EPSOM & EWELL TIMES
For the community, by the community. A not-for-profit service

3rd September 2026

ISSN 2753-2771

EPSOM & EWELL TIMES

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Spotlight on Epsom’s Film Festival

19 April 2023

Romy Sustar In conversation with the father of The Satisfied Eye International Film Festival (SEIFF), **Chris Hastings**:

When discussing film festivals, one thinks of the famous five festivals: Venice, Cannes, Berlin, Sundance and Toronto. However, you might not come up with Epsom when thinking about film festivals in England.

Q: Is there a film festival in Epsom?

A: **The Epsom Film Festival** is also known under the name **The Satisfied Eye International Film Festival** (SEIFF), and it was launched in 2018. The festival attracted international attention, and in 2020 SEIFF took place at the Odeon in Epsom just a week before the lockdown. 2021 was a year of uncertainties and lockdowns, so the team decided to plan ahead, especially after the **Picture House** announced its arrival in Epsom 2022. Unfortunately, unpredicted delays took place, and there is still no sign of Picture House opening its doors soon. The good news is that **Bourne Hall** kindly agreed to host the film festival, and we are grateful to be part of their exciting rebrand and relaunch between the **26th and 28th of May**.

Q: Why do you think Epsom needs a film festival?

A: In our first year, we carried out an audience survey to discover local likes and habits. Apart from finding out that Epsom’s two most desired things were a Primark and fewer potholes, we found that many people travel to Wimbledon, Kingston and Guildford for entertainment. I grew up in Hastings, like living in an episode of The Last of Us. The town completely reinvigorated and reinvented itself through arts and culture. Many towns and cities have done the same, with arts and culture driving regeneration. When you ask what Epsom is famous for, most people say Epsom Salts or the Derby. And nobody is coming to Epsom for the salts, and the Derby is one weekend yearly. So to have any sense of sustainability and to battle ever-changing shopping habits, there need to be events and attractions that draw people in. After our first year, we were rated in the top 100 festivals in the world so that we could be a part of that cultural change.

Q: Please share with us a few past SEIFF insights.

A: The festival always finishes with our gala red carpet awards ceremony, our chance to enjoy glitz and glamour. The awards ceremony is open to everyone, so we always get a mix of our filmmakers and festival goers and local people. It’s an excellent chance for anyone who has been to any of the screenings to come and meet some of the filmmakers and for the filmmakers to talk to their audiences. Generally, the audiences like to dress up for the occasion, and filmmakers, like I, dress down! They’re our mini Oscars with all the awards you’d expect and a few particular to SEIFF. We also have a People’s Choice award, which goes to the best film chosen by local people who are part of our judging panel. The People’s Choice is always the first event of the festival, where we screen 90 minutes of the most popular short films as voted by local filmgoers, and for instance, this year includes one of this year’s Oscar winners.

Q: How can Epsom support the Film Festival?

A: SEIFF is an entirely voluntary event run wholly by local volunteers, and local people’s excitement and enthusiasm help keep it growing. So, the most important thing is bums on seats and volunteers! We’re lucky to have a loyal following, but we want to grow because that will allow us to do more events and bring more fun and excitement to the borough!

Q: Any final thoughts?

A: Every year, some of our films end up at the Oscars or go on to secure big deals. While these are all independent shorts, feature films, documentaries and animation, the quality is phenomenal, and you’ll see some of the best films you’ve seen in your life. That’s why a festival like the Satisfied Eye International Film Festival exists. So, save the date and meet us in Bourne Hall, Spring St, Ewell, Epsom KT17 1UF, between the 26th and 28th of May.

Q: How would you describe Epsom with one word and why?

A: Prospect. Epsom is a bit like a rookie footballer or boxer. There’s huge potential and the possibility to be something special. It simply needs everyone to come together and help make that happen.

Q: Where can we find out more about the Epsom film festival?

A: The best thing to do is follow our FB group at https://www.facebook.com/satisfiedeye.

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ISSN 2753-2771

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