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 inside
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EDITOR'S NOTE

A Student of Films

I got the bulk of my cinematic education through a now defunct video store in Montreal, La Boîte Noire. I'd frequent it several times per week during my college years at McGill University in the late 1990s, when I studied philosophy and Latin and German and had to get out of my head.

All employees at La Boîte Noire (The Black Box) were film students at one of the four universities downtown — it must have been a criteria for employment — and all were versed in obscure film auteurs. You could go to any of them and say something like, "Tonight, I feel like watching something from the 1960s, on the surrealist side," and they'd walk you to a shelf dedicated to, say, Chilean-French filmmaker Alejandro Jodorowsky, and point at *El topo* (1970) or the even more bizarre *Fando y Lis* (1968). They'd also give you a list of all the other movies by that director, and that's how I watched Jodorowsky's *La montaña sagrada* (1973) and *La cravate* (1957) instead of paying more attention to what Hegel or Spinoza or Aristotle, or the dreaded Kant, had to say about universal something or other.

In the middle of the summer, I'd queue for hours in front of the decrepit Cinéma Imperial to see everything I could at the new Fantasia Festival. In late August, being a poor college student, I'd beg my father to buy me a pass for the Festival des films du monde de Montréal (Montreal World Film Festival), which I hear is also now defunct.

Film festivals, just like La Boîte Noire was, are pure magic: You browse through a list and pick a film at random, and not knowing anything about the film — other than that it's not a horror film (I don't do horror films) — you sit and let someone tell you a story.

Which brings me to this: I was recently browsing through the list of feature-film screeners the organizers of the Santa Fe International Film Festival had shared with me, when I came across a name: Matthew Rankin.

Matthew is an experimental filmmaker from Canada who's second feature-length film, *Universal Language* (Canada, 99 minutes), premiered this year at Cannes and won the inaugural Chantal Akerman award. *Universal Language* screened at the CCA recently, as a special SFIFF presentation. The film is set between Winnipeg and Tehran, and is based in part on Matthew's parents, who died during the pandemic.

Matthew was one of my closest friends at McGill. He studied history, I studied the ancient Greeks, and we'd watch Boîte Noire films together. He spent his summers planting trees up north, so at the end of my first year of college, I sublet his room in a crowded apartment building on Pine Avenue near Cinéma du Parc. The room was inside a kitchen, basically a pantry, and was so small that to enter it, I had to simultaneously push the door open and lift my mattress off the floor.



That winter, after I rented a bigger room from a former Portuguese nun, Matthew made his first short film and starred me in it. We shot the movie's only scene in the middle of the night at Les 4 Frères, a 24-hour grocery store on Saint-Laurent. Matthew had me walk through the cereal aisle and pick up boxes and stare at them. I never saw the end result, or maybe I did. I forget. I just remember how cold it was outside that night.

Matthew's *Universal Language* is Canada's official submission to the 2025 Academy Awards. How about that?



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The New Mexican's Weekly Magazine
of Arts, Entertainment & Culture
October 18, 2024



Breaking Big

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Movie Magic: Santa Fe International Film Festival

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Star Attractions by Ania Hull

Sure, the movies are the main reason to go to a film festival. But don't miss this year's panel discussions, Q&As, mixers, awards presentations, and other film-related events.

ON THE COVER

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 Breaking It Down by Ania Hull

Actor Closeup: Bryan Cranston, this year's festival Lifetime Achievement Award recipient, finds good chemistry in New Mexico's terrain and baseball teams.

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 Short Cuts by Emiliana Sandoval

On the Home Front: New Mexico filmmakers keep it lean for their contributions to the festival's shorts lineup.

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 Where There's a Will by Ania Hull

International Focus: A new film by Hong Kong's Ray Yeung explores the idea of family — and the law of the land.

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 A Political Animal by Ania Hull

Real Life: Love and politics weave a tale as old as time in this film festival documentary.

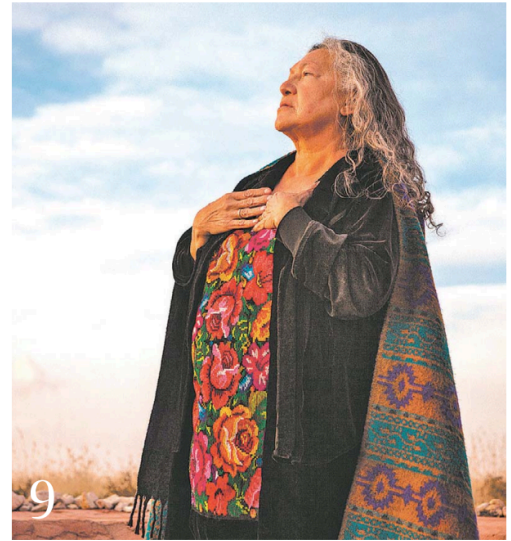


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Screen for the Rarely Seen by Brian Sandford

No Name Cinema, a space for discovering cinematic secrets, celebrates its 100th offering.

Cover: Bryan Cranston in *Breaking Bad*
Design Taura Costidis



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(Heather Roan Robbins/Star Codes is on vacation this week.)

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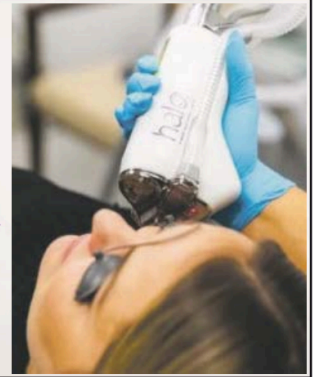
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