

# The story behind Baton Rouge's newest film festival

By Dillon Lowe



A new nonprofit film festival—the [Baton Rouge Underground Film Festival](#), or BRUFF—is coming to downtown's [Manship Theatre](#) this August.

The three-day event has a stated goal of “celebrating indie and genre-focused talent from Louisiana and beyond.” BRUFF will screen a variety of short and feature-length films and host a series of panels and workshops to provide attendees with hands-on learning opportunities. Funding is already secured for follow-up festivals in 2026 and 2027, as well.

But how did the festival actually come to be?

Joe Carleton, one of the festival's organizers, tells *Daily Report* that BRUFF was born from a desire to fill a gap in Baton Rouge's film scene that has lingered since the Louisiana International Film Festival went on hiatus due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

"There's been an empty void of film expression in Baton Rouge," he says. "We've got a couple of niche festivals, but there's no real central pivot point for independent filmmakers to showcase their art."

Carleton and his fellow festival organizers—Nathan Hall, Michael Prince-Bouton and Brendan Pyron—are independent filmmakers themselves. Together, they run [Unoriginal Films](#), a Baton Rouge production company founded in 2022 that focuses on narrative-driven, surrealist content.

They first started talking about putting together an independent film festival about eight months ago, but the idea gained momentum when Hall pitched the concept to [Visit Baton Rouge](#) this past fall. The tourism agency liked the idea and bought in.

"The pitch went really well, and now Visit Baton Rouge is our headline sponsor for the next three years," Carleton says. "They were the first people to really get behind the project."

With initial funding secured, the festival's organizers moved into development, designing their branding, reaching out to additional sponsors and, of course, structuring their submission and selection process.

According to Carleton, that process will be somewhat competitive. A panel of industry professionals and local filmmakers will review submissions and narrow them down to a lineup that they think makes the most of the limited screening slots available.

"It's not just like 'submit and you'll be shown.' ... It's a three-day event, and there's only so much time in a day," Carleton says. "But we're going to pack the festival with as many high-quality projects as we can."

Looking forward, Carleton and his team are hopeful that BRUFF will persist beyond 2027 and become a lasting fixture of Baton Rouge's arts scene.

“The ideal scenario is that everybody really enjoys the inaugural festival and it gets bigger and bigger each year,” Carleton says. “The intention is certainly not to stop after three years.”

BRUFF is set to take place Aug. 22-24. Film submissions are now open through the festival’s [FilmFreeway portal](#), and tickets will become available in the coming months.

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