

Sonoma International Film Festival



The wine red carpet is prepped, the searchlights have been polished and the town is primed for another Hollywood invasion.

The 14th annual Sonoma International Film Festival consumes the Valley April 6 to 10, bringing a long weekend of unique independent films, parties that overflow with food and wine and a celebrity-laced tribute to screen siren Susan Sarandon.

“From the launch of the UFO sidebar to the film ‘Acts of Godfrey’ to a British black comedy spoken entirely in verse, the festival’s programming will be filled with surprises. The documentary category is so strong this year, it’s been moved to the larger capacity Community Center,” said program director Cevin Cathell.

From the moment she captured America’s attention in the cult classic, “The Rocky Horror Picture Show,” Susan Sarandon proved she had star power. Her career became as fiery as her signature red

hair, commanding interesting character roles in films such as “The Witches of Eastwick,” “Thelma and Louise” and “Dead Man Walking.” For her illustrious career, including one Oscar win and four nominations, Sarandon will be honored with the festival’s Lifetime Achievement Award on Saturday, April 9.

Film festival Executive Director Kevin McNeely says of Sarandon, “She is a person who is a social activist, and someone who has conducted her private life in an admirable fashion.”

This year’s film menu is a virtual smorgasbord. The festival received more than 600 submissions from 14 countries, and pulled films from some of the top festivals around the world, including the 2011 Sundance Film Festival, for a menu of around 90 short and feature length movies. They are shown at venues all around the Plaza, ranging from the historic Sebastiani Theatre, to a slate of art films being presented at the Sonoma Valley Museum of Art.

This year is all about the documentaries, which range in topic from “Deeper,” about snowboarders who travel the globe searching for the highest and most remote peaks to ride, to “Death By Medicine,” a dark look into America’s pharmaceutical industry. The films are created by first-timers and seasoned directors alike, of

which 200 are expected to attend. One of those filmmakers will be Juanita Wilson, named one of Variety magazine’s Top Directors to Watch in 2011. Her film, “As If I Am Not There,” takes a critical look at the war in Bosnia of the 1990s.

Actress Jennifer Siebel Newsom, wife of California’s Lieutenant Governor Gavin Newsom, presents her first film as a writer and director with the documentary, “Miss Representation,” about how objectification holds women back professionally and politically, which features interviews with Sen. Dianne Feinstein, Condoleezza Rice and Katie Couric.

In between screenings, the festival includes lavish, wine-soaked parties with a taste of the best Sonoma has to offer.

Festival passes range in price, offering entrance to everything from a single film to an all-access pass. For all the details, point your browser to sonomafilmfest.org.