



Love for shorts in 'Short Focus'



Danny Monico, left, and Luke Parker Bowles compare notes and talk about shorts in the offices of Scoundrel Films.
KATE ALBRGHT/FOR MONTCLAIR LOCAL

Short Focus

Premiere screening and drinks, with filmmakers for Q&A

Moderated by Patrick Wilson

Thursday, Feb. 28, 7 p.m.

Cinema505, 505 Bloomfield Ave.

**Event is sold out, but tickets to be released*

Show premieres on PBS Friday, March 1, 10 p.m.

montclairfilm.org

By GWEN OREL

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In Montclair, short films are getting some love.

Oscar Shorts - Celebrate the Underdog had its 10th outing in Montclair last Saturday, Feb.23.

And on Thursday, Feb. 28, Montclairites have the opportunity to get a sneak preview of five short films that will appear on PBS the following night.

Scoundrel Films' "Short Focus" debuts on PBS on Friday, March 1. Short films, says Scoundrel CEO Luke Parker Bowles, are "the genesis of where all these amazing directors started, and they never get looked at. They are aired at 4 in the morning, or sent to the wastebasket."

Danny Monico, president of Scoundrel films, agrees. Parker Bowles is a director of Montclair Film and a former chairman of BAFTA (British Academy of Film and Television Arts); he is originally from London. He is also one of the people spearheading the drive to reopen the Bellevue Theater, along with Patrick Wilson, Andy Childs, Vincent Onorati, and Steven Plofker. That team is hopeful the Bellevue will have its doors open in two years.

Monico is a Jersey boy, from Montclair. He now lives in Bloomfield.

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It was Monico, who had been working with Parker Bowles in a company called Open Road, who told Parker Bowles to move to town. And it was Monico's mother, Joan, who helped Parker Bowles settle in. Monico was then still living in Brooklyn, but Joan Monico introduced Parker Bowles to everyone. Now, Parker Bowles said, "You'll have to drag me out of Montclair in a coffin."

Gov. Murphy's enticements to filmmakers in New Jersey have already made Montclair a more attractive place to film, he added. And Montclair is very receptive: "I can call the mayor on my phone. He loves people who are enthusiastic about helping the community. I'd love former Mayor Bloomberg's number on autodial. It's never going to happen."

It was Monico who came up with the idea for Short Focus.

“Bob [Feinberg, the founder and chairman of the board of Montclair Film], wanted to showcase my film ‘Broken Wing.’ They didn’t know how to showcase it, because it was seven minutes. I pitched to PBS to do an hour-long segment of the top five films of 2018, and they really loved it. And I had just seen so many good short films over the past year, going to different festivals. But where do they go?”



CONTEXT AND REWARD

For the “Short Focus” screening, directors will be answer questions in a discussion moderated by Montclair local, movie star Patrick Wilson.

While the films are fictional narratives, they are based in something real, Monico explained.

Monico’s “Broken Wing” is about a couple dealing with dementia, in which the couple have a moment of clarity.

“Cheer Up Baby,” by Adinah Dancyger, won Sundance’s Best Short in 2018. It deals with what the #MeToo movement is about, and deals with a girl dealing with having been assaulted on a train.

“Boy Boy Girl Girl” by Ross Kaufman and Addie Morfoot is about a gay couple adopting a baby from a Meth addict. Katie Holmes is in it, and the film, which received money from Apple, was shot on an iPhone.

“Stop” by Reinaldo Marcus Green, who directed “Monsters and Men,” is about a young black kid walking home in Brooklyn who is stopped by the police.

“All the films are slices of life,” Monico said.

The menu may seem heavy, Parker Bowles said. “But to us, to get context from them makes it so much more rewarding. We felt there was such a goldmine of material.”

MAKING SHORTS IS BIG WORK

Picking the five films was difficult because the pool was so large, Monico said. Altogether, they watched about 200 films.

“If you go out there and talk to Mike Plant [Sundance Programmer], and ask him to recommend the ones that are best at the moment, he’d probably say that’s about 5,000, can you narrow it down a bit,” Parker Bowles said.

“What I want to do is get these filmmakers out there on a network level, publicly, more, not just in theaters. We have to get these films on TV again,” Monico said.

And, Parker Bowles said, a 10-minute film can be far harder than making a feature film. It still needs a three-act structure, with a beginning, middle and end. It cannot be a slice from a longer film.

The films in "Short Focus" were made from budgets ranging from 500 to 25,000 dollars.

The filmmakers will talk about "how you scarp together the money. What issues did you go through, what were the challenges. Because there's a ton," Monico said.

Also, it's in the short films that directors have freedom to play, without the restrictions that studios can put upon them, so they are happy to talk about these films, Parker Bowles said.

"It can be exhausting," Monico said. "But it's also the most fulfilling, when you do have success and have somebody that says 'hey, we want to put this on TV.' Short films are really labors of love."