

Being married to Executive Director, Nicole Gregg, has more perks than are apparent. Along with receiving the ceremonial title “Chairman of the Board” and being a ticket checker at the events, I also have the pleasure of assisting the Programming Director, Nicole Galovski, making photocopies, doing database entry and making the coffee runs. Glamorous, I know, but I do get to do one thing that no one else does. I get to screen every film that is either on the fence or ultimately accepted into the festival. Because of this, I have the unique insight to produce this helpful festival cheat sheet or guide to the fest, commonly known as Zac's Picks.

For those of you who don't have the time to pore over the program, click through the website or wouldn't know where to start even if you did, this write-up is for you. That said, the best advice I can give you is go to our website (<http://nhfilmfestival.com>) or grab a program and read about our amazing slate of films for yourself. If you like the synopsis, you will likely be amazed by the film. Every film has been accepted for a reason; the final program is made up of 93 films selected from over 1500 entries. My picks are merely a list of the films and events that I think are significant and should not be missed.

First, a disclaimer. I warn you I am a GUY, and a guy who likes sports and “movies.” I have, however, learned through my role at NHFF to appreciate “films” and I often think when I am watching them, “Ooh, my mom would like this, my dad would like this, my grandmother...,” etc. etc. So this year, I am going to use these family members as demographic markers to help you make your selections. You might have picked up on my denotation between “Movies” and “Film.” Neil Gibb once explained it to me as simply this: “movies” make money and money makes “film.” See you at the films!

FESTIVAL OVERVIEW:

Every festival-goer should start the festival with a check-in at **HEADQUARTERS: THE DISCOVER PORTSMOUTH CENTER RULE BOSTON CAMERA HEADQUARTERS** (the corner of Middle, Islington, Maplewood & Congress, across from Jumpin' Jay's and the Health Food Store), where you can grab a festival program guide, buy some cool festival swag (t-shirts and hats), talk with knowledgeable NHFF staff about what's playing, which celebs are attending, which films are expected to fill up and other general info. Headquarters also doubles as our panel and workshop venue.

SHORT FILMS — AN OVERVIEW:

The short films this year are amazing, and each block has a definite vibe, so be sure to read the synopsis before you arrive with your grandmother at the short block with *Anal Break Up* and *Bicycle Hooker* (so frickin funny). Or your wife and children at *Trold*, the short narrative about an eastern European family that sell their pregnant, 13-year-old daughter into prostitution on the family farm.

Just do some homework, read the program, and you will be rewarded with something truly special. Many of the NHFF shorts have won awards and played at prestigious festivals like Sundance, SXSW, Toronto and beyond. The Saturday night blocks at 4:45 and 6:35 or the NH block on Sunday afternoon (a bit safer) are my top picks.

Footnote: Last year my favorite short was *92 Skybox Alonzo Mourning Rookie Card*. This year it has been made into a feature length film that we are proud to be playing 6:30 pm Saturday night at the Seacoast Rep. The film has been renamed *Awful Nice*. Those same insane brothers who ruin their father's wake inherit a lake house together. Not for your nana or likely your mother, but anybody my brother's age or younger who enjoys stupid stuff will belly laugh through the entire film.

THURSDAY HIGHLIGHTS:

Thursday is New Hampshire Day and Night – every film has a New Hampshire affiliation. This means the filmmaker, writer, producer, director or lead actor is from the Granite State, or a significant amount of the film has been shot here.

We are proud to say the NH roots are so deep this year that, for the second year in a row NH Day and Night needed two venues. Even with two venues, many great NH films did not make the cut.

As always, the main Thursday venue is The Music Hall where you can view films on the Music Hall's Main Stage. Our additional Thursday venue is The Music Hall Loft's Access Sports Medicine Screening Room (which is right around the corner at 131 Congress St.).

THURSDAY FILMS:

1:35 p.m. – The Music Hall Loft's Access Sports Medicine Screening Room

Click with Deb Cram is a documentary about local photographer and Portsmouth Herald contributor Deb Cram's frightening childhood. Confronting her secret past might just help others never keep secrets again. This film is for anyone and it should be seen by everyone.

2:55 p.m. – The Music Hall Loft's Access Sports Medicine Screening Room

Tom Rush: No Regrets – Tom Rush is a gifted folk artist from NH who left his mark on the '60s playing alongside Joan Baez, Joni Mitchell and James Taylor. Still talented as ever, his recent awe-inspiring performance at Boston's Symphony Hall is used to frame an amazing career in this music documentary. Did I mention he is from NH? <http://vimeo.com/76486506>

The rest of Thursday is a toss-up. Normally we play a short block that includes our nominees for NH Film of the Year. But this year we had so many amazing shorts we had to break the best shorts into two blocks:

4:30 p.m. – The Music Hall Main Stage: funny and entertaining for the young at heart.

6:15 p.m. – The Music Hall Loft's Access Sports Medicine Screening Room: smart, thoughtful and entertaining. I would bring anyone but my children.

It is rare to have a Feature Film meet our NH criteria and be good enough to be in award consideration. This year we have three, four if you include *Labor Day* which qualifies as NH and will be headlining the international competition on Friday Night.

4:40 p.m. – The Music Hall Loft's Access Sports Medicine Screening Room:

Twenty Million People – Funny romantic comedy about twenty-somethings. Definitely bringing my wife and friends to this one. Probably watching it alone if she doesn't join me. <http://vimeo.com/55793713>

6:05 p.m. – The Music Hall Main Stage:

Only Daughter – Aaron Wiederspahn directs and acts in this amazing, gritty feature film about life and family. Aaron is one of NH's most talented filmmakers and this is likely his best work to date. He also wrote and directed *The Sensation of Sight* with David Strathairn. I am not taking my mom or grandmom to this because they likely wouldn't approve of the content, but I might take my dad. Regardless, this film is well done. Aaron and cast are outstanding, and the film is captivating. It is also playing Sunday if you miss it Thursday. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nFir2gwJQNE>

8:20 p.m. – The Music Hall Main Stage:

Prince Avalanche – Visually stunning and peculiarly entertaining, this quirky character study, with Emile Hirsch (*Into The Wild*) and Paul Rudd is our Thursday night headliner for a reason. This film is so different than the movies I usually like, yet so entertaining and visually engaging. I'm not sure how to describe it but I know I really enjoyed it, and I'd take anyone in my family (minus my kids)—even my

grandmother. I'd also probably be surprised by who loved it and who just liked it, but I know everyone would enjoy it. The 1988 part made it a bit nostalgic to boot. <http://vimeo.com/69111281>

THURSDAY EVENTS:

8:00 - 8:20 p.m. – The Music Hall Main Stage and Lobby:

Juston McKinney Stand-up — This 20 minutes is quite possibly my favorite part of the festival. Yes, there are awards, and yes, food—but I am talking about the performance by New Hampshire's own comedian, Juston McKinney. Juston is one of the funniest comedians in show business today, and he is generous enough to perform a glimpse of his routine to kick off NH Night in style (however, if he makes fun of me again during his bit, this is the last time I write anything complimentary about him).

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y-dbzbeOyCM>

7:00 p.m. - 10:00 p.m – The Music Hall Main Stage

Join us for: The reception! The Van McLeod Award! The stand-up routine by Juston McKinney! The Thursday night feature *Prince Avalanche* produced by NH native Lisa Muskat (who will be in attendance)! The NH Award presentations!

10:00 p.m. - 12:00 p.m – Flatbread Co.

Flatbread Co. and NH Film & TV Office **NH Night After Party** until midnight! Flatbread Co. hooks it up!

FRIDAY FILMS:

Documentaries

11:35 p.m. — The Moffatt-Ladd House's Provident Bank Screening Room:

If You Build It – Patrick Creadon directed one of my all time favorite NHFF docs, *I.O.U.S.A.*, and I'm actually wondering where the sequel is about now. This film follows a radically different approach to education in a poor rural county in North Carolina where it couldn't get much worse. You can't ask for more out of a documentary—it expands your mind, it challenges the norms and inspires us to think outside the box. This is one of the best films of the fest. It plays at the Loft on Saturday if you miss it Friday.

12:40 p.m. — The Music Hall Main Stage:

The Kill Team – As if war is not bad enough. U.S. War crimes perpetrated at this Afghan outpost brought on by herd behavior, peer pressure and broken souls makes Abu Ghraib seem like a kindergarten. To add insult to injury, the only soldier with the balls to stand up to the herd gets charged with the premeditated murder. A must-see war doc for the ages. Dad, mom, grandmom—you'd have to like being angry, but at the same time you really shouldn't miss it. No kids. <http://vimeo.com/63356395>

1:15 p.m. — The Moffatt-Ladd House's Provident Bank Screening Room:

Life According to Sam — If you can't stomach *The Kill Team*, learn about Progeria. A family and a son battle one of the strangest diseases on earth. Sam, a 2-year-old, is diagnosed with a disease that ages people faster than dog years. Average life expectancy is 13. This amazing family takes you through their battle. Mind-blowing doc, soon to be out on HBO. Plays again Saturday. <http://vimeo.com/74468499>

3:00 p.m. — The Moffatt-Ladd House's Provident Bank Screening Room:

William and the Windmill – A young Malawian prodigy builds himself a power generating windmill out of junk parts in an african country where electricity is scarce. His accomplishment and his prowess lead this unassuming student to headline TED events, and eventually Dartmouth College, where he currently studies. <http://vimeo.com/59617999>

5:00 p.m. — The Moffatt-Ladd House's Provident Bank Screening Room:

The Naked Brand – Might be my favorite film of the festival. Jeff Rosenblum, renowned marketer, talks about the future of brands and corporations through marketing. The demands of an informed generation just might make ethics and honesty the cornerstone of every healthy brand. Taking my dad, my brother and every corporate sponsor of the festival to this film! MUST SEE! <http://vimeo.com/58925712>

6:20 p.m. — The Moffatt-Ladd House's Provident Bank Screening Room:

Elena – I have watched a lot of films this year, and this normally wouldn't be my kind of film, but I can't ever remember seeing such an intimate documentary—so well told, so different from anything I have ever seen. This filmmaker is in a class of her own. I can't imagine a woman who would not identify with at least a part of this incredible family story. MUST SEE! I'm not sure I'm going to watch it again, but I know I want my wife too. <http://vimeo.com/59004760>

Features

2:20 p.m. – The Music Hall Main Stage:

The Retrieval – A unique story of a young black man's journey during the Civil War. Incredible young actor and a compelling story. This one is up for our Grand Jury Award, so it's good.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bJqhzbtJ7kE>

4:10 p.m. – The Music Hall Main Stage:

Touchy Feely – Ellen Page, Allison Janney and Ron Livingston team up for this fun film about a massage therapist and a dentist who cross powers. All the ladies in my life have to join me for this one.

<http://vimeo.com/71223341>

4:20 p.m. – The Music Hall Loft's Access Sports Medicine Screening Room:

The Broken Circle Breakdown – Awesome indie film. I can't wait to see it again. Foreign film from Belgium and one of my top three favorite features in the fest. Sexy, harsh and real. Not for everyone, definitely not my mom or my grandmom, but my wife loved it.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JrBgSZIQAzO>

6:00 p.m. – The Music Hall Main Stage:

Austenland – Mom, this one's for you. One of the year's biggest independent films. Keri Russell and Jane Seymour star in a unique romantic comedy that even I enjoyed. The entire family (minus children) would love it. <http://sonyclassics.com/austenland/>

8:15 p.m. – The Music Hall Main Stage:

Labor Day – Jason Reitman and Joyce Maynard made this star-studded film with Kate Winslet, Josh Brolin and Tobey Maguire. One of the few I have not seen, but I can't wait. Playing again Sunday night as the Closing Night Film. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oYux4QWDpdQ>

8:30 p.m. – The Music Hall Loft's Access Sports Medicine Screening Room:

Sanatorium – If you like scary and horror – suspense, but not blood and guts – this is your film. Hands down, the best scare-thriller I have seen in a long time. Ghost Hunters look to shoot an episode at the Sanatorium and... Plays again Saturday night.

FRIDAY EVENTS:

5:30 p.m. – 7:00 p.m. – Granite SOFFA Screenplay Competition Reception at RiverRun Bookstore: Grand Prize Industry Judge Susan Kim and writing partner Laurence Klavan will attend and read from their new book, *Wasteland*.

7:00 p.m. - 10:05 p.m. – The Music Hall Main Stage:

Opening Night Reception, Opening Ceremonies, Lifetime Achievement Award presentation to Joyce

Maynard and Opening Night Feature Film *Labor Day*, starring Kate Winslet and Josh Brolin and directed by Jason Reitman. **MUST SEE!**

10:05 p.m. - Midnight – Portsmouth Gas Light Third Floor Night Club:

The Vital Portsmouth Gas Light Friday Night After Party! This party blows the doors off! Come party with the celebs and industry guests at this **MUST DO** event!

SATURDAY HIGHLIGHTS:

11:00 a.m. Comedy Panel at the Discover Portsmouth Center Rule Boston Camera Headquarters: Television's Tom Bergeron, actress Rae Dawn Chong, comedian Juston McKinney, and radio host Greg Kretschmar in attendance. Part *Inside the Actors Studio*, part talk show—not to be missed!

4:00 p.m. Delta Bravo Urban Exploration Visual Presentation at the Discover Portsmouth Center Rule Boston Camera Headquarters:

Delta Bravo Urban Exploration is a group of urban explorers based in Los Angeles, founded by Danny Boy O'Connor, of hip hop group House of Pain and La Coka Nostra. O'Connor will be joined by Knocko Nolan and Steve Mona to host a visual panel presentation.

SATURDAY FILMS:

Documentaries

10:20 a.m. – The Music Hall Loft's Access Sports Medicine Screening Room:

America's Longest War — Drug Prohibition has failed. Drug usage rates have not declined and illegal drugs are more available and cheaper than ever before. At the same time the costs of the war are staggering. Nonviolent drug offenders are wasting their lives away and at our expense. Super informative. I'm taking anyone who will listen. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ok48ebjgOPM>

10:40 a.m. – Seacoast Repertory Theatre's KBW Financial Screening Room:

The Crash Reel— An epic rivalry between snowboarders and childhood friends Shaun White and Vermont's Kevin Pearce unfolds leading up to the Vancouver Olympics. A devastating injury sidelines and almost kills Kevin. **AWESOME, MUST SEE!** Plays again Sunday. If you like sports, you'll like this film. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B2bMgADjoeo>

11:45 a.m. – The Music Hall Loft's Access Sports Medicine Screening Room:

Losing Lebron — Cleveland hated losing Lebron, and many now hate Lebron. This is an awesome sports doc for you men (and sports-loving women) out there. <http://vimeo.com/62134420>

12:05 p.m. – The Moffatt-Ladd House's Provident Bank Screening Room:

High and Hallowed: Everest 1963 — An awesome historical Everest film about the first American expedition to the summit of Everest. Really well done, captivating...one of my festival favorites. <http://vimeo.com/65902887>

1:05 p.m. – The Music Hall Loft's Access Sports Medicine Screening Room:

If You Build It — Patrick Creadon, Education, reviewed on Friday. <http://vimeo.com/67223035>

1:15 p.m. – Moffatt-Ladd House's Provident Bank Screening Room:

Blood Brother — This incredible story of a lovingly selfless man and his effort to bring comfort to AIDS orphans in India. This film is touching, special and the reason why I love being able to be a part of this festival. <http://vimeo.com/34800252>

2:40 p.m. – The Music Hall Main Stage:

Blackfish — Maybe the best doc of the fest. Killer whales in captivity doing tricks for audiences is just the

start of the story. Intense, informative, amazing...I'm bringing anyone who will come with me.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y6ou5DqfkZ8>

3:00 p.m. – The Moffatt-Ladd House's Provident Bank Screening Room:

The Kill Team – U.S. War crimes (see review from Friday). <http://vimeo.com/63356395>

4:45 p.m. – The Moffatt-Ladd House's Provident Bank Screening Room:

Linsanity – So much more to this story than an Asian-American basketball player who got hot for a couple weeks in the NBA. This is a sports doc that the whole family would enjoy. Awe-inspiring.

6:30 p.m. – The Moffatt-Ladd House's Provident Bank Screening Room:

Elena – Amazing family story (see review from Friday). <http://vimeo.com/59004760>

Features

10:25 a.m. – The Music Hall Main Stage:

Great Expectations – The Dickens novel. Helena Bonham Carter and Ralph Fiennes. The only showing, so make sure to catch it. A little long, but anything less would be shortchanging this classic.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GlVkvvuv-g>

12:45 p.m. – The Music Hall Main Stage:

The English Teacher – Nathan Lane, Julianne Moore and Greg Kinnear join forces in this really nicely done film. If you were in a high school musical or loved your English class, this film will evoke nostalgia. Mom, you are going to love this, but so would anyone. <http://vimeo.com/65685310>

2:25 p.m. – Seacoast Repertory Theatre's KBW Financial Screening Room:

Sal – Men, perk up, you never get a film like this at a fest. This Chilean/Argentinian Western with a foreign film flare blew my socks off. But to call it a Western would take away from its uniqueness and depth. *No Country for Old Men*-esque. Dad, brother, bro—let's make this happen!

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O5bLXZTM9SI>

4:35 p.m. – The Music Hall Main Stage:

All That I Am – An awesomely-told and interesting drama about family issues. Deep, dark and good. Filmmaker in attendance.

4:45 p.m. – The Music Hall Loft's Access Sports Medicine Screening Room:

Doomsdays – Looking for something different? This film is weird and messed up, but thoroughly entertaining. Definitely not taking my mom. <http://vimeo.com/51621815>

6:15 p.m. – The Music Hall Main Stage:

The Truth About Emanuel – Jessica Biel in one of the best films of the fest. People who know more about film than I do will love this film. **MUST SEE!**

6:30 p.m. – Seacoast Repertory Theatre's KBW Financial Screening Room:

Awful Nice – *92 Skybox Alonzo Mourning Rookie Card* has been made into a feature film and renamed. Those insane brothers who ruin their father's wake inherit a lake house together. Not for your nana or likely your mother, but anybody my brother's age or younger who enjoys stupid stuff will belly laugh through the entire film.

8:15 p.m. – The Music Hall Main Stage:

Goodbye World – NHFF Alumni Adrian Grenier stars in this end-of-the-world doomsday scenario. Sounds like a guys' film, but this one is about friendships, childhood, family and more. I loved it, and my wife would, too. Plays again Sunday. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kibp3qsAvvg>

8:20 p.m. – The Music Hall Loft's Access Sports Medicine Screening Room:
Sanatorium – Scary (see review from Friday). <http://vimeo.com/50757811>

8:25 p.m. – Seacoast Repertory Theatre's KBW Financial Screening Room:
Drinking Buddies – Offbeat romantic comedy featuring Olivia Wilde (most beautiful woman in the world) and Ron Livingston (Office Space). <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wxuxkQF7Bak>

SATURDAY EVENTS:

1:00 p.m. - 4:00 p.m. – Waterfront Hospitality Tent Party at One Harbor Place — a Kate Parker Designs and Chris Malloy Events party featuring Demeters Steakhouse appetizers and Robert's Maine Grill chowder. Don't miss this Chowder and Booze event by the Piscataqua River with Stella Artois, Debauchery Wines and spirits from Bully Boy Distillery. This event is a **CAN'T MISS**.

10:00 p.m. - midnight – The Portsmouth Chevrolet After Party at Martingale Wharf
 This will be the second year at Martingale Wharf — last year this event was so popular we had a line around the block. All the celebs will be out, as well as all the sponsors, all the industry peeps and the entire NHFF crew. Come party with us!

SUNDAY HIGHLIGHTS:

10:00 a.m. – 11:00 a.m. — Family Fun Block at Discover Portsmouth Center Rule Boston Camera Headquarters:

Bring the kids to the Family Fun Block, showing episodes of *Arthur* and *Are You Afraid of the Dark*, all written by Susan Kim (who will be in attendance). Perfect for Halloween and for families, but this is also a festival treat for adults.

7:10 p.m. Closing Night Feature at The Music Hall:
Labor Day – See my write-up from Friday.

SUNDAY FILMS:

Documentaries

By now I have reviewed most of the films in the previous days' write-ups.

11:45 a.m. – The Music Hall Loft's Access Sports Medicine Screening Room:
High and Hallowed: Everest 1963 – An awesome historical Everest film (see review from Saturday).

12:05 p.m. – The Moffatt-Ladd House's Provident Bank Screening Room:
Forbidden Voices – Possibly one of the most culturally significant docs of the fest. This film about women bloggers from Iran, Cuba and China who are suppressed, prohibited and censored from speaking out risk their lives to do so. Standing up against their dictators and using modern means to communicate, these women are true revolutionaries.

12:20 a.m. – The Music Hall Main Stage:
The Crash Reel– Snowboarding and sports injury (see review from Saturday).
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B2bMgADjoeo>

12:40 p.m. — Seacoast Repertory Theatre's KBW Financial Screening Room:
Tom Rush: No Regrets — Instrumental Folk Artist from NH (see review from Thursday). **Tom Rush will be in attendance** and will be **playing an intimate set** after the screening. **MUST SEE!**
<http://vimeo.com/76486506>

1:55 p.m. – The Moffatt-Ladd House's Provident Bank Screening Room:

The Naked Brand – Brand transparency and corporate ethics (see review from Friday). **MUST SEE!**

<http://vimeo.com/58925712>

2:40p.m. – The Music Hall Loft's Access Sports Medicine Screening Room:

Little Hope Was Arson – Ten churches were burned in the middle of the Bible Belt. This is the story.

<http://vimeo.com/57033506>

Features

All of the features have been reviewed above. All Sunday Feature Films have played once before.

SUNDAY EVENTS:

11 a.m. - 1 p.m. – The Left Bank Films One Hundred Club VIP Brunch:

This is an exclusive brunch gathering for VIP, Artist and Industry Pass holders, but is bar none the best event of the festival. Eat and drink on us with the best views of Portsmouth from the highest point in the city. You have to be a VIP to attend, but this brunch makes it worth it! The 100 Club is the classiest and best restaurant in the Seacoast and is normally open to members only...and to VIP festival-goers on Sunday morning!

5:40 p.m. - 7:00 p.m. – Sheraton Portsmouth Harborside Closing Night Ceremonies and Reception at The Music Hall:

See what films won the big awards, eat and drink at the catered reception, watch the Young Filmmakers Production and much more at this can't-miss culmination event.

In closing, this is the best year ever. Come to as much as you can. Eat at the restaurants and stay at the hotels who sponsor this amazing event. I look forward to seeing you at the films.

Best,

Zac