

Our Chat with Brooklyn Film Fest Executive Director Marco Ursino

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Earlier this week we headed to the surprisingly relaxed Williamsburg offices of [The Brooklyn International Film Festival](#) to speak with its creator and Executive Director, Marco Ursino. Now in its 12th year, the festival — whose proclaimed mission is “to discover, expose, and promote independent filmmakers while drawing worldwide attention to Brooklyn” — launched last Friday and runs through June 14th at the Brooklyn Heights Cinema.

Flavorpill: How long have you been working with the festival?

Marco Ursino: The full 12 years. I came to New York from Italy in 1988 and was a filmmaker. I worked on a film for about four or five years, but couldn’t find a way to distribute it. So, me and a few friends got together and started showing movies. We also knew that there was no venue showing international independent films. So we started the film festival. There are a couple of versions about how it started, but that’s the cute story [laughs].

FP: Tell us more about it. How has it changed over the years?

MU: We didn’t expect it to become a full-time job! It’s incredible the virtual growth. We had 100 submissions the first year and showed 30 of them. From the first year to the fifth year, the festival doubled in size. It was the first international film festival in the area. Also, the crowd and audience are great. We are in Brooklyn, and Brooklyn is a particular animal. It keeps growing every year at a regular Brooklyn pace.

FP: Yeah, Brooklyn is special and has particular tastes. What do you think are going to be the Brooklyn favorites? What are your picks so far?

MU: The opening night film was good. The film that night [*Breaking Upwards*] was about breaking up and painful relationships. *The Timekeeper*. *Borderline*. Those are all good.

FP: Relationships seem to be a theme of the festival. Also, the intimacy and the ability to actually touch and mingle with the filmmakers, is nice and well, different.

MU: Ours has more cutting-edge films, different standards; we like the novelty, experimental and the like. There's a big turnout. There's more storytelling. Everything around us is about relationships. American films are about communication and relationships. And a lot of independent films are about death, the telling of the story, desire for rebirth, closure and moving on. These films are more like "the crash of the planet" point of view. That speaks to a lot of people. Especially right now.

FP: Since you brought it up, independent films do offer something to the audience that big blockbusters can't. What do you think of the Hollywood mentality?

MU: Well, I'll say this: I don't like a film where within five minutes, I can figure out the ending. But an independent movie offers freedom from that. The independent movie *equals* freedom. People identify with independents. Hollywood even understands that flashy is not kosher right now. And the downside of the economy is good for cinema. And people have more to say. Independent films can take more risks. There's no formula.

FP: Wait a minute. Are you saying the recession is good for business?

MU: [Laughs, shrugs] What can I say? It is!

FP: Anything else you'd like your audience to know?

MU: Well, I don't know if I should tell you this... Well, this is kind of gossipy, but it's not bad or anything. OK, we provide accommodations for the filmmakers, because as you know, a lot of them are from overseas, about 80 percent of them. So, The Hotel Chandler handles all of the accommodations. You know that guy from *The Real Housewives* show? The one with the hotel?

FP: Simon [van Kempen]?

MU: Yes! That's him! He runs that hotel! He takes care of the accommodations. No charge. He came to the festival one year; he really liked it, I guess, and he's provided the complimentary accommodations ever since.

Also: Out of the 114 films selected, 14 of them were done by children, submitted by Kidsfilmfest, an organization through the New Museum that shows films made by kids, for kids. It's really interesting for the kids and they have a monthly program at the museum. The first Saturday of every month.

Also, one of the awards given at the end of the festival, The \$5000 Diane Seligman Award, presented to the Best Documentary, is made possible by her husband Marvin Seligman. He grants this money on behalf of her memory. And we really think it's something.

FP: What's your idea of a successful festival?

MU: Being alive! Making it out in one piece! Taking on challenges. Pushing filmmakers to the next level.

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