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# New Toronto festival to celebrate fantasy films

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Toronto will play host to fantasy fans from around the world this weekend, as the Fantasy Worldwide International Film Festival launches its inaugural event.

The three-day festival, which runs through Sunday, will showcase 31 films from six continents at Toronto's Bloor Cinema. The lineup includes feature-length films, documentaries, animation, shorts and "a kaleidoscope of talent," festival founder Johanna Kern told CBC Arts Online.

Highlights of the event include *Moongirl*, the latest animation from Henry Selick, director of *The Nightmare Before Christmas* and *James and the Giant Peach*, and *Lord of the Brush*, a documentary biography of Canadian artist John Howe, who helped bring to life J.R.R. Tolkien's world in Peter Jackson's Oscar-winning *Lord of the Rings* film trilogy.

Organizers tried to program a wide-ranging lineup, from thought-provoking commentary to silly spoofs.

"We keep forgetting that fantasy is fun. ... It doesn't have to be serious," Kern said.

A fantasy film director and producer, Kern began searching for international film festivals dedicated to the genre about a year and a half ago. She discovered about 16 events but found that most tended to focus on horror or science fiction – few explored sub-genres like world mythology, magical realism, historical fiction or legends, she said.

Planning for the festival began in earnest in March and Kern said the international response has been overwhelming, with "tons of submissions from around the world."

She attributed this enthusiasm to the fact that the film community's spotlight is usually on big budget, Hollywood-style fantasy or science fiction epics like *Lord of the Rings*, *Star Wars* or *The Matrix*, while independent films are overlooked.

With the festival dedicated to both low- and high-budget films, organizers of the inaugural event are expecting to fill up Toronto's Bloor Cinema this weekend, having received ticket inquiries from filmmakers and audience members in Canada, the U.S. and overseas.

Kern's goal is to continue forging relationships with fantasy filmmakers worldwide and bring even more to Toronto for another event next year, which she would like to see extended past three days.

"We were not able to screen many great films because of the time limitations. We had more submissions than we could ever dream of," she said. "These are profound stories that haven't been showcased before.

"We hope to grow, we hope to attract even more filmmakers and be able to make this an international, annual event on a really huge scale."

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