

Celestial Cinema for the Soul

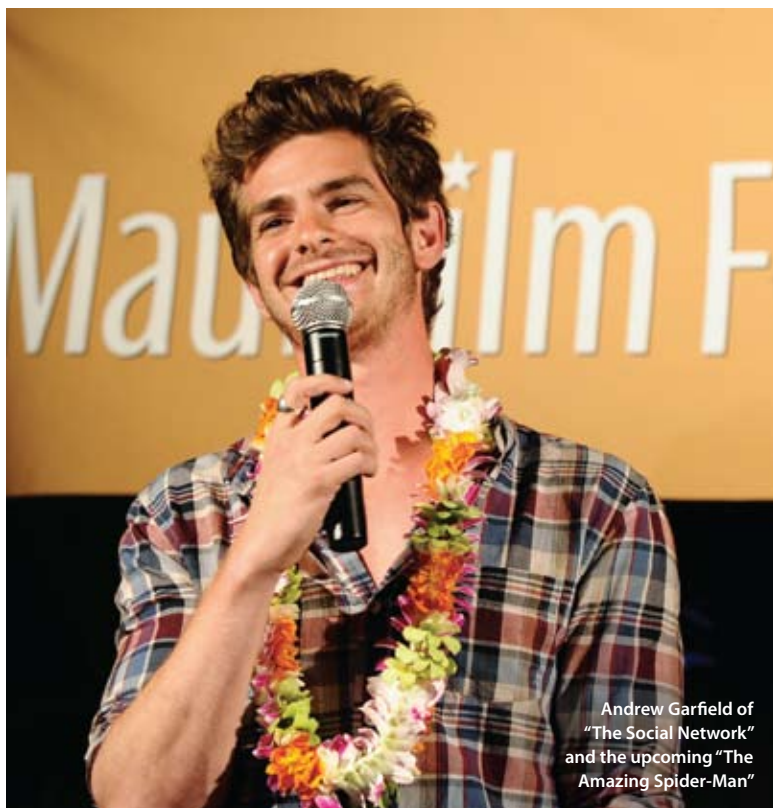
Stars in every form light up the Maui skies

By **DONNE DAWSON**





The Filmmakers Panel at
Wailea Beach Marriott
Resort & Spa



Andrew Garfield of
"The Social Network"
and the upcoming "The
Amazing Spider-Man"

The medium of film is one of the most powerful forms of communication in the world, and there is no better venue for this art form than the Maui Film Festival at Wailea. Consider this scenario: In the distance, the magnificent slopes of Haleakala. Around you, the breathtaking Pacific Ocean. Above and before you, starry nights and inspiring films — eye candy in every direction. It's no wonder this jewel of a film festival, now in its 13th year, is reputed to be one of the most compelling festivals in the world.

To the inspiring location of Wailea, festival organizers have added a brilliant menu of events to anchor the five-day festival. It takes place every June in this premier oceanside community on Maui's sunny south shore. The festival is jam-packed with star-studded gatherings: celebrity tributes, the ever-popular Taste of Wailea, Taste of Chocolate, Starry Night MoonDance, and thought-provoking film seminars to stimulate the creative mind. All of this takes place at some of the most sought-after resort properties: the Four Seasons Resort Maui at Wailea, Hotel Wailea, Grand Wailea, The Fairmont Kea Lani, Maui, and Wailea Beach Marriott Resort & Spa.

It's hard not to feel like a rock star in this environment of glamour, talent and inspiration. But the festival's true secret lies in the quality of its programming and its premier event, the Celestial Cinema at Wailea. The allure of Maui is another key element: Many Hollywood elite either live on the island or vacation there over the holidays. And what drives the festival, says founder Barry Rivers, is its goal of raising awareness "as to what cinema could be and how positive stories can create social change."

Don King, a film festival habitué and one of Hawai'i's preeminent surf cinematographers, is one of countless Celestial Cinema fans. "It's the best venue in the world to see a movie," he says. "Out on the grass with hundreds of people, under the stars, on a massive screen with awesome sound. It doesn't get any better. It's what Hawai'i is all about. I don't think there's any place in the world that can compete with that." King has attended the film festival to help present big-wave films he's shot, including "All Aboard the Crazy Train," "Riding Giants," and "Step Into Liquid."

FirstLight: Academy Screenings on Maui highlights Oscar-worthy films that otherwise would not be accessible to the people of Maui. In the current cycle, Rivers screened more than 50 films, including "Hugo," "The Descendants," "The Artist" and "The War Horse." These films are among the festival titles that earned a total of 75 Academy Award nominations.

Another superlative: The Maui Film Festival, according to Rivers, is the only festival "in the known universe" with an official astronomer on staff. Each



Olivia Wilde receives an award.

night at the Celestial Cinema, award-winning Harriet Witt takes the audience of nearly 2,000 people (relaxed on their blankets and beach chairs) on a tour of the night sky. In her soothing voice, she expertly weaves science and Hawaiian culture into a one-of-a-kind experience. In the words of one observer, “It makes one feel lucky to be alive and breathing on this planet.”

The films are projected on a 50-foot screen stretched across an inviting swath of green: the driving range “bowl” of the Gold and Emerald golf courses. Incredibly, the screenings are solar-powered, and have been for the past five years. “I like to say that we’re lit by the moon and powered by the sun,” he says.

The festival screens 35mm film as well as high-definition digital cinema in “ear-boggling” Dolby Digital 5.1 surround sound. It’s a feast for the senses, tak-

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ing movie-going to a whole new level. In the words of one well-known Hollywood director, “The Maui Film Festival is the only place in the world where a filmmaker can see his film with that many people at once,

and in a technologically perfect environment.”

The ability to project high-definition video also means that the celebrity tributes, formerly held in the hotel ballrooms, can now be experienced under the stars, with the stars, at the Celestial Cinema. Among the powerhouse list of celebrities past: Clint Eastwood, Claire Danes, Dennis Quaid, Joan Allen, Jake Gyllenhaal, Greg Kinnear, William Hurt and Helen Hunt. They attend this festival not so much for the accolades, but also to experience the beauty of the Valley Isle and the creative energy of this filmmaking jewel.

“The Maui Film Festival is built on the belief that great filmmaking is pure alchemy,” says Rivers. “When filmmakers choose to tell compassionate, life-affirming stories, they can turn the darkness into light. This belief—in the power of creativity to enlighten as well as entertain—gives the Maui Film Festival its character, its energy and its soul.”

Celestial Dining

Recognizing that food is the other half of cinema, Wailea Resort chefs display their own superstar talents at Taste of Wailea, the culinary version of Celestial Cinema. Foodies and film buffs gather under the stars in an atmosphere where everything dazzles — the food, the wine, the sunset, the celebrities, the good vibes everywhere. The 2012 Taste of Wailea, supported by Wailea Resort partners, takes place 4:30 to 7 p.m. June 16 at the David Leadbetter Private Golf Academy, near the driving range of Wailea’s Gold and Emerald golf courses.

Wailea’s chefs, sommeliers and wine purveyors pull out all the stops in their menus and pairings as they share the culinary red carpet. Each Taste of Wailea ticket includes Saturday night Celestial Cinema. For information: mauifilmfestival.com.

All Roads Lead to Chocolate

Think locally grown cacao beans, mocha caramel macchiato, dark chocolate ganache and more. Anyone who has experienced Taste of Chocolate will never stop longing for the next one. Four Seasons Resort Maui at Wailea hosts this event on its oceanfront lawn, 10 p.m. to midnight June 15, as a mouthwatering finale to an evening of Celestial Cinema.

One year there was a chocolate fountain, another year a mini-doughnut maker. Designer chocolate is a staple, with a dash of vanilla shortbread, white chocolate mousse, or a Godiva chocolate cocktail for an extra kick. Themes vary each year, and there are always surprises. But when you’re oceanfront under Maui skies with chocolate at your fingertips, life couldn’t get any better. For information: mauifilmfestival.com.



Taste of Wailea at the film festival



Four Seasons Resort Maui’s Tyson Kubo at Taste of Chocolate.