

COLUMNIST

HUNT: 'Important' film to close festival



Fredericton-born film director, writer and editor Jon Mann will watch his film, *You Can Call Me Roger*, from the fourth row of the auditorium at Tilley Hall on the UNB campus Sunday night as the Silver Wave Film Festival comes to a close. Photo: Submitted/Bill Hunt

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Bill Hunt | Special to Brunswick News

Fredericton-born filmmaker Jon Mann's film, *You Can Call Me Roger*, is the Sunday night finale at the 22nd annual Silver Wave Film Festival, which has been running at Fredericton locations and virtually since Thursday – 61 online, 54 in person.

Mann is the writer, director and editor of the picture which is part profile of 75-year-old Roger Augustine, the Assembly of First Nations regional chief for New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island, part history lesson in the fight for the rights of First Nations people, and part hopeful blueprint “for a better Canada.”

“We wanted to close our festival with Jon's film as it's such an important film considering its subject matter and focus,” said festival chief organizer Cat LeBlanc. “We wanted audiences to leave the festival reflecting on the film's themes, dialogue, and message to the community.”

It's the cleanup spot in the Silver Wave batting order, if you will, an impressive accomplishment for the young man who has already built a solid dossier – 13 writing and 11 directing credits to date.

He's appeared in front of the camera too: a diabetic, he represented the Canadian Diabetes Association at the 2002 NHL Awards. But his preference is the director's chair.

He wears his heart on his sleeve – well, his left arm, actually. Among his tattoos is a film reel.

His stories are of the underdog: the union man in *Drink 'Em Dry*, which won top small budget film at Silver Wave a decade ago. There have been others and there will be more, but right now, this is his opus.

Even Mann isn't sure how to categorize it. The most chilling thing: it's not fiction.

“It's not a biopic. It's just a really good story.” he said.

“Chief [Augustine] is the through line, and trying to use him, and his character, and who he is and what he's been through, running away from a residential school, to being an Indian day school survivor ... using his life as an example of what the formative years since the invasion 400 years ago, and that relationship between the Indigenous and non-indigenous in Canada, and how using Roger's life and career will change the next 400 years.”

Suffice to say they are 77 powerful minutes, beginning with a Bugs Bunny cartoon in which horrific stereotypes are underlined, and ending with author Ken Coates, who wrote a book entitled *A Global History of Indigenous Peoples: Struggle and Survival*, saying Chief Augustine “has spent his entire adult life extending a hand in friendship. If I had one bit of advice for every non-Indigenous person watching this it would be ... reach back. That hand is extended in friendship ... reach out to that hand and please, please don't let go. Because that is the future of Canada.”

Mann did all the interviews – 35 in all, including one with former prime minister Paul Martin. Over the course of filming came the discovery of 215 bodies on the grounds of a residential school in Kamloops, B.C.

“It turned into a much larger story than we originally anticipated,” said Mann.

It gave him an education and a perspective he didn't get growing up as a kid in Nashwaaksis, a graduate of Leo Hayes High School, or even from Acadia University or the New York Film Academy.

It screens Sunday night at 7 p.m. in the theatre at Sir Leonard Tilley Hall on the UNB campus.

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