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Sundance: Films, parties, networking keep festival-goers busy

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Keri Russell and Bret Mckenzie in a scene from 'Austenland.' / Courtesy photo

Written by Meira Blaustein For the Poughkeepsie Journal

PARK CITY, UTAH — Sundance is such a complicated and layered event to navigate.

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It always is, and this year is no exception.

Between the hundreds of movies one wants/needs to see, parties one wants/needs to attend and people one wants/needs to meet and talk to, I always feel as if I'm being pulled in never-ending directions. No matter how specific and detailed my plans are, they always seem to fly out the window once I'm here as new opportunities pop up and I must remain flexible and go with the

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From left, Jane Seymour, James Callis, Ricky Whittle, and Georgia King from the film 'Austenland,' pose for a portrait during the 2013 Sundance Film Festival at the Fender Music Lodge on Jan. 19 in Park City, Utah. / AP

I am staying this year at a huge condo with a constant flow of people who are here day and night, many of whom are up all night (not me). You can see them before you go to sleep and then again as you come downstairs early in the morning to get some work done.

So while seeing premieres is always the highlight, and going to the various parties is always a must, hanging at the condo this year has become an interesting bonus where new acquaintances — so many are from the West Coast — can easily become new opportunities of growth for the Woodstock Film Festival.

Clear blue skies have been constant over Sundance this year, making walking from venue to venue easier and more pleasurable than usual. I've tried to avoid shuttles and use the sidewalks as I attempt to make it on time from parties to screenings and vice-versa.

Some of the films I've seen to date have been anywhere from not great to brilliant.

"Emanuel and the Truth About Fishes" was one of my highlights so far, though I also enjoyed films such as "20 Feet From Stardom," "Austenland" and "Touchy Feely."

But many of the more talked-about films out here I am yet to see.

Films such as "Blue Caprice," "Concussion," "Before Midnight," "C.O.G.," "Toy's House," "We Are What We Are" and "Running From Crazy," for instance. I truly look forward to seeing all of these and more.

Parties and meetings are among the activities in Sundance that are unique to this event.

While every film festival is a fertile ground for networking, there aren't too many film events in the world that are as concentrated and populated as Sundance, and many attend not only to see brand-new, exciting films, but also to take important meetings that

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could generate funding for new projects or connect them with those they will work with toward new projects, be it agents, distributors, press, producers, directors and so on.

There are many who come here without attending even one screening, but rather just take meetings and attend parties.

Then there are those who watch seven films a day, one right after the other. Those are the buyers, programmers and critics. They basically live in the movie theaters.

I fall somewhere in between. Watching a marathon of movies is sort of heaven for me and I plan on doing that on my last day here.

As a juror this year at Slamdance, I also still must finish viewing the 12 films in competition in the Dramatic Feature category, so that has to be integrated into my schedule as well. That and convening with my co-jurors to determine who the grand prize will go to. That is an exciting responsibility I feel honored to be a part of.

Until later, see you at the movies.

Meira Blaustein is executive director and co-founder of the Woodstock Film Festival.

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