

the CANINE CORNER

by Kathleen Crisley, CSMT, CTMT, SCMT

www.balanceddog.co.nz / www.doggymom.com

On 31 October, the third annual Top Dog Film Festival had its Christchurch screening — yet another event that was delayed thanks to COVID-19. It was originally scheduled for August.

Prior to the festival, I spoke to Nat Ward, the New Zealand tour's organiser.

"I worked for over 20 years in the digital industry and was taking a one-year sabbatical from work to decide what next in my career. By chance, I met the Australian organiser who asked me to take on the organisation of the festival in New Zealand. I accepted.

"2020 is the third year of the Top Dog Film Festival; in 2018 we sold out and we are hopeful for an equally good turnout this year.

"Each year, we review over 500 films using the Film Freeway, a clearinghouse for independent filmmakers. Filmmakers upload their films to this platform and apply for grants and entry into film festivals.

"For Top Dog, we aim to celebrate the bond between animals and their people by screening feel-good films that are suitable for this family-friendly event. There were several films that we reviewed which had material unsuitable for the festival's atmosphere."

Festivals pay a licensing fee to the filmmakers for those films that they choose for screening; by far the largest cost for a film festival is the hiring of the independent cinemas. Big box theatres are just too expensive for small one-off event viewings.

Other costs for the festival include advertising to ensure the event is promoted for ticket sales, securing of sponsors for the prize draw at each screening location, and travel for Nat to host each screening around the country.

This year, the Festival has had screenings in Wellington, Tauranga, Dunedin, Christchurch, Nelson and Auckland.

This was the first year that dogs were allowed into the Hollywood Theatre in the Christchurch suburb of Sumner.

"Last year, we had a dog-friendly showing in Auckland and the theatre owner said the dogs were better behaved than many human patrons they typically see in the theatre. I asked the owner of the Hollywood if he would be willing to have dogs attend in 2020. He unreservedly said yes. He was willing to give it a try."

Owners with large dogs were asked to book seats in the front row, which is where I sat with Greyhounds Izzy and her friend Spot (right top). A number of my clients, past and present, were in the theatre too, with seats booked especially for their dogs.

My favourite part of the day occurred when I noticed that Bella, a Golden Retriever, was sitting up and watching the films just like her humans were.

I apologise for the somewhat dark photos in this column – dark theatres make it difficult for great photos.

To follow the Top Dog Film Festival for 2021, sign up for the newsletter at topdogfilmfestivalnz.com. 🐾



Spot and Izzy get comfortable in the front row.

Candace with Tabasco.

