

A New Star In Pictures

Your ticket to the Jersey Shore Film Fest >>> By Craig A. Dowd > triCityNews Contributor



From "Ajami" - screening on July 18

DEAL - Attending a film festival is like getting a free pass to wander through the halls of a different auteur's mind every two hours. It's no surprise that no matter how many festivals pop up in the triCity region, the enthusiasm they elicit never seems to wane. There's something mystical about ditching the sweltering sun of summer, slipping into a cool theater and bearing witness to the rising dawn of a young filmmaker's imagination. It's the quintessential peak into the creative process unburdened by the pressures of big business, and its appeal will never lose its luster.

With big budget studio films being consumed and discarded more to the tune of meals at roadside diners than works of art, film festivals often serve as the last refuge for individuals who have retained that fine madness of youth: their imagination. The latest refuge to offer up its embrace - The Jersey Shore Film Festival - is a gem of an event and, with twenty-two days of screenings at six different venues in our region, seems to be making a bid for the best festival around.

"Only at the Jersey Shore Film Festival can filmmakers, film fans and the general public gather to screen leading films from around the globe," said Steve Doueck, the festival's Founding Director. "This is a unique and exciting opportunity to view fantastic films, and also learn more about the film industry from the filmmakers themselves - right here at the Jersey Shore."

Having just got under way last Sunday, the JSFF, now in its fifth year, will continue tonight, Thursday, July 1 with a special presentation from world-renowned mentalist Marc Salem at 8 p.m. at the Axelrod Theater in Deal. Having an act of this nature perform at a film festival is both a successful power play to make the Axelrod Theater an arts destination as well as a subtle, and perhaps unconscious, statement on the magic inherent in the medium of film.

Even Ingmar Bergman, the masterful Swedish director, called himself an illusionist, referring to how a projector presents successive images on the screen in such a manner that we see each image only one twenty-fourth of a second and thus experience the illusion of movement. If weren't for this imperfection of the human eye it would be impossible to enjoy the power of cinematic storytelling, which can send us careening through interweaving canals of confusion and elation all within just a few hours time. For the next two and a half weeks, culminating with a screening of Academy Award nominee "Ajami" on Sunday, July 18 at 7 p.m. at Axelrod Theater, you'll have the chance to submit to such powerful magic.

The festival will continue on Saturday, July 3 at the Axelrod Theater with a double billing beginning at 9:45 p.m. First up will be a short dramedy directed by Jamie Ruddy titled "Weequahic," a tale of four inept Jewish gangsters attempting to shake down the owner of

their favorite diner in 1952 Newark. Saturday night's feature, "The Infidel," is a comedic-drama directed by Josh Appignanesi about the identity crisis that ensues upon a young Muslim's discovery that he is in fact not Muslim at all, but Jewish. Coming from across the pond in England, "The Infidel" is probably another film that, without festivals like the JSFF, we most likely would be deprived of.

Over sixty feature films and shorts from around the globe will be screened in total; the number of people they inspire, however, will no doubt exceed that figure. I was fortunate enough to attend the JSFF in 2007 when Doueck personally screened an entire weekend of 35 millimeter Alfred Hitchcock films at the iconic Baronet Theatre on 4th Avenue in Asbury Park, just before the art deco treasure closed its doors. That's what film festivals should be - a defining experience, a memorable frame - anything that survives the daily rhythms of life and burrows into your core for good. After a brief hiatus the JSFF is returning to Asbury Park, showing two collections of short films on Friday, July 9 at McLoone's Supper Club as well two consecutive nights of feature films on July 11 and 12 at The Showroom on Cookman Avenue.

Adding The Showroom and McLoone's to the list of venues for the JSFF is emblematic of our progress. The more established festivals like the Garden State Film Festival are here to stay. But for these smaller