

MM

# INDIE MOVIEMAKERS ON THE MOVE



TREVOR SMITH INTRODUCES A FILM IN CALGARY.

## CALGARY INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL

**A NEW FRONTIER IN THE WORLD FESTIVAL CIRCUIT** • Like a great classic Western, Calgary International Film Festival (CIFF) came out with all its guns blazing in 2009. From September 25 - October 4, the festival celebrated its 10th year and did so by rolling out a world-class event. With presenting sponsor American Express, the festival not only awarded cash prizes for eight prestigious awards, but stepped onto the world stage by awarding one of the largest cash prizes on the international circuit: \$25,000 for its Maverick award.

"The programming team feels more than ever like CIFF is heading into the beginning of a lasting and defined [stand as a] fest with an identity of its own," says director of programming Trevor Smith.

From the moment we rolled into town, we knew we were experiencing a new frontier in the world festival circuit: A festival that doesn't stop at programming, but that seeks out audiences not only through traditional marketing and press outlets, but by blogging about and viral marketing the festival's films as well.

As a result, people were lined up around the block for our screening of *Lovers in a Dangerous Time*. Programmer Brenda Lieberman was on the ball and had already moved our film to a larger theater to accommodate the pleasant surprise. If that wasn't enough, the film ended up winning the People's Choice Award and a \$2,500 cash prize. As all

great Western stories do end, this festival provided the moviemakers a road out of town—sunset and all. —MARK HUG

[www.calgaryfilm.com](http://www.calgaryfilm.com)

Moviemakers May Charters and Mark Hug's debut feature, *Lovers in a Dangerous Time* ([www.inadangeroustime.com](http://www.inadangeroustime.com)), is a nostalgic tale of small-town Canadian romance between two childhood friends who are reunited at their high school reunion.

## CONEY ISLAND FILM FESTIVAL

**CONTINUING THE CITY'S CINEMATIC HISTORY** • Buster Keaton and Fatty Arbuckle clowned around there, Ray Ashley's *Little Fugitive* got lost there, Woody Allen lived under a roller coaster there and The Warriors fought all night to get back there.

The bond between Coney Island and cinema continues with the Coney Island Film Festival, a gem of a festival held during the area's off-season each fall. The 2009 event, which took place October 2 - 4, opened with *The Prince of Mermaid Avenue*, a documentary by local historian Charles Denson about the last man standing in a soon-to-be-gentrified Mermaid Avenue. The touching film was followed by a killer party with classic vaudeville and burlesque, as well as some of Coney Island's famous sideshow performances.

Festival director Rob Leddy programs a kaleidoscope of genres, from arthouse to zombie movies. Perhaps Denson describes the fest best when he calls it "the most exciting cinematic event to hit Coney Island since Feltman's restaurant introduced outdoor movies as a novelty nearly a century ago."

The festival is a rare opportunity for moviemakers to mingle, watch films and party while eating hot dogs, smelling the ocean and taking in live stunts and spectacles. The festival fittingly concludes with an ass-bumping awards ceremony, held at the famous Eldorado Bumper Cars. —CRAIG BUTTA

[www.coneyislandfilmfestival.com](http://www.coneyislandfilmfestival.com)

Craig Butta is the writer-director of *Sea Legs*, a feature shot in and around Coney Island. *Sea Legs* won Best Feature at the 2009 Coney Island Film Festival and the Audience Award in the Feature Narrative category at the 2009 Brooklyn International Film Festival.



A CONEY ISLAND CROWD.

## DC SHORTS FILM FESTIVAL

**SHORTS ARE THE MAIN MEAL** • It's no secret that short films aren't exactly a big selling point at major film festivals. They're the appetizers before the meal; people may enjoy them, but it's not the reason they come to the restaurant.

At the DC Shorts Film Festival, though, the audience views your film like one mini pizza bagel on a tray of a 100 when you're drunk—they want all of them. In its sixth year, DC Shorts is extraordinarily well-organized, with a strong list of sponsors.

The screenings are arranged into two-hour blocks, but it's the only festival I've attended that actually cared to make bumpers before each film with the moviemaker's name and the film's title. This gave each film individual recognition and prepared the audience with just enough time to hit the reset button on their brains.

Each screening I attended at the 2009 event, which took place in the nation's capital September 10 - 17, was filled to capacity, and at the end of each block the audience texted in their votes for their favorite films, giving one moviemaker per block a coveted audience award (my film, *Boo*, won my block).

Festival director Jon Gann is passionate about the atmosphere he has created, and seems just as excited as the moviemakers to be taking part in the fest. Providing each moviemaker with free accommodations at home stays or reduced hotel rates (whichever you choose), egos were checked at the door, and our reward was simply being recognized.

Short films may fall through the cracks at other festivals, but DC Shorts is the first event I've attended that makes sure the audience knows a short film is no small deal. —MICHAEL GOLDBERG

[www.dshorts.com](http://www.dshorts.com)

Michael Goldberg's *Boo* ([www.boothemovie.com](http://www.boothemovie.com)) won the Audience Choice and Filmmaker's Choice awards at the DC Shorts Film Festival. He writes and directs animated letter and number films for "Sesame Street."

## BIG APPLE FILM FESTIVAL

**ONE-STOP FESTIVAL EXPERIENCE** • The most resounding impression I took from the 2009 Big Apple Film Fest, which took place November 3 - 7, is the sense of community that comes when so many talented artists are brought together in one place, in this case Tribeca Cinemas. There's a unique camaraderie that forms when everyone is experiencing something together.

Living about five minutes away by



MICHAEL GOLDBERG ATTENDS THE DC SHORTS FILM FESTIVAL.

