

Aurora Film Circuit marks ten years of bringing international fare to local market



By Brock Weir

Ten years ago, moving to Aurora from the big city might have been something of a culture shock.

In Toronto, they had access to everything the film world had to offer, whether it was blockbusters or subtitled foreign fare.

What did they have in Aurora?

A Town with no movie theatre and limited viewing options in Newmarket and Richmond Hill.

What did they do about it?

They founded the Aurora Film Circuit and, a decade on, the citizen-led group remains committed to bringing the best of the best to Aurora for all to see.

?I have always loved film and I grew up in the city, so I had access to all the wonderful films in independent theatres,? says Nelia Pacheco, formerly a casual film buff, and now Chair of the Film Circuit. ?When I moved up here and found out about the Circuit, I signed up as a subscriber and threw my name in when there was an opportunity to be a volunteer.?

A watershed moment, she says, was coming into the Aurora Public Library and seeing a poster for the Canadian film, *Shake Hands With The Devil*, based on Romeo Dallaire's memoir on the Rwandan Genocide. Having been frustrated by only being able to catch the latest blockbuster on nearby screens, she says she was ?thrilled? something like the Circuit even existed.

The same is felt by Circuit secretary Sylvia Gilchrist, who has been with the group since its inception.

?I particularly enjoy it because they show films that aren't on the general circuit,? says Ms. Gilchrist, adding one particular favourite they unspoiled is the international documentary, *Babe*, which follows the growth and development of young kids in places as accessible as the United States or as far-flung as Mongolia. ?They are usually films that get you thinking, or have something different about them, that is really interesting.?

And that truly is their recipe for success. Now in partnership with TIFF ? the Toronto International Film Festival ? the Aurora Film Circuit operates under TIFF's mandate of giving people the chance to ?see the world differently through film.?

?Some subscribers love foreign films, and others say, ?please stop!?" Ms. Pacheco offers with a laugh. ?We have a bit of a love-hate relationship, which is wonderful, but if you leave the theatre following a good discussion, or it has made you see something

differently, we have done our job.?

But sometimes programming can be a tough job. Ms. Pacheco and her co-programmer sift through several films, sit through dozens of screenings at TIFF, and pore over other sources to make a shortlist of films they would like to bring to Aurora. Sometimes with distribution rights it just doesn't pan out, but there might be some thrill in the chase.

While they have their films for the first few months of 2016 lined up ? including the British film *45 Years* and the current critical darling *The Room* ? they are still hoping to secure the rights to screen *Brooklyn*, the new acclaimed film charting an Irish immigrant coming to the New York borough in the 1950s for January.

As they look ahead to their milestone 2016, the Aurora Film Circuit is looking at ways to broaden their mandate and working with Cineplex to see how they can expand what they offer, including the possibility of a local ?mini-film festival.?

?It is a challenge, but that doesn't mean we won't keep trying.?

Over the past nine years, the Aurora Film Circuit has also been reinvesting in the community. Both women were on hand at last week's meeting of the Aurora Public Library Board to present a \$3,000 cheque to Library CEO Jill Foster and Board Chair Rino Roncadin for further programming. The Circuit has now donated \$41,000 to the Library over the course of the last eight years which the Library in turn uses to invest in their DVD and film catalogue, including securing copies of every film the Circuit has screened since its inception.

?They are incredibly generous,? says the Library's Reccia Mandelcorn. ?They have allowed the Library to buy titles from the Criterion Collection, which is the ultimate for the film buff. They are quite expensive and libraries don't generally get to purchase them. At the Film Circuit, you see your neighbours, you meet new people, and it is a fabulous night out ? and you don't have to go far!?

Now screening out of Aurora's Cineplex, the Aurora Film Circuit offers 250 film subscriptions per year at \$80 each, which gives subscribers eight films spanning eight months. An additional block of 50 tickets per individual screening is offered for sale at the Aurora Public Library.

Approximately 45 subscriptions are still available for 2016. The Library's individual tickets for the January 11 screening go on sale December 7. For more on the Circuit, go to aurorafilmcircuit.ca.