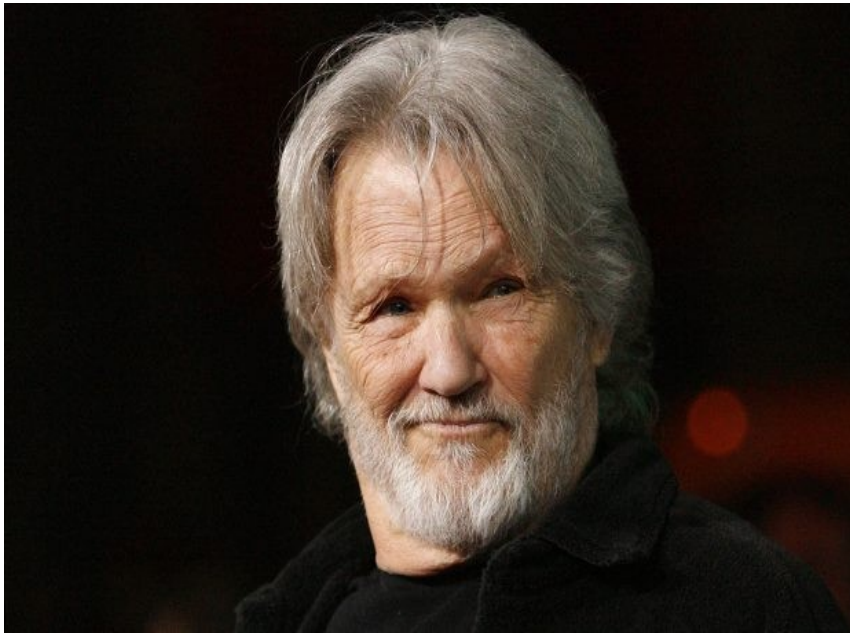


Sneak peek reveals celebrity guests and features at the Victoria Film Festival

This year, film event features everything from Coco to a killer whale

BY MICHAEL D. REID, TIMES COLONIST January 8, 2010



Kris Kristofferson will be a guest at the upcoming Victoria Film Festival.

Photograph by: REUTERS/Mario Anzuoni, Times Colonist

Who says artsy types don't have Olympic spirit? A tongue-in-cheek dose of that unspooled at last night's 2010 Victoria Film Festival pre-fest bash. It was a shtick that might even have amused those picky Vancouver Olympics organizers.

It featured A-Channel Vancouver Island's Adam Sawatsky, a likable fellow but certainly not someone you'd confuse with torchbearer Simon Whitfield or Silken Laumann. That didn't stop Sawatsky from getting cheers of his own as he spoofed the 106-day Olympic torch relay at Simon Game's Island Industrial FX Studio on John Street.

Sawatsky single-handedly completed a 106-second Program Guide Relay last night. Passing the program guide to himself over and over, he appeared to be sprinting through New York, Las Vegas and other locations, thanks to the wonders of green screen technology.

Sawatsky emceed the official launch of the festival at the studio, where dozens of film fans previewed festival flicks and sampled Driftwood Brewery's Reel Beer and gourmet goodies from Sauce Restaurant. Fittingly, considering the festival features a homage to Italian cinema this year, the menu included an antipasto platter and tomato bruschetta crostini.

It also seemed fitting that the venue for this cinematic January tradition was switched from Lucky Bar to the production facility where strategically placed cameras and the studio's giant green screen gave cinephiles the chance to become part of the action beamed onto large monitors.

"It was just time," festival director Kathy Kay said. "We've been at Lucky for four years, and it's easy to keep going back to the same place.

"We wanted to freshen things up, and with all the new media stuff we're doing, it's perfect."

Guests got sneak previews of the festival's technological advances (including tiny pink USB drives containing interactive program guides and a festival iPhone app) and its focus on Web-based productions and new delivery systems.

Flickering away were clips from films such as opening night gala presentation Coco Chanel and Igor Stravinsky; the Canadian film Beyond Gay, Bob Christie's documentary on gay pride; Private Lives of Pippa Lee, Rebecca Miller's Brad Pitt-produced satire starring Robin Wright Penn as its enigmatic heroine; and Bruce Sweeney's sexual dysfunction comedy Excited.

Other noteworthy features will include Lost Cause, Steeve Leonard's absurdist Québécois comedy about a soul-searching janitor; A Shine of Rainbows, Vic Sarin's drama about the exploits of a young Irish orphan; the Australian drama Three Blind Mice; Untitled, Jonathan Parker's satire on New York's modern art scene; and Uwe Boll's take on Darfur.

We can also expect some intriguing entries with local interest, notably Who Killed Miracle?, Scott Renyard's documentary revisiting the mysterious death of the baby killer whale; and The Brothel Project, April Butler-Parry's directorial debut, which chronicles attempts by columnist Jody Paterson and retired sex worker Lauren Casey to open Victoria's first legal brothel.

And we got the lowdown on movers and shakers coming to speak at Springboard.

They include the industry event's host, Canada AM film critic Richard Crouse; writer-comedian Todd Allen (This Hour Has 22 Minutes); Infinity Features producer Rob Merilees (The Imaginarium of Dr. Parnassus); Kinosmith's Robin Smith; director Warren P. Sonoda; and Angie Burns, vice-president publicity and promotions for Maple Pictures Corp.

Winners of this year's FilmCan student short films competition were also announced. St. Michaels University School student Chris-tina Robillard won a Sony HD Handycam in the junior category for her short film Wannabe, and Dunsmuir Middle School's Emma-Lynn Whitman won in the senior category, taking home an iMac, complete with Final Cut Express software, for Technology Is a Dead Bird. The winning films can be viewed at vimeo.com/groups/filmcan.

Not surprisingly, there was much talk about special guest Kris Kristofferson, who will be here Feb. 2 to accept the inaugural IN award recognizing innovation, independence and inspiration.

The trail-blazing actor, singer and songwriter will be interviewed by Crouse at the Empire Capitol 6 at 9:15 p.m., followed by a screening of a Kristofferson classic.

"He's such a lovely man," Kay said. "He represents all of what the award's about, and works with a lot of indie directors like John Sayles and Alan Rudolph."

Also confirmed last night were two new curatorial programs, Pleasure Paradox and Future Perfect, and the debut of the Office (formerly Platinum) as the festival's social hub. Parkside Victoria Resort and Spa will be the new opening gala venue.

The 2010 Victoria Film Festival runs from Jan. 29 to Feb. 7 at the Capitol 6, Cineplex Odeon, the Fairmont Empress hotel, Whitebird and other venues. Program guides hit the streets today and the box office is open at 1215 Blanshard St. Tel. 250-389-0444, www.victoriafilmfestival.com.

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