



## NJ Film history at Oscar Shorts Underdogs



A still from "Hair Love." COURTESY OSCAR SHORTS

*Oscar Shorts: Celebrate the Underdog short film festival*

*Saturday, Feb. 8, 10 a.m.-5:30 p.m.*

*All nominated short films.*

*David Schoner, associate director of the NJ Motion Picture & Television Commission, to speak at 1 p.m.*

*Buzz Aldrin Middle School, 173 Bellevue Ave.*

[oscarshortsmontclair.com](http://oscarshortsmontclair.com)

**By GWEN OREL**

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Corinna Sager and Jeanne Reilly have been bringing the Oscar-nominated short films to Montclair for 10 years: this year marks the 11th time Montclairites will have an opportunity to see all the films nominated for Academy Awards, introduced by category by Sager herself.

Sager had co-produced the Oscar-nominated short film “Ferry Tales” in 2004, and knows the process from the inside.

As in previous years, there will be a morning session, a break and an afternoon session. Live action short films will be shown in the morning, with animated and documentary shorts screened in the afternoon.

Among this year’s 15 films are “Nefta Football Club,” a live action film made in Tunisia and France about two football fan brothers and a headphones-wearing donkey — who has a hidden drug stash — in Algeria; “Learning to Skateboard in Warzone (if You’re a Girl),” by Carol Dysinger and Elena Andreicheva, of the UK, a short documentary about young girls in Kabul learning to read, write and skateboard; and “Kitbull,” an animated short by Rosana Sullivan and Kathryn Hendrickson, of the USA, about an independent stray kitten and a chained-up pit bull who become friends.

A complete list is on the [Oscar Shorts website](#).

This year, Associate Director of the NJ Motion Picture & Television Commission David Schoner will speak. It’s the first time the Underdog Short Film Festival has had a guest speaker.

The agency promotes filmmaking in New Jersey, and works to attract filmmakers to the state, offering economic benefits, and facilitating the process of filming when moviemakers are here.

Schoner, a resident of Cedar Grove, has been with the agency since 1985. He loves film,



DAVID SCHONER

and has made a few himself: He produced “A Dangerous Place” in 2012, which was shown on the film festival circuit, and the short “Leo” in 2020. (More credits can be found on [IMDB.com](https://www.imdb.com).)

“I would make Super-8 movies as a teen,” Schoner said. “I had a paper route. I knew what it would cost to get Super-8 film and develop it, and I knew I had to get that in tips.”

The Oscar Shorts festival excites Schoner, because “the general public doesn’t have the opportunity or exposure to see those short films. Sometimes even if you are in the film world you don’t.

“Short films are another form of the art of filmmaking.”

The interesting stories told in a compact period of time can have a disproportionate impact, he said. Audiences can be used to how long a full-length movie should be, and come to expect what will happen when, but a short film, with varying lengths, still needs to tell a complete story: and audiences can be surprised.

“They are little mini-art forms. It’s great to see a short documentary, which gives a bunch of information and resolves itself,” he said.

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READ: [OSCAR SHORTS; THE UNDERDOG TURNS 10](#)

READ: [LOVE FOR SHORTS IN ‘SHORT FOCUS’](#)

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There are not many places to see the shorts today. He especially loves the animations.

Schoner especially loves the animated shorts. “With [live-action] film, you can film a lot of stuff, and in the editing room cut down to what works.

“When animating, it takes so much time, energy and money... to do sequences that don’t work or don’t use does not make sense.” Animation has to have precise planning, he said.

He’s excited by “Hair Love,” by Matthew A. Cherry and Karen Rupert Tolliver. “It’s an animated movie about a father having to work on his daughter’s hair. It’s great on multiple levels.

“I’m on board of Women in Media — a film festival that takes place in March, Women’s History month. We screen movies over nine days that are movies for women, about women, by female filmmakers, and topics that deal with women, whether it’s child marriage, human trafficking... one year we did a whole day on women and their perception of their hair, how people receive you and react to you via your hair. This animated film addresses that.” The festival takes place in Newark, Maplewood and East Orange.



A still from "Learning to Skateboard in a warzone (if you're a girl)." COURTESY OSCAR SHORTS

## NEW JERSEY FILM

Schoner, who works to keep filmmakers coming to New Jersey will speak about New Jersey's history of film on Saturday. New Jersey is the birthplace of film, he said. He will show a short film — appropriate for the day — on Thomas Edison and how film language began in Fort Lee and West Orange.

"Fort Lee was a massive hub back in the day," he said. Then, moviemakers left for Hollywood.

Steven Spielberg's "West Side Story" (2020) and "The Joker" (2019) are examples of recent films made in New Jersey. Schoner will also take audience questions.

"Montclair is a big film town. It's one of the top five places in the state for filming," Schoner said. "There is a very vibrant artistic community, and it really shows." He attends the Montclair Film Festival, and enjoys seeing films that have not had a wider release yet.

The people who come to the Underdog Festival may not be cinephiles in the traditional sense, but something makes them want to come see these nominated shorts, he continued. "There is a creative community here that passionately wants to see this art form and style of filmmaking."



## Oscar shorts: The Underdog turns 10



A still from the animated short "Animal Behavior." COURTESY OSCAR SHORTS

Oscar Shorts — Celebrate the Underdog

10th annual film festival featuring 15 Academy Award-nominated short films

Saturday, Feb. 16, 10 a.m.-6 p.m.  
Buzz Aldrin Middle School, 173 Bellevue Ave.  
[OscarshortsMontclair.com](http://OscarshortsMontclair.com)

**By GWEN OREL**

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There's a reason why you haven't seen the 15 short films nominated for Academy Awards this year: they aren't playing anywhere.

And Academy voters only vote in their field, with the exception of the Best Picture, which is open to all voters.

Only the filmmakers who have been nominated or won short films vote in this category.

But it doesn't mean you can't see them.

Corinna Sager and Jeanne Reilly have been bringing the Oscar Shorts to Montclair since 2010.

This year, the 10th iteration of "Oscar Shorts — Celebrate the Underdog" will take place on Saturday at Buzz Aldrin Middle School.



CORINNA SAGER

Sager, who is originally from Germany, co-produced an Oscar nominated short film, "Ferry Tales," in 2004. She has been to the Oscars, and walked the red carpet. "It was a lot of fun," she said with a smile.

Reilly and Sager met when Reilly was a member of the now-defunct Montclair Arts Council. The MAC established advisory boards, and asked Sager to participate in the advisory board for film. Reilly, a film lover,

suggested showcasing the Oscar Shorts, after seeing a screening Sager had done of documentary shorts in New York City.

The first Oscar Shorts was challenging to put together then: each filmmaker had to be contacted individually. Today they are able to get them through one distribution company.

All 15 films will screen on Saturday, including five animated shorts, five documentary shorts, and five live action shorts. There is a 20-minute break and then a lunch hour. BAMS sells baked goods. Sager will introduce groups of films.



A still from "Bao." COURTESY OSCAR SHORTS

## LITTLE GEMS

Short films "should be acknowledged, because it takes a lot of effort to make a short film," Sager said. "And it's very different filmmaking. And they're interesting stories that lend themselves only to a short.

"Not every subject lends itself to a long film. You could try to stretch it but you lose the essence of things. If you look at the short films, in documentary, they are often times subject matters that are intense, powerful, and serious: you can't do more than 40 minutes. The subject matter doesn't lend itself to it."

Short films can run between two and 40 minutes, she said. The animated shorts are 30 seconds to 10 minutes, Reilly said. Live action and documentaries are typically 25 to 40 minutes.

Typically, theaters do not screen them, so viewers only have a chance to see them on the Festival circuit. Montclair's "Underdogs" is one of the few places to see them before the



*JEANNE REILLY*

Oscars air.

"We call them gems," Reilly said.

They often take a long time to make, because they're made on a shoestring. The films come out of a passion to tell a story. Some of the histories of the films involve years of work.

"You get to see a lot of diversity. Because they aren't the commercialized versions of things, but they are passion projects, you see much more diverse and interesting filmmaking than you would often see on the big screen," Sager said.

For awhile, Oscar Shorts screened at MSU, but more recently they've been at Buzz Aldrin.

The Broadcast department of BAMS supports this program, Sager said.

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[READ: THE RABBIT TEST IN 'MOMTRESS' IS A SIGN](#)

[LOOK: PHOTOS OF 'BEHIND THE SCREEN AT MSU](#)

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“We really wanted this to be a community, and a discussion about these films,” Reilly said. And they have succeeded, Sager added. “You look at the audience, and it’s like ‘hello,’ ‘hello.’ A friend of mine, she’s a Real Estate agent, she comes with her husband...” Not only film makers, but movie buffs attend.

“It’s really film enthusiasts who are interested in the world and what’s happening in the world,” Reilly said.

Neither woman has seen the films yet. They read the synopses, so Sager can research the films and give some background to the audience.

Sager is intrigued by the animated short “Animal Behavior,” about animals in therapy, adding that all of the documentaries sound fascinating.

“Now, I just have to start doing research on all of them,” she said.

The research Sager shares is “insight you really wouldn’t have otherwise,” Reilly said. “You’re learning. So when you see a particular animation you have a little knowledge about what went into that. Or about the filmmaker, and why he or she was inspired to make a film about it. Part of our mission is for people to learn.”

Like the films themselves, Underdogs is a labor of love: it is not affiliated with Montclair Film or with any other group.

“We just do it,” Sager said.



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'LIFEBOAT' Directed by SKYE FITZGERALD

A still from “Lifeboat.” COURTESY OSCAR SHORTS



## Culture in brief: Oscar Shorts on Saturday



*The Oscar Shorts underdog*

“Oscar Shorts - Celebrate the Underdog,” the one-day film festival that screens all the Oscar-nominated short films (animated, live action and documentary), will take place on Saturday, Feb. 24, 10 a.m.-5:30 p.m. at Buzz Aldrin Middle School, 173 Bellevue Ave.

“Underdog,” sponsored by Montclair Recreation and Cultural Affairs, is in its ninth year.

Jeanne Reilly, co-producer of the event said in a release, “It’s a unique opportunity to see all 15 nominated films ry powerful and provocative and they move me in unexpected ways.”

“Short films to this day are the ‘underdogs’ of the academy,” said Corinna Sager, the other co-producer, in a release, “but audiences are discovering them — and rightly so. There is a lot of talent behind them.

“When we started 9 years ago hardly anyone knew about shorts. Now you can even find some online.” This year’s entries include the animated film “Garden Party” by French graduate students and the German-Kenyan live action film “Watu Wote” (Kiswahili for “Us All”), based on a true story of Muslim bus passengers in Kenya refusing to identify Christians after being attacked by the Islamist terrorist group Al-Shabab.

Buzz Aldrin students and faculty attend for free, and are involved by selling baked goods throughout the day and holding a raffle during the lunch break. All proceeds support the school’s Broadcast Studio, Chorus and Dance Departments.

For tickets and information, visit [Oscarshortsmontclair.com](http://Oscarshortsmontclair.com).

**SCREENING SCHEDULE:**

**MORNING SESSION - 10 a.m. to noon**

ANIMATED SHORTS (Running Time: 53 minutes)

Dear Basketball - Glen Keane and Kobe Bryant, USA, 5 minutes

Negative Space - Max Porter and Ru Kuwahata, France, 5 minutes

Lou - Dave Mullins and Dana Murray, USA, 7 minutes

Revolting Rhymes - Jakob Schuh and Jan Lachauer, UK, 29 minutes

Garden Party - Victor Caire and Gabriel Grapperon, France 7 minutes

LIVE ACTION SHORTS ( Running Time: 40 minutes)

DeKalb Elementary - Reed Van Dyk, USA, 20 minutes

The Silent Child - Chris Overton and Rachel Shenton, UK, 20 minutes

**Noon to 1 p.m. - LUNCH**

**AFTERNOON SESSION - 1 - 5:30 p.m.**

LIVE ACTION SHORTS CONTINUES ( Running Time: 55 minutes)

My Nephew Emmett - Kevin Wilson, Jr., USA, 20 minutes

The Eleven O'Clock - Derin Seale and Josh Lawson, Australia, 13 minutes

Watu Wote/All of Us - Katja Benrath and Tobias Rosen, Germany, 22 minutes

DOCUMENTARY SHORTS (Program A- 102 MINUTES)

Traffic Stop - Kate Davis and David Heilbroner, USA, 30 minutes

Edith + Eddie - Laura Checkoway and Thomas Lee Wright, USA, 29 minutes

Heaven is a Traffic Jam on the 405 - Frank Stiefel, USA, 40 minutes

3:15 - 3:30 BREAK

DOCUMENTARY SHORTS - PROGRAM B (Running Time: 82 minutes)

Heroin(e) - Elaine McMillion Sheldon and Kerrin Sheldon, USA, 39 minutes

Knife Skills - Thomas Lennon, USA, 40 minutes

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## Montclair Local Voices: Healing the Break in Promises



CORINNA SAGER

By CORINNA SAGER

Recently I did a favor for a friend. I hosted a fundraising event because she's going into politics. I'm proud of her and of course support her. I sent photos of us after the event. No thank you. I sent another email. No word. Sadly — it's not the first time. And it reminded me of other disappointments, and broken promises.

Today we live in a world where people say they'll do things and then don't follow through. Potential clients say

they'll call, but never do. My Media, Communications and Visual Arts graduate students at Pace University tell me how desperate they are for someone, just one professional with whom they connected in person, to get back to them when they email or call. But no one does. And my mother says she is tired of the many contractors and vendors who promise their work is guaranteed, but when something fails and she calls them to fix it — they never call her back. What society do we live in today? Is a person's word dead? Is it all just lip service?

I'm tired of lip service. I'm tired of broken promises. I'm tired of people saying they'll do something they won't. What happened to responsibility, guts and honesty?

Today we spend more time online than in person with our loved ones. We post selfies, opinions and photos. But where is the caring about others? The true humanity? The human interaction that requires give and take? Poof. Gone!

We are, however, still human and not machines. We each want to be valued, cared for and respected. So we have to remember to give it back as well. Of course, there are times when things just fall by the wayside, when we have to set priorities, when we are overwhelmed. But if you can't return a call that day, text or email to say when you will call back. And are you really that busy that you can't even write or say thank you for a wonderful dinner or great party?

I'm sick of all this. I want honesty and guts back. I don't want: "I'm sorry for the inconvenience," I want a solution. Just tell me the truth, or don't make the promise. Because guess what — I can handle the truth. It saves me time and effort.

There's an old German proverb: "The way you call into the forest is how it echoes back to you." If you say you'll call but won't, don't expect others to call you back either. If you're always late, don't expect others to value your time. If you don't keep your promise, don't expect others to keep theirs — and don't be disappointed when you find out they don't. You started the cycle.

The other day a potential client who promised she'd call — actually did. What a pleasant surprise. She kept her word. Three weeks ago a customer service rep from my health insurance promised she'd call me back after she was going to figure out what had gone wrong. I never expected to hear from her (by that time I had called them repeatedly for two months). But she did call me back three days later. And she had actually solved the issue.

I was so delighted I told her that this was the first time in years I could remember a customer rep actually doing this. I thanked her profoundly. She said how nice that was to hear. Yes, it can be done!

So let's cycle back. Let's cycle back to responsibility. Let's value each other's time, each other's expectations, each other's knowledge. Let's appreciate what friends give, what clients offer, what colleagues contribute. And let's keep our promises. Every time. To every person. In every situation. We'll make the world a better place.

*Corinna Sager is an international communications expert and public speaking strategist. She has directed, produced and coached for companies around the world, bringing stories to Life - with Style.*

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

LOCAL VOICES: Local Voices is a forum for residents' essays about issues and subjects that affect them, and will combine individual essays with rotating columns on such subjects as relationships, health, gardening and more. To submit an idea for a series or individual essay, write to [arts@montclairlocal.news](mailto:arts@montclairlocal.news).