

Paper Mache for 9-18-26 by David Read

Growing up in Los Angeles around a bunch of working actors, I have always been enamored of the film industry and filmmaking in general. My first foray into filmmaking involving some theater friends and me and was called "The Scrabble Game." It depicted a couple playing Scrabble while enjoying a bottle of wine. As the evening progressed and more wine was consumed, the words appearing on the game board became increasingly suggestive until, well, you can imagine the final word. Fade to black!

Then we made a pseudo-documentary called "The Sand Dune Jumping Contest." The premise was simple: contestants climbed to the top of the tallest sand dune in Death Valley and then rolled downhill. Points were awarded for style as well as order of finish. Silly commentary from the announcer added to the fun. Our group's magnum opus was "Mondo Fausto," a brief retelling of the Faust legend. Our Faustian character was a down-and-out jazz musician who had pawned his horn for food money. He wandered around Santa Monica miming the trombone until a chance encounter with a seemingly humble newspaper vendor changed his fate. The newsman was none other than Mephistopheles, ready to make him an offer he couldn't refuse. A beautiful trombone appeared in exchange for the musician's someday-to-be-collected soul. We certainly weren't creating cinematic masterpieces, but we were telling stories and having a wonderful time doing it.

That same spirit of imagination, collaboration and cheerful madness is at the heart of Yuba Sutter Arts & Culture's annual 48-Hour Film Festival. The idea comes from what is sometimes called an "instant" or "flash" film festival. The first 48 Hour Film Project was held in Washington, D.C., in 2001. Filmmaking teams were given a genre, character, prop and line of dialogue, then had only 48 hours to write, shoot and edit a short film. The concept quickly spread and is now embraced by filmmakers in communities around the world, including Yuba-Sutter, where we borrowed the same basic guidelines.

The time limit may sound like an obstacle, but creative restrictions can be surprisingly liberating. Filmmakers do not have months to debate every decision, endlessly rewrite the script or wait for perfect conditions. They must trust their instincts, work together, solve problems quickly and use whatever locations, equipment, actors and resources are available.

Short films also remind us that meaningful storytelling does not require two hours, a massive budget or an army of technicians. In just five minutes, a filmmaker can make us laugh, surprise us, unsettle us or cause us to see something familiar in a new way. Every camera angle, sound, musical choice and edit becomes part of the language of the story. Filmmaking is also one of our most collaborative art forms. It combines writing, acting, directing, photography, sound, music, costume design, lighting and editing. Each person contributes something essential, and all those individual contributions must come together to create one coherent experience for an audience.

That is why a 48-Hour Film Festival matters. It gives experienced filmmakers an opportunity to sharpen their skills, invites newcomers to take a creative risk and encourages teams to turn ideas into finished works of art. Most importantly, it provides local storytellers with a screen and a community eager to see what they have created.

This year's entries will be presented on the big screen at the Sutter Theater Center for the Arts, 754 Plumas Street in Yuba City, on Saturday, September 26, at 4 p.m. Come support our local filmmaking community and enjoy an afternoon of cinematic surprises. With only 48 hours to create them, the films may be short, but the imagination behind them has no time limit.