



2019 MFF: 'Wild Rose' opens Montclair Film Festival



Jessie Buckley as Rose-Lynn in "Wild Rose." COURTESY MONTCLAIR FILM

By GRACE L. WILLIAMS

For Montclair Local

[Montclair Film](#) kicked off its eighth festival season last Friday night with heartbreak, grit, and rockabilly glamour, as a crowd packed into the Wellmont Theater to screen the opening film, "Wild Rose."

The film, set in Glasgow, Scotland, tells the story of Rose-Lynn, a single mother and ex-convict with a golden voice and dreams of one day making it in Nashville.

Seen on the red carpet before the screening were actress and actor wife and husband Dagmara Dominczyk and Patrick Wilson, who are also Montclair locals. Jessie Buckley, who stars as Rose-Lynn, posed with several heavy hitters in the festival, including Bob Feinberg, Luke Parker Bowles, Evelyn Colbert, and Tom Hall, all of whom serve in leadership positions for the festival.

Stephen Colbert, who serves in several roles for the festival, including emcee at the Storyteller Series, also posed with Buckley on the red carpet, joking with the audience during a photo, “People have so much more life [when a photo is being taken] when they say it’s for social media.”

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Joining the red carpet for the kickoff was filmmaker Haley Finnegan, who wrote, directed, and starred in “Westphalia,” a short that will screen later on in the festival (Sunday, May 12, 12:15 p.m., with “Montclair Shorts,” at Montclair Kimberley Academy Upper School, 6 Lloyd Road). “Westphalia” tackles the sometimes thorny topic of just how far some are willing to go to be famous on social media.

Inside the theater before the screening, Hall told the audience to not only welcome, but to sing “Happy Birthday” to Daniel Battsek, a trustee for the festival, and the director of “Wild Rose.”

After the singing faded, an enthusiastic Battsek addressed the audience. “I spend a lot of my life traveling around going to film festivals,” he said. When he was asked to get involved with the Montclair Film festival, he admitted, he had his doubts, which were soon put at ease.

“At first, I thought, the last thing I needed was another film festival, and yet, here you are,” he said. “Look at it. It’s been so successful.”



Jessie Buckley and Thom Hall at the opening of the Montclair Film Festival. COURTESY NEIL GRABOWSKY/MONTCLAIR FILM

Being able to bring a film like “Wild Rose,” which will officially debut in the U.S. on June 14, to the festival, has deep meaning to Battsek. “I can happily bring films like tonight’s and know they’re going to grow,” he said, before joking with the audience that the film takes place in Scotland, and to bear in mind that “Scottish people speak English.”

In “Wild Rose,” Buckley, as Rose-Lynn, artfully captures what it means to be a person with substantial circumstances and big dreams. Rose-Lynn navigates single parenthood, a criminal record, and the dream of one day getting up on stage at Nashville’s Grand Ole Opry to show the world her talent.

In the question-and-answer session immediately after the film, which received a standing ovation, Buckley was candid with the audience, saying that Rose-Lyn’s character is an admittedly complicated person, but “I just love her.”

A party followed, with food, drink, music, mingling and dancing.

Allison Goldstein Silverstein, a nine-year Montclair resident, is a festival supporter. Five years ago, she started a tradition of attending the opening of the festival with friends and family, in addition to going to various events, talks, and screenings.

"I love it that the town comes alive for it," Silverstein said. "It has grown from a yearly festival to a staple all year round where you can go watch a movie, and I love that they get kids involved with their artwork and you can see their posters all around town."

Silverstein said "Wild Rose" was her favorite opening film of all the years she has attended.

"Going into it, I didn't know much about it, and I cried buckets watching," she said. "I really enjoyed it."

The festival, which expects to show 150 films over nine days, concluding on May 12, will screen features, shorts, and Q&A sessions with filmmakers. It will also present several artist talks as part of its Storyteller Series.

Executive Director Tom Hall expressed gratitude for the community's support, noting that attendance appears to be on track to exceed the expected numbers they had budgeted for this year. Hall said he is "excited to see where we end up, but we're on track for our biggest year ever."

Hall also said that the film "Blinded By the Light" has been added to the lineup and will screen on May 12. "I am a huge fan of Bruce Springsteen, so this film is one I am very excited about."