



As The Sun Sets On Aspen's Summer Event Season, Aspen Film Filmfest Makes An In-Person Return To Local Theaters

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Aspen Film's Filmfest makes an in-person return to local theaters after a partially virtual festival last year due to the pandemic. This year's event will have some notable changes, however, including proof of vaccinations, mandatory masks and a lack of filmmakers (as seen here from a previous year's Filmfest panel discussion) due to current public health protocols in Pitkin County.

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Ask any event organizer in the Roaring Fork Valley, and they'll say this past summer has been a bit of a whirlwind. Susan Wrubel, Aspen Film's executive and artistic director, is no exception.

"When we started putting everything together for Filmfest, we wanted to do (it) fully in-person, and we had to make our plans at the beginning of the summer when things looked a whole lot different here," said Wrubel, noting that some patrons were disappointed with last year's mix of virtual screenings for Filmfest. "We're just tap dancing as fast as we can right now to make sure no detail is missed and that everyone who attends has a safe experience."

That means organizing an army of volunteers to check vaccination cards — or negative COVID test results — before any attendees can pick up their tickets. And meeting any last-minute health protocols since Wrubel and her team started planning this year's Filmfest months ago.

One notable change last week was Pitkin County's indoor-mask mandate, which went into effect Sept. 16. Wrubel said she is fully supportive of the new rule, a sentiment she has also heard echoed from patrons. Another big change is that visiting filmmakers won't be part of this week's event.

"No, we're not bringing any guests this year," Wrubel said, adding that organizers made the decision early in the planning process due to the lack of hotel rooms in Aspen this time of year and high local transmission of COVID-19.

Wrubel said that is another change from pre-COVID events, as filmmakers typically host discussions and panels throughout the week, and visit local classrooms while they are in town. But Aspen Film is offering its Wednesday matinee "Chasing Childhood" to local teachers by request to keep a component of educational programming in this year's festival.

Focus on Local Community

Although there won't be any directors flying in for screenings at this year's Filmfest, filmmaker Dirk Braun, an Aspen pilot, will be in attendance. His film "Flying Boat," which documents the history and rise of flying boat planes, will screen Thursday and Sunday.

There is also a planned reception for Aspen Film founder Ellen Kohner Hunt. Wrubel said her vision has been a guiding principle for the organization since its founding more than 40 years ago.

“It was a very small independent film festival in the mountain, and she wanted it to be for and about locals, and Ellen was a real champion of art and filmmaking and just independent voices,” Wrubel said.

Aspen Film on Thursday will host an "Ellenfest" tribute as part of this year’s event, including a reception (4 p.m.) honoring Kohner Hunt’s local legacy and a screening (5 p.m.) of some of her favorite films from over the years.

A festival schedule is available at [Aspen Film’s website](#).

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Kirsten Dobroth

Kirsten was born and raised in Massachusetts, and has called Colorado home since 2008. She moved to Vail the day after graduating from the University of Colorado at Boulder in 2011. Before relocating to Basalt in 2020, she also spent a year living in one of Aspen’s sister cities, Queenstown, New Zealand.

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