

Animated shorts at LGBT film festival focus on acceptance

Ross Reagan, IndyStar correspondent 12:50 p.m. EST November 7, 2016



(Photo: Provided by Indianapolis LGBT Film Festival)

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The [Indianapolis LGBT Film Festival](#) is getting very animated this year.

Literally.

A series of animated shorts will premiere with all of the films Nov. 11-13 at The Toby at the Indianapolis Museum of Art. For the shorts, directors are giving audiences a werewolf boyfriend, two candy grams, a peppy cartoon couple from the 1930s, killer Barbie and a young man's coming-of-age journey through Polaroids.

The festival has featured animated shorts in the past, but never a whole program dedicated to the genre. Now in its 16th year, the festival tackles themes of social

acceptance and sexual identity, focusing on the struggles and triumphs of members in the LGBT community.

A program focusing on animation wasn't initially planned.

"It happened very organically," Matthew Mutchmore, art director for the festival, said in an email. "Several animated films were submitted, and we tracked down some more to create a program with some great variety and a lot of style. We were looking for something new to start the day, and our shorts programs tend to be some of the best attended parts of the weekend. We are always trying to reach new audiences."

Acceptance and awareness are common issues raised in LGBT-related films, whether live action or animated. For years, gay audiences often didn't have characters they could relate to in film.

"In past decades, a lot of LGBT people chose to live secretive, closeted lives," said festival director Kevin Kelly. "There were very few gay films that played in movie theaters."

Kelly said he has seen growth in gay culture being portrayed in film.

"Animation is an art form just the way any other kind of filmmaking is," he said. "It's another way of telling a story. ... Gay-themed films that had wide theatrical releases showed the world that it's fine to be who you are."

Being who you are is exactly what director Alex Myung captures in "[Arrival: A Short Film by Alex Myung](#)." The animated short is told through a series of digitally inked and colored Polaroids that documents one gay man's coming-of-age journey. The film is composed of nearly 7,000 drawings.

"The story is more about somebody not being forthright with who they are to themselves — somebody who is not being true to who they are," Myung said. "I think that connects far beyond the queer community. Everyone has things they're afraid to tell other people."

The main character experiences falling in love with his first boyfriend and his struggles not only with his relationship, but in his quest to find inner peace and acceptance by his mother. Throughout the 22-minute film, audiences experience — with dream sequences and short vignettes — many pinnacle moments affecting the main character.

“I was able to manipulate time a little more and still in every single minute. I feel like I was able to create a larger, more full relationship between him and his mother in the 20 minutes of the film rather than if it had been live action.”

If you are a classic cartoon lover, then you might want to check this out:

The film “[Happy & Gay](#),” directed by American animation artist Lorelei Pepi, gives viewers an RKO-inspired musical soundtrack by Brian Carpenter and the Ghost Train Orchestra out of New York City.

The film begins with two cool-cat couples wanting to spend a night out on the town. Both are targeted for being gay, and their fun-filled night is thwarted by the police and a problematic wedding.

The peppy cinematography sends a powerful message to audiences. The film responds to the real acts of censorship during the 1930s when The Motion Picture Production Code eliminated the representation of LGBT identities in film.

Pepi combats stereotypical representations of gay and lesbian couples by depicting what it would look like if heterosexual couples’ roles were reversed as cartoon characters, such as a hippo wearing lipstick or a hairy bulldog in a dress.

“Our goal is to present a lineup of films that are as diverse as the LGBT community,” Kelly said. “Filmmakers are making all kinds of different movies. In the early days of gay cinema, the scope of what was being made seemed a little narrow at times. It’s not like that at all now.”

Other film highlights for the animated program include “[Dirty Paws](#),” directed by Karina Farek, where things get more than a little hairy for one couple during a full moon.

All proceeds for the festival benefit the Indiana Youth Group, a nonprofit organization that has been serving the needs of Indiana LGBT youths since 1987.

For a full list of film screenings and the history of premieres, check out the Film Festival’s website at indygbtfilmfest.com.

Ross Reagan is a 2016 arts journalism fellow. The fellowship is a partnership between the Arts Council of Indianapolis and IndyStar.

Indianapolis LGBT Film Festival

Where: The Toby theater at the Indianapolis Museum of Art, 4000 Michigan Road

When: Nov. 11-13.

Tickets: \$15 for Nov. 11, \$8 per film Nov. 12-13. Weekend passes range from \$40 to \$60.