

Actress from Mount Airy plays role in movie about J.D. Salinger that shows at RiverRun



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Linda Donnell, an actress from Mount Airy, appears in a single scene in the movie “Coming Through the Rye,” but it’s a role that is pivotal to the story.

The movie is being shown tonight at SECCA as part of the RiverRun International Film Festival.

It is a coming-of-age story set in 1969, with Alex Wolff ("The Naked Brothers Band") as Jamie Schwartz, an introverted, unpopular student at an all-boys boarding school. He finds solace in J.D. Salinger's classic novel "The Catcher in the Rye" about teen angst, and decides to try to mount a stage production of the story. But he wants to get the notoriously reclusive Salinger's permission first. This leads to a trip to the small community where he has heard Salinger lives. Jamie is accompanied on the trip by Deedee (Stefania Owen of "The Carrie Diaries"), a townie with a barely-concealed crush on Jamie.

The cast also includes Chris Cooper, a prolific character actor perhaps best known for roles in "Lonesome Dove" and "American Beauty," as Salinger, and Adrian Pasdar ("Heroes," "Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.") as one of Jamie's teachers.

During their quest to find Salinger, Jamie and Deedee ask locals who give conflicting information, seemingly as part of a conspiracy to keep interlopers from bothering the writer. But Donnell's character, a harried mom, provides them with a key piece of information. The movie was directed, written and produced by Jim Sadwith and inspired by true events. Sara Elizabeth Timmins, a co-producer on the film, is scheduled to appear at tonight's screening.

Donnell, who is originally from Chicago, is the daughter of actors and studied dance and acting. She has appeared in various stage productions and short films, and also appeared in the George Clooney comedy "Leatherheads," which was filmed in Winston-Salem.

When her agent suggested she audition for "Coming Through the Rye," she was aware of J.D. Salinger and the popularity of "The Catcher in the Rye," but had never read it. "When I got the audition, (reading the book) is the first thing that I did, and immediately fell in love with the book," she said in an email interview. "I also read the screenplay of 'Coming Through the Rye'." I then researched everything I could find out about J.D. Salinger. This project was an actor's dream. Being cast in this film opened up my world ... a world that I may not have come to know were it not for being invited to audition."

Her scene was shot in a rural section of Orange, Va. Her character is not named, but is referred to in the credits as "Dust Bowl Woman," in reference to classic photos of weary mothers surrounded by small children during the 1930s.

"I found that in researching Salinger's neighbors, I was able to get a sense of her and her relationship to the reclusive Salinger," Donnell said. "Why was his privacy so important to her and her other neighbors? It was also fun to play someone with such an iconic look. It informed me of what her life might have been like, for her to appear so tired and worn."

Donnell has attended RiverRun, as well as the Virginia Film Festival in Charlottesville and the Movies By Movers Film Festival in Winston-Salem. "Independent film is my favorite because of how personal the narratives and documentaries are to the filmmakers," she said. "The work seems less about pleasing studio

heads and more about telling the stories that want to be told... I would like to work with more independent filmmakers on their films. This type of film-making speaks to my heart and inspires me.”

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