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What Films Make the Cut?

By Kim Skene, Program Coordinator, Tom Thomson Art Gallery



Still from: *Chasing Ice*

Roger Ebert gave it three-and-a-half stars. Leonard Maltin thought it was one of the season's best. It scored 82% on the Tomato Meter and 7.3 at IMDB. Idiewire's group gave it a B+. And Aunt June saw it in the city and loved it. But is this film worthy of Gallery Night at the Movies or Owen Sound's Reel Festival?

The Tom Thomson Art Gallery presents Gallery Night at the Movies monthly from September to May at Galaxy Cinemas in Owen Sound. Owen Sound's Reel Festival is an annual weekend festival taking place this March at the historic Roxy Theatre. As programmer for both of these film series I am responsible for selecting film for more than 4000 area movie-goers. Answering to an audience of very engaged and film-savvy patrons is always challenging.

My quest for great movies starts early in the year as the first in a series of festivals like Sundance, and then Cannes, begin announcing their competition entries and schedules. We have a very active volunteer committee for the movie series who help fine-tune the short-list of potential films. I regularly consult with a number of area cinephiles, and receive numerous emails, phone messages, review clippings and even shouts from across the street, that all make great movie recommendations.

I am in constant contact with our programmer at Film Circuit, a division of the Toronto International Film Festival Group, who is familiar with our demographic, has seen most of the films, and gets regular feedback as to which movies are showing well throughout the Film Circuit family of presenters. From the many dozens of films available to us through Film Circuit, our programmer makes informed recommendations. Daily reviews come across my desk, my kitchen table, my various screens. I watch, and share, hours and hours of movie trailers and excerpted clips weekly. Sometimes, if I am very lucky I get to preview films at TIFF or Cinéfest.

The selection process gets tough this time of year. Post-holiday and into awards season, film releases are broadened or extended as distributors serve up their contenders *for your consideration*, wreaking havoc with film availability and DVD release schedules. We have a wonderful, fully digital 7-screen Cineplex Galaxy Theatre in town playing wide releases. The many on-demand services have earlier and

newer releases all the time and home theatre systems are ever bigger and better; sometimes “going to the movies” may seem redundant. Often in one season of cinema, several great films come out dealing with similar topics or storylines. Which to choose? *Amour* or *A Song for Marion*. *Chasing Ice* or *Revolution*? *Inch’Allah* or *Barbara*? Programming a great line-up is no meagre task. A variety of genre, style and topic must accompany excellence in direction, performance and cinematography.

So, what makes the cut? We strive to include in the Gallery’s film presentations the very best in alternative, foreign and Canadian film which would otherwise not come to our region, and I think we have some great features coming up. *Stories We Tell* by Sarah Polley just received the Toronto Film Critics Association’s Rogers Best Canadian Film Award. It is genre-bending and thought-provoking. Acting legend Dustin Hoffman’s directorial debut *Quartet*, (featuring an ensemble of veteran British actors including Maggie Smith and Billy Connolly) continues to delight audiences but has limited release in smaller markets like ours – so, we are bringing it in. Hot Docs People’s Choice winner *Chasing Ice* is one of our confirmations for the Reel Festival, as is the internationally-acclaimed German film *Barbara*. Yes, selecting films for two successful and well established programs is a daunting task – and I embrace the challenge. But keep those suggestions coming!