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Mystic Film Festival offers dozens of films including a comedy/drama about breast cancer awareness



Courtesy of "Love, Danielle"

Devin Sidell stars in "Love, Danielle," a film inspired by her own experiences undergoing preventative surgery after testing positive for BRCA-1. (Courtesy of "Love, Danielle")



There are dozens of films in this year's [Mystic Film Festival](#), which spans four days, Oct. 2-5, and four venues: Mystic Luxury Cinemas and the Mystic Aquarium's Milne Center, LaGrua Center in Stonington and the United Theatre in Westerly, Rhode Island, just over the Connecticut border.

The festival offers 13 narrative features, eight documentary features, 15 documentary shorts, a whopping 53 narrative shorts, 26 student films and a couple of animated films. Among the highlights are ["The Art of Joy Brown,"](#) about the late Branford-based sculptor and environmental artists (screening Oct. 4 at 11:30 a.m. at the the Mystic Luxury), Zeljko Mirkovic's ["He is UConn: Big Red,"](#) about one of the most conspicuous UConn Huskies fans (Oct. 5 at 11:30 a.m. at Mystic Luxury) and the quirky short ["Wilbur, the King"](#) which concerns a washed-up Elvis impersonator.

Among the narrative features is one with intriguing real-life roots. "Love, Danielle" is described as "the first scripted feature film to tackle the completely absurd decisions and issues faced by an individual who carries a BRCA gene mutation but has not been diagnosed with cancer."

The film stars Devin Sidell, a professional actress based in Los Angeles who also co-wrote the movie, basing it on her own experiences testing positive for BRCA-1 and undergoing a preventative oophorectomy/hysterectomy. The operation was in 2017.

"I met with the other screenwriter while I was still recovering from surgery," Sidell said. "The movie is based on my personal story. We used a classic film structure, and we definitely made some changes for dramatic effect. My mother, for example, who's a two-time cancer survivor herself, is nothing like the mother character in the film."

The project was written and prepped largely during the COVID shutdown. It was shot in 2021, but Sidell and her team felt "it still wasn't right" so they rewrote and reshot some of the film in 2023.

"I hoped the comedy and drama would appeal to any audience," Sidell said of the film's multi-faceted approach to its daunting subject matter. "It was important that this wasn't a PSA but geared to people who wanted to see a movie."

"Mystic is the end of the festival circuit," Sidell told the Courant in an interview last month. On Oct. 3, the same weekend that it screens in Mystic, "Love, Danielle" will be released to streaming services. The film played around a dozen festivals before Mystic.

The reaction at other festivals, Sidell said, has been a succession of audience members coming up to her to say, "I feel seen. Thank you for making this."

Sidell will take part in a Q&A following the screening. She continues to act, but doesn't have other filmmaking projects at the moment. She learned while making "Love, Danielle" that she had to stay conscious of her ongoing health issues and balance her work carefully.

"I've always been an actress. Theater is my first love. Writing, producing and acting was exhausting. I'm excited to just be hired as an actor again."

"Love, Danielle," directed by Marianna Palka, screens on Oct. 3 at 2:30 p.m. at the United Theatre, 5 Canal St., Westerly, Rhode Island. The complete Mystic Film Festival schedule is at mysticfilmfestival2025.eventive.org.