured" introduced a slate of animal-centered shorts that concluded with "Beyond the Herd," a

poignant film about Mexican American equestrians navigating issues of discrimination and identity. Director Michelle Fenn's presence brought an added layer of engagement as she fielded questions from the audience, many of whom were moved by the film's themes of struggle and belonging.

The festival's closing program, "Community Action," featured impactful shorts focused on activism and social justice. An audience favorite was "Then Comes the Body," which spotlighted Nigeria's first ballet school, along with a locally inspired short about tree defenders protecting Jackson Demonstration State Forest. Director Ian A. Nelson's insightful post-film commentary was a highlight, as he discussed the film's resonance with the community.

Arena Theater's 2nd Short Film Festival was an exhilarating weekend that captured the power of cinema to entertain, inspire, and connect us. With such a successful second year, it's clear the festival has become a beloved event in the community, one that we look forward to for years to come.

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