

Your guide to arts, culture, history,
entertainment, music, food, drink, family and fun

SUMMIT *life*

THE COMEDY IN TRAGEDY

'What Cheer?' takes an
unorthodox look at grief

By Krista Driscoll
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Sometimes, grief comes quietly, somberly, sitting like a heavy weight on your shoulders, and sometimes it crashes down upon you, screaming in your ear and making it impossible to concentrate on anything else. Friends, work and even alcohol can't provide an escape, and you are forced to face your demons or be destroyed by them.

Thus is the premise behind Michael Slavens' short film "What Cheer?" screening at the Breckenridge Film Festival on Friday, Sept. 19. The 17-minute film stars Drama Desk award winner and Tony nominee Richard Kind, known for his roles as Paul Lassiter in the TV series "Spin City" and as Max Klein in the 2013 Academy Award winner for Best Picture, "Argo."

Kind said he got involved with "What Cheer?" because he and Slavens are good friends and he found the film to be very innovative.

"He said that he wanted to do a short film, sort of as something that he could present to future employers, sort of an audition tape of, 'This is how I direct,'" Kind said. "So he wrote a script and then rewrote it and rewrote it and rewrote it again. And he finally came up with this. And I thought this was charming. I love the whole idea."

BATTLING THE BRIGADE

In the film, Kind's character, Stan, tries to ignore his overwhelming grief at the passing of his wife, only to be doggedly followed by the What Cheer? Brigade, a 20-piece punk marching band that bombards him with constant, unavoidable song.

"I thought that (Slavens) brought the script to life," Kind said. "And what he really did, he showed off that band to such a great degree. They're fantastic; they're really a blast. They play clubs; they're freaky. I thought it served them well, not necessarily a music video but to show how eclectic this band is. Whoever sees a marching band playing that kind of music?"

"What Cheer?" takes a poignant look at grief while still



SPECIAL TO THE DAILY || TOP TO BOTTOM: 'What Cheer?' will be shown in a block of five films on Friday, sandwiched between three short comedies, 'Green Acres,' 'Bingo Night!' and 'There is No God and We All Die Alone,' and a documentary, 'Pie Lady of Pie Town'; In the short film 'What Cheer?,' stage and screen actor Richard Kind plays Stan, a man who tries to ignore his overwhelming grief at the passing of his wife, only to be doggedly followed by the What Cheer? Brigade, a 20-piece punk marching band that bombards him with constant, unavoidable song; Michael Slavens' short film will screen at Breckenridge Town Hall on Friday, Sept. 19, as part of the Breckenridge Film Festival.

maintaining a comedic tone and a raucous soundtrack. Kind said if the film had approached the subject matter from a viewpoint that was too serious or somber, it would have just been more of the same, sad stuff that most tragedies are made of.

"I think that's one of the things I liked about it; it was a little tongue-in-cheek," he said. "Everybody goes through grief, we're all familiar with it, and I thought this gave a nice slant to it. That's why I thought it was so original, creative, but still respectful to this band, as well as to the wife. It does take an obtuse view of how to handle grief or suppress grief and why you should just let it happen."

Kind said Slavens spent time researching the Kubler-Ross model of seven stages of grief while he was writing the short and incorporated those themes into the script.

"The story itself is very entertaining," Kind said. "It addresses a very difficult subject without being heavy-handed. It's a very light view of tragedy and grief in one's life. I think it's beautifully made and well shot."

IF YOU GO

What: Block of five films, including "Green Acres," "Bingo Night!," "What Cheer?," "There is No God and We All Die Alone" and "Pie Lady of Pie Town"

When: 3 p.m. Friday, Sept. 19

Where: Breckenridge Town Hall, 150 Ski Hill Road, Breckenridge

Cost: \$10 for a single film-block pass; punch passes also available for multiple blocks

More information: Visit www.breckfilmfest.com

IT'S A COMEDY

"What Cheer?," billed by the festival as a short drama, will be shown in a block of films sandwiched between three short comedies, "Green Acres," "Bingo Night!" and "There is No God and We All Die Alone," and a documentary, "Pie Lady of Pie Town." Kind said though the theme of Slavens' film is dark, art has a duty first and foremost to entertain, and above all, the actor thinks "What Cheer?" accomplishes that goal.

"A film about pies? It better be interesting and entertaining, or else it's a lecture, and that's the worst," Kind said, adding that the tone of "What Cheer?" is so unusual that it could take a lot to accept it after watching a pair of more traditional comedic shorts. "It's about death, surrounded by two comedies, but some people don't really know the tone until it's all over."

Kind said Slavens did a great job with the film, and he hopes audiences in Breckenridge appreciate the filmmaker

WHAT CHEER?

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for his work, but ultimately, films aren't made to cater to the whims of festival crowds.

"I think it works well as a short film," Kind said. "I'm not going to say it's going to work well at a festival. You make a piece of art that you are faithful to, try to do the best job that you can, you honor your goal, and if you like it, if it turns out the way you like, you send it to a festival. And if the festival doesn't like it, then, pardon my French, but what the (hell)?"

"He was very true to his vision. I'd give him input and he'd take it and I'd give him input and he wouldn't take it. It's his baby from the get-go and if you don't like it, tough luck."

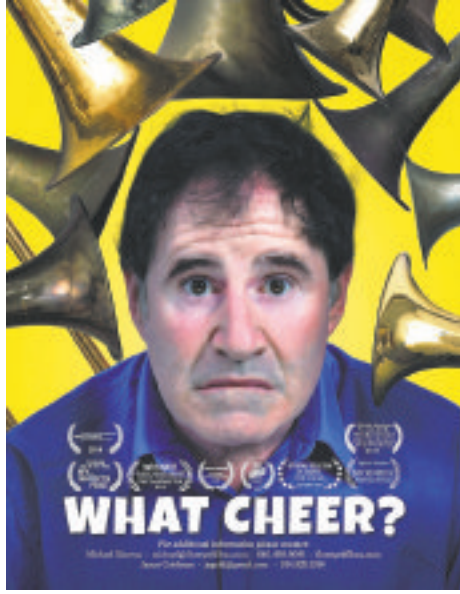
PLAYING THE TRUTH

As for his role in the film, Kind said he plays all types of characters, both serious and absurd, in all types of settings, from musicals and plays to sitcoms and feature films, and he approaches each in the same way.

"To me, acting is acting, you play the truth, and sometimes it's funny and sometimes it's not," he said, adding that starring in a short like "What Cheer?" is no different than being in longer films or being on stage. "You have a story to tell, it goes from Point A to Point B and Point C — it doesn't differ in any way. You're making a film that's shorter in length in time, that's all you're doing."

Kind said he agreed to do the film, not because it was likely to have a big impact on his own career, but because sometimes you do a favor for a good friend, and despite long hours and time away from home, when it was all finished, he was happy.

"There were long days and I remember giving up a lot of my vacation time and family time," he said. "I was supposed to be with my family at the time and I wasn't able to



SPECIAL TO THE DAILY

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because I was working on this. It was summer time in New York City; it was fun, but some of the parts were very hard.

"When I was up on the bridge and I was sweaty and crying and it was muggy, that's not so much fun, but afterwards, when you invest all that time and you say, OK, it's pretty good."

In the end, Kind said "What Cheer?" turned out to be wonderful, and the film makes him proud to know Slavens and proud to be a part of it.

"If I knew it was going to be good, I would have tried harder," he said, joking.



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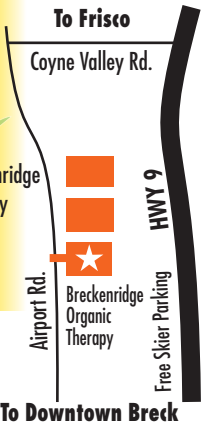


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