

Independent Cinema Takes Center Stage at Julien Dubuque International Film Festival 2025

JDIFF returns April 21–27 with premieres, filmmaker Q&As, Iowa stories, and international features across Dubuque’s historic venues.



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The 14th Annual Julien Dubuque International Film Festival (JDIFF) will return to downtown Dubuque from April 21 through April 27, 2025. The festival will present a week-long celebration of independent film, with a [robust slate](#) of feature films, documentaries, short films, student work, panels, and evening events. This year’s [programming](#) explores themes of identity, resilience, and human connection through a powerful selection of world and U.S. premieres.



The stories featured at JDIFF this year reflect the bravery, humor, and humanity that independent cinema captures best.”

*Susan Gorrell Executive
Director JDIFF*

Feature Film Highlights

PIGGY DUSTER

Written and Directed by Jesse Stewart, this emotionally-rich narrative about the mysteries of a family camping trip in the Rocky Mountains is enhanced by Producer Alex Rhodes-Wilmere’s recent discovery of his four half siblings—three of them living just outside of Dubuque,

their existence previously unknown to him—where they will meet for the first time at the film’s Midwest premiere.

FOUR RIVERS SIX RANGES (Thursday, April 24 – Five Flags Theater, 6:30 PM - International Night)
Directed by Shenpenn Khymzar and inspired by the book Flight at the Cuckoo’s Behest, this historical drama follows the Tibetan resistance fighters who protected the Dalai Lama during his 1959 escape into India. Cinematographer Brandon Cox will join Khymzar and other crew members for a post-screening Q&A. The evening continues with a live performance by Boogie Monster at the Hotel Julien River Room.

MISOPHONIA (Friday, April 25 – World Premiere Five Flags Theater, 7:30 PM)

When Martin loses his job after a misophonia outburst, he moves in with his sister and embarks on a comically exasperated quest to regain control of his life. The director, producer, and crew expected to attend. A 90s Glow Party will follow the screening at the Hotel Julien Ballroom.

MOTHERLAND

Starring Miriam Silverman, Néstor Carbonell, Holland Taylor, and Emily Arancio, this thought-provoking dystopian feature imagines a world where the state has relieved parents of the responsibility of child-rearing. Director Evan Matthews will be attending the screening.

NOTHING WRONG (U.S. Premiere)

Based on true events, two sisters, Andrea and Claire, uncover painful truths through a scavenger hunt that tests the strength of their bond.

Recollection. Set in 2033, this sci-fi thriller explores memory suppression technology through the story of Kate (Rosslyn Luke), who discovers her erased past due to a technological glitch.

Filmmakers and select cast expected.

THE STRANGE DARK

Directed and produced by Chris Messineo, this dark comedy follows Edgar, who claims to see the future. His family doesn't believe him—but mysterious agents are closing in. Director Chris Messineo and Producer Anthony Pettine will be at the screening.

MARTYR OF GOWANUS

Directed by Brian Meere and starring Sawyer Spielberg (son of Steven Spielberg), this film is set in post-9/11 Brooklyn and follows a housepainter grappling with personal trauma, neighborhood conflict, and moral choices.

Documentary Spotlight

STAND OUT - BEN KJAR

Born with a severe facial difference, Ben Kjar challenges stereotypes, medical expectations, and social limitations to become a world-champion wrestler. Ben Kjar will attend the festival screening.

REBEL WITH A CLAUSE

In 2018, Ellen Jovin launched a folding table in Manhattan marked "Grammar Table," prompting a movement that traveled to all 50 states, including Iowa. Directed by her husband, filmmaker Brandt Johnson, this documentary is a celebration of language and connection.

THE INNER SEA

Directed by a first-time female filmmaker and birth mother, this film explores adoption, music, and identity through an artistic road trip on a bright blue school bus. The filmmaker has ties to Dubuque and will be in attendance.

THE LAST HOUNDS

Focusing on the disappearing world of greyhound racing, this documentary features the lives of Iowa and Kansas racetrack workers and breeders as they face cultural and political pressure from animal rights groups.

CODE IS LAW

Produced by a London-based team, this cybercrime documentary explores crypto hacking, featuring notorious hacker Andean Medjedovic, who famously stole \$64 million while taunting his victims and the justice system.

LOOKING UP

When 20-year-old military recruit Eitan Armon is diagnosed with a rare eye disease that leads to blindness, he chooses to take on one of the world's most dangerous climbs: Yosemite's El Capitan.

Short Film Standouts

HAPPY ENDINGS FUNERAL PARLOR

Starring Corbin Bernsen this dark comedy follows two brothers tasked with delivering a mobster's body across rural Iowa. Bernsen is expected to attend.

FLOCKY

A beautifully animated allegory exploring pregnancy and loss, created by a Spanish filmmaker attending the festival.

TANGO IN ROOM 1310

Starring Colin Campbell, this story follows Patrick, who travels to the big city to propose—only to discover his night, and future, may not go as planned.

STORAGE FEES

Directed by Norman Buckley and based on a poem by Nicholas Michael Buck, this reflective piece follows a grieving son living out of a storage unit while contemplating his life's limited choices.

WHAT HAPPENED AT BRUNCH

Shot during the JDIFF Film Camp, which welcomes participants of all backgrounds, this student short highlights rising voices in filmmaking.

Featured Festival Events and Screenings

Wednesday, April 23

Celebrate Canada: 5:30–7:30 PM, Five Flags Promenade

Screening: Singing Back the Buffalo, followed by an after-party with live music by Joie Wales at EJ's Wine Shop & Tasting Room.

Thursday, April 24

International Night screening: Four Rivers Six Ranges

Five Flags Theater, 6:30 PM (doors open at 5:30)

After-party at Hotel Julien Dubuque River Room with live music from Boogie Monster.

Friday, April 25

World Premiere of Misophonia

Five Flags Theater, 7:30 PM (doors open at 6:30)

After-party: 90s Glow Party at Hotel Julien Dubuque Ballroom.

Saturday, April 26

Awards Night Celebration

Awards presented for Best Feature, Best Documentary, Best Short I and Short II, Acting, Music, and more. The esteemed FIPRESCI award will also be presented.

Sunday, April 27

Screenings all day.

Panels and Workshops

Panels and industry workshops will run throughout the week, covering topics such as cinematography, film preservation, pitching TV vs film, trailer creation, branding, and social media strategy.

About JDIFF

The Julien Dubuque International Film Festival showcases bold, independent storytelling from around the globe while celebrating community, creativity, and cinematic excellence in Iowa.

For tickets and full schedule, visit www.julienfilmfest.com

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