

JEFFERSON MONTHLY



10th Annual Ashland Independent Film Festival



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The acclaimed Ashland Independent Film Festival returns to the Varsity Theatre, the Historic Ashland Armory, and the Ashland Springs Hotel in the heart of the historic downtown, April 7–11 for the tenth annual, five-day showcase of independent film. Over 6000 film lovers gather each year as creators of documentaries, features and shorts come from around the world to engage with the community at film screenings from 9:30 a.m. to midnight, gala parties, filmmaker panels, film screenings and more.

The non-profit AIFF's mission is to celebrate the diversity of human experience through the art of independent film – enriching, educating and inspiring audiences of all ages. The April film festival is one of many events the organization presents, including a monthly film series at the Varsity and occasional special screenings under the stars at Britt Festivals. Educational outreach throughout Southern Oregon in-

cludes *The Launch*, a K–12 and university level free student film competition, with the winners highlighted at the film festival. *The Launch* is made possible, in part, by a grant from The Carpenter Foundation.

The annual Ashland Independent Film Festival continues to gain accolades regionally and nationally. Last year, *Documentary* magazine featured the festival in a cover article alongside the Sundance and South by Southwest festivals. *Moviemaker* magazine named it one of the top 25 film festivals for filmmakers and a website that tracks the industry ranked the AIFF as one of the 25 best festivals in the world for documentary films.

“Go,” says Shawn Levy, of the *The Oregonian* newspaper. “The AIFF is one of the best things you can do in Oregon – or anywhere – for your movie heart. Pound for pound this is the best film festival that Oregon offers.” Fellow *Oregonian* film critic Stan Hall said the Ashland Independent Film Festival is “reliably fabulous.”

Among the 80+ documentary, short and feature films this year are numerous films made in Oregon, including *Hood to Coast*, about the famous team relay run from Mount Hood to the Oregon coast; *How to Die in Oregon*, focusing on the state's assisted suicide law and *If a Tree Falls: A Story of the Earth Liberation Front*. Many productions were based in Ashland, including local attorney turned filmmaker Susan Saladoff's *Hot Coffee* and AIFF alumni filmmaker Kim Shelton's *The Welcome*. Other 2011 festival attractions are special guest, three time Emmy nominee Harry Shearer (*This is Spinal Tap*, *A Mighty Wind*), who will present his documentary *The Big Un-easy*, about why New Orleans flooded during Hurricane Katrina, and receive the AIFF's Rogue Award. Academy Award-nominated documentary filmmaker Morgan Spurlock (*Supersize Me*) will also attend and be presented a Rogue Award this year.

The festival's gala Opening Night Bash,



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Shawn Levy, *The Oregonian*

80+ films with filmmakers from around the world, special guests Harry Shearer and Morgan Spurlock, Oscar® Nominated films ... and more

By Tom Olbrich



Being honored with a Rogue Award at this year's AIFF is Morgan Spurlock, best known for *Super Size Me*, which was nominated for an Academy Award® 2005. His latest work, *POM Wonderful Presents: The Greatest Movie Ever Sold*, examines the world of product placement, marketing and advertising by making a film entirely financed by them.

Thursday, April 7 at the Ashland Springs Hotel features “Savor the Rogue,” a specialty food and wine event presented by the Rogue Creamery with regional gourmet offerings including the Creamery’s award-winning cheeses, area chocolates, meats and more – as well as Southern Oregon’s internationally famous wines and ales. Sunday evening, April 10, juried and audience Awards will be presented at the annual Awards Celebration party and dinner at the Historic Ashland Armory, featuring ten of the valley’s finest restaurants. Most of the award winning films will receive encore presentations on Monday, April 11.

“The Academy” Honors the AIFF and its films

The celebration of the 10th annual AIFF will include even more filmmakers as The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences – presenters of the Oscars® – has honored the AIFF as one of only 30 festivals

PREVIOUS PAGE: New Orleans is an unnatural disaster says 2011 AIFF Rogue Award honoree Harry Shearer in his documentary *The Big Uneasy*.

ABOVE: *Hood to Coast:* Relay teams get ready to conquer the world’s largest relay race, run from Mount Hood to the Oregon coast.

in the U.S. to receive a prestigious Academy grant. The festival was awarded \$17,500 to bring additional filmmakers, directors and producers to 2011 event.

The AIFF again will feature Oscar® nominated films in the documentary, short and animated categories in a rare opportunity to see these Academy-recognized films on a big screen.

Short films are a mainstay at the Ashland Independent Film Festival. More than half the films presented will be shorts including a full *Short Stories* section of films and a complete program featuring some of the world’s best animation, including the



The gripping real-life saga of a lioness, her cubs, water buffalo, and the rival pride — National Geographic's *The Last Lions*.

Oscar® nominated *Let's Pollute*. Two other 2011 AIFF films received Academy Award® nominations for best Live Action Short. The comedic *God of Love* follows the adventures of a lounge-singing darts champion, whose prayers are answered — literally — when he receives a package of passion-inducing darts. In *The Confession*, a sincere boy with a clean conscience worries about his first confession.

Harry Shearer

2011 AIFF Rogue Award honoree Harry Shearer is a comic personality who takes “hyphenate” to new levels. First and foremost an actor, he is also an author, director, satirist, musician, radio personality, playwright, multi-media artist and record label owner. He is the host of a one-hour satirical sandbox — his weekly *Le Show* — on JPR and National Public Radio. For 20 years he has enjoyed enormous success worldwide thanks to his voice work for *The Simpsons*. Shearer plays a stable of characters: most notably Mr. Burns, Smithers, Ned Flanders, Rev. Lovejoy and Scratchy. In the early 1980s, he and friends Michael McKean and Christopher Guest, along with director Rob Reiner, incubated an idea for a fake documentary about an aging heavy metal band. The resulting movie, *This is Spinal Tap*, became the granddaddy of the mockumentary genre and gave the world new insight into the concepts of spontaneously-combusting drummers and amps that go up to eleven.

Membership enhances the AIFF Experience.

Members of the AIFF have access to ticket pre-sale, the members-only line for first entry into the theatres, ticket discounts and more. Festival membership passes are now available at ashlandfilm.org.

Tickets are available to members beginning March 15 and to the general public March 20.

For more information visit ashlandfilm.org, [facebook.com/ashlandfilm](https://www.facebook.com/ashlandfilm), or call 541.488.3823

Shearer's other film collaborations with Guest include *A Mighty Wind* and *For Your Consideration*. In addition, he was a regular cast member of *Saturday Night Live* for many years.

Shearer is a New Orleans resident and his newest film, the “unnatural disaster” documentary *The Big Uneasy*, featured at the AIFF is the inside story of the flooding of the city during Hurricane Katrina. He wrote, directed and narrates the film and speaks to the on-scene investigators and a whistle-blower from the Army Corps of Engineers, revealing that the same flawed methods responsible for the levee failure are being used to rebuild the system to protect the new New Orleans. Actor John Goodman is featured in short segments highlighting local residents. Shearer says the film “serves

as a stark reminder that the same agency (The Army Corp of Engineers), that failed to protect New Orleans, still exists in other cities across America.”

Morgan Spurlock

Also being honored with a Rogue Award at this year's AIFF is Morgan Spurlock, best known for *Super Size Me*, which was nominated for an Academy Award® for Best Documentary Feature in 2005. For the project he ate three McDonald's meals a day every day (and nothing else) for 30 days. The end result was a diet with twice the calories recommended by the USDA. He was of above-average health and fitness when he started and by the end gained 25 pounds, suffered liver dysfunction and depression. With the film Spurlock displayed his irreverent sense of humor — proving he could be funny as he explored a serious subject. In each episode of his FX channel television series *30 Days*, Spurlock and his crew spend a month immersing themselves in a mode of life markedly different from their norm (being in prison, a devout Christian living in a Muslim family, a homophobe staying with a homosexual person, living on minimum wage, etc.)

Spurlock's *Where in the World is Osama Bin Laden?* premiered at the Sundance Film Festival in 2008. His newest work, *POM Wonderful Presents: The Greatest Movie Ever Sold*, featured there this year, examines the world of product placement, marketing and advertising by making a film entirely financed by them. Spurlock shared duties with four directors for the highly acclaimed documentary adaptation of the book *Freakonomics*.

Documentaries — Made In Oregon and Beyond

Everyone knows about the McDonald's coffee lawsuit. It has been routinely cited as an example of how citizens take advantage of America's legal system, but is that a fair rendition of the facts? For *Hot Coffee*, Ashland attorney Susan Saladoff put her career on hold to become a filmmaker and tell the story of the Albuquerque woman who spilled coffee on herself and sued McDonald's. Saladoff explores how and why the case garnered so much media attention, who funded the effort and to what end. For many Americans, the case has become emblematic of the frivolous lawsuits that clog our courts.

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Oscar® nominated documentary *Exit Through the Gift Shop* is the story of how an eccentric French shop keeper and amateur film maker attempted to locate and befriend “Banksy,” only to have the artist turn the camera back on its owner. The film contains footage of Banksy, Shephard Fairey, Invader and many of the world's most infamous graffiti artists at work.



In AIFF alum filmmaker Peter Richardson's Sundance Film Festival Grand Jury prize-winning documentary *How to Die In Oregon* Cody Curtis (left) is diagnosed with terminal liver cancer and considers physician assisted suicide.

Using this now-infamous legal battle as a springboard into investigating our civil-justice system, *Hot Coffee* exposes the way corporations have spent millions using this case to promote tort reform by following four people whose lives have been devastated by their inability to access the courts.

Ashland filmmakers (AIFF alum – *A Great Wonder: Lost Children of Sudan*) Kim Shelton and Bill McMillan's special screening of *The Welcome* documents a five day healing retreat for veterans and family members from wars in Iraq, Afghanistan and Vietnam. Filming follows them from the retreat at Buckhorn Springs Resort outside of Ashland to the culminating welcome home event at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival where the vets present vivid personal poetry to a sold out audience of the civilian community. The

retreat combines cleansing rituals, ancient stories about war and healing and the stark honesty necessary to understand the realities of the aftermath of war. What emerges is the poetry these men and women create about the truth of their lives, PTSD, friendship, disillusion and redemption. Finally, on



Ashland filmmaker and AIFF alum (*A Great Wonder: Lost Children of Sudan*) Kim Shelton's *The Welcome* documents a five day healing retreat for veterans and their public performance of their poetry at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival.

Memorial Day the vets travel to the Angus Bowmer Theatre where they present themselves and their poetry to the public. Through the sharing of their stories, they offer truth and humanity. *Welcome Home* provides an unusual answer to a vital national question: how can we truly bring our veterans home from war?

In 1994 Oregon became the first state to legalize physician-assisted suicide. AIFF alum filmmaker (*Clear Cut: The Story of Philomath, Oregon*) Peter Richardson's Sundance Film Festival Grand Jury prize-winning documentary *How to Die In Oregon* tells the stories of those most intimately involved with the practice today – terminally ill Oregonians, their families, doctors, and friends. The film introduces viewers to a number of Oregonians who are considering using the Death with Dignity law and the unique circumstances and situations that have led them to seek the option. The primary subject of the film, Cody Curtis hikes with friends and discusses giving away of her possessions. At 54 she is diagnosed with terminal liver cancer, given less than 6 months to live and has obtained her lethal prescription. She now must

decide whether and when to end her life by taking the medication. Volunteers from the advocacy organization Compassion and Choices are featured as well as the campaign for a similar law in Washington state.

Hood to Coast follows four unlikely teams on their epic journey to conquer the world's largest relay race, run from Mount Hood to the Oregon coast. The film captures the love, dedication, and insanity of the every day runner as well as the excitement, pain, and humor of the unprepared first time racer. Each year 1,000 teams (12,000 runners) cover 197 grueling miles of relay, putting themselves through an arduous physical and mental journey. Some run to test their limits, some to overcome personal obstacles, and others leap in blindly looking for a way to shake up a complacent life. In this celebratory look at motivation and attempting the extraordinary, four teams, from their preparations through the big event, prove that winning isn't everything.

AIFF alumni filmmaker (*Street Fight, Racing Dreams*) Marshall Curry's *If a Tree Falls: A Story of the Earth Liberation Front* captures the tension between political action and environmental beliefs. His reconstruction of the recent history and unraveling of the ELF is an exploration of a modern revolutionary movement. Combining concerns about ecological imbalance and unbridled capitalism, ELF members em-

ployed economic sabotage by destroying facilities involved in deforestation. Focusing on Oregon-based activist Daniel McGowan, Curry relates the tale of a mild-mannered, middle-class citizen driven to extremes and brought to trial on charges of terrorism for his participation in ELF-related plots. The film poses difficult questions about the possibility of effecting change in a world in which dissenters risk being labeled terrorists.

In 1896, the Hawaiian language was banned from public schools. The current resurgence of the language and culture is reflected in the spirit of a unique competition. *One Voice* chronicles the annual Kamehameha School Song Contest as 2000 high school students, directed by their peers, sing eight-part harmony in the Hawaiian language. Their preparation involves research and lengthy rehearsals, and competition among the classes is intense. AIFF alumni filmmaker Lisette Flannery (*Men of Hula, American Aloha*) follows student “song leaders” as they prepare for this cultural celebration.

What do *Casablanca*, *Blazing Saddles* and *West Side Story* have in common?

They have been deemed “culturally, historically or aesthetically significant” by the Library of Congress and listed in The National Film Registry, a roll call of American cinema treasures that reflects the diversity of film and the American experience. *These Amazing Shadows* focuses on this unique list of 525 films including selections from every genre - documentaries, home movies, Hollywood classics, avant-garde, newsreels and silent films. *These Amazing Shadows* shows us the importance of American films as “our family album.”

The AIFF will again present some of the best new feature film work available on the festival circuit.

In the film *Inuk*, a sixteen-year-old (Inuk) lives a troubled life in Greenland’s

capital. One morning, after pulling the half-frozen boy out of an abandoned car, the social services send him North, to a residential home on an island in the middle of the arctic sea-ice. Shortly after arriving, Inuk meets a local hunter who has his own share of problems – overcome by self-doubt and a haunted past, his extraordinary hunting skills are mysteriously disappearing. One morning, the home’s director asks the hunter to take Inuk on his annual seal-hunting trip so the boy can be exposed to ancestral traditions. She is certain that despite the risks of such a long and dangerous voyage, Inuk will undoubtedly learn that he has both a valiant past and a hopeful future. On an epic dogsled voyage, they face much more than the bitter cold and fragile sea-ice.

Family Programs

On Saturday and Sunday the festival will again present its popular program of short films for families. It is a mix of animation and documentary films that features post-film Q&A similar to other festival films.

National Geographic’s *The Last Lions*, suitable for children 10+, will also be featured at the festival. From the lush wetlands of Botswana this is a suspense-

filled tale of a determined lioness ready to try anything – and willing to risk everything – to keep her family alive. The gripping real-life saga of a lioness, her cubs, water buffalo, and the rival pride unfolds inside a stark re-

ality: Lions are vanishing from the wild. In the last 50 years, lion populations have plummeted from 450,000 to as few as 20,000. The filmmakers weave their dramatic storytelling and breathtaking, up-close footage around a resonating question: is this lioness and her young to be among the last lions? The film is narrated by Academy Award®-winning actor Jeremy Irons.

Free Local Programs

The AIFF will again offer *Locals Only*, free programs of works by local filmmakers. The Sunday morning *Locals* program will include the winners of *The Launch*, the festival’s Southern Oregon student competition.

The Ashland Independent Film Festival features question-and-answer sessions which follow many of the screenings and festival audiences also have the opportunity to rub elbows with filmmakers over a late-night drink at the afterLOUNGE hosted by The Black Sheep Pub and Restaurant.

The festival will also again feature free TALKback panel discussions with filmmakers of all genres discussing their craft at the Ashland Springs Hotel Friday, Saturday and Sunday morning. Guest moderators will lead the discussions and field audience questions.

A full schedule of festival films will be available by March 10 at www.ashlandfilm.org.



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In cooperation with the Ashland Independent Film Festival, Houston’s Custom Framing and Fine Art, 270 E. Main Street, Ashland, will present a retrospective of the ten years of the AIFF official poster art. Artists who have created original work for the festival, including Ashland’s Bruce Bayard will be guests at a gallery reception as part of the First Friday Artwalk, April 1. Posters and original art will be on display throughout the month.

LEFT: Art from Bruce Bayard’s 2009 AIFF poster.