Welcome to the 14th Doctober Film Festival, our annual ode to curiosity.

As our world has become curioser and curioser, filmmakers are more important than ever, translating the complexities of the world into films that can educate, illuminate, inspire, and entertain us—collectively, as real audiences, with real discussions. Sure, we may still be masked, we may even be distanced, and in the name of all that is holy, vaccinated. But those human connections inspired by great film are something I fervently hope will never pass.

This may well be my last ride as Program Director for Pickford Film Center (20 years!) and my pride and joy, Doctober. A pleasure it has been, my friends. My co-programmer, Jane Julian, and I look at hundreds of documentaries annually, enough to book some time with our respective therapists, in order to bring you an eclectic but tailored assortment of the year’s best docs. This year’s edition ended up with some intriguing patterns.

Clearly, after the last couple of years, we are all in need of inspiration—and if that’s where you are at, check out: To Which We Belong (restorative agriculture); Youth v Gov (students pursuing climate change action); The Berrigan’s (activism as a way-of-life); Medicine Man (the indefatigable Stan Brock); White Coat Rebels (nurses turned activists for better health care); Mau (artist as philosopher); Lily Topples the World (one domino at a time); For the Left Hand (overcoming trauma); or Firestarter (persevering through trauma).

I had an opportunity to go to Cuba several years ago, before Obama opened up relations—and out of that period came a flood of docs. It’s no surprise that music is central to those films – in Cuba, nearly everyone can play an instrument: Check out Soy Cubano, a gorgeous doc with vocal artistry to match; Los Hermanos, two brothers, two master musicians, separated by the Cold War and reunited by music; and Havanna Libre, about dedicated and creative surfers (a sport the government doesn’t encourage). Speaking of surfing, travel to Portugal with Big v Small and the dynamo Joana Andrade as your guide.

Snow and ice feature prominently in Max Lowe’s Torn. Max will be in Bellingham to present his film about his father, Alex Lowe, and the world of high-risk mountaineering. Adventuring continues with films like After Antarctica and Becoming Cousteau. A whole secret world awaits, like the China seen in Ascension, or the underwater labyrinth of The Crab Season. Music is well-represented: Todd Hayne’s The Velvet Underground, Fanny—about the legendary all women Filipina-American rock band; Without Getting Killed or Caught, about Guy Clark and friends. Two of my favorites: the genre-defying 499, where a time traveling conquistador encounters modern-day Mexico and Alien on Stage, because it made me laugh and then it made me cry.

We hope our Doctober program plugs right in to your TODO calendar, and to tempt you further we offer you our DocChallenge—fill up your dance card with 8 docs and turn in for prizes. 16 docs gets you even more—and one thing is certain, your corporeal presence at Doctober 2021 will help make you one of the Smartest People in the Universe.

Happy viewing!

Michael Falter, Program Director
All films are playing at Pickford Film Center 1318 Bay Street | Bellingham, WA

**Over 40 films? That’s a lot to process.**
Start here—all the October films are below with descriptions and details in alphabetical order. More of a visual person? Flip to our centerfold to check out the festival calendar.

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**499 10/5 + 10/10**
Rodrigo Reyes’ stunning doc-narrative hybrid centers around a time-traveling conquistador who experiences first-hand the challenges of the post-colonial world. An achievement that lingers in the imagination. A big screen must. 87 min. Unrated.

**AFTER ANTARCTICA 10/7 + 10/10**
Director Tasha van Zandt captures polar explorer Will Steger near the end of his career preparing for a final expedition — and expertly traverses his long history of exploration and engagement with adventurers from around the world. Snow, ice and thoughtful reflection abound. 106 min. Unrated.

**ALIEN ON STAGE 10/8 + 10/12**
Directors Lucy Harvey and Danielle Kummer embed themselves in the world of amateur theatre with the very amateur Dorset Bus Drivers production of Alien, a serious endeavor with shades of Waiting for Guffman but with a denouement that may have you in tears of joy. 93 min. PG-13.

**AMERICAN GADFLY 10/4 + 10/7**
When a group of enterprising teens formulated a plan to enlist former Alaska Senator Mike Gravel to run for president in 2019, it seemed like a lark—but it was so much more. Witness what happens when youthful optimism teams up with an 88-year-old politician to speak truth to power. 95 min. Unrated.

**ASCENSION 10/21 + 10/24**
Director Jessica Kingdon deserves awards for this mind-blowing examination of the ‘Chinese Dream’ and the endless pursuit of productivity. Her camera finds incredible places — observing workers in a sex doll factory or a bodyguard training school. Fascinating, rhythmic, and no talking heads. 97 min. Unrated.

**BECOMING COUSTEAU 10/2 + 10/5**
Presented by The Whatcom Watersheds Information Network, WWU Marine and Coastal Science & Environmental Sciences Department.
From acclaimed director Liz Garbus (The Farm: Angola, USA) comes the definitive portrait of both Cousteaus—Jacques, famous explorer, writer, celebrity, and his wife Simone Melchior, diver, mother and business partner. From the Aqua Lung to ocean conservation, all with gorgeous archival film. 93 min. PG-13.

**BIG VS SMALL 10/3 + 10/5**
Joana Andrade may be diminutive in height, but her stature in the world of big wave surfing is lofty. Director Minna Dufton travels with her from the monster waves of her native Portugal to facing her fears and demons in the dark cold waters of Finland with breathing coach Johanna Nordblad. 76 min. Unrated.

**CIVIL WAR (OR, WHO DO WE THINK WE ARE) 10/2 + 10/4**
As recent events have illustrated, the issues that caused the Civil War still permeate this country. This doc travels the country to look at that bloody battle through a modern lens, from President Obama’s last year in office to present day. 100 min. Unrated.

**CLAYDREAM 10/9 + 10/15**
Director Marq Evans in person, 10/9.
Director Marq Evans reveals Portland’s Will Vinton, the father of Claymation, as an artistic wunderkind who brought the world the California Raisins and many glorious films—but who ultimately loses it all. A must-see for animation fans. 96 min. Unrated.

**END OF THE LINE: WOMEN OF STANDING ROCK (W/ HONOR THY MOTHER) 10/11 + 10/17**
Presented by CASCADIA International Women’s Film Festival and The Whatcom Watersheds Information Network
Director Shannon Kring captures the heroic spirit of indigenous women risking it all to halt the Dakota Access Pipeline, a project with potentially disastrous environmental ramifications on Native soil. Against many obstacles, these women stand firm.

+ Short: Honor Thy Mother is the untold story of 36 Aboriginal women from Canada and Native women from tribes in Washington and Alaska who migrated to Bainbridge Island, the traditional territory of the Suquamish people, in the early 1940s. 97m + 31m. Unrated.

**BEING BEBE 10/8 + 10/16**
In 2009, BeBe Zahara Benet became the first winner of RuPaul’s Drag Race, firmly etching his place in queer pop culture history. But the story of Cameroon-born Marshall Ngwa is so much bigger than that moment. See Queen BeBe in all her glory. 88 min. Unrated.
**FANNY: THE RIGHT TO ROCK**  10/22 + 10/28  
*Presented by Bellingham Girls Rock Camp, FilAm Student Org., DIWA Filipino Film Festival*  
Fanny bears the distinction of being the first all-women band signed to a major label. They made five excellent albums, they rocked, and few have ever heard of them. See the story of a barrier-breaking band—with commentary by Bonnie Raitt, Cherie Currie and more—that was totally ahead of its time. 92 min. Unrated.

**FIRESTARTER**  10/2 + 10/11  
*Presented by WWU CFPA Dept. of Theatre and Dance*  
Bangarra Dance Theatre’s 30th anniversary is marked by Firestarter, following three Aboriginal brothers as they form what has become a cultural phenom. With gorgeous and original choreography and music the brothers must meet personal and intergenerational trauma with a message for social change. 96 min. Unrated.

**FOR THE LEFT HAND**  10/6 + 10/9  
*Director Gordon Quinn in person, 10/6.*  
Norman Malone, a child piano prodigy at 5, is attacked by his father at 10 and loses the use of his right arm. A lifetime of resilience follows as he masters the most difficult left-hand music, never sharing his growing mastery—until now. 87 min. Unrated.

**Havana Libre**  10/9 + 10/13  
*Presented by WWU Dept. of Modern & Classical Languages*  
Until a few years ago, surfing was illegal in Cuba and those who participated in the sport did so on homemade boards and in fear. Watch as Cuban surfers fight for legitimacy, first in their own country and then on the world stage. 114 min. Unrated.

**HOLY FRIT**  10/17 + 10/20  
A tale of creative hutzpah, Tim Carey, an unknown artist, pursues and wins a contract to create the largest stained-glass window of its kind—despite having no knowledge of how to do it. Enter Narcissus Quagliata, an aptly named glass maestro, who helps push Tim to the limits of kilnforming. 119 min. Unrated.

**IN BALANCHINE’S CLASSROOM**  10/8 + 10/9 + 10/13  
*Presented by WWU CFPA Dept. of Theatre and Dance*  
In the world of ballet, no names loom larger than George Balanchine and the New York City Ballet. Enter his classroom and his world as seen through the eyes of the dancers he taught who are determined to pass on his legacy to a new generation of ballerinas. 95 min. Unrated.

**LILY TOPPLES THE WORLD**  10/3 + 10/10  
*Presented by Mindport Exhibits*  
Lily Hevesh, a 20-year-old with a dream, is already considered the greatest domino toppler (and only female) in her field. Now she faces some very adult decisions about her future and meets them head on. Toppling will never be the same. 90 min. Unrated.

**LITTLE GIRL**  10/2 + 10/11  
7-year-old Sasha has always known she’s a girl. Gender identity collides with small-town sensibilities in this moving look at the life of a very courageous little girl and the fierce mother fighting to open the hearts and minds of folks in their rural French town. Directed by renowned filmmaker Sebastien Lifshitz. 88m. Unrated.

**LOS HERMANOS**  10/3 + 10/7  
*Presented by WWU Dept. of Modern & Classical Languages*  
Two Cuban brothers, both musical prodigies, separated by a half-century of Cold War politics, are reunited during the brief detente between the US and Cuba. Their tour and eventual continued separation illustrate the challenges of estrangement. 84 min. Unrated.

**MAU**  10/23 + 10/26  
*Presented by Paper Whale*  
Bruce Mau, from humble Canadian beginnings, becomes a celebrated designer and artist—yet his worldview is one that leads him to ask big questions, the answers to which may help hold the keys to our survival as a species. Lighthearted but profound (and inspiring). 77 min. Unrated.

**MEDICINE MAN: THE STAN BROCK STORY**  10/22 + 10/25  
Brock is a British born, Amazonian cowboy turned Mutual of Omaha’s Wild Kingdom star—enough for a doc, but he ultimately dedicates his life to providing free health care around the world with Remote Area Medical, a portable clinic. Sainthood awaits. 96 min. Unrated.

**MISSION: JOY**  10/14 + 10/16  
They may hail from different backgrounds, but Archbishop Desmond Tutu and His Holiness the Dalai Lama are united both by friendship and their belief in the power of finding joy. Watch an unforgettable sit-down between the two men and learn to apply their joyful lessons to your own life. 98 min. Unrated.  
*Sponsored by Chrysalis Inn & Spa*
NOT GOING QUIETLY 10/10 + 10/12
Many of us saw video of ALS sufferer Ady Barkan confronting Senator Jeff Flake on a plane in 2017 to ask him to vote against a tax bill that would cripple U.S. health care. This doc goes inside the movement Barkan has spurred and the remarkable life of the man who says, “the weaker I get, the louder I become.” 97 min. Unrated.

ON BROADWAY 10/1 + 10/2 + 10/3
As the lights of Broadway tentatively turn back on comes this doc detailing the last time the Great White Way was on the brink. It’s a vibrant, performance-filled history lesson as only the likes of Helen Mirren, Ian McKellan, Hugh Jackman, and more can tell it. 85 min. Unrated.

SCRUM 10/16 + 10/19
Presented by Chuckanut Bay Rugby
Rugby is an overwhelmingly white sport. Frank McKinney, the only Black college rugby coach in the United States, aims to change that, building a team of all races and backgrounds. This is an inspirational story, yes, but it’s also one rooted in reality—and reality can be complicated stuff. 75 min. Unrated.

SEARCHING FOR MR. RUGOFF
10/23 + 10/27
Cinema 5 was a legendary NYC theatre chain and distribution company that broke all rules and helped launch an era of international and independent cinema. Donald Rugoff was the mad/maddening genius behind it all. Film buffs unite. 94 min. Unrated.

THE BERRIGAN’S: DEVOUT AND DANGEROUS 10/14 + 10/23
With discussion moderated by Bellingham Human Rights Film Festival.
A guidebook for activism, Susan Hagedorn’s doc is a portrait of the Berrigan’s – Daniel and Phillip – who were Catholic priests dedicated to non-violent resistance. From the Vietnam War to AIDS funding, these two brothers walked the talk for over 50 years. 80 min. Unrated.

THE CRAB SEASON (W/ LESSONS FOR JEJU)
10/18 + 10/21
From March to November, Christophe Leboucher, who is profoundly visually impaired, hikes to the foot of the cliffs at Etretat at low tide, where he spelunks with his stick and hands into tiny crevices hunting crab and lobster, reminding us there are other ways to see the world. 51 min. Unrated.

+ Short: When diver and expectant mother Kimi Werner travels to the island of Jeju to meet her heroes, the haenyeo – a group of freediving and fishing women—she finds inspiring life lessons. 13m. Unrated.

shorts: go guurrls! 10/25 + 10/28
Celebrate true “Girl Power” with these three inspiring short films. All trailblazers: 7-year-old cancer survivor and mutton buster, Marley McDonald; Lucy Harris, one of the greatest living women’s basketball players who was drafted by the NBA! and Jess Kimura, tough as nails Pro snowboarder and “girl power advocate.” 69 min. Unrated.

SOY CUBANA 10/15 + 10/19
Presented by WWU Dept. of Modern & Classical Languages
What began as a hit short film about the Vocal Vidas became a long-form doc when the group was invited to the US in 2017. Based in Santiago de Cuba, their gorgeous vocals and infectious, resilient spirits meet the challenges of daily life in Cuba head-on. 79 min. Unrated.

STORM LAKE 10/18 // FREE! ITVS
Iowa’s Storm Lake Times is one of the last of its kind: a family-owned, Pulitzer Prize-winning newspaper. It barely breaks even and when Storm Lake becomes a national COVID hotspot, loss of ad revenue threatens the existence of the paper right when the town needs it most. It’s the story of journalism writ large as seen through a small-town lens. 85 min. Unrated.

THE MOST BEAUTIFUL BOY IN THE WORLD
10/14 + 10/16
When director Luchino Visconti declared Björn Andrésen, star of Death in Venice to be the “most beautiful boy in the world,” it turned the teenager into an instant idol and set him down a path that can only be described as ugly. This doc gives Andrésen the opportunity to frame his own story and reclaim his life. 93 min. Unrated.

THE PLACE THAT MAKES US 10/24 + 10/26
Youngstown, Ohio is a quintessential post-industrial city: blighted, crime-ridden, economically depressed—but not without hope. Witness what happens when the city’s younger generation decides to stay put and transform their city in ways sure to inspire. 70 min. Unrated.

THE STORY WON’T DIE Opens 10/6 + 10/9
The story of war in Syria has been told in several moving and award-winning docs, but never quite like this. See the war and its aftermath through the eyes of a rapper, a post-rock musician, a breakdancer, visual artists and other creatives who found inspiration in the least likely of places. 83 min. Unrated.

THE VELVET UNDERGROUND 10/15 - 10/28
It’s only appropriate that when legendary filmmaker Todd Haynes (Far From Heaven, I’m Not There) went looking for a subject for his first foray into documentaries he chose a band equally as legendary: the Velvet Underground. This is the documentary equivalent of game recognizing game. Not to be missed. 90m. R.

THE LONG COAST 10/25 + 10/28
Presented by The Whatcom Watersheds Information Network (WWIN)
A lyrical and impactful study of the coast of Maine, its watery ecosystem and the hardy folks who earn a living from it, told in five chapters that detail both the triumphs and challenges of a rapidly changing way of life. Deceptively simple and decidedly beautiful. 80 min. Unrated.

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TO WHICH WE BELONG 10/24 + 10/27
Presented by the Community Food Co-op.
Restorative agriculture has never been as sexy. Directors Pamela Tanner Boll and Lindsay Richardson follow farmers and ranchers taking the sustainable path forward, saving our land and sea for both economic health and future generations. Inspiring? Very. 90 min. Unrated.

TOM PETTY: SOMEBODY YOU FEEL FREE
10/20 + 10/21
Tom Petty's death in 2017 from an accidental drug overdose shook music fans worldwide. Following his death, his family discovered a collection of 16mm footage shot during the creation of Petty's solo album "Wildflowers." Director Mary Wharton (Jimmy Carter Rock & Roll President) uses these nostalgic moments with intimate interviews to weave together a love letter to Petty's touchstone solo album "Wildflowers." Director Mary Wharton in person, Opening Night.

WITHOUT GETTING KILLED OR CAUGHT
10/1 + 10/4
Guy Clark was a songwriter's songwriter who toiled in near-obscurity for most of his life. This doc assembles such luminaries as Rodney Crowell, Steve Earle, Vince Gill, and more to speak to his lasting influence. But it's through the words of his wife and muse Susanna—a songwriter and artist in her own right—that Guy's story comes to life. 95 min. Unrated.

YOUTH V GOV 10/13 + 10/17
Since 2015, 21 youth climate activists have been embroiled in a groundbreaking lawsuit against the federal government for degrading the environment and endangering their right to life, liberty and property. A stunningly inspirational film and call to action. 110 min. Unrated.

TRY HARDER 10/19 + 10/24
Presented by Bellingham Schools Foundation
Go inside the hallowed and highly competitive halls of San Francisco's Lowell High, one of the best public schools in the nation. With an elite and highly skilled student body, the culture is overwhelming and the pressure intense as they all vie for acceptance at the same top universities. 85 min. Unrated.

WHITE COAT REBELS 10/12 + 10/18
Few docs speak to this moment in time quite like this one. Find out about Big Pharma's corrupting influence on the medical profession and meet a handful of health care workers determined to buck the system. 82 min. Unrated.