

Blackstone, Heartland lead in nominations for Alberta Film and Television Awards

BY ERIC VOLMERS, CALGARY HERALD MARCH 13, 2014



Amber Marshall and Graham Wardle in Heartland, which received 10 Alberta Film and Television Award nominations.

CBC's Alberta-shot family series Heartland is again poised to be the big Calgary winner at the 40th annual Alberta Film and Television Awards, picking up 10 nominations including best dramatic series.

The nominations were announced Thursday at press conferences in both Edmonton and Calgary. Heartland was second only to the Edmonton-based series Blackstone, which nabbed 13 nominations. Meanwhile, Corkscrew Media scored the most nods for a Calgary production company with 19, 13 of which were co-produced by Calgary's Stir Films.

Now in its seventh season, Heartland picked up nods for Shaun Johnston in the best actor category and Dean Bennett for best director. It was also nominated in screenwriting, cinematography, editing, sound, production design, costume design and visual effects.

"No matter how long the show has been running, the fact that it still gets critical acclaim and gets these nominations still means a lot because we strive to make the show better every single year," says Jordy Randall, who produces the show with Tom Cox for SEVEN24 Films.

"To survive as long as we have, that's really critical. It's got to be fresh and it's got to be better than the

last year.”

For the first time, the Rosies added a separate category for comedy series, so Heartland’s competition this year is dramatic series Blackstone and the Calgary-based AMC western Hell on Wheels.

Hell on Wheels has won best series the past two years.

The series, which begins shooting Season 4 near Calgary in April, also picked up a nomination for Kevin Davey and nods for editing, sound, production design, costume design and makeup.

More than 500 entries were submitted this year for the Rosies, which includes 22 class awards for Alberta-based productions and 32 craft awards for Alberta-based artists and technicians.

There were 303 finalists, 162 of them from Calgary-based productions.

Alongside established shows such as Hell on Wheels and Heartland, the awards also put a spotlight on independent filmmakers and their projects.

This year, the Calgary-shot indie drama After the Storm picked up five nominations, including for best dramatic production over 30 minutes and directing and screenwriting nods for Stephen Lubig.

Spencer Estabrooks and Greg Jeffs’ The Hunt, recently named best horror short in Rue Morgue Magazine, picked up five nominations in screenwriting, sound, makeup, visual effects and for best short.

Common Chord, a family drama by Lethbridge filmmaker Deric Olsen, received seven nominations, including for best production over 30 minutes, pitting it against After the Storm, Carl’s Way by Rosebud-based Smoke Signal Media and Edmonton productions I Fall Down, Freezer and Double Booked.

“There are these bigger productions, Blackstone, Hell on Wheels, Heartland, but then you also have lots of smaller productions and lots of new faces and new names that I don’t even know,” says Bill Evans, executive director of the Alberta Media Production Industries Association (AMPIA). “ ... that’s where a lot of the younger people are coming up through, bubbling up to the surface. It’s lower budget but still very creative.”

On March 6, the provincial government announced that the Alberta Media Fund — which support Alberta’s film and digital industries — got a \$5-million boost to hit \$24.9 million.

In February, the Alberta government announced that the creation of a long-awaited \$22.8-million film studio would be overseen by Calgary Economic Development, a project that is expected to increase film production in Calgary. It is scheduled to open in 2015 although a location has yet to be announced.

“It will certainly help,” Evans said. “There is certainly a need for it, for indigenous production and it helps attract bigger shows.”

The 40th Annual Alberta Film and Television Awards will be held on April 12 at the Telus Convention

Centre. Actor-comedian Sean Cullen will host the awards. For a full list of nominees, [click here](#).

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