

Jaina Kalifa

Hinterland Times March 2020



Every year volunteers from the Maleny Film Society put a lot of thought and effort into staging the Australian Film Festival (AFF). We asked Festival Organiser Andrew Wallace to reflect on why the AFF is worth doing and why it continues to flourish.

"The medium of film powerfully combines visual art, drama, music, story-telling. It's great for escapist entertainment but can be much more than that. Films offer a vision of how things were or are or should be. Often that vision needs to be assessed critically, not just swallowed whole or taken for granted," shared Andrew.

"There is still something unique about viewing on a large screen and, especially, viewing with others. Somehow anything funny becomes funnier; anything moving becomes more emotionally intense. Perhaps it is because we are social animals?

"The benefit of having a festival is you will often encounter at least one rewarding film that's outside the range of what you would normally choose. Seeing a number of films over a single weekend encourages people to compare and contrast.

"Festivals focussed on a particular nation (in our case Australia) reveal a lot about its values and anxieties and cultural shifts. Festivals also facilitate sharing ideas and hearing directly from film-makers."

But the AFF is not just for dedicated film buffs, hence the inclusion of films that young people will appreciate. "We want to encourage those who are interested in making films to come along," said Andrew. "This year the Festival includes examples of local work including short films made by University of the Sunshine Coast students."

One of the guests, film-maker Jaina Kalifa, will be sharing his knowledge of documentary making. Jaina was born in the Obi Obi Valley and grew up in Maleny - his parents, Marc and Juliette Kalifa, still live here.

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MARCH 2020



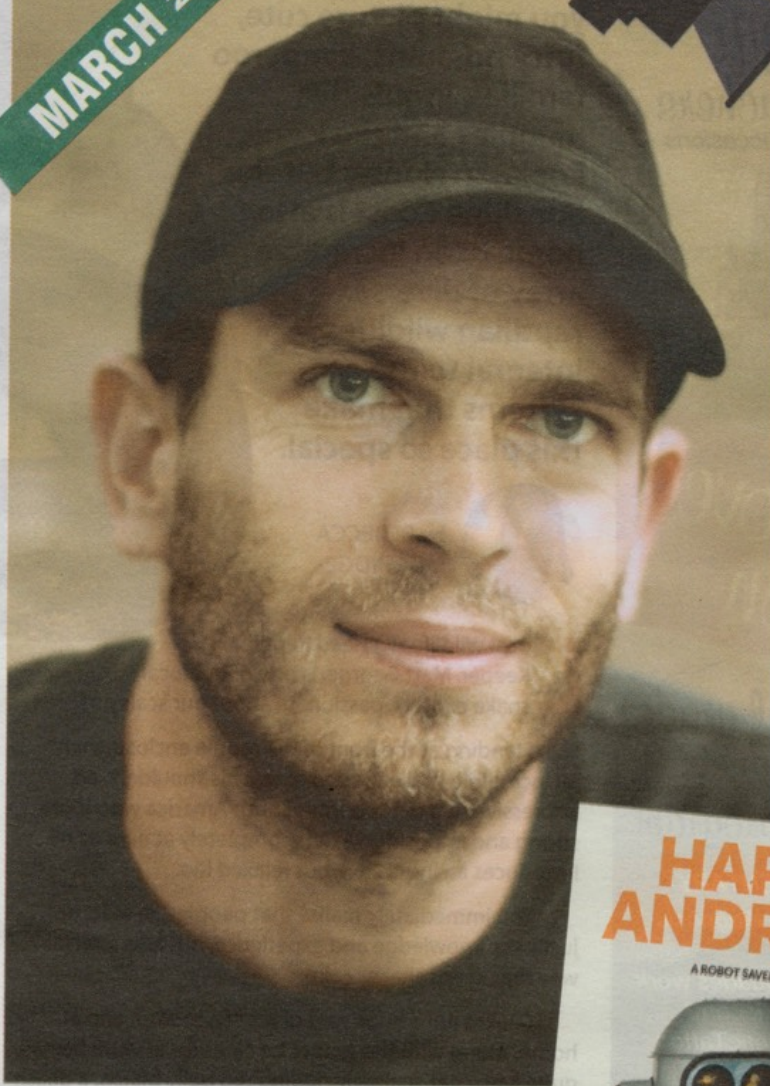
"Coming back to a Maleny Film Society screening as an adult and showing my own film is something really special. I'm looking forward to being there with my parents and seeing my film on the big screen with the local community."

Happy Android is a 25-minute documentary about a street performer called Paul Cooper, who has an unlikely ally in his ongoing battle with anxiety and depression – his robot, Tubby.

"Paul is actually an old friend of mine and making the film was a collaborative process with him," Jaina shared. "We've taken a bit of a stylised approach by turning Tubby into a character in the film, so we interview Tubby about Paul, which allows for some really interesting insights. The film offers a different take on mental health issues and shows how Paul's creativity has helped him to deal with the challenges he faces every day."

We're all really looking forward to this year's AFF which will be showcasing, not only the best of current Australian film, but also the best of our community, with support from local businesses, a fantastic team of volunteers, trainees from Neighbourhood Centre's *Skilling Queenslanders for Work* Program and students from Maleny High School.

So all-in-all, we believe this year's festival is going to be unique – it will be a real celebration of Australian identity and film-making – for all ages! 🎬



▲ Filmmaker Jaina Kalifa, who was born in the Obi Obi Valley, returns with his documentary, *Happy Android*

"I'm really excited to be bringing my film, *Happy Android*, to Maleny," said Jaina. "It's travelled all around the world to different film festivals and been broadcast on TV but it's really special to be playing it in the place where I grew up."

"As a kid I remember going to screenings at the Maleny Film Society with my parents and I'd fall asleep at their feet, on the floor of the community centre, while they watched the film."



▲ *Happy Android*, which is part of the Australian Film Festival weekend in Maleny

The Australian Film Festival runs from March 13 - 15, details on page 28.