

36th Atlantic Film Festival to feature East Coast stories of inspiration

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Aug 10, 2016 7:49 PM / 5 Ethan Hawke stars as Everett Lewis and Sally Hawkins as famed folk artist Maud Lewis in Maudie, the opening night gala at the Atlantic Film Festival on Sept. 15 at the Rebecca Cohn Auditorium.

A nod to the inspiration for its opening night gala film Maudie, [the Atlantic Film Festival](#) announced its slate of East Coast films at the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia on Wednesday.

At the theatre directly underneath the restored painted house of famed folk artist Maud Lewis, festival program director Jason Beaudry revealed what local filmmakers had to offer for the 36th year of the event, taking place in Halifax Sept. 15 to 22.

The full program of national and international films and events will be announced on Wednesday, Aug. 24.

Like Maudie, which features Academy Award-nominated Sally Hawkins as the physically challenged painter, many of the announced titles concern personal stories about overcoming unique challenges, a theme that resonates in a year that saw the East Coast film industry beset by obstacles on all sides.

Although Beaudry didn't specifically mention recent cuts to and restructuring of provincial film funding in Nova Scotia, he prefaced his announcement by noting that despite the challenges of the past 18 months, "with typical Atlantic Canadian determination and resolve, our moving image storytellers have delivered a credible selection for festival goers this year."

Set in Newfoundland by Irish director Aisling Walsh, [Maudie](#) opens the festival on Thursday, Sept. 15, with four-time Oscar nominee — and occasional North Shore resident — Ethan Hawke co-starring as Maud Lewis's husband Everett. The Rebecca Cohn Auditorium screening will be followed by the opening night party at the AGNS, with the director in attendance.

"I cannot think of a better place to celebrate Maud Lewis's life and work," Walsh said in a news release. "Nova Scotia is where Maud Lewis's story lives and breathes. It is where she is from.

Halifax is particularly special for me as the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia is where I started my journey on this film. I remember being so moved standing in front of Maud's painted house for the first time."



Dylan Authors and Julia Sarah Stone star in Weirdos, shown in Nova Scotia last fall. Written by Cape Breton native Daniel McIvor and directed by Bruce McDonald, it will be the Atlantic Gala of the Atlantic Film Festival on Sept. 16. (MICHAEL TOMPKINS)

The following night, on Friday, Sept. 16, the festival returns to the historic Oxford Theatre for another film flashback with *Weirdos*, fresh from its Canadian premiere at the Toronto International Film Festival.

With a script by playwright and actor Daniel McIvor and directed by road trip movie maestro Bruce McDonald, *Weirdos* is a love letter to the 1970s, set in the shadow of the U.S. Bicentennial celebrations and shot in glowing black and white.

[See also: Nova Scotia feature *Weirdos* to have world premiere at Toronto International Film Festival](#)

Set to a Canadian content soundtrack, *Weirdos* follows two teens (Dylan Authors, Julia Sarah Stone) as they hitchhike to a new home in Cape Breton to live with the boy's free-spirited mom (Molly Parker).

"I was probably one of the worst hitchhikers ever, and the kids in the movie, it takes them a day and a half to get from Antigonish to Sydney," laughed McIvor at the launch announcement, remarking that the songs of the '70s become a driving force in the film.

"I love music, Bruce loves music, and he really knows how to put it to good use. A lot of the music that inspired the story we were able to use, so there's Patsy Gallant, Gordon Lightfoot, Nick Gilder, Murray McLauchlan and so on," said McIvor, also pointing out the inclusion of Halifax actor Rhys Bevan-John as the

ds' imaginary spirit guide, Andy Warhol. It's the sort of surreal touch that makes Weirdos an appropriate followup to McDonald classics like Highway 61 and Hard Core Logo.

ruce is like the cowboy Buddah, it's got his kind of feel, where he's going, 'Yeah man! Everything's cool!' When we were in Toronto, he was talking about how it's got two and a half more kisses than Star Trek."



Perfume War which has its world premiere at the Atlantic Film Festival on Wednesday, Sept. 21, chronicles the longtime friendship between author and entrepreneur Barb Stegemann and Capt. Trevor Greene.

Stegemann was inspired to start her perfume business after Greene, shown here shaking hands with a village elder in Afghanistan, was brutally attacked with an axe. (RICK MADONIK / Toronto Star)

A much different kind of personal journey takes place in Michael Melski's new documentary *Perfume War* which has its world premiere at the Atlantic Film Fest on Wednesday, Sept. 21. Chronicling the longtime friendship between author and entrepreneur Barb Stegemann and Capt. Trevor Greene, the film shows how she was inspired to go to Afghanistan after he was brutally assaulted by the Taliban, to help Afghan farmers grow legal crops to make perfume instead of fuelling the international heroin trade with opium poppies.

"I had an intimacy with the story and the people involved," Melski said at the launch, remarking on his personal friendship with both Stegemann and Greene dating back to their days at the University of King's College in Halifax. "I was quite moved myself as I went deeper and started to understand more about what they experienced and what they went through.

They're not only surviving, they're flourishing and defying the odds. It was an inspirational journey for me

and I hope it's going to be the same for the audience as well."



part from the galas, there is also a strong lineup of features in the AFF's Essential Presentations program including Justin Simms' family drama *Away From Everywhere*, starring Jason Priestley, and the documentaries *Quebec: My Country, Mon Pays* by John Walker and Oscar winner Brigitte Berman's *The Lover of My Dreams: A Portrait of Gordon Pinsent*. The program also includes *Werewolf*, the highly awaited feature debut by Cape Breton filmmaker Ashley McKenzie, about the struggles of a young methadone-addicted couple.

There's also a rich tapestry of topics found in the Atlantic Focus program ranging from the gothic noir romantic triangle of Paul Kimball's *Exit Thread*, fresh from playing 26 festivals around the world from Iraq to Kurdistan to Martinique, to the romantic implosion of Ariyah & Tristan's *Inevitable Breakup* shot over four days on a microbudget by writer/director/actor Koumbie.

"It's been wild, the film is in the final stages of post-production now, and we actually have a film," said the Halifax multi-talent, who also has a short film in the festival, *Hustle and Heart*. "For a while, I wasn't sure if we did, but it's got a start, a middle and an end.

"I have a script that I've been working on, very slowly, but I wouldn't want to do another feature until I have the right resources. Right now I've got a couple of short films I'm developing and a web series, hopefully it seems to have more opportunities, but the feature has actually opened some doors. There are a lot of programs I want to apply to, and having made a feature is proving to be very helpful."

The first for the Atlantic Film Festival is the new Strategic Partners Presentation, featuring a production made

ossible by the annual Strategic Partners conference, which brings film industry figures from around the world to the East Coast. The inaugural film in the series is writer/director [Paco Arango's The Healer](#), produced with Spain's Enrique Posner and Nova Scotia's Michael Volpe, and shot in Halifax and Lunenburg. His South Shore take on magic realism will have its premiere on Friday, Sept. 16, at Cineplex Cinemas Paradise.

Meanwhile, the festival's short film program proves to be as vibrant as ever, with 81 titles spread over nine programs, from animation and comedy to drama and documentaries. "We'll have more treats than a puppy in its first obedience class," promised program administrator Walter Forsyth, naming new work from noted filmmakers like Cory Bowles, Jay Dahl, Struan Sutherland, Leah Johnston and Teresa MacInnes & Kent Mason.

Several films will be featured in the Reel East Coast Shorts gala on Sunday, Sept. 18, at the Oxford Theatre in conjunction with the second season of CBC-TV's Reel East Coast, with host Jonathan Torrens, beginning on Sept. 18.

A limited number of tickets for the opening night gala film screening of Maudie at the Rebecca Cohn Auditorium are now available through the [Dalhousie Arts Centre box office](#), 1-800-874-1668, while tickets for the opening night gala party are available at [atlanticfilm.com](#).

Tickets and passes for the remainder of the Atlantic Film Festival programming are now available exclusively at the fest's [online box office](#). Pass options include the Festival Experience Pass (\$300), the Paradise Festival Pass (\$150) and the Oxford Festival Pass (\$125). All prices include taxes.

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