

World Artists Experiences Presents



Bridges to the World

**18th Annual International Film Festival
February 10 – March 10, 2026**



Egypt



Estonia



India



Canada



United States

PROGRAM GUIDE FOR
VIRTUAL ATTENDANCE
www.WorldArtists.org

Arts as a bridge to international understanding

For information: wae@comcast.net www.WorldArtists.org





February, 2026

Dear Friends,

Welcome to the 18th Annual Bridges to the World International Film Festival! World Artists Experiences sponsors the film in partnership with respective embassies, international organizations, institutions and, periodically, with individual film makers.

The festival is in recognition of bridging the people and cultures of the world.

The five-week celebration features films in the following order: Egypt (2/10), Estonia (2/17), India (2/24), Canada (3/3) and the United States (3/10). The films present each country through images and sounds. Our hope is that you will gain the spirit of each one represented.

For the sixth year, the festival is being held virtually. In the past, films were screened throughout the State of Maryland. Now, the festival is screened by individuals and groups in different geographical areas. We recognize the venues and organizations who held and supported the live festival in the past and continue to support the festival: Salisbury University, Towson University, Allegany County Arts Council, Anne Arundel Arts Council, and many others.

Each film will be introduced by a diplomat, scholar, actor, and/or producer. The audience will then screen the film through the chat box. Following the screening, questions and answers will be addressed by presenters. This program guide will direct you through the details for attending virtually and provide information on each film at www.worldartists.org.

The link to register for the film is in the technical section of the Film Festival Guide webinars: https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_2q36RzzzQ7eDtZouDSMQ6A
Webinar ID: 812 2349 2063; Passcode: bridges

We express gratitude to the planning committee: Greg Faller, June Krell-Salgado, Linda Smith, and Mendy Nitsch. We appreciate Dr. Greg Faller for writing the essays, Tessa Kellar for her technical expertise, and Margaret Rose Caro for editing and designing the program guide. Thank you to the WAE Communications' Team, Suzanne Jaques, Bernard Wulff, Douglas Steele, Beth Penn and Sophie Castro. We acknowledge all volunteers and in-kind supporters, who have generously contributed their time, talents, and resources to make the festival possible. We especially thank the embassies and other international organizations for partnering with World Artists Experiences to produce the 18th Annual Bridges to the World Film Festival.

We hope you will enjoy and learn about our world through this year's Bridges to the World Film Festival.

Bridging our world together,

Betty McGinnis

President, World Artists Experiences

Note: World Artists Experiences is a nonprofit organization that bridges people and cultures across the continents using the international language of the arts in communities, colleges, and schools.

Email: wae@comcast.net for further information.

Guide for Attending the Virtual Film Festival

In order to attend the 2024 Bridges to the World International Film Festival, attendees will need to follow the Zoom link below and provide a valid name and email address to attend. Zoom Webinars require both a valid name and e-mail address for security purposes.

ZOOM LINK

https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_2q36RzzzQ7eDtZouDSMQ6A

If prompted, the webinar ID is **812 2349 2063**, and the password is **bridges**.

World Artists Experiences Webinar



TOPIC

2024 Bridges to the World International Film Festival

DESCRIPTION

At 7pm, guests will be invited into the Zoom Webinar room, where we will kick off the screenings with an introduction to that evening's film. After the introduction, we will post the film's screening URL in the chat box of the Zoom Webinar Platform. Guests will then follow that link to screen the film on their own computers. After the film has completed its runtime, guests are invited to return to the Webinar room to participate in a Q&A using the chat feature, if they would like to. We will hold brief closing statements and thank you's at the conclusion of the evening.



February 10, 2026, 7pm — Egypt

February 17, 2026, 7pm — Estonia

February 24, 2026, 7pm — India

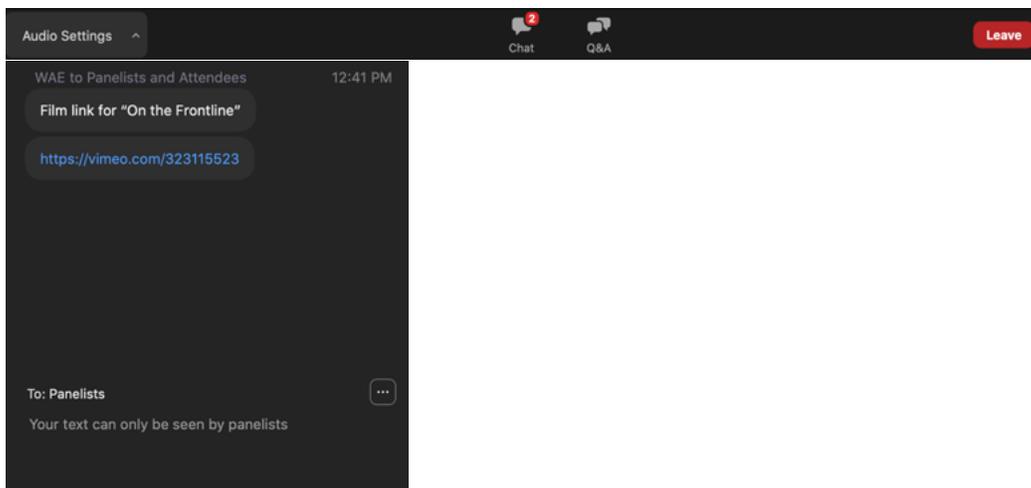
March 3, 2026, 7pm — Canada

March 10, 2026 7pm — USA

Time shows in Eastern Standard Time (U.S. and Canada)

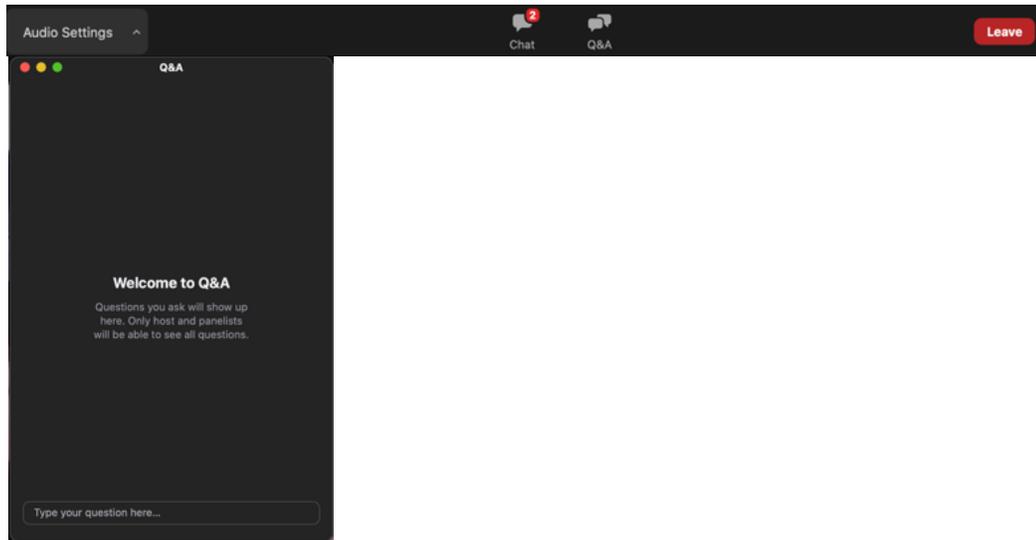
Each Tuesday night, screening of the film festival will use the same link listed above and begin promptly at 7pm.

- ❖ At 7pm, guests will be invited into the Zoom Webinar room, where we will hold a pre-screening introduction.
- ❖ After the introduction, we will post the link to the film's screening URL in the Chat box of the Zoom Webinar platform. The Chat feature is located in the "Control Bar," either at the top or bottom of your Zoom window. A notification will appear announcing that the link has been posted. When directed, select this box to bring up a new window.



- ❖ Guests will then follow the link in the Chat to screen the film on their own computers. Selecting the link will bring up an Internet browser window.
- ❖ We will make an announcement to play the film and expectations for the length of the film's runtime. Guests are invited to come back to the Zoom Webinar at the conclusion of the film's runtime. We will give you an expectation for a specific time to rejoin the Zoom Webinar.
- ❖ Please leave your Zoom Webinar open and in the background during this time. Be aware that while you will have the ability to pause and resume play of the film at your leisure, we are only allowing for a five-minute buffer before the post-screening discussion. If you close your Zoom Webinar window, you will have to rejoin the Zoom Webinar to participate in the post-screening discussion.

- ❖ After the film has completed its runtime, guests are invited to return to the Zoom Webinar room to participate in a post-screening discussion using the Q&A feature. Submit questions by writing them in the Q&A box.



- ❖ We will hold brief closing statements and thank you's at the conclusion of the evening.

ADDITIONAL NOTES:

- ❖ Guests will be muted during the session. If guests have any technical difficulties, they may correspond with WAE Tech Support via the Chat feature. WAE Tech Support will privately message you to respond. Please reserve the Q&A function for the post-screening discussion.
- ❖ The links to these films will only remain active DURING the screening, so guests will NOT be able to watch these films via the links after the evening of the event.

February 10, 2026

EGYPT



Keera & the Jinn (2022)

Director: Marwan Hamed

Writer: Ahmed Mourad (based on his novel, 1919)

Running Time: 175 minutes

Introduced by: Dr. Nirmeen Ahmed Sabry, Cultural Attache and Director of Egyptian Cultural and Educational Bureau, Embassy of Egypt, Professor Cairo University*

Moderator: Greg Faller, Associate Dean of College of Fine Arts and Communications, Towson University

AN EPIC ACTION-ADVENTURE FILM about the Arab resistance to the British occupation, *Keera & the Jinn* offers a rousing fictionalized history of Egypt during the first half of the 20th century. Beginning with the infamous Denshawai massacre in 1906 and concluding with the Egyptian victory against the Tripartite Aggression in 1956 (which forced the British to abandon its oppressive regime), the film celebrates national pride and the people whose “only reward was to live in a free country.”

In many ways, *Keera & the Jinn* is a “buddy film” centered on two very different men (a small time cocaine dealer and a medical doctor) and what makes them join forces to fight the British. Initially antagonistic, they become close friends willing to forfeit their lives for each other. The film could also be called “Keera & the Jinn and Dawlat” since this third main character offers as much of herself as the other resistance fighters (and arguably makes the most devastating sacrifice). The film also weaves together two romantic subplots, a detective story, class and religious differences, British hubris, numerous historical events, people and organizations, and the ignominy of betrayal.

Keera & the Jinn won multiple awards and critical praise, features stunning cinematography and sharp editing, stands as the highest-grossing film in the history of Egyptian cinema, and showcases the talent of well-known actors including: Karim Abdel Aziz (Keera), Ahmed Ezz (the Jinn), and Hend Sabry (Dawlat). Marwan Hamed is a prominent Egyptian director, who graduated from the High Cinema Institute in 1999, now has a career that spans 25 years with some of the best-received films in Arab cinema (*The Yacoubian Building* [2006], *The Blue Elephant* [2014], and *The Blue Elephant: Dark Whispers* [2019]), and was recently recognized with a Career Achievement Award for his record of making impressive blockbusters and establishing new standards in the Egyptian film industry.

The nearly three-hour running time should not be considered a deterrent; the film uses a kinetic style that fully engages the viewer as it successfully juggles epic historical re-enactments and the personal stories of the resistance fighters. The viewer is placed in the middle of the action and will be swept along by the film’s intense emotional and political drama. *Keera & the Jinn* might become your favorite international film.

* Professor Nermine A. Sabry is the Egyptian Cultural and Educational Attaché in Washington, D.C., and Director of the Egyptian Cultural & Educational Bureau, where she leads cultural diplomacy and advances academic cooperation, student mobility, and institutional partnerships between Egypt and the United States. She is also a Professor of Clinical Pharmacy and Pharmacy Practice at Cairo University, and earned her PhD from King’s College London, with extensive experience in clinical education, medication safety, and healthcare quality leadership.

February 17, 2026

ESTONIA



Little Comrade (*Seltsimees laps*, 2018)

Director: Moonika Siimets*

Producer: Riina Siidos

Writer: Leelo Tungal**

Running Time: 98 minutes

Speaker: Sarah Luure, Counselor for Press and Culture, Embassy of Estonia, Washington D.C.

Moderator: Greg Faller, Associate Dean of College of Fine Arts and Communications, Towson University

THE LITTLE COMRADE OFFERS A SUBTLY POWERFUL depiction of a small community's everyday struggles during the repressive Soviet occupation. Set during the final years of Stalin's attempt to systematically erase Estonian culture, the film

looks at the world through the eyes of Leelo, a six-year-old girl, who doesn't quite recognize the political dangers surrounding her. Why is the Estonian flag forbidden? Why are her father's athletic awards treasonous? Should she want to become a Pioneer? Can she trust government officials? Is it okay to tell a lie? Leelo finds it harder and harder to understand what is good and what is bad; how can she be a good girl as she promised her mother? Released in 2018 as part of the centennial recognition of the Anniversary of the Republic of Estonia (celebrated annually on 24 February), the film venerates national pride and self-determination — and the sacrifices one makes to achieve those goals.

The Little Comrade focuses on family relationships and the importance of generational love and support. Leelo and her father, aunt, and grandparents must navigate the ideological minefield of Stalinism while keeping Leelo safe. How much can they tell her about her mother? What will her father need to give up to become head teacher at his school? Why did they move to a new home? What is propaganda and what is truth? This focus on family is beautifully reflected in the cinematography and production design of the film. The amber tones suggest a nostalgia that is thematically opposed to the bittersweet narrative — a tension wonderfully balanced between visuals and story, and resolved by a bright sky that promises a better future. Numerous historical and cultural references also help ground the time period, such

as: Emil Zátopek (winner of three Olympic gold medals in 1952), The Forest Brothers (rural resistance fighters), Russian immigration (diluting the Estonian population), folks songs (Estonian and Soviet), the Siberian gulags, and the menacing surveillance of the NKVD.



**Director Moonika Siimets is an internationally trained and award winning filmmaker who began her career making documentaries for Estonian television. The Little Comrade was her first feature film; it remained the top film in Estonia for five weeks upon its release. Her most recent film, The Black Hole (2024), is an outrageous sci-fi comedy.*

***The Little Comrade was co-written by Leelo Tungal, a celebrated Estonian author who has published more than 80 books of prose and poetry. She is perhaps best known for creating the children's magazine Hea Laps ("Good Kid") and writing for young adults. Her autobiographical novels Velvet & Sawdust and Comrade Kid and the Gown Ups provided the basis for The Little Comrade.*

February 24, 2026

INDIA



Sacred Buddhist Dance (2011) [25']

Darshan of the Divine (2007) [25']

Producer: Benoy K. Behl*

Writer: Benoy K. Behl

Running Time: 25 minutes

Speaker: Benoy K. Behl

Moderator: Greg Faller, Associate Dean, College of Fine Arts and Communications,
Towson University Baltimore, Maryland

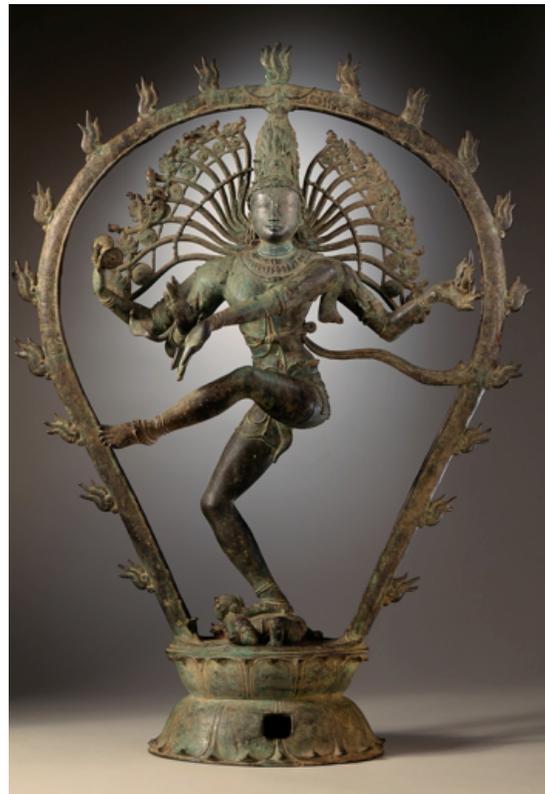
THE HIGHLY ACCOMPLISHED AND INTERNATIONALLY acclaimed documentarian Benoy K. Behl explores two ancient cultural traditions from two distinct regions of India — Tamil Nadu in the south and Ladakh in the north. Equal parts travelogue, ethnography, and art lecture these documentaries reveal the beauty and spiritual grounding of Buddhist dance and Hindu sculpture. Sacred Buddhist Dance is one of

26 films Mr. Behl created for the Spectacular India! series while Darshan of the Divine is one of 26 films created for the Sculpture of India series; both series were broadcast on Doordarshan, India's public media organization.

Born in New Delhi in 1956, Benoy Behl started making documentaries in 1976. Since then he has made almost 150 films celebrating India and Asian art. He is also a photographer (having taken over 53,000 photographs) whose work has been featured in National Geographic magazine and in exhibitions in 75 countries. According to one publication, he is the most travelled photographer and art historian in the world.

Sacred Buddhist Dance discusses the Cham, a masked sacred ritual performed by monks — usually on the grounds of a monastery — to represent the triumph of good over evil. The Cham can be considered a type of “meditation in action,” where performers embody deities to teach moral lessons and to bring spiritual purification to the audience. The elaborate costumes and masks are used to help the monks transcend their ego and embody the deities they are portraying. The Cham is not for entertainment; it is meant to create a solemn atmosphere for the monks and spectators to contemplate the spiritual meaning of the choreography.

Darshan of the Divine discusses the famous Chola Bronzes and the spiritual practice of the “darshana” — an auspicious sight of a deity which bestows blessing on the viewer. The Cholas empire dominated southern India for 400 years (850 CE — 1250 CE) and built impressive temples and created magnificent bronze statues. These bronzes were portable, processional statues (as opposed to permanent stone sculptures) that actively participated in daily life and festivals. They were carried through town, adorned with garlands and jewels, allowing devotees to have a direct “darshana” with the divine. The most famous Chola bronze is the Nataraja, a depiction of Shiva as the divine cosmic dancer, destroying and creating the universe.



**Benoy K. Behl was born in New Delhi in 1956, Benoy Behl started making documentaries in 1976. Since then, he has made almost 150 films celebrating India and Asian art. He is also a photographer (having taken over 53,000 photographs) whose work has been featured in National Geographic magazine and in exhibitions in 75 countries. According to one publication, he is the most travelled photographer and art historian in the world. He is featured by the Ministry of Culture of India in numerous lectures, exhibitions, public media, etc.*

March 3, 2026

CANADA



Matimekush (2025)

Director: Guillaume Sylvestre

Running Time: 90 minutes

Speaker: Guillame Sylvestre

Moderator: Greg Faller, Associate Dean of College of Fine Arts and Communications. Towson University. Baltimore, Maryland

MATIMEKUSH IS A FIRST NATIONS RESERVE on Lac-John belonging to the Innu Nation. Remotely located in the Côte-Nord Region of Quebec, about 650 miles northeast of Quebec City, the community can only be reached by plane or train. One solitary school, the École Kanatamat Tshitipenitamunu, provides pre-Kindergarten to grade 10 education to a small student body. Matimekush examines the interpersonal and educational dynamics of the teachers and students over the course of an

academic year. It demonstrates an approach to documentary filmmaking — often referred to as Direct Cinema — that arguably began in the late 1950s at the National Film Board in Quebec.

Direct Cinema aspires to capture reality in a purely observational way; to record the lives of individuals without intruding and to present those lives truthfully. Direct Cinema offers no interviews and provides no voiceover narration to guide the audience. This type of documentary is non-judgmental; each viewer must generate their own opinion from the material presented. Direct Cinema typically utilizes hand-held camera work that imparts an intimate perspective. Ultimately, it relies on an agreement among the filmmaker, subjects, and audience to act as if the presence of the camera (and filmmaker) does not substantially alter the recorded event; an agreement that raises a number of questions, particularly regarding how editing provides “narrative” structure and meaning.

Matimekush reveals a fascinating school system where educators from Algeria, Senegal, Morocco, and Haiti teach Innu children. Not only must they navigate cultural differences, but they must also find ways to motivate the students who apparently find their cell phones more interesting than their lessons. One local teacher — Conrad André — inspires the students by teaching them Innu culture and language. In addition to scenes in the school, the film highlights community meetings (one including an amateur production of the cultural genocide administered by the Indian Residential School System), a fishing trip and a hunting trip (both to help feed the community), a winter camping outing via snowmobile, and a funeral. In the Direct Cinema model, each viewer must assemble these various pieces to create a full picture and impression of the community and its inhabitants.

Since 2006, filmmaker Guillaume Sylvestre, has made his mark on the international film festival circuit with a perspective that is both human and unflinching. His socially engaged documentaries, shot hand-held by himself over extended periods, lift the veil on Quebec society and deliver raw portraits that consistently provoke strong reactions.

Matimekush offers a powerful example of his work. Although specific to this one school, the relationship between students and teachers seems universal and constant.



March 10, 2026

UNITED STATES



The Conqueror: Hollywood Fallout (2023)

Writer and Director: William Nunez*

Running Time: 115 minutes

Speaker: William Nunez

Moderator: Greg Faller, Associate Dean, College of Fine Arts and Communications, Towson University, Baltimore, MD

DID THE US GOVERNMENT KILL JOHN WAYNE? This might seem an absurd question, but William Nunez's fascinating documentary examines how that might be possible. By deconstructing the production history of Howard Hughes' failed epic, *The Conqueror* (1956), Nunez weaves a compelling tapestry of Hughes' aspirations and paranoia, the final years of the Hollywood studio system, nuclear testing, administrative cover-up, and the community of St. George, Utah — all revealing the devastating impact of radioactive fallout.

The Conqueror (directed by Dick Powell, perhaps best known for his roles in Busby Berkeley musicals) is typically considered a \$6 million disaster. Most kindly described

as “the toughest movie to find anything admirable about” or, more critically, “one of the worst films of all time,” the film stars John Wayne as Genghis Khan. The miscasting doesn’t stop there: Susan Hayward, William Conrad, Agnes Moorehead, Pedro Armendáriz, Lee Van Cleef, and many Hollywood extras unconvincingly portray Asian characters. And yet, moving past the racist and sexist problems of the 1950s, the stilted dialogue of the script, and the artificiality of the sound stage “exteriors,” the real villain of the movie is where it was filmed.

Shot in the southwestern corner of Utah (because it looked like the Gobi Desert), this location was 140 miles downwind of the 928 (!) nuclear tests the United States detonated in Yucca Flat, Nevada, 60 miles outside of Las Vegas. After spending 13–4 weeks working in this irradiated environment, 91 cast and crew members (of about 220) developed and died from cancer. Even worse, is the continuing impact of cancer in generations of St. George residents. Hollywood Fallout acknowledges that epidemiological studies can’t prove a 100 percent cause/effect relationship between the downwind fallout and St. George cancer rates, but the concentrated cluster of cancers in the St. George community is 2.5 times higher than the national average. As terrible as *The Conqueror* is, it can rightfully claim one important credit — it helped bring to light the lasting dangers of nuclear fallout.

Nunez presents an important and relatable documentary about Hollywood’s xenophobia, careless production decisions, the atomic bomb, government lies, and human tragedy. The film highlights government irresponsibility and attempts to hide the truth about nuclear weapons from the American public. As one Pentagon scientist said, “Please, God, don’t let us have killed John Wayne.” Hollywood Fallout suggests that might have indeed been the case.

**William Nunez is an award-winning director of shorts, feature films, television news, and more than 100 commercials. He won the prestigious Dupont and Peabody awards for his coverage of the 2008 presidential election and Hurricane Katrina. His previous film, The Laureate (2021), won best film at the Oxford Film Festival and Cannes Film Screening. Metal Racket was in competition at the Cannes Film Festival and screened in 24 countries. Fear of Man won the Golden Hugo award at Chicago Film Festival. His last short, Around the World in 90 Seconds, screened in film festivals around the world including the Rio de Janeiro Short Film Festival and the Marbella Film Festival. He is currently developing the dark comedy Death Benefit.*

As a former television director, for CNN and NBC, Mr. Nunez has directed many of the news stories of the last decade winning the prestigious Dupont and Peabody awards for directing coverage of the 2008 U.S. Presidential election as well as Hurricane Katrina. He has also directed numerous U.S. presidential debates including the 2016 election which reached 120 million homes worldwide. He has also been nominated for News and Documentary Emmy Award for Best Live Interview.