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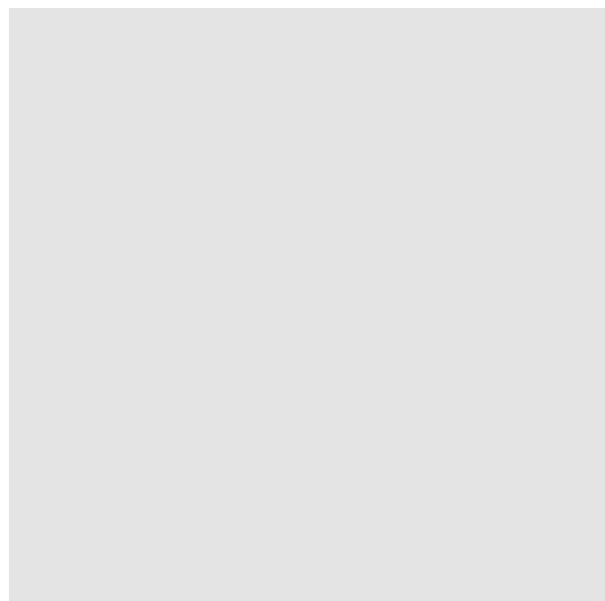


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WKU grad's film to premiere at Nashville Film Festival

By MICHEAL COMPTON mcompton@bgdailynews.com 12 hrs ago



Faith McQuinn

The Nashville Film Festival wraps up Saturday, a culmination of a 10-day event that has showcased filmmakers throughout the world.

One of the final films to premiere will feature some distinct connections to Western Kentucky University with 2001 WKU graduate Faith McQuinn's short "Ashes" making its premiere at 3 p.m. Saturday.

McQuinn's film is part of the festival's inaugural Actor's Challenge in which three filmmakers were given five actors randomly selected during an open casting call and asked to come up with a five-minute short using those actors. The filmmaker and actors did not meet until after casting and were given one month to complete the film.

McQuinn's crew includes another WKU graduate, Cody Duncam, who served as "Ashes" director of photography.

McQuinn, a Franklin, Tenn., native who is also a jury member for the screenwriting competition, said she was asked to be part of the Actor's Challenge in March.

"I'm super excited. That's such a big thing for me. I had a film in 2015 get into the festival. That was a great honor, but the idea of being asked to come and make a film to be in the festival was amazing and really cool," she said.

"Ashes" tells the story of a young woman named Odessa who, after a year away, returns home for a funeral only to realize the time away from her family has deepened old wounds.

McQuinn said she got the idea for the film last year after seeing photos of a friend burning furniture in a bonfire on her farm.

"I wrote to her and said, 'Jessica, if you are going to burn any more furniture please make sure I have a camera and a crew there,'" McQuinn said. "It had honestly been in the back of my head that I need to make a film where somehow the story gets around to me burning a piece of furniture. When this opportunity came up I said, 'OK, I think I can make this work.'"

The film's title stems partially from that visual, but also from other themes throughout the five-minute short – a decision that McQuinn said was intentional.

“I love playing with titles,” McQuinn said. “I even play with names. My main character’s name is Odessa and Odessa actually means warrior and fighter. So the whole idea was that it was kind of this person that fights her family.”

McQuinn has been interested in filmmaking since eighth grade and credits her time at WKU with helping nurture that passion.

“I realized while I was at Western that I loved editing, because under (WKU professors) Steve White and Cory Lash I did a bunch of editing projects,” McQuinn said. “So many of my classmates hated sitting in a dark room and sitting in front of a computer for long periods of time. I had no problem with it and I loved doing it. I realized I wanted to get into filmmaking way before I went to school, but I didn’t know what kind of filmmaking. I realized I wanted to be an editor when I was there.”



After working on live television and independent films in Kentucky and Tennessee, McQuinn moved to California and received her master of fine arts from Chapman University.

McQuinn remained in California for several years working in post-production at various production houses, including the company behind “Top Chef” Magical Elves, before moving back to Tennessee.

She now works as a freelance video editor and writer as well as a part-time film instructor at The Art Institute of Tennessee and Middle Tennessee, and started the production company Observer Pictures in 2015.

“When I moved back here to Nashville I was getting more work and various projects,” McQuinn said. “Everything I was doing in L.A. was for reality television and syndicated television, but back here I got the opportunity to do music videos and documentaries and commercials. The Nashville community when I moved here was small, but it is getting so much bigger, so many opportunities for actors and filmmakers and writers to get together and make projects. We are all a really supportive community and I like that.”

“Ashes” premieres prior to the showing of the festival’s narrative grand jury winner. McQuinn said she hopes her film not only entertains, but perhaps serves as inspiration for her own students as well as aspiring filmmakers currently at WKU.

“I’m hoping it is a sold-out crowd,” she said. “It’s great to be like, ‘We went to school there. We wanted to do these things. That’s what we went to school for and look we are doing it.’ I really love telling my students that you can make things happen because so many times they think they don’t have the money or they don’t have this. You just have to work really hard and you can scrap it together and find people that support you and make it happen.”

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