

Revisiting Caligari, which 'exploded' in Regina four years ago

ASHLEY MARTIN, REGINA LEADER-POST ([HTTPS://LEADERPOST.COM/AUTHOR/LPASHLEYM](https://leaderpost.com/author/lpashleym)) Updated: January 30, 2020

A festival that began with three friends reminiscing about their love of a film, The Caligari Project made an impression on Regina's arts scene in 2016.

It has a renewed focus on Thursday night during The Caligari Project: The Aftermath, an event at the Regina Public Library Film Theatre.

"It started off small. It started off with Chrystene (Ells), Berny (Hi) and I saying, 'Hey, wouldn't it be cool to watch this film again? (<https://leaderpost.com/entertainment/local-arts/regina-filmmakers-paying-homage-to-german-expressionism>) Why don't we invite an audience? And hey, why don't we have some music with it?" said Gerald Saul, a filmmaker and organizer of the festival.

"And a couple phone calls later, it's like, everybody was excited and everybody jumped on board (<https://leaderpost.com/entertainment/local-arts/festivals-team-up-in-regina-on-short-film>)... and it exploded. I'm still amazed by how everybody said yes."

More than 200 local artists contributed (<https://leaderpost.com/entertainment/arts/regina-artists-think-big-in-the-ambitious-caligari-project>) to the months-theatre, film, music and visual arts that was entirely focused on German expressionist Robert Wiene's 1920 film *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*.

Its central event was Oct. 16, 2016. *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* screened while eight musicians performed an original score by Jason Cullimore, conducted by Victor Sawa.

Revisiting the project

Thursday's event will include a panel discussion based on the in-depth articles in the *Acta Universitatis Sapientiae* journal, of the Sapientia Hungarian University of Transylvania.

The first half of the journal's new issue is focused on The Caligari Project, specifically the German expressionist speakers' series that ran in fall 2016.

"These were very interesting presentations, lectures," said Christina Stojanova, who curated the series and co-edited the journal's "Special Dossier: Reframing German Expressionism" with University of Regina history professor Ian Germani.

“We put so much energy and work and all that, why wouldn’t we want it to have a longer life?” said Stojanova.

Her only regret is that some speakers were excluded from the journal — including Ken Wilson, who presented about visual artist Otto Dix.

Thursday’s panellists are all University of Regina faculty members.

Germani (history) will speak on the First World War’s impact on arts and culture, “severing cultural ties” between Germany and other countries.

Leanne Groeneveld (theatre) will discuss the morality play *From Morning to Midnight*.

Stojanova (film) will address the psychology of German expressionist films.

Saul (film) will speak on German expressionism and how it might guide today’s filmmakers. He co-authored his piece with Ells.

Andrew Burke (University of Winnipeg) also contributed to the journal, writing about Winnipeg filmmaker Guy Maddin.



Regina filmmaker Gerald Saul.
*MICHAEL BELL / REGINA
LEADER-POST*

Screening local films

Before the panel discussion, two local German expressionist-style films will screen.

Der Glockner, which is German for the bellringer, is set in 1914 in a European town on the brink of war. Like *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, it has no dialogue and is shot on film (16mm, as opposed to *Caligari*’s 35mm).

Director Ells and cinematographer Berny Hi were inspired by German expressionists’ approach, said Saul.

The crew built “gigantic sets in the soundstage,” said Saul. “They were really trying to engage with the process that those filmmakers worked with.”

Saul made two films for *The Caligari Project*. Screening Thursday, *Eyes of Sorrow Moon* employed a German expressionist style, but used new technologies.

“Filmmakers of the 1920s, they were very inventive people,” said Saul, and “if they had our digital tools, they would use them.”

Both films were low budget; German expressionist artists by necessity made low-budget works.

“They were made immediately after the devastation of the German economy by World War I, and they turned necessity into virtue,” said Stojanova.

“We’re not always sympathetic to the losing side of a war,” said Saul, but for the impoverished artists trying to rebuild their culture, “it was impossible for them to try to fit in with what the world was saying is the way to proceed on art and film and all these things.

“They don’t look for the happy ending, necessarily,” added Saul. “They don’t go for the easy payoff that a Hollywood film will do. They kind of spit in the eye of Hollywood.”



Director Chrystene Ells (left) and actor Amanda Schenstead on the set of German expressionist-style film *Der Glöckner* at the soundstage in Regina on Aug. 19, 2016. *DON HEALY / REGINA LEADER-POST*

Why celebrate German expressionism, then and now?

“Our interests in this movement have not waned,” said Saul. “We are as excited about German expressionism as we were four years ago, as we were when Chrystene and Berny and I first laid eyes on this work 30 or 30-plus years ago.

“It’s just so engaging and it connects to people in different ways,” added Saul. “Some people engage with it because of the strange stories, some with the styles and the

shadows, some with the creepiness, the psychology. ... And that has not stopped, and I don't think it's going to stop ever. I think in 100 years we'll still be revisiting this work."

Stojanova says German expressionism "talks to our unconscious, to something that's inside of us."

"It's weird, it's not mainstream art, but it has an immensely devoted and committed following," she added.

The movement has inspired well-known filmmakers including Tim Burton and Alfred Hitchcock.

The Caligari Project: The Aftermath is Thursday, Jan. 30, 6:30 p.m. at the RPL Film Theatre. Admission is free.

amartin@postmedia.com (<mailto:amartin@postmedia.com>)