

Students get the credit for organizing the upcoming Bates Film Festival

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By Ray Routhier

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Nolan Potter's film course this semester comes with some fairly unusual requirements.

He and his classmates at Bates College in Lewiston are watching films: That's a given. But they're also contacting movie distributors, writing emails to filmmakers, creating video trailers and drumming up publicity. Their work won't be captured in some epic research paper, but will be used to put on a film festival.

BATES FILM FESTIVAL

WHEN: Tuesday through Sunday, April 3

WHERE: Nordica Theatre, Freeport, and Bates College, Lewiston

HOW MUCH: Free, but tickets are available through the festival website.

INFO: For schedule of films and guest speakers as well as tickets, go to [bates.edu](https://www.bates.edu) and search for “Bates Film Festival 2022”

WHAT ELSE: The student-run festival is part of a course on film festivals at the college. Guest speakers this year include actor/director John Turturro, Emmy Award-winning actor and Bates alum John Shea, animator and director Bruce W. Smith, film producer Trevor Crafts and several other film and entertainment industry professionals.

SCREENINGS: The festival includes screenings of eight short films and 21 feature films, including “Framing Agnes,” “The Gravedigger’s Wife,” “Grey Lady,” “Mac,” “Meet Me in St. Louis,” “Coming Home Again,” “Street Gang: How We Got to Sesame Street,” “Tron” and “The Worst Person in the World.”

The [Bates Film Festival](#), organized by students in Jonathan Cavallero’s film festival studies course, runs Tuesday through Sunday at Nordica Theatre in Freeport and on the Bates campus. It features 29 films, ranging from classics of their genres, like the musical “Meet Me in St. Louis” and the science-fiction adventure “Tron,” to critically acclaimed releases from the past year or two, including the documentary “Street Gang: How We Got to Sesame Street” and the Norwegian dark comedy “The Worst Person in the World.”

“It’s one thing to take a course and write a paper, but we’re learning how things work in the real world, and we get to see our work translated to an actual product, a film festival,” said Potter, 21, a senior rhetoric and film studies major from Wells.

Guest speakers scheduled for the festival include actor and director John Turturro, who plays crime boss Carmine Falcone in the recently released “The Batman,” as well as Emmy Award-winning actor and Bates alum John Shea, class of 1970, who has had a 45-plus year career in TV and films. Another is animator and director Bruce W. Smith, creator of Disney Channel’s animated series “The Proud Family.” His 1992 film “Bebe’s Kids” is widely recognized as the first animated film to feature a predominantly Black cast.

“To be able to point to someone like John Turturro and tell people he’s in ‘The Batman,’ and he’s coming to our festival, is exciting,” said Potter.

The festival’s screenings and guest events – including Q&A sessions with various film professionals after screenings – are all free to attend.



Jonathan Cavallero fields questions in his festival studies course at Bates College in Lewiston on the upcoming Bates Film Festival. *Derek Davis/Staff Photographer*

CONNECTION TO THE INDUSTRY

Cavallero, an associate professor of rhetoric, film and screen studies, began the film festival course as a way to connect students interested in film and television work with people working in the film industry, including alumni. His hope was that those connections would allow them to explore internships or future employment opportunities. Many of the filmmakers or actors booked to speak at the festival were contacted with the help of Bates alumni or parents who have connections to the industry, Cavallero said.

The first festival was held in 2018 and the second was in 2019. This year’s is the third. The festival’s advisory board this year includes recent Bates graduates who now work in film or TV in some capacity. The festival course is not offered every year.

“Maine is 3,000 or more miles away from the filmmaking universe, so kids here are studying film and then trying to get jobs there after college,” said Cavallero. “So I wanted to come up with a way for students to work with alumni, work with people in the industry and learn about it for themselves. Nobody in our alumni network ever says no when we ask for help.”

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Students in the festival studies course tried to pick films that, in some way, spur civic conversation and bring people together. This year's lineup represents a wide range of topics, genres and styles.

"We looked at how we could engage the film community and Maine in general," said Gene Chen, a senior art history major from Beijing, China, who is in the film festival class. "They all have this social justice component. We were able to get our hands on a lot of great films."

Assignments for the class involve scholarly reading but also a lot of practical writing, including emails to filmmakers, blog posts for the festival website, publicity blurbs for the films and invitations to prospective guests and panelists.

BRINGING ARTS TO TOWN

The festival will kick off Tuesday on the Bates campus with a reception on the commons patio in the afternoon and a screening of "The Worst Person in the World." On Friday, the festival moves to Freeport and Nordica Theatre, where most of the screenings will be held. There will be several panel discussions featuring industry professionals at Meetinghouse Arts, run by the Arts & Cultural Alliance of Freeport.

In past years, most of the festival's screenings were held in lecture halls on the Bates campus. But this year, Cavallero and the students wanted to show films in a real movie theater. So they got in touch with the owners of Nordica, which is about a half hour from Bates, and also contacted the Arts & Cultural Alliance of Freeport.

Nordica Theatre, with six screens, opened in 2011 in downtown Freeport. The theater has been closed since the beginning of the pandemic, but owners are optimistic it will open again at some point as COVID restrictions ease and the threat of the virus lessens, said Alfred Yebba, one of the owners. Yebba said Nordica's owners are watching the financial performance of independent movie theaters around the country as they try to figure out when it makes sense for them to reopen.

Yebba said that having the theater involved in the Bates Film Festival is a way to build "intrinsic value" for the theater and to help draw film fans to Freeport, which is best-known for its retail outlets. The theater is in the Freeport Village Station and is owned by partners in the retail complex.



Actor and director John Turturro will speak at the Bates Film Festival this year. *Photo courtesy of Bates Film Festival*

Dana Legawiec, executive director of the Arts & Cultural Alliance of Freeport, said that hosting the Bates Film Festival is a way for the town to expand its appeal and its identity.

“The stores and the restaurants and the businesses are all supporting (the festival) because it’s a way of bringing folks to town for live arts,” said Legawiec. “It also shows how important it can be to have a local movie theater.”



Jonathan Cavallero started a film festival studies class at Bates College in Lewiston as a way to help introduce students to the film industry. *Derek Davis/Staff Photographer*

THE STORIES BEHIND THE WORK

Cavallero said that Turturro – contacted with help from a Bates parent – was happy to come to the festival even though “The Batman” was released March 4, and he’s been busy helping to promote that film. Turturro’s long career in film includes a star turn in the Cohen brothers’ “Barton Fink” in 1991 and supporting roles in “Miller’s Crossing,” “Quiz Show,” “Oh Brother, Where Art Thou?” and “The Big Lebowski.”

Turturro will be giving a talk April 3 at Schaeffer Theatre at Bates and will do audience Q&A sessions after screenings of two films he directed, “Mac” and “Romance & Cigarettes,” on Saturday at Nordica Theatre. “Mac,” from 1992, also stars Turturro and focuses on an eldest

son dealing with the pressures of taking over the family construction business after his father dies. "Romance & Cigarettes," from 2005, is a musical romantic comedy with an ensemble cast that includes Susan Sarandon, Kate Winslet, Steve Buscemi and many others.

Shea, who first gained wide acclaim in the 1982 thriller "Missing" with Jack Lemmon and Sissy Spacek, will be doing a Q&A session following a film he directed, "Grey Lady," on Friday at Nordica Theatre. It's a 2017 romantic thriller about a Boston homicide detective trying to track down the killer of both his sister and his partner. The cast includes Eric Dane and Amy Madigan.

Shea has also appeared in dozens of TV shows over the years, including "The Blacklist" and "Law & Order" on NBC, "The Good Wife" on CBS and "Gossip Girl" on CW.

Shea will be giving a talk on April 3 at Shaeffer Theatre about the importance of recognizing opportunities and taking chances. Shea said his acting career got started at Bates, but by accident.

He was on the football team and the debate team but had never thought about acting, until one day, when he was on his way to get his fake ID, so he could buy beer for his friends. He was walking toward the debate room, where his fake ID was, and passed by a theater rehearsal. The director stopped him and asked him to read for a part, and he did. He got the part, in Shakespeare's "Much Ado About Nothing," and fell in love with theater. He went on to attend the Yale School of Drama after graduating from Bates.

"Life is full of surprising signposts and cosmic moments that put you on the right path if you pay attention to them. I could have said no (to reading for the part), but I said yes," said Shea during a phone interview. "The purpose of higher education is to really explore and see what's out there."

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Bates alum and longtime actor John Shea will be a guest at this year's Bates Film Festival.

Photo courtesy of John Shea