

THIS SUMMER, Wonder Woman stalked around Georgetown. Well, that was Marvel franchise star Gal Gadot, filming “Wonder Woman 1984” at spots around the city rewound to the Reagan era thanks to vintage cars and costumed extras.

From the early 20th-century to today, D.C.’s dazzling white monuments, vintage neighborhoods and history have made it a popular setting for filmmakers. Highlights from the reels? The 1912 silent short “Filial Love” and “The Exorcist,” the 1971 horror movie, where a priest topples to his demon-induced demise on steep outdoor stairs in Georgetown. Countless thrillers and political intrigues have at least used background shots, if not whole scenes, of the capital city, too. “I feel like Washington becomes more of a character than a place,” says local Jen Betkey. “I’ve seen the White House get destroyed so many times on film, I almost can’t believe it when I see it standing.”

Many of the top locations center around the White House (“Independence Day,” “Jackie”) or the monument-stuffed National Mall (“Captain America: The Winter Soldier,” “Forrest Gump”). But high costs (and high security) mean many interiors and some exteriors happen in less-busy stand-ins like Baltimore, Philly and even Cleveland.

For cinephiles, the District gets two thumbs up as a place to see films, too. “D.C. is a surprisingly diverse movie town in terms of both festivals and what’s showing,” says Kristen Page-Kirby, a local film critic at Washington Post Express newspaper. “You’ve got the Goliath, American Film Institute’s AFI DOCS, and smaller events focusing on environmental films, Hong Kong cinema and more.”

September 6-16, the DC Shorts festival screens 125 works (all with run times of 40 minutes or less) at downtown’s E Street Cinema and Capitol Hill’s snug Miracle Theatre. Offerings include “Laboratory Conditions,” a 16-minute horror flick about an illegal experiment and a missing body starring Marisa Tomei and Minnie Driver, and “Negative Space,” a five-minute animated short about packing for business trips. Films are shown in 90- to 100-minute blocks. “It gets people to see a wide variety of works,” says Joe Bilancio, the festival’s director of pro-



gramming. “Even if an audience member doesn’t like everything in the showcase, that range starts discussions.”

Venues also skew diverse. Besides first-run theaters (E Street rules for arty fare; the AMC Loew’s Georgetown 14 boasts plush, reclining seats and a bar), historic movie palaces and quirkier spots are also popular. The 1936 Uptown Theater boasts a curved, 70-foot-long, 40-foot-high screen and Art Deco architecture. “There’s really nothing like the AFI Silver,” says Page-Kirby of Silver Spring’s historic-yet-state-of-the-art spot. “It’s so technically perfect, and it’s one of the few places in the U.S. that can still show actual film in 70 mm.”

Screenings take place at local museums, too, with classic fare at the Library of Congress’ Mary Pickford Theater and high culture at the National Gallery of Art, both free. At the Smithsonian, the Air and Space Museum in D.C. and in Chantilly, Virginia, show current releases on huge IMAX screens, while the American History museum offers a more intimate space.

And then there’s Suns Cinema, a theater-bar mash-up in D.C.’s funky Mt. Pleasant. In a 20th-century rowhouse, the second-floor theater holds mismatched bar stools and folding chairs for 1970s horror flicks and contemporary Korean action hits.

No wonder locals are constantly holed up at the movies. “I go to 50 or more a year,” says Betkey. “There’s just too much to see.”

MOVIE-MAKING MAGIC

(Above) Gal Gadot filming “Wonder Woman 1984” in D.C.; (Facing page) The famous “Exorcist” steps in Georgetown.