

The 2022 Santa Fe Film Festival offers viewers a wide variety of independent films

Written by By Glenn Kay For the Sun
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“Delicate State” will be screening at the Santa Fe Film Festival on Feb. 12. “Shoveling Pixie Dust: A Memoir” is playing on Feb. 13 with the filmmaker in attendance. Online all-screening passes are also available through the official festival website for those who cannot attend the event in person.

Attending film festivals is a great way to check out exciting independent features, as well as up-and-coming talent. This year, the Santa Fe Film Festival has a full slate of more than 150 movies for enthusiasts to take in. While it is impossible to see everything available for viewing at these events, there are always new discoveries to be made. This reviewer was sent two interesting titles from the upcoming affair ahead of time for review.

“Delicate State” is an effective spin on the “found footage” feature. The story follows Paula (Paula Rhodes), a pregnant children’s book author whose partner, Charlie (Charles Bodin), purchases a video camera in order to document the following nine months. Initially, the footage shows the two celebrating and dealing with trivial issues like picking out car seats and clothing for their upcoming arrival. However, it soon becomes clear that the country around them is teetering on the brink of a violent revolution.

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The situation turns ugly and the pair must eventually contend with chaos around them. After their safety becomes compromised, they leave their home. Sadly, the couple soon finds themselves in greater danger.

The entire movie was photographed by the two stars. Lead performer, writer, and director Paula Rhodes was actually pregnant during the filming and her physical state lends a great deal of authenticity to the proceedings. Both performers are excellent in their roles, convincingly depicting the nervousness and anxiety of their impending new arrival. What initially begins as upbeat and excited interactions between the couple about the baby, shifts effectively into fear and panic as unsettling elements are added into the story.

With a presumably tight budget, the filmmaker can't show all of the madness occurring outside their home in the streets. But, in several respects this works to the movie's advantage. The characters are well-developed and there is a claustrophobic feel to the proceedings. It also doesn't focus on the specific details of why all of this is happening, instead it simply depicts the horrifying impact that extremist acts, rioting, and inhumanity has on one young family.

And there is the occasional unexpected and striking image (including a moment involving fighter jets flying above the lead's home), as well as some impressive wide shots as they ultimately venture out. Like many movies that feature protagonists recording everything around them, there are a couple of moments late in the picture when one wonders why the characters are still shooting. But, as mentioned, the leads are engaging and in the end the movie works more effectively than others of its ilk. It marks a confident and compelling directorial debut for Paula Rhodes.

Numerous documentaries are also being screened at the festival. One of these is "Shoveling Pixie Dust" from visual effects artist and Disney Imagineer Tim Landry. Now retired, he examines his career and the many unexpected places that life has taken him. Raised in Colorado, he details his beginnings as a film student at the University of Southern California in the 1970s, hoping to become a big Hollywood director.

While things didn't turn out quite the way he planned, the artist did some incredible work creating visual effects for film, as well as amusement park rides.

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While one might expect the film to be focused primarily on his time at Disney, the story is told in chronological order, going through each personal experience. Landry is a devoutly religious and hardworking man, meaning that he doesn't dish much gossip about Hollywood or any of the personalities he encountered while working on film projects or the Disney theme parks. But while the movie lacks a sense of on-the-job tension for its subject or a detailed picture of how a complete ride comes to life, there is interesting information from a steadfast and dedicated artist about some of the steps involved in the process.

Perhaps the most interesting stories involve Landry's USC student film, an ambitious project combining live-action and animation. He details the whole process and the difficulties in putting it all together, as well as how the short ultimately gained attention from upstart visual effects house Industrial Light and Magic (which was just starting out on a feature film called "Star Wars"). As his career progresses, we see how many employers fall by the wayside as trends change.

He also shows clips of the many titles he worked on as a visual effects supervisor. There is also footage of the man creating elements for some very familiar and beloved rides at Disney parks. So, while Landry may not have become a big Hollywood director, he can rest assured that his work has thrilled and entertained families around the world.

So, there's likely something for everyone at this year's Santa Fe Film Festival. Both of these features will find an appreciative audience, as will many of the films being screened. For those who can't attend the event, but are interested in "Delicate State," I should also note that the movie was recently picked up for distribution and is now available to stream on demand from various outlets like Amazon and iTunes.

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