

New Jersey Film Festival rolls out fall lineup at Rutgers



A scene from 'The Rule,' a documentary filmed at St. Benedict's Prep in Newark that screens this Sunday at the New Jersey Film Festival. (Bongiorno Productions)



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Now that all the summer blockbusters are through, and the "**Guardians of the Galaxy**" is fading into the distance, it is time once again for the New Jersey Film Festival. The fall lineup starts this week, with plenty of documentaries, feature-length movies and shorts from Garden State storytellers.

The festival, based on the campus of Rutgers University in New Brunswick, hosts a new slate of films each fall and spring.

Premiering at the festival this Sunday is a documentary called "**The Rule**" the second in a trilogy of films by Marylou Tibaldo-Bongiorno and Jerome Bongiorno of Newark. The 90-minute story, **also playing in New York**, follows **Benedictine monks at Newark's St. Benedict's Prep**, a school that serves grades 7 through 12 that boasts a near-100 percent college acceptance rate.

The husband and wife team spent three and a half years following the monks at the school and completing the film, which is also due to air on PBS.

"We really made it so people could learn from the academics," says Marylou Tibaldo-Bongiorno.

Bongiorno Productions is working with Teachers College at Columbia University to create a companion study guide for policymakers and educators, the aim to use St. Benedict's as a model for urban school reform.

In addition to students, the film follows the school's headmaster, "Father Ed."

"I often call him the heart of St. Benedict's," says Tibaldo-Bongiorno, the producer and director of the documentary (Jerome is the film editor and cinematographer). "He's been there for 40 years and I don't think his energy has diminished, at all." The filmmakers also focused on the school's student leadership strategy. "It's really about building community," she says, with spirituality as a lynchpin to the whole enterprise.

The Bongiorno's first film in the series, "Revolution '67," about the 1967 Newark riots, also aired on PBS and won the grand prize at the same film festival in 2007. Their next, "Rust," is about "rust belt" cities, using Newark, says Tibaldo-Bongiorno, as a microcosm for the country.

"We see poverty as the biggest problem in inner cities," she says.

Among the non-documentary festival offerings is "**Leaving Circadia**," a dramedy from a team of Rutgers alumni.

"It starts out in Atlantic City, actually," says Drew Seltzer, 33, the executive producer, who also plays a role in the movie, screening at the festival this Friday.

A 2003 graduate of Rutgers' Mason Gross School of the Arts, Seltzer appears alongside fellow Rutgers alum Evan Mathew Weinstein of Sayreville, who directs the film and plays protagonist Tom, a slacker building superintendent.

The name of the film is a play on circadian rhythms, Seltzer says, "commenting on how people get into a cycle," or, simply stuck in a rut. A group of friends wake up hungover after a crazy night and the majority of the movie unfolds in Brooklyn. "Leaving Circadia" is more broadly about the transition from college life to a period of "buckling down," Seltzer says, moving from their 20s to their 30s.

"You find a lot of people in their 30s still living at home," he says. "Their first career that they went to school for isn't working out."

Joseph R. Gannascoli, who played Vito Spatafore in "[The Sopranos](#)," portrays another building owner. Other familiar faces include Christian Coulson, who played Tom Riddle in "Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets," Rutgers alum Larisa Polonsky of "Chicago Fire," Michael Cerveris from the HBO series "Treme" and Ashley Williams from "Human Centipede."

"Leaving Circadia" will be screened 7 p.m. Sept. 12 at the New Jersey Film Festival. "The Rule" screens 7 p.m. Sept. 14. Both screenings are at Rutgers' Voorhees Hall #105, 71 Hamilton St., near the corner of George street in New Brunswick. Admission \$10. The festival runs through Nov. 21; visit njfilmfest.com for a full schedule of films.

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