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Short Films with Edmonton Connections at EIFF

September 26, 2018 • by Chelsea Novak • Add Comment

Lena Wandering Spirit with director Jay Cardinal Villeneuve / Lisa Kolanyk

Short Flicks with Local Flavour

Short films often seem to disappear under the shadow of their feature-length siblings, but the Edmonton International Film Festival makes it a point to celebrate both long and short-form works, presenting the short films in packaged programmes.

A number of this year's films have Edmonton connections, and *Vue* connected with some of the filmmakers to talk about their work.

Sun., Sept. 30 (2:30 pm)
Remain
Directed by Carolina Cortella
Landmark Cinemas 9 City Centre

Kelsey Oluk grew up and began studying dance in Edmonton. She's since gone on to choreograph and dance in videos for the Toronto band The Balconies, and George Leach, and was a dancer in Feist's "1, 2, 3, 4" video. She's also acted in movies, including 2017's *M.F.A.*

She recently teamed up with Argentinian director Carolina Cortella and Belgian composer Rafaël Leloup—both of whom Oluk met in L.A.—to create the short film *Remain*, which features Oluk dancing on Cortella's rooftop.

Leloup provided Cortella and Oluk (who also choreographed) with a selection of songs to choose from, and the two developed a storyline to fit their chosen piece.

The themes of grief and letting go in the film were informed by Cortella's experience, as well as Oluk's. The latter explains that Cortella lost her father when she was a teenager, "and she always felt like she was clinging onto something," Oluk, on the other hand, had to accept her limitations after an injury changed what she was able to do as a dancer.

"The expectations of my ability just had to be shifted," she explains. " I couldn't do the big leaps anymore, I couldn't kick my face anymore. It was like that part of my dancing was really altered."

Oluk says *Remain* offered some catharsis for both her and Cortella.

Sun., Sept. 30 (4 pm)
Snow Warrior
Directed by Kurt Spenrath and Frederick Kroetsch
Landmark Cinemas 9 City Centre

Local filmmakers Kurt Spenrath and Frederick Kroetsch founded Open Sky Pictures in 2012, and have since produced many projects, including the popular *Kitten TV*.

Their short documentary, *Snow Warriors*, is a distinctly Edmonton film about the city's year-round bike couriers.

"A friend of ours was a bike messenger for a few years in Edmonton, and we sort of thought, 'Wouldn't it be neat to just sort of explore this subculture?' We didn't really know a lot about it, and you see all the same faces around Edmonton—there aren't that many of them—and we were just curious," Kroetsch says.

Once they met their main subject, Mariah Hoy, they knew they had a documentary.

"She's just super hardcore, and the way she talked about being a bike messenger, especially in the winter, and about how it sort of defined her, and how Edmonton is really proud of what they do, and how they do it—that's sort of the point where I realized we were dealing with something cinematic and not just an anecdote," Kroetsch says.

Capturing Hoy while she navigated winter streets on a bike presented some challenges, but the team got creative and built a trike that would allow someone to sit in the back with a camera.

"The problem with that is it just didn't go fast enough to keep up with the fastest bikes, so then we took to sitting in the back of a minivan, strapped in with camera gimbals, getting shots," Kroetsch says.

The bigger problem was that the team wanted to film during blizzards, but with director of photography (DoP) aAron munson travelling for *Equus: Story of the Horse* (a docuseries on which he was also DoP) and fewer blizzards than in previous years, it ended up taking three years to shoot the film—and then during that time Hoy cut her hair.

But ultimately it all came together to tell a unique Edmonton story.

Sun., Sept. 30 (4 pm)
Holy Angels
Directed by Jay Cardinal Villeneuve
Landmark Cinemas 9 City Centre

Director Jay Cardinal Villeneuve first met Lena Wandering Spirit, the subject of his film *Holy Angels*, in Edmonton. He was a videographer with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) and was filming private statements from residential school survivors.

"It was a beautiful experience, but it was also really hard because it's really tough hearing these stories—because it's just me in there with them, so you have to be there with them," he says.

Villeneuve contacted Wandering Spirit after meeting her to ask if she would be interested in sharing her stories about residential school in a film. She agreed, but when Villeneuve and his crew travelled to Fort Chipewyan to interview her, she became ill, and wound up in a hospital in Fort McMurray. The crew eventually travelled there and filmed her interview in the hospital chapel.

While in Chipewyan, they filmed the church and the priests' residence of the Convent of Holy Angels Indian Residential School, where Wandering Spirit was sent as a child. They also filmed five-year-old dancer Phoenix Sawan in the halls of St. Mary's Indian Residential School in Mission, B.C.

"What I really wanted to do was have a young girl kind of interpret Lena's memories, and I thought it would be something to have her interpreting it through this kind of dance, and mixing the ballet with the jingle dress dance," he says.

Villeneuve is of both Cree and Métis descent, and his father's mother was a residential school survivor. He says it was his father who told him that his grandmother had been at a residential school.

"Before I worked for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, I knew a little about residential school, but I never heard a story, and then I still remember my first one in Vancouver here. It was a really hard thing to listen to, and it was a really terrible experience of a residential school survivor—and it was horrific," he says.

Villeneuve describes his experience with the TRC as life changing, and says he may one day make a feature about residential schools.

Sept. 27 – Oct. 6
Edmonton International Film Festival
Various venues
edmontonfilmfest.com

#Edmonton International Film Festival #EIFF #Holy Angels #Remain #Snow Warrior