

Dark Sunrise to haunt the big screen at Village Playhouse May 9



By Nate Smelle

On Tuesday, May 9 the Highway 7 Film Festival is hosting a special screening of the film *Dark Sunrise* at the Bancroft Village Playhouse.

Written and produced by Greg Gibbons and the film's director Hilary Phillips, *Dark Sunrise* was shot primarily at the Sunrise Lodge on Baptiste Lake during the summer of 2015. Taking advantage of the old style, rustic charm of the lakeside resort that was originally built in the 1940s, Phillips said the location helped give the film the "creepy" feel they were aiming to create. Although they did some of their casting auditions in Toronto, she said they also knew that there was a vibrant local theatre community in Bancroft that they could draw on.

"We tapped into the local talent through that community and they helped us audition some wonderful character actors for the film, including most of the children," explained Phillips. "Those children were also the voices in our creepy lullaby theme song, beautifully crafted, directed and recorded locally. Musical talent runs deep in Bancroft, we were so fortunate to have these contributors create the tone and feel of the soundtrack."

According to Phillips, the film's local connection didn't stop there. At the time, she said the newly minted Bancroft Brewery donated

the beer to help them deal with the 'tricky' business of product placement in filmmaking. In addition, she said they had some cool drone work done by working with a local real estate company.

'We could not have felt more supported by the community,' said Phillips.

As amazing as the experience of shooting the film in North Hastings was, Phillips said there were some challenges. The biggest challenge, she said was shooting 105 scenes in just 17 days and nights. Despite the magnitude of this obstacle to overcome, Phillips said it was challenging to keep the 60+ cast, crew, parents and supporters of the film happily fed and watered.

Providing further insight into some of the challenges and triumphs they faced during the filmmaking process, Phillips said 'As the actors and crew got to know one another we found our rhythm and scenes were flying 'in the can' towards the end of shooting. Oh right, the mosquitoes, they were a big challenge!'

Phillips and Gibbons returned the following year, in the same season to match footage, film retakes, shoot some new scenes, and 'B' roll scenes without actors, such as sunrises and night skies. Noting how slow of a process indie filmmaking is, she said over the next several years their industry colleagues stepped up and added their expertise in editing, special effects, sound design, musical score, colour, and the 'zillion' technical bits that put the polish on the raw footage.

'They worked on weekends, between gigs, whenever they could find the time,' Phillips said.

'With all that input and collaborative energy the film began to take shape and find its voice as a dark fantasy thriller woven together with mythology and magic and a whole lot of creepy!'

According to Phillips, Dark Sunrise was finally finished in August 2022. Since the film was completed last summer, she said they have entered it into several indie film festivals. One festival 'the Austin Revolution Film Festival' awarded Dark Sunrise with the Best Foreign Film award. In addition, Phillips said the film also shared the Best Foreign Director award with an Australian film.

'We could not be more thrilled for the Dark Sunrise team!' Phillips told Bancroft This Week.

'Film festivals are important to the other side of filmmaking, the marketing, so we hope to get into a few more as the year progresses.' When asked what's next for the award winning filmmakers, she added, 'Well, Dark Sunrise was written as a trilogy so...'

Expressing her gratitude to the local community for everyone's support during the production, Phillips said they are looking forward to returning to Bancroft for the screening of Dark Sunrise at the Village Playhouse. On May 9, she said there will be a matinee at 2 p.m., as well as a second viewing at 7 p.m. Prior to the second screening that day, Phillips said they plan to discuss the film with the audience at 6:30 p.m. As a special treat for local filmgoers, she said they also plan to screen their short film Getting Late at the event.

For more information on the film Dark Sunrise, as well as the cast and crew, visit their website at: www.darksunrisefilms.com.

To purchase tickets for the Bancroft screening of Dark Sunrise, and learn more about the Highway 7 Film Festival visit: www.villageplayhouse.ca/tiff-film-circuit.