

OXFORD FILM FESTIVAL

16th annual Oxford Film Festival embraces diversity, growth

By Ellis Farese

staff writer

The Oxford Film Festival has made an impressive name for itself as one of the most sought-after festivals in the country. The five-day event ran from Feb. 6-10 with films, panels and parties. The 16th annual festival, themed "Sixteen Candles," brought in the largest number of submissions and largest audiences in the festival's history, with people from all around the world coming together to celebrate the independent film industry. The categories included Narrative Feature, Documentary Feature, Narrative Short, Documentary Short, Fest Forward, Mississippi Shorts and Features, Mississippi Music Video, LGBTQ and Music Documentary.

The films were open to the public and played throughout the week in various locations around Oxford. A special experience on opening night featured John Rash's documentary, "Negro Terror," following an anti-racist punk band based out of Memphis. The film was showed at local restaurant and venue Proud Larry's with the band playing along live, and it won Best Music Documentary.

Featured on opening night at the Ford Center was "Ghost Light" by John Stimpson. This dark comedy about the conspiracies regarding the Scottish Play found the perfect

balance between horror and humor, winning the award for Audience's Favorite Film.

Filmmakers wishing to submit into one of the Mississippi categories must provide their connection to the state, or at least 50% of the film has to be made in Mississippi. John Reyer Afamasaga's "Door Ajar: The M.B. Mayfield Story," won the Mississippi Feature, and "Roots and Wings," directed by Hanna Miller, took home the award for Best Mississippi Short Film.

The LGBTQ categories were added within the past few years, showcasing the inclusivity and appreciation of all films at the Oxford Film Festival. Directors Michael Palmieri and Donal Mosher's film, "The Gospel of Eureka," found ground between the actors in the world's largest Christian passion play and drag performers in Eureka Springs, AR, which took home the prize for the Best LGBTQ Film; and Morgan Jon Fox's "The One You Never Forget" and Will Stewart's "All We Are" tied for best LGBTQ short.

An emotional documentary about a wrestling team at J.O. Johnson High School in Huntsville, AL reveals the teenagers' hardships and the importance of wrestling in their lives. Suzannah Herbert and Lauren Belfer's authentic presentation and raw story that made "Wrestle" won it Best Documentary, and the two women also received the Alice Guy-Blaché

Emerging Female Filmmaker Award.

The winner of Best Mississippi Feature Film exposes interesting facets of southern culture that are often overlooked. Jeffery Dennis's "Sharde Thomas: Legacy of the Fife," follows Mississippi blues icon Othar Turner's granddaughter and her family as they continue his legacy and ensure to keep their culture and traditions alive.

The narrative feature winner "This World Alone," directed by Jordan Noel, transports viewers to a post-apocalyptic world through the story of a young girl facing unforeseen challenges as she breaks through her mom's protectiveness. Shot in the northern Georgia mountains, this film shows the simple relationship that human and nature share and enhances the genuine ruggedness of the narrative.

The success of the Oxford Film Festival does not seem to be slowing down anytime soon, and it is obvious why this small southern town attracts filmmakers and filmgoers from across the globe. The literary and artistic history of Oxford is felt in the community and new and old generations of creatives alike are able to embrace it. Not only do people continue to return to the Oxford Film Festival due to the quality of the films, but also because of the hospitality and the very present feeling of union that is shared amongst film lovers.



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