

# Cape Breton's Werewolf triple winner at Atlantic Film Festival Awards

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Cape Breton filmmaker Ashley McKenzie's gritty drama *Werewolf* won best director and best acting awards for its two leads Andrew Gillis and Bhreagh MacNeil when the Atlantic Film Festival announced its awards on Monday. The feature stars Gillis and MacNeil as a pair of young drug addicts trying to survive on their own terms.

*Werewolf*, which turned heads at the prestigious Toronto International Film Festival where it had its world premiere, continued to earn acclaim when the Atlantic Film Festival (AFF) released its list of winners on Monday.

The drama about a young couple struggling with substance abuse issues as they try to get by day-to-day won three awards. Ashley McKenzie won the Best Atlantic Director Award, Bhreagh MacNeil won the Joan Aronstein Award for Outstanding Performance by an Actress and Andrew Gillis won the David Renton Award for Outstanding Performance by an Actor.

[Maudie](#), the Newfoundland-shot movie about Nova Scotia folk artist Maud Lewis that was the opening gala on Sept. 15, won the Gordon Parsons Award for Best Atlantic Feature and screenwriter Sherry White won the Michael Weir Award for Best Atlantic Screenwriting.

[See also: Maudie lives up to great expectations at Atlantic Film Festival's opening gala](#)



*Ethan Hawke  
as Everett and  
Sally Hawkins  
as the famed  
folk artist  
Maud Lewis  
star in Maudie  
Directed by  
Ireland's Aislinn  
Walsh, the film  
won Best  
Atlantic Picture  
and The  
Michael Weir  
Screenwriting  
Award for*

*Newfoundland's Sherry White.*

[Werewolf](#) was the feature filmmaking debut of McKenzie, a 31-year-old New Waterford native, who now lives in Whitney Pier. She and producing partner Nelson MacDonald made four shorts in five years: *Monda's Party*, which won the 2011 CBC Short Film Face Off and was named one of Canada's top short films of 2011 by TIFF, *When You Sleep*, *Stray* and *4 Quarters*, which won best Atlantic Short at the 2015 Atlantic Film Festival. *4 Quarters* was co-written by and featured Andrew Gillis who won best actor for *Werewolf*.

"The acting performances and direction (in *Werewolf*) were stellar," said AFF program director Alison Beaudry in a phone interview. "Ashley McKenzie is one of the hottest rising stars in Canadian filmmaking, not just Atlantic filmmaking, and it is reflected in the prizes she has received.

"This is exactly the story you want to see in a developing filmmaker. Every time Ashley and Nelson come out with a project it brings them further down the road in their filmmaking pursuits and we are incredibly proud to be a small part of promoting her talent to the world."

**[See also: McKenzie's feature debut Werewolf shows struggle of young Cape Bretoners](#)**

"It was a strong year," continued Beaudry, who is proud of all the award winners. "We had great attendance and great response which was reflected in the diversity of the award winners from first time filmmakers to

ry, very established filmmakers with a wide variety of projects."



*Perfume War*  
directed by  
Michael Melski  
won the Best  
Atlantic  
Documentary  
award. The film  
chronicles how  
Afghan veteran  
Lt. Trevor  
Greene's  
determination  
to overcome  
brain injury  
inspired  
entrepreneur  
Barb  
Stegemann to

create scents. (Rick Madonik/Toronto Star)

[Perfume War](#) justly deserved its best documentary win, he noted.

The feature-length documentary directed by Cape Breton native Michael Melski, now living in Halifax, won the Best Atlantic Documentary Award. The film investigates how Canadian soldier Lt. Trevor Greene's determination to overcome damage done to his brain in an axe attack in Afghanistan inspired longtime friend Barb Stegemann to continue Greene's mission to help the Afghan people by using their crops to create perfume.

[See also: Class reunion: Soldier, entrepreneur and filmmaker from King's collaborate in Perfume War](#)

The gala screened at the Rebecca Cohn Auditorium. All the other galas: Nova Scotia-shot Weirdos, which also debuted at TIFF; American Honey; Reel East Coast Shorts, presented by CBC; the NFB presentation of Theater of Life; Xavier Dolan's divisive Juste La Fin Du Monde; Perfume War and the Closing Night Gala, Manchester by the Sea, on Sept. 22 — screened at the Oxford Theatre. Beaudry said moving the galas back to the Oxford improved the flow at Park Lane which also saw increased attendance this year.

[See also: Alzheimer's, police shootings in focus at Reel East Coast Shorts Gala](#)

moonlight, one of the hottest films of the festival season, was added to the AFF program just a few days before its Sept. 16 screening and won the 2016 People's Choice Award, said Beaudry.

There was a lot of depth to this year's program. We had a great series of talks from NSCAD professors about the documentary program and we had great response for our international films like *The Salesman* and the Atlantic program continues to be at the core of the festival."



*Halifax-based filmmaker Struan Sutherland won the best animated short film for *Rubb* *The Wrong Way*, which screened in the Reel East Coast Shorts Gala, presented by CBC, on Sept. 18.*

Beaudry declined to pick a personal favourite film but said he was happy that not just one type of film did well.

He was especially pleased with the response to NFB Films *The Gift* and *We Can't Make The Same Mistake* twice and to the Feed Nova Scotia event that followed the Theatre of Life screening in which Chefs Jamie MacAulay and Mike Silvester served up delicacies created with foods deemed unmarketable.

"They really moved people, and not just the films. I'm proud of the way we are expanding our reach."

**[See also: From waste to wonderful: chefs conjure up economical hors d'oeuvres](#)**

Beaudry said that it was important that the films that succeeded weren't just those that came in with the biggest buzz, but were films with a very distinctive identity and voice that helped bring in people to the theatre and affects them in their daily lives.

The complete list of winners for the [36th Atlantic Film Festival](#), Sept. 15 to 22 in Halifax is:

**Best 2016 People's Choice Award:** *Moonlight*

**Best Gordon Parsons Award for Best Atlantic Feature:** *Maudie*, directed by Aisling Walsh

**Best Atlantic Short:** *Hustle & Heart*, directed by Koumbie

**Best Atlantic Documentary:** *Perfume War*, directed by Michael Melski

**Best Atlantic Short Documentary:** *My Life So Far*, directed by Alan Collins

**Best Atlantic Animation:** *Rubbed The Wrong Way*, directed by Struan Sutherland

**Best Atlantic Director:** Ashley McKenzie, *Werewolf*

**Best Michael Weir Award for Best Atlantic Screenwriting:** Sherry White, *Maudie*

**Best Atlantic Cinematographer:** Craig Norris, *Kokota: The Islet of Hope*

**Best Atlantic Editor:** Brad Sayeau, *We're From Here*

**Best Atlantic Original Score or Song:** Hillsburn for *Hillsburn, A Band Becomes*

**Best Joan Orenstein Award for Outstanding Performance by an Actress:** Bhreagh MacNeil, *Werewolf*

**Best David Renton Award for Outstanding Performance by an Actor:** Andrew Gillis, *Werewolf*

**Best Telefilm Canada Script Pitch:** Mary Lewis, *February*

The jury included filmmaker Sobaz Benjamin, Yael Strasberg, Acquisitions Manager for Entertainment One Films Canada and producer Trevite Willis.

The 2017 festival is slated for Sept. 14 to 21.

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**Comments**

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**Catherine McCarthy**

Congrats to all the winners at AFF! When and where can we see these films now that the awards are over?

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