

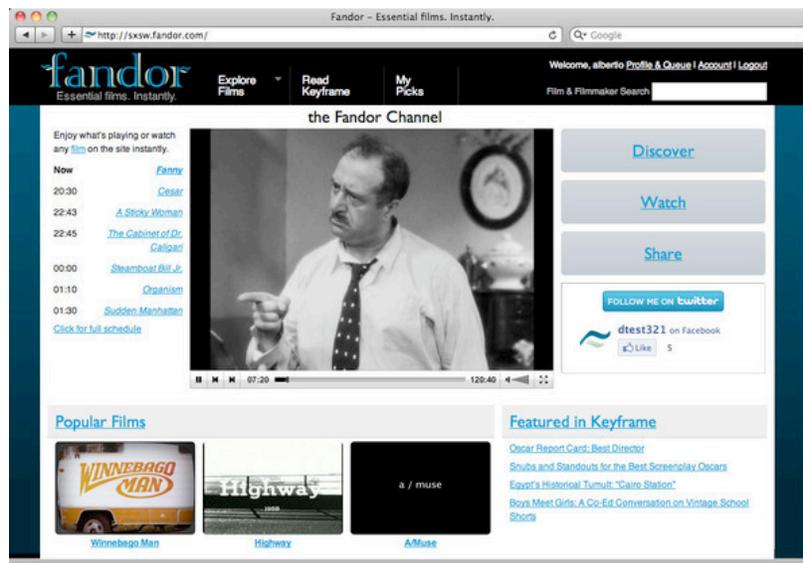
Independent Film Site Fandor is “All About Discovery”

By Toby Bielawski

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Fandor.com offers on-demand streaming of independent films and, Friday, a chance to win an overseas trip for watching a movie.

In the wake of Netflix's recent decision to hike its prices, one Albany resident suggested that people might one day turn to alternatives, such as Bay Area online film streaming subscription service Fandor. As it turns out, Fandor's chief operations officer, Monty Kosma, is a recent Albany transplant. We spoke with him this week to learn about the company.



So what is Fandor, anyway?

Fandor provides an opportunity to discover and share exceptional stories by passionate filmmakers. It's a way to see films on-demand, films that might be independent, shown at festivals. These kinds of films are not necessarily made to make money, but because the filmmakers care about the story, and are compelled to tell it. There's something very human about these stories.

Who does the “curating” of the films? How do you decide which films Fandor will show?

Our head of content is Jonathan Marlow, who's an indie film guru; he's been active in the SF film community for years. But lots of people are involved in the search

process: we have freelance film reviewers, and people like filmmaker like Ted Hope. And Roger Ebert has been working with us – he shares our vision of helping these stories get told. Most of our films don't have a huge marketing budget behind them!

Who is your target audience?

There are several million people who attend film festivals every year, which can be expensive. Plus, it's hard to see everything you want to see when you're at a festival – there's so much going on. I went to South by Southwest this year, and I had to miss a lot of things. So, those people are one audience for us.

But also, there are 65-75 million folks who see one or more indie film every year. Like, let's say, *The King's Speech* or *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*. For every one of those films, there are a dozen more you just don't hear about. Fandor is all about discovery – discovery of these fantastic stories, fantastic movies.

How do you make that discovery happen?

We really owe thanks to Netflix and Facebook – Netflix for driving down the cost and complexity of streaming technology, and Facebook for bringing us word-of-mouth connectivity... because word-of-mouth and social networks are an important source of discovery. For instance, let's say you watch *Winnebago Man* (on Fandor) and love it. You can clip out a favorite scene, and share it on Facebook. In that way, Fandor is a community, a community of people who appreciate thought-provoking movies.

What are some of the obstacles and opportunities for Fandor?

Soon we'll be launching our service on iPad, Google TV, Android....for discovery of these films to work, it has to be easy. I think that's the biggest challenge: People like to do what's easy, flip through cable channels. But there are so many options now, so some people – we call them “cable cutters” – will assemble their own content. You know, using Netflix for their mainstream films, another source for their sports, Fandor for their indie films.... There's also an altruistic piece to it: half of every dollar spent at Fandor goes back to the rights-holders, so fans of these movies are directly supporting them, allowing more to be made.

What's your favorite film on Fandor right now?

It's hard being a start-up executive: I don't have enough time to watch movies – my queue is so long! But one of our films that I found really powerful is called *Kimjongilia*, a documentary told from the viewpoint of escapees from North Korea's regime. And I do love *Winnebago Man*, a docu-comedy that started out as a VHS tape that went viral. The thing I'm really excited to see is a new film from Wales called *Sleep Furiously* – it's won festivals in Europe, and it makes its U.S. premier on Friday, July 29, in New York, Chicago...and on Fandor!

The same day it debuts in New York and Chicago, it's on Fandor?

We're really excited about that – in fact, we're running a contest, open to anyone who signs up for a free trial (or already has a Fandor account) and streams the film by midnight on the July 29. We're giving away tickets to Wales.

Very cool. So, will any Albany FilmFest winners be coming to Fandor?

Unfortunately, I couldn't attend the FilmFest. It can be complicated, legally, to take a local movie to global distribution. The world is ready to change, but it's not quite there yet. From Albany FilmFest to Sundance, there are legal challenges.

While Fandor works with a number of leading independent and international distributors, we are increasingly working directly with filmmakers. Anyone interested in submitting a film for review by our curatorial team can check out our content submission guidelines.

How did you end up in Albany?

We just moved here in January, from Virginia. My wife and I really like the feel of Albany – it's artsy and eclectic without being stuck up. And it's convenient to get to the city. What's not to like? Except that this has been the coldest July I've ever experienced!