

Pixar animator, 'X-Men' producer among Judson film festival headliners

by Madhu Krishnamurthy, published in The Daily Herald, March 22, 2016



Pixar animator Matthew Luhn will speak this month during the 12th annual Imago Film Festival at Judson University in Elgin. *Courtesy of Judson University*

Pixar animator [Matthew Luhn](#), who helped create characters for the "Toy Story" movie franchise, "Monsters Inc.," "Cars" and "Finding Nemo," will headline Judson University's Imago Film Festival later this month.

The 12th annual [Imago Film Festival](#) runs March 29 to April 2 in Thulin Performance Hall in the Thompson Center, 1151 N. State St., Elgin. It showcases independent films dealing with faith issues, emphasizing image and story.

"We've tried to build on what we've done well before," said Terrence Wandtke, director of Judson's film and media program and festival director. "We've gotten more submissions than we've ever had."

In its first year, Judson's festival exclusively showcased student films. This year, of the more than 100 submissions from 15 countries, 18, mostly professional films, have been selected to be shown during the five-day festival.

"They are quality independent films that look at faith and ethics in a very broad way," Wandtke said. "The films that we showcase are not the ones that stereotypically fall into the category of Christian film. We try to broaden that (to) an expansive notion of what it means to live a religious life, to live an ethical life."

The festival kicks off with a showing of the film "Zero," produced by notable director Ridley Scott on March 29.



In this image released by Disney, Jessie, left, voiced by Joan Cusack, Buzz Lightyear, voiced by Tim Allen and Woody, voiced by Tom Hanks are shown in a scene from "Toy Story 3." Pixar animator Matthew Luhn, one of several animators who worked on the "Toy Story" movie franchise, will speak during this month's 12th annual Imago Film Festival at Judson University in Elgin. *AP Photo/Disney Pixar*

Luhn will talk about "Creating Stories with Heart," share his Christian faith and the journey that led him to discover his talents as a storyteller at 7 p.m. March 30. General admission for this event is \$6, and \$3 for Judson faculty, staff and students.

"He has these exciting ideas about creativity," said Wandtke, who chose Luhn as a festival headliner after reading an article in which he talked about the playfulness that adults often lose. "Pixar in general, if you look at what they do, they have this wonderful way of bridging the gap between adulthood and childhood, and not acting in a way that they are uniformly different from one another."

[Pixar Animation Studios'](#) stories focus on life's transitions that have broad appeal among adults, he added.

Other festival highlights include a 20-minute preview of Paramount Pictures' new film "Ben-Hur," releasing later in the summer/fall, on the evening of April 1. The studio is creating a special cut of the film that will feature producer Mark Burnett and Roma Downey, from the "Touched by an Angel" TV series.

Also showing April 1 is "The Return," created by Judson alum and film professor Matthew Bilen, who involved professional filmmakers and six Judson students in making the film, and the film "We Can't Live Without the Cosmos," which was nominated for an Oscar. Citizen Way, a contemporary Christian band, will perform that night in honor of a new album release.

On April 2, actor and film producer [Ralph Winter](#) will be on campus to receive the festival's Lifetime Achievement Award, given to an individual whose work has shaped the discourse on faith and ethics in the arts.

Winter, a devout Christian, produced four of the earlier "X-Men" franchise movies, "Fantastic Four" and "Fantastic Four: Rise of the Silver Surfer," and

several "Star Trek" movies from the 1980s. He is executive producer of "The Giver," "Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon: Sword of Destiny" just released on Netflix, and "The Promise" with Christian Bale, now in postproduction.

Winter will talk about his career in a retrospective interview. General admission for this event is \$10, and \$5 for Judson faculty, staff and students. Other festival awards also will be presented that night, which is a red carpet event for Judson students.

This year's festival represents the broad diversity of Christians in the arts, Wandtke said.

"Art is part of the process of people experiencing faith," he said. "We're trying to move beyond the standard expectations that people have for Christian film and to engage people."

For a full schedule of film festival events, visit imagofilmfestival.com.