

Fable Deaf: A Ruth Shaw award finalist at Yorkton Film Festival



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Fable Deaf is a pioneering film, being the first deaf film made in Saskatchewan. | Deaf Crows Collective / Yorkton This Week

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YORKTON - The Yorkton Film Festival begins later this month with five films vying for the coveted Ruth Shaw Award for Best of Saskatchewan.

Among this year's finalists is *Fable Deaf*.

"We were thrilled to learn of the nomination of *Fable Deaf* for the Ruth Shaw award," said Dr. Joanne Weber, Artistic Director Deaf Crows Collective. "This is an incredible honour, and makes history in many ways."

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"*Fable Deaf* is a pioneering film, being the first Deaf film made in Saskatchewan, and we believe, in all of Western Canada. It is also the first Deaf film to be nominated for the Best of Saskatchewan Award. This recognition of a Deaf film serves as an affirmation for our highly marginalized Deaf community in Saskatchewan."

As such it is also the collective's first film with its world premier planned for the Yorkton Film Festival.

Weber said the nomination is also important in terms of validating the film and helping market it.

"The Ruth Shaw award would be extremely validating for *Fable Deaf*. It would be a prestigious launch for the film's festival run, and provide marketing exposure both for the film and for the Deaf artists involved. *Fable Deaf* stars an all-Deaf cast," she said. "Its entire production was overseen by a Deaf consultant. The writing team was a collaboration between Deaf and hearing writers, and the crew was a mix of Deaf and hearing designers and technicians."

"This award would serve as validation for uniquely Deaf expression, creativity and storytelling. It would acknowledge and recognize Deaf artists, actors, and filmmakers, and affirm the significance of Deaf art collectives making work that resonates with both Deaf and hearing audiences."

"Last but not least, this award would highlight that award-winning, world-class, beautiful films are made right here in Saskatchewan."

In broader terms the YFF is simply good for the film industry in the province.

“The Saskatchewan film industry is alive, but in order to really thrive it needs the kind of investment that comes from incentives like a film tax credit,” said Weber. “There are so many talented, highly creative film artists in Saskatchewan, some of whom made brilliant and innovative contributions to our own film.

“Showcasing Saskatchewan films by YFF underscores the importance of this industry for Saskatchewan, in creative and financial sectors.”

In the case of *Fable Deaf* itself, the story is a unique one, offered Weber.

“*Fable Deaf* is a magical realist myth, set in a world of visual, rather than spoken language, where anger can bring a storm, and tears of frustration can become a monsoon,” she explained.

“The story follows Hugo (Allard Thomas), a Deaf elder, stubbornly rooted in history and tradition, whose rigid system of artifacts and memories is jeopardized by the unwelcome arrival of Jaul (Mustafa Alabssi), an illiterate and language-less young Deaf traveller.

“The plot revolves around the conflict between the two men, the interventions of Hugo’s young mentee, Devi (Fatima Nafisa), and the isolation of the Deaf child, Jasper (Oscar Grodecki), whose future in the Deaf community is at stake.”

And the film was shot and created entirely in Saskatchewan, said Weber.

The film features an all-Deaf cast of four Saskatchewan actors between the ages of 12 and 74 who all identify as culturally Deaf and communicate using American Sign Language, and who have contributed to the film’s narrative.

“Created by Deaf Crows Collective, *Fable Deaf* is a highly unique short film with lush and stunning visual effects that examines the threat of cultural devastation, and offers an invitation for its preservation,” noted Weber.

When looking at the film now as a YFF nominee has Weber’s view of it changed?

“Now that it’s a YFF nominee, we are even prouder of *Fable Deaf* than we already were; the nomination affirms the quality and impact of the film for both hearing and Deaf audiences,” she said.

“*Fable Deaf* has been a labour of love for us.

“Our writing process began in 2018, with plans to film at various rural locations across Saskatchewan during the summer of 2020. However, like many other projects, the pandemic put a halt on our plans for the cast and crew to travel and live together on location.

“We had to devise a new approach to making the film, so the script underwent numerous rewrites as we adapted to changing circumstances and protocols.

“Ultimately we developed a plan to shoot on greenscreen with a minimal crew, and during a brief easing of provincial COVID assembly rules in August 2021, the film was shot at the Saskatchewan Production Stage under provincial pandemic restrictions. Our dedicated crew built a greenscreen and set while the actors rehearsed at the stages. It has been a challenging journey, but one that we are immensely proud of.

“We have spent the past 18 months working with a team of Saskatchewan post-production artists: colourist Jason Rister, visual effects artist Jack Hilkewich, composer Jason Cullimore and sound design by Roman Empire Studios, and we are now so excited to share this Saskatchewan-made Deaf story with the world!”

After its world premiere at the Yorkton Film Festival, it is expected *Fable Deaf* will spend the next couple of years on the festival circuit, including screenings at Deaf film festivals in the United States and Europe.

Correction: The headline in an earlier version of this story said Fable Death instead of Fable Deaf. We apologize for the error.

[This article was posted by Yorkton This Week.](#)
