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Milwaukee Film to Present Milwaukee-Native Filmmaker Michael Schultz with Award at Tribute Event this September

Director Michael Schultz will be in attendance for film screenings, Q&As, and an award ceremony at the Oriental Theatre on September 13, 2025



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MILWAUKEE – Wednesday, August 13th – Milwaukee Film is thrilled to announce the [inaugural Michael Schultz Award](#), an annual award presented to a luminary Black filmmaker, sponsored by the [Brewers Community Foundation](#). On September 13, Milwaukee Film will present the very first of these awards to its namesake, Michael Schultz, in person at the Oriental Theatre. Beyond the award ceremony, Milwaukee Film has curated a selection of three of Schultz's most influential films to screen at the Oriental Theatre: *Cooley High* (1975), *Car Wash* (1976), and *The Last Dragon* (1985).

As one of the first Black men to consistently direct Hollywood film and television productions, at 86, Michael Schultz has no plans to slow down. Since the 1970s, he has directed over a dozen feature-length projects and for over 100 television shows.

“Milwaukee Film is proud to honor illustrious filmmaker Michael Schultz. He has made a lasting impact in Hollywood and possesses such a wide range of directing talents that naming an award for him to recognize not only his great legacy, but also the legacy of the many filmmakers he has inspired, is a win-win for everyone involved. It is our privilege to offer this award, and we are absolutely delighted that he will be returning to Milwaukee to share his films and his stories with our community,” said Susan Kerns, Milwaukee Film’s Executive Director.

Schultz, who grew up on Vine St. in Milwaukee, graduated from Riverside High School and Marquette University before attending Princeton University. He won a 1969 Obie and a Tony nomination for directing *Song of the Lusitanian Bogey*, and went on to direct the influential 1975 film *Cooley High*. With 1977’s *Car Wash*, starring Richard Pryor and George Carlin, Schultz became the first African American director nominated for Cannes Film Festival awards, including the Palme d’Or, and the film went on to win Cannes’ Grand Prix Technique and Best Music awards. When making *Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band* (1978), Schultz was entrusted with the largest film budget of any Black director until that time. He helped launch the careers of Denzel Washington and Samuel L. Jackson, worked repeatedly with Richard Pryor, and was inducted into the Black Filmmakers Hall of Fame in 1991.

“Milwaukee filmmaker Rubin Whitmore actually conceived of this award. He and I were discussing the 50th anniversary of *Cooley High* when he suggested an annual award named in Michael Schultz’s honor to bring prominence to luminary Black filmmakers. I thought it was an excellent idea! The Milwaukee Film team, along with an advisory committee of prominent Black leaders, then started working to make it happen. We are so appreciative that the Brewers Community Foundation shares the vision for this award and signed on as a leading sponsor! Their support helps ensure that we can offer this award in years to come,” executive director Kerns continued.

“I was moved by the desire to see this extraordinary Black man from Milwaukee, Michael Schultz, get his flowers for his lifetime of cinematic excellence. In that moment, I also realized this recognition could be the beginning of a greater effort to uplift other extraordinary filmmakers,” said Rubin Whitmore II, filmmaker and Lecturer of Film, Video, Animation, and New Genres at University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

The Tribute weekend will include the following public events with tickets now available at the links below:

- [Screening of *The Last Dragon*](#) | Sept. 12, 2025, 8pm | Oriental Theatre
- [Screening of *Car Wash*](#) with director Q&A to follow | Sept. 13, 2025, 3pm | Oriental Theatre

- [Screening of *Cooley High*](#) with awards presentation and extended Q&A preceding | Sept. 13, 2025, 7:30pm | Oriental Theatre

“The three films we are showing represent the range of Schultz’s filmmaking. *Cooley High*, a comedic drama with an amazing soundtrack about the long days of youth, is perhaps his most influential film, while the urban comedy *Car Wash* remains one of his most well-known as an early star vehicle for Richard Pryor and George Carlin. With *The Last Dragon*, Schultz’s mastery at integrating music into his films became this amazing martial arts musical comedy! *The Last Dragon* is so much fun, and such a classic ‘80s film, that people have every line of it memorized,” Kerns added.

“Inspired by Michael Schultz’ roots in Milwaukee and filmography, the team hopes that we can inspire others who want to follow in his footsteps. This is why we have decided to establish the Michael Schultz Award, a yearly commitment to honor extraordinary Black filmmakers, and through screening their work and bringing them into dialogue with Milwaukee, educate the public about why their works in film are so important,” notes Ty Williams, Milwaukee Film’s Black Lens Programmer. “It is my hope that you will join us and show lots of love for the icon that is Michael Schultz, and as a community that we show to him how deep our appreciation for the craft of filmmaking is,” Williams concluded.

Michael Schultz Feature Film Highlights

Cooley High - 1975

Car Wash - 1976

Greased Lightning - 1977

Which Way is Up? - 1977

Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band - 1978

Carbon Copy - 1981

The Last Dragon - 1985

Krush Groove - 1985

Disorderlies - 1987

Livin’ Large! - 1991

Woman Thou Art Loosed – 2004

Michael Schultz Television Directing Highlights

Picket Fences – 1992 (7 episodes)

Chicago Hope – 1994 (6 episodes)

Touched by an Angel – 1994 (8 episodes)

Ally McBeal – 1997 (7 episodes)

The Practice - 1997 (8 episodes)

The Adventures of Young Indiana Jones – 2002 (5 episodes)

Everwood – 2002 (16 episodes)

Brothers & Sisters – 2006 (13 episodes)

Arrow – 2012 (8 episodes)

Black-ish – 2014 (6 episodes)

All American – 2018 (15 episodes)

All American: Homecoming – 2022 (5 episodes)

All Tickets and showtimes can be found online at mkefilm.org/comingsoon

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About Milwaukee Film

Milwaukee Film is a nonprofit arts organization dedicated to entertaining, educating, and engaging our community through cinematic experiences, with a vision to make Milwaukee a center for film culture. Milwaukee Film is committed to high-quality and accessible film programming through their operation of the magnificent Oriental Theatre, a historic cinema palace, and the iconic Downer Theatre, Milwaukee's oldest running cinema. The second [Dialogues Documentary Festival](#) presented by Potawatomi Casino Hotel will take place September 18-21, 2025. The 18th annual [Milwaukee Film Festival](#) will take place April 16-30, 2026. For more information or to become a Member, visit mkefilm.org.

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