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Athens International Film Festival to celebrate 45th year

By Heather Willard Messenger Staff Journalist Apr 7, 2018 Updated Apr 11, 2018



The Athens International Film and Video Festival will feature dozens of movies from April 9-15, including “The Turn Out” — a movie filmed in several Athens County locations.

Photo courtesy Pearl Gluck

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Organizers and cinephiles are gearing up for the 45th annual Athens International Film and Video Festival (AIFVF), set for April 9-15, with many screenings to take place at the Athena Cinema of films from over 60 countries.

AIFVF has been known to bring in crowds of movie buffs from across the world. David Colagiovanni, the festival’s director, said like previous years the 2018 festival will the same general format, but the films and content are entirely new. He says that the main draw is networking with international filmmakers as well as showcasing work from across the world.



“It’s amazing to present work to the community; it’s always positive to meet filmmakers that come from all over,” he said. “There’s a filmmaker coming from Iraq, and filmmakers from the U.K., Ireland, Australia, and we see their movies and we’re excited about their movies, but all the sudden they’re outside the theater, standing right there. It’s amazing to share their work with our audience and also share our town with them.”

This year, the festival will host special guest Laurie Anderson, whose virtual reality project “Chalk Room” will be displayed in the Ohio University GRID Lab for the public to view during limited hours the entire week except Thursday. Anderson will also perform her piece “All the Things I Lost in the Flood” on Wednesday, April 11. The multimedia performance focuses on a series of essays and images from Anderson’s new book with the same title.

While the film festival has a significant international perspective, several films in competition this year are related to local issues. One such film is “The Turn Out,” from director Pearl Gluck. The film focuses on the redemption of a drug-addicted truck driver who realizes he is an active participant in a sex-trafficking ring. The movie was filmed locally in Glouster, Chauncey and in Mineral Wells, West Virginia, and was inspired by real events. Several of the actors are local residents and have experienced some of these issues first-hand.

Gluck researched the story thoroughly, and worked with the Athens Police Department, Catch Court (an alternative court in Columbus), several trafficking survivors, Athens County Children Services, Ohio Rep. Teresa Fedor (D-Toledo) who helped push through the 2014 End Demand Act, and many others. The filmmaker says she was drawn to the issue of sex trafficking by a 2013 story of a Glouster teenager who was being used as a prostitute in exchange for money and drugs.

“It takes that larger term trafficking because they’re being used in exchange for something, and that’s what horrified me and drew me in,” Gluck explained.

When she was writing the film, Gluck was a professor at Ohio University's school of film and worked with OU students to help complete the project. One of the more significant choices she made for the film was to not portray any of the actual abuse. Gluck recalled a quote from her grandmother, a Holocaust survivor, who said in reference to movie depictions of the Holocaust that filmmakers were "killing us over and over on screen."

"Most of us want to know what happened and we need help visualizing the reality," Gluck said. "But her perspective changed mine, so I decided not to show any actual abuse and focus on the underlying causes and the effect. In this particular case, that was the poverty and lack of opportunity and lack of advocacy for children."

Gluck's film will be shown on April 11 at 5 p.m. and is entered into the competition component of the film festival.

This year, AIFVF is collaborating more with organizers of the Nelsonville Music Festival. Together, this group has planned film festival "after-parties" for six nights of the week. Each will be held in a different Athens location, many of which are sponsors of the festival. Colagiovanni said that in past years organizers have "dabbled in" after-parties, but this is the first year to offer them for most of the week.

"We realized that it's a great way to provide extra content during the week," Colagiovanni said. "It'll be a place for festival-goers to discover our town and explore after hours."

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