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Aspen-based filmmaker to premiere movie at EAA AirVenture festival

Megan Webber, Aspen Daily News Staff Writer
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Director-producer Dirk Braun: “[Aspen’s] been so supportive and I’ve learned so much while I’ve been here.”
Megan Webber/Aspen Daily News

Attendees at this year’s Experimental Aircraft Association AirVenture festival in Oshkosh, Wisconsin, will get a little taste of Aspen when “Flying Boat” premieres on the big screen before 600,000 aviation enthusiasts on July 25.

The 77-minute documentary was five years in the making. The project was directed and produced by Dirk Braun of Red Mtn Productions, an Aspen-based commercial production company. The film follows the story of the Grumman Albatross aircraft, a World War II-era plane that was popular among world travelers because it could fly great distances and land on water.

“Beyond just bringing to light a beautiful piece of history that’s been lost in time, I hope this film inspires people to pursue their dreams no matter how unattainable they may seem,” Braun said. “I wanted to have the past, the present and the future. The past is all the history, the present is the handful of pilots that are keeping this thing alive, and the future is me and my dream and hopefully pursuing that.”

Flying boats were originally designed for open ocean search-and-rescue operations, Braun said, and were later repurposed for travel and other things. Although the Grumman Albatross could fly farther and for longer than any other aircraft, the flying boats became obsolete after WWII when commercial airlines built long runways.

For decades, the last remaining examples of the Grumman Albatross sat in a “boneyard” in Arizona. Over the years, some of these planes have been rescued by pilots and aviation enthusiasts who decided to restore the engines and fly them elsewhere.

With a bit of his own visual storytelling thrown in, Braun’s film includes voices of an all-star cast of professional aviators to create the narrative. The main voice is that of Tom Casey, a pilot based in New York who owns a Grumman Albatross.

Casey and a number of other experts — including a military pilot, a couple who dreamed of traveling the country by flying boat, an aircraft restorer, an adventurer and an airline pilot who vacations in the Arctic — inspired Braun to tell their stories and chase his own dream of flying a Grumman Albatross.

“What inspired me was that capability (of the aircraft) and I just fantasized what I’d do with one, and I always wanted to fly one,” Braun said.

Braun was 18 when he first discovered a Grumman Albatross, and while working with Casey on the film, he finally had the opportunity to learn to fly. Between shooting and editing his documentary, Braun took flying lessons in New York and became a certified pilot after flying in Aspen and Glenwood Springs.

The film includes footage from Braun's flights over Aspen. The shots are used in montages, which Braun said he hopes will help carry along the story's main metaphor.

"That was really what I was hoping to be able to fit in there, because I owe a lot to Aspen," he said. "This town's been so supportive and I've learned so much while I've been here, so I'm just happy to give back a little, to at least have a little bit of Aspen in there."

Braun will donate a portion of the proceeds from the sale of 100 limited-edition, signed movie posters to the Aspen Flight Academy. Plans are in the works for a local showing of the film later this year, and the movie also will be released on streaming platforms and DVDs following its premiere.

For more information about the film, including trailers and prints for sale, visit flyingboatfilm.com.

Megan Webber

Reporter