

Tomorrow's Moviemakers Today

Carolina Film & Video Fest celebrates the industry's newcomers

WE'VE COME A LONG WAY from screening entries in a basement lecture hall," says Kimberlianne Podlas, director of Greensboro, North Carolina's Carolina Film & Video Festival. Celebrating its 2006 event from February 22nd to 25th, the fest has long since proven its dedication to tomorrow's moviemakers as one of the world's oldest student-run festivals.

"We are now and have always been a student-run festival," states Podlas. "CFVF is part of a class where students put their filmmaking and critical skills to the test, but also learn—experientially—how to run a multi-day, multi-venue festival. Students take part in preliminary screenings and have a hand in administering the festival."

With these newcomers at the helm, it would be easy to write the CFVF off as an amateur event. But with nearly three decades of screenings behind them, the fest proved—long ago—that they're onto something unique. For Podlas, it's the student perspective that makes all the difference. "With this type of a



Richard Keel's *Forgotten Stars: The Jerry and Delbert Story*.

perspective, i.e. the perspective of *truly* beginning filmmakers looking anywhere to get a break and find a platform for their work, it is easy to stay true to our mission: To present "Tomorrow's Filmmakers Today."

For the festival's visiting moviemakers and attendees, it doesn't hurt that students know a little something about word of mouth marketing. "I've already got a lending list in my office," laughs Podlas, "with students begging to borrow some of their favorite films to watch again or show to their friends!"

Impressing this year's crowd was a host of features, shorts and documentaries, "ranging from two seconds to two hours in length [and] created by both student and independent filmmakers," according to Podlas.

Director James Oxford took home the SymPics Narrative Award for *Smartcard*, about a man who realizes his life is not his own, with an honorable mention going to Richard Keel for *Forgotten Stars: The Jerry and Delbert Story*, a hilarious mockumentary on one of "America's best, and least remembered, ventriloquist teams."

When it came to documentaries, political matters seemed to dominate the program. Matthew O'Neill's *Venezuela: Revolution in Progress*, an inside look at the near-unseating of Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez, and student moviemaker Penny Lane's *The Abortion Diaries*, which presents the stories of 12 women who have had abortions, were named two of the fest's best.

The nonfiction celebration continued with what was perhaps the highlight

of this year's event: The presentation of the 2006 North Carolina Distinguished Filmmaker Award to documentarian (and Charlotte native) Ross McElwee, whose seminal works (including *Sherman's March* and *Bright Leaves*) have paid tribute to his home state. With moviemakers like McElwee among their ranks, it's no wonder that the Carolina Film & Video Festival has existed—and thrived—for almost three decades.

For more information, visit www.uncg.edu/bcn/cfvf. —Jennifer M. Wood

Calling Thomas Edison

Black Maria pushes the boundaries of film

THE ORIGINAL BLACK MARIA WAS A MASSIVE clunker of a building, the very existence of which marked the beginning of a new era—one in which numerous media would flood into daily living and bring about whirlwind changes to society. Built in 1893, Edison's studio became a symbol of this progressive world, solidifying his emerging presence in the early film industry and inspiring others to join in the effort to explore the intersections of technology and art.

More than 100 years later, the Black Maria Film & Video Festival resembles its namesake when it comes to inspiration and innovation. The festival is unique in both its approach and content: For the past 25 years, it has encouraged moviemakers to produce cutting-edge projects of quality, while also challenging audiences around the globe with its far-reaching method of exhibition. Unlike other festivals, which present a new program with each passing year, the Black Maria Film Festival offers a different program at each of over 60 venues. In the first months of the year, the 50 or so films that are selected begin a journey that brings them from the festival's home in Jersey City, New Jersey to spots as varied as Anchorage, Alaska and Des Moines, Iowa to Rome, Italy. Each venue's program is specifically tailored, making the festival more like 60 intimate events that showcase quality shorts in different combinations.

This act of mingling is certainly a draw for audiences, since it makes each and every show a unique experience. Moviemaker Jane Steuerwald, whose film *The Memory Box* screened at the festival's premiere in February, notes that the very nature of Black Maria is "inclusive" rather than "exclusive;" it allows maximum exposure for moviemakers since it reaches a wide audience, and offers audiences who might not otherwise be exposed to independent film a chance to enjoy it.

For example, this year's fest includes films that represent a wide range of subjects and approaches, such as Tiffany Shlain's *Tribe*, a comedic look at Judaism and Barbie; Deron Albright's animated live-action flick, *The Legend of Black Tom*; Ivan Golovnev's *Tiny Katerina*, about a young girl from a small province in Siberia; and *Lover Other*, Barbara Hammer's short feature about the artists Claude Cahun and Marcel Moore, who were stepsisters and lovers.

But what Black Maria does best harkens back to the origins of its name. Although thoroughly modern and totally inclusive, it has never lost a sense of what festivals are really about: Old-fashioned community. "This festival demonstrates the independent spirit that fuels artists like myself today," says Louis Libitz, a longtime festival attendee of the festival and director of this year's *Giorno Di Festivita*. It's by supporting festivals like Black Maria—as both moviemakers and moviegoers—that this independent spirit will continue for years to come.

For more information, visit www.blackmariafilmfestival.org. —Alexis Buryk

