

Imago Film Festival Wraps Up After Days of Spectacular Short Films, Music and Presentations

(ELGIN, IL - April 11, 2017) From Tuesday-Saturday, April 4-8, Judson University hosted the Imago Film Festival on its Elgin campus. The festival is designed to showcase independent films from around the world about faith and ethics dealing with the journey from brokenness to hope.

This year marked the 13th annual festival. It also marked a number of firsts: it was the first time the festival honored a Hollywood celebrity with the Lifetime Achievement Award who started his career teaching at Judson (David McFadzean); it was the first time the festival featured a film from Myanmar, or Burma (and it won the grand prize), as "My Life I Don't Want" did; and it was the first time the film festival partnered with Affirm Sony Films for the premiere screening of "All Saints," which featured the story of Karen refugees. This is an unintentional (albeit wonderful) connection to Judson University namesake Adoniram Judson, the first Protestant missionary sent from North America to preach in Burma.

"I am always encouraged by those who come to the film festival as guests and attendees," said Imago Film Festival Director Dr. Terry Wandtke. "Their insights provide me with lots of ideas and the interpersonal connects me with lots of hope. Moreover, I am thrilled by the way each year develops its own identity. Topics reoccur and themes emerge that imply something greater is at work at the fest."

On Tuesday, April 4, the festival opened with screenings of the first block of films in competition for the \$1,000 grand prize. The films included "The Next Door" (a crime film about missionaries in the wrong place) and "Life Coach" (a story about a motivational speaker confronting his own limitations). Several filmmakers introduced films, including the star of "The Key," who emphasized the responsibility of an actor to honestly represent his character and the material.



Wednesday, April 5, the festival continued with the presentation of the Imago Lifetime Achievement Award to producer David McFadzean ("Home Improvement," "What Women Want" and "Bernie" fame). Speaking in both chapel and at the fest, McFadzean shared the way

that being accepted completely was essential to his faith journey. In his career retrospective interview, McFadzean offered anecdotes about story development (such as how Elgin, Ill., served as the basis for the hometown of television series, “Roseanne”). Moreover, he discussed story as the essential thread that connects human beings as a way to make sense of frailty.

On Thursday, April 6, the festival continued with a discussion with filmmakers Eric Groth and T.J. Berden of ODB Films. Founding the company as a Catholic ministry that produced short videos, the filmmakers became committed to the artful presentation of faith seen with directors like Terrence Malick. This eventually led to the critically acclaimed independent film “*Full of Grace*” about the life of Mary after the death of Jesus and their current project on the apostle Paul. The remaining films in the festival competition were screened and included “Bruce” (a story about a father desperate to impress a son obsessed with Bruce Lee) and “One Word” (a film about the fight of a teenage refugee to express himself through performing art).



The Wistful Larks opened the evening with music on Friday, April 7. On this day, the fest premiered the Affirm Sony film, “*All Saints*,” about a Nashville pastor (starring John Corbett) who was told to close his small church but who opened it to refugees. After the film, Rich Peluso, Affirm Sony executive vice president, answered questions about the film. In addition to describing the production challenges that faced the film, he discussed his desire as a producer to make films that resonate with human longings for something greater (especially those that fall outside the model for the Hollywood blockbuster).



On Saturday, April 8, the festival came to a close with its elegant Red Carpet Celebration, complete with food, live music and a best-dressed contest. That One Band (winner of the Battle of the Band competition) played live music, and the evening ended with an awards ceremony and screenings of the festival-winning films. The grand-prize winner was “*My Life I Don’t Want*,” an animated film from Myanmar by director Nyan Kyal Say. The film follows the life of a girl dealing with a too-common experience of oppression of women in her culture. In a hand-drawn style that is both literal and symbolic, the film shared with the audience a creative and urgent

vision.

SAVE THE DATE: The 14th annual Imago Film Festival is tentatively scheduled for Tuesday-Saturday, April 3-7, 2018. More information can be found at www.imagofilmfestival.com.