

los angeles celebrates 10 years of nordic film

by ann christin eng & liecel tverli scully

In January, the 10th Scandinavian Film Festival in Los Angeles showcased riveting drama, zany comedies, and haunting imagery. Four Norwegian films were screened this year at the Writers Guild Theatre in Beverly Hills.

The inspiration to create the festival came from an interest in Nordic film and a desire to share it with the American audience, founder and director James Koenig explained. "In a way, Scandinavian Film Festival L.A. was inspired by Liv Ullmann. About a dozen years ago, an organization called Women in Film, along with the Norwegian and Danish consulates sponsored a screening of Ullmann's directorial debut 'Sophie.' She was there along with a small audience. I couldn't help but think, 'There are wonderful Nordic films like this, and people here don't get the chance to see them.' People need to see such films," Koenig said. He then set out to create an annual opportunity to see films from the five Nordic countries – including as many as possible of the Nordic Oscar submissions, feature films, shorts, and documentaries.

"The response has been great. It is clear that there is interest in Nordic film in Hollywood. Now in our 10th year we are proud to have regulars who see nearly every screening – industry professionals, film lovers, and homesick Nordics." Increased interest and the growth of the festival are in many ways connected to current cultural and technological changes. Koenig points out that the diversity of the American population has made the country more used to linguistic diversity and subtitles, opening up the market for foreign films. "Film is a nexus of art and technology, and business. Technology is increasing accessibility. Accessibility translates to increased interest," he said.

Norwegian films screened this year included "Peer Gynt from the Streets," Harald Zwart's comedy "Long Flat Balls II," "Dead Cold," set in 2020 when the Gulf Stream has disappeared and the northern areas are frozen over, and "The Kautokeino Rebellion." The last chronicles a Sami uprising in northern



PHOTO BY NORWEGIAN FILM INSTITUTE

"The Kautokeino Rebellion," the second most seen Norwegian film in 2008, chronicles a Sami uprising in northern Norway in 1852. It is directed by Nils Gaup, a descendant of the rebellion. It was one of four Norwegian films showed in Los Angeles in January.

Norway in 1852, directed by a descendant of the rebellion. "After screening Nils Gaup's wonderful Kautokeino Rebellion, I received letters of gratitude from a lawyer who has handled major cases defending the rights of Native Americans, and from a Native American producer working for a film studio," Koenig said.

The film festival offers important networking opportunities for film professionals and Koenig has witnessed it giving rise to further collaborations: "A Norwegian cinematographer who was working here met Danish director Bille August at our festival and ended up working with him. Norwegian director Erik Poppe, at the festival with his film, 'Hawaii Oslo,' connected with both an agent and North American management via introductions at the festival. I've kept the thank you note from the agent. Filmmakers attending the festival have found distributors for theatrical and DVD releases," Koenig said. According to the festival director, Norwegian film has something essentially Nordic to it, dealing with life, death, love, hate, fear, identity, immigration, alienation, and other human issues, which the American audience is readily able to identify with.

WHERE TO SEE NORWEGIAN FILM

Los Angeles Scandinavian Film Festival
Los Angeles, Calif., January
www.scandinavianfilmfestivalla.com

Austin Scandinavian Film Fest
Austin, Texas, February
www.scandinavianfilmfest.com/austin

Denver Scandinavian Film Fest
Denver, Colo., March/April
wwwscandinavianfilmfest.com/denver

Scandinavia House Films
New York, year-round
www.scandinaviahouse.org

Seattle Scandinavian Film Fest
Seattle, Wash., October
www.scandinavianfilmfest.com/seattle

Twin Cities Nordic Lights Film Fest
Minneapolis, Minn., November
www.scandinavianfilmfest.com/twincities

