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BOSTON FILM FESTIVAL EMBRACES NEW CHALLENGES WITH 36<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL CELEBRATION OF VIBRANT AND DIVERSE FEATURE FILMS AND DOCUMENTARIES IN LIVE AND VIRTUAL PLATFORMS FROM SEPTEMBER 24-27

Big-tent Cinema Showcase Rolls Out World Premieres of Documentaries “Beyond Zero,” “This Hits Home,” and “25”; Also Included Are U.S. Debuts of “Small Town Wisconsin,” “Me the People,” and “The Memory of Water,” the East Coast Openers for “Paper Spiders,” “The Girl Who Wore Freedom,” “After the Rain,” and “Stro,” and the Boston Film Festival’s Excellence in Entertainment Award to “Jay Leno’s Garage.”

BOSTON – September 15, 2020 – The 36<sup>th</sup> edition of the Boston Film Festival will transcend summer into fall with a colorful palette of inspiring and entertaining films from September 24-27. Touching all the bases, addressing topics ranging from war, politics, mental health, sports, and the environment, featured films include the world premieres of the documentaries “Beyond Zero,” “This Hits Home,” and “25,” which examines the star-crossed career of Boston Red Sox legend Tony Conigliaro.

Also burnishing the festival’s legacy are the U.S. premieres of the features “Small Town Wisconsin,” and “The Memory of Water,” plus the documentary “Me the People.” Making East Coast premieres are “Paper Spiders,” “The Girl Who Wore Freedom,” “After the Rain,” and “Stro: The Michael D’Asaro Story.” In addition, contemporary issues such as familial mental illness and abuse and harmonizing established businesses with the environment as well as a look at the political stage will be spotlighted.

Included in this year’s edition will be an episode of the Emmy Nominated “Jay Leno’s Garage” on CNBC Opening Night (6:30PM). The BFF will present Leno (a native of Andover, MA) with the Boston Film Festival’s Excellence in Entertainment Award after the question-and-answer session with Leno that follows the screening.

In addition, there will be two short film programs that will be available virtually beginning on Opening Night. Viewers will have the opportunity to watch until the festival closes.

A limited number of the Boston Film Festival’s (BFF) entries will be screened at the Showplace Icon Seaport Theater beginning September 24. All of the films will be made available for virtual viewing.

Virtual question-and-answer sessions also will be offered on some of the films as listed below. The BFF will be in compliance with all local and state health advisories made necessary by the COVID-19 pandemic. All live screenings also will be made virtual.

On the opening night of September 24 (9:00PM), the feature film “Paper Spiders” makes its U.S. premiere in a bittersweet, coming-of-age story that unfolds in the shadow of mental illness. High school student Melanie (Stefania LaVie Owen, “Messiah”) simply craves a normal senior year but her life turns upside down when her mother, Dawn (Lili Taylor, “Perry Mason”), begins to suffer from paranoid delusions. Since she just lost her father, Melanie cannot bear to stand by and see her mother lose her mind, so she attempts a series of interventions – but challenging Dawn’s reality could destroy their relationship. As Dawn’s paranoia spirals out of control, her daughter is forced to make the toughest of choices. In addition to Taylor and Owen, the stars include Peyton List, David Rasche and Max Casella. Inon Shampanier (“Beautiful & Twisted”) directs and the producers are Anne Clements (“The Oath”) and Ash Christian (“Chick Fight”).

Special memoirs from the historic D-Day invasion of Normandy, France in June 1944 form the backdrop of the documentary “The Girl Who Wore Freedom,” which makes its East Coast premiere on the opening night of September 24 (6:45PM). French citizens Dany Patrice, Maurice Lecouer, Henri-Jean Renaud are among the local citizens who recount their unique relationships with the Allied forces that liberated Normandy from German control. Their journey from occupation to freedom includes forgiveness, gratitude and pride through interviews with the French survivors and American veterans. The powerful personal film visits Brecourt Manor, the site of a battle between Easy Company – known as the Band of Brothers – and a German battery. U.S. veterans such as Ceo Bauer, Brad Freeman and Bob DeVinney also recall their relationships built over the summer of 1944, and audiences will discover that freedom is not free. Christian Taylor directs and the producers are Taylor, David Paterson and Terry Jun.

In its U.S. premiere, “Small Town Wisconsin” September 24, (7:00PM) is a feature film directed by Tufts alumnus Niels Mueller (“The Assassination of Richard Nixon”) that depicts the life of fun-loving Wayne Stobieski (David Sullivan, “The Wilds”) – the hardest party animal in tiny Rhinelander, Wisconsin. His favorite wingman is his 9-year-old son, Tyler (Cooper J. Friedman), who has seen a lot of living in his short life – thanks to his dad. When Wayne learns that he is losing shared custody of his son who will have to move far away, he plans a blowout weekend in Milwaukee. But the big city overwhelms small-town Wayne, and he passes out drunk and wakes up in the middle of an unscheduled family reunion. Surrounded by his family’s tough love, Wayne must confront his demons and still show his son the time of his life. Besides Sullivan and Friedman, the cast includes, Bill Heck (“The Ballad of Buster Scruggs”), Kristen Johnston (“3<sup>rd</sup> Rock from the Sun”), Tanya Fischer and Mark Borchardt. The producers are Niels Mueller, Scott K. Foley, Josh Rosenberg and Hongtau Liu.

The East Coast premiere of “After the Rain,” is a moving redemptive drama. Suyun, the beloved, youngest daughter of the Sultanbekova family, mysteriously goes missing one afternoon. A devastating

phone call reveals that she has been kidnapped by an unknown man to be his sudden bride. As Suyun is driven further away from her family's grasp, the Sultanbekovas must now face against all odds—come trial or shame—to bring her back. Chingiz Narynov directs this poignant story that he has witnessed all too often in his beloved Krygyzstan. Writers, Eugenia Chung, Richard Hewitt and producers are Eugenia Chung, Zarnigar Marlenova. The cast includes; Nazbiike Aidarova, Sakyn Karabaev, Ulanbek Sultangaziev, Taalaikan Abazova, Anvar Osmonaliev, and Omurbek Nurdinov.

“Me the People” is a documentary that makes its U.S. premiere as it explores how elected leaders of Western countries often increasingly use wedge politics on key divisive issues, giving rise to a new kind of populist leader. These disruptors use a new playbook – but are they expressing the will of the people who elected them? Dan Shannon and Isabelle Depelteau (both from “Angela, Virtuoso”) direct; Shannon is the producer.

Multi-talented Sydney Scotia is an award-winning actress (Canada International Film Festival), producer singer-songwriter and dancer who directs and produces “This Hits Home” in its world premiere. The documentary is imbued with Scotia's beliefs that media should be used to elevate important issues as well as to champion social change. Her drive and compassion help her to nurture her ideas from a suggestion to the screen. Ultimately, Scotia draws on her experience both in front of and behind the camera to tell a story about a silent epidemic that will no longer be silent.

The documentary “Stro: The Michael D’Asaro Story” makes its East Coast premiere as the film vividly illustrates how Michael D’Asaro impacted thousands of lives around the world as a world-ranked saber fencer and coach who used fencing as a metaphor for life. Gregory Lynch (“Special Skills”) and Doug Nichols (“The Last Captain”) direct and produce with Mark Headley (“The Last Captain”).

The enigmatic laws of nature are depicted through the symbolism of water in “The Memory of Water,” a thoughtful documentary from director Jaeun Chin that makes its U.S. debut. The film proposes the idea that water is a personal force that unrelentingly moves forward – much like life. First seen from 10 years ago, a farmer began biological agriculture amid political turmoil. A decade later, the now-deceased farmer runs into a boy who communicates with nature without any fear. But the boy and the farmer remain eternally alive through the water's memory. Harang Han stars.

In the world premiere of the documentary “Beyond Zero,” first-time filmmaker Nathan Havey depicts the story of Ray Anderson, who built Interface, a successful carpet tile business. Havey has used Anderson's story to teach business leaders to thrive by setting their sights beyond profit to solve humanity's most pressing problems. Now an emerging leader in the global movement to evolve capitalism, Havey is eager to bring “The most important business story of the last 100 years” to contemporary audiences. Nathan Havey is writer director and his father, Jim Havey, is the producer.

Following the screening, a virtual question-and-answer session will include director Nathan Havey, Erin Meezan, Vice President and Chief Sustainability Officer for Interface;” and Interface dream team member, and Paul Hawken, acclaimed environmentalist and Interface team member.

The documentary “25” celebrates the difficult but triumphant struggle of former Boston Red Sox player Tony Conigliaro – who wore number 25 and was known as “Tony C” – who was struck by a pitch in 1967 and lost the use of his eye but still battled back to play again. The heartfelt film was written, directed and produced by John Ippolito of Yellow Box Entertainment. It showcases beloved Red Sox playing legends Rico Petrocelli, Jim Lonborg and Luis Tiant, former Red Sox general manager Dan Duquette as well as Boston sportscaster Mike Lynch, actor Lenny Clarke and Richie Conigliaro. The film is narrated by former Massachusetts State Treasurer Joe Malone. A live panel discussion will follow with director John Ippolito, Rico Petrocelli, Jim Lonborg, Richie Conigliaro and Joe Malone.

The sponsors of the 36<sup>th</sup> Boston Film Festival are AETN, Showplace Icon Seaport, Barletta Co., BCA Financial Group, Dream Alley Partners, Patrice Vinci Salon.

Filmgoers and virtual viewers can access [www.bostonfilmfestival.org](http://www.bostonfilmfestival.org) for more details and to obtain tickets. For Facebook: Boston Film Festival; Instagram: Bostonfilmfestival; Twitter: @Bostonfilmfest.

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