

Karen Allen to appear at United to discuss her short film, 'A Tree. A Rock. A Cloud.'

By Nancy Burns-Fusaro Sun staff writer Jun 15, 2023 Updated Jun 15, 2023 0



Karen Allen. Photo credit Peter Balamonte

If You Go

WHAT: Screening of "A Tree. A Rock. A Cloud." and live conversation with the film's director, Karen Allen.

WHEN: Saturday, June 24, at 4 p.m.

WHERE: United Theatre, 5 Canal St., Westerly.

TICKETS: \$25 per person.



WESTERLY — Karen Allen may best be known for her role as Marion Ravenwood playing opposite Harrison Ford in "Raiders of the Lost Ark," but this week the Berkshires-based actor and fiber artist is focused on her upcoming visit to the United Theatre and a short film called "A Tree. A Rock. A Cloud."

On Saturday, June 24, Allen, who has appeared in dozens of films and television programs — including "Animal House," "Malcolm X" and "The Perfect Storm" — will be in Westerly for a screening of "A Tree. A Rock. A Cloud.," the 2016 film that marked her directorial debut.

Based on the short story by groundbreaking southern American writer Carson McCullers, written when she was just 25, the film, is set at a roadside café in the early morning in the Spring of 1947.

"I love showing this film," said Allen on the phone from her home in Monterey, Massachusetts, one afternoon last week. "I will be delighted if people come to see it."

She said the story for the film has been etched in her mind for decades.

Allen, now in her 70s, said she first read the story as an 18-year-old, and "fell head over heels in love with it."

"It's almost from a Buddhist place," she said. "It's about the nature of love and about passing of wisdom from a man to a boy after World War One."

The film shows a young boy and an older man who meet by chance. The man shares a story about personal heartbreak and loss, and of his hard won understanding of the nature of love, Allen said.

"It's a gorgeous story," added Allen. "One of those stories that goes beyond ... and brings in so much ... like racial justice."

The 30-minute film, starring Jeffrey DeMunn of "Billions" and "The Green Mile" fame, James McMenamin, who appeared in "Orange is the New Black" and Jackson Smith — who was 12 years old at the time — premiered at the Manchester Film Festival in England, where it won Best International Short Film.

"A Tree. A Rock. A Cloud." went on to win numerous other film festival awards and has screened in more than 25 film festivals, including Cannes, Madrid, Rhode Island (where Allen won Best Director), the Big Apple Festival, NY Shorts, the Berkshire International Film Festival, the Woods Hole Film Festival and the U.S. Film Festival in Dallas. It also screened in Rome, Italy and in Columbus, Georgia, as part of a 100th anniversary celebration of Carson McCullers as a writer.

McCullers, a novelist, short-story writer, playwright, essayist, and poet, also wrote the novels "The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter" and "The Member of the Wedding," and a novella, "The Ballad of the Sad Café."

"Carson McCullers is more beloved in other countries than in the United States," Allen said. "In Japan she's considered a master."

"It's great to celebrate here again," she added, "to bring her back into the public eye."

Allen, a lifetime member of the Actors Studio in New York, has been directing for the stage for roughly 15 years, she said. She first began directing while an adjunct professor at Bard College at Simon's Rock. It was there she directed Joan Ackerman's "The Batting Cage," which is her next big project and will mark her first time directing a feature film.

"It's a beautiful story about two sisters who have just lost another sister, the third sister who was a twin," she explained. "It takes place on a beach in St. Augustine, where they've gone to spread the sister's ashes."

"It's a story about people dealing with grief," she said, "and how it affects them. It's also quite poignant and could be healing. But it's also very funny."

Allen, who is on the board of the Berkshire International Film Festival and the Amazon Conservation Team, is also the owner of Karen Allen Fiber Arts, a shop that sells cashmere sweaters, scarves and hats made on her Japanese knitting machine. An Illinois native, she grew up in Washington, D.C., and has been interested in textiles since she was a young child. She attended the Fashion Institute of Technology in New York and George Washington University, where she studied acting and performed in a number of theater productions with the Washington Theatre Laboratory and co-produced performances at the Washington Project for the Arts.

Following next week's screening of "A Tree. A Rock. A Cloud.," Allen will be part of a Q&A and will attend a wine reception, where she will meet and mingle with guests, said Mystic Film Festival Director of Development and Special Events Jennifer Schwindt. The film festival is sponsoring the screening, along with the Mystic Film Institute.

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Athlete of the Week

Athlete of the Week: June 10

Sponsored by Antonino Auto Group: For the 2022-2023 school year, The Westerly Sun will be selecting high school Athletes of the Week. Voting closes on Tuesday at 9am and the top selection will be announced on Thursday. The nominees for the week ending June 10 are as follows:

- TYLER SIGNOR, Wheeler, Golf, Junior; Signor finished with an 8-over par 79 as Wheeler placed eighth at the Division III state championships. The Lions finished with a team round of 350.
JOSH MOONEY, Stonington, Boys Track, Senior; Mooney earned All-New England recognition in two events at the regional championships in Bangor, Maine. Mooney was first in the 110 hurdles in meet record time. He finished second in the javelin.
DREW PIETRASZKA, Westerly, Boys Lacrosse, Senior; Pietraszka scored four goals and had an assist as Westerly beat Smithfield for the Division III championship. Westerly finished the season, 16-1, unbeaten against D-III opponents.
ERIN VONHOUSEN, Charho, Girls Track, Junior; VonHousen earned All-New England honors with a third-place showing in the 3,200 at the regional meet in Bangor, Maine. VonHousen improved her time in the event by 10 seconds from the previous year. Rhode Island runners compete in the 3,000 not the 3,200 during their season.

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