

Q&A with Jason Carney of The Phoenix Film Festival

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Tuesday, 24 March 2015 15:02 - Last Updated Tuesday, 24 March 2015 15:11



As The Phoenix Film Festival kicks off today (through April 2), AZFoothills.com chatted about what this year's festival holds and the Valley arts scene with Jason Carney, festival director.

AFM: How long have you been with the film festival? How did you get your start?

JC: I started with the festival in the first year way back in 2001. I was asked a friend, Program Director Greg Hall, to come volunteer. I was instantly hooked and over the years I worked my way up the ranks. In 2005, I became the Executive Director of the Phoenix Film Foundation and have remained in this position since.

AFM: For those festival first-timers, what can they expect?

JC: They can expect the ultimate film-lover experience. It's a great opportunity to see films you couldn't find anywhere else, plus great films that you can see before they're released in theatres. Not only will they be mingling with other filmgoers but filmmakers will be on hand to discuss the films and how they are made. Plus audiences will even run into them at the festival parties each night. Having filmmakers in attendance is what separates a film festival from going to the movies.

AFM: What do you consider to be this year's standout event?

JC: I'm pretty proud of our "Growing up Baumbach" series which is a Noah Baumbach retrospective. He's so well respected in the indie film world and we'll be showcasing three of his earlier films including "Frances Ha," "Kicking and Screaming" and "The Squid and the Whale." Then we close out the festival with his new release, "While We're Young" starring Ben Stiller, Naomi Watts, Amanda Seyfried and Adam Driver. Plus we'll also have Ryan Serhant from Million Dollar Listing: New York in attendance who is also in the film.

AFM: Do you have a favorite film from the 2015 festival?

JC: The film I'm anticipating most is "Me and Girl and the Dying Girl." The film premiered at Sundance with stellar reviews and it cleaned up in awards department. We're super excited to get it so early before its release in July.

AFM: What role do you expect social media to play in the festival?

JC: Social media has been a great resource for our filmgoers and filmmakers. It's a great space for filmgoers to discuss what they like and dislike at the festival. They have found it very helpful in trying to decide what to see next. And for filmmakers it is huge because it gives them an opportunity to spread the word about their film. With so many films playing, filmmakers are looking for opportunities to stand out.

AFM: What are your thoughts on the Valley arts scene?

JC: I'm extremely proud to be part of the arts community here. We're fortunate to have so many options in every discipline not only with bigger established groups like Phoenix Theatre and the Phoenix Art Museum but also extremely creative growing groups like Stray Cat Theatre and Scorpius Dance. The arts community continues to evolve and grow and I'm lucky to be a part of it.