Forty Student Films and Digital Videos to be Screened During 2003 Columbia Film Festival

By Kristin Sterling

The Columbia University Film Festival, featuring the work of students from the School of the Arts’ Film Division, has earned a reputation as a place to spot emerging talent. This year is no exception.

Three SOA filmmakers are up for prizes at the 2003 Student Academy Awards. Annemarie Jacir’s, SOA’02, like twenty impossibles is a finalist in the competition’s alternative category. Dennis Lee and Jowan Carbin, also ’02 graduates, are regional finalists in the narrative category for their respective films, Jesus Henry Christ and Welcome to Life, which will screen during the Columbia Festival.

Jacir’s film has also been selected for the Cannes Film Festival in France, May 14–25. At Cannes, like twenty impossibles will screen in the prestigious Cinéfondation Screening, which selects approximately 15 films from emerging filmmakers from film schools around the world. In the film, Jacir investigates the nature of documentary productions, the creative process and the reality of making films in Israel’s West Bank.

Of the 40 films and digital videos included in the 2003 festival, which runs from April 28 through May 9, eight were filmed outside the United States, in countries ranging from Italy and China to Venezuela and Nigeria. Among many topics, the international films follow an Albanian family who flees war-torn Macedonia for Italy (Marre/Tides); offer a poignant personal account of the Tiananmen Square uprising (Personal Ruin); look at middle class life and family relationships in Nigeria (Something Else); and analyze 1970s Brazil, when the country was under a dictatorship (Baseado Em Estorias/Based on a True Story).

Three other films explore immigration and the sense of being a stranger in a foreign land: Alma depicts a young couple from Mexico struggling to find work and survive in New York; Yume No Ato/What Is Left of the Garden depicts the story of two lone visitors to New York, one from Beijing and other from Belgrade, who share a brief moment of tenderness.

Closer to home, several filmmakers address New York City community issues. Gentrification and the brinks with the landlord (Nondisclosure) and ethical dilemmas by publicists (Fame, Fama and Ayad Stehle-Akhtar to create Life Document 2: Identity. “The 16th annual Columbia University Film Festival offers a glimpse of the diverse work of talented young filmmakers who are on the brink of major careers,” says Bruce W. Ferguson, dean of the School of the Arts. “More than half of the films focus on persons of color, putting the Festival on the cutting edge of independent and break over films. These are not the filmmakers of tomorrow. These are the filmmakers of today.”

The Columbia University Film Festival begins with screenings at Loews 34th Street (between 8th and 9th Avenues), Mon., April 28–Thurs., May 1, at 5:15 p.m. and 8:15 p.m. daily. Eight different film programs will be offered throughout the week. On Mon., May 5, the Faculty Selects program, featuring films selected by the Film Division faculty as the best of the 2003 Festival, will screen at 3:00 p.m. and 7:00 p.m. On Friday, May 9, Faculty Selects Screenplay Readings will be presented at 7:30 p.m. in the McGraw-Hill Auditorium, 1221 Avenue of the Americas at 40th Street. Preceding the readings, at 7:00 p.m., alumni Shari Springer Berman and Robert Pulcinii, the team that created American Splendor, the 2003 Grand Prize winner at Sundance, will receive the Andrew Sarris Award. The festival will continue in Los Angeles on June 2–3. More than $110,000 in awards will be presented to students throughout the Festival.

Films from the 2002 Columbia Festival went on to screen at prestigious international festivals, including: Beifan, Cannes, Clermont-Ferrand, Palm Springs, Sao Paulo, Sundance, Telluride and Tribeca. Also from the 2002 festival, Patricia Riggen’s La Milpa (The Cornfield) won a Mexican Academy Award and is a regional finalist for the 2003 Student Academy Awards competition. Columbia film students have won Student Academy Award Gold Medals in five of the last six years.

Complete information about the festival, schedules, films and filmmakers are available at www.cufilmfest.com. For more information, call 212-854-1547. Admission to all programs is $10 and are available at the Loews 34th Street box office or via www.fandango.com. Tickets for the May 9 screenplay readings may be reserved by calling 212-854-1547.


Jessica Weigmann’s Gardening Tips for Housewives models the theme of suburban ennui found in recent films such as American Beauty...