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TORONTO'S ONLINE FILM MAGAZINE

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FOR THE LOVE OF SHORT FILM: WHY FILMMAKERS CHOOSE SHORT FILM TO TELL A STORY

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Short filmmaking is an art form worthy of celebration. It's not only a place for artists to get their work noticed, but for some, it is a way to have fun and challenge the artistic medium. These films often tackle themes and narratives of a socio-cultural and political context, which shape and influence how we experience ourselves, and the world around, us via film. Frequently, short filmmaking also has a community aspect among artists and filmmakers. In developing this identity, new ways are established to get filmmakers recognized for the positive aspects of their craft.

Creating a short film is often a necessary stepping-stone for any first-time filmmaker. Numerous notable directors, such as Tim Burton (**Frankenweenie**), Wes Anderson (**Bottle Rocket**) and Paul Thomas Anderson (**Coffee and Cigarettes**), received their starts early on making short films. Often produced on a limited budget by emerging filmmakers, the art of short film can transform and transcend traditional filmmaking and storytelling.

With running times under 40 minutes (which is the industry standard), short films span every style and genre imaginable. Animation or live action, documentary, horror, drama and even experimental, nothing is off limits. This freedom is certainly an enticing aspect to directors, who use these works to gain experience and/or prove their talent, in order to gain funding for future endeavours.

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At film festivals across the globe, short films are generally recognized within their own separate programmes. Often flying under the radar of commercial moviegoers, festival audiences tend to recognize the significance of these features. Each year at the Toronto International Film Festival, Short Cuts offers a wide variety of films from around the world. With nine separate programmes at TIFF 2015, this is the ideal place for audiences that have an appreciation for the medium and want to view a type of intricate filmmaking that places emphasis on artistic expression and creative innovation. Prioritizing the shorts programmes is also a way for viewers to support emerging filmmakers that will likely go on to make full-length features.

This year's Short Cuts programmes include films that explore a variety of themes — from dysfunctional family relationships to sexual identity and even a museum

dedicated to gopher taxidermy (which I'm especially excited for). For a deeper insight into a few of the short films that will be part of the Short Cuts programmes, filmmakers Sherren Lee (**Benjamin**), Steven McCarthy (**O Negative**) and Grayson Moore and Aidan Shipley (**Boxing**) shared their experiences in filmmaking. Whether a short was created as a learning experience or simply for the love of, each filmmaker expresses an equal amount of passion and appreciation for the art of short film.

Lee's **Benjamin** is a 16-minute short that will have its world premiere at this year's Toronto International Film Festival. The film confronts the themes of grief and surrogacy for two couples caught in a tragic situation. Lee admits to never having attended film school, but explains how making short films was a way to develop her skills and discover a passion for the medium. "I've learned to love the form. I think there are stories that can only be told through the short film form, and that's interesting."

Lee explains what she believes makes an effective short: "I think the best are meant to be told in short form and not attempt to tell a piece of a longer story. Making a good short film might take less time to shoot or money to make, but they require just as much thought, care and hard work as any other product of quality, no matter its length."

// The Internet is making the whole idea of how long something is pretty irrelevant. I think that previously people might have thought, 'well, if it was any good, why isn't it longer, like a feature?' But now, people are seeing all kinds of TV shows and films of various lengths. [The audience] can feel that it's trying to sell you something, rather than make you feel anything. (Steven McCarthy)

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Benjamin confronts difficult yet very human themes, representing the social and cultural implications of modern life. "The setting of this short film seems very contemporary, [but] I think that **Benjamin** is a timeless story. Conflicts and challenges between lovers and friends aren't new, but hopefully the film can act as a reminder for us all to look at our community's interests, not just our own." Lee is excited to screen her short at the Festival and is currently working on her first feature, a romance entitled **Verses**.

Boxing is a short by Ryerson film school alumni Moore and Shipley, and is the first for both. It's 13 minutes center upon a woman returning to her boxing gym after a tragic accident. Recent graduates from Ryerson University's film program, Moore and Shipley share a passion and appreciation for short film. However, making a short,

rather than a full-length, proved to make sense for not only artistic but budgetary reasons. “Making a feature wasn’t an option,” Shipley says. “The plus side was we were able to create quite a few opportunities and form a good team to move forward with, as well as experiment and take risks to find out what we liked and didn’t.” Moore continues, “It doesn’t take long to realize that the moments you appreciate in feature films are the same ones you can create in shorts. **Boxing** represents the first time we’ve told a story that unquestionably belongs in a short film.”

Like any artistic endeavour, Moore and Shipley faced challenges throughout production. “We have a four-minute, continuous shot in the film that takes place over two floors of the gym and includes stunts, so we dedicated one of our two shoot days to nailing that.” Moore and Shipley are thrilled to screen their short at the Festival. In 2016, both Moore and Shipley will be co-directing their first feature, a thriller entitled **Cardinal**, funded by Telefilm’s micro-budget program.

O Negative is a 15-minute short making its world premiere in the Shorts Cuts programme. It’s the first film directed by acclaimed actor, musician and theatre-maker Steven McCarthy. **O Negative** is an unsettling love story of desire and dependency. With McCarthy also in the lead role, and real-life girlfriend and National Theatre School of Canada newcomer Alyx Melone starring as well, he explains that

making this short was an experiment in writing and directing. “The short was a way to just get on set and learn and see if I could do this. Making a short seemed the best and simplest way to learn about the medium of filmmaking. Also, everyone is working for nothing, so doing something short is a much easier way to get people to commit to spending a week in Northern Ontario.”

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Even though he used his short as a learning experience, McCarthy recognizes the misconceptions about the medium in our culture and the film industry. “The Internet is making the whole idea of how long something is pretty irrelevant. I think that previously people might have thought, ‘well, if it was any good, why isn't it longer, like a feature?’ But now, people are seeing all kinds of TV shows and films of various lengths. I hate it when I can tell the short is basically a commercial for something longer. [The audience] can feel that it's trying to sell you something, rather than make you feel anything.”

McCarthy previously attended the Festival in 2012, thanks

to his role as Jim, in Kate Melville's **Picture Day**, and is "overjoyed and thrilled" to have his first film premiere in the Short Cuts programme at TIFF this year. He will also be attending the Festival as an actor, appearing in **The Steps**, directed by Andrew Currie, which will premiere in the Contemporary World Cinema programme. McCarthy is currently working on the feature version of **O Negative**, and has a script in the works with Susanna Fournier, about a woman who commits suicide on her wedding day. He is also writing a musical and performs with his ten-piece band, the ElastoCitizens.

Short filmmaking is not only a way for emerging filmmakers to exercise their creative capacity, lead to a feature and become recognized for their work; it is an avenue for filmmakers to establish a thoughtful and engaging dialogue with an audience in a way that's unique to the movie, the filmmaker and what the filmmaker hopes the audience will take away. Whether you are a first-time Festival attendee or a die-hard fan, put some time aside from your regular, jam-packed festival schedule and take in one of the Short Cuts programmes to not only experience a wide range of creativity and artistic filmmaking innovation, but to support the best in emerging filmmakers.

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