

The Sure Thing

Written by Mark Shaffer

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UNCSA dominates BIFF Student Film Category

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This year's Beaufort International Film Festival comes with what Vegas odds makers would call a mortal lock: the Student Film trophy will go back to Winston-Salem. All eight finalists hail from the University of North Carolina School of the Arts.

And while such utter domination of the category may be unprecedented, it's not entirely shocking. Each year some of BIFF's best moments come by way of UNCAS. The school is also looking at a possible four-peat in the Animation category.

Last year The Hollywood Reporter ranked UNCSA 12th on its annual list of the Top 25 Film Schools in America. The momentum continues to build through a network of successful alumni working in the business and a state with a viable, booming film industry. It's part of Kate Miller's job to build the buzz on UNCSA. She's the school's Film Festival and Internship Coordinator. Like most of the staff and faculty, she has a background in the business, as well. Every February Kate packs a bag of recruitment material, loads a van full of students and heads to Beaufort. This year she may need an extra van. We spoke by phone from her office on campus.

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Mark Shaffer: Congratulations on sweeping the Student Film category.

Kate Miller: Thank you. We are very excited.

MS: This has gradually built up over the last four or five years as it seems that more and more UNCSCA entries have made it to the finals in not just the Student Category but Animation, as well.

KM: We never expected this. I know [Festival Director] Ron [Tucker] has been getting more and more films from more and more schools. I've talked about the festival to the people who do my job at other schools, how much fun it is and what a great opportunity it is for the students and how BIFF is so supportive in bringing students to Beaufort. I definitely talk it up among my peers at other schools. So I know that Chapman, Southern Cal, UCLA, Florida State, SCAD and more are sending films. I really thought we'd be getting fewer finalists.

MS: That says a lot about your program. What was the reaction like on campus?

KM (Laughs) Oh, they're very excited! And we're very proud. It's fantastic for us because we're making way more films than we're actually getting seen every year. We make 10 or 12 fourth year films, the same number of third year films and another 20 second year films. So there's a great mix of films in there. And Ron's always asking for everything we've got. It's a great festival to be in.

MS: So, you've got all 8 films in the student category, but there is a ninth.

KM: There certainly is. Austin Taylor's once again a finalist in Animation.

MS: That's his fourth consecutive appearance in the category and he's collected the trophy each year

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