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The Eighth annual East Lansing Film Festival

What it is: The largest film festival in Michigan. The festival presents 16 feature-length films, 22 documentaries and 77 short films from countries including Russia, Spain, the United Kingdom, Denmark, Germany, Singapore and Senegal. The festival also includes more than 50 entries from the Lake Michigan Film Competition, which screens and awards films made by individuals from the Lake Michigan border states of Wisconsin, Illinois, Michigan and Indiana.

When: The festival began Wednesday and will run until Sunday.

Where: Screenings are held at Hannah Community Center, 819 Abbott Road, and on campus at Wells Hall.

Price: General admission for most films is \$7 and \$5 for students. Tonight's screening of Clara Bow's 1927 film, "It," with musical accompaniment by Blue Dahlia, is \$10 for general admission and \$7 for students. The seminar "Producing High Def Video Products" is \$15 and \$10 for students.

Tickets: Available online at [www.presale ticketing.com](http://www.presale.ticketing.com).

For more information, please

Reel big fun

Largest film festival in Mich. busts budgets

By [EMILY BUCKLER](#)

The State News

Getting an audience for smaller-budget independent films is not always an easy task.

Without the studio name or financing, some films might never even make it past private viewing.

For a film producer such as Christopher Gentry, of Chicago-based Life is a Dream Productions, exposure is everything.

"What we hope to do is make sure we know who our audience is going to be for each particular film and make sure our budget is enough to reach that audience," Gentry said. "The hope is to be able to have a film that crosses over to a broader audience. We're not so concerned about getting rich out of this business - any public exposure for your film is good."

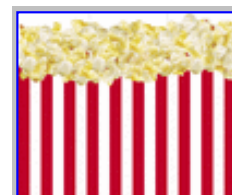
The 8th annual East Lansing Film Festival, which opened Wednesday and will run until Sunday, is one such event critical for independent filmmakers. The Life is a Dream-based film "Cast in Gray" will be shown at 4:30 p.m. Sunday at Wells Hall.

"Everything is so much work, money, blood, sweat and tears," festival Director Susan Woods said. "For independent films to be seen and celebrated is really valuable."

This year, the largest film festival in Michigan - will screen 114 films, not only from filmmakers in the Lake Michigan region, but also from countries such as Afghanistan, Singapore, Quebec, India, Ireland and Senegal.

The opportunity to bring these films to East Lansing is significant, particularly considering the lack of independent venues in the area, Woods said.

"People have tried very hard to bring a theater into East Lansing - it's been the



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contact the East Lansing Film Festival at (517) 336-5802 or visit www.elff.com.

Source: *The East Lansing Film Festival*

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number one request both in Lansing and East Lansing," she said. "You just cannot compete with multiplexes.

"There's simply not enough money and not enough space."

For "Cast in Gray" actor Stephen Angus, the East Lansing Film Festival also represents something slightly more personal. A 1986 MSU graduate, Angus is returning to East Lansing for the first time in nearly 20 years.

"The film festival is a perfect way for me to come back, the added bonus being my personal attachment to the area," he said. "There needs to be a venue for this stuff. Independent films are having a tremendous impact on our culture."

"Cast in Gray," a 39-minute, interpretive short film written and directed by I. Michael Toth, is part of the Lake Michigan Film Competition.

In the film, Angus plays a hitchhiker who catches a ride with a man considering suicide. Their subsequent conversation touches on ideas of religion, identity and escape - all while leaving viewers unsure if Angus' character is really just a figment of the driver's imagination or is he really alive.

"In a subtle way, leaving it open and letting people interpret it keeps you attached to what will happen in the future," Angus said. "Without trying to sound ambiguous, I'm thrilled that the film provokes more than one interpretation - that viewers are engaged enough to keep thinking through the possibilities."

The Lake Michigan Film Competition, which begins on Sunday, screens and awards more than 50 film entries made by filmmakers from Wisconsin, Illinois, Indiana and Michigan.

One such film from Michigan is "Neighbors in the Square," a 58-minute documentary on the lives of elderly residents at the Washington Square Co-op in Kalamazoo, Mich.

Director Dhera Strauss, a media producer and instructor at Kalamazoo College, filmed and shot the documentary after it was requested by the building's residents.

"If I had a motive or point of view making this film, it would be that often this is an under-served population," Strauss said. "I would want the average viewer to come away respectful of the individual, and to portray the dignity, intelligence, and interests of this population that has been overlooked."

"Neighbors in the Square," also contains footage of the Kalamazoo area from the early half of the 20th century. It will be shown at 2 p.m. Sunday in Wells Hall.

Two of Strauss' students, Joseph Blustein and Meghan Kralej, also have submitted films to the Lake Michigan Film Competition, in the student program category.

The Lake Michigan Film Competition portion of the festival will begin at 4:30 p.m. Sunday in Wells Hall.

"The mission of the East Lansing Film Festival is to bring independent films that would not be seen otherwise, to enrich the community," Woods said. "What you get in multiplexes are generally not a reflection of good films."

Festival events begin at 8 p.m. Thursday with a screening of the 1927 silent film "It," starring Clara Bow, at the Hannah Community Center, 819 Abbott Road. Kalamazoo-based band Blue Dahlia will provide a live, original soundtrack to the film. For more

information on the East Lansing Film Festival, please visit www.elff.com.

A selection of Friday's films

"Tarnation" Director Jonathan Caouette shot this creative documentary as a self-portrait of his upbringing in a dysfunctional Texas family and the relationship he develops with his schizophrenic mother, Renee. Showing at 9:30 p.m. at Wells Hall.

"Rush to War" Robert Taicher examines American foreign policy and the issues surrounding the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks in this historical documentary. Taicher and his film crew drove cross-country collecting interviews for "Rush to War" in October of 2001. Showing at 9:30 p.m. at Wells Hall.

"Trundell" Director Heather Rae profiles Native American activist John Trundell. The film, selected for the 2005 Sundance Film Festival Documentary Competition, focuses on Trundell's poetic words, music and intellect. Showing at 7 p.m. at Wells Hall.

A selection of Saturday's and Sunday's films

"Plagues and Pleasures on the Salton Sea"

The Salton Sea in southeast California is known as one of the world's worst ecological disasters. Created by accident, it is a stagnant, salty lake that kills thousands of fish and birds. Directors Chris Metzler and Jeff Springer explore this phenomenon and the surrounding Salton Sea community in "Plagues and Pleasures on the Salton Sea," showing at 4 p.m. Saturday at Wells Hall.

"The Tunnel"

Based on a true story, "The Tunnel" recreates the story of champion swimmer Harry Melchior after his escape from East Berlin in 1961, following the construction of the Berlin Wall. Once there, Melchior decides to dig a tunnel under the wall in an effort to get his sister, Lotte, and her family to the other side. Showing at 9 p.m. Saturday in Wells Hall.

"Headrush"

Charlie and T-Bag, two disillusioned cannabis-enthusiasts from Dublin, Ireland, hope to solve their problems by smuggling drugs for a local underworld gangster in this 85-minute comedy. Showing at 6:30 p.m. Saturday at Wells Hall.

"Neighbors in the Square"

Director Dhera Strauss explores life within a Housing and Urban Development high-rise apartment in Kalamazoo, Mich. and the social community of its independent elderly and physically handicapped residents. "Neighbors in the Square" will be shown at 2 p.m. Sunday in Wells Hall as part of the Lake Michigan Film Competition.

Source: The State News, East Lansing Film Festival

