

NJ film festivals bring must-see movies this fall

Alex Biese

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Willa Cofield is bringing her history to the big screen.

Cofield, a 92-year-old Plainfield resident, is the co-director of the essential new documentary "The Nine O'clock Whistle," a film documenting the early-1960s fight for civil rights in her hometown of Enfield, North Carolina.

The film preserves memories of the day-to-day struggles against segregation undertaken by Cofield, a longtime teacher, as well as her students and her husband, who campaigned for local elected office.

"The people who did it did not have experience, we had never done anything like that before. We'd never even seen a picket line, a protest," Cofield said. "And when we found ourselves doing it we were amazed at our own ability to just stand up and do things."

The film screens Saturday, Sept. 11, as part of the New Jersey Film Festival at Voorhees Hall on Hamilton Street, located on the New Brunswick campus of Rutgers University.

Celebrating its 40th anniversary in 2021, the New Jersey Film Festival runs Fridays and Sundays, Sept. 10 through Oct. 10. Films will screen at Voorhees Hall and will also be available for 24 hours on their screening date via video-on-demand.

Cofield's cousin and co-director, Karen Riley of Piscataway, discussed the importance of the film screening for younger viewers on the Rutgers campus.

"I think it's important for people, especially young people, to realize there's power in stepping up," said Riley, "that they have the ability to make significant changes, even if it's on an individual basis. But there is power collectively, as well."

"I hope that (viewers) will admire the young people who were so courageous in 1963, who took a chance, who confronted people in our community who were denying them access to public facilities, the library and the theater," said Cofield. "And I hope they'll be inspired to see that young people can do things. And I think they've proved that they can, I think the Black Lives Matter cam-



Willa Cofield in a scene from her documentary "The Nine O'clock Whistle."

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paid over the past few years has shown people in a very positive light. But I hope that this film will support those efforts to make changes and not to just accept things as they are and assume that they can't be changed."

Under the executive direction and curation of Al Nigrin, the festival is presented by the the Rutgers Film Co-op/ New Jersey Media Arts Center in association with the Rutgers University Program in Cinema Studies.

For a full schedule, tickets and more information, visit newjerseyfilmfestivalfall2021.eventive.org.

Coming soon to New Jersey screens

The New Jersey Film Festival is one of several festivals set to light up screens across the state this fall. Here is a look at some of the other cinematic gatherings happening this season.

"RuPaul's Drag Race" contestant Mrs. Kasha Davis visits Red Bank to introduce her documentary, "Workhorse Queen," playing as part of Indie Street at 8:15 p.m. Saturday, Sept. 11, at the Two River Theater on Bridge Avenue.

The film, directed by Angela Washko, will also be available to watch online as part of the festival.



Taylour Paige stars as Zola in director Janicza Bravo's "Zola."

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The Indie Street Film Festival runs through Sept. 13, with online screenings available Sept. 13 to 19.

For tickets, a full schedule of screenings and events and more information, visit indiestreetfilmfestival.org.

In its first 29 years, the Arthouse Film Festival hosted nearly 2,000 film premieres an welcomed more than 1,000 surprise guests — including New Jersey talent such as Oscar nominees Jesse Eisenberg and Ethan Hawke, Emmy winner Joe Pantoliano and independent film icon Kevin Smith.

The festival returns for 10-week sea-

sons this fall, running Mondays at the AMC Mountainside and Wednesdays (except for Nov. 23) at the AMC Monmouth Mall.

The festival's exact schedule is always kept under wraps, giving founder Chuck Rose the flexibility to accept last-minute screening opportunities.

Here's what we do know: Films start at 6:45 p.m. beginning on Sept. 20 in Mountainside and Sept. 22 in Eatontown. Theater capacity will be limited, and all attendees are required to show proof of COVID-19 vaccination.

According to a news release from Rose, films confirmed or under consideration include the "Sopranos" prequel "The Many Saints of Newark," Guillermo del Toro's "Nightmare Alley" and Ridley Scott's "House of Gucci" starring Adam Driver and Lady Gaga.

The festival is an entirely in-person experience.

"The experience of watching a movie with other people is way different than watching it at home," Rose told the Asbury Park Press in 2020. "And the experience of watching a movie on a 40-foot screen with a gigantic sound system — I don't care how much you put into your home system, I have a pretty good one — it's not the same."

"And the experience of watching it with an audience and then talking about it with people who know what they're talking about is something you can't get at home. So I think that is why I still have this unbelievably loyal, hardcore audience that comes back year after year after year."

For tickets, a full schedule and more information, visit arthousefilmfestival.com.

If you're in the spirit for something scary, the New Jersey Horror Con and Film Festival returns to the Showboat Hotel in Atlantic City from Nov. 12 to 14.

Guests announced so far include "Sleepaway Camp" star Felissa Rose, Dee Wallace of "E.T. The Extra-Terrestrial," "The Howling" and "The Frighteners" and more.

For tickets and all the latest updates, check out newjerseyhorrorcon.com.

Alex Biese has been writing about art, entertainment, culture and news on a local and national level for more than 15 years.