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Award-winning Werewolf makes international debut at Berlinale

Cape Breton filmmakers Ashley McKenzie and Nelson MacDonald, cinematographer Scott Moore and actors Bhreagh MacNeil and Andrew Gillis are heading to Germany for their film's screening in the prestigious Forum program. Nova Scotia film Weirdos will play in the Generations program.

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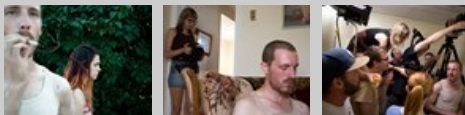
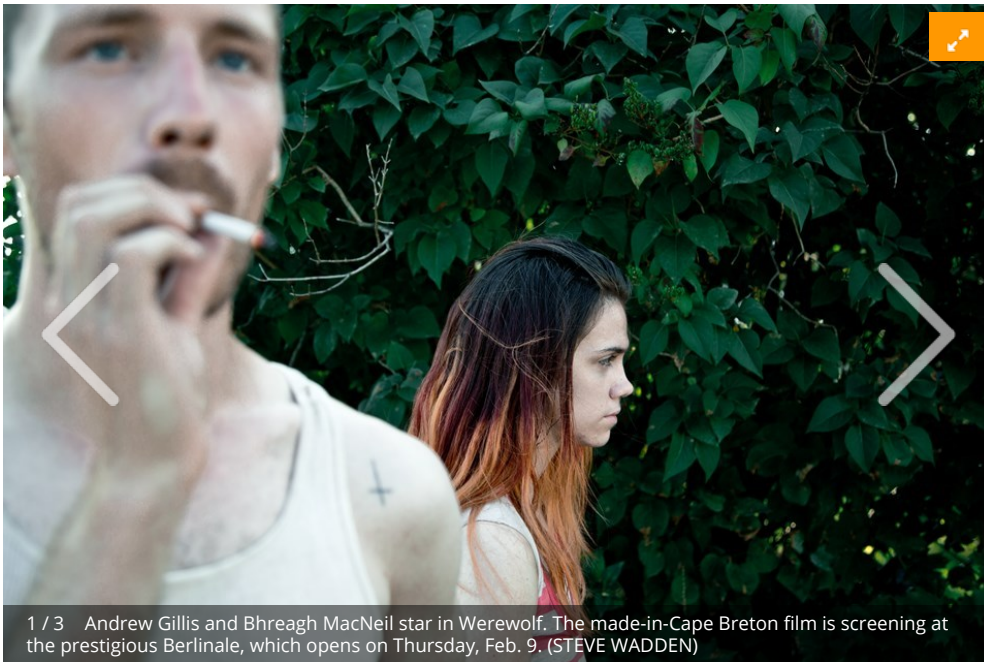
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Feb 5, 2017 11:57 AM by: Andrea Nemetz



A made-in-Cape Breton drama about a young couple struggling with substance abuse is making its international debut.

Werewolf screens at [Berlinale](#), Feb. 9 to 19 in Germany, where guests will include Richard Gere, Laura Linney, Robert Pattinson, Penelope Cruz, Catherine Deneuve and Sienna

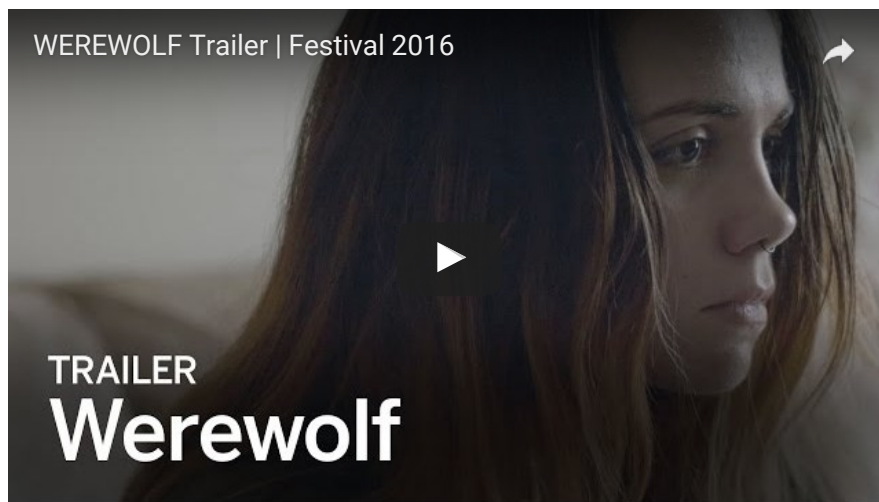
Miller.

"Going to Berlin might be the biggest honour for me and Ashley. Not a lot of films make it there," says Nelson MacDonald, who co-produced the film with director Ashley McKenzie through their company [Grassfire Films](#).

"We've had a lot of success in Canada, but to get into one of the Top 5 festivals in the world, to see how audiences respond, to be among really great filmmakers is a confidence builder. Companies pay more attention when you make an impact outside of our film market. There will be an opportunity for meetings and hopefully good things will come out of it."

McKenzie is particularly happy to be screening in the [Forum](#) section, described as "the most daring section of the Berlinale," where documentaries and feature films are given equal consideration and "straddle the line between art and cinema."

"We see ourselves in the tradition of filmmakers who started in Forum and have their films playing in Forum," she says, on a conference call with MacDonald from New Waterford, noting she is pleased to reach this place on her career trajectory.



McKenzie, MacDonald, cinematographer Scott Moore, and stars Bhreagh MacNeil and Andrew Gillis will fly to Germany to attend the Feb. 10 premiere. They will be among a large Nova Scotia contingent as the filmed-in-Nova Scotia [Weirdos](#), based on a script by Cape Breton's Daniel MacIvor, is screening in the Generations program for children and young people. *Weirdos'* producer Marc Almon of Halifax and Brittany Kerr, who worked on both *Werewolf* and *Weirdos*, will be among those representing *Weirdos* at its Feb. 14 Berlin debut.

"I've known Marc a long time and it's cool to be sharing the experience with them. Both films were at TIFF (Toronto International Film Festival) and AFF (Atlantic Film Festival)," says MacDonald.

"The films are very different. I like to think we're representing Cape Breton and they're the mainland," says McKenzie.

[Werewolf](#), McKenzie's feature film directorial debut, was filmed in Whitney Pier, New Waterford, Mira, Glace Bay and Sydney in the fall of 2015.

The 32-year-old filmmaker has made four shorts including three that made their debut at TIFF: [Rhonda's Party](#), which won the 2011 CBC Short Film Face Off and was named one of Canada's top short films of 2011 by TIFF; [When You Sleep](#) (2012), which also screened at Cannes, among other festivals and 4 Quarters (2015), which also played VIFF, Stockholm IFF, Festival du nouveau cinema, and won Best Short Film at the Atlantic Film Festival. Her

other short film was Stray (2013).

McKenzie wrote the script for Werewolf, which tells the story of Blaise (Andrew Gillis) and Nessa (Bhreagh MacNeil) who go door-to-door offering to mow people's lawns, in between trips to the methadone clinic. McKenzie was inspired by a real-life couple she saw pushing a lawnmower in her native New Waterford.



New Waterford's Andrew Gillis was nominated for a Canadian Screen Award for best actor for his role in Werewolf. He won the best actor award at the 2016 Atlantic Film Festival. (STEVE WADDEN)

Werewolf made its debut at TIFF, won three top awards at AFF and won best Canadian feature at the Festival du Nouveau Cinema in Montreal.

It recently earned four Canadian Screen Award nominations: best actor for Gillis, best actress for MacNeil, best editing for McKenzie and best cinematography for Moore.

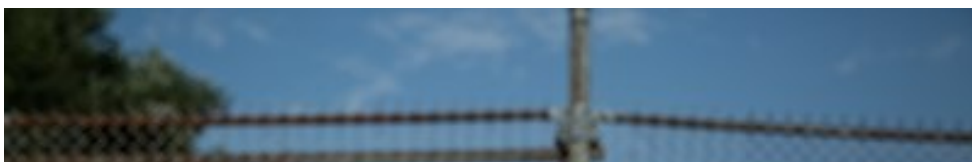
[See also: Nova Scotia-shot feature films Weirdos, Werewolf vie for Canadian Screen Awards](#)

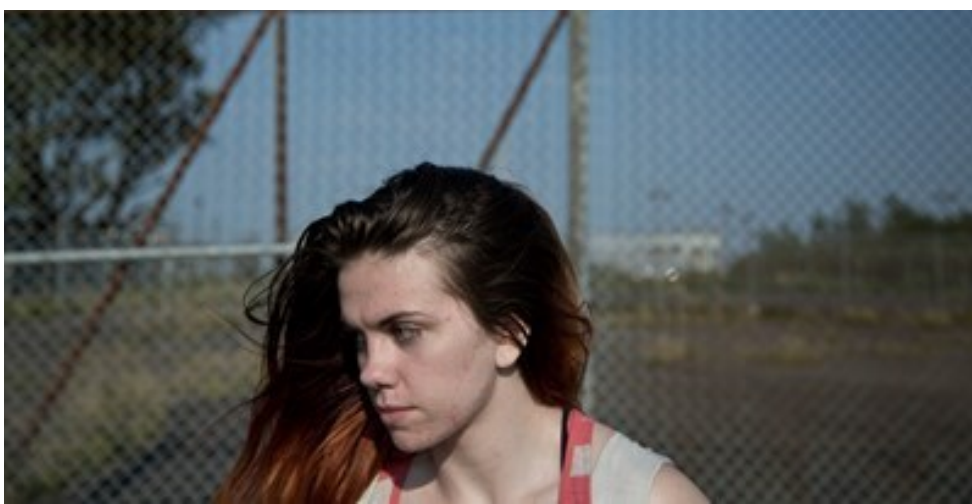
"I feel like it's a highlight of the film's journey so far, seeing Scott, Bhreagh and Andrew get nominated," says McKenzie, who is a first-time CSA nominee.

"Scott doesn't have a huge filmography and it's a testimony to his talent that his images are among the top in the country.

"When we screened the film in Montreal, the production designer told us every scene could be in a gallery."

In the feature film best actress category at CSAs, MacNeil is up against Emmy-winner Tatiana Maslany (Orphan Black), who she beat for best actress in a Canadian film at the [Vancouver Film Critics Circle Awards 2016](#). Big Pond native MacNeil, who made her debut in Werewolf, also won best actress at the 2016 Atlantic Film Festival. Gillis, of New Waterford, who co-wrote and starred in 4 Quarters, won best actor at AFF and McKenzie won best Atlantic director.





Bhreagh MacNeil, of Big Pond, who stars as Nessa in *Werewolf*, is nominated for a Canadian Screen Award for best actress. She was named best actress at the Atlantic Film Festival and best actress in a Canadian film at the Vancouver Film Critics Circle Awards. (STEVE WADDEN)

McKenzie notes what people seem to be responding to is the visual language of the film.

"It's very rigorous in the way it tells the story, more so than the average film. People think it is unique."

"And almost every review mentions the authenticity; it feels like part documentary, it draws people in," says MacDonald, noting the film is a more empathetic portrayal of drug dependency, more sensitive and gentle than other films about the issue.

[See also: McKenzie's feature debut *Werewolf* shows struggle of young Cape Bretoners](#)

Werewolf will have a theatrical release in France in mid-March with the film playing in 50 to 100 theatres and the filmmakers hope screening in Berlin will help get the word out.

MacDonald and McKenzie are also both cinephiles and are already excitedly planning the films they want to watch.

"We always make time to see films. A lot of people take the opportunity to meet people, but living in Sydney we don't get a chance to see many films by directors who have inspired us and to meet the filmmakers," says MacDonald.

McKenzie is looking forward to *The Party*, a new film by Sally Porter (Orlando), and *On the Beach at Night Alone* by Hong Sangsoo. MacDonald mentions *Somniloquies* a film in the Forum program by filmmakers from the Sensory Ethnography Lab at Harvard.

After Berlin, McKenzie is heading to [Glasgow Film Festival](#) where the film is part of a spotlight on Canada program, which also includes *Weirdos*. Canadian distributor [La Distributrice](#) will release *Werewolf* for a small theatrical run in Canada in March and it will also be available on iTunes. *Werewolf* will play in Halifax on March 3 as part of the Carbon Arc film series and in May at the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia as part of the [Canada's Top 10 Film Festival](#) touring program presented by TIFF.

MacDonald is proud of the fact *Werewolf* is set in today's Cape Breton, noting many movies filmed in or about Cape Breton are period pieces.

"And it's made by our friends and to go with our friends to one of the biggest festivals in the world makes it extra special."

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