

SNAPSHOTS IN TIME

NJCU professor's film earns citation at Black Maria festival

By **COTTON DELO**
JOURNAL STAFF WRITER

Artists are measured by their handling of themes like loss, mystery and love, and filmmaker Jane Steuerwald deals with all of those themes in 8 1/2 minutes.

Her three-part film, "The Memory Box," was awarded a second prize Jury's Citation at the Black Maria Film Festival, which begins its coast-to-coast 2006 tour with a premiere and awards ceremony tonight at New Jersey City University.

NJCU alumnus Louis Libitz's video "Giorno di Festivita" was a third prize Director's Choice pick, and both works will be screened tonight.

Started in 1981, Black Maria is an Academy-Award qualifying festival — named for the world's first motion picture studio built by Thomas Edison in West Orange — for short films under 40 minutes.

Seven hundred films entered this year were vetted by a panel of pre-screeners who sent their picks to the jury. The 58 films chosen in first, second and third place categories will be screened on a rotating basis in venues across the country and abroad.

Steuerwald — 54, a professor of media arts at NJCU — had been on Black Maria's Board of Trustees and was prohibited from entering her own work until this year.

"The Memory Box" was inspired by a recording of her mother rehearsing for a vocal performance at the New Jersey Pavilion of the 1964 World's Fair in New York. Each segment — Loss, Mystery and Love — is set to a song with a varied palate of footage, juxtaposing film Steuerwald shot at various times of her life with home movies and World War II era newsreels.

Though her film is nostalgic, it can also be viewed politically.

"I used footage from the ticker tape parades (after World War II) to brush up against my feelings about loss, and what it means when soldiers go to war and don't return," said Steuerwald, who used the film to channel her feelings about the war in Iraq. "People lose individual loved ones, but I think there's loss on a grand scale."



JANE STEUERWALD'S hands move into the frame to open her uncle's tin box in which his personal journals were kept. Below left to right, an ice show ballet at Madison Square Garden, circa 1944 and a still image from "Giorno di Festivita" by Louis Libitz.



STEUERWALD'S mother and father, in the front row, are arm-and-arm with her mother's voice teacher, John Cushing, at an outing at Jones Beach.



STEUERWALD, age 2, and their boxer Big Lizz in the yard of their Long Island home, circa 1954.

IF YOU GO ...

WHAT: Black Maria Premiere and Awards Ceremony

WHEN: Tonight at 7 p.m.

WHERE: Margaret Williams Theatre of Hepburn Hall, on the NJCU campus at 2039 Kennedy Blvd., Jersey City.

DETAILS: (201) 200-2043; www.blackmariafilmfestival.org.

OTHER LOCAL SCREENINGS...

■ **JERSEY CITY MUSEUM,** 350 Montgomery St., Jersey City. (201) 413-0303. Tomorrow at 7 p.m.

■ **HOBOKEN HISTORICAL MUSEUM,** 1301 Hudson St., Hoboken. (201) 656-2240. Monday at 7:30 p.m.

Steuerwald's film would seem to have little in common with Libitz's, though Black Maria founder and director John Columbus calls them both "a slice of Americana."

Libitz — a second year graduate student in video at Syracuse University, and a former student of Steuerwald's — made an 8 1/2-minute video on the Feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, an Italian festival that had its 100th anniversary in the Marion section of Jersey City last year.

He follows the church procession through neighborhood streets and interviews revelers at the seven-day street festival.

Libitz, 29, describes his video as a document in time, in which he examines a tradition that now includes Latino and Filipino residents of the neighborhood where he grew up.

"It's really about tradition and belonging, and that's a valuable quantity in a world where everybody's moving every two years," he said. "Here, this is people who value their culture, their heritage, their home."