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SUNDANCE FILMMAKER SPOTLIGHTS



We have been chatting and emailing with producers and directors whose work has been selected for screening at this year's Sundance Film Festival.

Last year's big Sundance environmental documentary was 'Who Killed the Electric Car?' - this year it looks to be 'Fields of Fuel'. Here is an interview with Greg Reitman, the Producer, Writer, and Director of the film:

AFFP: In a couple sentences what is 'Fields of Fuel' about?

"Fields of Fuel" is a feature length theatrical documentary about one man's search for a solution to America's dependence on foreign oil. It tells the story of Josh Tickell, an alternative fuel zealot who grew up in the shadows of a Louisiana oil refinery. Ten years ago he set out on a mission to promote biodiesel, a clean burning, renewable fuel by touring the country in The Veggie Van, a motor home fueled by used French fry oil. His road trip earned him national media attention. But America wasn't ready to listen. Instead they bought SUVs and hummers. Ten years later in a post 9-11 world our country is engulfed in an oil war, our environment is being destroyed and gas prices have gone through the roof. FIELDS OF FUEL is the story of how Josh launches the Veggie Van on a new biodiesel-fueled quest to find out how we got into this mess and more importantly, how we get out. What he finds on his journey are new solutions to problems, new reasons to hope for the future and a growing grassroots movement passionate about the need for sustainable American made fuel.

AFFP: Is there a common thread between the films you've been involved with?

Greg Reitman is the founder of Blue Water Entertainment, Inc. an independent production company who focuses primarily on environmental conscience entertainment. His first film which he wrote, produced and directed was 'Hollywood's Magical Island - Catalina' which is currently syndicating on PBS which had a strong environmental theme in the film. He is currently in production on his new feature documentary film, 'Rooted in Peace.'

AFFP: What is your background as a filmmaker?

Graduate at UCLA Film program in writing, producing and directing. Participated in the 2003 Masters Class Program in Tel Aviv Israel in Creative Producing, Almunus at the Hollywood Film Institute and the Travis Directing School,

AFFP: Have you been to Sundance before?

Yes, but only as a film viewer,

AFFP: What is your next project?

The next project, I am directing and producing is called, 'Rooted in Peace' "ROOTED IN PEACE" deals with the Arab-Israeli conflict in a fundamentally different way. By concentrating on the role of religious extremism in the Middle East, it exposes those who use God to divide and conquer and reveals the road blocks to peace. Thru careful examination of Middle Eastern culture, politics, and media, the viewer comes to understand the destructive power of religious fundamentalists of Jews, Christians Muslims, whose mission is to create cultural division, undermine interfaith coexistence, manipulate political systems, and ultimately prevent a peaceful settlement in the Middle East and the rest of the world.

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Sundance'08



'CHRONIC TOWN'
Sundance '08
Interview with Tom Hines, Director



AFFP: What is 'Chronic Town' about?

If you're looking for a synopsis, this would be my answer:

"Chronic Town" is a slice-of-life piece about Truman (JR Bourne), a lonely cab driver in Fairbanks, Alaska. After a bad acid trip lands him in the local 'loony bin', Truman meets a few 'loonies' that will have more of an impact on him than he ever could have imagined. He may also discover that there is more to life than just watching it pass him by.

If you're looking for what I 'feel' the film is about, then I'd say:

"Chronic Town" is a story of survival. It's that time in one's life where you do what it takes to get through the daily struggles. And when that 'moment of truth' arrives, you hope you've got the strength to see it through.

AFFP: Is there a common thread between the films you've been involved with?

Not really, because I've spent the last 10 years working for director Garry Marshall, who is best known for his romantic comedies. "Chronic Town" has its own form of romance and comedy, but it's about as far removed from 'romantic comedy' as you can get. The closest I've been to a film like this would probably be Andrew Wagner's "The Talent Given Us" – a film that I helped produce that was at Sundance in 2005.

AFFP: What is your background as a filmmaker?

My real filmmaking background began with Garry Marshall. He first hired me as an actor in his film "Exit to Eden", but then offered me a full-time Assistant job on "Runaway Bride." With the 10 years I spent with him, I really felt it was like getting paid to go to film school. Working actors, producers, writers, directors, all willing to share what they've learned over the years. Garry gave me all the opportunities to act, write and produce, but I had to leave my job (with his blessing) to direct "Chronic Town."

AFFP: Have you been to Sundance before?

I was at Sundance in 2005 as a Producer on Andrew Wagner's "The Talent Given Us." That was an awesome filmmaking experience. Andrew was the director/cinematographer and I was the producer/sound guy. We were a 2-man crew, so Andrew getting into Sundance was pretty mind-blowing.

AFFP: What is your next project?

My next project is an 'Inspired by True Events' story about the Gallaudet University Women's Basketball Team. Gallaudet is the only Deaf university in the world (located in Washington, D.C.) and it's the story of their incredible 1998-99 basketball season. It's called "Winning Sounds Like This" and it's based on the book by Wayne Coffey. I co-wrote the script with my writing partner, Bob Brunner. It's not just about basketball. It's a story about the girls, their coach and what they went through as the only Deaf team in college basketball.

AFFP: How cold was it in Alaska?

We shot for 16 days during one of the coldest March's on record in Alaska. Our coldest day was 50 below freezing and it never got above zero. After all that, I'm embarrassed to ever say "I'm chilly" while living in LA.



'Buyo'
Sundance '08
Interview with Andrea Fasciani, Director

AFFP: In a couple sentences what is 'Buyo' about?

In this post-modern tale, Ralph is a guy whose voice only generates weird sounds, and Anna is deaf. One day they meet in the elevator. Ralph's unusual voice makes Anna's body vibrate, prompting Anna's affections and her desire to follow him everywhere.

AFFP: Is there a common thread between the films you've been involved with?

Each project suggest me its best final shape, so the only relation between my works is my constant desire to create an unreal atmosphere, something able to make people forget their everyday life.

AFFP: What is your background as a filmmaker?

I don't know so much about the history of cinema. I just love great artists such as Pasolini, Herzog, Brakhage, Lynch, Korine. In my work I'm always looking for deep emotions, I believe it's the only way to start creating a shape. I concentrate on simple things, common people and everyday life. The more simple is the reality, the more abstract are the ideas it gives me.

AFFP: Have you been to Sundance before?

'Buyo'
 Sundance '08
 Directed by Andrea Fasciani

No, never. It's my first time, and it's a honour for me.

AFFP: What is your next project?

In the next 3 years I will study direction at the National School of Cinema in Cinecittà, Rome, so the shapes I will create there will be a result of my collaboration with other students. My next personal project will be a story about my grandfather.



'Adventures of Baxter & McGuire: The Boss'
Sundance '08
Suju Vijayan, Producer

AFFP: In a couple sentences what is 'Adventures...' about?

This animated buddy-comedy chronicles the adventures of Baxter and McGuire, the closest of pals who never leave each other's side. They also just happen to be testicles. In this episode, the boys lament being overlooked by their "boss."

AFFP: Is there a common thread between the films you've been involved with?

They all mix computer animation with pathos and most of them tend to make the squeamish funny. This last part is less a result of my niche and more about making shorts that people will remember. My tastes run the gamut.

AFFP: What is your background as a filmmaker?

I am basically self-taught. I spent a dozen years working in senior level positions at Disney Feature Animation, but none of my paid jobs required me to be creative per se. Instead, I started writing/producing/directing animated shorts after hours with the blessing of the company. I got to work with the very best artists in the world and learned from them. And somehow I was able to convince these folks to take direction from me!

AFFP: Have you been to Sundance before?

Yes. I have missed just 1 year since 1991 and that was because I was recovering from malaria! I went to grad school at the University of Utah.

AFFP: What is your next project?

I have a variety of projects in development and am waiting to see which will get a green light first. I am also waiting to hear about a couple of "for hire" feature projects that I am up for. It's a very exciting time for me.



Interview with the director of 'Blue Eyelids', Ernesto Contrera:

AFFP: In a couple sentences what is 'Blue Eyelids' about?

Blue Eyelids is a journey through urban loneliness, a trip to the heart of a lost battle: two beings that try to love and be loved, or in the best of scenarios, be with someone.

AFFP: Is there a common thread between the films you've been involved with?

Yes, thematically it is very close to several of my shortfilms, like Hertzian Waves (Ondas Hertzianas, 1999) and Evenings (Tardes, 2000). The characters are built with the same needs and the same restraint. Loneliness is the engine that moves them.

AFFP: What is your background as a filmmaker?

I studied at the University Center of Cinematographic Studies of the National Autonomous University of Mexico. I have worked in television, advertising and was assistant to Arturo Ripstein in his film El evangelio de las maravillas (1998). I have directed 7 short films.

AFFP: Have you been to Sundance before?

No, this is my first time.

AFFP: What is your next project?

I am currently in postproduction of two documentaries, one as director and the other as producer. At the same time I am developing two scripts with my brother Carlos (screenwriter of Blue Eyelids). One is a psychological thriller and the other is science fiction. I am convinced that the only way in which I can mature and develop as a director is achieving a continuity in my work.

Interview with Matthew Lessner, Director of 'By Modern Measure'

"As part of an ongoing, unaired TV series, an amateur French anthropologist presents his observations on a day in the life of two young Americans who meet by chance outside a Taco Bell."

I've really only completed two films thus far in my career, now I'm working on another, something a little longer, but I would say they're all very much about what it means to an American, particularly a young American, at this specific point in history. I'm interested in our place in the current global climate, the responsibilities contained therein, as well as the actions we take (or don't take for that matter.) I'm also very much interested in the multiple layers of disconnect ever present in our society. I guess I try to incorporate these elements in a kind of indirect or roundabout way, infuse them with a bit of absurd humor perhaps, try to make you laugh and think at the same time....

My next project is a feature length narrative, it doesn't really have a name at the moment, but I've been calling it The Woods/ Tupac's Ghost. It's about a small group of friends who've grown tired with the state of the world, and decide that the best solution to their perceived problems is to just head off deep into the forests of the Pacific Northwest and forge a new society from scratch. While they're all generally well intentioned, they know virtually nothing about the workings of the natural world, or even really about the fundamental elements of society, plus they're all addicted to technology and consumer goods, and so they kind of bring all that stuff with them. While they're out there's kind of a major infrastructure collapse back in the real world, and things get a little crazy, there are some other mysterious forces at play in the woods, it goes on from there.... Lot's of fireworks, hot-air balloons, elaborate face-painting, that sort of thing.