



SCREEN SAVVY Aspen Film's new artistic director, Maggie Mackay, and executive director, John Thew, aim to carry on the organization's tradition of bringing the best of independent film to town.

Through the quality of their programming for the organization's annual festivals and their passion for independent film, the couple left an indelible mark, both locally and among the various filmmakers they nurtured and supported along the way.

"Aspen Film has an incredible brand, thanks to Laura and George," Thew says. "Aspen Shortsfest is known the world over as one of the top film festivals in the country. The December Academy Screenings and Aspen Filmfest annually give [local] audiences the unique opportunity to see some of the year's best cinematic offerings. I feel fortunate to inherit such a strong and creative program."

Thew himself brings an impressive background in theater, public relations and business to his post. After college, he tried his hand at acting and "fell into the arms" of Second Stage Theatre in Manhattan, a contemporary off-Broadway theater company. He soon found his marketing skills and business acumen more in demand and worked at Second Stage for seven years as director of public relations and then director of development, increasing the bottom line for the organization by 350 percent over a four-year period. His other bona fides include founding his own management company and working as a consultant for Fortune 500 companies.

After two successful decades in the business world, Thew had a realization. "I was working as an executive consultant in Minnesota and also volunteering at the Cookie Cart, a nonprofit aimed at helping disadvantaged kids," he relates. "Their stories touched my heart and made me think about what I was doing. I realized it was time to return to the arts and do something I feel passionate about and that has an impact on society."

He went to work for Theater Latté Da in Minneapolis until 2013, when Theatre Aspen hired him away to become managing director. Then Aspen Film, whose office is right next door in The Red Brick, came knocking. "I love theater and film. Both art forms open us up to new perspectives," he says. "But I couldn't resist the opportunity to lead an organization that has accomplished so much."

In early 2016, Thew plans to embark on strategic planning for Aspen Film. "I would love to see title sponsors for our three major festivals. The philanthropic dollars that have come to Aspen Film are essential to our success, CONTINUED...

# REEL PEOPLE

John Thew and Maggie Mackay step into the leading roles at Aspen Film.

By Dexter Cirillo  
Photography by Chris Council and Emily Chaplin

Trading Places as "influential" (picking favorites, she adds, is impossible). Both are passionate about the arts. Meet John Thew and Maggie Mackay, the new executive and artistic directors, respectively, of Aspen Film ([aspenfilm.com](http://aspenfilm.com)).

The pair replaces Laura Thielen and George Eldred, who worked for the 36-year-old local nonprofit for 20 years, most recently as co-directors.

He grew up on an orchard in Hudson Valley, N.Y. She grew up in Manhattan's Soho. He majored in theater at the University of Nebraska. She majored in English and film studies at the University of Delaware. He was an actor in soap operas and commercials. She got a master's in film studies at Claremont Graduate University. He counts *The Sound of Music*, *Nashville* and *The Maids* among his favorite movies. She cites *After Hours*, *The Third Man* and

## ART &amp; CULTURE

film

...CONTINUED and I hope to cultivate even more of a passion for cinema in the Aspen community.” He cites the robustness of the education program while also hoping to bolster it. “Right now, we take filmmakers to the classroom and arrange for classes to attend the festivals. I hope to explore ways we might expand our educational outreach to include after-school and summer programs in filmmaking for students.”

Mackay is equally fervent about film, having grown up going to movies with her mother at Manhattan’s Film Forum. “Many were—sometimes hilariously—inappropriate for a child my age,” she recalls, “but that experience made me fall in love with movies.” After completing her master’s at Claremont, she stayed in California, working in a variety of production and programming jobs, and landing a stint as Sacha Baron Cohen’s assistant.

As senior coordinator of the Sundance Documentary Fund, Mackay worked closely with filmmakers. “I have always loved documentaries,” she says. “The focus at Sundance was on human rights and social justice films.” She joined Film Independent’s Los Angeles Film Festival in 2003 as the programming coordinator and eventually worked her way up to senior programmer and director of nominations for Film Independent’s Spirit Awards, for which she remains a consultant.

Mackay’s connection to Aspen Film came through Thielen. “Laura has been a trusted colleague for many years,” she says. “She’s served on Spirit Awards committees with me and has shown many films at Aspen Filmfest that premiered at LAFF when I was there, so I’ve always felt a connection with her work in Aspen.” Mackay also credits Thielen with supporting the genre of short film. “Aspen Shortsfest is responsible for launching the careers of countless filmmakers, and, for years, it has been the first festival I recommend to filmmakers when they are inquiring about the festival landscape,” she notes.

She lauds the diversity of the Aspen audience, saying, “People from all over the world attend the movies in Aspen. The festivals feel more universal than regional. I look forward to building programs that will live up to our audience’s expectations.” Aspen’s silver screens await. ■

## And the Oscar Goes to...

Come the holidays, all of Hollywood is consumed by one thing: the upcoming Academy Award nominations. With its annual Academy Screenings, Aspen Film presents twice-daily showings of likely Oscar contenders, giving local audiences an opportunity to see this year’s buzzworthy movies as well as the occasional sneak peek of a film that hasn’t yet been released. In anticipation of this year’s event (Dec. 22 to Jan. 2 at the Wheeler Opera House, tickets from \$15, [aspenfilm.com](http://aspenfilm.com)), we asked Aspen Film Artistic Director Maggie Mackay to share some of her Oscar predictions. —DC

« AMY “*Asif Kapadia’s stunning, all-archival documentary about singer/songwriter Amy Winehouse goes deep and leaves an indelible mark.*” »



« ANOMALISA “*Charlie Kaufman and Duke Johnson’s stop-motion animated movie for grown-ups is an amazing achievement. I love it in the mix with the Disney movie Inside Out (another great animation contender), which interestingly touches on many of the same subjects, but from a child’s perspective.*” »

« CAROL “*Everything about this film—from Todd Haynes’ direction to Phyllis Nagy’s adaptation of a classic Patricia Highsmith novel to the transcendent performances of Rooney Mara and Cate Blanchett—is thoroughly engrossing and deeply moving.*” »



« SPOTLIGHT “*This is a rapid-fire, quietly intellectual and deeply moving film marked by a near pitch-perfect ensemble cast.*” »