By KELISTY TUNLING

The 2003 Sundance Film Festival brought together key players in School of the Arts (SOA) alumni affiliated with two Grand Jury Prize winners. The screening/directing team of Shari Springer Berman SOA ’95 and Robert Pulcinii SOA ’94 took home the Dramatic Grand Jury Prize for their first narrative feature, Capturing the Friedmans. Richard Hankin SOA ’92 shared in honors as editor of the Experimental Grand Jury Prize winning Capturing the Fruit of Love.

The festival, which ran January 16-26 in Park City, Utah, also featured works by film students Sarah Rogacki SOA ’03 and Sergio Unamnsoy SOA ’03 and alumna Lisa Cholodenko SOA ’97 and Daniel Algrant SPA ’88.

American Splendor is derived from the autobiographical comic books of Harvey Pekar, which were adapted into a film at a VA hospital in Cleveland. Using film, video and animation, Berman and Pulcinii convert the madman into a comic book, incorporating real-life images of Pekar.

“Taking as its theme the Pekarism that ‘ordinary life is pretty complex stuff,’ the two document the working (Berman and Pulcinii) in their feature debut hit an unarguably rich vein of documentary film. Living the crazy, paranoid, psychological turmoil, com- monplace travails, genuine trauma and artistic triumph,” writes the Hollywood Reporter (Jan. 24).

Berman and Pulcinii’s award-winning documentary Off the Menu: The Last Days of Chase’s, was one of the “Ten Best Movies of 1998” by USA Today and CNN. Their follow-up The Young and the Dead premiered at the 2000 Sundance Film Festival and aired on HBO.

In the documentary category, Capturing the Friedmans won the Grand Jury Prize. Hankin edited the film, which creates a portrait of a seemingly ordinary, upper-middle-class Jewish family that is transformed when the father and youngest son are charged with shocking crimes. Student Sarah Rogacki made her feature film directorial debut with Rhythm of the Saints. The film is a coming-of-age story about a Latina teen in Washington Heights, NY, who is plagued by an abusive stepfather and turns to the mystical practice of Santeria for aid.

This marked Rogacki’s second trip to Sundance. Her short film Muse 6 screened in 2001. She is currently working on a feature version of that film.

“What a great year for the School of the Arts at Sundance,” says Dan Kleinman, chair of SOA’s film division. “Sarah Rogacki’s thesis film project is set in Laurel Canyon, stars Al Pacino and features Ryan O’Neal, Tea Leoni and Kim Bassinger. Pacino plays a New York publicist whose career has seen better days and finds himself in a political scandal with a celebrity. The film has screened on numerous occasions and is scheduled to be released for planned for late April in New York and Los Angeles. Algrant’s first feature film, Naked in New York, was produced by Martin Scorsese and premiered at the 1994 Sundance Film Festival, winning the Deauville Film Festival Audience Award. More recently, Algrant directed multiple seasons of HBO’s Sex in the City.

Rodford in 1981, the Sundance Institute is dedicated to the development of artists of independent vision and the exhibition of their work. The 2003 Sundance Film Festival included important work and the cultural history of SOA students.

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The collaborative efforts of the SOA, the RSC and the University Musical Society of the University of Michigan will bring this work to the stage of the Apollo Theater in Harlem in March. Beyond the stage, the MSE will serve multiple cross-disciplinary courses throughout the University. Using the text of the novel and the play as frames, it presents Columbia faculty an opportu- nity to speak on the turning points of South Asian history, literary commentary, dramatic critique, and the process of adapting the novel to the stage, as well as the play itself.

Professor Neguin Yavari from Columbia’s Religion Department, will be using the Midnight’s Children MSE in her “Religion, Gender & Literature: Muslim Women Write Islam” course at Columbia this spring. As she explains in speaking about her spring course syllabus.

“The Midnight’s Children project focuses on a novel rooted in a specific locality at a certain juncture in history and yet invites questions and raises issues directly relevant to the interplay of religion and culture in different spheres and contexts...”

The MSE has broad interdisciplinary application and will also be used in Professor Anu- pama Rao’s “Political Modernity in South Asia, in the History Department at Barnard; Nar- rative and Identity: Rushdie’s Midnight’s Children,” a Com- parative Literature course, taught by Professor Deborah A. Martinson and instructor John Frankfort; and in Constructing Digital Educational “Commu- nities: Midight’s Children & A Case Study in Self-Education” at Teachers College.

Distinguishing features of the MSE include Rushdie’s video commentary, interviews with director Tim Supple and other creative artists on the stage production team, and interviews with Columbia University faculty whose respective disciplines complement and enhances the understanding of Rushdie’s work and the cultural history of South Asia. These Columbia faculty conversations include Bob Weinberg of the School of General Studies; Dennis Dalton, Political Science; Nicholas Dirks, chairman of Anthropology and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, English.