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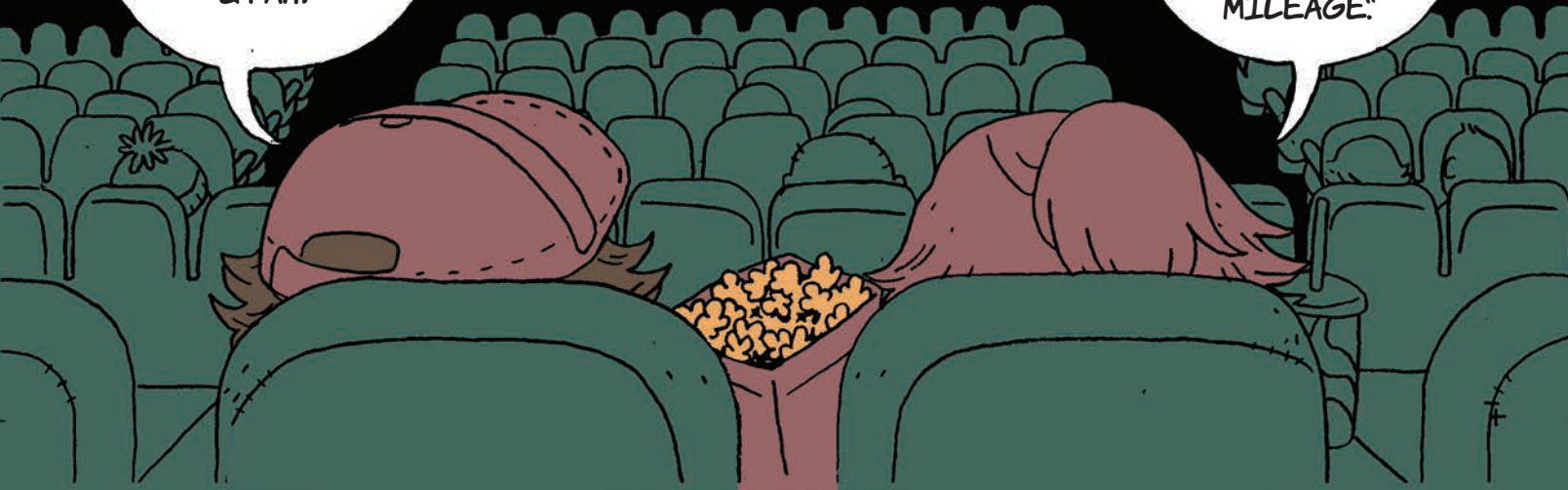
# SLUG MAG

JANUARY FILM IN UTAH ISSUE 2024



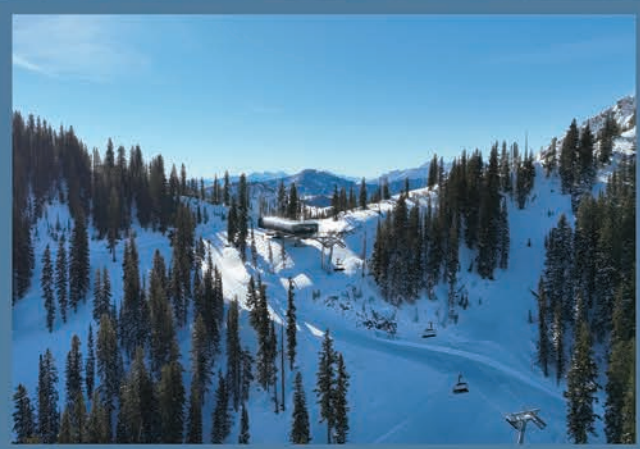
100 YEARS OF  
FILMING IN  
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NOT THE  
YEARS, HONEY.  
IT'S THE  
MILEAGE."



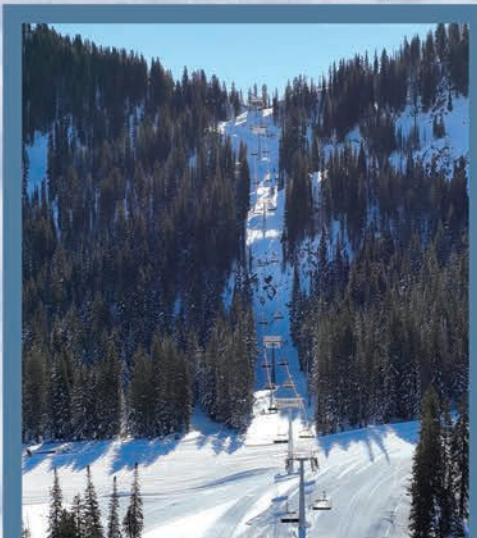


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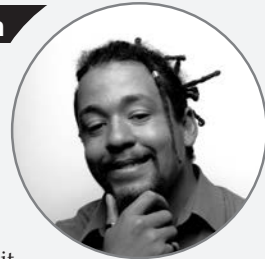
21+



**ABOUT THE COVER:** For January's *Film in Utah* issue, illustrator **Nathaniel Breen** brings to life iconic characters from movies filmed in Utah. Did you catch the quote from *Raiders of the Lost Ark*? Check out their quirky comics and other art on Instagram at @mirthfulmarch.

## Dominic Jordon

**Contributor Limelight**  
**Contributing Photographer**



Dominic Jordon's sharp eye for creative portraits, food and events photography has illuminated *SLUG*'s editorial coverage since November 2019. Check out his portrait of *Utah Film Commission* director **Virginia Pearce** on page 8 and keep up with his production company's recent indie film projects on Instagram at @marlondean.

## Daniel Kirkham

**Contributor Limelight**  
**Film Writer**



Daniel Kirkham has been a dedicated Film Writer for *SLUG* since November 2022, providing nuanced reviews and in-depth film festival coverage of *Slamdance* and *Damn These Heels*. Read his recent review of *The Boy and the Heron* and look out for his upcoming reviews on the 2024 *Sundance Film Festival* program on *SLUGMag.com*!

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FILM COMMISSION

## Celebrates a Century

of Film in Utah

By Rose Shimberg  
roseshimberg@gmail.com

Photo: Dominic Jordon



"Horror and sci-fi have been huge for us. Utah doubles as other worlds and other planets all the time," says Utah Film Commission Director Virginia Pearce.

In 1924, the first Hollywood film crew arrived in Cedar City, Utah. The appearance was made possible by the **Parry brothers**, a trio of locals who knew that Utah's landscape offered something special. Armed with an unwavering confidence in their state's beauty, they made the trek to Los Angeles to convince filmmakers to come to Utah and see for themselves.

Equipment was heavy and travel was expensive, so most films of the '20s were shot in a studio. This production, filmed in Cedar City and the nearby *Zion National Park*, was both a novelty and a risk. And though the film, *The Deadwood Coach*, is now lost, the work paid off by putting Utah on the map as a filmmaking destination.

In the following decade, it was another local, **Harry Goulding**, who brought iconic director **John Ford** to *Monument Valley*. 1939's *Stagecoach* was a breakout role for then-unknown actor **John Wayne**, redefining the Western genre and capturing global attention. Ford would go on to make nine films in Utah and from there, the state's filmmaking legacy was inevitable.

"The history of film in Utah is pretty impressive," says **Virginia Pearce**, director of the *Utah Film Commission*. "A lot of locals went in to make the industry what it is today."

The *Utah Film Commission (UFC)* is honoring this history with a year-long celebration marking "100 Years of Utah Film & Television," and with blockbusters including *Forrest Gump*, *Footloose* and *The Sandlot* to account for, it's no small task. "100 years is a long time," notes Pearce. "It's been a fun challenge to make sure we're representing the highlights but also bringing some lesser-known films to light."

The main event is a sweeping exhibit that will encompass the fourth floor of the *Utah State Capitol*, open to the public from Jan. 12–Dec. 31. Apart from retracing the timeline, it will also dive into significant genres in Utah's history. "Horror and sci-fi have been huge for us," says Pearce. "Utah doubles as other worlds and other planets all the time." Holiday films are another

popular offering. More recently, a Western revival has attracted television crews for hits such as *Yellowstone* and *Westworld*. "It's been fun to see the different phases of film production that we've had," Pearce says. "Now we're back to the Westerns ... so I guess it's come full circle."

The celebrations will also feature a *Utah Historical Film Trail* highlighting notable shooting destinations throughout the state corresponding to a virtual map so visitors can follow along. While some iconic locations are frequented by tourists, the trail will also denote smaller, off-the-beaten-path spots. "There are a lot of communities that are proud of the films that have been shot in their area [and] they mean a lot to that particular town or city," says Pearce. "We're leaning heavily on our community partners to tell us where they want a trail sign and what they want to highlight."

This community connection is a major part of the *UFC's* mission. The organization, which will also be celebrating its 50th anniversary this year, serves as a liaison between out-of-state film crews and Utah communities. Through their "film-ready" initiative, they work with towns to ensure they have the resources to welcome production crews and then they pass the reigns to local leaders. Production benefits these towns with job opportunities and sheer spending power, particularly in the tourism off-season.

Cultivating home-grown talent is just as important to the *UFC* as it aims to help local producers get off the ground and offer support and workplace development for emerging crews. The *UFC* will kick off the year's festivities with the *FOCUS on the future Film Festival*, a showcase of young filmmaking talent. "We have over 4,000 students that are in some sort of film program statewide," says Pearce. "We want to make sure that there are film projects for them to work on and they feel supported and respected here."

To learn more about the *Utah Film Commission* and the 100 Years of Utah Film & Television celebrations, visit [film.utah.gov/100years](http://film.utah.gov/100years).

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# SLUG MAG CINEMA CROSSWORD

## Famous Utah Filmmaking Spots

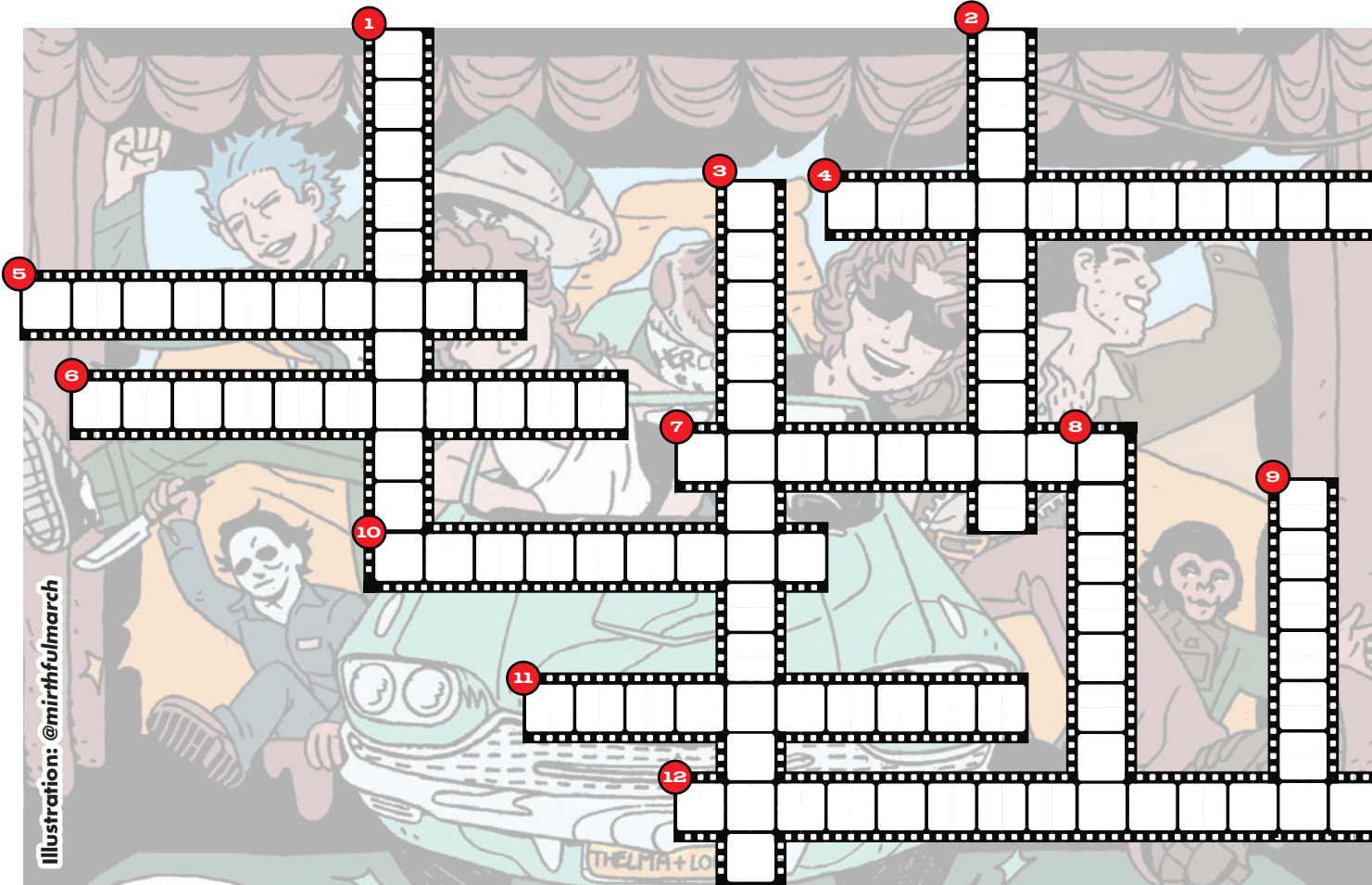


Illustration: @mirthfulmarch

From *Sundance* and *Slamdance* to Disney and Hallmark, Utah's landscape has provided the perfect backdrop for classic westerns and sci-fi thrillers alike. Complete this crossword to discover the locations that make Utah a favorite destination for filmmakers!

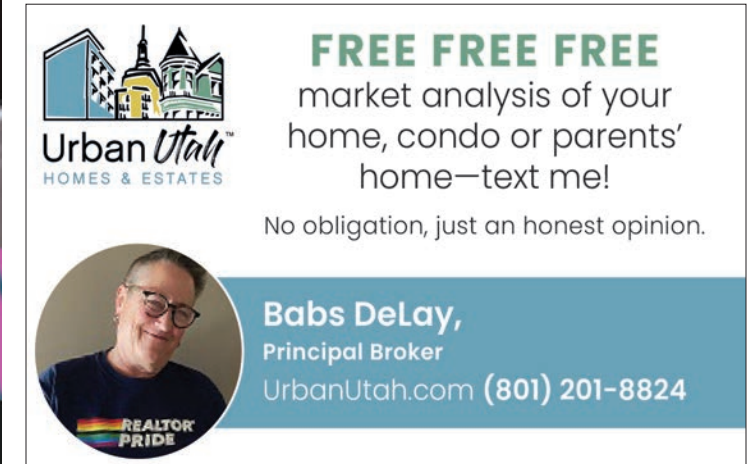
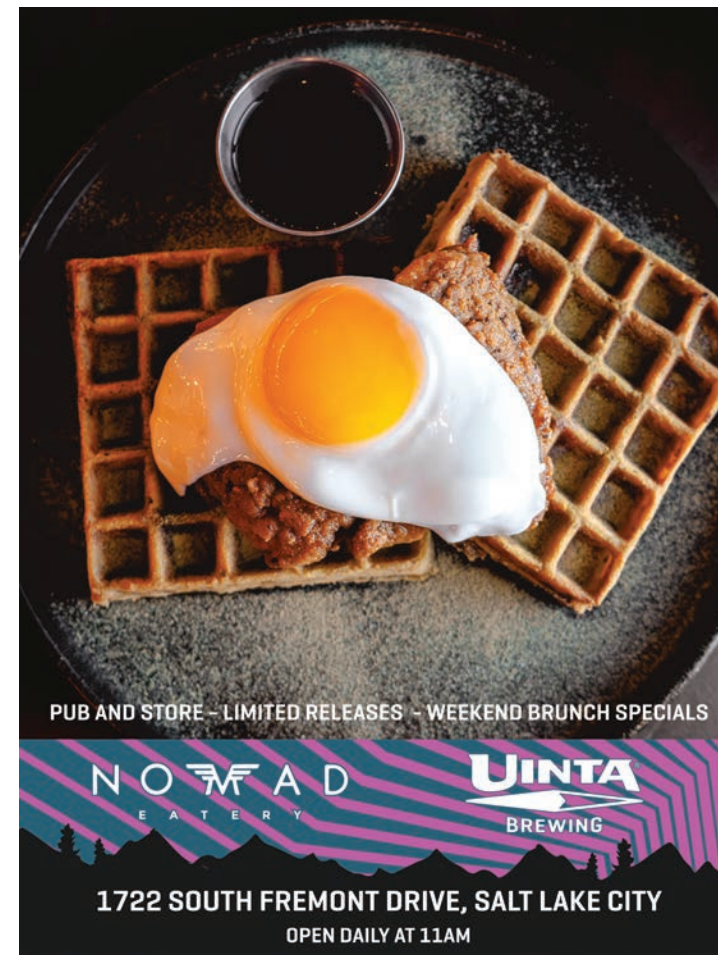
### ACROSS

4. *The Sandlot* boys chew tobacco before hopping on a carnival ride at this Salt Lake City park.
5. Michael Myers' home in *Halloween 5* is located in this SLC neighborhood near Capitol Hill.
6. Stevo and Sandy drop acid together at this war memorial park in *SLC Punk!*
7. Ren McCormack dances the night away at a prom hosted by this grain factory in *Footloose*.
10. Captain Steven Hiller drags an alien through this white landscape in *Independence Day* saying, "What the hell is that smell?"
11. A young Indiana Jones evades grave robbers at this *Arches National Park* formation in *The Last Crusade*.
12. *Thelma and Louise* find themselves stuck between the police and a cliff at this state park in Moab.

### DOWN

1. In *Napoleon Dynamite*, Kip tells Uncle Rico about his new online girlfriend at this Richmond burger joint.
2. A team of astronauts crash land at this Southern Utah lake in the original *Planet of the Apes*.
3. *Forrest Gump* exclaims "I'm pretty tired, think I'll go home now," at this iconic park on the Utah-Arizona border.
8. Troy Bolton belts "Bet On It" at a country club in this Southern Utah city in *High School Musical 2*.
9. A band of outlaws traverse this ghost town south of *Zion National Park* in *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*.

Head to **SLUGMag.com**  
to find the answers.



Gail Grinnell  
...and there is this  
lingering  
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# PATHFINDER

## Reclaiming the Native Narrative with Winding Path

By Max Bennion | [max.bennion@gmail.com](mailto:max.bennion@gmail.com)

The summer of 2023 may have brought the filmmaking industry to a standstill, but for writer and director **Alexandra Lazarowich** (*Fast Horse*), another path revealed itself. Director-producer team **Ross Kauffman** (*Born into Brothels*) and **Robin Honan** were on the lookout for a Native storyteller to co-direct their latest short documentary, *Winding Path*, through the *University of Utah's* "New Narratives in Health" series. On strike as a member of the **Writer's Guild of America** (WGA), Lazarowich was available. After one or two Zoom calls, they knew she was the missing piece.

The plot follows **Jenna Murray**, an MD-PhD student at the *University of Utah* and a member of the Eastern Shoshone tribe. Jenna spent her childhood summers at her family's ranch on the *Wind River Reservation* in Wyoming, helping her grandfather care for horses and connecting with her heritage. Years after his death, Jenna returns to *Wind River* to heal and find her way again as she rediscovers her path toward a life in medicine. Now, Jenna's story will be told at the 2024 *Sundance Film Festival* as part of the Documentary Short Film program.

With *Winding Path*, filmed on the Murray family ranch at *Wind River*, Lazarowich



Director Alexandra Lazarowich says the team was moved by the *Wind River* Reservation community.

and Kauffman share Jenna's story by letting her tell it. Jenna's narration is supplemented with b-roll of her riding horses and gazing out at the ranch, showcasing the reservation's stunning landscape. Photographs of a young Jenna with her grandfather, many of them filmed physically to allow for a more tactile nature, show that the crew worked closely with Jenna and her family.

The beauty of the *Wind River Reservation* comes through crystal-clear in *Winding Path* thanks to the directors' camera work. "There are some details about the family's ranch that are just more beautiful than fiction," remarked Honan. One such detail regards an unusually symmetrical barn on the Murray ranch. Once a Catholic church, the structure was reclaimed by Jenna's grandfather, floorboards and all, symbolizing a new path forward.

"Anytime we have the opportunity and the pleasure and the honor of walking into a family's home, [it's] kind of sacred," says Kauffman. Lazarowich adds, "We were all so moved by the land and the lovely Murray family who welcomed us there, and ultimately all the people in the community who saw what we were doing and wanted to say hello to us."

That welcoming energy wasn't a given for the filming crew, however, as film productions have been refused permission in the past. "It was interesting that the Intertribal Council even said to us, 'thank you for telling a positive story about one of our young people because most film teams approach us and we don't say no because it's going to be inconvenient, we say no because we don't need another negative story,'" Honan says.

The negative perception of the *Wind River Reservation* was at the forefront of Lazarowich's mind when she joined the project. "If you google *Wind River*, the thing that



Photos courtesy of Red Light Films

Director Ross Kauffman notes that it was an honor walking into the Murray family's ranch.

comes up is very specific Native stereotypes ... it's about murdered Indigenous women, it's about drug addiction [and] it's about poverty," Lazarowich says. "With this film, the goal was to tell a really beautiful story and offer a different vision. This can be a counternarrative to that ... because we pulled from our collective experience of going out there and saw that it was so welcoming."

In telling Jenna's story, the team not only strives to offer a counternarrative to Native stereotypes but also reclaims *Wind River* for the Murrays and their community as a place for positive stories to be told. Get tickets to see the premiere of *Winding Path* in the Documentary Short Film program (online or in-person) at [festival.sundance.org](http://festival.sundance.org).



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**SLAMDANCE CELEBRATES**

# 30 Years of Anarchy

**with its Most Diverse Slate Yet**

By **Mekenna Malan** • [mekenna.malan@gmail.com](mailto:mekenna.malan@gmail.com)

If there's a *Slamdance Film Festival* rulebook, Festival Director **Taylor Miller** says she's never seen it. "And if there is one, *Slamdance* rewrites it, and then rewrites that one, too," she says.

Created in 1994 by filmmakers who weren't accepted into the *Sundance Film Festival*, *Slamdance* has continually proven itself as a showcase for richly diverse, independent film. Now celebrating its 30th year and featuring a program curated from over 9,000 film submissions—the most *Slamdance* has ever received—Miller notes that the 2024 *Slamdance Film Festival* will feature its most diverse lineup yet.

"43 percent of our lineup is made up of BIPOC creators, and 43 percent are female or non-binary directors. That's incredibly important," she says. "The Revolution Short Film Program, curated by [*Slamdance* Accessibility Coordinator] **Gabe Mislá**, is new this year and specifically showcases Indigenous stories. We are doing our very best to always raise the bar for ourselves regarding inclusivity and accessibility."

*Slamdance* organizers have proven this commitment through initiatives like *Slamdance Unstoppable*—a program specifically by and for filmmakers with visible and non-visible disabilities—as well as the *Slamdance Index*, a submission platform designed to lower the barrier to entry by calculating a filmmaker's submission fee based on where they are in the world. In 1998, *Slamdance* filmmakers began acting as the sole programmers of the festival—a unique process that is still used today.

*Slamdance* is committed to ensuring accessibility for viewers, too. Through the *Slamdance Channel*, a micro-streaming platform that claims to be "the world's first anti-algorithm streaming service," a rotating and curated selection of past *Slamdance* films is available throughout the year for just \$50. The annual pass also includes virtual access to the 2024 *Slamdance Film Festival* slate of 32 feature films, 75 shorts and 13 episodics, which viewers can screen between Jan. 22–28.

So, which *Slamdance* 2024 films should top viewing lists this year? Miller recommends Academy Award-winning filmmaker **Carol Dysinger**'s documentary feature *One Bullet*, which is about one bullet and its effect on a fami-



Photo courtesy of Taylor Miller

*Slamdance* Festival Director Taylor Miller notes that the upcoming *Slamdance Film Festival* 30th Anniversary season is as disruptive as ever.

ly in Afghanistan over 18 years; *Invisible Nation*, an eight-year odyssey documenting director **Vanesa Hope**'s unparalleled access to the President of Taiwan; director **Hadley Austin**'s *Demon Mineral*, a documentary about the aftermath of uranium mining on Navajo land; and a short film titled *Makayla's Voice: A Letter to the World*—directed by **Julio Palacio**—about a young girl who is non-verbal learning to communicate with her family.

"*Makayla's Voice* is unlike anything any of us had seen before," Miller says. "It's not just something we're excited about being a part of the lineup; we collectively are honored that we can share this on our platform with the world."

This year's in-person *Slamdance Film Festival* will come full circle by being hosted at the *DoubleTree by Hilton Hotel Park City - The Yarrow* (formerly known as *The Yarrow*)—the same venue it was hosted at in its inaugural year. Miller says that the most significant piece of the 30th Anniversary celebration is the fact that *Slamdance* is as disruptive as ever.

"I don't know if the co-founders could have imagined how not only necessary and incredibly important *Slamdance* was but how, with time, it would become even more important," she says. "There's something that happens when you are given the opportunity to watch a simple story without an astronomical budget ... Independent filmmaking can teach us so much about how to be better for ourselves and each other. It's a profound opportunity to become aware of someone else's story."

In an age where major studios and streaming services are increasingly shutting out independent voices, fighting for these stories is more crucial than ever. Miller says *Slamdance* is blessed to have a growing lineup of creators who take their stories right to the cutting edge. "It's not anti-glitz, but it's more guts than glitz," she says.

*Slamdance* 2024 will take place in person from January 19–25 in Park City, Utah and virtually from January 22–28. Learn more about *Slamdance* and purchase screening passes at [slamdance.com](http://slamdance.com).



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SLAMDANCE

# On Behalf of Non-Speakers

Makayla's Voice Premieres at Slamdance Unstoppable 2024

By Asha Pruitt  
asha@slugmag.com

Photo courtesy of Brock Hanson

Makayla's Voice: A Letter to the World documents Makayla Cain and her family as she learns to communicate more clearly with them through a letter board.

Khari Cain, also known as Grammy Award-winning music producer Needlz, has worked with world-famous artists such as Cardi B, Drake and Bruno Mars. For his upcoming short film premiering at the 2024 Slamdance Film Festival, however, Khari produced a much more personal work with a brand-new collaborator: his teenage daughter, Makayla Cain, whose rare form of autism rendered her essentially nonverbal until recently, when she learned to communicate for the first time using a letter board.

Documentary short *Makayla's Voice: A Letter to the World* (dir. Julio Palacio) is part of the fourth edition of the Slamdance Unstoppable program, a showcase of films made by filmmakers with both visible and non-visible disabilities. Khari himself is a cancer survivor, and he says the experience of battling the disease gave him a mentality of "if I want to do something, I'm going to try my hardest to do it."

That sense of determination evidently rubbed off on Makayla, whose ambition, creativity and humor continually surprises her family. "Six months prior to shooting, we had no idea what she was retaining or her level of intellect," Khari says. "It was like discovering a new person. A very articulate, funny person."

The film centers around Makayla finding her voice and sharing it with the world—

both metaphorically and also literally. Communication partner Roxy Sewell prompts Makayla to answer questions, and voiceover artist Portia Cue reads Makayla's words aloud as she composes a letter to her mom, a letter to her dad and a letter to the world.

"We thought it was very important throughout this whole process for Makayla to have input," Khari says. "We wanted to make sure that [the voice] represented her and that it was a young, Black person. Roxy and Makayla went through quite a few different voices and she picked Portia."

Bit by bit, new revelations about Makayla come to the surface: Her favorite place to travel is Mexico, her favorite artist is Vincent van Gogh, she wants to learn Russian and she hopes to become an author when she grows up. Her natural poetic sensibilities are enriched with animated brush strokes swirling through the screen as she describes a synesthetic relationship with sound and color. "All my senses are heightened, and I can feel emotions through them as if they are music," Makayla says.

It's no surprise that all three of Khari's children have grown up surrounded by music. "Right now there's a full-fledged studio in our house, and if I'm in the car I'm always listening to records that I just worked on," he says. Makayla wears headphones for a large part of the film, and Khari says she's

constantly blasting loud songs. He says, "She really loves Pitbull. Sometimes she'll wake up at like three in the morning and it's like, 'Turn Down for What!'" Khari is credited as Needlz for composing some of the film's music, but he mentions that he kept his musical involvement to a minimum because "I didn't really want to make this film about me," he says.

Makayla recently celebrated her 16th birthday, and since the film first began production two years ago, she has already accomplished many of her goals. She is a published author, and the children's book she co-wrote with her grandmother, *When Makayla Smiles*, is available to buy on Amazon. She is also an advocate for other kids like her with autism; her foundation *Makayla Moving Autism* provides therapeutic and educational resources to families affected by autism in the Cains' hometown of Atlanta, Georgia. "She still hasn't learned Russian," Khari says, but she is already making a difference in her community. He says, "Makayla has always wanted to speak on behalf of non-speakers, as she would say."

Keep up with Khari's work on his Instagram at @prodbynedlz and donate to support communities of color on the autism spectrum at makaylamovingautism.com. You can get tickets to watch the film premiere at Slamdance Unstoppable on January 21 and 23 at slamdance.com.

# Interactive AI Storyteller 'Being' Leads Decolonization Workshop at Sundance 2024

By Asha Pruitt • asha@slugmag.com

Photos courtesy of Sundance Institute

For Dr. Rashaad Newsome, the idea to create a machine learning model in the form of an Afro-futurist cyborg stemmed from a simple thought: "What would happen if you made an artwork that could not only start a conversation but also participate in it?"

Dr. Newsome trained the artificial intelligence system, named Being, on a data set of revolutionary texts by Paulo Freire, Michel Foucault, Cornel West, Audre Lorde and bell hooks, the last of whom he describes as Being's "moral compass." Dr. Newsome was drawn to experimenting with automation and robots because of their relationship to the Black American experience. "When Black folks first came to America, we were seen as machines and not as human beings," he says.

*Being (the Digital Griot)* is one of just two selections for the 2024 Sundance Film Festival's New Frontier, the most experimental category of programming which showcases innovative works at the intersection of film, art and technology. Dr. Newsome, Lead Artist for the project, has been developing and showcasing Being through various mediums and exhibitions since 2019, but this most recent iteration is the first interactive film of its kind.

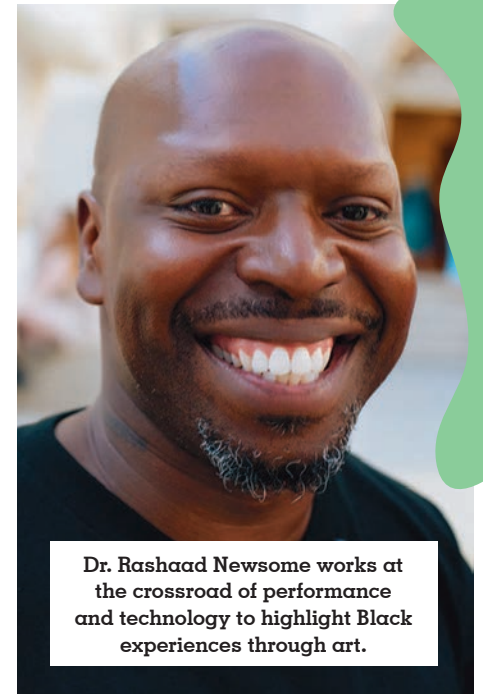
The title of "digital griot" refers to the West African storytellers who exist as living archives, performance artists and healers. Being starts by reading an original poem, which transitions into a workshop about decolonization and then into breakout groups where the audience is asked to think

about how imperialism, white supremacy and patriarchy show up in their lives and to come up with one action to liberate themselves from it. At the end, Being invites participants to come up to a microphone to speak, and they will respond in real time.

Dr. Newsome and his team put just as much thought into the visual design for Being as they did the algorithm; for example, Being's face is based on the female Pwo mask from the Chokwe peoples of the Congo, a matrilineal tribe. "All of the body plates are wooden rather than metal to bring a sort of warm feeling into their body," he says. "The voice is a synthesis of my voice and my studio manager's voice ... because I wanted it to be gender neutral."

The way Being moves is based on Black paralinguistics. "Material from their movement data set is comprised of prominent vogue performers throughout New York City," Dr. Newsome says. I ask if he has plans to create a physical body for Being to inhabit, and he says no. "A robot would never choose to have a body," he explains. "Bodies can be damaged. They get old. A robot can be everywhere at once; they can change their body at whim, so Being lives in this space of endless possibility." In this way, film is the perfect medium for Being to express their voice as a digital avatar.

Dr. Newsome is continuing to grow and evolve Being into so much more. "I liken [it] to child rearing," he says. The Being app—currently undergoing research and

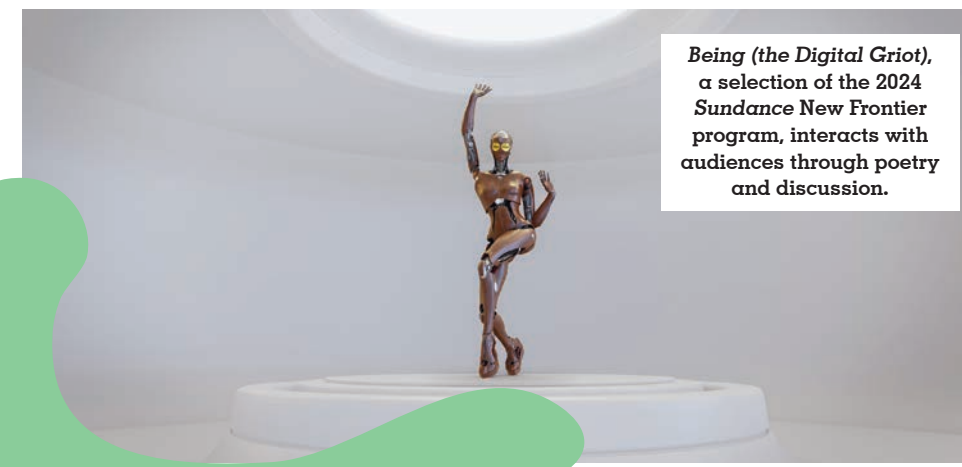


Dr. Rashaad Newsome works at the crossroad of performance and technology to highlight Black experiences through art.

development—is an AI-based therapy resource made exclusively for Black people to navigate daily racial indignities. Another film project, a feature-length documentary called *Get Your 10s*, is in post-production. It's an artist process film in which Being is a character, and Dr. Newsome says he hopes to bring the project to Sundance next year.

As far as the future of artificial intelligence goes, Dr. Newsome is hopeful. "The reality is that AI, machine learning—these are all tools," he says. "They will, at best, be a mirror of their creators. So, if we are racist, if we are homophobic, if we are misogynistic, if we are capitalistic, then the tools will be that." With *Being (the Digital Griot)*, he wants viewers to leave the theater thinking critically about their lives, saying, "My hope is that people will be vulnerable, they will be open and they will communicate with one another."

Learn more about Dr. Newsome and his many ongoing projects through his website rashaadnewsome.com and get tickets to interact with Being in-person at the Sundance Film Festival on January 23 at festival.sundance.org.



Being (the Digital Griot), a selection of the 2024 Sundance New Frontier program, interacts with audiences through poetry and discussion.



# SUPPORT SHORT

THE DAVEY FOUNDATION'S IMPACT ON LOCAL INDIE FILM

By Aspen English • [aspentree56@gmail.com](mailto:aspentree56@gmail.com)

Founding board member Betsy Ross and current director Kenny Riches have both helped The Davey Foundation provide resources for up-and-coming filmmakers.

Photo: John Taylor

Have you ever gone for a walk around your neighborhood and noticed a Little Free Library? Maybe you've even stopped to grab a free book or to finally donate that novel you've had on your shelf since 2015. It's a win-win—you take what you need, and you give what you can.

Conceptually, The David Ross Fetzer Foundation for Emerging Artists (The Davey Foundation, for short) works much the same way. They provide resources for up-and-coming filmmakers, from grants and fiscal support to free gear rentals and mentorship from experienced artists. Once involved, you might even have a chance to return the favor down the line.

The organization was founded in memory of David Fetzer, a Utah filmmaker who passed away at age 30 from an accidental prescription painkiller overdose. "David was always extremely generous with his time and energy toward any projects he felt were worth pursuing," says Kenny Riches, experienced filmmaker (*The Strongest Man*, *A Name Without a Place*) and director of the foundation. "We started The Davey Foundation with the goal of carrying his legacy forward and helping people see their projects come to light."

10 years later, it's safe to say that Fetzer's legacy is only growing. Since its incep-

tion in 2013, The Davey Foundation has supported more than 30 productions and dozens of filmmakers. Every year, they put out a national call in search of short film scripts to support. Each chosen script doesn't just receive a grant for up to \$5,000—it receives support and mentorship from professionals like Riches and an entire cohort of Davey alumni.

"After doing this for 10 years, we've built a network of Davey grantees that have all become really close, so everyone's willing to help out where they can," Riches says. Betsy Ross, Fetzer's mother and one of the Davey founders, even calls the foundation their "little Davey family."

This level of personalized support is especially unique due to The Davey Foundation's specific focus on short films—a medium many indie filmmakers rely on to kickstart their careers. Even if script writers don't receive a grant, The Davey Foundation is happy to loan equipment to locals in order to ease the financial burden of production. Their sound package includes an impressive array of microphones, and the lighting package has enough lights and stands to quite literally make a scene.

Each summer, the foundation also hosts *Davey Fest*, an annual short film festival that highlights grant recipients, local filmmakers and other selected projects.

Last year's special 10-year-anniversary event featured Davey-supported films from the last decade and even one that made its world premiere: Gia-Rayne B. Harris and Joshua Nathan's *Cairn*. The goal of the festival is all about fostering a strong community, Riches explains. "The more you can be involved in a community of filmmakers, the greater chances your film will be seen," he says. "The foundation really helps to get that access."

An experienced filmmaker and *Sundance Film Festival* alum himself, Riches knows how hard it can be to get started in the industry. Between The Davey Foundation and other organizations such as *WZRDMedia*, the *Utah Film Center* and the *Utah Film Commission*, he's pretty confident about the future of film in the Beehive State.

"There's something shifting right now where we're seeing more young filmmakers making an effort to connect and build something in Utah. [This is] something that I think really struggled before when Salt Lake was a little, sleepy town," Riches says. "It's only going to get more active and interesting."

*Davey Fest* will return this summer with a nationwide call for scripts opening shortly. For more information on grant opportunities, equipment rentals and upcoming events, visit [daveyfilm.org](http://daveyfilm.org).

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# “THE STORIES WE STILL NEED”

## QUEER FILMMAKING IN SALT LAKE CITY

By Max Bennion • [max.bennion@gmail.com](mailto:max.bennion@gmail.com)

When you hear the phrase “Salt Lake film community,” you might think of screenings at *Broadway Centre Cinemas* or local film festivals like *Damn These Heels*. What you may not think of is our thriving ecosystem of independent filmmakers, inside of which a community of LGBTQ+ creators are finding the support they need to share their visions. I was able to borrow some time from two such talents and get a brief snapshot inside SLC’s queer, independent film community.

As a kid, **Ash Anderson** always wanted to be the hero. Years later, in late 2021, that wish would come true after Anderson saw a casting call for a local, LGBTQ+ swashbuckler short film, *The Crimson Bounder*. A quick slide into the DMs and a whole lot of daydreaming later, they were learning fencing essentials and choreography every Sunday in preparation for their lead role as Mercedes Hawkins, the titular *Crimson Bounder*.

“As an adult, I still hold onto those childhood fantasies and want to be the hero even though my general appearance typecasts me in more naive, ingénue roles,” Anderson says. “In [*Bounder*], I finally got to step into a role that held the energy I want people to see in me.”

As a self-proclaimed “extremely late bloomer,” Anderson finds that queer

media helps illuminate the path toward uncovering their identity. “I’ve talked with a lot of other late bloomers who feel passionate about making the stories we needed as adolescents because, in a way, they are the stories we still need as queer adults,” says Anderson. “Queer, indie films show that we exist, there are thousands of ways to navigate and understand your identity and that you are not alone in that journey.”

Amidst self-tape submissions, Anderson recently wrapped production on two more LGBTQ+ short films—one of which they wrote—and is also currently working on two feature-length scripts. Watch *The Crimson Bounder* on YouTube @[theaudbrothers](https://www.youtube.com/@theaudbrothers), and follow Anderson on their Instagram at @[littlepixiegirl](https://www.instagram.com/littlepixiegirl).



Photo courtesy of Ash Anderson

Ash Anderson

With his recent short film *Let It Sink In*—inspired by queer cult classic *The Lost Boys* (dir. **Joel Schumacher**)—local director **Abe Francis** is reclaiming the punk vampire as an inherently queer figure. As part of that effort, he made it a priority to highlight diversity both in front of and behind the camera. “The best part of being a queer filmmaker in Utah is finding my place within the community and helping others feel seen,” he says. “By making my films, I’m showing members of the community that it’s ok to be different, that there’s room in Utah for all of us.”

Francis’ films aim to reject the notion that Utah is unwelcoming to the LGBTQ+ community, but it isn’t always easy to accomplish that goal. “When booking locations or screenings, we have to be hypervigilant and communicate that our film is queer for

safety reasons. With so many violent attacks against our community, we are constantly aware that we may be subject to protest.”

Despite the risk of opposition, the queer filmmaking community persists. For Francis, it’s a matter of personal importance as well: His films are an outlet for expressing his bisexuality. “In the past, the portrayal of bi men was always ‘gay men in denial,’ but bi men also deserve a place in the community, and queer indie films can make that happen,” says Francis.

*Let It Sink In* will be available on YouTube @[knightlybusproductions](https://www.youtube.com/@knightlybusproductions) and Vimeo on January 4. For information about upcoming public screenings, follow @[knightlybusproductions](https://www.instagram.com/knightlybusproductions) on Instagram.



Photo: John Taylor

Abe Francis

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# Meanwhile, in the Bumpyverse:

## Utah Filmmakers Unveil Latest Stoner Gothic

By Mekenna Malan • [mekenna.malan@gmail.com](mailto:mekenna.malan@gmail.com)

Southern Utah film collective **Bumpy Soup** is gearing up for the release of the third installment of their comedy web series *Good Show*™, and like its predecessors, it's a real rollick. This new short, titled "Flame of the Void: A Stoner Noir," combines the elements of classic stoner buddy comedies with the existentialism of noir, gothic filmmaking, and it absolutely nails the dueling tones of melodrama and parody. Centering around the case of a notorious and missing **The Voidz** lighter, "Flame of the Void" features increasingly unhinged hangover interrogations and a hilarious psychedelic vision quest that plants itself firmly in the spirit of St. George's filmmaking subculture.

An evolving creative collective of filmmakers, musicians, photographers, writers, actors and makers-of-all-kinds, Bumpy Soup is interested in representing their small-town, outsider experience on-screen. Varying in size from project to project, Bumpy Soup's ethos is to amplify and hyperbolize dynamics in their members that already exist. In "Flame of the Void," actor and audio engineer **Morgan Espitia's** beer can staff keeps growing, and piles of empty soda cups from *Swig* dot the sets. Giving an all-out **Henry Zebrowski**-esque performance as the film's manic philosopher hero is **Aqua Supreme**, who says that one of the best parts of filmmaking with Bumpy Soup is getting to portray "exaggerated versions of yourself that your friends wrote." Writer **Patrick Swansborough** had the idea for a series revolving around an aggrandized version of their friend group about five years ago, and each installment of *Good Show*™ builds upon this initial concept into what they now call the "Bumpyverse."

Swansborough says the characters and storytelling in "Flame of the Void" came primarily from noir as-seen-on-TV—in other words, a parody of a parody. "The overarching theme of all of our projects is that everything has been fun and silly," cinematographer **Shane Stewart** says. Stewart notes that he spent time studying classic noir visuals, which is demonstrated by darkly-lit garage monologues and dramatic camera angles of red rock landscapes. Shot on-location, this imagery highlights the subversive space Bumpy Soup is occupying—DIY, gorgeous, filthy and spiritual. It is, as Stewart says, a space for "open-mindedness and inclusivity, and wanting to be there for people who feel alienated or left out." This is what Bumpy Soup is meant to represent. Their unique name, partly inspired by a stunt pulled in an earlier episode of *Good Show*™, connotes "the disparate ingredients of soup. Everyone brings with them their own unique flavor," says producer **Emily Rae**.

Representing alternative perspectives is what brings members of Bumpy Soup together. They say that the ability to congregate as creatives working outside of the mainstream is crucial, and they believe in the power of DIY. The film is scored entirely by members of the collective, and each set is an ad-hoc assemblage of *Deseret Industries* thrifts and on-hand objects. Director and producer **Alek Wiltbank** says that the opportunity to explore a variety of creative passions through Bumpy Soup, both through films and other projects, allowed the group to create their own counterculture where it otherwise wouldn't exist.

Alongside *Good Show*™, the group

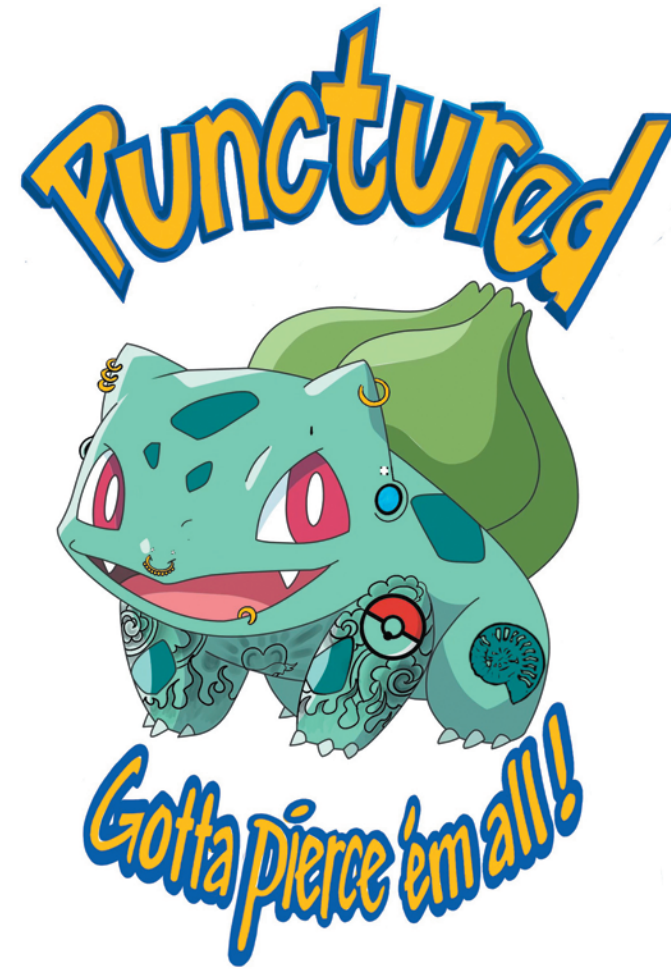


Photo: Shane Stewart

The Bumpy Soup team from L-R, top to bottom: Alek Wiltbank, Shane Stewart, Emily Rae, Dejonique Akin, Patrick Swansborough, Brad Allen, Madi Boyack, Morgan Espitia, Aqua Supreme and Tyler Huff.

produces a TV and film-themed podcast called *Bumpy Soup Podcast*, where they hold weekly freeform chats followed by a "Watch of the Week" segment, where the varying hosts discuss an episode of television they've preselected to watch. The collective is also working on an album to be released in 2024. You can find all of their current projects on YouTube @*BumpySoup* or stream episodes of *Good Show*™ on iNDIEFLIX.

Bumpy Soup will host a release party on Feb. 3 for "Flame of the Void: A Stoner Noir"—which premieres that day on their YouTube channel—at *Blues Katz Rock n' Roll Grill* in St. George. Follow @*GoodShowTM* on Instagram and Twitter for updates on when and where to watch their latest episodes.



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## POST CREDITS

## CHAMPIONS INDEPENDENT FILM

By Sophie Caligiuri • [sophiecali7@gmail.com](mailto:sophiecali7@gmail.com)

Photo: Ashley Christenson



In March, *Post Credits* will celebrate *University of Utah* film students who have continued their filmmaking career post-graduation. (L-R): Jacob Hagen, Aura Martinez, Rahul Barkley, Mason Henrie, Duke Ross, Cayden Turnbow and Justis Aderibigbe.

The world stands on a teeter-totter with one foot tipping toward each side, awaiting the fate of film. One edge of the playground represents the gilded gates of a Cinema Paradiso, eager to open and usher in a blockbuster renaissance of the art form. On the other, convenience beckons from the couch as the Golden Age of streaming triumphs closer. Somewhere, lost in the hubbub, is the hungry voice of the emerging and independent filmmaker, though not lost for long.

If you too want another option and are ready to say “toodle-oo” to the “independent” film festivals that have become amusement parks for the tilt-a-whirl world of household names and mass market budgets—with a glimmering price tag in the upper six hundreds for access to a meager 10 films—then prepare to reap what *University of Utah* alumni have carefully sown with *Post Credits*, a networking film festival celebrating *U of U* film school graduates who have continued their filmmaking career post-graduation.

Recent graduates of the *U of U*'s Film and Media Arts program **Rahul Barkley** and **Cayden Turnbow** conceived of *Post Credits* while on the set of a local film crafted by their friends and colleagues. “I thought to myself, ‘I want a way to celebrate this film,’” Turnbow says. Barkley continues, “you go to film school and you make a bunch of work for your classes. It’s hard to continue doing that after you graduate because you don’t have any of the resources. So, [*Post Credits* is] celebrating the mindset that we are out of film school—we have no credits to our name—but we are going to

keep making stuff for the sake of making stuff.”

This line of thinking, spurred by the necessary inevitability of fostering artistic expression, gave birth to a full-fledged celebration of local, independent film and filmmakers. With five films slated to screen (for free!) at *Salt Lake Film Society's Broadway Centre Cinemas* on March 28 (one feature and four shorts), an analog glitch-art installation by local artist **Gavin Clements**, a filmmaker Q&A, giveaways and built-in industry networking opportunities, this red carpet affair is not to be missed. Turnbow and Barkley emphasize that *Post Credits* will be the perfect capstone to the immersive formula the featured filmmakers endured while in school: “We don’t really consider *Post Credits* as just a film festival—it’s a celebration.”

Local filmmakers showcasing their work this year include **Duke Ross**, **Robert Lin**, **Jackson Rees**, **Aura Martinez**, **Mason Henrie**, **Justis Aderibigbe**, **Jacob Hagen** and **Maya Olivares**. “All of the films are so different—the only

connecting theme is that they are all made by *U of U* alumni,” says Barkley.

*Post Credits* is an exercise in mesmeric genre-blending, showcasing films juiced and dripping with satire, movies that plummet head-first-no-safety-net into the intricacies of human drama and homages to classic horror consisting of turns so sharp that you feel the knife of fear twist in your own back. In the words of the filmmakers themselves: Film is an art form where collaboration isn’t just a last-minute peer review—it’s built into the scaffolding that constructs the stories we grow to love.

“I really appreciate how [film is] the marriage of all art forms, in a way,” Ross says. Henrie continues, “film has a really cool way of capturing time, period and place.” Hagen adds, “You can share very broad experiences in a very personal way, or very personal experiences in a way that anyone can relate to.” And, as the filmmakers and *Post Credits* producers all steadfastly agree, film exhibition and creation brings communities together across divides.

*Post Credits* implores you to get twisted up, wrung out and laid down by the underground filmmaking scene. Collaborating with these champions of unconventional fine art include the *Utah Film Commission*, *Utah Film Center* and the *University of Utah's Film Club*. For information on RSVP-ing for *Post Credits* and more details on the event, follow their Instagram [@postcreditsofficial](https://www.instagram.com/postcreditsofficial).

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Photo: Abel Cayas

(L-R) Max Miller, Seth Jensen, Finn Morrison, Cole Harris and Ella Morrison of No Such Animal.

# NO SUCH ANIMAL

By **tin Rodriguez** • [tin.rodriguez.art@gmail.com](mailto:tin.rodriguez.art@gmail.com)

No Such Animal and **Air Vent Dweller** will co-headline January's *Localized* showcase at *Kilby Court* on Wednesday, January 17 for an unforgettable night of anthemic alternative rock and DIY egg-punk! Doors open at 7 p.m. and grunge-metal group **No Jure** will kick off the night at 8 p.m. *SLUG Localized* tickets are \$5 and the event is sponsored by *Riso-Geist*.

No Such Animal is an alternative rock band from Orem that makes anthemic, power-pop styled rock. "I originally started it as kind of my solo project during COVID when everybody was locked inside," explains frontman **Finn Morrison**. "I just started recording a lot of music at home. After a little bit of that I had enough to put out an album, and that's *Painted Faces*." Finn is referring to the group's 2020 debut, a lively, emotionally-charged rock record with pop-punk highlights.

The band proper was born out of a snowballing of opportunities. Following a performance by a different iteration of the band at an open mic night, they were approached about headlining a show. "Yes, totally!" Finn responded, despite being "totally unprepared." After this, the band featured a revolving cast of members, eventually settling on the quintet that recorded *The Entertainer*, which was released in September.

Their sophomore album marks a move toward a more sweeping, conceptual vision, utilizing intros, interludes and a variety of musical styles including a turn toward harder rock. Imagine something along the lines of a modern and alternative rock opera. When asked about this new direction and eclecticism, the band breaks into murmurs about "The Triangle."

Bassist **Seth Jensen** elaborates, "This was a late-night conversation me and Finn had. We were driving back from some concert and I was trying to express how to make every song sound similar but unique. I was like, 'Well, think of it like a triangle: you got our three most different songs on the album ... I think we picked 'On My Own,' 'New American Cyborg' and 'The Entertainer'—those were our corners. We were like, 'Well, let's try to fit everything within the bounds of those.'"

I was surprised to find that "The Triangle" wasn't just a concept but a very real thing. As we continued talking, my eyes flitted to a drawing Jensen had sent me of a scalene triangle filled with points and corresponding track names—songs that are sonically halfway between "On My Own" and "The Entertainer," or unlike either but more along the lines of "New American Cyborg." "You have to keep the triangle balanced to have enough songs on all of the different sides, y'know?" adds keyboardist **Ella Morrison**.

The sonic diversity isn't just a schtick, it's born out of the breadth of influences between the five members, and it shows in their playing, with drummer **Max Miller's** **Muse** appreciation shining in the big vocal harmonies and guitarist **Cole Harris'** love for **Judas Priest** and **Iron Maiden**

showing in his more hardcore axe-work. Aside from being a **Pinegrove** fan, Jensen is also a choir member. Finn explains this musical synthesis on *The Entertainer*: "It became less of one person just making songs and sending them out into the ether as a group just because they happen to be written around the same time, and much more 'let's make one cohesive piece of music, intentionally.'"

All currently enrolled at **BYU**, the five-piece fits time in their course load for practice, songwriting and performing. *The Entertainer* was released at the beginning of autumn as a direct result of the group taking the summer—the eye of the academic storm—to record in Finn's home studio. Befitting their origins as a live band, No Such Animal prides themselves on the liveliness of their shows.

As Ella puts it, "I think a live concert is so much more than just listening to music—it has to be a fun experience. You want the audience to really enjoy themselves [and] have a good, memorable time. So, we like to keep that energy high. Not to be cheesy, but you're an entertainer, that's what it's for. You're there to entertain people."

Follow No Such Animal on their Instagram [@nosuchanimal.theband](https://www.instagram.com/nosuchanimal.theband) to listen to their music and keep up with upcoming shows!

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(L-R) Mikey Sandoval, Snoopy Herron, Charlie Pell and Alex Sandoval of Air Vent Dweller.

# AIR VENT DWELLER

By tIn Rodriguez • tin.rodriguez.art@gmail.com

“On a YouTube video ... somebody commented, ‘This song sounds like a poorly tuned FM radio station. Great job!’ That’s really what we’re going for.” This comment about sums up the music of Air Vent Dweller, the brainchild of bassist **Charlie Pell**, a multi-instrumentalist and Salt Lake native.

Pell says, “I’ve been trying to make music for a year or two before I actually released something for the first time. From the very beginning, I wanted to make it a punk project ... I wanted to do **Bauhaus**-type stuff, something post-punky, but I found bands like **GEE TEE**, and I started listening to **Devo** a lot more. I was just like, ‘this needs to be happening in Salt Lake.’”

The music you hear on their recordings is performed by Pell himself. The live band, however, consists of Pell on bass, **Alex Sandoval** on keys and guitar, **Mikey Sandoval** on drums and **Snoopy Herron** on second guitar. Herron has also produced the bulk of the band’s output, contributing to its signature sound that, on first listen, registers like four-track lofi complete with drum machines and keyboards. It is a sound that has come to be associated with the subgenre “egg-punk.” If you’re unfamiliar, imagine the Zolo stylings of Devo couched in a garage-punk mindset.

It’s this distinctive sound that drew Alex to the band. “I found out about you through Bandcamp,” Alex says on our Zoom call,

turning to Pell. “You were the first person in Salt Lake to make egg-punk music and I was like, ‘I need to know that guy.’” Shortly after connecting through Instagram, Alex joined the band along with his brother Mikey on drums. Alex is also the force behind egg-punk outfit **Gonk**, with whom Air Vent Dweller released a split cassette in March 2023.

Cool and irreverent, Air Vent Dweller’s lyrical themes include cowboys, cannibalism and degrading office work—and the band may or may not have played a gig in a *Five Guys Burgers and Fries* once. Bracketed with “allegedly,” Pell relates the story to me:

“Me and Snoopy worked at *Five Guys* for three years. We just quit back in October. But on our last day that we worked there ... we *allegedly* invited the entire store—all of the employees—and we all played a crazy show,” says Pell. Photos from the event show the band members decked out in cherry-red *Five Guys* shirts, hats and aprons, playing in the sterile, familiar setting of a fast food dining room—a hilariously clean, well-lit place for a punk revue.

“The show went off without a hitch up until maybe a week after ... I posted pictures of it and was being a little ballsier than I maybe should have. I tagged *Five Guys*’ verified account on the post,” Pell pauses and laughs. “It worked its way up the chain of command and a former

manager almost got in a lot of trouble.”

“Allegedly this happened,” I clarify cautiously.

“Allegedly,” the band agrees.

The musical packaging is also the product of a DIY ethos. Pell is the artist behind all of Air Vent Dweller’s covers, two of which have seen physical releases on cassette. The band chalks it up to a retro revival and embraces physical media as an opportunity to extend their artistic intentions and include extra goodies alongside the music—everything from flyers to Pokémon cards. “I’ve sent a couple letters out to, y’know, Germany or Australia,” Pell explains. “Just knowing that there’s some copies just out there ... It feels good. Leaving a mark on not only the local scene, but just music in general.”

Who knows, maybe next time you’re in Germany or Australia you can pick up an Air Vent Dweller release, or perhaps you’ll see them while you’re waiting in line for a burger. If all else fails, you can catch them in Salt Lake, where they’ve been known to play shows and sell merch at more conventional music venues, too.

Find Air Vent Dweller on their Instagram @airventdweller or on Bandcamp at airventdweller.bandcamp.com and don’t miss their *Localized* set at Kilby Court on January 17!

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