

Wisconsin Film Festival a treat for all due to hard work and dedication

By: Kevin Slane / The Daily Cardinal - April 2, 2009

Director Meg Hamel talks about the history of the Festival, and the work that goes into preparing it

Today marks the beginning of the Wisconsin Film Festival, four days and nights worth of wonderful, yet obscure films that would normally not reach a wide audience. Established in 1999, the festival was actually originally conceived by the Wisconsin Board of Tourism as a way to attract film buffs to the campus. In the process, the state contacted the two major film groups, the Wisconsin Union Directorate (WUD) Film Committee and the UW Cinematheque. Although the first film festival was a bit of a logistical mess, the films were still shown, and a tradition was born.

A festival of such scale certainly can't function without a group of hard-working individuals. Meg Hamel, the director of the festival, has worked tirelessly almost year-round to select the films that will screen for the audience. In terms of picking films, Hamel has a few different criteria. "We first look for a lot of Wisconsin-made films because we want to include a local flavor," Hamel said. Several prominent Wisconsin-made films will be shown, and many of their directors will attend the screenings to discuss the movies.

Additionally, Hamel mentioned films are often selected to fit a package. "We have a series of films from Korea that we're running in conjunction with the center of East Asian studies," Hamel said. "So we decided this would be a good thing to do so I went out specifically looking for Korean films."

Hamel also looks for films that have won awards, feature up-and-coming directors and are representative of film today. According to Hamel, the main goal is to find a "good balance between documentaries, experimental, avant garde and other film styles," and make sure the audience is represented.

Watching thousands of movies each year may sound like a dream job to some, but Hamel cautions it isn't easy. "I joke that it's like being the ice cream taster at the ice cream factory," Hamel said with a grin. "When you hear someone does that you think 'oh cool!, you get ice cream all the time!' But what they have to deal with is whether there's a bad batch, or one that doesn't taste good all the time, and it can be difficult at times."

Although many students may show enthusiasm for attending the festival, many may either find the prices too prohibitive, or believe that all the films are sold out in advance. Hamel promises this isn't the case. "The ticket price for students only 4 bucks, and if students buy tickets in advance, the price gets even lower" Don't want to get tied into purchasing tickets at the box office or online? "If you're buying tickets at the theater, the price is still only 4 bucks a pop, and that's at least half the cost of a regular movie," Hamel said. So no matter what, there's really no excuse to miss out on this unique opportunity to view some obscure yet amazing films.

The Wisconsin Film Festival runs from today until Sunday night. Any information about locations, showtimes or general information can be found at <http://www.wifilmfest.com>
