

niagara life

MAY/JUNE 2015



Lights,
VINE,
Action!

Ready to
RUN
ART in the *garden*



There hasn't been this much buzz in Niagara since Marilyn Monroe slept in Room 801 at the old General Brock Hotel and Superman flew over the Falls, at a perfect camera angle, to rescue a young boy from the churning waters.

Bill Marshall may not leap tall buildings, but he's landed a brilliant leap of faith, and it's about to rocket this region to the world stage.

BY JOANNE MCDONALD
PHOTOS BY STEVE HENSCHEL

Heard it *through the* GRAPEVINE



You heard it through the grapevine – the stars will come out June 18-21 when the Niagara Integrated Film Festival brings thousands of fans, filmmakers, press and industry leaders together to share the extraordinary experience of fine food, wine, and a spectacular lineup of films from around the world screened in vineyards across Niagara.

NIFF Founder and CEO, Marshall says bringing a film festival to Niagara's award-winning wineries and culinary excellence was a no brainer.

"There's no better food, you can't beat the wine and the region looks fabulous. All you have to do is stick a screen up and a good movie and you have the perfect experience," said Marshall, Founder and Chair Emeritus of the Toronto International Film Festival, and one of the industry's most respected and accomplished producers.

It's an incredibly unique concept of setting up film screens on the rolling terroir. NIFF has become a signature event for the region, a choice location for distributors to premiere summer release films - more than 70 films will be showcased – and both audience and industry insiders have put NIFF easily in the top 50 of the world's 5,000 film festivals.

Now in its second year, the credits are still rolling on NIFF's inaugural foray into wine country. And they're about to get even better.

NIFF co-founder and president Sari Ruda is passionate about the distinctive wineries and their professionalism and commitment that will bring the best of Niagara to the festival. "Every winery has a completely different style, from historic and classic to high modern," Ruda said. "We've tried really hard to be representative of the region, to bring the best of the region and as we grow, we will bring in more wineries."

"We're reaching to the stars with programming," says Ruda. "We're trying hard to provide something for everybody and we're encouraging people to plan in advance to see the kind of things that attract their attention."

Last year's ticket sales went beyond box office expectations so planning early will ensure the best festival experience. From the spectacular Opening Night event, the Galas, and Filmalicious with top chefs, dinner and film screenings in the vineyards, to the Film Feast tours through wine country with wine, food and a selection of short films, or booking a 10-pack of tickets and a guarantee of seeing 10 great films, NIFF has left no stone unturned to enjoy the festival.

The festival will offer a diverse selection of programs from grand galas to picnic blanket viewings. There will be ways to watch a movie on a \$10 ticket and they'll all be terrific films.

CHASING FILMS

Kate Yorga, NIFF programming manager, has been chasing films around the world for months solid. "We are trying to track down films and inviting a lot of films. Head programmer Tony Watts started at Sundance and went to Berlin. He's currently in Hong Kong, then Cannes," Yorga said. "He has had his ear to the ground since last summer."

Mann Munoz is one of the Niagara directors that will have their works featured at this year's festival. His coming-of-age drama, *Lost Penny*.



Be it the thrill of watching a world premiere, or the magic of a hard-to-find film from a distant land, "you get the festival buzz, that's part of the experience when a festival comes to town. It creates this energy that makes everything come alive, meeting people from near and far. You never know who you will bump into and that's part of the experience," Yorga said.

NIFF will highlight the connection of film, food, and wine, with programming to include: Opening Night, Galas, Filmalicious, Film Feast, World's Smallest Film Festival, Niagara Rises, Family Fun Fare and Industry Day.

Film Feast will feature a selection of short films from the series Canada's Not Short on Talent, curated by Danny Lennon for the Cannes Film Festival. "We had it last year and people absolutely loved it," Ruda said. "A really good short, one to five minutes, can pack an incredible punch of information and emotion," Ruda said. "Last year I was amazed at how incredibly engaged people were and the animated discussions about the short films."

A showcase for local talent, "Niagara Rises is being sponsored by RBC, an incredible gift to us. They are committed to helping the community and our initiative and mandate to help local Niagara film producers," Ruda said, grateful for the support of sponsors also including Orbixa Technologies and White Oaks Resort and Spa. Last year six corporations gave NIFF straight up donations to give purchased tickets to community organizations.

Success means drawing visitors to enjoy the beauty of the region, and for Ruda, "we want to lay the groundwork for a legacy of helping to build the film and television and digital media industry here in the Niagara Region where there is already an incredible wealth of talent and skills awaiting the opportunity to build itself into a major hub."

TIPS FOR NIFFTY NEWBIES

Filmgoers at last year's inaugural festival know what's in store for June 18-21. But for NIFFty newbies, the following tips will help them get the most out of the festival.

- Plan ahead. Ticket sales were beyond box office predictions last year.
- Book early. As soon as the schedule goes live, start buying tickets.
- Take advantage of the early bird specials and package deals.
- There are program choices to fit every budget. The 10-pack is a great place to start. The earlier you book, the better the price and you're guaranteed to see 10 great films.
- It's a thrill to see it first, be it a Canadian or world premiere and NIFF audiences will be definitely seeing some firsts, but don't miss the films you may never have the opportunity to see outside the festival. Last year's first-ever NIFF award went to Ian Gabriel's South African film *Four Corners*.
- Check out some foreign films – they will open you to a magical world of ideas and entertainment.
- Keep a watch in the vineyards. The stars will be out with celebrities and industry names and you never know who you might see.
- Don't miss the shorts. Those five-minute short films can pack a mighty message and emotional punch.
- Check out the website for the full schedule of films and programs.
- Tickets are on sale now. For package deals, early bird savings and the full lineup of films and program details visit: <https://niagarafilmfest.com/tickets/> Phone: 1-800-656-0713

WORLD PREMIERES

Yorga said that for organizers and audiences, it's the thrill and distinction of seeing something first, be it a Canadian premiere or a world premiere and NIFF audiences will undoubtedly be seeing some films first.

"Last year we had some world premieres and I can definitely say right now we have two films that have not played anywhere," Yorga said, giving up only that one is a romantic comedy and the other a dramatic fantasy.

But, Yorga reminds filmgoers, there are also big rewards in finding the movie gems that audiences outside the festival would never have a chance to see. Last year's winner was from South Africa, *Four Corners*, directed by Ian Gabriel.

"As a personal filmgoer, when I go to a festival those are the films I choose, to go to see a film from a foreign country that will expose you to a magical world and ideas and entertainment the you might not otherwise get to see."

Fazio says festival excitement is building across the region. "We've got the support locally and the ownership is what we're really starting to build and the community is embracing it as a regional local event."

Author Mark Twain in his 1897 travelogue *Following the Equator* called Niagara a Garden of Eden.

Not a bad pre-century segue to NIFF and the new world – and all the sights and sounds, and tastes to be savoured in the garden of vineyards that is now Niagara.

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ECONOMIC BENEFITS

There are no boundaries around Dino Fazio's enthusiasm for showing the world what Niagara has to offer. Former general manager of the Winter Festival of Lights, he's brought millions of visitors to Niagara over the years.

NIFF festival manager, Fazio said the film festival's economic benefit to Niagara has been huge. "The direct impact last year was \$1 million plus the intangibles of bringing the film industry to Niagara looking at the region as a place to shoot or to locate a studio."

Ruda agrees, "We were very happy last year, we balanced the budget and that was unique, almost unheard of and very lucky. The goal for this year is to have enough sponsors to do that again, pump up attendance and really be able to keep the community in mind and look after them."

Young NIFF is being raised on the same formula that turned Toronto cousin TIFF into a strapping world-renowned festival – take the best programmers on the planet, chase the best movies around the world, introduce audiences to the people who made the movies, and show them in great locations.

Marshall said meeting the producers and celebrities is a big part of the festival magic. "You spend about 90 minutes watching the story, and it's great, but the average film takes eight years to make and the people who made it have a lot to talk about."

It's also about bringing the film industry to Niagara to help develop and showcase the talent that already exists. "I was talking to this kid whose family grows fruit and he said, 'I've got this little short, can I show it to you?'" said Marshall. Turns out, "it's terrific, *Made in Bali* by Michael Pohorly from NOTL." Niagara Rises featuring local filmmakers will surprise people. "We've got three more local films running and nobody knows they're that good."

Marshall's heart is never far from the struggles of young filmmakers trying to find their way in the industry. Making movies starts with a good script and the story of Marshall's own foray into filmmaking and the launch of the Toronto festival in 1976, is a blockbuster.

He was chief of staff during the 70s to former Toronto mayor David Crombie, but Marshall was no civic lifer. He just wanted to make movies and launching TIFF was a way to bring the experts together who could teach him how. A partner in a film company, "we weren't good at making movies. We were getting nervous," Marshall recalled.

Against all the naysayers who said the film festival would never work, people would never come and wouldn't give him any money, TIFF was born.

"Everybody hated the concept except the people and you can't stop them now." The very first year 35,000 people came, a diverse, multicultural audience thrilled to have access to international movies that couldn't be found anywhere else.

Outrageous was just the second movie Marshall produced. When it went to Cannes, the critics, all Marshall's pals, were terrified they wouldn't like it. But they loved it. The film went on to Berlin and won Most Popular Audience, and starring talented actor Craig Russell developed a burgeoning international following. Somewhere in the States it's still being distributed on DVD and just last week Marshall got a cheque for \$45.

It took years of legwork to get the films and distributors on board when TIFF was launched and since become a launching ground for Oscar winning films as the world's top film festival.

"The Internet has changed everything. We've had \$2.5 million worth of media exposure from NIFF," Marshall said, and distributors are sold when they hear about the unique festival and perfect launch pad for their summer release films.

MARSHALL HAS A PRETTY GOOD IDEA OF WHERE NIFF IS HEADED. "GIVE US A FEW YEARS AND WE'LL BE IN THE TOP 10 IN THE WORLD."

NIFF PROGRAMS

NIFF will highlight the connection of film, food, and wine, with unparalleled programming to include: Opening Night, Galas, Filmalicious, Film Feast, World's Smallest Film Festival, Niagara Rises, Family Fun Fare and Industry Day.

For ticket sales, package deals, early bird savings and the full lineup of films and program details visit: <https://niagarafilmfest.com/tickets/> Phone: 1-800-656-0713

OPENING NIGHT

The stars will be out with industry celebrities and newsmakers to launch NIFF 2015 during 'Opening Night' celebrations Thursday, June 18 at the internationally acclaimed Peller Estates.

GALAS

Galas will be held June 19-21 at Jackson-Triggs Niagara Estate Winery in Niagara-on-the-Lake. The spotlight will be on Canada's most awarded winery and an ultimate epicurean experience featuring fine wine, a sumptuous dinner prepared by Executive Chef Timothy MacKiddie and a feature presentation film in the vineyard with celebrities and newsmakers.

FILMALICIOUS

Filmalicious is a spectacular dinner and a movie event hosted at four of Niagara Region's world-class wineries. Each location will present a sumptuous dinner with wine pairings from some of Canada's most talented chefs, followed by a special feature film presentation in the vineyard with celebrities and newsmakers sharing the experience. Locations include: Henry of Pelham Estate Winery, St. Catharines; Peller Estates, Niagara-on-the-Lake; Redstone Winery, Beamsville; and Southbrook Vineyards, Niagara-on-the-Lake.

FILM FEAST

Film Feast is a unique three-hour bus excursion of Niagara's most spectacular wineries from Twenty Valley to Niagara-on-the-Lake. Guests will sample award-winning vintages, accompanied by exquisitely prepared hors d'oeuvres, and watch a selection of intriguing short films. Included will be the series Canada's Not Short on Talent, a compilation of Canada's top short films. Originally an exclusive series to the Cannes Film Festival, NIFF brings these creative shorts to Canadian soil.



WORLD'S SMALLEST FILM FESTIVAL

The World's Smallest Film Festival is a film competition featuring shorts shot entirely on a mobile device. This is an exciting opportunity to showcase today's ground-breaking mobile film capabilities and the talent and creativity of filmmakers.

NIAGARA RISES

The Niagara Region is home to some incredible filmmakers who have honed their crafts working on everything from Hollywood blockbusters like *X-Men* to world acclaimed Cannes winners. NIFF celebrates and supports the local industry and the Niagara Rises program showcases the talent bursting forth from this exciting creative cluster.

FAMILY FUN FARE

New to the festival this year is the Family Fun Fare featuring indoor and outdoor entertainment for the whole family with tickets sold on a per-picnic blanket basis to encourage group viewings.

INDUSTRY DAY

Industry day will be a full day event geared to those in the industry. Niagara is home to some incredible filmmakers. Both Brock University and Niagara College have film programs and there are many movie-related types of industry in the region.