

MM

25 BEST FILM FESTIVAL INVESTMENTS: 2011

WHERE TO GET THE MOST BANG FOR YOUR ENTRY FEE BUCK

After years of emotional and financial strain, your film—at long last—is finished. So you submit it to a few film festivals, sending off two DVDs, some promo stills and an entry fee that you probably can't afford. But what good is your film if no one sees it?

When your film eventually gets accepted into a fest, you make the trek to the festival (on your dime, of course), do a post-screening Q&A with the audience, hand out some postcards and maybe get a few audience members to sign up for your mailing list. You drink a little too much at the closing night party, then head home. Rinse, repeat.

For every festival horror story—"I wasn't allowed into my own film's screening!" "The projectionist accidentally played the audio from *Troll 2* over my sensitive costume drama!" "The festival director's kid threw up on my poster!"—there are hundreds of festival experiences that are... lackluster. Not disastrous, mind you, but not exactly the kind that will advance your career.

Worthwhile festivals are out there, though, as this year's list of 25 film festivals worth the entry fee attests. Some of the lauded fests even have

a specific enough focus to ensure your film won't get buried between a dystopian sci-fi character study and an experimental film composed of archival footage of ducks (see LA Comedy Shorts). Others offer maximum exposure for a minimal (read: zero-dollar) entry fee (Environmental Film Festival). Here, then, are *MM*'s 2011 picks for 25 festivals worth your time, money and effort.

AUSTIN FILM FESTIVAL

www.austinfilmfestival.com

Sure, writers have plenty of screenwriting competitions to take part in, but how many opportunities do they get to network with their fellow scribes instead of slaving away in secrecy? The Austin Film Festival offers one opportunity; at this Texas fest, the writer is king! Whether you're itching to write the next season of "The Office" or a modern-day *Casablanca*, AFF offers cash prizes of up to \$5,000 in eight writing categories for both film and television. And it all happens in a traditional, screening-fueled festival setting where some of the world's most successful writers are also in attendance and ready to mingle.

BIG APPLE FILM FESTIVAL

www.bigapplefilmfestival.com

New York is the apple of this fest's eye,

where founder Jonathan Lipp says "the primary focus is the New York filmmaking community." Each year BAFF presents a series of awards—including the NY Emerging Talent Award, the Golden Apple Award and the Spirit of New York Award—to influential individuals from the local indie filmmaking community. Golden Apple recipient (and noted actor) Alan Cumming says the BAFF is "not just an excuse for swag, but a place where film, filmmakers and those who love them experience life outside the mainstream."

BOULDER INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL

www.biff1.com

Documentary moviemakers, take note: When your film gets screened at Colorado's BIFF, audience involvement doesn't end when the lights come up. Through its unique Call 2 Action program, BIFF does its part to mobilize Boulder's socially-conscious citizens to take action. "We have dedicated a major portion of our yearly efforts to build a system that takes the social consciousness that these films raise and carry it out of the theater and into the world," says the fest's executive director (and documentarian in her own right), Robin Beeck. "Talkback sessions and stations of groups associated with the topics covered are located in our tent at the crossroads of the festival,