



[Newport Beach Film Fest] Orange County Connections Abound Among This Year's Entries

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Local Motion (Pictures)

Orange County connections abound among this year's festival entries

Many young actors and filmmakers with Orange County roots have their work entered in the 2009 Newport Beach Film Festival (NBFF)—and not just because of Volcom's Youth Film Showcase, which features four short films created by local high school students, and the Collegiate Showcases from UC Irvine, Chapman University, Cal State Fullerton, Saddleback College and Orange Coast College.

San Clemente's Rian Johnson follows up his intriguing teen noir *Brick*—which he shot in his hometown, edited on his home computer and took six years to acquire enough financing for to get it on the screen in 2005—with the romantic comedy *The Brothers Bloom*. Written and directed by Johnson, it follows orphans Stephen (Mark Ruffalo) and Bloom (Adrien Brody), who bonded in childhood and were mentored into highly skilled con men. For their last job, they must get their mark, lonely New Jersey heiress Penelope (Rachel Weisz), to invest in a scheme involving smugglers, antiquarian books and caves under a Prague castle. Rinko Kikuchi, Robbie Coltrane and screen legend Maximilian Schell round out what is arguably the festival's strongest cast.

Actor Matthew Lillard, who grew up in Tustin, is the lead in the rom-com *Spooner*, directed by Drake Doremus—who hails from Santa Ana. Lillard plays 30-year-old used-car salesman Herman Spooner, who still lives at home with his parents and loves it. But they are pushing him to move out, and his boss is pushing him to sell more cars—or else. Just when things look as if they can't get worse, he meets Rose Conlin (Nora Zehetner). But the girl of his dreams is fixing to leave for the Philippines. Please be aware the festival wrote the following, not me: “How far will Spooner go to show Rose he really knows how to spoon?”

Bijou Phillips and Ian Somerhalder head the cast of yet another rom-com, *Wake*. She cheers herself up by attending strangers' funerals, and he is the man mourning his fiancée whom she falls for. Newport Harbor High School grad Marguerite Moreau, who has appeared in *The O.C.*, *Lost* and *Mad Men*, plays Phillips' friend.

Ryan Sheckler, a pro skateboarder out of San Clemente and the star of the MTV reality show *Life of Ryan*, is in the cast of Chris Zamosciany's drama *Street Dreams*, in which a young man avoids life's obstacles as he pursues his dream of becoming a sponsored skater. *Street Dreams* is making its world premiere at Newport.

Nancy Montuori Stein's musical comedy *All Ages Night* is set in Anaheim, where a shy 17-year-old musician from London goes to stay with his cousin and gets plunged into a rock & roll world he never dreamed of. (Where? At the Doll Hut?)

Many Orange Countians have feature-length documentaries entered this year. Garden Grove's David Di Sabatino directed *Fallen Angel: The Outlaw Larry Norman*, a bio-doc of the controversial "father of Christian rock music," Larry Norman. (A review appears elsewhere in these pages.)

Orange County is also the home of: writer/director Jeff Parker and writer Stefan Jeremias, whose *Echo Beach*, making its world premiere at NBFF, looks at a 100-yard stretch of Newport Beach sand that, in the 1980s, launched the surfers who would influence the surf industry and youth culture through their boards, magazines, photographs and companies such as Quiksilver, Stussy, Rip Curl, McCoy and Wave Tools; writer/directors Sam Bozzo, whose *Blue Gold: World Water Wars* is based on Maude Barlow's frightening book about the inevitable future conflicts over the world's water supply; and Mike Reola, whose *5'5 x 19 1/4 Redux* follows two surfers attacking the North Shore of Oahu in the winter of 1996-97, before equipment changes made that easier.

Irvine-based *Lost Clothing* produced *5'5 x 19 1/4 Redux*. Crosstown competitor Billabong U.S. produced *Out of the Pond*, Chris Heffner's documentary on the Billabong Wake Team that makes its world premiere at the festival. Huntington Beach-based Quiksilver produced *Clay: Marzon: Just Add Water*, Jamie Tierney's look at a surfer whose passion defies description and dominance of his sport defies logic, as he struggles with Asperger syndrome.

The subject of *Beyond the Dream: The Joey Buran Story* is a Newport Beach resident who rose to fame as one of surfing's greatest athletes in 1984, but then fell into obscurity and later attempted suicide. But Matt Katsolis and Nic McLean's documentary is ultimately a story of redemption and discovering one's true purpose, as Buran embarks on his comeback a decade later. Tom Curren, Kelly Slater and Rob Machado share their experiences, and the film includes vintage local footage.

Ron Vignone's documentary *The Back Nine*, making its world premiere at NBFF, follows 40-year-old golfer Jon Fitzgerald, who dreams of becoming a touring pro, as he plays in an Orange County tournament.

Among the short films, Laguna Niguel resident/UC Irvine grad Richard Martin directed and co-wrote *Light Years*, which shows four relationships spanning the four corners of the globe put to the ultimate test when they learn the world may end in eight minutes.

The sci-fi thriller *1:03 AM* comes from Huntington Beach resident Raymond Cinemato. The Chapman University student's film is about a man who applies for a strange government permit.

Did somebody say strange? Justin Lutsky, a local and Chapman University graduate who was featured on the reality show *On the Lot*, directed *Victims of Love*, a rom-com about a self-made thirtysomething woman who won't hesitate to end a relationship—permanently—if a man she dates does not live up to her impossible standards. Did I mention she's a serial killer?

Documentary shorts also get in on the local action. Unabashed liberal Tim Temple tries to get to the bottom of why highly educated professionals make the choice to serve in the military instead of pursuing more lucrative careers in the private sector in *Why We Serve*. Irvine-based company ChopShop and local resident Zach Lyons produced *Steezy Riders*, which follows pro

snowboarders-turned-Harley-Davidson enthusiasts on a 2,000-mile journey across the western U.S.

Saving the Boom is John Keitel's video chronicling Fred Karger's mission to save Laguna Beach's legendary gay bar the Boom Boom Room, which closed on Sept. 4, 2007. It is reviewed elsewhere in these pages, as is Tracy Sabeti's documentary Center Street Rising, which focuses on the windowless TKO Boxing Club in Santa Ana that played a prominent part in Daffodil J. Altan's Weekly cover story on Olympic hopeful Ronny Rios ("[Ronny](#)," Aug. 3, 2007).

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