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Long Island International Film Expo comes to Bellmore

By KAREN BLOOM

Instead of rushing to see the latest summer blockbuster, check out the works of an international array of independent filmmakers when Bellmore rolls out the red carpet once again for the Long Island International Film Expo, which opens July 8. The film festival, now in its 13th year, offers film buffs nine days of movie watching. It showcases the creativity of independent filmmakers, representing all genres of movie-making from around the world.

From short to feature-length, moviegoers can partake of a diverse group of 156 independent films this year representing over 19 countries, including many contributions from the burgeoning Long Island film industry. As always, the Film Expo remains an audience-friendly event: viewers can help choose festival winners, and converse with the filmmakers during the popular Q & A sessions between screenings.

Those Q & A events held after most of the movie blocks are one of the festival's biggest draws, according to Debra Markowitz, Director of Nassau County's Film Office, who is also executive director of the Long Island Film/TV Foundation, which presents the Long Island Interna-

tional Film Expo.

The festival steadily continues to expand and evolve. In addition to the extensive schedule of films – that demonstrates the quality of independent films being produced by today – there are many panels, social gatherings and networking opportunities for those interested in getting into the film business. The Film Expo offers its usual panels on scriptwriting, film distribution, and the filmmaker's breakfast panel, but this year will also have a panel in association with DnA (Directors "n" Actors from New York City) and a NYWIFT (New York Women in Film and Television) panel on "Women in Film." All panels are free except for the filmmaker's breakfast which has a nominal \$5 charge.

'Filmmaking on Long Island is really coming into its own now. It's great to see local people who have evolved as filmmakers.'

DEBRA MARKOWITZ
Director, Nassau County Film Office

"This is a very accessible festival for filmmakers and the public," said Markowitz. "It's an opportunity to see a wide variety of films, from the \$10 million full-length feature to a \$500 student production."

The region's movie makers shine. In fact, this year's group of "local" films – those films that were either shot on Long Island or produced by Long Islanders – represents the largest number in the festival's history. "Filmmaking on Long Island is really coming into its own now," Markowitz said. "It's great to see



Courtesy of Dan Brennan

MAKING A MOVIE: On the set of Maggie Marvel, Jeanne Brennan filled a dual role as both producer and cinematographer.

local people who have evolved as filmmakers."

Among them, is documentary filmmaker Leslye Abbey, a Bellmore resident. The clinical social worker has embarked on a second career as a documentary filmmaker.

Abbey has traveled the world creating films that reflect the human spirit. She began to develop a love for photography while living in New Mexico and working as social worker with Southwest American Indians. Her passion for photography paved the way for her growth as an independent filmmaker as she launched into videography. Following up to the film she presented at last year's festival, "Little Shop of Wonders," this year's selection is her short film, "Rosey At One Hundred." The documentary follows the dynamic Rose Kramer, who lives at Lido Towers in Long Beach, through her 100th year. "Rosey is an amazing woman," Abbey said. "Always a leader, Rose is once again a pioneer as we have a glimpse into what it may be like for the future generations who will probably live to be one hundred or more." The film will be shown, on Sunday, July 10, in the 2 p.m. block.

Another local contribution is "The 5th Quarter," from producer Rick Beiber, of North Massapequa, who is a graduate of Hofstra University. His film, which has the honor of opening the festival on Friday (Thursday is considered to be a 'pre-opening'), stars Andie McDowell and Aidan Quim. "It's a wonderful story that's based on a true-life event and so well-made," Markowitz said.

The film tells the story of Jon Abbate, who driven by the tragic car crash that took the life of his 15 year-old brother Luke, helps to lead the Wake Forest Demon Deacons to the most successful season in school history.



Now playing...film festival in Bellmore

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of Markowitz's list. This film – about a woman who gets entangled in a series of bizarre lies in order to take care of herself and her 12 year old son – marks Michael J. Weithorn's feature writing and directing debut (after already making a mark in the entertainment business by creating television shows such as King of Queens, and Ned & Stacey). This film was shot primarily in Plandome Village and Port Washington. Weithorn was raised in Port Washington, and was proud to be able to shoot much of his first feature film in his hometown. The cast includes Jenna Fischer, Chris O'Donnell, Lesley Ann Warren, Brooke Smith, Sam MacMurray, and James Rebhorn. It has original songs written and recorded for the film by Jakob Dylan.

Another local contribution is "Maggie Marvel," a dark comedy about a single mom who moonlights as a contract killer for extra money. It's the second feature from director/writer Dan Brennan, also of Port Washington, his wife, producer Jeanne Brennan. Their first entry into the festival, last

year's "The Video Guys," took home five awards, including Best Feature.

The film is a family affair, with Brennan's daughters Sabrina and Diana, both appearing in the film. "This movie is 'Pulp Fiction' for women," Brennan said. "It's about strong women taking charge of a bad situation," added Jeanne Brennan. It was shot in Manhasset and Port Washington.

The festival is about more than simply screening movies. Aspiring film makers – and those film buffs who are interested in the process of film making – have an opportunity to interact with industry insiders. And, of course, you never know who will show up for some film talk. Surprise guests who over the years have included The Sopranos' Edie Falco and Vincent Pastore, Steven Bauer from Scarface, Fredric Lane from Lost, and Paul Dano of There Will Be Blood, among others.

"The Long Island International Film Expo is getting a lot of great buzz," Markowitz said. "It's become the premier regional showcase for new, innovative works of local and national independent filmmakers. Anyone who's interested in film should drop by and see some



Courtesy of Leslye Abbey

ROSE KRAMER (left), with her closest friend Edith Rubin, reflects on living to be 100, in "Rosey At One Hundred," a documentary conceived and produced by Bellmore filmmaker Leslye Abbey.

of these great films."

Winners of the Long Island International Film Expo are chosen by a combination of audience ballot and judging committee. They are to be honored at the Closing Night Party and Awards Ceremony, on Sunday, July 18, where they receive their trophies and prizes. This year, actor Armand Assante will be honored with a Creative Achievement Award at the closing ceremony. The gala evening

includes a buffet, musical act, comedy by Jackie "The Jokeman" Martling, and an awards ceremony where the winners receive their trophies and clips of the winning films will be shown.

The gala, at the historic Bellmore Movies, is open to the public. As Markowitz, who co-hosts the event, put it, "If you ever wanted to come to a Hollywood-type event, then this is the venue for you!"

LONG ISLAND INTERNATIONAL FILM EXPO

July 8 through July 18 at Bellmore Movies, 222 Pettit Ave., Bellmore. Gold Pass \$60; Day Pass \$20, film blocks \$9 seniors \$7. Gala tickets are \$50.

For information on the Long Island International Film Expo and related events, www.LongIslandFilm.com or call (516) 783-3199.