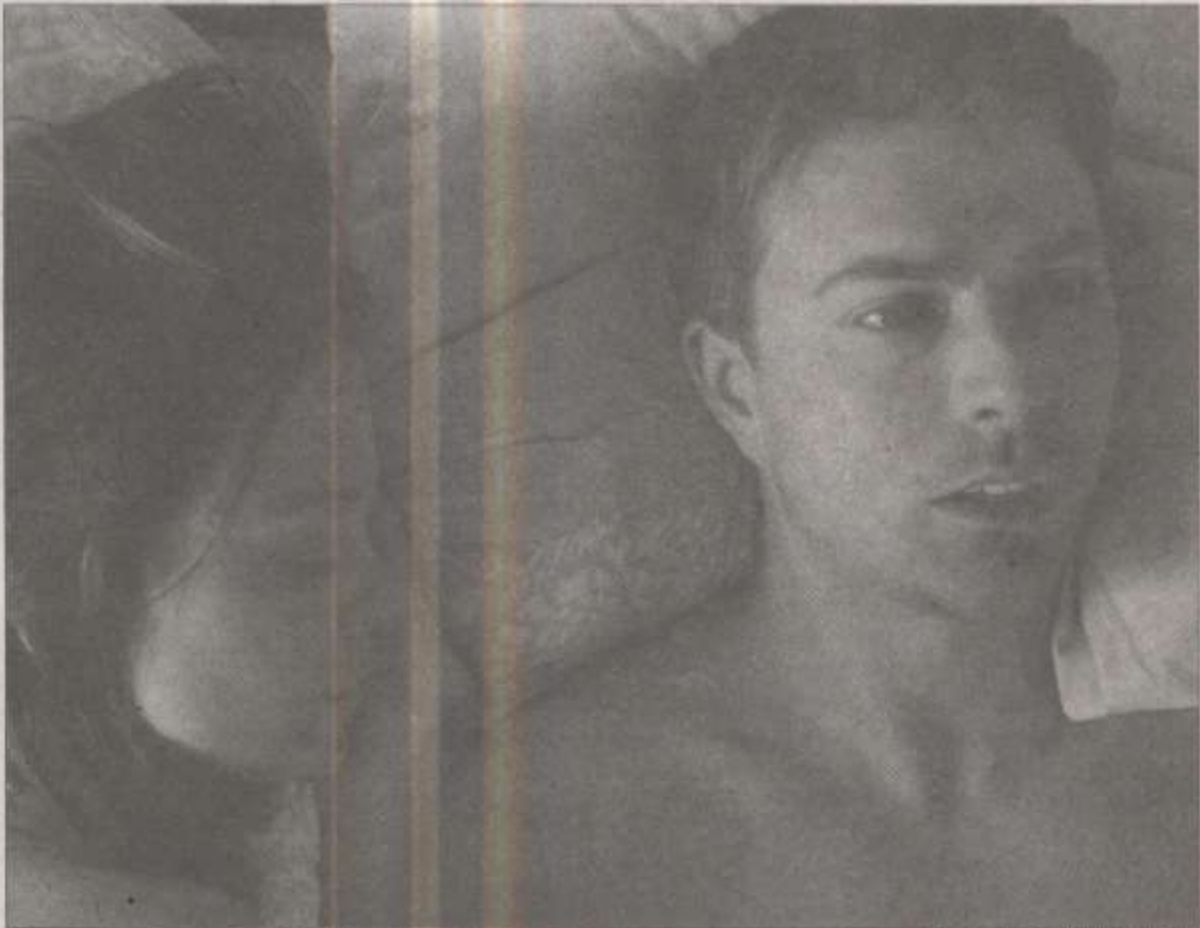


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## AT THE MOVIES



Photographs from *Dances With Films*

**'THE PILL':** Rachel Boston and Noah Bean costar in the film about a pregnancy scare.

# A breath of fresh flair

Leslee Scallon and Michael Trent created the Dances With Films Festival to showcase low-budget, indie films.

SUSAN KING

The Dances With Films Festival was born out of a typical Hollywood rejection: Fifteen years ago, Leslee Scallon and Michael Trent made a feature film for \$50,000. They submitted it to a bunch of festivals, only to be turned down.

"When we got back all of those generic rejection letters, you start wondering at some point did they even look at my film?" Scallon recalled about "Indemnity." "Did they even see it?"

Trent decided they should organize a festival that would feature their film plus 15 other starless, low-budget indies. After the festival (which they dubbed Dances With Films as a play on festival names like Sundance and Slamdance), Trent and Scallon had a gathering in their apartment with a few of the filmmakers with whom they had become close during the event at the Laemmle in Santa Monica. During the evening, they told the filmmakers that the festival was just a one-time event. The news didn't go over well.

"I remember one of the guys stomping his feet," Scallon said. "He said, 'You have to continue. This is what gives people faith to do what they are doing. They can see their dreams on the large screen.'"

And so they continued. The 14th annual Dances With Films kicks off Thursday evening at Laemmle's Sunset 5 and continues through June 9. Billing itself as the "Last Independent Independent Film Festival," the event typically attracts 6,000 to 7,000 patrons during the week and includes an awards ceremony. The festival is funded by sponsorships, submissions, tickets and volunteers.

"We range from about 1,100 to 1,400 submissions depending on the year," Scallon said. "We have shown films from all over the world. We had a film from India that was a one-minute short, and the filmmaker actually came in from India for the premiere."

This year the festival includes about 100 films, including features,



**'LETTING GO'**: Jake Torem wrote, directed and stars in the film about a man coming to grips with a family tragedy.

shorts, documentaries and music videos. And, yes, Trent and Scallon watch every film and even include notes with their rejection letters. (When they are not working on Dances With Films, Scallon and Trent operate Firefly Creative, which produces such projects as awards shows, commercials, infomercials and small films.)

The Australian drama "Charge Over You," from 21-year-old filmmaker Regardt Steenkamp, is in dramatic competition at the festival. "It's a real honor," Steenkamp said about his participation. "I just moved here from Australia, and this is its first film festival screening and U.S. premiere. I produced it on a budget for only \$40,000. It's a complete Australian production. What makes Dances With Films unique is that they recognize a filmmaker who has very little to work with and makes the best of it. That's incredible, I think."

Quite a few Dances With Films movies find DVD distribution, Scallon said, and some have landed theatrical releases, including "Cost of a Soul," which appeared at the festival last year and opened in theaters May 20.

Among alumni who have gone on to bigger success are Will Scheffer and Mark Olsen, both of whom created HBO's "Big Love," and Aaron Downing, who produced the recently released "Hesher."

British filmmaker James Hacking is returning to the festival with his opening-night film, a romantic comedy called "Love's Kitchen," with Gordon Ramsay of "Hell's Kitchen," as well as Dougray Scott and his wife, Claire Forlani. Hacking was living in Los Angeles four years ago when he submitted his short film, "Airport Ride." He credits Dances With Films for giving him his start.

"Love's Kitchen," which is playing out of competition, is set for theatrical release next month in England and is making its VOD and DVD debut in June in the U.S. Hacking said it was imperative that he'd let Dances With Films have "Love's Kitchen" for this year's festival. "I had to give back to the people who supported me," he said.

For more information about Dances With Films Festival, go to [danceswithfilms.com](http://danceswithfilms.com).

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