



All photos courtesy of Centre Film Festival

Centre Film Festival fosters community, economic development in sixth year



Of the movies produced around the world, only a small percentage ever make it to a streaming platform or the movie theater. The others, produced without the backing of a major production company, are known as independent, or “indie,” films. These films—ranging from films by first-timers on the movie scene to films up for Oscars—are promoted by public screening events like the Centre Film Festival.

The brainchild of Pearl Gluck, associate professor of film production at Penn State, and the late Curt Chandler, the Centre Film Festival first aired twenty-five films over a weekend at the Rowland Theatre in Philipsburg in 2019. Now in its sixth year, the festival has expanded to a sprawling, weeklong community effort involving students, local filmmakers and artists, community members, businesses, and out-of-towners.

“Film festivals are a way to connect to people in the community and to see how your film speaks specifically to that [geographic] area,” says Gluck, who oversees the festival as its artistic director. “We’re at a time now where I think it’s extremely important to make sure all parts of the U.S. have voices. It’s one thing to show your films at L.A. or New York or Toronto, and it’s another to bring it here, where it’s less known or popular to see indie films.”

On November 11-17, the Centre Film Festival will screen 100 films in several categories, including narrative features, documentaries, short films, undergraduate and graduate student-produced films, high school student-produced shorts, Pennsylvania-produced films, and kid-friendly films. The festival typically accepts 100 projects from about 700 submissions; the accepted projects

are chosen by a juried selection committee.

During the weekdays (November 11-14), films will air at The State Theatre in downtown State College. On Friday and Saturday (November 13-14), the festival will move to the Rowland Theatre in Philipsburg. Kid-friendly films will air on Nov. 17 at Tempest Studios, a performing arts school and venue in downtown State College.

A BUS TO PHILIPSBURG

For Philipsburg, where the festival first took root, the impact is tangible, says Rebecca Inlow, a board member for the Rowland Theatre and author of *The Rowland Story*, a history of the theater.

“It’s a whirlwind of activity,” she says. “We don’t get a lot of sleep that weekend.”

The festival draws visitors from out of state, Inlow says—people who would usually not have a reason to visit Philipsburg or the Rowland. But the festival draws locals, too, with room to grow: the theater can seat 1,000, and it has not sold out during festival weekend.

“It’s good for Philipsburg, because visitors are also coming into Philipsburg’s businesses,” Inlow says. “Then for the local people, it brings the arts to town that they normally wouldn’t have a chance to experience. They can attend these movies and actually hear the actors and directors talk afterward.”

There is a learning curve for some local movie-goers, Inlow explains, because the movies screened at the film festival have not made a theatrical release. Throughout the year, the Rowland shows popular first-run movies, much like the theater multiplexes in State College do.

“Local residents tend to want to go to a movie

they’ve heard of, and we’re always trying to get the word out that these are the movies that you haven’t heard of yet,” Inlow says. “These are the movies that are going to get there.”

Sponsored by Penn State Student Affairs and film festival funds, Penn State students can hop on a shuttle bus from the HUB to the Rowland Theatre to attend the festival. Admission to the festival is free for students.

“It’s always really fun to see a Fullington bus pull up in front of the theater,” Inlow says. “It’s an exciting thing in downtown Philipsburg because you just say, look, we have something going on here that people are being bused in for. Yeah, that’s great.”

A GROUNDED EXPERIENCE

For a filmmaker, the festival offers a space to make connections with other industry professionals, according to Spanish filmmaker Àlex Lora, whose feature film *Unicorns* aired at last year’s Centre Film Festival.



“The festival stands out for its focus on community and personal connections,” Lora says. “Unlike larger, more commercial festivals, this one feels more grounded and accessible. The organizers make a genuine effort to ensure that every filmmaker feels valued, which is not always the case at bigger festivals. The local community’s involvement adds a special touch, making it a festival that celebrates both film and the region’s culture.”

For Lora, meeting J.J. Abrams, who attended last year’s festival, fulfilled a personal dream. Abrams is an American filmmaker known for *Armageddon* (1998), *Star Trek* (2009), *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* (2015) and *Star Wars: The Rise of Skywalker* (2019). Abrams’ father, Gerry Abrams, a famous film and television producer and Penn State alumnus, accepted a Lifetime Achievement Award at last year’s festival.

THE CENTRE FILM FESTIVAL

November 11-17

-Screenings at the Rowland Theatre in Philipsburg, and The State Theatre and Tempest Studios in State College

-Tickets are free for students; other ticket prices to be determined

-The full film schedule and a link to purchase tickets will be available at centrefilm.org

[f](https://www.facebook.com/centrefilm) [i](https://www.instagram.com/centrefilm) [t](https://www.tiktok.com/@centrefilm) centrefilm

The festival will screen 100 films. Short films whose directors will be present include:



-*The Masterpiece* (Spain; 2024), Sundance Film Festival Best Short winner, directed by Centre Film Festival alum Àlex Lora



-*We Should Eat* (USA; 2024) directed by Centre Film Festival alum and award-winner Shaina Feinberg, featuring Tovah Feldshuh, Joel de la Fluent, and Jackie Hoffman



-*Cut Me if You Can* (USA; 2024) a thrills-and-chills title directed by Nicolas Polixene and Sylvain Loubet dit Gajol, which has screened at festivals such as Woodstock and Clermont Ferrand

October 2024 Town&Gown 47





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"SOVIET FINGERPRINTS, THE SECOND LIFE OF SOCIALIST CARS"
BY ILKAY UNAY GAILHARD
August 30 - October 27
First Sunday Opening Reception, September 1 and October 6

An automobile symbolizes many personal desires: **FREEDOM, ADVENTURE, STATUS, MOBILITY.**

In the context of the Soviet Union, in contrast to the collective ideology, the desire for a private mobile space gave Soviet Cars a life of their own: **VOLGAS, LADAS, MOSKVICHES, ZHIGULIS...**

Nowadays, these old, tired cars living their second life under Capitalist systems in many post-Soviet states: **ARMENIA, AZERBAIJAN, GEORGIA, KAZAKHSTAN, UKRAINE, UZBEKISTAN...**

SOVIET'S FINGERPRINTS project paints the portrait of Soviet automobiles in their second life, with themes of humor & life, and overloaded dreams of profit.



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Lora's short film *The Masterpiece* won best short at the 2024 Sundance Film Festival and was selected to air at this year's Centre Film Festival. Addressing themes of poverty, nature, immigration and identity, the film follows a wealthy couple who form a relationship with two immigrant scrap dealers after they meet at a recycling center.

Lora will return to the festival this year to introduce *The Masterpiece* to local audiences.

"I was struck by the friendliness of the people and the beauty of the surrounding area, especially in the fall," Lora says. "The vibrant college-town vibe provided the perfect backdrop for the festival, a great setting for creative inspiration and relaxation."


AN ECONOMIC BOOST

Beyond famous producer sightings, the film festival has become a platform for economic development in Centre County, according to Fritz Smith, president and CEO of The Happy Valley Adventure Bureau, and Pablo Lopez, film production manager of HVAB.


"Having the Centre Film Fest come here every autumn to celebrate film and showcase the industry to students and the local



Black Barbie was among the documentaries screened at the 2023 festival.



Penn State alumnus Gerry Abrams received a Lifetime Achievement Award at the 2023 festival.



community has slowly built more enthusiasm for film in the area," Lopez says. "It has boosted the morale of local film freelancers and small production teams."

Lopez notes that the potential for job opportunities in filmmaking has led Penn State students to stay in Happy Valley after they graduate, as well as for alumni in the industry to return.

"We want to take the film festival, combine it with the existence of the film school at Penn State, and then combine that with our history, great architecture, and beautiful agricultural scenery—as well as emphasize that it's a less expensive venue to do film production here," Smith says.

HVAB provided the film festival with two Centre County tourism grants—one for \$25,000 in 2023-24 and another for \$30,000 in 2024-25. In addition to providing grants and marketing, HVAB

has served as a resource to filmmakers seeking to start productions in Happy Valley, even providing help with site selection for filming.

Smith and Lopez point out that it's not just producers who make a film possible, but other types of workers as well, which can bolster a local economy.

"Something that's great about the film industry is that so many industries work within it to make it what it is," Lopez says. "Having students right here to help with any volunteering and production assistant work, having local businesses and communities work with catering, construction, art, and set decoration—all those industries work and coalesce together and collaborate." **T&G**


Mariah Lucas is a freelance reporter living in Bellefonte.

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