SOA Student Heads to Cannes for the Chrysler ‘Extreme Filmmaking Competition’

By KRISTIN STERLING

Before her film, “A Girl’s Guide to the Galaxy,” screened at the Columbia University Film Festival last month, Hypnotic, an entertainment production company, pre-00035 Catherine Tingey’s (SOA ‘03) submission to the Sundance Channel. The short film has proven a winning vehicle so far as Tingey now prepares for the next leg in the competition: the Chrysler Million Dollar Film Festival.

Tingey, which helps emerging filmmakers distribute their work, owns the exclusive distribution rights to the film as a result of Tingey’s participation and semi-final berth in the Chrysler festival, a multi-step competition in which hundreds of emerging filmmakers compete for a $1,000,000 feature film production and distribution deal, courtesy of Chrysler, Hypnotic and Universal Pictures. Having been selected as a semi-finalist in the competition, Tingey is one of 10 who will travel to Cannes, France, in May for 10 days of “extreme” filmmaking.

This phase of the festival is called the “Extreme Filmmaking Competition” because filmmakers will write, direct, shoot and edit their films in a very compressed timeframe. The purpose of the competition is to test filmmakers’ ability to develop their skill in each of these filmmaking disciplines.

Upon notification, semi-finalists had approximately 10 days to create and finalize a script. They will have about the same amount of time in May to cast, film, produce and edit their films, with the final determination made in Cannes, under the backdrop of the prestigious Cannes Film Festival.

“Being part of the Chrysler Million Dollar Film Festival has been a thrilling ride—much like the experience of hope audiences get from my film,” says Tingey.

The film that got Tingey to the semi-finals, “A Girl’s Guide to the Galaxy,” is a 13.5-minute comedy about a 16-year-old girl obsessed with astrology.

“The film was conceived as a wild ride through a day in the life of a love-struck teenager girl,” says Tingey. “I wanted to capture the essence of the learning cycle and make the final determinations for the 10 filmmakers who will progress to the semi-finals in Cannes.

For any filmmaker to cast, film, produce and edit in such a compressed timeframe would be challenging enough. But this competition has added complications: imaging and for the foreign country and requiring filmmakers to seamlessly incorporate either the Chrysler PT Cruiser or Crossfire, a 2002 sport touring coupe concept car, into the film.

“I was a little disappointed to learn that you can’t do any real crazy stunts with the car,” confesses Tingey, who was envisioning an action scene with one of the Chrysler cars.

In dealing with the challenges of working in Cannes, Tingey may have a slight advantage over her competition who are all Americans. She spent a year in Paris as a photographer before beginning the film program at Columbia and she speaks French.

Tingey led a group of teenagers on a 50-day bike trip through France, Switzerland and Italy during the summer of 1998, and has a sense of the landscape of Cannes.

Between the Chrysler competition and the Columbia Film Festival, “A Girl’s Guide to the Galaxy” has generated positive industry response and audience reaction, which Tingey hopes will aid her landing her agent.

As she heads for Cannes on May 12, Tingey’s thoughts are firmly focused on creating the film. She looks with excitement to May 22, when the extreme films premiere in Cannes and the five finalists are selected.

Should Tingey be one of the lucky five, she would spend Memorial Day through Labor Day in Los Angeles, living in the Chrysler Mansion with the five finalists and creating a feature film production package, which includes a treatment, working script and storyboards, as well as proposed cast lists, shooting schedule and budget and a trailer.

The winner of the Chrysler Million Dollar Film Festival will be determined by a panel of industry professionals based on quality of the production package, ability to direct a feature length motion picture and the feasibility of producing the picture on a $1 million budget.

The winner will be announced during a special screening of the “Million Dollar Film Festival in September.”

FROM THE SENATE

Senate Receives Online Learning Report, School of Continuing Education Proposal

By THOMAS J. MATHEWSON

Honoring George Rupp on April 26 with a special resolution at the last meeting of his Columbia presidency, the University Senate also approved the recommendation for the new School of Continuing Education (which will now be submitted to the Trustees for approval) and received annual reports from its committees, including a substantial interim report from the Columbia Online Learning and Digital Media Initiatives Committee.

Sen. Paul Duby, chairman of the Senate Executive Committee and a member of the search committee that selected Rupp as president in 1993, introduced the tribute with some remarks of his own. He stressed the president’s fulfillment of the pledge he made at the start of his administration to generate a stronger sense of the University as a whole greater than the sum of its parts. The written resolution focused on Rupp’s stewardship of the Senate through 71 plenary meetings over nine full sessions, acknowledging the “impatience and acerbity of some of his words about the Senate and its inefficiencies” but also praising his skill and sensitivity as chair.

The most ambitious of the Senate’s annual presentations, an interim report from the online learning committee formed a year ago, surveys Columbia’s current digital media initiatives, which have been funded from a variety of discretionary funds with some $63 million in 2001 alone.

The report expects the patent revenue that has provided these discretionary funds to decline during the next few years, and their one to five minute film in the new environment: rationalize and eliminate competing resource centers; fund initiatives that either make a profit, provide infrastructure for those that do, or reinforce Columbia’s core mission; view online learning as an extension of the traditional classroom experience; reposit and staff the now dormant Innovation Advisory Council, with members drawn from the administration, the faculty and the Senate; and continue to fund Fathom.com but only at a minimal level, to maintain basic operations, focusing efforts on increasing the value of the consortium of institutions that compose it.

Sen. Herve Varenne, a member of the online learning committee and a tenured professor at Teachers College, said that Sen. Sharyn O’Halloran (Ten., Political Science), the committee chair and principal author of the interim report, was away at a conference, but will give a comprehensive presentation to the Senate in the fall. The only comment was from President Rupp, who said the interim report had already garnered attention that was mainly unhelpful to the University; he said “one report that does its damage once, rather than piecemeal” would be preferable.

In the absence of a written report from Faculty Affairs, chairman Eugene Litwak summarized the committee’s work this year. He raised the question of how the committee should proceed in cases of unresolved disagreements with the administration over grievances, and he called attention to changes in the guidelines for appointing and promoting language lecturers that the vice president for Arts and Sciences has recently made over the protests of his committee. Since the Senate originally approved this category of non-tenure-track appointments in the 1980s, he said, Faculty Affairs may review the status of language lecturers next year. Sen. Litwak also mentioned a recent “New York Times” article listing Columbia as last among the top 10 institutions in average salaries for senior professors; he said the faculty caucuses are thinking about ways in which Columbia can raise its standing and at the same time reduce disparities among faculty salaries.

The Senate heard from Professor Harvey Goldschmidt, who gave his last report as chair of the Advisory Committee on Socially Responsible Investing.

In other actions, the Senate extended the life of the Ad Hoc Committee on Research Staff Affairs for one year, approved the M.S. degree in Strategic Communications in the School of Continuing Education that it had just established, approved guidelines for the administration of dual degree programs, and approved the M.Phil and Ph.D. degrees in the Department of Biomedical Engineering.

All documents discussed at the meeting, along with information about next year’s session, will be available on the Senate web site, at www.columbia.edu/cu/senate.