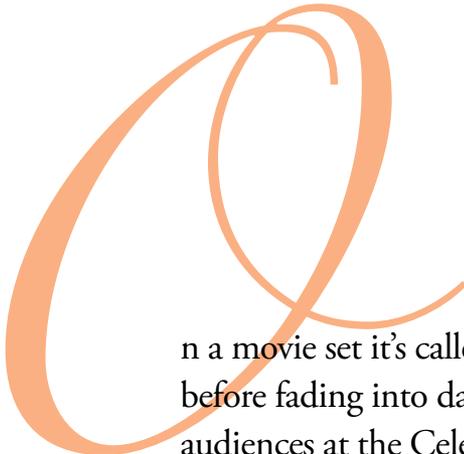


# Maui Film Festival at *Wailea*

The Magic Hour That Lasts Five Days

By Rick Chatenever

As the sun sets in shades of orange over the Pacific, the screen lights up at the Celestial Cinema, and another Maui Film Festival is underway.



n a movie set it's called "magic hour." Bright afternoon sunshine dissolves into swirls of pastel twilight before fading into darkness. It's a soft, diffused light known to Hollywood cinematographers as well as to audiences at the Celestial Cinema, the outdoor showpiece of the Maui Film Festival at Wailea.

When Robert Trent Jones Jr. created Wailea's world-class Gold and Emerald golf courses, he didn't realize he was also laying the foundation for the most sublime open-air movie theater on the planet.

Its commanding, 50-foot-wide screen is dwarfed by Maui's majestic volcano, Haleakalā, behind it. In the other direction, Wailea's hillsides roll seductively down to the beach. Its gentle, natural amphitheater slowly fills with thousands of blankets, beach chairs, and bodies, forming an impromptu jigsaw puzzle on the grass. The Dolby Sound System is crisp and clear as night descends.

And then the stars come out.

Fourteen years ago, Maui Film Festival creator and director Barry Rivers connected the dots between the glimmering stars in the sky and the human beings also known as "stars," whose faces would fill that big screen. He envisioned a festival with a resident astronomer, along with A-list filmmakers to honor each year.

"This festival is really about creativity," said actress Virginia Madsen, recipient of its Navigator Award in 2008. "It was so cool to watch the movie last night...in a

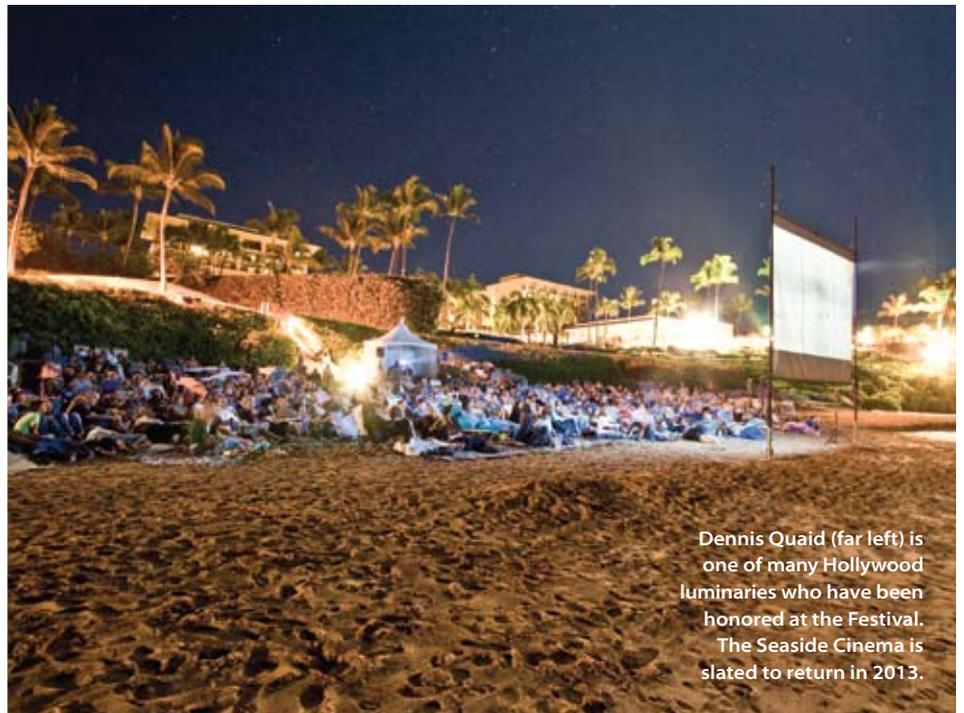
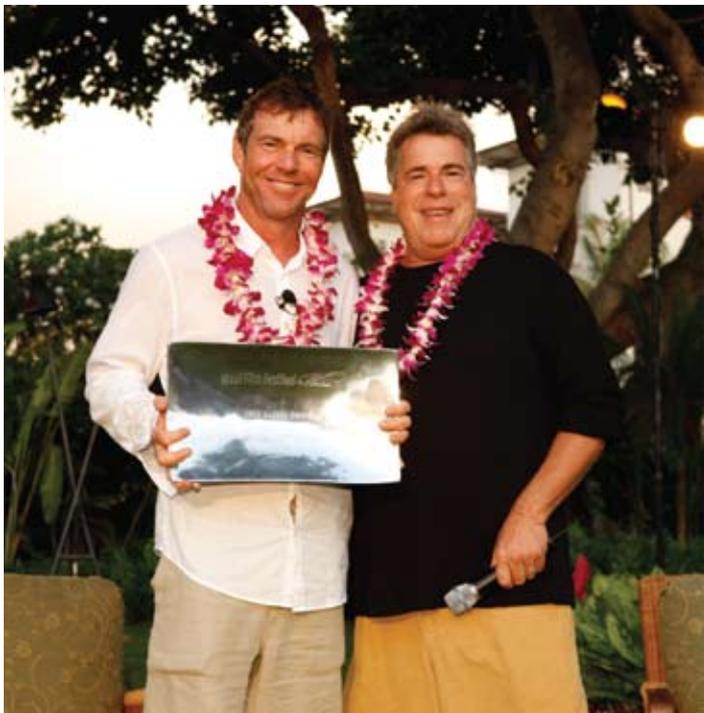
golf cart! The clouds moved out and the stars appeared above us. It just got you in a frame of mind that all things are possible."

Along with the films, the star tributes, and filmmaker panels, the five-day festival (returning June 12-16, 2013) is about having a good time, Wailea-style. Aloha wear is the dress code at culinary feasts and star-studded parties that take place throughout the resort.

At press time, plans were underway for the return of the Seaside Cinema this year. Formerly known as the Sand Dance Theater, at night moviegoers watch eclectic films on Wailea Beach; by day, the projection tent turns into the Seaside Cinema Lounge, a popular gathering place to talk story with visiting film artists.

Studio hits, indie favorites, shorts, and documentaries are part of the mix. Surfing odysseys and music concerts are staples in what has been described as "a jewel box festival," as though its assortment of films were a collection of sparkling gems.

Besides picking the movies, Rivers "reinvents" the festival each year. On tap for this June is the revival of the Father's Day Concert & Picnic; the "Cinema-centric Sand



Dennis Quaid (far left) is one of many Hollywood luminaries who have been honored at the Festival. The Seaside Cinema is slated to return in 2013.



Virginia Madsen (left) received the Maui Film Festival's Navigator Award in 2008. Taste of Wailea is always one of the most popular Festival events.

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Sculpture Contest” on Wailea Beach; and an “evolved” Starry Night MoonDance.

Chocolate aficionados will be happy to learn the Four Seasons’ Taste of Chocolate will return. And gastronomes are already salivating over Saturday’s Taste of Wailea, where the island’s top chefs serve their signature dishes from al fresco booths at twilight on the hill above the Celestial Cinema.

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Not bad for what Rivers laughingly calls “the most remote film festival on earth, outside of the Arctic.”

He and his wife, Stella, launched Maui Film Festival 14 years ago as a series of weekly screenings at the Maui Arts & Cultural Center’s (MACC) Castle Theater, dedicated to “compassionate storytelling and life-affirming filmmaking.”

Screenings at the MACC are still part of the June schedule, but it’s the unique character of the properties of the Wailea Resort Association that have imprinted the festival’s personality as a unique marriage of Hollywood glitz, surfer fearlessness, beach culture, and laid-back Maui hospitality, all tied together with a visionary imagination that Rivers likens to alchemy.

The honorees appear to step off the Celestial Cinema screen, from reel to real life. In our celebrity-centric society, Rivers prefers the term “luminaries, who give off as much light as their own heat. They bring their own sense of what’s important.”

Past award recipients have included iconic stars and part-time island residents

Clint Eastwood, Willie Nelson, and Woody Harrelson. The list is long on Oscar winners and nominees, including Geena Davis, Tim Burton, William Hurt, and Dennis Quaid. Pierce Brosnan (who has a home on Kaua’i) was recognized for his environmental activism along with his filmography.

Lately, the luminaries have gotten younger, their careers still on the rise. Festival appearances by Andrew Garfield in 2011, and Elizabeth Banks in 2012, coincided with their blockbusters “The Amazing Spider-Man” and “The Hunger Games.” Claire Danes, honored in 2007, and Zooey Deschanel in 2009, would become stars of game-changing TV series that are still huge hits. Olivia Wilde used her appearance two years ago to show a documentary she had co-produced in hurricane-ravaged Haiti.

From its inception, the festival has been on the cutting edge of technology. It signed on early for solar power for some of its energy needs. “We’re always looking for new ways for new tomorrows,” says Rivers. But he also points to the festival’s unique ability to harken back to forces ancient and primal, as it forges thousands of strangers each night into communities of shared emotions under the stars. “It’s about the story, the heartbeat,” he says. “It’s the telling of stories that take people to deeper and higher places.”

Getting to those deeper and higher places is so much easier at Wailea Resort, where “magic hour” lasts forever.

*For the latest news and more information about this year’s honorees, passes, tickets, and schedule, visit [www.mauifilmfestival.com](http://www.mauifilmfestival.com).*