

Award-winning 'Love Land' to be screened this Saturday

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Love Land, a powerful film starring actors with intellectual and development disabilities, will be screened Saturday evening at StageCenter in Downtown Bryan.

The film was written and directed by Joshua Tate, a Texas filmmaker with family connections to Bryan-College Station. Every character in the film who is depicted as having disabilities is portrayed by an actor with similar disabilities.

Love Land won the Audience Award for Narrative Feature and the Special Jury Award for Narrative Feature with an Ensemble Cast at the 2014 New Orleans Film Festival, as well as the Golden Strands for Outstanding Ensemble Cast at the 2014 Tallgrass International Film Festival.

The Kenner Times in Louisiana said, "A must-see movie. ... The cast ... give both inspiring and award-worthy performances."

Monica Gaseor stars as Ivy and Michael Iovine as Roger.

The two were chosen after a four-month-long search. They were veterans of the Dionysus Theatre in Houston and graduates of the VAST Academy at Houston Community College. Others in the cast also had previous experience, but some were new to filmmaking.

Tate, a native of California, grew up in Central, South and East Texas. He earned a bachelor of arts in psychology and a bachelor science in film production from The University of Texas at Austin and a master of fine arts in film and TV production from the University of Southern California School of Cinematic Arts. He has earned accolades from the American Society of Cinematographers and the Princess Grace Foundation.

A feature in The Eagle's Arts Watch a year ago said, "Love Land tells the story of 24-year-old Ivy, a young woman who suffered a traumatic brain injury in a car wreck and has been in trouble with the law on more than one occasion. While appearing unaffected by the accident, Ivy has lost most of her



Monica Gaseor

reasoning skills, which cause her to be unable to distinguish between what is acceptable and what isn't. After some time, her sister puts her in a facility -- named Love Land Ranch -- for people with disabilities in her small Texas town.

"Ivy hates it at Love Land and tries to escape repeatedly. She meets Roger, a young man with Down syndrome, who she manipulates in an effort to marry him and leave the facility together. Roger eventually tires of Ivy's manipulation and left her and Love Land to move into a group home.

"Ivy is devastated, but realizes she is to blame and finally 'gives in' to the system and becomes a model resident."

Tate is committed to the disabled community, saying, "My uncle, Jeff Garrison-Tate, who lives in Bryan-College Station and works at Texas A&M, has been a lifelong advocate for disability rights.

"My cousin, Charlotte Garrison-Tate, who went to Bryan High School, has Down syndrome and the conversations I've had with her and other friends in institutions and group homes throughout Texas really sparked my interest in telling a very intimate, human story about a person who wants community and the freedom to make choices for themselves in that community."

Saturday's screening will begin with a reception at 6:30 p.m. StageCenter is located at 201-B W. 26th St. in Downtown Bryan, above Mr. G's Pizza. Tickets are \$15 and benefit Community Now! Tickets will be available at the door.

Tate has had about a dozen screenings for Love Land. He said, "Viewers often remark about how unique the experience is, how much they fall in love with the leads, and how the film inspires them to seek out inclusion for people with disabilities.

"Love Land, while made with the support and guidance of friends and family in the disability community, is meant for the community at large. It's intended to challenge and embolden viewers who may not have been privy to the circumstances of institutionalization to support inclusion and empowerment in their communities."

Tate said of the screenings, "I hope audiences take three things away with them from the theater: (1) the feeling that they have more in common with their brothers and sisters with [intellectual development disorder] than they may have previously assumed; (2) the knowledge that artists with disabilities can represent themselves on screen in a real and powerful way; and (3) anger over the injustices of a system that limits living options to restrictive institutional-type settings for many people who wish for inclusion in their communities."

Tate praised StageCenter for opening its doors to the screening. "Venues like StageCenter are essential to fueling the bloodstream of American culture, drawing essential stories and voices out of the shadows and giving them a platform. I'm so grateful for advocates like StageCenter who invest so much to bring independent films like Love Land to their communities."

Community Now!, which will benefit from the ticket sales, is a statewide nonprofit "organization with a mission to support people with intellectual and development disabilities to live their lives as they define them in community," said Jeff Garrison-Tate.

"Thousands of Texans with intellectual disabilities live in state or private institutions. Community Now! supports the downsizing of institutional settings and repurposing of funding to services for people to live in their communities. It is critical that for this shift in long term care to occur that there are well funded, quality, accountable community services to provide the supports people need to live in their communities," Garrison said, noting the Texas continues to be 50th among the states in funding community-based services for those with intellectual and development disabilities.