

Debut Filmmaker Ali Cook Wins Top Genre Award at Oscar-Qualifying Cleveland Film Festival

British filmmaker's first film, THE PEARL COMB takes Best After Hours Short Film award at Cleveland International Film Festival

DALLAS, TX, UNITED STATES, May 7, 2025 /EINPresswire.com/ -- First-time filmmaker [Ali Cook](#) won the Oscar-qualifying Cleveland International Film Festival's top prize for genre films, Best

After Hours Short Film Audience Choice Award, for his film THE PEARL COMB. Cook is a recognized British actor and writer who marks his directorial debut with THE PEARL COMB, following his BAFTA long-listed short film, THE CUNNING MAN, which he wrote and starred in.



THE PEARL COMB, a short film by Ali Cook

“

I knew the film would stand out in the After Hours program and the audience would love it. This award is valuable for the film, for Ali's career, and for the genre feature film he has in development.”

Dr. Rebekah Louisa Smith

An alumnus of the Oscar-qualifying Cleveland International Film Festival, Cook returned for the 2025 festival in April, taking home the top prize for genre films – Best After Hours Short Film Audience Choice Award. Set in 1893, THE PEARL COMB tells the story of an endearing Cornish fisherman's wife who captures the attention of the medical profession as the first person to ever cure someone of Tuberculosis. A doctor, hell bent on proving a woman's place is in the home and not practicing medicine, is sent to investigate her miraculous claim – only to discover the source of her unearthly power.

Cook made the film after hearing the unjust, true story of the “Edinburgh Seven.” In the 1890s, seven women qualified to become doctors. However, instead of being celebrated, male doctors perceived them as a threat to their livelihood.

“The public pelted the women with mud, and they were denied the right to practice medicine,” said Cook. “I was thinking about the ‘seven’ around the time I visited Cornwall with my daughters,

where we heard the legend of the Pellar family – an ancient lineage of esoteric ‘healers,’ who claimed that their powers were granted to them by a mermaid. From there, I concocted a tale about a Victorian female doctor who practiced medicine under the guise of being a witch, blessed with healing powers – a narrative her rural community preferred to believe.”

The Cleveland International Film Festival, now in its 49th year, attracts more than 70,000 film enthusiasts annually for film exhibitions and education programs as diverse as the audience, a microcosm of the city of Cleveland. The uber-popular After Hours program features sold out audiences for its late-night screening.

THE PEARL COMB is represented by [Dr. Rebekah Louisa Smith](#), an award-winning film festival strategist, published author, and founder of [The Film Festival Doctor](#), who included the Cleveland festival as part of THE PEARL COMB's festival strategy.

“I knew that Paul Sloop, the leading director of Short Film Programming, would love this film as it suited his audience's taste and would be a stand-out film in his After Hours program,” said Smith. “To win this award was the icing on the cake and will prove to be extremely valuable for both the film and Ali's career. He has a genre feature film in development and I'm excited to see him go from strength to strength. Thank you so much to the team!”

About Ali Cook

Ali Cook's career began with writing and starring in seven of his own British TV series for Channel 4, Channel 5, and Sky 1. His series DIRTY TRICKS (Channel 4) was nominated for a British Comedy Award.

He's also an actor. Credits include the BAFTA nominated and BIFA winning film KAJAKI (Dir. Paul Katis), MUSCLE (Dir. Gerard Johnson), HOW TO FAKE A WAR alongside Katherine Parkinson (Dir. Rudolph Herzog) and as series regular DCI Simmons in RAGDOLL for AMC, produced by Sid Gentle. THE PEARL COMB is his directorial debut. For more information, visit www.alicook.co.uk and follow on Instagram @ali_cook.

About The Film Festival Doctor

Founded in 2010, Dr. Rebekah Louisa Smith and her team at The Film Festival Doctor are committed to nurturing filmmakers to help them secure film festival screenings, win awards, and receive positive recognition within the film industry. The Film Festival Doctor helps filmmakers worldwide navigate the film festival circuit. So far, she has helped filmmakers win over 2,500 awards and 3 Oscar success stories. For more information, visit www.thefilmfestivaldoctor.com and follow on Instagram @rebekahfilmdr.

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