



# RESURGENCE

## Revenge of the SIFF

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Tired of pillaging Pirates, swinging Spider-men, and revolting Robots? Scratching your head wondering if the "Silver Surfer" is rising because the "Surf's Up" on "Ocean's 13"? Just how many sequels, prequels, and comic book movies can the Hollywood meat grinder feed us in one summer anyway? Well, Seattle serves up even more film, arguably for those with more discerning taste, in an endless stream of cinema from May through June. The Seattle International Film Festival, purported to be the largest film festival in the United States, had 160,000 attendees in 2006 and likely more in 2007.

Dan Ireland, co-founder and Board Emeritus of SIFF, spoke candidly with me during an interview about the very first festival in 1976. "We didn't know how the reception was going to be, because it was our first year, but the moment we opened our door it was mind blowing; we had the respect of the audiences and the film critics at large in Seattle at the time. That year we got to introduce *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* ... it's really wild to look back."

The 2007 Film Festival's catalog-sized playbook testifies to our cities worship-sized love of cinema, sporting a winged heart wrapped in a mission statement that informs the cinemaphile to "find true film". What makes a film true? Well, SIFF's companion site [www.findtruefilm.com](http://www.findtruefilm.com) features a fairly humorous test to see what film is "true" for each of us, suggesting that a film's "truth" is subjective for the viewer. I couldn't help but notice this effectively mirrors our Emerald City's normative disposition toward truth in all aspects of life, including our spirituality.

Attending the SIFF post-party with some friends at Pan Pacific Seattle on Denny and Westlake, lavishly hosted/funded by Vulcan (Allen, not Spock) in an obvious play to expose the restaurant, hotel, and accompanying condominiums) I had been uncertain what to wear for the occasion. It didn't matter, as the crowd was as mixed and diverse as what I might expect at Mars Hill Church, from suits to sweats, people mingling and mulling over the final film - *Moliere* - and the festival overall, as if they'd shared a religious experience.

No longer constrained to an annual event, SIFF provides film programs throughout the entire year, given space in McCaw Hall for other events like the summer Seattle Noir City Festival to the 1 Reel Film Festival (short films) in September. Those wishing to immerse themselves in the narrative vision and stunning cinematography of artists and experimentalists can baptize themselves all year round.

Reviewing a handful of SIFF entries was my first official serving opportunity at Mars Hill Church back in 2001 as an intern, and my first real foray into the world of independent and international cinema. Many SIFF members have great disdain for popular film, bound together by their communal "discovery" of lesser known films by independent filmmakers and visionary storytellers. For some, there is something almost Gnostic about their attachment to SIFF, manifesting in a pride for their appreciation of the art, one's worth determined by one's choice of narrative consumption... the discovery of an overlooked film masterpiece. While these viewers might abhor seeing "Pirates of the Caribbean", they

engage their movies like free agents exploring unseen shores of cinema, digging for celluloid or digital treasures.

In his book *Bambi Versus Godzilla*, screenwriter David Mamet advises young aspirants that "storytelling is like sex. We all do it naturally. Some of us are better at it than others." While Mamet's unsurprising hubris emerges in the last sentence, the idea that storytelling is part of our DNA is prescient, though I doubt Mamet would see it as biblical. When the creator of everything is a storyteller, and He makes mankind in His image and likeness, it simply makes sense that we have an innate rhythm for telling and receiving stories. For better or worse, we exhaust ourselves trying to "find true film" in the hopes that a story will satisfy.

When I look at the faithful throngs of those attending the Film Festival, I have a Pauline reaction much like his response to observing the Athenians: "I see that you are very religious". As a former cinemaddict, many silver screens did offer me flickers and glimmers of hope and truth. Unfortunately, these hopes and truths only lasted about 120 minutes, sometimes less. I'm glad we live in an art-engaging city that will gather and converse about inspirational film. Watching now, these meager reflections on the screen remind and reinforce something far more substantial in my soul, and occasionally illuminate someone I'm always willing to talk about when given the opportunity.