

SILVER LAKE SHORTS

STARS OF SUNSET



Editorial by Lucas Murphy

A few miles east on Sunset Boulevard from the grand old movie palaces—the Dolby, the Chinese, the Egyptian—a very different kind of premiere is taking place. Down the rickety steps of the hallowed Flamenco venue El Cid—a grotto-like space that has been serving tapas and sangria for sixty years—hundreds of animators, filmmakers and curious bypassers flock each month to Silver Lake Shorts.

During the most recent Friday night of screenings, the venue overflowed with the eccentric crowd this newly upstart festival has built; trucker animators with long, wispy beards mingled with straight-out-of-film-school interns, and TV executives caught up with wizened creators and new voices alike. But despite the crowd's pedigree, in a city full of industry hopefuls always looking for their next professional fix, no one seemed to be putting on airs.

The magic of Silver Lake Shorts, founded by events booker Ben Sharpe and filmmaker Jared Corwin, lies in the festival's unassuming nature. Each month,

the event curates a new collection of films by and for the community with free admission and submission. Mainly, the programming focuses on shorter, quirkier short films, animated films and work that would otherwise go overlooked by more professional festivals.

While the series was started by Sharpe in 2019 as a casual way to screen a friend's work, when Corwin came to screen one of his films and met Sharpe, the bigger purpose of the series started to coalesce; "I had a short film that did pretty well in the festival circuit and I think the first thing that strikes you is: 'Hey, it's a lot of money to submit to these things, but how do you get people to actually see it?'" Corwin saw the true potential in what Sharpe was building: a place for filmmakers to show their work and build a community under the nose of Hollywood without needing any of its institutions.

Corwin quickly came on board and together, the pair were able to expand their roster of filmmakers

substantially. "I'd heard about other screenings in Los Angeles but the lineups were limited to people's existing friend groups or people with clout. For us, it was really approaching it very earnestly: How do we get rid of that gatekeeping aspect? How do you not charge people to just showcase their art?" To that end, they've worked together, without any financial backing, to go from small DIY screenings with a few dozen attendees to two hundred attendees across two simultaneous screening rooms. Now, as a non-profit organization, Silver Lake Shorts also partners with sponsors (including Giphy Arts, Titmouse, The Animation Guild, Toon Boom and Stitch Space) to fund filmmaker fellowships and finance new projects by independent filmmakers.

Independently organized festivals are rare in the world of film, and even rarer in Los Angeles. Most film festivals charge hefty fees just to submit a film. Screening a short film for audiences often adds up to thousands of dollars in submission fees, paid out to fat-cat festivals that prioritize the selection of a few already-established creators before sending out rejection letters by the thousands.

Silver Lake Shorts operates in a space that is antithetical to the traditional festival experience. "We're screening people who are more established alongside people who are right out of film school or who made a film for sixty bucks on a handy-cam. I think a lot of people out here have been working professionally in the industry for a while, and they start to get jaded and burnt out. They want to feel that spark again to make things, and that's what we're all about." Even when discussing their plans for the future, Sharpe and Corwin never stray from this core tenement of the festival.

Simply stepping into Silver Lake Shorts is signing up to be part of the scene: to be potentially recruited to star in, produce, or collaborate on the next project to come out of the community. Even during the screenings, which Sharpe describes as having the energy of punk shows, the audience walks in and out as they please, smoking cigarettes and taking shots.

It would be easy to step out on the patio where drinks and numbers are exchanged and see not a revolution, but another outcropping of Hollywood's insidious reach: another place for overeducated and overindulged young adults to exploit one another. But listen to the conversations at Silver Lake Shorts and you'll hear something quite different than the who's who chatter of greenlights and elevated genre pitches. Rather, you'll learn of upcoming parties, or how to shoot on that block of York or Alvarado without a permit. The net-working here is not in the pursuit of making it big, the way a Friday night at All Season Brewing or Barney's Beanery might feel.

The collection of people gathered here creates a scene in its truest form; a community dedicated to the non-corporate and non-commercial, thereby generating the cutting-edge culture that will catch on in the next several years. Silver Lake Shorts signals a possibility for the democratization of the festival circuit—by us for us. Shedding the exclusivity of traditional screenings, this return to form offers hope that you, too, can be a star.



Photography by Greg Feiner