

THE SEATTLE FILM FESTIVAL

MAGAZINE

Meet Bobby LePire, the new Creative Director
of the Seattle Film Festival Team

11
YEARS

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BOBBY LePIRE

Meet the new Creative Director of the 2026 Seattle Film Festival

Bobby LePire is not your typical film critic. His life has played out across continents and cultures, from Los Angeles to Ghana, Germany, South Korea, and various locations in the U.S. Each new location shaped his view of film, art, and the world itself. For the Seattle Film Festival's 11th anniversary, Bobby sits down with us for a candid discussion.

Q: Tell us a little about yourself and how you became a film critic.

Ever since I was, you know, “knee-high to a grasshopper,” I've loved movies. Movies are a perfect form of art. By combining all the other art forms into one medium, it encompasses everything.

Q: You've lived in all these different places across the world, so there probably wasn't as much access to American TV at that time.



"Movies are a perfect form of art. By combining all the other art forms into one medium, it encompasses everything."

-Bobby LePire

My dad worked for the Department of State and living abroad at that time, there were only a few English speaking channels we could get. The one American channel was AFN, the Armed Forces Network.



At Dragon Con
with Jodie Whittaker

Q: Did you find that living overseas meant watching even more movies than you would have in the States?

Yes, definitely. For example, living in Accra, we rented a lot of movies because there was little English-language television available. However, living overseas, I did find that movies were a language everyone spoke.

If you brought up some big film like the *Wizard of Oz*, people all over the world seemed to know of it, even if they spoke little or no English and vice versa.

Q: How did you end up working for Film Threat as a critic?

I always liked writing and movies so I combined the two and ran my own site at the time called Terribly Fun Films. Then in 2017, I attended Dragon Con and was able to make only one panel and it was Chris Gore's. Afterwards, I went up and found he was very outgoing and loves talking with people. He mentioned he was looking for writers so I emailed him a sample of one of my reviews from Terribly Fun. After a trial period, I wound up writing so many reviews every month they eventually moved me to be one of the editors.

Q: Do you review mainly indie films? And do you happen to know how many films you have reviewed for Film Threat to date?

I review big-budget movies as well. Okay, I checked and I have reviewed 1,300 total films for Film Threat.



One film from our previous Seattle Film Festival, *Go For Grandma*, really stood out. It was only 30 minutes long, and I don't know the budget, but every dollar was on the screen. The movie looked better than a lot of big-budget movies I've seen lately. The effects in that film are flawless.

Q: What was your initial reaction when you were asked to be the Creative Director for the Seattle Film Festival this year?

I immediately said yes! I had a really great time when I came out to Seattle in 2024. I did not know Seattle very well at

all, and had a blast meeting everyone at the festival. I loved meeting so many filmmakers and actors like Tammy Kaitz, Larry and Terry Ziegelman, Ryan Busse, Sarah Hanner, and Tony K. Hall. It was just a lot of fun and I look forward to keeping in contact with them.

This year I look forward to seeing more great films and discovering something new.



Festival Directors William Wayne and Michael Rey with Bobby at the 2024 Seattle Film Festival.

Q: Have you had any directors react to your reviews and reach out?

Yes. I have, those are mostly positive interactions. I reviewed William Wayne's movie *Lost Angelas*, and I responded to it very, very well. I think I gave it a 9 out of 10 with the scale of 10 being great. And he reached out after the review. The strong review made him eligible for the Film Threat Awards. And he won Best Director and also Best Indie Film made for under 100k. And then he invited me on the live watch party with Chris Gore and a few other people, where we discussed the movie further. I found out he re-edited the film in a scene based on something I pointed out in my review. A couple of years later, when he became a festival director, he reached out and asked me if I wanted to be on the jury for the Seattle Film Festival. I immediately said, "Yes!"

Q: What did you find interesting as a film festival judge, as opposed to being a film critic or reviewer?

As a festival judge, I can focus on the category for which a film was submitted. For example, if a film is entered for Best Editing, I pay special attention to the editing, even if the other elements aren't as strong. That's different from being a critic, where weak areas can lower your overall rating.

When judging films, I also consider what the movie set out to accomplish and how well it did, given its resources. A \$200 million movie has enough money to hire the right actors, the best directors, screenwriters and digital effects artists. And if the movie fails, that is a major problem. But if a \$20,000 indie film has rough lighting but amazing acting and writing, I can appreciate what they achieved with limited means.

The 10th Annual
SEATTLE FILM
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A CONVERSATION WITH FESTIVAL JUDGE

ANDRES BENATAR



Could you share a bit about your background and how your passion for cinema led you into becoming a film critic?

I grew up watching all sorts of movies; and, like anyone with a genuine passion, that interest deepened over time. I began exploring the work of modern legends like Scorsese, Refn and Nolan, which eventually led me to the timeless masters like Bergman, Kurosawa, and Kubrick. I always loved writing, and my passion for film naturally evolved into writing reviews.

For me, cinema is far more than entertainment. Anyone who dismisses it as such, is overlooking the depth as an art form. Much like a great novel, a film offers a direct window into the mind of its creator.

I've always enjoyed examining films from an analytical perspective, and that has shaped my approach as a critic.

What drew you to become part of Seattle Film Festival?

I was invited to join the jury and since then I've had the pleasure of working closely with Michael and William. From the start, I was drawn to the idea of watching such a wide range of submissions and forming new perspectives. It keeps me intellectually engaged. Sometimes I watch as an audience member, but more often I approach films with a critic's eye, looking for the layers and choices that reveal the artist's intent.

You've been involved with different film festivals over the years. What, in your view, makes this festival stand out in the indie film community?

Seattle Film Festival's strength lies in its diversity, both in the range of categories and in the variety of films it showcases. The festival creates a platform for filmmakers to share their work with new audiences and thus bring those films to wider attention.

Q: Given your background as a curator, editor, visual anthropologist, and creativity coach, how do those experiences shape your approach when selecting films for the festival?

I try to look at everything with a fresh eye. I specifically consider how submissions can be positioned with experimental cinematography, video art, contemporary art, anthropology, and—yes—film poetry. I'm a classically trained filmmaker; my original degree is in film directing and professional photography. Later, I discovered contemporary art and have loved it ever since. When I review submissions, I look for a contemporary angle—something that resonates with the times we live in and challenges our viewpoint. Submissions can be very educational; you learn how others perceive the world. As an editor and media professional with 30 years of experience, I look for truly new concepts. As a creativity coach, I want to see boundaries being expanded.

Q: With numerous film festivals around the world, what do you think makes the Seattle Film Festival uniquely attractive for both filmmakers and audiences?

Our festival is less formal. We have a very diverse body of judges. We all have experience in the film industry, and many of us also work in adjacent fields, so we view films from a wider

perspective—not only how they were made, but how they contribute to cultural advancement. We look for new expressions, fresh techniques, subjectivity, and personal experiences that are a bit outside the box. We're the people's festival.

Q: Finally, what's one piece of advice or encouragement you would give to new filmmakers hoping to get their films showcased in future Seattle Film Festivals?

Don't give up. Whoever you are, wherever you are, however down you may feel, keep shooting and keep submitting. If you stay true to your calling, opportunities will come. As the commercial industry becomes more inclusive, the alternative industry does too. We also have so much technical advantage now compared to ten years ago; you can even use your phone to shoot a movie. All power to you.

Michael Johnson

Festival Programming Coordinator

Q: As the Seattle Film Festival celebrates its 10th year, what makes this milestone particularly meaningful for you personally?

That I've been a part of the festival for nearly all of its years, and that I get to share the occasion with both new and old friends.

Q: Having served as a judge for the festival over the years, you've witnessed its evolution firsthand. What stands out to you as new or especially exciting about this year's edition compared to previous festivals?

All the young auteurs. There's been a wonderful surge, and the quality is astounding. "Coming soon to a theater near you" is how I see they're raw and, in most cases, yet to be refined talent.



Q: You've worn many hats, from festival judge to your current role overseeing programming. How has your experience as judge shaped the way you approach building this year's festival lineup?

I see my approach as that of an advocate. I want every film I watch to be great. In building this year's lineup, I strive to build blocks of films that encourage the greatest audience participation.

Q: As a Seattle native, you've watched the local film scene change over the decade. What's the most significant evolution you've observed within Seattle's indie film community?

The most significant evolution to me is the accessibility of festivals like ours that have allowed more and more filmmakers to have their films seen while giving them the ability to interact with other like-minded individuals.

Q: Given your background as a musician and writer, how do those artistic experiences shape your approach when selecting films for the festival?

These experiences, in addition to some professional gigs in front of and behind the camera, have given me a great appreciation for all the hard work and effort that goes into the making of each of these films. This leads me to approach these films with the grace and dignity they deserve when tasked with the selection process.

Q: With so many films around the world, what do you think makes the Seattle Film Festival uniquely attractive for both filmmakers and audiences?

This is a festival **for artists by artists** and gives audiences a great interactive experience to inspire their own creativity in ways more far-reaching than we may ever know.

Q: Finally, what's one piece of advice or encouragement you would give to new filmmakers hoping to get their films showcased in future Seattle Film Festivals?

Without risk there is no reward. There's a wonderful community that awaits you. Introduce yourself. I look forward to meeting you.



Juliet Gomez

Festival Awards Show Host

Q: This year you'll be stepping onto the stage as co-host of the Seattle Film Festival Awards Show. How does taking on this role feel different from your past experiences as a judge and moderator?

It's a shift for sure, judging and moderating are more behind-the-scenes, while hosting is all about setting the tone and connecting with the audience. I'm excited, since it's such a celebratory milestone with the Seattle Film Festival hitting its 10th anniversary. I'm really looking forward to sharing the stage and honoring the award winners.

Q: Before we dive deeper, would you share a bit about your background and what first drew you into the world of film and film festivals?

There's something truly awe-inspiring about the creative process: watching an idea transform into something that moves people, that brings stories to life. I started my career as a stage actress and director 15 years ago, working Off-Broadway and directing a 25-woman cast of *The Vagina Monologues*. Since then, I've explored all sides of storytelling, appearing in indie films, working behind the scenes, and even stepping in as an assistant director for a music video with a film production company. For me, whether it's theater, film, or music, it's all about that shared experience, the spark that happens when creativity meets emotion.

Q: Moderating Q&A conversations gives you a unique perspective. What do you enjoy most about engaging with filmmakers directly after their screenings?

There's something really special about connecting with filmmakers right after their work has just been seen. The emotions are still fresh, the audience is processing, and the filmmaker is often still in that vulnerable space of having just shared something personal. I love being able to ask questions that invite them to open up even more, and to help bridge that moment between the artist and the audience. It creates a kind of intimacy that you don't always get in other settings. And honestly, as someone who's worked on both sides of the creative process, I have a deep respect for what it takes to get a film made—so it's a privilege to help shine a light on that journey.

Q: When you are judging films, what qualities or elements make a submission stand out for you?

There have been so many that left a lasting impression. But the ones that truly stay with me are the films that shine a light on social justice, both here in our country and around the world.

Those stories—about marginalized and oppressed individuals or communities—are the ones that make me proud to be part of this festival. Being able to help share those voices, to give space to those narratives, and to create awareness through film... that's the heart of what we do. Showcasing those stories keeps those voices alive, heard, and impossible to ignore.

Q: What advice or encouragement would you give to new filmmakers who are considering submitting their work to the Seattle Film Festival?

There are really two sides to making a strong film—it comes down to execution and the passion behind the story. On the technical side, if you're submitting your work, the details matter—performances, lighting, editing, sound—it all plays a role in how your film is received. But just as important, if not more, is creating something that's rooted in authentic storytelling. When your work comes from a place of truth and passion, that energy translates—and that's what really connects with people. In the end, a film that's deeply resonant will always leave a stronger impact than the one that's just technically perfect.

A CONVERSATION WITH FESTIVAL JUDGE

Catia Orloff



Q: As the Seattle Film Festival celebrates its 10th year, what makes this milestone particularly meaningful for you personally?

What started as a small, independent project has grown into a powerful stream of submissions. I'm so happy to see familiar filmmakers returning this year. It's also meaningful because we keep adding new categories. Many professional communities have their own showcases, but our festival seems to have it all—just look at the list. We are here to help you gauge where your film stands relative to a variety of film, video and TV production standards. With judges from diverse professional backgrounds, we're essentially a test sample of your professional audience.

Q: Having served as a judge for the festival over the years, you've witnessed its evolution firsthand. What stands out to you as new or especially exciting about this year's edition?

The geography of our submissions. We receive films from all over the world—large and small productions, professional and student work, independent artists, and documentary filmmakers covering very exotic topics. We are very open-minded people here, and we do our best to validate your experiences.

I'm a big fan of Carl Jung, so I believe deep psychological ideas—when shown through visual symbols—help us advance to a new level of communication that's not only verbal but also visual. Not everything can be explained by words alone. The language of film speaks on a non-verbal, universal level: no matter your country or language, you can get your point across. There is something very human and liberating in this process. The festival connects people worldwide.