

Silent City Film Festival deep dives into the legacy of filmmaking

[Nolan Sheehan](#)



Located between Cinempolis and Deep Dive, the Silent City Film Festival stood as a showcase for the incredible level of talent that resided among directors, musicians and actors across the entire state of New York. From Rochester to Newburgh, Ithaca hosted dozens of experts in their craft from Oct. 4 to 8.

The origins of this film festival are rooted in tradition. The host of the event at Deep Dive, Dallas Hallam, spoke on the incredible history that surrounds the artistic process for films and other forms of media. Ithaca, being one of the centers for creative expression on the big screen for the first time, has quite the legacy to uphold.

"Ithaca has a very rich silent film heritage," Hallam said. "The Wharton Brothers were the beginning. Their studio stands as a reminder of our tremendous past with film and motivation to keep moving forward."

Those brothers were the start of Ithaca's film history itself, founding Wharton Studios right on Cayuga Lake in 1914. More than a century later, Hallam continues to honor their contributions to the industry with this film festival. It stands as great commemoration of the past, as well as great reverence for the future of film in the Ithaca area.

The atmosphere surrounding the event had much to do with this. The small, comforting theater created through the stage and curtains of Deep Dive added a strong personal feeling to the films, music videos and documentaries presented, as the environment was alive with openness and shared appreciation for film.

Much different from any standard movie theater style of show, the smaller crowd of a dozen people combined with the question-and-answer format between host and creator gave the viewers a greater understanding of the thought processes behind the creation of their work. A personal connection was reached with every answer a certain creator gave, adding another layer of depth to the work of art that simply couldn't be achieved in a standard movie-going format. With Deep Dive's interpersonal presentation style, it was no doubt a successful front in the war against possible misinterpretations or unanswered inquiries regarding local creators and their work.

The work described in the makings of creator projects was presented through small interviews conducted by Hallam, in which the audience could ask questions afterward. These discussions, much to the benefit of the event, were quite revealing in part of the production, writing and storyboarding elements. Despite all projects ending up at the same event, the production cycles for each project were revealed to be incredibly different for each director.

Director David Fishel explained the difficulties in directing music videos, ranging from how the choreography will play out to what the driving force behind the project truly was.

"It was a lot of planning in terms of the limitations, as well as what we're going to show," Fishel said. "I was telling Carleye that I was nervous to show my work. But the experience proves to be educational."

Carleye Eckert, Fishel's long-time directing partner of many years, was also present at the event. When asked about production, her answer was very in line with Fishel's concerns and challenges regarding managing the project.

"One thing I'm always reminded of is our productions: doing so much with so little," Eckert said.

Other directors seemed to lean in the opposite direction with their feelings toward the production of film. Different approaches are apparent in every director at Silent City, which helps to expand the culture of filmmaking in Ithaca for general viewers. Kristen Wheeler, director of short, silent film "You Bettor, You Bettor, You Bet" talked about the passion she felt when directing, acting as her guiding motivation in finishing the project.

"It was really fun to make," Wheeler said. "We shot it in one day!"

In contrast to production, driving motivations for products seem to ring a similar bell for most creators. The driving force behind many aspiring directors at Silent City was their feelings toward everyday issues and how people react to them. Singer-songwriter Lilac Milk presented her music video for "Here With Me," a personal favorite of the audience on day three of the festival. The video was centered around Milk's feelings toward the constant absence of her boyfriend due to his career as a musician.

"Mood is motivation in my case," Milk said. "If a person is feeling sad, they are put in a rainy field. It's the driving factor for so much of the creative

element in the industry."

She regarded the experience as incredibly personal for her and an undeniably liberating experience, giving herself the ability to express her emotions in the classic format that Silent City celebrates.

Director Alex Curtis spoke regarding common insecurities presented in his short film "Dress to Impress," emphasizing that their representations in the film were a result of common human emotions.

"I didn't consider the experience revealing," Curtis said. "Isn't it just normal for everyone?"

From the perspectives of both creators, experiences prompted by strong emotions struck the core of their piece, adding to the personal element Silent City excels at.

Most of the audience was in agreement with what films spoke the most to them. Being a part of the small viewership was a gift, as opinions regarding certain projects were open and free-flowing because of how the viewing was structured.

A collection of short films shown on day four of the film festival evoked the strongest applause from the audience. The favorite projects were both short films, "Pete & Re-Pete" and "Keith." Despite the constraints in budget for small projects, these two short films excelled at building character, which could be seen as the core reason for the viewership's favor by the end.

"Pete & Re-Pete" tells a hard-hitting story of grief in a relatively silly format, connecting personally with the audience with a deep message showcased through solid humor. "Keith," in contrast, conveyed its message more brutally, demonstrating the breakdown of a middle-aged man and the world as he knew it crumbling around him. The short film was a very grounded, honest approach to the struggles growing adults face with their past, once

again connecting with the viewership with strength.

When looking back on Silent City, the impact film has had on Ithaca is quite clear: reaching out to its citizens with strong messages founded on tough production and honest creators. The atmosphere of the event was excellent, providing a mix of welcoming fun and a familiar movie-enjoying aura. This festival certainly earns its spot in Ithaca's grand archive of film history and appreciation. It most certainly deserves a larger audience for next season's round of delightful, talented creators.