

# A RICH FILM EXPERIENCE

## Jamie Rich and the 16th Annual Kansas City LGBT Film Festival

by BRIAN JUSTICE

Anascent gay film festival started in Kansas City in the early 1990s, then lay dormant for several years until being resurrected in 2000 as Out Here Now: the Kansas City LGBT Film Festival by Jerry Harrington of the Tivoli Cinemas in Westport, Tom Poe, associate professor of communication studies at UMKC, and Jamie Rich, creative director, Open Circle Media & Marketing. The eight-day 2015 Kansas City LGBT Film Festival will be held June 25 - July 2 at the Tivoli Cinemas in Westport.

There was only the “G” in the early festivals (“A lot of what we call ‘shirtless boy movies,’ says Rich) – the “L, B and T” came with the festival’s revival, and since that time it has become a showcase for films that go beyond merely referencing the LGBT experience, but instead has become a celebration of movies for everyone who loves them. “That’s the shared commonality of the demographic,” Rich says. “This is the only event that I do that I am the target audience for!”

An organizer and lifelong cinephile, Rich spoke with The Phoenix recently about Out Here Now, its audience, mission and success, and what sets it apart from other LGBT festivals.

### Give me a mini-history of the festival. How did you get involved, and when?

I got involved when Jerry Harrington revived the film festival after it had been out of sorts. And at that time film festivals were the only way in which you could get these films shown. There was only one print, and it would literally travel from the two major film festivals in New York and San Francisco, so there was this two-week window when the films were traveling, literally, over Kansas City. You hear



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that phrase about flyover country? That’s one of the reasons we were able to do the film festival when we did it because we were able to get the film prints as they were traveling across the country.

**“Gay films” from 15, 20 years ago were just so bad, but people flocked to them simply because they were “gay films,” though there was the occasional genuinely good movie, like “Parting Glances.” Have you seen an improvement in quality?**

Yes! Because what happened, or is happening now, is that once the technology got into the hands of LGBT filmmakers, people be-

came able to tell their own stories. They were able to add in the complexity and the layers. That’s what has changed in festivals over the years. It’s no longer just important that you have a gay character, or that you have a gay theme. Now it’s “What’s the story? What’s the content? What’s being told? What’s new?”

### What is different about KC’s festival? What sets it apart?

We made the decision a long time ago to not become really trendy. We don’t do an elaborate gala like in Miami, where it’s \$75 for the opening-night film. It’s the middle of the summer, people can come in their jeans, in their shorts,

in their flip-flops. We curate the films for people who like to go to movies. Somebody who is educated, is aware of issues, certainly doesn’t mind a broad comedy, but they are looking for something with a little bit more depth, and we do more foreign films. There’s a director from LA who came in last year, and he said “How in the world did you get 165 gay men to come to a foreign film on a Monday night?” And I just kind of smiled, and said “Because it’s a good movie.”

That’s what is different. Our film festival is for people who love to watch movies, and the average person who comes to our festival attends seven to eight films. There’s nothing quite like the shared experience of watching

a movie with a like-minded audience.

### What impact have the remarkable strides made in LGBT rights in the last two, or even five years, even the last six months, had on the festival in terms of awareness?

Documentaries that have to do with marriage equality are so strong. What’s also really on the forefront now in terms of documentary is gender. The “T” is the dominant theme in a lot of the documentaries that are circulating for this particular season. I can tell you that overall the issues right now are in gender and gender identity. That’s where you are going to see more conversations.

There is an intersection where all oppressions are related. And that’s where the LGBT movement is, now, in that all of these things that we have been fighting for, as far as LGBT history, we have achieved a certain level of success with marriage equality, etc., but what we are beginning to see is that we do have to address oppression of the earth, oppression of sexuality, oppression of women, oppression of poor people, all of those issues are now sort of blended together.

You are going to see more stories about the complexity of what it means to be LGBT, and the stories are not always going to be about our sexuality or gender preference. They are about another aspects of our being.

### Is there anything you would like to add before we part ways?

One thing that we are doing this year is that Lisa Marie Evans, a filmmaker in Kansas City, is doing an animation workshop in conjunction with the festival, so creative



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people who want to learn how to do animated films, or translate their ideas into animation will have the opportunity to work with Lisa and then have their stories told, their finished product shown, as part of a showcase in the festival of animation. People can learn more about that at our website, but we're really proud of that. We initially thought that we would

just focus on LGBT people, and allow them to come in, but we are going to be doing other stories around the themes of equality. Our class, just like our movies, is open to everyone, including straight people!

For show times, tickets and information on the animation workshop visit **out-herenow.com**. ▼