

# Final plans are in preparation for film festival

By **ROBERT CROZIER** Staff writer | Posted: Monday, January 4, 2016 4:00 pm

BELOIT — It's a new year, and preparations for the 11th annual Beloit International Film Festival are in full swing.

The 10-day celebration of art and culture will take place Feb. 19 to Feb. 28 across several venues in Beloit's city center.

And, because of a growing connection to the Hollywood Film Festival, organizers in Beloit had more films than ever to pick from this year.

BIFF Executive Director Rod Beaudoin started consulting with the Hollywood festival two years ago. He recently became the Hollywood festival's director in addition to directing the Beloit event.

He arranged an affiliation agreement giving the Beloit festival access to all the films shown in the Hollywood festival, and this will be the first one since the change. Instead of hundreds of films to choose from, the selection committee this year had thousands.

"We're going to have better films," Beaudoin said.

The 109 films that will be shown in February have been carefully selected. A group of 15 or 20 screeners — mostly film students looking for something to put on their resume, according to Beaudoin — put in a lot of time to watch and rate all of the submissions, and each film was viewed several times by different people. Then their ratings and written reviews were sorted through.

Beaudoin said that, in order to become important, film festivals must judge films on their merits: things like cinematography, acting and a certain feeling of the film. "BIFF is really well-respected around the world," he said. "This is a film festival that people watch."

Organizers didn't simply admit the films that had the highest composite ratings by the screeners. Beaudoin said he likes to view and consider movies that some people may have considered controversial.

"Our moniker is to bring the world to Beloit and Beloit to the world," he said. "We deal with some pretty controversial



## BIFF 2016 is nearly here

The Rock River Philharmonic performs during the Silent Film Showcase Saturday at the Eclipse Center in 2014.

topics.”

Some five members of Beaudoin’s inner circle each get to champion a film, he said. This means they each get one pass they can apply to any film they think is important, even if everyone else hates it, to get it into the festival.

Of the films selected, Beaudoin is particularly excited about a short, 31 minute film called “Pony.”

He first saw it at the Hollywood festival and called it “amazing” and “absolutely delightful.”

He touted a documentary film called “Among the Believers,” in which the filmmakers gain access to a madrassa — or Islamic seminary — that supports ISIS and the Taliban.

“The film crew for this amazing footage out of the Red Madrassas in Pakistan is under a death sentence right now,” Beaudoin said. “This is one of the finest documentaries I’ve seen in my career.”

Beaudoin also mentioned a narrative feature film called “Forward.Side.Close,” a Wisconsin documentary called “Cheeseheads: The Documentary,” and a documentary called “Right-Footed” as being ones to watch out for.

While the films themselves will be as vibrant as ever, they will be screened in fewer locations, according to Beaudoin. Organizers decided not to add a new venue after Cafe Fromage closed in downtown Beloit.

“We’ve actually cut down on the number of venues,” Beaudoin said. “We felt that it would make for larger audiences.”

Filmmakers from around the world will attend the event, and some of them will be available to chat with the public after their films are shown, Beaudoin said.

In addition to the contest entries across three categories — short films, narrative feature films and documentaries — there will be screenings in a few specialty categories as well.

A silent film — 1925’s original The Wizard of Oz — will be accompanied by the Rock River Philharmonic. Beaudoin said the silent film showcase has been a tradition and, at \$25 a ticket, always sells out.

A classic film and a singalong film will also be shown. This year they will be The Maltese Falcon and Hairspray, respectively.

The special film categories each have corporate sponsors. Beaudoin said the community should take pride in how forthcoming local residents and businesses have been, with more than 400 volunteers stepping up.

“Beloit can be really proud of this festival,” he said. “This whole community gets behind this great event.”

Several details about the upcoming event are still in the air. A date hasn't been set yet for tickets to go on sale, although Beaudoin said they will likely go up before the end of the week. An honorary chairperson has not yet been named. The schedule of screenings has not yet been finalized.

Film tickets will cost between \$7 and \$10 each, depending on how soon they are ordered and whether they are purchased individually or in packs of four or six. Students can get tickets for as little as \$5. A new ticket is needed for each film. Gold passes, which in years past allowed holders to attend as many movies as they like, will not be available this year.