

Film News: 'Animals' is Top Film at 'Best of the Midwest' Awards Night

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CHICAGO – On Tuesday, December 2nd, the Midwest Independent Film Festival gave out their 2014 “Best of the Midwest” awards with a ceremony at The Underground Nightclub in Chicago. Sweeping Best Actor, Director and Feature Film was the Collin Schiffli-directed “Animals,” starring and written by David Dastmalchian.



BMA Host Mike McNamara with Presenter/Screenwriter Irvine Welsh
Photo credit: Jason Brown (jbrownweddingphoto.com) for MidwestFilm.com

The evening was hosted by Festival Director Mike McNamara, and featured appearances by television stars Jon Seda and LaRoyce Hawkins of “Chicago PD”; Christian Stolte and Charlie Barnett of “Chicago Fire”; Kelly O’Sullivan and Maura Kidwell of “Sirens”; Screenwriter Irvine Walsh (“Trainspotting”); and Betsy Steinberg, the Director of the Illinois Film Office.

The Midwest Independent Film Festival is a year-round movie event in Chicago that takes place the first Tuesday of every month, at the

Landmark Century Centre Cinema. The festival has been named by *Chicago Magazine* in their "Best of Chicago" issue, and has become one of the top places for local filmmakers, producers and actors to network in the city.

HollywoodChicago.com was there at the "BMAs," and snagged a couple of Red Carpet interviews with the Best Director, Collin Schiffli of "Animals," and Christian Stolte, who portrays Mouch on "Chicago Fire."

**Collin Schiffli , BMA Best Director for "Animals"**

The gritty Best Feature at the BMAs was "Animals," the story of two desperate souls fighting to survive and maintain their relationships, was written by BMA Best Actor David Dastmalchian. Schiffli is a Midwesterner from Indiana, and attended Columbia College in Chicago. "Animals" is his feature film debut.



Director Collin Schiffli Accepts the Award for 'Animals'

Photo credit: Jason Brown (jbrownweddingphoto.com) for MidwestFilm.com

HollywoodChicago.com: What does it mean to you to win an award from a Midwestern Film Festival?

Collin Schiffli : Incredible. As I said when I accepted the award, I was born in Fort Wayne, Indiana, and studied at Columbia College in Chicago. It's just fitting to be accepting an award that represents where I am from, so I want to soak it in and enjoy it, because it's very gratifying.

HollywoodChicago.com: This is something I like to ask first time feature film directors. When you did the first take on 'Animals,' how long did you hold it until you called, 'cut'?

Schiffli: It was actually a scene that we tested, so I was going crazy to shoot it for real. It worked in the test shoot, because it was a 1970s-style long take with the actors walking down the street, with no cut. I knew it had to matter. Even with the obstacles...like cars rolling in front of us...I didn't care, I had to get that first shot.

HollywoodChicago.com: You talked about the 1970s film traditions. In the last 40 years, where would you rank the 1970s in its influence on the cinematic art?

Schiffli: It is top notch, ranking with the golden age of the studio system in the late 1930s and '40s. I feel like it precipitated a change, and that is something I want to be now – someone who changes the definition of how films are, and I say that humbly. Like Scorsese and Spielberg, when they redefined the last of the bloated film factories, I want to be that guy. I want to understand where the heart is, when doing my films.

HollywoodChicago.com: You're a f**king rock star, brother.

**Christian Stolte, BMA Presenter & Actor, "Chicago Fire"**

If there is anyone that can be tagged "Mr. Chicago," as far as working actors are concerned, Christian Stolte is the man. Forging a strong career based in the Windy City, The veteran stage actor is currently in his third TV season portraying firehouse favorite Mouch on "Chicago Fire." His resume includes many made-in-Chicago TV and film favorites, including "Public Enemies," "The Chicago Code," "The Playboy

Club," "Boss" and "ER."



Christian Stolte of 'Chicago Fire' at the BMAs

Photo credit: Patrick McDonald for HollywoodChicago.com

HollywoodChicago.com: You've portrayed your 'Chicago Fire' character for three seasons now. In the interesting paradigm of TV acting, what does it mean to you in the development of character?

Christian Stolte: At a certain point, you reach an odd turn in the road with a television character. The writers are writing for your voice. I've always heard that if you are, hopefully, going to play a character for a long time, make the character as much as an expression of your own personality as you can possibly can. I've injected more of myself into it, and more and more the writers and producers have gotten to know all of us as individuals.

They've included the slices in each of our 'prisms of light' in both ourselves and our characters. I'm ever mindful of the sword that hangs over any TV show, and any season can be our last. But as long as it's going on, I'm really enjoying this unusual and very privileged position, where people are writing specifically for us and our characters. It's just been great.

HollywoodChicago.com: In that sense, how do you interrelate with the show runner [Matt Olmstead] and writing staff?

Stolte: As far as the writers, I don't know all of them, but there is a few of them that I know, and when I open a script with their name on it, I realize I will get something that is idiosyncratic for me, and the character. That's when I feel they know what I'm trying to do. There is nothing better than that.

HollywoodChicago.com: Now that you are in the historic pantheon of successful TV series, which character would you compare Mouch to, as far as who you liked as a kid watching TV when you were growing up?

Stolte: Our show, in this analogy, is 'Hill Street Blues,' and my character is Mick Belker. He wasn't part of the group necessarily, and we shoot a lot of scenes where Mouch is on the couch, and the real shit is going on in front of me, but I'll call out some comment or helpful information – yet I'm not part of that action. That's how Belker operated on Hill Street.

NEXT PAGE: All the winners of the Midwest Independent Film Festival "Best of the Midwest Awards..."



Mary Kay Cook, Collin Schiffli and Ashley Lobo at the BMA Awards

Photo credit: Jason Brown (jbrownweddingphoto.com) for MidwestFilm.com

★ **Best Music Video**

"Am I Awake" directed by Joe Cuomo, written by Paul Swiatek

★ **Best Short Film**

"The Scumbag Barbers of Rotterdam" directed by Seth Henrikson

★ **Best Editing**

Craig Lewandowski, "Adventures in the Sin Bin "

★ **Best Cinematography**

Pete Biagi, "Bad Ambulance"

★ **Best Screenplay**

Bill Boehler, "Apartment Guy"

★ **Best Female Actor**

Katie Oellerich, "The Cold and the Quiet"

★ **Best Male Actor**

David Dastmalchian, "Animals "

★ **Best Director**

Collin Schiffli, "Animals "

★ **Best Feature**

"Animals," directed by Collin Schiffli

The Midwest Independent Film Festival kicks off again on the first Tuesday of the new year, February 3rd 2015. [Click here](#) [25] for details about the festival and how you can participate in what Chicago Magazine called "the place to be and be seen for veteran pros and up-and-comers."

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