

CINEMA from page 7A

The risk for City Lights is that locals who can't wait for a movie such as "Green Book" to finally make its way to Florence go to Eugene to see the film.

And sometimes studios flat out refuse to allow a movie to play in Florence.

"That's one of the more frustrating elements for this business in Florence for us," Falter said. "We thought that we wouldn't have any competition, so we would be able to show whatever we want. But it's really a matter of proving to distributors that we have an audience for that film."

Falter brought up the genre of faith-based films.

"For instance, 'Run the Race' was a faith-based film we showed a few months ago," he said. "We had a total of 31 people come the entire week. And that was three or four showtimes a day. Those are the type of comparables that distributors look at and decide whether or not to allow to show the film. Typically distributors look at grosses before they give a film to a certain theater."

If nobody comes to see one faith-based film in Florence, distributors won't bother to send future ones here.

Earlier this month, City Lights began receiving requests for the faith-based film "Unplanned."

"Unplanned" had a larger than expected opening, and nationally there's been a lot of interest in the film," Falter said.

Because of that, the distributor was willing to show the film in Florence. While it initially did well, with local church groups purchasing tickets at a group rate, the rest of theatrical run was small.

"The other 21 screenings never had more than a handful, and

often no patrons," Falter said. "Thus, there was no potential for a second week of business."

But "Unplanned" was an R-rated faith-based film about abortion, which may have turned off many viewers.

"Breakthrough," which opens in Florence on May 3, is a less controversial film, but it appeals to the faith-based audience," Falter said. "It's based on a true story of a mother's prayers and her son's miraculous survival. It will be intriguing to watch. Will the fact that it has a more broad-based appeal work more effectively in Florence, even if nationally 'Unplanned' did much more business?"

The success of "Breakthrough" could help determine the future of faith-based films in Florence.

"We're in a position right now where the community can help determine and tell us what niche films they're interested in seeing," Falter added.

Ultimately, that's what will help smaller theaters such as City Lights survive — audiences saying what they want to see, and going to see them. And sometimes, seeing a movie that someone generally isn't interested in can actually help a community come together.

**'Film is an empathy machine'**

"I make a living out of watching documentaries for one of my other jobs," Falter said. He helps choose movies for an annual documentary festival in Bellingham, Washington. "There's just some films that I don't think I'm going to be interested in, and I don't really want to see that film."

However, as the person in charge of picking the festival's line up, Falter has to watch hundreds of submitted films to see which should be shown.

"At the end of two hours, I'll be tear strewn and think how lucky I am that I got to see that film, and it shined a light on something I didn't know anything about," he said.

"People should try and see different films," Tive added. "Just like trying different types of food, or when you go to see an art museum and you look at a variety of things. You don't know what you're going to like or don't like until you expose yourself to it. It's about people having access and a feeling of safety. There's a place where you can try something new and different and it's not going to be frightening or overwhelming."

Falter brought the issue back to "Unplanned," which was considered controversial when it was released nationally. People called for it to be boycotted, and even City Lights got a few complaints for showing it.

"I think it's important for us to provoke ourselves," he said. "The same week we showed 'Unplanned,' we also showed 'Before the Flood,' which is about climate change. I think that climate

change is something that some people feel is politically loaded, but you can watch a film and not be ideological, with you going into your corner and me going in my corner. It's something we can talk about. I think controversy, at its best, can inspire discussion. It can inspire examination. If people are open and interested in other points of view, then there are ways that we can talk to each other in this time of political and ideological difference. I think the natural human instinct is to talk to each other and try to understand each other."

It's the conversation after the film that's the most important thing.

For example, Falter mentioned "Green Book," which was heavily criticized upon release for not accurately portraying the events the film was based on. Many refused to see it based on that alone.

"Based on true events' is one of the great lies of narrative film, and 'Green Book' was a fascinating example of that," he said. "That film, and the controversy that it sparked, led to so much more discussion about race and

about that period of time."

Falter pointed to the many radio and newspaper articles about the controversy that came out after the film was released. If the film hadn't been released, and the controversy hadn't occurred, he most likely wouldn't know anything about the actual story behind "Green Book."

"For me, watching the film, and then hearing about it on the news, my takeaway is a much richer one than if I had just skipped the film. My wish is that we can use our skills to think critically about everything we see. I don't believe that not having those conversations is the answer. I think we plod along in this human story, and we try to make corrections when necessary, and we try to talk to each other. And I think films inspire talking to each other more than not. It's amazing how much you


can learn through extended examinations that films produce. Film is an empathy machine."

Whether it's talking about the conclusion of a beloved superhero franchise, hot topic issues such as abortion and climate change, or the complexities of history and race relations, seeing a movie and talking about it afterward are a safe conduit to bring people together, according to Tive.

"It seems to me more important that people watch films in a theater in the physical presence of other human beings, whether they like it or not, or know them or not," she said. "How isolated we are as a society. There's so much division, and we've lost a sense of how to talk to one another. Film provides that safety to bring people together and talk to one another. And that's something our society desperately needs."


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