

Written by Mark Shaffer

Tuesday, 07 February 2017 18:01



The Class of '17 Hits a Highwater Mark for Diversity and Talent

By Mark Shaffer

"If my film makes one more person miserable, I've done my job." – Woody Allen

It's a Lowcountry Weekly film festival tradition to reach out to a group of attending filmmakers, get the story behind their films and find out why the Beaufort International Film Festival is such a draw. It's also a pretty good way to take the pulse of the fest before a single frame of film hits the screen. The class of 2017 may be the most diverse so far. They're represented here by a half dozen filmmakers, all of whom will personally present the South Carolina premier of their work at BIFF.

From the Feature Film category Writer/Director/Producer **Shawn Tolleson** brings her second feature *Saturn Returns* to BIFF. Tolleson, who splits time between L.A. and Vancouver, is an alumna of the University of North Carolina School of the Arts and among the vanguard of a 2017 class strongly represented by women on both sides of the camera (

[See 'BIFF's Year of the Woman](#)

."

)

Wally Marzano-Lesnevich writes, produces and acts in *Almost Paris*, directed by Domenica Cameron-Scorsese (yes, *that* Scorsese) and starring a cast of familiar faces including up-and-comer Abigail Hawk, better known as Lt. Baker on CBS' *Blue Bloods*.

Directors **Tommy Faircloth** and **Thomas Torrey** are both South Carolina based. Faircloth works out of Columbia while Torrey calls Fort Mill home. Faircloth's *Family Possessions* suggests that "some family secrets should remain buried." The plot of Torrey's tense *Fare* centers on a driver for hire who finds himself driving the man who he believes is having an affair with his wife.

From the Short Film category **Ilana Guibert** writes, produces, directs and stars in *Twice Upon a Time*

which is based in part on her experiences as a 9/11 widow. And finally, BIFF and local bartender favorite

Felix Martiz

returns (above, with partner Xiomara Castro).

In 2012 Martiz flew back to L.A. with Best Feature and Best Actor trophies for his inventive *Santiago*

, an exercise in guerilla filmmaking. This time out he brings the short

Mia

, "a fresh retelling of an old Mexican folktale, La Llorona (The Weeping Woman)."

FADE IN:

First time attendees, how did you find out about BIFF?

Tolleson: I did a lot of research on festivals, aiming to identify the ones that might be a fit for my film. I went to the University of North Carolina School of the Arts, so festivals in the Carolinas were a target of mine. I reached out to Ron with an email that included the trailer for my film, asking if he thought it would be a fit for BIFF, and he replied positively!

Torrey: As a southeastern filmmaker and South Carolina resident, BIFF has floated around the periphery of my radar for a few years. But I didn't become fully aware of all that BIFF had to offer until my friend and colleague Evan Vetter told me that I had to apply. Evan is a festival alum and said it was one of the highlights of his own film's most recent festival run.

Marzano-Lesnevich: We were lucky enough to play the Big River Film Festival in Savannah, GA, where we won Best First Time Feature Director and our team met the wonderful Rebecca & Ron Tucker at the awards reception.

Guibert: I found out about the Beaufort International Film Festival through a search on FilmFreeway and via word of mouth.

Faircloth: I met Ron and Rebecca at a small film festival, South Carolina Underground Film Festival, in Charleston in 2015 and they told me about their festival. I had already heard about it before, but doing mainly horror films. I had never submitted a project to BIFF before. I usually stick to genre festivals but after meeting them, I decided to take a chance.

So Felix, how many BIFFs is this and what keeps you coming back?

Martiz: This will be the third time and definitely not the last. I'm a huge fan of the festival and all the wonderful people that make Beaufort the special place it is. Beaufort is a beautiful town with a wealth of history and a unique spirit. We return for the southern hospitality and the art loving people who come out every year to support our independent films, which we are proud to share with everyone here. Ron and Rebeca have truly created something special for us filmmakers to look forward to every year... I definitely do.

You're traveling from near and far. Why go to all the trouble to attend our little soiree?

Guibert: After hearing such nice feedback from other filmmakers who attended BIFF in the past I knew I wanted in.

Torrey: [It's] an easy drive for me. "Fare" was shot in Charlotte and Fort Mill, and while our BIFF screening is our final stop on our festival tour before our worldwide release, it happens to be the first screening in South Carolina. We couldn't miss the chance to be present at our hometown premiere.

Martiz: The intimate setting allows for a personal experience during the festival. We love the attention, and have made some incredible lasting friendships and great memories over the years. Beaufort is an awesome town with an amazing festival that's on our minds year round.



Tolleson (left, standing): First off, I feel really supported by Ron. He personally called me to invite me to the festival and to share that the film and I had been nominated for awards. The personal touch goes a long way. Also, he talked about how well supported the festival is by the community. This goes a long way for a filmmaker. I want to come to a festival where there's an audience for my film!

Written by Mark Shaffer

Tuesday, 07 February 2017 18:01

Faircloth: I've been all over the country to festivals of all sizes. Once we found out we were accepted, it was very important to attend to not only support the film but also the film festival. As a SC filmmaker, I want any film projects and festivals in my home state to be successful. Since I was lucky enough to be chosen as an official selection, there was no way I was going to miss it. Almost my entire cast is attending as well. It's also super important to support other filmmakers too, so I want to catch as many of the films as I can.

Marzano-Lesnevich: We were fortunate enough to be nominated for a variety of awards, including Best Picture, Best Director, Best Actress and Best Actor (twice!), so we wanted to make sure we were represented. Also [I've] heard terrific things from [festival alums] V.W. Scheich and Gary Weeks. Plus, that famous Southern hospitality!

Put some butts in seats for your screening.

Martiz: *Mia* is a psychological drama about a woman's decent into madness after being unable to cope with the loss of her daughter. She calls upon the souls of dead children in the hopes of seeing her daughter once again. This is a unique and fresh retelling of an old Mexican folktale *La Llorona* (The Weeping Woman).

Faircloth: *Family Possessions* is a paranormal type of horror film with a lot of elements from



the late 70's, early 80's horror films. The story centers around a family moving into the house of a deceased relative and once inside, they discover they may have inherited more than just the house. It will make you JUMP out of your seat!

Torrey: *Fare* is a feature-length thriller set entirely inside a moving car. It's a dark exploration of marriage and betrayal and follows an Uber driver who finds himself driving the man who is secretly sleeping with his wife.

Marzano-Lesnevich: *Almost Paris*, which premiered at the prestigious Tribeca Film Festival, tells the personal side of the financial crisis. Directed by Domenica Cameron-Scorsese (daughter of the legendary filmmaker), the film's set in the wake of the mortgage-lending crisis, when a former banker returns to his hometown. Faced with his family and childhood friends and seeing the impact of his actions, our hero learns to give back to those he loves in ways that are priceless. Plus, there'll be a Q&A afterwards with myself and Ms. Abigail Hawk.

Tolleson: *Saturn Returns* is the story of 5 college friends who reunite in Mammoth Lakes, California for a wedding of two of their group. Thirty-six hours before the wedding the missing sixth friend of their group shows up uninvited and unexpected. He is also the former best friend of the groom and ex-boyfriend of the bride.

All are about to turn 30, which in astrological terms is their first Saturn return. Saturn represents big life decisions—life partner, life purpose, career and the like. As a filmmaker, I find this time in a person's life to be really rich. And so this is a touchstone for the film, and hopefully something that many in the audience can relate to. The film is also a love-letter to Mammoth Lakes and the Eastern Sierras, best known as Ansel Adams favorite place to photograph. The Eastern Sierras are a character in the movie, which has the effect of taking the audience on a journey as they watch the film.

Tell us about the cast.

BIFF 2017: Meet the Filmmakers

Written by Mark Shaffer

Tuesday, 07 February 2017 18:01



Mark Shaffer is a writer and producer. He has written and produced several films, including "The Last Days of the American Republic" and "The Last Days of the American Republic". He is currently working on a new film, "The Last Days of the American Republic".



Mark Shaffer is a writer and producer. He has written and produced several films, including "The Last Days of the American Republic" and "The Last Days of the American Republic". He is currently working on a new film, "The Last Days of the American Republic".



Mark Shaffer is a writer and producer. He has written and produced several films, including "The Last Days of the American Republic" and "The Last Days of the American Republic". He is currently working on a new film, "The Last Days of the American Republic".

BIFF 2017: Meet the Filmmakers

Written by Mark Shaffer

Tuesday, 07 February 2017 18:01



Buy tickets and more at www.beaumontfestival.com