

Mountain News

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Film Festival Opens

While there will be stars aplenty in person and up on the screens at the Lake Arrowhead Film Festival, one of the true pleasures of attending a film festival is finding a little-known film by an unknown director. Without the pressures of Hollywood, independent filmmakers are free to express their unique visions, and the LAFF is proud to present films that range from shorts to documentaries to what is, without a doubt, the best film ever made about tire chains! In addition, the LAFF will be presenting two benefit screenings this year—in support of our troops overseas and our veterans here at home.

The 2008 Lake Arrowhead Film Festival starts tonight (April 10) and runs through Sunday, April 13 at the Lake Arrowhead Resort and Spa. It is presented by BMW of Riverside, the County of San Bernardino, Lake Arrowhead Village, and the home of the festival, the Lake Arrowhead Resort and Spa. Tickets to all screenings can be purchased at the door for just \$5.

UNIQUE VISIONS

Under The Snow is a charming slice-of-life romantic comedy co-written, produced and directed by Candela Figueira and Maitena Muruzabal (screens Sunday, 11:45 a.m.). Already the winner of several awards at film festivals around the world, *Under The Snow* tells the story of two male workers in a factory's snow chain division and the changes they undergo when they are joined—during the heavy snow season—by two female temporary workers.

For long, frigid days they pack chains in silence until feisty Angela starts breaking the rules. Work suddenly becomes a game and their cold gray building a playground. The film is based on the actual experiences of co-director Muruzabal and was shot at the factory in Spain where she once worked. *Under the Snow* is a Spanish language film presented with subtitles.

Hold On, directed by Jackie Julio and Doug Olear (screens Friday, 11:30 a.m.), is a quirky comic short about a spirited, quadriplegic physicist (Julio) who goes to extreme measures in her quest for romance. *Hold On* is sprinkled with absurdity and symbolism, adding a little spice for the consummate film lover.

It's also quite an achievement for Julio, a quadriplegic who earned her law degree, but then returned to film school to follow her one true passion. And she's really looking forward to visiting Lake Arrowhead for the first time. Film festivals are a great opportunity to screen films for audiences who really love films, she said. "They're great venues for filmmakers and audiences alike." Right now Julio is already in the planning stages for her first feature. *Hold On* also stars co-director Olear (*The Wire*, *Something the Lord Made*) and Dominic West (*300*, *Chicago*), and features music by Bruce Springsteen.

Rabia is an engrossing and very timely short film directed by Muhammad Ali Hasan (screens Friday, 10 a.m.). Go inside the mind and heart of a terrorist—a woman named Rabia—who must sacrifice herself in order to exist. From the moment she straps explosives to her bare body, we are exposed to flashbacks of Rabia's past, filled with abuse, rejection, and struggle. Is Rabia's act one of evil or one of heroism?

According to Hasan, “We made Rabia to open the dialogue and force people to talk about this subject. We got to dig deeper and figure out why people are blowing themselves up. I strongly believe Rabia is going to open up that dialogue.”

Out of Step, a powerful film that tells the emotional story of a father coming to terms with his daughter’s life after her death, makes its world premiere at LAFF on Friday in the 11:30 a.m. block of Women Shorts. Writer/director Eileen Connors said she wanted to make a film that “told a story that mattered.”

Connors found her inspiration in her own experience of coming out to her family. “I was terrified my family would find out [I was gay] before I was ready to tell them.” The film follow’s the father’s journey from shock and horror to sympathy and understanding.

Notable documentaries include Feast of the Assumption, the heart-wrenching story of a boy who survived an attack by the infamous B.T.K. killer, and the man that he has grown up to be (screens Friday, 11:30 a.m.); The Bad Boys of Summer, the story of convict baseball players at San Quentin during their final season together (screens Saturday, 10 a.m.); and The Hat Lady (screens Saturday, 10 a.m.), the inspiring and heart-warming true story of Shirley Eberhardt, whose knitting charity has touched people the world over.

FOR OUR TROOPS

Each year, the Lake Arrowhead Film Festival likes to present topical films as benefits for local causes. This year, both benefit films happen to have a military flavor.

On Sunday morning, April 13 at 10:30 a.m., the festival will present MIA: A Soldier's Homecoming. MIA tells the story of four American soldiers shot down (and killed) over the jungles of Laos in 1971. Fifteen years later, they were finally returned home and buried in Arlington National Cemetery. This film chronicles their long—and, for their families and loved ones, heartbreaking—journey. Money earned from the sale of single ticket seats to MIA: A Soldier's Homecoming will benefit the Jerry Pettis VA Hospital in Loma Linda.

On Saturday afternoon, April 12 at 3 p.m., the film festival will screen the Oscar-nominated documentary, Operation Homecoming: Writing the War Time Experience. Directed by Richard Robbin, Operation Homecoming chronicles troops' experiences in Iraq and Afghanistan based on writings by soldiers, Marines and airmen. The effect is a remarkable portrait of troops at war—the complexities, doubts and fears—written with honesty. Saturday's screening will be presented by 2008 LAFF Honoree Beau Bridges. The film will be preceded by Larry Mendte's short documentary, The Beanie Baby Soldier, the story of one soldier's gift to the children of war-torn Iraq.

Proceeds from the sale of tickets to this special screening will be donated to Touch of Home: Support 4R Military, a locally run organization that sends packages containing requested items and letters to our troops overseas.

For more information on the festival, and for a complete schedule of film screenings, visit www.LakeArrowheadFilmFestival.com. All film screenings and celebrity appearances are subject to change or cancellation.