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TIP JAR

Column: Liking LunaFest

Film festival raised money for sexual assault prevention

BY MEGAN EVE RYAN

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It was Friday the 13th, and walking into the University of Michigan's East Hall, I wondered whether the allegedly cursed day would doom LunaFest from the beginning. It didn't – and as I awaited the start of this philanthropic film festival, I could tell I was not alone in my anticipation for the films we were to see.

LunaFest celebrated its eighth anniversary this year, premiering on over 170 screens throughout the country. Ann Arbor played host to the event, which featured 10 short films written “by... for... about women.” Dozens of people filled the hall, excitedly talking about what was to come. “What do you think the films will be about?” “I heard one of them was about female wrestlers.” “Do you think they'll be good?”

The festival was established in 2000 by LUNA, makers of the nutrition bar for women. This Ann Arbor event was sponsored by the Sexual Assault Prevention and Awareness Center, which raises money on behalf of promoting the well-being of women. Profits were split between SAPAC and the Breast Cancer Fund, with some used to purchase prizes offered to the attendees in the form of a raffle during the festival's intermission.

Jamie Budnick, who works with SAPAC, introduced the festival. Devoted to increased awareness for women's issues, she said, LunaFest also works to promote women as leaders in society.

When she finished, the room darkened and the first movie began. Titled “Big Girl,” it explored the dynamics between a little girl and the man her mother is dating. This feel-good short reflected women in relationships, a popular theme throughout the event.

While “Big Girl” explored that theme through the life of a young girl, the concept was revisited in a different generation with “The Ladies,” which followed the lives of two elderly female roommates. Sisters Mimi and Vali are impossible to hate as they lightly talk about sex and the relationships they've had throughout their life. At one point as Mimi discusses her first husband, she explains that he was a good man, yet he had one small problem: “He had a tendency for homosexuals.”

The films ranged from animation in “My First Crush,” in which men and women admitted their first memories of “crushing” by lending their voices to various cartoon animals, to documentaries like “Kaden,” which featured the tribulations of life as a transgender, or “34x25x36,” which showed the process used to achieve the perfect figure – building mannequins.

An hour and a half later when the movies were done, the success of the festival was evident. Walking out of the room, the air was filled with animated chatter: “I loved ‘Grappling Girls’ – how cool would it be to be a female wrestler?” “‘Red Wednesday’ was amazing. That little girl was incredible.”

From appreciation for the directing to intrigue for the content, LunaFest delivered on its promise for emotional and moving films. Upon leaving, one attendee promised, “I am going to make a movie and it's going to be in LunaFest. Well, more realistically, I am going to help out with the event next year. I honestly didn't expect to enjoy it so much. I am so happy I came.”

Editor's note: Megan Eve Ryan is a University of Michigan student and an intern with The Ann Arbor Chronicle. This is her first column for The Chronicle.

Section: Entertainment, Opinion

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