

FILMMAKER PROGRAMMING — CATHERINE CUMMINGS THEATRE
OCTOBER 1-3, 2026 • SYRACUSE INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL • 23RD ANNIVERSARY

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Selected Films & Program Highlights
22 Lincklaen St • Cazenovia, NY 13035

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 1

Award-Winning Experimental & Avant-Garde Films

6:00 PM – 9:00 PM

Spheres

Directed by Martin Gerigk

Spheres is an immersive cinematic meditation that moves from the microscopic to the cosmic, exploring the unseen rhythms connecting nature, humanity, and the universe and reminding us that every moment is part of something far greater.

Silent Echoes

Directed by Carlo De Togni

Silent Echoes reimagines forgotten silent film performers from 1926 within a fractured digital world, exploring creativity, ownership, artificial intelligence, and who controls the story when humans and algorithms create together.

Evil Usher

Directed by Lomaii

A devoted cinephile takes a job at a classic movie theater and becomes increasingly disturbed by patrons who disrespect the sanctity of film. After he kills a man for texting during a screening, a haunting vision pushes him toward a murderous mission to protect the theater at any cost.

Q&A MODERATED BY ADRIA DAWN

Followed by a filmmaker networking session.

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 2

Short Film Block 1

11:15 AM – 12:45 PM

A Sleeper's Silence

Directed by Ross Raventos | 12 min 11 sec

When Phillip suffers an accident that delays his return to work, his friend John begins visiting him in the hospital as often as he can — and he always comes bearing gifts. A quiet, tender story about presence, care, and what it means to show up for someone.

Clean Getaway

Directed by Patricia Rigney | 10 min 45 sec

"The only crime is a messy house."

A meticulous thief breaks into a home — and tidies up instead of robbing it. A sharp, playful comedy about obsession, order, and the most unusual kind of heist.

Northeast

Directed by Gilbert McCauley | 17 min 40 sec

In the American South of the early 1940s, an elderly Black man named Man Cody sets out on a difficult journey after the death of his wife — searching for the son he hasn't seen or heard from in decades, to deliver news that his mother is gone. Navigating grief, the weight of Jim Crow, and the simple act of buying a train ticket, Man Cody finds that even the heaviest burdens can be made lighter by an unexpected act of humanity.

Rosalie

Directed by Erin McGuff-Pennington | 20 min 2 sec

An unplanned pregnancy leaves an overwhelmed mother of four determined to end it. Her infertile best friend is equally determined to stop her. A raw, emotionally charged film about friendship, choice, and the impossible weight of circumstance.

Short Film Block 2

1:00 PM – 2:30 PM

Nomina

Submitted by Alex Borlo | 6 min

A woman with no name wakes alone in a forest, where three strangers draw her into a ritual she was never meant to escape. A haunting, atmospheric piece that lingers long after the credits roll.

The Liars of Black Mountain Road

Directed by Parker Croft | 12 min 30 sec | Presented by Academy Award nominee Abigail Breslin

When a couple runs over a stranger's dog, they compete for the moral high ground at any cost. A wickedly funny and incisive look at ego, guilt, and the lengths people go to feel righteous.

Committed

LGBTQIA+ Short/Feature | Directed by Monica Raymond | 13 min 14 sec

During the Lavender Scare, the U.S. government created files to track individuals deemed to have "weak morals." Lists were made. Suspected gay Americans were on those lists. So were Black Americans, Native Americans, intellectuals, and feminists.

On the night of her son's birthday party, a family's matriarch is hunted by an underground government unit — exposing her family to far more than her persecutors anticipated. Committed is the story of one American family simply trying to exist at a moment in history that looks unsettlingly close to today.

Lady

Women's Voices | Directed by Daniela Ortiz & Olivia Speaker | 19 min 18 sec

Lady Carmel Petallo Litango grew up on the magical island of Halian, destined to inherit her grandmother's healing gift — but longing for a life beyond its shores. After leaving home to study psychology in the city, her world shifted dramatically when Super Typhoon Odette devastated the island, separating her from her family and deepening her commitment to service. Now pursuing her master's degree, Lady leads environmental restoration efforts back home: organizing beach cleanups, protecting turtle nests, and inspiring the next generation to live in harmony with nature — all while dreaming of studying marine biology to bridge traditional wisdom with modern science.

Code Red

Directed by Jessica McGaugh | 8 min

After a menstrual mishap on her way to class, a professor is exposed in front of her students and must decide: flee the scene, or use the moment to teach a lesson about shame. Bold, timely, and unapologetically human.

Sports Films

2:45 PM – 4:45 PM

Full Count

Directed by Benjamin Swackhamer | 12 min 31 sec

This documentary follows three upstate New York college baseball players — Cooper Loyal, Carter Fink, and Max Friedlander — as they balance the relentless demands of athletics, academics, and personal life. Through rare behind-the-scenes access and candid interviews, Full Count reveals the unseen pressures of

student-athlete life: early morning workouts, late-night study sessions, the mental weight of performance expectations, and the ever-present fear of injury or an uncertain future. With insight from a professional coach, the film honors the sacrifice, resilience, and quiet determination behind the dream of playing at the next level.

Hidden Jab

Directed by Michael Bernardi & Michael Fischer | 20 min 54 sec | No Photos

When his young daughter Lily is diagnosed with a terminal illness, former boxer Danny is forced into the brutal underground fight scene to cover her mounting medical bills. The cash comes fast — but so does the toll on his body, his mind, and the precious time he has left with her. Caught between the desperate need to provide and the irreplaceable need to be present, Danny must confront the true cost of his choices before it's too late.

Ringside in the Mountains

Directed by Evan Haiman | 54 min

Where Boxing Legends Met the Borscht Belt: A Forgotten Chapter of American Sports • History

Long before modern training camps became part of boxing mythology, generations of prizefighters were already flocking to the Catskills — drawn by fresh air, isolation, and the ideal conditions to prepare for championship bouts. From the 1930s through the 1990s, the storied Borscht Belt resort region — home to legendary hotels like Grossinger's, Kutsher's, the Pines, and the Concord — quietly doubled as one of the sport's greatest proving grounds, where vacationers could catch open sparring sessions between poolside cocktails and comedy acts.

Through rare archival footage, historic photographs, and first-hand interviews with champions, journalists, and historians, Ringside in the Mountains resurrects a golden era that shaped the sport — and reveals how its echoes still reverberate in today's Catskills. A story of grit, glamour, and the unlikely intersection of athletic greatness and summer retreat.

Teddy and Tater + Hog Heaven + Dear Lara

5:30 PM – 8:00 PM

Teddy & Tater

Directed by Lou Duchin | 14 min 59 sec

Teddy and his puppet, Tater, perform a beloved weekly show at Smirk's Playhouse, run by Teddy's friend and mentor Ray Smirk. When an elegant woman in the audience catches Tater's eye one evening, it sparks a journey of self-discovery that leads Tater to question his gender identity. With a career-defining opportunity suddenly on the line, Teddy must choose between ambition and standing fully by Tater's side.

Hog Heaven: The Pigz Brotherz

Directed by Scott Simerly Jr. | 10 min 50 sec

For 40 years, the Pigz Brotherz have been a cornerstone of Raleigh's music scene at the iconic Berkeley Cafe. But as the city transforms around them, what becomes of the art that helped build it? Through the eyes of charismatic lead singer Danny Squires, Hog Heaven is a meditation on resilience, nostalgia, and the bittersweet intersection of personal and cultural change.

Dear Lara

Directed by Lara St. John | 1 hr 34 min

When celebrated violinist Lara St. John goes public about her own assault as a child at an elite music school, she uncovers a global pattern of abuse in the classical music world — and joins fellow survivors in a courageous effort to confront an entrenched culture of silence. A deeply personal and urgent documentary about accountability, community, and the power of speaking truth.

Short Films — Made in CNY + Documentary

8:15 PM – 10:45 PM

Bring Them Home

Directed by Matt Reynolds | 7 min 49 sec | No Poster or Photos Available

Alex and Yan fled persecution in Cuba to marry in the United States. When the federal government suddenly detains them and threatens deportation, their community unites in an unprecedented effort to fight for their release. A timely, deeply human story about love, belonging, and the fight to stay home.

Dr. Mary Edwards Walker

Directed by Shane Johnson | 15 min

Radical reformer. Civil War surgeon. Defiant suffragist. The only woman ever to receive the Medal of Honor.

This short documentary explores the extraordinary life of Dr. Mary Edwards Walker — a 19th-century physician who defied rigid expectations to serve on the Civil War front lines, treat wounded soldiers, and cross enemy lines to care for civilians, work that led to her capture by Confederate forces. After the war, she became an unrelenting advocate for abolition, women's rights, and dress reform, refusing to yield despite ridicule, arrest, and professional exclusion. A life defined by courage, conviction, and an unyielding fight for equality.

From Stones to Flames

Directed by Patrick Irwin | 10 min 32 sec

On July 2, 1918, a catastrophic explosion at Split Rock Quarry in Syracuse, NY tore through an explosives factory, killing 50 people and injuring 50 more — the largest industrial tragedy in Upstate New York history. From Stones to Flames honors the workers who gave their lives to save others during one of World War I's most devastating home-front disasters.

Complicated

Directed by Andrew Abrahams | 1 hr 25 min

At a moment when the failures of American healthcare are under unprecedented scrutiny, *Complicated* tells the poignant story of children with complex illnesses suffering at the margins of mainstream medicine — and the parents who risk losing them if they go too far in search of help. A shocking, compassionate look at a hidden epidemic in pediatric care, where complicated disease, inadequate research, and the limits of child protection law collide in heartbreaking ways.

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 3

Family / Children's

11:15 AM – 1:20 PM

Canine Royale

Directed by Brian Neil Hoff | 1 hr 34 min 55 sec

This wild animated adventure follows the world's most charming canine spy, 00K9, as he teams up with glamorous poodle superstar Tinky Bigmoore for a high-stakes mystery in the dazzling, multi-species metropolis of Furrywood.

When Tinky's priceless Pink Diamond dog collar is stolen, shock ripples through the city's glittering entertainment scene. Devastated, Tinky turns to her influential father, Arthur Wetbottom, a powerful oil tycoon, who calls in elite operative 00K9 from the International Animal Spy Headquarters. Armed with wild gadgets, razor-sharp instincts, and irresistible wit, 00K9 dives deep into Furrywood's underworld. With pulse-pounding action, and a generous dose of humor and heart, this thrilling adventure delivers a family-friendly spy caper packed with excitement, charm, and unforgettable fun!

Indigenous Cinema Showcase

1:20 PM – 1:35 PM

Waska

Directed by Nina Gualinga | 15 mins

As commodification and extractivism in the Amazon Rainforest extends to the plant medicine hayakwaska, the granddaughter of a Yachak (shaman) reveals the essence of what it means to live as part of the forest.

Nina Gualinga of the Kichwa People of Sarayaku, speaks with the memory of her Apayaya (grandfather) about the ongoing cultural appropriation, environmental destruction and marginalization of Indigenous Peoples, questioning our very relationship to earth and the quest for healing.

Medicine Ball

Directed by Leya Hale | 57 mins

Medicine Ball follows Native college athletes, Lexus Redthunder and Leroy Fairbanks IV, as they navigate college life and basketball at the University of Minnesota Morris located on the site of a former Native boarding school. Their journey reveals how basketball became a powerful symbol of resilience, hope, and cultural pride in Native communities.

Seeds We Bury

Directed by Olivia Hansen & Soledad Robins | 30 mins

SEEDS WE BURY tells the story of the Ati Tribe of the Philippines and the Shinnecock Nation of the United States, two indigenous island communities separated by oceans, yet united in the preservation of land, people, and culture. By questioning the echoes of history and unveiling the pulse of the present, this documentary reveals that the fight against greed, genocide, and erasure of Indigenous Peoples is not a buried past, but a sprouting present. Woven from the threads of land, identity, and resistance, this story follows the multigenerational battle of these two communities as their journey becomes a testament to survival, a tribute to heritage, and the hope for justice.

Narrative Feature + Short

4:00 PM – 6:15 PM

Final Act

Directed by Sam Kornreich | 4 min 47 sec

Within a dreadful motel room, a man faces a life-altering decision in what may be the final act of his life.

Judge No Book

Directed by Christopher Mormando | 1 hr 39 min 7 sec

Trying to outrun a legacy of violence, a man struggles to protect his mother and daughter as his past resurfaces in deadly ways. When old ties come calling, he's forced to confront what he's willing to sacrifice for a different future.