

Spotlight shines on Tally Shorts Film Festival

Amanda Sieradzki
Council on Culture & Arts

Like many great inventions of the imagination, the Tally Shorts Film Festival was born in a garage.

Conspiring alongside six other Tallahassee film visionaries, Mark Bauer wanted to increase the odds for independent filmmakers to have their work spotlighted, so as not be lost in the deluge of media prevalent in today's market. Short films especially get the short-end of the stick, a disadvantage as it's the place where Bauer says many filmmakers "cut their teeth."

The first year they launched the festival, it was a grassroots effort and free to attend. Six years later, Bauer says the festival continues to grow in both audience and submissions, showing short films from all over the world, and will premiere its sixth season Jan. 26 and 27 at the Challenger Learning Center.

"Last year we had Phillip Middleton visit us from Australia, and filmmakers from Finland and Iraq come and represent their films," says Bauer, who is also proud of the local talent that is part of the festival as well. "You find that the goal of all filmmakers is to get as many people to watch a film as they can. We wanted to bring that to Tallahassee with short films and give them an avenue to show their stuff."

Before he was a filmmaker, Bauer first honed his artistic skills in the realm of fine arts. Both of his parents were artists in their own right, and he was inclined to follow a similar path. He credits his high school art teacher, Mr. Stuber, for imparting to him the importance of composition. Those foundations are something he still carries with him when envisioning his short films.

Before earning his bachelor's in studio art at Florida State University, Bauer found a mentor in Tallahassee Community College professor Carlos Miranda. He and Miranda still keep in close contact, as both are founding members of the Tally Shorts Film Festival. Enrolling



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in a video course in college first introduced Bauer to the idea of pursuing film. He remembers making his first film about a chess match but laughs as he recalls it.

"It was fun, but I'm sure if I opened it up now I would cringe," says Bauer. "All artists go through that journey with their early work."

Working in editing, animation, graphic design, and freelance, Bauer's experience spans every realm of film and video production. One of the most important lessons he's learned in the field is to not overlook pre-production.

Before getting a camera rolling, he stresses how pre-planning each step of the process meticulously will save time in the long run. He sees production itself as being the most fun as you feel you're accomplishing something each day, whereas post-production can be more of a nail-biter.

"That's when you assemble the pieces and see it all come together," says Bauer. "It's pretty nerve-racking because it could have all gone wrong or you might have captured lightning in a bottle."

Bauer has been a professional and hobbyist independent filmmaker for 15 years. He looks up to directors like the Cohen Brothers, David Fincher, and Mark Romanek, who all contain a sense of mystery and foreboding in their styles.

"I always look for a good story and a good script because it doesn't matter how slick your visuals are, if it doesn't have a good story it's not going to work," says Bauer, who served as Programming Director for Tally Shorts for five years. "When we are watching the films, we have a group of 20 people rate it for story, technical ability, and overall entertainment value. If it has a weak story that is the fastest thing that will prevent it from being chosen."

He captured the concept for his short film "Lucky Break" in 2010. The quirky tale of a fortune cookie that could predict the future follows along the lines of shows like "The Twilight Zone" and "Black Mirror," both favorites of Bauer, and won awards at the Florida Panhandle Film Festival, Synerfest Film Festival, and the Black Hills Film Festival.

He's most proud of his recent short

If you go

What: Sixth Annual Tally Shorts Film Festival

When: 6-11 p.m. on Friday, Jan. 26 and 10 a.m.-11 p.m. on Saturday, Jan. 27

Where: Challenger Learning Center, 200 S. Duval St.

Cost: Individual tickets \$6 at the door, all-inclusive passes \$22. Discounts are available for 55+, film society members, and students with valid photo I.D.

Contact: For more information, call 850-321-9390 or visit <http://tallyshorts.com/>.

film, however, "Specimen 0625c" which follows a girl who is abducted by aliens and must run like a lab rat in a maze with a complete stranger. Bauer crafted an eerie plot to keep audiences guessing, and was grateful to have found a dedicated crew — another scarce resource in the world of short film.

As Marketing Director of this year's Tally Shorts Film Festival, Bauer is most looking forward to seeing the films for the first time as an attendee. He says the opening night block of films is perfect for anyone looking to get a taste of the best of Tally Shorts, as it will feature a film from every genre.

On Saturday, a kid-friendly block will kick off the day, and later a meet and greet with professionals from all different parts of filmmaking, writing, production, costume design, will provide an opportunity for networking.

Introducing a new element to the weekend, Bauer is also excited for the Friday education panel on "The Importance of Short Film," which will bring together expert and visiting filmmakers to discuss the impact short films can have.

"If you can tell a really convincing story in 25 minutes or less then you've got what it takes," states Bauer, whose advice to budding filmmakers is as succinct as his films. "Keep it short."