



**FILM
SOCIETY**



**Minneapolis St Paul
International Film Festival ³⁸
April 4-20, 2019**

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For immediate release:

**MSP FILM SOCIETY ANNOUNCES
OPENING NIGHT FILM AND WOMEN IN FILM INITIATIVE
AT THE 38th MINNEAPOLIS ST. PAUL INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL**

MINNEAPOLIS – February 26, 2019. The MSP Film Society announces the award-winning *Yuli* as the **Opening Night Film of the 38th Minneapolis St. Paul International Film Festival, which runs April 4 – 20, 2019.** Festival Passes and 6-packs are on sale now at mspfilm.org, with individual ticket sales opening to MSP Film Society Members on March 14 and to the public on March 21.

Yuli is a dazzling dramatization of the early life and work of legendary Cuban dancer Carlos Acosta. Inspired by Acosta's 2007 memoir *No Way Home*, which detailed his rise from the streets of Havana to the heights of classical ballet. The film was helmed by the distinguished Basque director **Icía Bollaín** and adapted for the screen by her frequent collaborator Paul Laverty. **Special guest Santiago Alfonso, the acclaimed Cuban choreographer, dancer, and actor, will be in attendance for MSPIFF's Opening Night festivities,** which include the presentation of *Yuli* at **St. Anthony Main Theatres on Thursday, April 4, 2019, at 7pm,** and a party to follow at **Jefe Urban Hacienda,** featuring live music by celebrated Afro-Caribbean ensemble **Malamanya.** Tickets to the Opening Night Film include entrance to the party.

The MSP Film Society also announces the **expansion of their WOMEN & FILM INITIATIVE** for the **38th Minneapolis St. Paul International Film Festival** and the **launch of a new Fiscal Sponsorship Program** for local women filmmakers, which will charge a mere 1.9% fee, instead of the industry standard of 5-10%.

"When we read that women accounted for only 1.9% of the directors of the 100 top-grossing US films in 2014, this statistic propelled us to find ways within our organization to begin to address this disparity and inequity," says **Susan Smoluchowski, Executive Director of the MSP Film Society.** "In 2015, we developed and launched a major MSPIFF program entitled **Women & Film** to highlight the work of women filmmakers from around the globe. Every year since, a growing number of films directed by women and programs highlighting the work of women directors have been included in our annual MSPIFF line-up, and in 2019 we expand that commitment."

The **38th MSPIFF will include 75+ films directed by women filmmakers spanning all programs,** from the **Opening Night film *Yuli*, directed by Icíar Bollaín,** to the **Nextwave** program of shorts directed by aspiring teen filmmakers. The **MSPIFF Luminaries Tribute to Alice Guy-Blaché on Saturday, April 13, 2019,** will include a screening of the riveting documentary ***Be Natural: The Untold Story of Alice Guy-Blaché*, directed by Pamela B. Green and narrated by Jodie Foster,** followed by the **MSPIFF Centerpiece Party at the A-Mill Artist Lofts** to celebrate all the women filmmakers and special guests attending this year's festival, including **Ann Hornaday, Chief Film Critic from the Washington Post.**

“The **MSPIFF Luminaries Tribute Program** recognizes notable filmmakers for their contributions to the medium of filmmaking and for artistic talents that have been instrumental in promoting a higher regard for the art of film around the world,” says **MSPIFF Programming Director Jesse Bishop**. “And no one embodies this spirit more than the pioneering French filmmaker Alice Guy-Blaché. We’re excited to also present a collection of her recently-restored films in this year’s festival.”

The **MSPIFF Women & Film Initiative** strives to **increase the number of visiting women filmmakers and members of the film industry** each year, and arranges workshops at schools, colleges and universities while they are in attendance, to both increase their visibility and underscore the importance of diversity in filmmaking. **Many of our visiting filmmakers will be available for media appearances; details of their schedules will follow in coming weeks.**

The **38th MSPIFF runs April 4 - 20, 2019** and showcases over 250 dynamic narrative films, engaging documentaries, and innovative shorts by both emerging and veteran filmmakers hailing from 70+ countries around the world. **The complete MSPIFF line-up will be announced on March 14, 2019.**

MSPIFF screenings will once again be concentrated at the **St. Anthony Main Theatre**, taking over all five screens for the full run of the festival. **MSPIFF** continues to expand the festival’s footprint with screenings and special events to be held the newly-renovated **Parkway Theater in South Minneapolis**, while also returning to the **Capri Theater in North Minneapolis, Film Space at Metropolitan State University in St. Paul**, and the **Marcus Rochester Cinema in Rochester, MN.**

OPENING NIGHT FILM – Thursday, April 4, 2019

YULI

Yuli is the nickname given to a young boy named Carlos Acosta by his father Pedro, who considers him the son of Ogun, an African warrior god. From a young age, Yuli flees any kind of discipline and formal education, instead gleaning his schooling on the streets of a run-down neighborhood in Havana. But Pedro knows his son has a natural talent for dance and forces him to attend Cuba’s National Dance School. Despite initially resisting the discipline, Yuli ends up being captivated by the world of dance, and begins to forge his own legend as one of the best dancers of his generation. His star rises as he breaks taboos by becoming the first black dancer to interpret some of the most famous roles in esteemed companies, such Romeo in London’s Royal Ballet. Directed by Icíar Bollaín, *Yuli* premiered at the 2018 San Sebastian Film Festival before screening at the Havana and Palm Springs International Film Festivals. **Acclaimed Cuban choreographer, dancer, and actor Santiago Alfonso will be in attendance!**

Official Trailer: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sL_jRFyN9_w

LUMINARY TRIBUTE to the ORIGINAL WOMAN IN FILM: ALICE GUY-BLACHÉ – Saturday, April 13, 2019

BE NATURAL: THE UNTOLD STORY OF ALICE GUY-BLACHÉ

This energetic documentary about the trailblazing filmmaker Alice Guy-Blaché is both a tribute and a detective story, tracing the how the first woman director, screenwriter, and producer revolutionized the film industry, made over 1,000 films, then was all but erased from history. **Directed by Pamela B. Green and narrated by Jodie Foster**, this documentary expertly ensures her game-changing accomplishments will no longer be ignored. *Be Natural* premiered at the 2018 Cannes Film Festival before screening at Sundance Film Festival last month. **DIRECTOR WILL BE IN ATTENDANCE!**

Official Trailer: <https://vimeo.com/70380930>

ADDITIONAL HIGHLIGHTS OF WOMEN & FILM FEATURE TITLES

Complete MSPIFF line-up will be announced March 14, 2019.

UPDATES TO VISITING FILMMAKERS WILL FOLLOW AS THEY ARE CONFIRMED.

RAISE HELL: The Life & Times of Molly Ivins

Six feet of Texas trouble, Molly Ivins took on Good Old Boy corruption wherever she found it. Director Janice Engel charts her early days, from the Minneapolis Tribune, where Ivins was the first woman police reporter covering the turbulence of the late 60s, to joining the New York Times in the mid-70s, and freelancing everywhere from *The Nation* to *TV Guide*. Ivins served up her quality reportage with a heaping dollop of humor, and by the height of her popularity in the early 2000s, she was a best-selling author of seven books, and over 400 newspapers around the country carried her column. *Raise Hell* premiered last month at the 2019 Sundance Film Festival. **DIRECTOR WILL BE IN ATTENDANCE!**

PERSONAL STATEMENT

Director, Producer and Cinematographer Julie Dressner's debut feature-length documentary follows three seniors from Brooklyn who are determined to get their entire class to college, even though they aren't sure they are going to make it there themselves. They are working as peer counselors because many of their friends have nowhere else to turn for support. They struggle and they stumble, but refuse to succumb to the barriers that prevent so many low-income students from attending and graduating from college. *Personal Statement* premiered at the 2018 AFI Docs, where it was the Opening Night Film. **DIRECTOR WILL BE IN ATTENDANCE!**

HUGH HEFNER'S AFTER DARK: Speaking Out in America

In the wake of both Hefner's death and the #MeToo movement, Academy Award-winning Filmmaker Brigitte Berman returns to a familiar subject, Hugh Hefner, this time focusing on the *Playboy* icon's brief but impactful television ventures. *Penthouse* and *Playboy: After Dark* were talk shows that aired in the late 50s and 60's, respectfully, and featured numerous celebrity guests, musicians, public figures and more. Told through interviews and a collection of riveting archived footage, this documentary makes it clear how and why Hugh Hefner deserves a spot in television history. **DIRECTOR WILL BE IN ATTENDANCE!**

CRYSTAL SWAN / Хрусталь

The year is 1996. Young Belarusian DJ Velya dreams of starting a new life in Chicago, the place that first inspired her love of music. Desperate to claim her own version of the American Dream, young Velya is instead stuck in farcical limbo. From Director Darya Zhuk, who previously directed the documentary *Gogol Bordello NonStop*, *Crystal Swan* is her first narrative feature film, and premiered at the 2018 Karlovy Vary International Film Festival. **DIRECTOR WILL BE IN ATTENDANCE!**

HAIL SATAN?

Director Penny Lane charts the meteoric rise and influence of The Satanic Temple, a religious group catapulted to the spotlight in 2015 after pleading for the removal of the Ten Commandments from the Oklahoma State Capitol in exchange for an 8-foot tall statue of occult deity Baphomet. Both controversial and widely misunderstood in the public consciousness. Lane follows members of the religion with an unbiased gaze as they tell the real story. *Hail Satan?* premiered last month at the Sundance Film Festival. **DIRECTOR INVITED!**

AFTERWARD

An examination of the trauma shared between victims and victimizers alike, director and trauma expert Ofra Bloch serves as her own subject director as she visits to Germany, Israel and Palestine to confront her own demons in the wake of the recent surge of anti-Semitism. *Afterward* premiered at 2018 DOC NYC. **DIRECTOR INVITED!**

KATE NASH: Underestimate The Girl

Director Amy Goldstein's unfiltered documentary follows English punk renegade-turned-TV wrestling star Kate Nash through the tumultuous highs and lows in her life, alternating between explosive live performances and vulnerable moments of personal betrayal and insight. *Kate Nash: Underestimate The Girl* premiered at the 2018 Los Angeles Film Festival. **DIRECTOR INVITED!**

ANTHROPOCENE: The Human Epoch

Travelling across twenty countries and six continents, filmmakers Jennifer Baichwal, Nicholas de Pencier and Edward Burtynsky explore and investigate the vast, undeniable and lasting human impact on the planet. *Anthropocene* premiered at 2018 Toronto International Film Festival, followed by Sundance and Berlin.

CORE OF THE WORLD / Serdtse Mira

Egor is a vet at a training facility for hunting dogs in a remote region of Russia, where he is surrounded by foxes, deer, and badgers. He cleans the kennels, oversees the workers, and meets with the clients and treats their dogs. Egor is willing to take on any job to get closer to the facility's master, and his near and dear. He wants the impossible —to become a member of that family. *Core of the World* premiered at 2018 San Sebastian, followed by Toronto and Rotterdam International Film Festivals.

THE DAY I LOST MY SHADOW / Yom Afaatou Zouli

In the war torn Damascus countryside, a Syrian pharmacist named Sena is separated for her son. Forced to venture outside of town alongside to siblings, Sena navigates a landscape of brutality, loss and trauma. Working primarily with exiled Syrian cast and crew, first-time director Soudade Kaadan's cinema vérité style is melded with touches of magic realism. *The Day I Lost My Shadow* premiered at the 2018 Venice Film Festival, where Kaadan received the Lion of the Future award.

FIG TREE

Ethiopian-Israeli writer-director Aäläm-Wärqe Davidian makes a startlingly confident feature debut with this story of 16-year old Mina, whose Jewish family is planning to flee war-torn Ethiopia for Israel. But this plan leaves out the person Mina loves most: Eli, her Christian boyfriend. *Fig Tree* premiered at the 2018 Haifa Film Festival, followed by Toronto International Film Festival.

GIRLS ALWAYS HAPPY / 柔情史

A hilarious and heartfelt telling of the relationship between mothers and daughters, Yang Mingming's feature film debut follows duo Wu (played by Yang) and her mother (Nai An) as neurotic writers who are as rebellious as they are codependent. *Girls Always Happy* premiered at the 2018 Berlin International Film Festival.

THE GOOD GIRLS / Las Niñas Bien

This stunning feature from director Alejandra Márquez Abella highlights the stark reality of Mexico's financial crisis of 1982 through the eyes of a young couple, Fernando and his socialite wife Sofia (beautifully portrayed by Ilse Sala.) With the world now spinning on its head, they are forced to adjust to a life without wealth. *Las Niñas Bien* premiered at 2018 Toronto International Film Festival.

THE LITTLE COMRADE / Seltsimees Laps

This poignant coming-of-age story shows the effect of the Stalinist terror visited on the Baltic countries in the 1950s from the point of view of a traumatized six-year-old Estonian girl, who sees her school principal mother arrested and taken away at gun-point. Based on autobiographical novels by Leelo Tungal, one of Estonia's most beloved writers. *The Little Comrade* has won awards at the Berlin, Locarno, and Busan International Film Festivals.

LOVE THEM FIRST: Lessons from Lucy Laney Elementary School

Principal Mauri Melander Friestleben grew up just blocks from the school she now leads, Lucy Laney Elementary School in North Minneapolis, which is facing the state's harshest penalty for failure in a state where the achievement gap between black and white students is the largest in the nation. By building a culture of unconditional love and high expectations, test scores rise for the first time in two decades. World Premiere.

MUG / TWARZ

Carefree metalhead Jacek is engaged to beautiful Dagmara and working construction on what is supposed to be the world's tallest statue of Jesus when a shocking accident completely changes his life. This tragi-comedy offers a powerful indictment of provincial Poland's hypocrisy, prejudice and fear of difference, as a young man's face transplant brings out the worst in his small town neighbors. *Mug* premiered at the 2018 Berlin Film Festival.

THE SHARKS

Director Lucía Garibaldi's film features the unusual conceit of a rumor of actual sharks storming the beach where a pair of young lovers also happen to be taking their first measured steps towards a lasting romance. Unfazed, Rosina pursues Joselo as a self-aware heroine of her own hopes and agency. *The Sharks* premiered at the 2019 Sundance Film Festival.

THE SILENCE OF OTHERS / El Silencio de Otros

Filmed over six years, Almudena Carracedo and Robert Bahar's gripping documentary explores the aftermath of General Franco's 40-year dictatorship of Spain through a group of citizens whose parents were disappeared, whose newborn children were taken, or who were imprisoned and tortured by the regime, as they pursue the groundbreaking 'Argentine Lawsuit' against the Spanish government. *The Silence of Others* premiered at the 2018 Berlin Film Festival.

SOFIA

Honor and social appearance prove more important than the truth in this caustic look at contemporary Moroccan society, where it is still a crime for a woman to give birth out of wedlock. Faced with this dilemma, the title character, a 20-year-old from a middle-class family, has little choice. *Sofia* premiered at the 2018 Cannes Film Festival.

THE THIRD WIFE

In 19th century Vietnam, 14-year old May has been married off to a rich landowner, becoming his third wife. Her husband is kind to her, so long as May produces the male heir she is all but expected to. But when May witnesses a taboo affair happening behind closed doors, the discovery spurs a flood of new emotions that she never knew existed. *The Third Wife* premiered at the 2018 Toronto International Film Festival.

TOO LATE TO DIE YOUNG / Tarde Para Morir Joven

Chilean director Dominga Sotomayor Castillo third feature-film is a dynamic tale of adolescence set in a rustic community of artists. It's almost New Year's Eve and Sofía, Lucas and Clara are navigating the complicated road of growing up, a road littered with first loves, dysfunction and all-too adult stakes. *Too Late to Die Young* premiered at the 2018 Locarno International Film Festival.

VISION

From auteur Naomi Kawase, whose work spans over three decades and includes numerous award-winning and nominated documentaries and narrative features, *Vision* tells the story of Jeanne (celebrated French actress Juliette Binoche) as a travel writer in search of a healing herb who is joined on her journey by a young translator and a local skeptic. *Vision* premiered at the 2018 Toronto International Film Festival.

WORKING WOMAN / Isha Ovedet

This riveting drama about workplace sexual harassment centers on a young Israeli mother of three whose successes on the job are accompanied by increasingly overt advances by her boss, a luxury real estate developer not used to hearing the word “no.” Director-writer Michal Aviad is widely acclaimed for her portraits of Israeli society seen through the prism of gender. *Working Woman* premiered at the 2018 Jerusalem Film Festival, followed by the Toronto International Film Festival.

Links to available Screeners and Promotional Stills available on request.

Contact Kelly Nathe for more information – kelly@mspfilm.org

MSPIFF is presented by the **MSP Film Society**, a dynamic 501(c)(3) non-profit dedicated to fostering a knowledgeable and vibrant appreciation of the art of film and its power to inform and transform individuals and communities.

The **Minneapolis St. Paul International Film Festival** is generously supported by many sponsors including The Star Tribune, Cedarwoods Foundation, the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, Minnesota State Arts Board Legacy Amendment Funding, National Endowment for the Arts, McKnight Foundation, US Bank, Best Buy, Knock, Inc., Jazz 88, Indeed Brewing, Fox Rothschild, Depot Renaissance Minneapolis Hotel, numerous locally owned and based businesses, consulates from around the world, our Masters and Auteurs Member Circles and the 2,500+ Members and Donors of the Film Society of Minneapolis St. Paul.

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