

## Q + A



Above: Enich Harris (left) and Ben Warner, co-founders of Coast Film & Music Festival; top: a panel discussion at Hobie Surf Shop during a past year's festival



## Movie Magic

COAST FILM & MUSIC FESTIVAL HELPS CULTIVATE COMMUNITY WHILE HIGHLIGHTING CINEMA AND CONSERVATION. | By ASHLEY RYAN

While Laguna Beach is known for its art scene, Coast Film & Music Festival is incorporating even more of the local culture in its annual affair, combining creative cinema with elements of nature, conservation and adventure.

Co-founder Ben Warner moved to California from Colorado to work for Powder magazine. "It was a dream job for me as a young skier with big ideas," he says. He went on to launch Laguna Beach Magazine with Steve Zepezauer in 2007 and worked for the publication's parent company, Firebrand Media Inc., among other endeavors before eventually planning his first film festival.

Then known simply as Coast Film Festival, the inaugural iteration took place in 2019. Warner partnered with Enich Harris and Ben Classen, both marketing professionals, to make it happen. "We honestly had no idea how much work it would be and continue to learn with each event," Warner notes.

The types of films presented range from feature narratives and stories of exploration to behind-the-scenes looks at action sports, with the themed Filmmaker Showcases taking place at the Festival of Arts grounds. Over the years, the film festival has collaborated with a number of local businesses and organizations, including SchoolPower, The Ranch at Laguna Beach, KX FM radio station, Troy Lee Designs and many others—including, to bring it full circle, Firebrand Media.

This year, the festival takes place Nov. 9-13, with an additional online iteration Nov. 17-27, and Warner will introduce the Coast Film Foundation, which will create an endowment to support emerging filmmakers and their projects. Read on to discover more about the event and what it has to offer moviegoers.

### LAGUNA BEACH MAGAZINE: What inspired you to start the Coast Film & Music Festival?

**BEN WARNER:** There was a need for a fresh arts and entertainment event for locals and to attract younger visitors to Laguna Beach. Additionally, our city has an incredible history centered not only in the arts, but also in conservation, and there wasn't an adventure film festival in the region. ... We started a platform that recognizes creators and change-makers to amplify their vibrant stories and promote change through the power of film. ... We wanted to help grow the local film culture, ... provide support for future filmmakers and inspire young explorers. Hopefully it will become a legacy event that has a positive impact on the community for many years to come.

### LBM: What films do you typically present?

**BW:** We balance simplicity, innovation, art and nature in our programming. We showcase about 70 short and feature-length,

nonfiction films that have inspirational stories to entertain, inform and inspire audiences. ... When selecting films, we look for uniqueness and impact. We consider what our aspirational audience and what the core enthusiasts would want to watch and balance the two.

### LBM: How do you select films to show?

**BW:** Films are chosen by a jury who watch all of the films submitted and share comments and feedback to get to the final list. It's an arduous process; last year we watched over 375 films. ... We give nine awards and started including cash [prizes] ... last year.

### LBM: How is music being incorporated this year?

**BW:** Something new for this year's event is the addition of more live music on Saturday and Sunday afternoons. We feel music is a great way to entertain festivalgoers, share stories and build community. Laguna Beach resident Matt

Costa and his friends played [in 2021] ... and people were blown away.

### LBM: What can guests expect from this year's event?

**BW:** Guests can expect to be entertained by inspiring films and speakers through the weekend. Additionally, new events this year include the launch of our ... student program [with films by children in grades 6-12] on Saturday morning, live music at the main stage on Saturday and Sunday afternoons, the Follow The Light surf photography awards on Saturday and organized outdoor experiences for the adventurers.

### LBM: What are some of your favorite films from past years?

**BW:** A few of the most memorable have been the West Coast premiere of "The Alpinist," which went on to win a ... [Sports] Emmy. Also notable are "Waterman," "Girls Can't Surf," "Torn," "Fire on The Mountain" [and] "Voice

Above Water." "Kiss The Ground," the film that sparked the regenerative farming movement, was [also] a standout.

### LBM: What about speakers?

**BW:** Max Lowe, Chris Burkard, Pete McBride, Greg Long, Dana Frankoff, Greg MacGillivray, Jeremy Jones, two-time Olympian Elena Hight, Troy Lee, ... youth ski phenom Kai Jones and his dad, filmmaker Todd [Jones], and ... others.

### LBM: Anything else to add?

**BW:** It is important to include stories about sustainability and conservation. ... Many films and topics include stories about the power of nature and stewardship of the planet for future generations. ... The event is plastic-free and we work hard to minimize our impact. Each year, we have donated about 5% of our proceeds to nonprofit organizations, including 1% for the Planet, Laguna Canyon Foundation, Surfrider [Foundation], Protect Our Winters and others. ■



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