

Award-Winning Coming-of-Age Feature 'Bigfoot Woods' Treks to 17th Annual Awareness Film Festival

Father-and-Son Writers Bruce and Abel Pavalon Turn Personal Experience Into a Heartfelt Story of Identity, Acceptance and Bigfoot

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EINPresswire.com/ -- What happens when a small town finds it easier to believe in Bigfoot than to accept a teenager for who he really is? That question sits at the heart of "[Bigfoot Woods](#)," the award-winning coming-of-age feature written by father-and-son team Bruce and Abel Pavalon, which will make its West Coast Premiere as an Official Selection of the [17th Annual Awareness Film Festival](#) in Santa Monica, California.

The West Coast Premiere screening of "Bigfoot Woods" will be held on October 17 with the writers and several cast members in attendance.

Directed by Elizabeth Chatelain, "Bigfoot Woods" stars Ambrose Velasco, Rich Sommer (Mad Men, The Devil Wears Prada), Tristen MacDonald (High Potential, Lessons in Chemistry), Julia Zook (The Book Club Murders, Comics Café) and Derek Hughes (Captain America: The Winter Soldier,



Ambrose Velasco & Rich Sommer in Bigfoot Woods

Mr. Deeds).

Set in small-town northern Minnesota, the film follows teenager Bridget/Jonah Benally (Velasco) and his father Paul (Sommer), whose lives are unexpectedly transformed when they capture what appears to be video evidence of Bigfoot. Overnight, the pair become local celebrities. But as Jonah comes to understand and openly express himself as a boy, the attention exposes an uncomfortable contradiction within their community: the same people eager to embrace the possibility of a mythical creature struggle to accept the truth about someone they have known all their life.

Blending family drama, humor and the mythology surrounding one of America's most enduring legends, "Bigfoot Woods" uses an unlikely Bigfoot sighting to explore something distinctly human, the desire to be seen, understood and accepted.

For Bruce and Abel Pavalon, however, the story is more than fiction. The screenplay draws upon Abel Pavalon's own experience transitioning from female to male, giving the film's central father-son relationship an unusually personal foundation. The Pavalon's have longstanding ties to northern Minnesota, where they spend summers at their family cabin, ground the film in the community and landscape that helped inspire it.

That authenticity has helped "Bigfoot Woods" gain momentum on the festival circuit. The film had its world premiere at the 2026 Fargo Film Festival, where it received the festival's Prairie Spirit Award, an honor established to recognize films reflecting the distinctive strength of character associated with the Northern Plains. "Bigfoot Woods" subsequently became an Official Selection of the 45th Minneapolis St. Paul International Film Festival, and Ambrose Velasco received the Best Performance Award for his portrayal of Bridget/Jonah from [TwinCitiesGayScene.com](https://www.TwinCitiesGayScene.com).

Produced by Megan Huber and Wyatt McDill (3-Day Weekend), with Bruce Pavalon serving as



Rich Sommer & Ambrose Velasco in Bigfoot Woods



Rich Sommer, Tristen MacDonald & Ambrose Velasco in Bigfoot Woods

executive producer, "Bigfoot Woods" was filmed in Minnesota and features cinematography by Wilson Webb and editing by Cecilia Delgado.

Its next stop, the Awareness Film Festival, is particularly fitting for a film centered on empathy, family and acceptance. Presented by nonprofit organization Heal One World, the festival showcases independent filmmaking intended not only to entertain, but to raise awareness and inspire social change. Now in its 17th year, the festival will take place October 13–18, 2026, in Santa Monica, followed by an online program.

For "Bigfoot Woods", the festival provides another opportunity to introduce audiences to a story that approaches identity through an accessible and distinctly unconventional lens: part family drama, part small-town satire and part Bigfoot story.

"Bigfoot Woods" screens at the 17th Annual Awareness Film Festival at 2pm on Saturday October 17th at The Illusion Lounge Main Theatre in Santa Monica. Tickets can be found [HERE](#).

<https://www.bfwmovie.com/>

ABOUT BIGFOOT WOODS

'Bigfoot Woods' is a 2026 American independent feature directed by Elizabeth Chatelain and written by father-and-son screenwriting team Bruce and Abel Pavalon. Inspired by Abel and Bruce Pavalons' personal experience, the film follows a teenager and his father whose accidental video of an apparent Bigfoot sighting turns them into local celebrities, even as their community struggles to accept the teenager's transition. The film stars Rich Sommer, Ambrose Velasco, Tristen MacDonald, Julia Zook and Derek Hughes and is produced by Megan Huber and Wyatt McDill, with Bruce Pavalon serving as executive producer.

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