

# LC\* FILM FEST

LAS CRUCES INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL



# PROGRAM

LAS CRUCES, NM # APRIL 8TH - 12TH 2026



# 828

# PRODUCTIONS

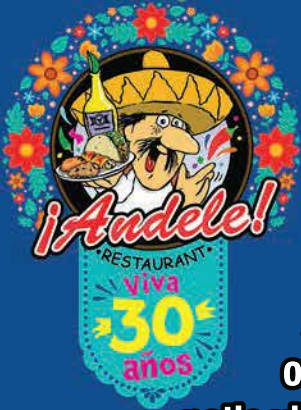
## HIRING ALL POSITIONS

- Production
- Post-production
- Animation
- AI
- Back Office

[info@828productions.com](mailto:info@828productions.com)

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Founder / Executive  
Director



**KYLE IVY**  
Marketing &  
Communications Director



**NATALIE STREANDER**  
Artistic Director



**ALFONSO LOYA**  
Technical Director



**MATTEO ISQUIERDO**  
Operations Manager

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**Andrew Jara, Film Las Cruces**

**Erin Johnson, Allen Theatres**

**Laura Spamer**

**Marianne Willis**

## LCIFF FILM FEST SPRING 2026 CLASS

**Celso Acosta**

**Deja Boyd**

**Victor Adame**

**Julainne Escalera-Diaz**

**Ben Flores**

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**Sebastian Garcia**

**Angie Hernandez**

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**Nathan Lindley**

**Jerzi Martinez**

**Noberto Olmos**

**Giselle Palmas**

**Cisco Trevinio**

**Barrow Williams**

**Nathan Willis**



# DEAR FILM FANS, FILM LOVERS, AND FILM ENTHUSIASTS

On behalf of the entire Las Cruces International Film Festival team, I am delighted to extend a heartfelt welcome to all of you!

This year marks our 11th anniversary—a remarkable milestone that would not have been achievable without the steadfast support of the Las Cruces community, New Mexico State University, our generous sponsors, and film lovers like you. This year we're proud to present our biggest and best slate of films and guests ever. 168 films from 40 different countries, alongside 24 invited guests, including esteemed actor Michael Rooker, the incomparable Steve Zahn, Academy Award nominee Bruce Davison, scream queen Kimberly Beck, and superstar filmmaker Shane Black, among many other distinguished industry professionals.

As the largest student-run film festival in the nation, we take immense pride in the platform we provide for indie filmmakers to share their unique voices and connect with audiences. The LCIFF serves as both an educational environment and a premier film festival. Our Creative Media Institute students from NMSU

make this festival go, taking on roles in programming, marketing, celebrity coordination, theater management, film projection, and organizing VIP parties. Over the past 11 years, more than 700 CMI students have contributed to the festival, and many have embarked on successful careers in the entertainment industry.

This year's festival promises to be an unforgettable event, featuring a diverse array of films from around the globe, engaging workshops, panels, celebrity guests, and, of course, fantastic VIP parties.

As a filmmaker, I can confidently say that there is no other film festival in the world that is as welcoming and supportive of cinematic storytellers as the LCIFF.

We invite you to join us in celebrating the magic of cinema and discovering the next generation of filmmaking talent.

Warm regards,

**Ross Marks**

Executive Director & Founder  
Las Cruces International Film Festival

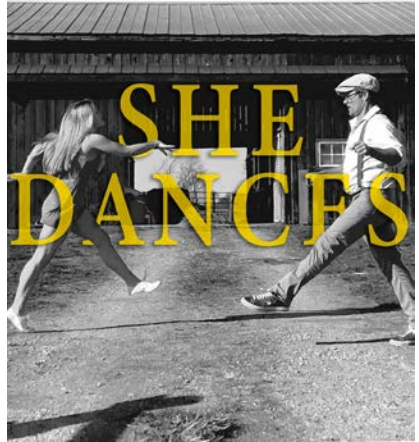
# OPENING NIGHT FILM

## SHE DANCES



Starring Steve Zahn  
opens 11th Annual  
Las Cruces International  
Film Festival

STEVE ZAHN AUDREY ZAHN ETHAN HAWKE MACKENZIE ZIEGLER



The Las Cruces International Film Festival is thrilled to announce that the much anticipated film "She Dances," featuring acclaimed actor Steve Zahn, will serve as the Opening Night Film for this year's celebration on April 8, 2026. Join us for an extraordinary evening of cinema with the film's star, Steve Zahn, in attendance for a special Q&A session following the screening.

"She Dances" is a heartfelt exploration of love, loss, and the transformative power of dance, weaving together the stories of four parallel lives linked by the rhythm of music and movement.

Directed by talented filmmaker Rick Gomez from a screenplay by Zahn and Gomez, the film captivates with its stunning visuals, emotional depth, and a remarkable performance by Zahn, who takes on the role of Jason, a struggling father seeking redemption and connection through the art he loves.

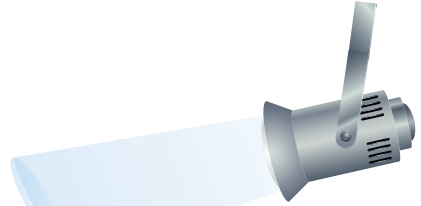
The film also features Ethan Hawke and Audrey Zahn giving a, "fantastic debut performance."

"Opening the festival with 'She Dances' is an honor and having Steve Zahn join us adds a very special touch to our event," said Ross Marks, LCIFF founder and executive director. "This film speaks to the universal themes of hope and resilience, making it the perfect choice to launch our 11th annual celebration of independent cinema. We believe that 'She Dances' will resonate strongly with audiences, especially amid the vibrant atmosphere of the Las Cruces International Film Festival. We are excited to share this story and connect with fans of cinema."

Join the LCIFF on April 8 at 6:30 p.m. at the Allen Theaters Cineport for an enchanting evening dedicated to the art of storytelling through film. Tickets for the Opening Night Screening of "She Dances" are available at [www.lascrucesfilmfest.com](http://www.lascrucesfilmfest.com).



## NARRATIVE SHORTS



### A Reflection Of You

Enrico Natale

A young boy and his mother flee Iran after the death of his father by the hands of the Iranian Government. Now all grown up, Amir has a dilemma: follow his dreams or continue his life of crime that supports his mother.

### Don't Fuck with BA

Sally Tran

A rag tag group of femmes in the depths of Chinatown band together, battling a rival gang to protect their community.

### Roger is a Serial Killer

Don Swaynos

A podcaster implicates her stepfather in a series of unsolved murders, which makes for a compelling show but an awkward family reunion.

### The Color of Sky

Cristal Gonzalez Avila

The hope that lingers in the farewell.

### Video Barn

Bianca Poletti

In Kennedy, best friends Hannah and Julie spend their last summer nights at the town's fading video store, Video Barn, obsessing over cult horror films. One night, Julie finds a mysterious VHS labeled "Just press play!" and vanishes after watching it. Days later, Hannah, consumed by guilt, plays the tape and is horrified to see Julie trapped inside the TV, stuck in a nightmare of twisted nostalgia. To save her, Hannah must uncover the dark secret of the tapes. Video Barn is a tribute to 80s films, blending surreal horror, friendship, and the unknown. Will Hannah rescue Julie or share her fate?

### Somebody Cares

Julien Lasseur

A deadbeat brother finally finds compassion from his grumpy sister moments before being catapulted through the air by a 4-wheel drive Bronco.

### Crash Site

Jason Sperling

Crash Site follows two hikers who stumble upon what appears to be a plane crash, only to discover something far more mysterious. When curiosity compels them to investigate, they unwittingly set in motion events that will force them into a desperate race to understand what they've found before it's too late. Through minimal dialogue and atmospheric storytelling, the film builds mounting tension toward a revelation that changes everything.

### Full Tank

Jonathan Williams

A getaway driver must wait three minutes for a gang of burglars to return to his car before making their escape.

There's just one problem... he's absolutely desperate for a piss.

### Vermin

Ryan Riddle

Greg Tanner, an ultra-conservative political commentator, must deal with some uninvited guests while he records and edits his latest piece of homemade propaganda.

### Cherry-Colored Funk

Chelsie Pennello

A serial grifter faces the music when seemingly everyone he's ever wronged shows up on the opening day of his dubious Italian ice business.

### Better Now

Levi Elizaga

Mercedes, a social media mental health influencer, is signing off. That's right. While eternally grateful to her followers for their support through difficult times, she doesn't need to journal or share her story online anymore. She is better now. But when Mercedes closes her laptop, we see the truth. She is a mess, haunted by dark creatures that twist and turn and present her with a choice... two journals... one is a journal from the past and one is blank, with a lock on the cover. Through encounters with these entities, Mercedes discovers she is the key to her own happiness... but does she have the courage to unlock it?

## NARRATIVE SHORTS CON'T

### The Orange at the Seder

Jacob Combs

When Adam brings his first-ever girlfriend to his beloved mentor's annual queer, all-male Passover seder, he must come out of the closet all over again—putting his relationship with his chosen family in jeopardy.

### Cherry-Colored Funk

Chelsie Pennello

A serial grifter faces the music when seemingly everyone he's ever wronged shows up on the opening day of his dubious Italian ice business.

### Sunkiss

Dice Rose

Teenage best girl friends decide to go on a dangerous joyride with two older men, and their lives are changed forever. Alex and Sofia are young girls discovering their sexual identities. Sofia gets bored and wants to go looking for trouble. They meet up with some skater boys to smoke weed. A couple of men pull up to the skate park in their car blasting punk music. Sofia is intrigued and drags Alex to come along with her. The girls find themselves in their backseat drinking. The driver pulls over and shotguns a hit of weed into Sofia's mouth. As Alex watches, her mind goes into a nightmare vision of Sofia having sex with the driver. Alex snaps out of this, and men drive to a desolate field at night. Sofia runs off and leaves Alex alone with the other man with as their fate is sealed and their innocence lost.



## NARRATIVE FEATURES

### Hamlet

Directed by Don K Williams, Samantha Suarez

A film noir reimagining of Shakespeare's classic as a true crime thriller.

### Donostia

Directed by Daniel Cummings

On a short trip to Donostia, Spain, Anna struggles with the recent loss of her mother and the quiet unraveling of her long-term relationship. Sleepless and emotionally adrift, she begins wandering the city at night, where she meets a mysterious woman who challenges her to confront the life she's been avoiding. As reality blurs, Anna must choose between holding on to comfort or stepping into the unknown.

### THE SNARE

Directed by Merlin Camozzi

When straight-A student Dani is caught with a small amount of drugs, the police give her a brutal choice: become an informant or risk losing everything she's worked for. Pulled into a dangerous double life, she must decide whether to protect the people she loves—or the future she's sacrificed everything to achieve.

### Irkalla: Gilgamesh's Dream

Directed by Mohamed Jabarah Al-Daradji

In a burning Baghdad, a homeless boy escapes into myth, seeking to resurrect his parents. As his friend is drawn into violence, Chum-Chum must save him, guided by the shadows of Gilgamesh and the Lamassu in a city that refuses to die.

### Rains Over Babel

Directed by Gala del Sol

In a tropical-punk twist on Dante's Inferno, a group of misfits converges at Babel, a mythical club that doubles as purgatory, where La Flaca—the city's Grim Reaper—presides. Here, souls gamble years of their lives, daring to outwit Death Herself.

### The Travel Companion

Directed by Travis Wood, Alex Mallis

Simon, a struggling documentary filmmaker, enjoys free flights courtesy of his best friend and roommate, Bruce, who works for an airline. However, when Beatrice, a more successful filmmaker, enters the picture and starts dating Bruce, Simon risks flying too close to the sun.

## NARRATIVE FEATURES

### THE QUIET MAN

Directed by Juan Gonzalez

In the lawless western town of Buscaderos, New Mexico. Where the Wild West never died and violence rules the streets. A silent vigilante known only as THE QUIET MAN delivers his own brand of justice. When outlaw Tom Brolin murders someone close to him, he and his brother are forced into a desperate escape. But as they race across the unforgiving frontier, they discover the law is the least of their worries. THE QUIET MAN is coming and he won't stop until justice is served.

### American Comic

Directed by Daniel J Clark

American Comic is a mockumentary that follows two up-and-coming stand-up comedians, who, despite their superficial "cultural" differences, share remarkable similarities when it comes to egotism, self-destruction, and social ineptitude. As the film pulls back the curtain on the unique subculture of stand-up comedy, self-absorbed competitiveness intensifies, leading to some shocking and unexpected revelations.

## DOCUMENTARY SHORTS

### Hello Beautiful Please Follow Back

Amandine Thomas

Her grandmother's relationship with an online romance scammer leads to a filmmaker's exploration into the ways in which we strive to connect through the internet.

### About Damn Time

Dana Romanoff

A boatman's tale about the women who row the iconic dories in the Grand Canyon, their struggles to break into the current, and the passing of the oars to the next generation.

### Teddy

Lauren Santucci

Teddy is a verité portrait of a male birth doula working to improve birth outcomes for Black women in Houston, Texas. A security guard by day, Timothy Gant Jr. trained to become a doula after hearing about his own mother's birth story as a child. As a doula working predominantly with Black women, Timothy helps his clients achieve a positive, safe, and empowering birth on their terms.

### Beautiful, Pam

Directed by J.R. Stokes

A Queer sex-worker undergoes a crisis of identity, addiction, and depression amidst the week of their son's 18th birthday.

### IN TRANSIT

Directed by Jaclyn Bethany

When a complacent young bartender living in small-town Maine agrees to model for an existentially floundering painter on an artist's retreat, both women must confront their preconceptions of what makes a good life.

### Dokita Musa

Directed by Lanre Obisesan

A love letter to Nigeria told through the lens of an 11-year-old boy with pailalia and aspirations of becoming a cardiologist has to navigate poverty, family dysfunction and violence in a poverty stricken west African village and other central characters.

### Psychedelic in the Sky

Matthew Salton

Blending personal reflection with a decades-old encounter, Psychedelic in the Sky examines how people make sense of unusual events, and what those stories reveal about belief.

The film begins with the filmmaker's childhood fascination with extraterrestrials—shaped by a religious upbringing that embraced life beyond earth. This early wonder sets the stage for a deeper exploration of belief, sparked by a chance meeting with a man who had a powerful experience in the 1960s.

The story unfolds across three chapters: the physical (what was seen), the personal (how it was experienced), and the social (how it is interpreted)—a structure framed by insights from Jacques Vallée, the "god-father of ufology." The man's sighting—a glowing orb in the night sky—was witnessed by dozens and reported in local newspapers, yet it led to a spiritual transformation. His story reveals a side of the phenomenon rarely shown in pop culture—more intimate and complex than Hollywood's alien tropes. Psychedelic in the Sky asks why we're drawn to stories of the unknown in the first place—and what we might be seeking.

# ABOUT THE ARTIST



## Asiah Thomas-Mandlman



It wasn't until she studied art at New Mexico State University that Las Cruces artist Asiah Thomas-Mandlman realized just how special her art skills are. Thomas-Mandlman is the official artist for the 11th annual Las Cruces International Film Festival poster.

Asiah was born and raised in Las Cruces. Her style is about realism. She loves drawing faces and capturing the emotion that is there. She begins with a photo, and the process is enhanced because she takes that photo herself rather than drawing something she might pull off the internet.

Asiah has experimented with many media, the result of her college education, but she prefers to work in colored pencil or charcoal.

In honoring the filmmakers participating in the Las Cruces International Film Festival, Thomas-Mandlman set out to capture both the colors of New Mexico and the essence of a film set in designing the festival's official poster.

Thomas-Mandlman used that palette to reflect the feel of New Mexico, then paired it with a top-down, aerial view of a film set. The goal was to ground every element in the world of filmmaking and production.

One of the more intriguing aspects of the design is the people depicted on the canvas. Rather than assigning each figure a specific role, Thomas-Mandlman left their identities open to interpretation. The scene also reflects a reality she discovered while working on film sets.

"I wanted to show that a lot of filmmaking is standing around and waiting, because people think it's fast-paced all the time," she said. "It's a lot of communicating, and standing, and waiting for the shot—sometimes for hours. Those moments are what this is portraying."

These days, Thomas-Mandlman, who is also an accomplished jazz musician, is channeling her creative energy in another direction: the stage.

She stars in the Broadway comedy "POTUS: Or, Behind Every Great Dumbass Are Seven Women Trying to Keep Him Alive" at the Santa Fe Playhouse.

## DOCUMENTARY SHORTS

### Miles Beyond Remission

Christopher Nicholas

After being told he'll never reach remission, a six-time cancer survivor sets out to be the first of his kind to run a marathon on every continent, with a moving message: if cancer is global, so is surviving.

A powerful short documentary about men's mental health, resiliency and learning to seek out the joy in life wherever you can find it.

### Sunday Mornings at the Beach

Tim Reid, Aaron Hosé

When heading to the oceanside, one might expect to see surfers, joggers, and sunbathers—but not this. Each Sunday, a quiet yet powerful ritual unfolds as worshippers in Tijuana and San Diego gather on opposite sides of the border wall. Through song, prayer, and fellowship shared across rusty steel bars, an unexpected act of unity, faith, and resistance comes to life.

## LOCAL DOCUMENTARY SHORTS

### Burritos "El Centenario"

Michelle Tarin

Burritos El Centenario uncovers the spirit of a beloved family business where recipes become memories, and every plate tells a story of community, culture, and passion.

### A City That Cares

Aaron Hosé

A legal educator reflects on her work as an activist along the US-Mexico border, a journey that guides her and her students to a compassionate Texas community where generosity and empathy are deeply intertwined.

### Moving Arts: Setting Hearts Ablaze

Zac Cornfield

Moving Arts| Setting Hearts Ablaze demonstrates how creative exploration and expression move at-risk kids from trauma into trust.

Through art, including dance, music, painting, photography, video, computer graphics, and gymnastics, children can heal physically, mentally, and emotionally by providing a necessary outlet for personal expression.

The film includes heartfelt interviews, stunning visuals, and a dramatic narrative (conceived by a former Moving Arts student and now teacher) that addresses the current epidemic of grandparents and extended family members raising up to 60% of students the Espanola school district. Additionally, the film features a dance performed by an alum student that represents the constraints of traditional teaching methods.

As the story evolves, we see how Moving Arts Espanola's core belief that 'art is medicine' is embedded in the souls of founders Roger Montoya, a 2019 CNN Hero, and Salvador Ruiz. As well as the teachers, former students, and volunteers. We take the viewer through a vibrant community where creative expression and experiential learning are encouraged and applauded.

### The Land of Sacrifice: The Burden of New Mexico's Oil and Gas Extraction

Annie Ersinghaus

The Land of Sacrifice: The Burden of New Mexico's Oil and Gas Extraction, is an environmental documentary that explores the oil and gas crisis unfolding in the state of New Mexico. As oil and gas production rapidly expands in NM, the film explores the severe and disproportionate impacts on marginalized, low income, and Indigenous communities in rural Northwestern and Southeastern parts of the state.

Featuring the NMLAWS coalition and its groundbreaking lawsuit, the documentary highlights a powerful legal approach to seeking justice and amplifying the voices of affected residents. It also presents practical policy solutions urgently needed to protect public health and address the growing challenges of climate change. This film will ask us to reevaluate what health and progress truly mean to us as a society and to start listening to the voices calling for help. The film seeks to convey a story that is instrumental in shaping the future of our state and world.

## LOCAL DOCUMENTARY SHORTS CON'T

### Untrammelled: The MCC Story

Tony Estrada

Grassroots group Mogollon Concerned Citizens band together to protect the cultural and historic landscape they call home in the Gila National Forest.

### Rolling Altars : Riding Low in Northern New Mexico

Peter Monro

Rolling Altars is a short documentary produced by Taos-based nonprofit True Kids 1 that looks at lowrider culture as it evolves from lifestyle to art form, documenting the colorful and vibrant pastime in the cultural epicenter of New Mexico. Featuring Nicholas Herrera, Fred Rael, Diego Lopez, Toby Morfin, Don Usner and others, the film was shot and edited by New Mexico youth, under the direction of True Kids 1 Director of Media, Pete Monro.

### An Immigrant

David Iván Lopez Duran

When hope outweighs fear, they take the leap: a powerful documentary exploring the human stories behind immigration, as individuals risk everything for a chance at a new life in the United States.



## DOCUMENTARY FEATURES

### Street Smart: Lessons from a TV Icon

Ernie Bustamante

STREET SMART: LESSONS FROM A TV ICON is a feature documentary about Sonia Manzano — known to millions as “Maria” from SESAME STREET. The film follows Sonia’s remarkable journey, from a young girl in the South Bronx finding refuge in television, to becoming the first Latina on American TV in a regular role, through 44 years on screen on SESAME STREET, and now as a creator of ALMA’S WAY. Featuring interviews with luminaries, original animation, and scripted scenes that blend humor and heart, this inspirational documentary invites viewers to learn once again from this beloved icon.

### Turtle Walker

Taira Malaney

### The Cemetery of Cinema

Thierno Souleymane Diallo

### Blame

Christian Frei

The outbreak of COVID-19 catapults three scientists on to the center stage of an unprecedented media frenzy and geopolitical blame games. Linfa Wang, Zhengli Shi and Peter Daszak, whose warnings and predictions were mostly missed by the wider world, have to defend and justify themselves. Their work and very existence are under threat.

Blame responds to the often speculative and shrill discussions around the origins of COVID-19 with a calm and factual narrative. Thanks to exclusive access to the three protagonists, we gain insight into their perspectives, challenges and feelings.

The film explores why we humans are so susceptible to and attracted by sensationalist narratives. How the new attention economy feeds us the honey of speculation, doubt and finger-pointing. And finally, how geopolitical blame games are used to win an election.

We are discarding an evidence-based worldview in favor of power and popular perception.

## DOCUMENTARY FEATURES CON'T

### A Photographic Memory

Rachel Elizabeth Seed

A Photographic Memory is an intimate, genre-bending portrait of a daughter's attempt to piece together a portrait of her mother, an avant-garde journalist and a woman she never knew. Uncovering the vast archive Sheila Turner-Seed produced, including lost interviews with iconic photographers Henri Cartier-Bresson, Gordon Parks, Cecil Beaton, Lisette Model, and others, the film explores memory, legacy, and stories left untold.

### Child of Dust

Weronika Mliczewska

Sang is one of countless children left behind by American soldiers after the Vietnam War—unwanted, discriminated against, and scarred by a war that took more than just his father. When Sang unexpectedly locates his gravely ill father in the U.S., he becomes determined to meet him, even though it comes at a price.

The only way to fulfill this need is to move to the U.S. permanently, leaving behind his beloved wife, daughter, and grandson. In this foreign land, he struggles to find his place—not only in a society that sees him as an outsider but also within an American family that never knew of his existence. Cultural barriers collide when the past catches up with the present in the least expected ways.

### Anxiety Club

Wendy Lobel

Anxiety Club offers a heartfelt and humorous exploration of anxiety through the lens of some of today's most brilliant comedians: Tiffany Jenkins, Joe List, Marc Maron, Aparna Nancharia, Mark Normand, Baron Vaughn, and Eva Victor. With a mix of stand-up performances, sketch videos, exclusive interviews, and relatable everyday life scenarios, they candidly share their personal struggles with anxiety, the world's most prevalent mental health condition, affecting more than 350 million people globally.

The film provides access to the private exposure therapy sessions of Tiffany Jenkins - a comic and author with millions of social media followers - as she confronts her deepest fears with grit and self-deprecating humor. Additionally, world-renowned meditation teacher and author Tara Brach, PhD, guides another brave comedian through an intense and transforma-

tive meditation experience. Viewers will also discover why Hollywood's Laugh Factory took the groundbreaking step of hiring a psychologist-in-residence to support its comics.

Join these comedians as they reveal how vulnerability and humor can coexist, turning their mental health battles into powerful narratives that resonate with audiences everywhere. And, have some laughs along the way.

### American Hate

Harry M Gantz, Arjun Sethi

American Hate is a feature-length documentary film that exposes the rise of violent hate crimes in America through the lens of the victims and their families. These first-person accounts give viewers an opportunity to see, hear, and feel what it means to be targeted on account of who you are or what you believe. American Hate takes viewers from the scene of the crime to the long-term effects and haunting memories that forever endure. All music and news footage has been cleared.

### The Ramba Effect

Claire Sandberg

Ramba, an Asian elephant who endured 50 years of isolation in a Chilean circus, embarks on an extraordinary 2,550-mile journey to her new home at Elephant Sanctuary Brazil, guided by compassionate experts and a devoted team of volunteers.

### Enongo

Kevin Schreck

"Enongo" is an award-winning, feature-length, animation-documentary hybrid and the inspiring story of rapper/producer/Ph.D. candidate, Enongo Lumumba-Kasongo, a.k.a., Sammus. With her autobiographical and afrofuturism-inspired music, Enongo tackles various subjects including (but certainly not limited to) mental health, growing up, and relationships. Through a combination of actuality and animation, "Enongo" tells a universally-relevant, intimate, empowering story of identity, artistic creation, and survival. Notably, "Enongo" is the first feature-length film of any genre in history to have an all-Black-women animation team.

## INTERNATIONAL SHORTS

### Susana

Gerardo Coello Escalante, Amandine Thomas

Susan, a middle-aged American tourist, finds herself alone in Mexico City. When she encounters a group of young Americans, she jumps at the opportunity for a little adventure, discovering just how powerful her dollars can make her.

### Specs

Alessandro Riconda

Mirko has to face his worst fear: wearing glasses. What if the little girl he has a crush on could see him?

### Family Man

Kalani Gacon

During a storm in a remote Nepalese village, a mysterious man finds refuge in the house of a family haunted by their father's disappearance years before. Strangely unwilling to leave, he slowly reawakens lost memories of the missing father.

### Ali

Adnan Al Rajeev

Poddopur is a lily pluckers village where women's voices are forbidden, Ali (15) and his mother lead a life surrounded by the mountains. Ali has a secret. When news of a singing competition offering a chance to migrate to the other side of the mountain reaches them, Salma is filled with hope as Ali is a talented singer. But Ali refuses to take part in the competition. Ali's mother tries to convince him as she hopes, since godly people live on that side, Ali's secret will be saved, and she won't have to whisper to his son anymore.

### Ebb & Flow

Nay Tabbara

Determined to have her first kiss, Loulwa defies her tumultuous world in search of normalcy. As she braves the streets of Beirut in pursuit of her sexual awakening, she finds herself taking an instant leap into adulthood when her world erupts into a redefined "normal".



# 2026 LAS CRUCES INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL SCHEDULE

April 8th | Opening Night Film - She Dances w/Steve Zahn 6:30PM, 6:45PM 7:00PM, 7:15PM  
VIP After Party - La Posta De Mesilla 9:00 PM

## Thursday APRIL 09

## Friday APRIL 10

	THEATRE A	THEATRE B	THEATRE C	THEATRE D	Other	THEATRE A	THEATRE B	THEATRE C	THEATRE D	Fountain Theatre
10:00AM	A Photographic Memory 10:00am-11:45am	Ghost School 10:30am-12:00pm	Blame 10:00am-12:00pm	Beautiful Pam 10:15am-11:30am		Animated Shorts 10:00 AM-11:30AM	Street Smart: Lessons from a TV Icon 10:00am-11:30am	The Ramba Effect 10:00am-11:30am	Screenwriting Panel w/ Ed Stone, Don Foster, Bill True, Lovinder Gill 10:00am-11:15am	
11:00AM										
12:00PM	Narrative Shorts 1 12:00pm-1:30pm	Local Shorts 1 12:30pm-1:45pm	Irkalla: Gilgamesh's Dream 12:15pm-2:15pm	Anxiety Club 12:00pm-1:30pm		High School Student Shorts 11:45am-1:45pm	Turtle Walker 12:00pm-1:30pm	International Documentary Shorts 11:45am-12:45am	A Conversation with Shane Black 11:30am-12:15pm	
1:00PM										
2:00PM	Local Shorts 2 2:00pm-3:15pm	Dokita Musa 2:00pm-3:30pm	Documentary Shorts 2:30pm-4:00pm		A Conversation w/ Michael Rooker @ NMSU Center for the Arts 2:00pm-3:00pm	Local Documentary Shorts 1 2:00pm-3:15pm	Local Documentary Shorts 2 2:00pm-3:15pm	Donostia 1:00pm-2:30pm	Financial Literacy & Planning in a Gig Economy 12:30pm-1:45pm	Stunts + Fight Choreography 2:00pm-3:15pm
3:00PM										
4:00PM	Student Shorts 3:30pm-5:15pm	Child of Dust 4:00pm-5:30pm		The Snare 3:15pm-5:05pm	Filmmaker Social @DIACC, Oholla Hall 4:00pm-6:00pm		Local Shorts 5 3:30pm-5:15pm	Local Student Shorts 2:45pm-4:15pm	Film School to Film Set Panel w/Julian Alexander 3:30pm-4:15pm	
5:00PM			Local Shorts 3 4:30pm-5:45pm			Local Shorts 4 4:00pm-5:45pm				
6:00PM					Music Videos 5:30pm-6:00pm					
7:00PM	Guardians of the Galaxy w/Michael Rooker Q&A 6:00pm-8:15pm	Guardians of the Galaxy w/Michael Rooker Q&A 6:15pm-8:30pm	Guardians of the Galaxy w/Michael Rooker Q&A 6:30pm-8:45pm	Guardians of the Galaxy 6:45pm-8:45pm	Hamlet @Fountain Theatre 6:00pm-8:00pm		The Nice Guys w/ Director Shane Black Q&A 6:00pm-8:15pm	The Nice Guys w/ Director Shane Black Q&A 6:15pm-8:30pm		American Hate w/Q+A @ Fountain Theatre 6:00pm-8:15pm
8:00PM						Rains Over Babel 7:00pm-9:00pm				
9:00PM										
	VIP After Party @ Cineport 9:00 PM					VIP After Party @ Salud De Mesilla 9:00 PM				

- Narrative Shorts
- Animated Shorts
- Music Videos
- Narrative Features
- Special Screenings
- Documentary Shorts
- Student Shorts
- Local Shorts
- Documentary Features
- Panels & Workshops

# 2026 LAS CRUCES INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL SCHEDULE

April 8th | Opening Night Film - She Dances w/Steve Zahn 6:30PM, 6:45PM 7:00PM, 7:15PM  
VIP After Party - La Posta De Mesilla 9:00 PM

Saturday APRIL 11

Sunday APRIL 12

	THEATRE A	THEATRE B	THEATRE C	THEATRE D	RIO GRANDE	THEATRE A	THEATRE B	THEATRE C
10:00 AM	The Cemetery of Cinema 10:00am-11:30am	Femme Frontera Selections 10:00am-12:00pm	The Travel Companion 11:30am	Enongo 10:00am-11:30am		Best Shorts The City, Myself, Secret Sorrowing Narrative Animated Documentary Music Video Student 48 hour 10:00am-11:00am	Best International Film 10:00am-11:30am	Best Documentary Feature 10:00am-11:30am
11:00 AM								
12:00 PM	Narrative Shorts 2 11:45am-1:00pm	Lepes 12:00pm-2:15pm	Local Music Videos 12:00pm-1:00pm	International Shorts 11:45am-1:45pm	Acting Workshop 12:00pm-1:30pm @Rio Grande Theatre	Best NM Film 11:30am-1:00pm	Best LGBTQ+ 12:00pm-1:30pm	Best Narrative Feature 12:00pm-2:00pm
1:00 PM								
2:00 PM	In Transit 1:30pm-3:00pm	Horror Shorts 2:30pm-3:45pm	LGBTQ+ Shorts 1:15pm-3:00pm	American Comic 2:00pm-3:30pm	Inside the World of Horror @Rio Grande Theatre 2:00pm-3:30pm	Grand Jury 1:30pm-3:30pm	Audience Choice 2:00pm-4:00pm	
3:00 PM								
4:00 PM	48 Hour Film Challenge Films 4:00pm-6:00pm	48 hour Film Challenge Films 4:00pm-6:00pm	New Mexico Heritage Short Film Contest Winners 4:00pm-5:00pm	Local Shorts 7 4:00pm-6:00pm				
5:00 PM								
6:00 PM	Awards Ceremony @ Rio Grande Theatre 7:00pm VIP After Party @ Rio Grande Winery 9:00 PM							

## NARRATIVE SHORTS 1

- A Reflections of You
- Don't Fuck with BA
- Roger is a Serial Killer
- The Color of Sky
- Video Barn
- Crash Site
- Sombody Cares

## NARRATIVE SHORTS 2

- Full Taste
- Vermis
- Better Now
- The Change at the Seder
- Cherry-Colored Funk
- Sunkiss

## HORROR SHORTS

- Pumpkin Guts
- The Viewing
- In and Out of the Hornbeam Maze
- Slow
- The Veil

## INTERNATIONAL SHORTS

- Sicaria
- Specs
- All
- Family man
- Edo and Flow
- Erenos Trilogy
- Kanary
- Mercanare

## DOCUMENTARY SHORTS

- Hello Beautiful Please Follow Back
- About Damn Time
- Psychedics in the Sky
- Miles Beyond Remission
- Teddy
- Sunday Mornings at the Beach

## LOCAL DOC SHORTS 1

- Burnin' 'E Centennials
- A City that Cares
- Moving Arts: Setting Hearts Ablaze
- The Land of Sacrifice: The Burden of NM Oil & Gas Extraction
- Unstrapped: The MCC Story

## LOCAL DOC SHORTS 2

- Riding Altars: Riding Low in Northern NM
- An Immigrant

## INTERNATIONAL DOC SHORTS

- While We Still Have Time
- Hindlight
- Going South
- ¡Milele Candela! / Fight On Candela!

## LGBTQ+

- Goldfish
- Sew Into You
- Three
- Not Exactly Strangers
- Wrong Bathroom
- True Spirit

## LOCAL SHORTS 1

- The Mourning
- Ninejay
- Two in the Morning
- True North
- Verdolanda

## LOCAL SHORTS 2

- Keros
- Introspection
- The Light Returns
- Identity
- Sin Marca

## LOCAL SHORTS 3

- Antagonist
- Triple Threat
- ALM
- Paan
- Pick Me Up

## LOCAL SHORTS 4

- Fallov
- I Did the Wrong Thing
- Never Bet Against Rick!!!
- Estival
- The Count's Will
- Hunters
- Breakups Suck
- Bucket List #47

## LOCAL SHORTS 5

- A Thousand Paper Cuts
- Pandora's Greenhouse
- Hungryland
- SLUT
- Bad Weather Friends
- Cart Bay Republic

## LOCAL SHORTS 6

- Like You a Bot
- Tito Ritmo
- The Way We Carry Water
- Rapacious Harriet and the Two Strangers

## LOCAL SHORTS 7

- Crawford
- The Bad Way to Pay
- The Nightmare Catchers
- Pocha
- Kidz as Play
- Whiteface

## STUDENT SHORTS

- To Write An Ending
- Eva
- SYNCOPE
- Mun's Beach
- Serendy of Friendship
- The Food Taster

## HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT

- To My Generation
- Patjak
- Bonfires
- Love You Here
- The Pig
- All That Music
- Porpore
- Full Mugs of Coffee
- Hidden Lives
- Is This All There Is To It?
- The Pact
- Last Task
- Crossing Paths
- Late For a Date
- Famiglia
- Going Somewhere
- Play It Safe

## LOCAL STUDENT SHORTS

- My Friend
- Forever After
- In/Out
- Devil Horns
- My Future is Colorful
- Crushed
- Grumpy Old Man
- Bad Boys Theory
- Woman at the Well
- The Commercial Breakup

## LOCAL MUSIC VIDEO

- Sleeves
- Open Your Eyes
- Sun
- Way Too Hot
- While I'm Hiding
- HONEY!
- Universe
- Era Snow "Pair Of Stars"
- Specks
- 1989
- Nick Browner "Ice Skaters"

## MUSIC VIDEOS

- BIBZA
- NEE-SHA - Sound Of The Waves
- Fast Edos
- Queerbeat - Bad Mood
- My Fathers Men
- Soap&Skin - Girl Loves Me

## ANIMATED SHORTS

- inkel
- The Golden
- Daily Kitty
- The Washing List of the Proud Princess
- Angry Lives in a Pretty New Town
- Tarhana
- Something Greater Than You
- The Ball Boy
- Brooming

# INTERNATIONAL SHORTS CON'T

## Eremos Trilogy

Sam Arnold

Eremos Trilogy is the first-ever Deaf short film anthology, and entirely self-funded. Eremos derived from the Greek word for "solitude" is the central theme that connects all three films. The trilogy follows three different deaf protagonists as they navigate various forms of isolation in modern society. Each story explores challenges unique to the deaf community, blending gritty, thought-provoking narratives with a touch of dark humor.

## Karupy

Kalainithan Kalaichelvan

At her 65th birthday, Karupy makes an unexpected announcement: she will be ending her own life that very night, sparking a whirlwind of emotions amongst her family. As she prepares for this final act, her party guests confront her regarding her decision.

## Mercenaire

Pier-Philippe Chevigny

Hired at a pig slaughterhouse through a social reintegration program, an ex-convict desperately tries to find another job while repressing his inner violence.

# INTERNATIONAL DOCUMENTARY SHORTS

## While We Still Have Time

Ava Grimshaw-Hall

While We Still Have Time is the debut from daughter-cum-documentary filmmaker, Ava Grimshaw-Hall, who embarks on a poignant journey to connect with her sperm donor father John, as he battles an aggressive cancer. Together, they explore their unique bond, seeking understanding and closure amidst life's uncertainties.

## iMétela Candela! / Fight On Candela!

Sadja Lozano, Ernesto Anaya

In a fight two out of three falls with no time limit!... Candela "La Bruja Vudú", will aim to become the new idol of professional wrestling, facing the male gaze and the reconstruction of her character based on her identity, her roots, and her sexual orientation.

## Going South

Alan Sahin

Dogs walking on the breakdown lane, bachelorettes partying in the car and a bored child looking for something to do. Thousands of impatient travelers are trapped in the traffic jam of the century. Ahead lies the Gotthard mountain, one of the longest tunnels in the world, the gateway to the sunny south. Glued to the asphalt, climate activists are heating up the mood even more. Who will snap first?

## Hindsight

Shubhi Sahni

A fleeting retrospect of a young woman who develops a chronic illness during a global pandemic.



## LGBTQ+ FILMS

### Goldfish

Bryant Staff Jr.

Freshly heartbroken, 16-year-old Darren Williams must confront lingering feelings before saying goodbye to his best friend.

### Sew Into You

Emma Josephson

A widowed older woman seeks guidance from her younger queer coworker to ask out a woman for the first time.

### Wrong Bathroom

Ragini Bhasin

A transgender high school student is pressured into a misogynistic conversation with his peers in order to be considered "one of the guys."

### Three

Amie Song

### Not Exactly Strangers

Ryan Rox

A tipsy hookup between a Latine trans woman and a rough-edged skater boy from her past becomes a comedic, yet intimate deep dive into post-surgical sex, lingering history, and a body she's still learning to celebrate.

### True Spirit

Graeme Lyle Roger

Lady Shug is a uniquely flamboyant, non-binary, drag indigenous activist from the Navajo nation, who has fought prejudice from all sides since their youth. Filmed at their home and on the unique landscapes of New Mexico and Arizona since 2018, this is their story.

## ANIMATED SHORTS

### Hidari

Masashi Kawamura

With a mechanical prosthetic arm and his sidekick "Sleeping Cat" on his side, legendary craftsman "Jingoro Hidari" faces one of his adversaries "Inumaru" in a fight to the death.

### The God Man

Andrew Foerster

The God man is a 9.5-min award-winning animated short that follows an interview with astronomer Jonah Weisman; the man who discovered "The God Man" a seemingly 20km tall alien corpse that is slowly drifting toward earth. But is it what we think it is?

Over the course of eight years as it slowly drifts toward earth, Jonah builds an obsession and parasocial relationship with his discovery, imbuing it in his life as a symbol of meaning and hope, even when it may seem otherwise.

### Pretty Kitty

Corey Campagna

After losing their job, an amusement park mascot actor struggles to cope with their current reality.

### The Wedding Veil of the Proud Princess

Anna-Ester Volozh

A princess's impossible demand sparks an endless war, until a mysterious suitor emerges, claiming to be the one to satisfy her pride.

A feminist exploration of a story by L.M.Montgomery.

### Anyone Lived in a Pretty How Town

Daniel Kreizberg

In a picturesque town, a man named "anyone" rejoices in the beauty of everyday life and celebrates the natural world. The people around him, however, are more focused on conforming to modern society, and ostracize anyone for being different.

### Tethered

Alessandro Cino Zolfanelli

After a chance encounter with a girl, a boy's longing to be with her is threatened by a mysterious gravitational pull from the moon.

## ANIMATED SHORTS CON'T

### Something Greater than You

Gordon LePage

A pair of feuding raccoons, having found shelter from a winter storm, receive an unexpected guest.

### The BellBoy

Sabrina Eliana Teran

A bellboy goes about his usual day at the hotel until a robber walks into the elevator, demanding a floor. The bellboy has to figure out how to handle this situation.

### Blooming

Ximena Loman

A heartbroken girl loses her soul dog. After crying on a magical flower, it blooms into the sky, revealing a realm of spirit dogs. She sets out on a magical journey to find her.

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## STUDENT SHORTS

### To Write the Ending

Shaler Keenum

When a street poet finds a typewriter that allows him to write the future, he uses it to try and find love.

### Eva

Barbara Lervig

A year after their mother commits suicide, two grieving sisters hold a séance to contact her spirit. In the days after, the younger sister has strange and terrifying visions and suspects she's being haunted.

### Syncope

Linus von Stumberg

Whim and the ensemble have to dance for their lives in the piece Syncope.

### Nun's Beach

Kate diRienzi

When introduced to her fellow nun's family, Sister Flora questions her romantic relationship with Sister Muriel and her devotion to God.

### Scrutiny of Friendship

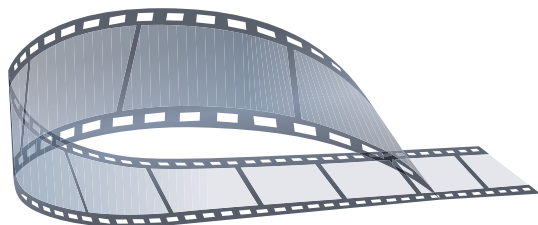
Ralph Hutchins

During the peak of summer, two best friends go on a walk through the countryside, but beneath the serene landscape lies a simmering tension, as one of them harbors a secret that will change everything.

### The Food Taster

Alexander Emborg

After the death of his wife, jaded food critic Roman Adler returns to Prague in search of the perfect bite that will rejuvenate his love for food. Along his search he butts heads with a passionate chef that forces Roman to confront his past and reconsider his perspective on food.



## LOCAL STUDENT SHORTS

### **My Friend**

Crane

Skye and Monica go about their everyday lives, finding comfort and support in one another.

### **Forever After**

Miles Smith Jr.

Ricardo “Matthew” suffers from Isa “Crystal” reminders playing back in his memories and the guilt from Crystal’s suicide. Can Matthew overcome his guilt with Izzy “Heather” support, or continue to blame himself for Crystal’s fate?

### **In/Out**

Angel E. Muñoz

Mando wants in. Harry wants out.

### **Devil Horns**

Francisco Trevinio

Lou, 22, is handling life after a tragic accident that took his mom’s life when he was 11, but after cleaning his grandma’s room, he discovers a curse that will turn his life upside down.

### **My Future is Colorful**

Shane Strong

As a lonely and pondering girl looks around her gloomy room to try to generate ideas for her poems, she realizes that most of her ideas become sad, she then lets her imagination take control to a more, “colorful,” future of poetry.

### **Crushed**

Adrian Enrique Tejada Escobedo

“Crushed” is a short film that explores the complexities of teenage emotions, identity, and the courage to express one’s true feelings in the face of societal expectations.

Set against the backdrop of a high school, the film follows Amber, a shy yet brave girl, as she gathers the courage to ask her friend Lauren to prom. The film delves into themes of unrequited love, fear of judgment, and the struggle to be authentic in a world that often pressures conformity.

### **Grumpy Old Man**

Chris Ihlenfeldt

A Grumpy Old Man is feed up with mole hills. Now he plots his revenge.

### **Bad Boss Theory**

Michael Neff, Christopher Ihlenfeldt

### **Woman at the Well**

Jacob Thomas McCaw

A young woman meets a man who won’t take “no” for an answer at a water-filling station, but they both have secrets that make this more than a chance meeting. Thirsty?

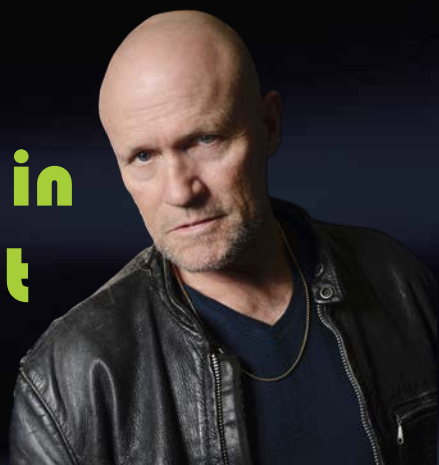
### **The Commercial Break-Up**

Hayes K. Davis

When his girlfriend (the lead news anchor) suddenly announces she has found a new job, a narcissistic weatherman has until the end of tonight’s broadcast to win her back.



# Outstanding Achievement in Entertainment Award



## Acclaimed actor Michael Rooker to be honored by Las Cruces International Film Festival

The 11th annual Las Cruces International Film Festival will honor acclaimed film and television star Michael Rooker with its prestigious “Outstanding Achievement in Entertainment” award April 9. Rooker will be on hand to accept the award in Las Cruces. Rooker will screen a film of his choice at the Allen Theatres Cineport at 7 p.m. and host a question-and-answer session with the audience. In the afternoon, Mr. Rooker will speak at New Mexico State University about his long and storied career. That evening at the LCIFF VIP Party at the Allen Theatres Cineport, Mr. Rooker will receive his



“Outstanding Achievement in Entertainment” award.

Past recipients of the celebrated LCIFF award include Helen Hunt, Ron Perlman, Giancarlo Esposito, William H Macy, Danny Trejo, Brendan Fraser, George Lopez, Cybill Shepherd, Richard Dreyfuss and Edward James Olmos.

Michael Rooker can currently be seen as “Cobb” on the final season of HBO’s *The Righteous Gemstones* opposite John Goodman, Adam Devine, and Danny McBride, and he just wrapped production on the international thriller *Pig Village* with Korean action star Don Lee.

# MICHAEL ROOKER

**A Conversation  
with  
Michael Rooker  
Thursday  
April 9th  
2:00PM-3:00PM  
at NMSU Center  
for the Arts**



Last year, Michael appeared in Kevin Costner's multi-part epic *Horizon: An American Saga*. Other recent credits include the Netflix comedy *The Outlaws* opposite Adam Devine and Pierce Brosnan, James Gunn's *The Suicide Squad*, and *Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 3*, Universal's *Fast and Furious 9*, and Paramount's *Love and Monsters*.

On the small screen, Michael recently starred in *Peacemaker* opposite John Cena as well as *Marvel's What If* for Disney+. Other notable recent credits include *The Dark Tower* and Season 3 of *True Detective*, opposite Mahershala Ali.

Michael first gained critical acclaim for creating the lead role of *Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer* in 1986, which he followed up with notable appearances in *Mississippi Burning*, *Days of Thunder*, *JFK*, *Cliffhanger*, and *Tombstone*. He is also known for his celebrated work on *The Walking Dead* as "Merle Dixon" and in the *Call of Duty* video game franchise as 11/11/2025 "Lieutenant Mike Harper." Since 2019, fans across the nation have known Michael as the current face of NASCAR.

"Michael Rooker is an extraordinary actor with incredible range. He has excelled in comedy, drama, and of course, great action movies. Known for his iconic role as Yondu Udonta in the hit Marvel franchise *Guardians of the Galaxy*, he is the perfect honoree to celebrate the film festival's 11th year. His diverse body of work is impressive. It is a thrill the Las Cruces International Film Festival can honor him in person. We are ecstatic to honor Michael Rooker at the 2026 film festival."

## LOCAL SHORTS

### The Mourning

Rafael Espinoza

After the passing of his best friend, Andy learns the best way of coping with this loss is through a shared song they used to sing.

### Ninejay

Robert Ray Jimenez

Ninejay is an episodic set in the 1800's about a dangerous female Japanese ninja, who is accidently delivered as a Chinese mail order bride to a widowed Southern gentleman-turned-marshal in New Mexico territory.

### Two In The Morning

A.Z. Ocoza

After their first night together, a young couple discuss whether they're about to begin a new relationship or are just going to keep repeating the mistakes of the past.

### True North

Ryan Parker

Lost in the woods, a forgotten compass awakens and begins a mysterious journey toward an unseen force.

### Verdolanda

Kody Young

Two coworkers are closing up their shipping store at the end of the day only for one of them to discover that the other is not who they seem to be!

### Sin Marca

Faith Perez

An immigrant brother and sister put their faith in a ruthless coyote to get them to the United States in pursuit of the American Dream.



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## LOCAL SHORTS CON'T

### **Keno**

Riley San Nicolas

Toni and Piper are raised by a single mom. When she has to take a shift at her old restaurant job to help pay the bills, the girls' grandmother, Antonia, picks them up for the day. Not to be deterred from her usual Sunday routine, Antonia takes the girls with her to the local casino where the girls might just win a little ice cream money. Told from a child's perspective, "Keno" is a subtle meditation on childhood memories.

### **Interropection**

Stephen Burhoe

A corrupt detective wrestles with her inner demon after a confidential informant is murdered.

### **The Light Returns**

Wolfgang Soldado

A war veteran sits in silence, surrounded by shadows. But even in the darkest rooms, the light returns.

### **Identity**

Zoe C. Anth

A girl goes for a walk to find herself, but something finds her instead.

### **Antagonist**

Rafael Prieto

Antagonist follows Mike Thousand, a street thief pulled into Tony Candeloro's orbit in a city ruled by three crime families. Robberies, sabotage, and quiet wars escalate as information proves deadlier than bullets. With no heroes—only survivors—each chapter forces Mike into irreversible choices, shifting loyalties, and the cost of power itself.

### **Triple Threat**

Avery Valdes

A suspicious husband meets with a private detective to discuss his predicament.

### **A.M.**

Lena Armstrong

The perfect way to start your day...it's not just coffee.

### **Never Bet Against Rick!!!**

Eduardo Diaz Sandoval

### **Pawn**

Elliott Hinojos

A lonesome hitman recalls his life's work.

### **Pick Me Up**

Cole Velasquez

Nick, trapped in a cycle of depression and grief, is pulled from his isolation when his best friend Cal unexpectedly bursts in with an adventurous proposal: a scavenger hunt. As they race solving clues, Nick's spirit lifts, reminding him of the unbreakable bond he shares with his friend.

### **Fallow**

KataLina Parrish

Fallow stars Richie Ramone as Jeremiah, a grieving widower spiraling into darkness after the loss of his loving wife and unborn child. Set on a decaying farm once filled with promise, the film dives into an artful, emotional portrait of grief, isolation, and despair - all underscored by the raw energy of Ramones music.

### **I Did The Wrong Thing**

Diego Munoz

A young man suffering from lost love whirls himself further into despair at the site of their favorite date spot.

### **Estrela!**

Angel E. Muñoz

An aspiring actress in El Paso finds out there are more to her dad's sunglasses than she expected.

### **The Count's Will**

Aldo Morales – Varela

During the reading of Count Dracula's will, Damian Renfield is declared the sole heir to Dracula's fortune, sparking a fierce rivalry with Alucard, Dracula's son.

### **In the Absence of Love**

Zeta Shearill & Vanessa Dabovich

### **Breakups Suck**

Ben Arndt

Luca fears for his life when attempting to dump his girlfriend Ruby, who may or may not be a vampire.

# LOCAL SHORTS CON'T

## Hunters

Derek Bauder

In the remote New Mexico wilderness, a hunting retreat becomes a dangerous intersection for a wealthy client seeking trophies and two troubled employees with deadly secrets.

## Bucket List #47

Sheila Warren

When a woman sets off on an orienteering race, as part of her life's bucket list, the experience morphs into a lesson in fear.

## A Thousand Paper Cuts

Sam Quinn

After killing her husband, a suburban housewife's emotional shock manifests through mundane household chores, troubling reflections on her marriage, and absurd sexual fantasies.

## Pandora's Greenhouse

Adrian Pijoan

Dr. Evelyn Green, a botanist at the Plant ESP Lab, built a machine that allows her to telepathically communicate with plants. But she's not prepared for what she unleashes within the eldritch realm of plant consciousness.

## Hungryland

Joe Singh

A fame-hungry influencer and his devoted cameraman stage a BBQ mukbang in the deep desert on sacred land but their livestream turns into a real nightmare, haunted by the spirits of Tony's regrets.

## Cart Bay Republic

Ulises Córdova

After losing her vape on a cart pushing shift, a frustrated supermarket cashier finds common ground with the unique personalities of the store parking lot.

## I Like You A Bot

Harmony Frances, Isabella Schlesinger

A clean and practical robot who follows his strict programming to a tee grapples with the difficulties of navigating the end of his relationship with his girlfriend.

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## SLVT

Anna Olshansky Fox

Rooney enjoys her job—high heels, writing reports, even her boss's flirtatious glances. But in a corporate jungle of power and seduction, those stolen looks give way to manipulation and violence, forcing her to confront a surreal reality.

## Bad Weather Friends

Ron Weisberg

This group of everyday Americans is tired of protesting war and corruption, so they take matters in their own hands by kidnapping the son of the largest weapons manufacturer. They learn how far the rabbit hole really goes..

## Tito Ritmo

Ulises Córdova

In early 1941, a zoot suit toting mechanic enters a "dance till you drop" competition in order to win a new car. In 2009, the car is now in the family lineage, and his grandson attempts to sell the classic car out of financial desperation.

## Pocha

Anna Lisa Padilla

A young woman struggles to learn Spanish in order to reconnect with her immigrant grandfather, but when life gets in the way, she learns that love transcends language.

## Kidz at Play

Brent Peterson

As the world tries to find its new normal after the apocalypse, an overprotective mother must stop an exterminator from killing her zombie children and those of the other families in her idyllic neighborhood.

## The Nightmare Catchers

J Diego Gonçalves

A documentary crew goes to investigate the murder of a 1930s actress in a haunted movie studio.

## Whiteface

Julian Alexander

## LOCAL SHORTS CON'T

### The Way We Carry Water

Makaio Marcos Frazier

Set in the rural landscapes of northern New Mexico, *The Way We Carry Water* follows Marcos, a young man struggling with the sudden loss of his grandfather, Iván. As he works through his grief, Marcos must take on the responsibility of preserving his family's acequia, an ancient irrigation system that not only sustains the land but also holds generations of cultural memory.

Filmed across the four seasons, the story mirrors the cycles of nature, grief and healing, death and rebirth, and offers a poetic reflection on legacy, resilience, and the bond between people and place. With stunning cinematography and a quiet, immersive narrative, *The Way We Carry Water* is a deeply personal exploration of what it means to carry forward tradition in a changing world.

## HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

### To My Generation

Azai Salmanaca Willis

Current event film created by a 13-year-old young man who has grown to counteract his own screen struggles with music, martial arts and time in Nature. It addresses the impact of screen dependencies including lack of purpose, isolation, depression, external validation, and a confused generation.

### Patjuk

Katherine Hee-Yeon Tae

From Seoul to Southwest, a Korean American teen follows her memories of patjuk, weaving Korean and Indigenous stories to redefine the meaning of home.

### Levi, You Here

Erik Posselt

A college student grows increasingly annoyed with his foreign exchange classmate, only to discover that the classmate's actions were meant as a genuine kindness. The experience teaches him not to judge too quickly, and to live more fully in the present by appreciating the people around him.

### Last Task - Shadow Of Freedom

Sean Dong

A dark world, a killer, a greedy conspiracy.

### Rapacious Harriet and the Two Strangers

Lex Lotito

Harriet has found all the little joys of living in her bunker - she has her plants, her holograms, and her periscope to see what's left of the world. When two strangers break into her bunker, she must decide what to protect.

### Crawford

Dakota Thomas

Fading Hollywood star Joan Crawford, desperate to revive her career, accepts a horror film role while wrestling with her past glories and professional jealousies.

### The Bad Way to Pay

Tom O'Hara

Jonesy is having a pretty bad day.

### The Pig

Valerie Hurtado

A gifted but self-critical teenage basketball player struggles under the weight of her own expectations. Pushing herself harder than anyone else, she begins to lose sight of the joy in the game—until her inspirational coach helps her rediscover her confidence, reminding her that true strength comes not from perfection, but from resilience and heart.

### Bonfires

Ralph Hutchins

*Bonfires* follows the story of two brothers who get caught up in an illegal dumping scheme. As time goes on, the secrets they burn start to catch up with them and the brothers bond begins to break.

### All That Music

Matthew Reynoso, Alexander Reynoso

This short documentary explores the timeless appeal of vinyl records and the passion that keeps the format alive. *All That Music* uncovers how vinyl represents more than just sound—it embodies ritual, authenticity, and a pure connection to music that transcends generations.

## HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

### Purpose

Erik Posselt

Told from the pencil's point of view, this short film follows its journey through many hands and moments—scribbling notes, sketching dreams, and leaving marks both big and small. Through its perspective, we witness the simple yet profound ways a pencil becomes part of human stories.

### The Pact

Nicholas Gao

### Full Mugs of Coffee

Sydney Wider

A wife, Mandy, goes through her day trying to distract herself from the struggle that is her grieving process. Her husband, Joseph, tries to console her through her challenges.

### Hidden Lives

Nicholas Gao

In bustling Hong Kong, a domestic helper and a delivery driver navigate long hours, tight spaces, and quiet sacrifices to keep the city moving.

### Is This All There is to It?

Alan Davis

At the age of eighteen, citizens must enter a competition against one other to decide which of them will enter high society, and which will stay on the bottom.

## HORROR SHORTS

### Pumpkin Guts

Bryan M. Ferguson

### The Viewing

Nick Blake

A house viewing spirals into a surreal nightmare for a young woman with a troubled past.

Starring Olivier Award Best Actress Winner Patsy Ferran (*God's Own Country*, *Living*, *Mickey 17*) and Leo Bill (*The Fall*, *In Fabric*, *Mr Turner*, *Foundation [TV]*), *The Viewing* is a twisted tale about death and the housing market.

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### Crossing Paths

Sean Dong

Aaron, a high school student from Beckman High School in Irvine, California, shares how mountain biking transformed his life. What began as a weekend hobby became a powerful outlet for growth, resilience, and self-discovery as he navigated personal challenges and learned to push past his limits—one trail at a time.

### Late For a Date

Dexter Shaffer, Jupiter Chapman

Patrick is running late for his date with Tiffany and gives her an increasingly absurd list of excuses as to why he is not there.

### Familgia

Eve Foster

After the death of his father, Lorenzo is reluctant to take over the family business and is desperate for a way out.

### Going Somewhere

Ginger Barbour

A misguided teen runs away from home after a fight with her mother, only to meet an unexpected mentor, making her rethink her decision.

### Play It Safe

Jupiter Chapman

Two bumbling, would-be thieves try their luck at stealing a rare diamond. When the heist doesn't go according to plan, they risk being caught unless they can put aside their differences and work together.

### In and Out of the Hornbeam Maze

Tomas Stark

Four kids are playing in a garden maze on a summer's day. One by one they are about to meet their fears. Based on a horror ballad by Helen Adam. The film is shot with a pinhole camera.

### Slow

Rebecca Berrih

A field recorder's life shatters when she encounters a sinister force that manipulates time and must outwit it to escape a nightmare where every second feels endless.

# MUSIC VIDEOS

## BIBIZA

Rupert Höller

Bibiza auf Spritztour durch Wien. Ein Leben auf der Überholspur.

Bibiza on a wild spin through Vienna. Life on the fast lane.

## NEE-SHA - Sound Of The Waves

Katharina Simunic

There was a promo piece on FM4's new music blog when this video first dropped (FM4: Austria's still-going, and still-relevant, alt. radio station). It spoke about, "the director Katharina Simunic and her team of divers in the Gulf of Thailand", and then it went onto describe the "impressive" cinematography.

Half of me didn't want to break the spell, didn't want to explain that, actually, the team of divers was just me, in a mask and snorkel, with this 300 dollar action-cam the size of a cigarette packet, a camera I'd never used before, underwater, where I'd never filmed before.

The protagonist in "Sound of the Waves" is also struggling to come to terms with a broken spell, struggling to admit that, actually, she's all alone, too. But it's not art that's caused her to believe in a fantasy, it's her heart.

A friend of mine sent me a photo after he'd seen the video. It was that classic Botticelli painting with the goddess being brought into existence in an oyster shell, with "The (water-)Birth of (the Black) Venus" as a caption.

A film has to be judged on its merits, of course, but I'm still proud of the back-story, the subtly radical feminist and black-story.

Nee-Sha made all the music herself in Vienna, and then she transmogrified into a free-diving mermaid supermodel during a one-week trip to Thailand. And silly old me with my laptop is a team of divers rebirthing Botticelli but more progressively. We two sisters are really doing it for ourselves.

## Queentide – bad mood

Wilbur Charles Roberts



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## MUSIC VIDEOS CON'T

### Fast Edee

Zebedee Row

The album's first single "Fast Edee" introduces listeners to a fictional hedonist character on a quest for pleasure. Row, who also directed the song's accompanying video, describes the character as someone who lives by the motto, "Go hard or go home." The video, set in New York, portrays Edee's attempt to escape his troubled past and start anew with his daughter, only to be drawn back into one final job.

### My Fathers Men

Mitch Parks

This is the story of every artist, especially females, in an industry riddled with sexism, and the fight to hold onto what's yours, your heart, your integrity, your power.

### Soap&Skin - Girl Loves Me

Ioan Gavriel, Anja Franziska Plaschg

"Under the spreading chestnut tree I sold you and you sold me: There lie they, and here lie we, under the spreading chestnut tree." George Orwell

To look at the outside world from your hideout, while madness reigns around you. Emotionally in the thick of it, yet fully paralyzed and sinking into inaction. Spinning and spiraling. A harbor, a safe place, yet a deadly prison at the same time.

Does "breaking out" mean committing to the direct opposite state of being? Surrendering to the allure

of chaos? Tying oneself to the unstoppable pull of destructive stimulation?

Two relationship models, two spheres of consciousness, collide, leaving behind hollow shells clinging to themselves while wandering off into the dark night. We encounter a person encased in a chestnut tree. This evokes ancient mythical symbolism and metaphors, like Artemis, the goddess of the forest, who transformed herself into a chestnut tree to escape the desires of Zeus. The tree was named "chestnut" because Artemis remained chaste.

To Christians, the plant became a symbol of hidden virtue, righteousness, and honesty, while also symbolizing fertility. George Orwell famously picked up on this in 1984, with the rebellious "chestnut-tree café" and the quote: "Under the spreading chestnut tree I sold you and you sold me."

We meet a frail old man, moving and acting in strange ways. He seems to exist only as a vision, peeking outside of a tree hole. A fantasy? A ghost? There is a strong resemblance to the late David Bowie. But is it him? Or could it be the madman from One Hundred Years of Solitude, who was tied to the said tree until he died?

"Where the fuck did Monday go? I'm cold to this pig and pug show I'm sitting in the chestnut tree Who the fuck's gonna mess with me?" David Bowie  
And finally, we race with a giant, alluring, but apocalyptic monster of steel. Smashing and flattening everything that cannot escape its enormous wheels. Never stopping, marching on and on — day and night — while carrying us with it.

Ultimately, this monster will eat the tree, and the circle of life will abruptly be interrupted.

## LOCAL MUSIC VIDEOS

### Sleeves

Liz Liano, Alex Antholzner, Josiah Colbert, Lauren Flores

This is a song about getting better.

### Open Your Eyes

Alfonso Loya

Two women embark on a blindfolded hike to Mount Cristo Rey, a powerful metaphor for the blindness they've endured in their toxic, abusive relationships. As they struggle up the mountain, each step becomes a battle for clarity, strength, and the courage to finally break free.

### Sus

Sai Elijah

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### Way Too Hot

Tony Marquez

This performance art music video follows a man on the verge of being sacrificed by a mysterious cult. As he breaks free, the truth is revealed—the one he escapes from is another version of himself. Blurring the line between victim and perpetrator, the piece explores identity, duality, and the struggle for self-liberation.

### While I'm Hiding

Rafael Verdugo

Both the song and its video explore pain in a raw and direct way, moving between introspection and emotional emptiness, set against a backdrop of uncertainty about the future.

# LOCAL MUSIC VIDEOS CON'T

## Honey!

Ramon Alqueza

Award-winning musician NCTR.exe returns with a new music video in collaboration with Æthereal

## Universe

Tony Marquez

Haunted by depression, a man drifts toward suicide. Across town, the woman he loves hovers over a message unsent—unaware that her hesitation could determine whether he fades away or finds a reason to stay.

## Era Snow “Pair Of Stairs”

Ryan M. Robson

I got a chance to see a slice of Era Snow's beautifully textured life. With her song, “Pair of Stairs,” I hope to capture the wonderment and exploration she experienced in her time in Oregon and her travels through our wild country. She has her life packed into her car, adorned in ornamental tenderness of those that pass through. Together we created an ode to the “Square”, a bond between Era, Josh, Rachel, and Steven. Friends who have forever ascended into the branches that mold and hold Era, and of course with Obi (Obi-wan, Obes, Shuggy, Overall Good Boy) always trotting not too far behind. Only known to those around her, Era holds the superpower to love life, in its smallest trinket, loveliest flower, quietest conversations, loneliest drives, friendliest photo, smelliest dog, and hardest choices. See and keep her smile as she gives it freely to everyone around her.

## Sparks

Zaavan Sanchez

## 1985

Alfonso Loya

A woman in her fifties feels trapped in the monotony of her life. Struggling with depression, she's lost the spark in her marriage and feels distant from her teenage grandson. Haunted by nostalgia for the 1980s, she longs for the past, wishing she could turn back time to when everything felt alive and full of possibility.

## Nick Brower “Ice Skaters”

Ryan M. Robson

Being a fan of Nick Brower naturally we were bound to work together again. This was shot over a very small window of rare snowfall in Las Cruces, NM. Nick's song has such a special grip on memory and the pull of two people that we wanted the video to live in two places, similar but different, and even though were simply in a neighborhood in the desert under street light, it can still feel like the expanse of so much more up there in the great darkness. A piece passing through time and space.

## SPECIAL SCREENINGS

**Friday, April 10, 4:30-6 p.m.**

**at Fountain Theatre**

**Oculto Selections**

A curated showcase featuring some of the most representative short films presented at Oculto Film Fest in previous years. The program highlights the diversity and creativity that define the festival, bringing together a variety of stories from filmmakers around the world. From imaginative stop-motion animation to chilling tales of monsters and the supernatural, this selection offers audiences a glimpse into the bold and inventive spirit of independent genre cinema.

**Saturday, April 11**

**Femme Frontera Selections, 10 a.m.-noon**

Femme Frontera centers the experiences of women, non-binary people, and LGBTQIA+ communities from border regions around the world and generates resources and support for filmmakers whose lived border experiences inform their connection to those stories.



**48-hour Film Challenge Films, 4-6 p.m.**

**New Mexico Heritage Short Film Contest Winners, 4-5 p.m.**

# PANELS & WORKSHOPS

APRIL 9TH

## A Conversation with Michael Rooker

Thursday, April 9, 2-3 p.m. at NMSU Center for the Arts

1000 E University Ave., Las Cruces

Michael Rooker is an American actor and voice actor. He first rose to prominence for portraying the titular role in *Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer* (1986), and is best known for starring as Merle Dixon in the AMC series *The Walking Dead* (2010–2013) and as Yondu Udonta in *Guardians of the Galaxy* (2014), and its sequel *Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 2* (2017). He is a recurring collaborator of *Guardians of the Galaxy* director and co-CEO of DC Studios James Gunn, appearing in all of his films to date including *Slither* (2006), *Super* (2010) and *The Suicide Squad* (2021). Rooker's other notable roles include Chick Gandil in *Eight Men Out* (1988), Frank Bailey in *Mississippi Burning* (1988), Terry Cruger in *Sea of Love* (1989), Rowdy Burns in *Days of Thunder* (1990), Bill Broussard in *JFK* (1991), Hal Tucker in *Cliffhanger* (1993), Sherman McMaster in *Tombstone* (1993), Jared Svenning in *Mallrats* (1995), Detective Howard Cheney in *The Bone Collector* (1999), and Buddy in *F9* (2021).

APRIL 10TH

## Screenwriting Panel with

## Don Foster, Bill True, Ed Stone and Lovinder S. Gill

Friday, April 10, 10-11:15 a.m. at Allen Theaters Cineport

700 S Telshor Blvd, Las Cruces

**Don Foster** is a proud graduate of NMSU. He has written for television for over 30 years. He is known for *Roseanne*, *Mike & Molly*, *Two And A Half Men*, and *The Big Bang Theory*. Don resides in Los Angeles.

**Bill True's** debut feature, *Runaway*, was hailed by critics as "Brilliant" and "Hitchcockian" as it premiered to universal accolades at Tribeca and Toronto. It went on to screen worldwide at Avignon, Woodstock, Vail, Palm Springs, and other top festivals. Bill took the top prize at the Austin Film Festival for his work on *Runaway*, which was subsequently released by eOne Films. As a screenwriter, Bill has developed feature and television projects with The Film Collective, NBA Entertainment, Warner Horizon Television, Veritas Entertainment, More/Medavoy Productions, eOne Television, and more. He was honored as a Bush Artists Fellowship for writing grant recipient and was selected to participate in the acclaimed Yale Writers Workshop. In addition to his work in Hollywood, Bill is Head of Dramatic Writing at the esteemed Scottsdale School of Film+Theatre. From 2015 to 2024, Bill also served as Department Chair for SSFT. Under Bill's leadership, SSFT was named one of industry-leading entertainment publication *Variety's* "Top Film Schools in North America" in 2023 and 2024, and was also named one of *MovieMaker Magazine's* "30 Best Film Schools in the US and Canada in 2024."

**Ed Stone** graduated from New Mexico State University. After years of writing screenplays that no one would read, much less buy, Ed and some friends decided to make their own film. The result was "Happy, Texas," which premiered at the Sundance Film Festival and was acquired by Miramax Films in what was at the time the largest purchase in Sundance history. (Ed was able to quit his waiter job.) What followed is what some historians would call a career... other historians would call it a run of just stupid, blind luck, and many historians have simply refused to call Ed at all. Ed has rewritten or contributed material to – *Stuart Little*, *Stuart Little 2*, *Scooby Doo*, *Scooby Doo 2*, *Haunter Mansion*, *The Looney Tunes Movie*, *Racing Stripes*, and a comedy porn film a friend made. (Ed has not seen this film but please don't tell his friend.) *Griffin & Phoenix*, which Ed directed and produced, was well received by the 10s of people who saw it. Ed's animated script, with Nate Hopper, *Paws of Fury: The Legend of Hank*, starring Michael Cera, Samuel L. Jackson, Ricky Gervais and Mel Brooks – was released by Paramount in July of 2022.

# PANELS & WORKSHOPS

## A Conversation with Shane Black

Friday, April 10, 11:30 a.m.-12:15 p.m. at Allen Theaters Cineport  
700 S Telshor Blvd, Las Cruces



Shane Black is an American screenwriter, film director, and actor, known for his distinctive style of action and action-comedy films. He originated the Lethal Weapon franchise and has also written such films as *The Monster Squad* (1987), *The Last Boy Scout* (1991), *Last Action Hero* (1993), and *The Long Kiss Goodnight* (1996). As an actor, Black is best known for his role as Hawkins in *Predator* (1987). He made his directorial debut with the film *Kiss Kiss Bang Bang* in 2005. Black went on to write and direct *Iron Man 3* (2013), *The Nice Guys* (2016), *The Predator* (2018) and *Play Dirty* (2025).

## Financial Literacy & Planning in a Gig Economy

Friday, April 10, 12:30-1:45 p.m. at Allen Theaters Cineport  
700 S Telshor Blvd, Las Cruces

Brandy Darden, Nusenda Credit Union, and David Beasley, Beasley Legal are the presenters for this workshop addressing the business side of the film industry.

## Stunts + Fight Choreography

Friday, April 10, 2-3:15 p.m. at Allen Theaters Cineport  
700 S Telshor Blvd, Las Cruces

Matthew Frieze is an actor, stuntman and oracle. He was born and raised in Las Cruces, New Mexico and has been on CBS, Plex TV and Amazon Prime. He has worked on films, commercials, internet projects and music videos. He also shares his talents and gifts on all popular social media platforms (@matthew\_frieze).



# PANELS & WORKSHOPS

**APRIL 10TH** con't

## **Film School to Film Set Panel with Julian Alexander**

**Friday, April 10, 3:30-4:15 p.m. at Allen Theaters Cineport  
700 S Telshor Blvd, Las Cruces**

Julian Alexander is a filmmaker, educator, and performer born in Norfolk, Virginia, but Las Cruces really raised him. An alumni of Las Cruces High School's Bulldawg Broadcast – the things he learned in V Wing he continues to implement today.

Julian graduated from NMSU's Creative Media Institute after completing his first short film "Buffalo" before continuing his education at the Northern Film School in England culminating with two short films, "Léo" – nominated for Best Post Graduate Film at the Royal Television Awards and "Beat Blue," a police drama all in rhyme starring Lana Young (A Jazzman's Blues, WandaVision) and shot in Mesilla!

Julian has written, directed, and starred in a phone-based web series produced by Story Island Productions, titled "Bad Juju," about a rapper navigating his career in New Mexico, featuring in and winning multiple web series' festivals globally. Most recently his film Layla, At Last, funded by the Sharjah Art Foundation in the UAE shot in Spain and Morocco.

Julian is a founder and co-manager of Diversity Decoded. The company gives explanations and strategies to help HR practitioners recognize and respond effectively when they encounter DEI opportunities and challenges. It is designed for varying levels of knowledge and experience with information that is based on current research.

When he is not leading a film set, Julian is leading a classroom as a professor and lecturer. Julian spent two years teaching at the Creative Media Student and currently is a senior lecturer in film at the University of East London. Julian is also a researcher with his work involving adapting classic literature using hip-hop practice.

**APRIL 11TH**

## **LCIFF Acting Workshop**

**Saturday, April 11, noon-1:30 p.m., Rio Grande Theatre  
211 N Main St, Las Cruces**

Renowned acting coach and teacher Don K. Williams leads a once-in-a-lifetime workshop on acting for beginning, intermediate and advanced acting students. From the most experienced to the neophyte, Don's advice and teaching in this seminar will help each actor grow, learn and become better at their craft.

Don served for four years as the Head of Acting for the Stella Adler Studio/ NYU Tisch BFA program and for eight years as a senior acting instructor in the same program. Most recently, Don led the Los Angeles branch of the Stella Adler Studio (Art of Acting Studio) as artistic director and master teacher and served as the artistic director for the award winning HCLAB Theatre Company.

In addition to Don's educational experience, Don has been seen on stages such as the California Shakespeare Festival, the Denver Center Theatre Company, Playwrights Horizons, the Neighborhood Playhouse and the Marin Theatre Company, to name a few. As a director, Don has helmed over 100 off-Broadway, regional and collegiate productions as well as numerous short films. As a playwright Don's productions have appeared on stages in both New York and Los Angeles. Don is a 17-year member of the Screen Actor's Guild.

# Inside the World of Horror

Saturday, April 11, 2-3:30 p.m., Rio Grande Theatre

211 N Main St, Las Cruces



Kimberly Beck  
(Friday the 13th)



Bruce Davison

The Las Cruces International Film Festival is thrilled to announce an exciting panel discussion titled “Inside the World of Horror.” This engaging deep dive into the realm of horror films will feature a captivating lineup of industry veterans, including Academy Award nominated actor Bruce Davison (known for his iconic role in *Willard*), actress Kimberly Beck (*Friday the 13th*), acclaimed director Lucky” McKee, and rising horror director Andrew Jara.

Moderating the panel will be screenwriter Bill True, known for his adept storytelling and understanding of genre nuances. Attendees can expect an enlightening discussion as the panelists explore the intricacies of horror filmmaking, the evolution of the genre, and what makes horror films resonate with audiences across generations.

Academy Award nominee Bruce Davison brings decades of experience to the table, having starred in both independent films and major productions. Kimberly Beck has become a beloved figure in the horror community, renowned for her performances in classic slasher films. Like *Friday The 13th*. Edward McKee, known for his compelling storytelling and unique vision, has directed several critically acclaimed horror films, while Andrew Jara is making waves with his fresh perspectives and creative approaches to the genre. This panel promises to provide valuable insights into the creative processes that drive horror storytelling, as well as explore themes of fear, suspense, and imagination in cinema. Audience participation will be encouraged, providing fans the opportunity to engage directly with these influential creators.

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Taylor Atwell Photography

# From classroom to red carpet: Inside Las Cruces' film festival



Kurt Johnson - The Las Cruces Bulletin

For more than a decade, the Las Cruces International Film Festival has quietly evolved into one of the Southwest's most compelling cultural celebrations — a story of community, education and cinematic ambition unfolding each spring on the sun-drenched stages of southern New Mexico.

What began in 2016 as a spirited experiment, a small festival of independent films anchored at Allen Theatres Cineport and New Mexico State University, has grown into a marquee event that draws thousands of film fans, filmmakers and industry guests to Las Cruces each year.

The inaugural festival featured roughly 60 films and welcomed around 3,000 attendees, a humble beginning that belied the grand vision of its founder, filmmaker and NMSU professor Ross Marks.

"It's a film festival that was designed for the students, and for me, because of the experience I had as a young filmmaker at Sundance," Marks said. "I wanted to duplicate that here in Las Cruces for my students. It's a bit of a convention, a bit of a gathering of filmmakers from around the world."

From that first spark, the festival has blossomed into what could be seen as a Southwestern Sundance, combining global cinema with hands-on training and deep community participation.

Over its first 10 years, LCIFF has screened films from dozens of countries, expanded its programming to include features, shorts, documentaries and animation, and welcomed celebrated actors and directors for screenings and conversations — from Danny Trejo in its early years to Academy Award winner Helen Hunt during its 10th anniversary festivities.

Beyond its role as a showcase, the festival is deeply educational. Entirely run by students in NMSU's Creative Media Institute, LCIFF provides emerging filmmakers and media professionals with real-world experience in programming, production and festival operations, a mission that has shaped hundreds of careers and helped establish it as one of the largest student-run film festivals in the country.

"I would say over the 11 years we've had well over a hundred students get jobs because of the film festival," Marks said. "Through interactions with producers, filmmakers, actors, directors and production companies, they land jobs and earn professional credits on their resumes.

"Students in the fall program the festival and can list that they were a programming coordinator for a specific category. In the spring, they might be a marketing director, a celebrity handler or a theater manager. It's a real-world event, not just a theory class, but a practice class and a resume builder."

Students experience the very real pressure of producing an event that locals and visitors alike have come to expect at a high level.

"At the beginning of the semester, they're thinking, 'Oh man, I don't think we can pull this off. This is scary,'" Marks said. "By the end, every single one of them is empowered and confident because they pull it off. It's the pressure of an event that brings in 12,000 people and 168 filmmakers. It's the second-largest event in southern New Mexico and one of the largest film festivals in the Southwest."

Marks said he's consistently impressed by how students rise to the challenge.



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“They run it. They put it together. I just guide them and give them the tools to be successful,” he said. “It’s experiential learning — the film festival is as much a lab and a classroom as it is an event. They take responsibility, and they have to deliver.”

Students typically serve on two or three committees, managing different aspects of the festival and gaining a view of the operation from multiple angles.

For Barrow Williams, that hands-on experience has been transformative. He doesn’t remember exactly when he became interested in making movies, but he knows it started early.

“My mom says when I was two, she showed me *Mary Poppins*, and we had an oven that reflected like a mirror,” Williams said. “She said I would do the ‘Step in Time’ dance in front of it. Ever since then, I’ve wanted to make movies. I’ve never really considered anything else.”

Williams transferred from a film school in New York and said the opportunities at NMSU far exceed what he experienced elsewhere.

“They’re letting the students run a film festival,” he said. “You don’t see that at other schools. You might have student volunteers, but they’re not actually running the show. Here, we are, and they’re telling us to go for it.”

“It’s something that looks great on a resume, and honestly, it’s something most film schools don’t even offer.”

One key element of the festival is its Q&A sessions with visiting filmmakers. Students moderate discussions following screenings, an experience Elijah Garcia said proved invaluable.




Garcia first became interested in film in middle school, making YouTube skits with friends.

“That was such a cool creative outlet,” he said. “We did a lot of comedy sketches, then got more into music in high school. I just carried it with me into college.”

Preparing for the Q&As helped him better understand the business side of filmmaking — something he said often gets overlooked.

“The Q&As were the most challenging part for me because public speaking isn’t my strong suit,” Garcia said. “But I met so many people, and I saw how many people around the world are interested in creating things.”

Sebastian Garcia said the festival’s networking opportunities were among its most rewarding aspects.



“It helps just getting out there and meeting people who make films,” he said. “When you really work the festival, you get access to things you wouldn’t normally see as an attendee.”

For Angie Hernandez, a senior graduating in May, film has long been a creative outlet.

“I feel like sharing my emotions and ideas through film is a really important part of my life,” she said. “I’ve always liked making small documentaries and series. I’m just enjoying the ride.”

She said the camaraderie among students is one of the most meaningful parts of bringing the festival to life.

“I really enjoy engaging with my peers,” Hernandez said. “For my job, I do a lot of behind-the-scenes management and recruiting, so this class lets me apply what I’ve already learned to something I care about. It’s a great opportunity to grow.”

This year, she’s helping plan the awards show, a chance to celebrate the work of filmmakers and students alike.

Nathan Lindley entered NMSU as a biology major before finding his way to film. He now spends countless hours reviewing submissions.

“These aren’t high-budget productions — they’re short films,” Lindley said. “I contacted a little over a thousand filmmakers about submitting their work.”

He served on the narrative shorts committee.

“We received more than 372 films,” Lindley said. “I watched every single one. I had about a month and spent close to 80 hours watching them. A lot of them were really good.”

Nathan Willis is now helping produce an event in which he once competed. As a high school junior, he won the festival’s 48-Hour Film Challenge.

“We were filming about 12 hours a day,” Willis said. “I’d never worked that hard before. I was exhausted by the end, but we pulled through. We were given a prompt and built a sci-fi story about a kid stranded alone on a planet.”

Over the years, the festival’s footprint has grown not only in audience size — now drawing up to 12,000 attendees annually — but in its broader impact, welcoming filmmakers from around the globe and building bridges across the borderlands.

As the festival heads into its 11th year this April, it remains rooted in its original purpose: to spark imagination, build creative skills and celebrate storytelling from every corner of the globe, while highlighting the unique spirit of Las Cruces and the students who bring the event to life.

“Everywhere I go in town, I hear, ‘I can’t wait for the film festival,’” Marks said. “People here get a taste of Hollywood — red carpets, celebrity photos, premieres and after-parties. I went to the American Film Institute, where we had major filmmakers visit weekly. We don’t get that here year-round. But during the film festival, we do.”

Editor’s note: This story originally ran in the “Las Cruces Bulletin.”

# MORE THAN A TROPHY



## The art behind LCIFF's awards

Kurt Johnson  
Las Cruces Bulletin

The awards handed out at a film festival are meant to recognize great work.

At the Las Cruces International Film Festival, they're also meant to be works of art themselves.

That distinction is by design.

From the beginning, founder Ross Marks envisioned the festival as more than a celebration of film, a showcase for the full scope of the region's creative identity. Music, dance, visual art, all of it has a place. Even the awards.

"I love the fact that at the awards show, we're going to have the NMSU mariachi band and the NMSU folklorica dancers," Marks said. "We'll be supporting music and dance, so we're just really trying to be a mouthpiece for the arts in southern New Mexico."

That vision found a natural partner in Theresa Balasua.

Balasua has spent a lifetime in the arts.

A former art director at the Las Cruces Bulletin and later a designer at Wilson Binkley advertising, she eventually stepped away from agency work to focus

on creating — particularly jewelry — alongside her husband, Daniel. The two met in a high school art class, a shared foundation that continues to shape their work today.

At New Mexico State University, Balasua immersed herself in as many disciplines as she could.

"While I was there I couldn't stop taking classes," Balasua said. "You had to choose an emphasis, but I was doing graphic design, and then I did metalsmithing, and jewelry, and then I did photography, and I was taking drawing classes. I just love every area."

That curiosity — that refusal to stay in one lane — would later shape the way she approached something unexpected: awards.

The connection came through a chance meeting with a colleague.

While working at her booth at the Las Cruces Farmers' Market, Balasua reconnected with Marks. The two had previously worked together during the White Sands International Film Festival, a smaller predecessor to what would become LCIFF.



"Before I did the Las Cruces International Film Festival, I did a little festival called the White Sands International Film Festival for about three years," Marks said. "Then I stepped away and they ran it for one year before it went away."

When Las Cruces approached Marks about launching a new festival, he agreed — with one condition: it would be tied to New Mexico State University.

As the festival grew, so did the desire to elevate every part of the experience.

That included the awards.

By then, Balasua had already begun experimenting with custom pieces.

What started with jewelry evolved into something broader — creating handcrafted awards for local events, from tennis tournaments to pool leagues.

"My brother is the coach of the tennis team in Alamogordo, and he'd ask me to come up with something, so I started making random awards," she said. "Then, my husband and I played pool league for several years here in Cruces and I started doing awards for some of the pool tournaments as well, so that sort of started building up, and I was making more and more."

Marks saw the potential immediately.

What if the awards themselves reflected the same creativity the festival was built to celebrate?

In 2025, Balasua took on the challenge — creating every award for the festival by hand.

There are two distinct types: one set for filmmakers and another for the festival's high-profile guests. Each piece begins with an idea rooted in the culture of southern New Mexico.

"Last year, after seeing the artwork on the poster, I decided to do the large ones for the people coming in, as a woman that looked indigenous to this area," Balasua said. "So, I created artwork of this woman from a side view with a braid because braids seem like a simple thing that gives a Hispanic Native American heritage of the area very quickly."

From there, the process becomes layered — literally.

Balasua digitizes the design, engraves it, builds it from laser-cut wood, paints each layer, inlays turquoise and crushed glass, and finishes it with resin. The result is something that feels less like a trophy and more like a sculpture.

For the individual film awards, she created a complementary design featuring a wolf, tying the pieces together thematically.

But the process is as demanding as it is creative.



"I batch them when I do my laser cutting and then my husband and I will sit and we'll sand everything and stain it," she said. "I want to say there were 17 or 18 of the film awards and then there were five last year of the big awards. It takes several weeks to do all of them."

This year, the vision continues to evolve.

Balasia is working toward a design that can become a recognizable staple of the festival — something consistent year to year, but still rooted in place.

The concept draws from the landscape itself: the colors of the New Mexico sky, layered forms that suggest mountains or dunes, and inlays that catch the light.

"It will look really beautiful for each award and we're adding custom things that really represent the area that we can do every year but it's definitely unique to this festival," she said. "We absolutely are influenced by everything around us, with our jewelry and everything we create. And with everything, we want to make it uniquely ours."

For Balasia, the reward comes in the reaction.

At last year's ceremony, she watched as recipients took the stage and held something entirely different from the standard plaques and acrylic trophies common at film festivals.

"It's great to see that, which then transcends them realizing that we put time and effort to acknowledge their work and we wanted that to show through in their award, that it was special and that what they did means something and that their award reflects that," she said.

Marks saw the same thing — and knew they had created something distinct.

"I love Theresa, and I love her work," he said. "We've grown to be so big now that we're trying to elevate the arts in Las Cruces across the board. Last year was the first year she did the awards. They were really sculptures. I remember Helen Hunt got hers and she said, 'This is as nice as some of the others I've gotten.' I said, 'Including the Oscars?' And she said, 'It's going right next to the Oscar.' That was kind of neat."

As LCIFF continues to grow, those details matter.

"Theresa is an artist, so Theresa is a big part of that because she's creating sculptures that are going to the filmmakers, and our award winners like Michael Rooker and Shane Black and Bruce Davison," Marks said. "It also really elevates the film festival because instead of getting a standard acrylic or brass award that most festivals do, we have a handmade piece of art that really stands out."

"We're constantly trying to figure out ways to elevate our event and to stand out from other festivals, and Theresa's awards are one way we do that."

At most film festivals, the award is the end of the story.

In Las Cruces, it's part of it. A reflection not just of the film being honored, but of the place doing the honoring — layered, handmade and rooted in the culture that inspired it.





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