

Richmond International Film Festival re-branding to be the next South By Southwest

By MARKUS SCHMIDT Richmond Times-Dispatch | Posted: Tuesday, November 15, 2016 10:30 pm

The theory that Richmond may be the next Austin just got a little bit more plausible.

For 2017, the Richmond International Film Festival is expanding to become more like South By Southwest, the annual film and music festival of international acclaim held in the Texas capital every March since 1987.

“We’re in our sixth year, and since our early planning stages, I always wanted a music component and to eventually become a full-blown festival that could compete with South By Southwest,” said RIFF founder and producer Heather Waters in an interview Tuesday.

A total of 137 films from 26 countries were shown to an audience totaling more than 10,000 during last February’s festival, and a prize pool of more than \$20,000 was split among winners in 28 categories.

But on Feb. 27, the one-week event will return as the RIFF Music Festival. In addition to the screening of 120 to 130 films, it offers a platform for more than 60 bands from all over the country, including local artists, in addition to music industry trade shows, artist panels, industry think tanks and jam sessions, all designed to bring people together.

“The festival’s aim is to bring cutting-edge music to Richmond while providing a development platform for artists and filmmakers alike. This is an expansion of RIFF’s early focus to showcase emerging music talent and create stronger dialogue between filmmakers, performers and music industry professionals,” Waters said.

The events will be spread out across the city at venues such as The Broadberry, The Camel, Strange Matter and many others. The organizers have designed a program grid consisting of the “Scott’s Addition Track,” the “Broad Street Track” and the “Fan Track.”

“We’re not going as big as South By Southwest, but for Richmond, we are really going far out,” Waters said.

Like its bigger competitor in Texas, which had more than 2,000 live acts in 2014, the new Richmond festival is submission-based. Bands and artists apply through two available booking platforms, Sonicbids and FilmFreeway. The latter is also used by South By Southwest.

“Once they submit, we review all of the music material and from there we are starting to narrow it down,” Waters said. “Our review committee will make the final selections and those musicians will get an invitation.”



Richmond International Film Festival

Qualifying artists will not only get to perform but also compete for several prizes, including the top award — a music video production. Other prizes include awards for critics' choice, emerging artist, best local favorite, best national favorite, international and audience choice.

The selection process started in mid-September, but the deadline for musicians isn't until Dec. 2. Waters said she is negotiating to book at least two major bands to headline the festival, but she wasn't ready to reveal their names.

"This is going to be the big year. The goal now is to not just put a spotlight on local talent but bring in national and international talent as well," Waters said.

"My hope is that the festival helps contribute to put Richmond on the map as one of the main go-to music, film and arts incubators and just one of the places to experience great art in the country. In Austin, South By Southwest has helped to transform the whole city, and we hope to do the same," she said.

Originally from Nashville, Waters lived in Los Angeles and Atlanta before moving to Richmond seven years ago. She has worked as an actress, model and singer, eventually moving behind the camera as a producer, writer and director. She founded the RIFF in 2010.

"I had discussions with some of our musicians here and asked them what they are doing, but there was disconnect in terms of not having a platform to really get their music out there and create an awareness of Richmond as an up-and-coming talent hub," Waters said.