

A Reel Revolution

HSU Film Fest Sets Spotlight on Independent Film

By Desiree Perez

The Humboldt International Film Festival is many things. It's the longest-running student-run festival of its kind. It's a showcase for local and international filmmakers, alike. And it's also a weeklong celebration of the revolutionary potential of the cinema and the current revolution unfolding within the world of filmmaking.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Vintage magazines become commemorative buttons at the film festival's merchandise table. ▶ Student Andrew Baird steps out of the John Van Duzer Theatre's control room, where submitted films reach the big screen. ▶ Staff advisor Joshua Nelson speaks with co-directors Jeff Cronise and David Fox about the Best of the Fest award. ▶ A student-designed art installation dubbed "Revolution" greets guests as they enter the theater. FACING PAGE: Canisters contain film submissions from previous film festivals. For the past few years, submissions have been digital only.



Filmgoers watch "Stan vs. Squirrel" during Documentary Night at the John Van Duzer Theatre. The film won Honorable Mention at Best of the Fest.



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Brittany White,
Theatre major and
film festival participant

During his workshop, Hayes gave students an insider's point of view on how to get established in the film industry. The workshop topics fed largely off audience questions and concerns, touching on subjects ranging from attending the Sundance Film Festival to affordable insurance for shooting low-budget films. The biggest question on everyone's mind was "How do I become a filmmaker?" And for Hayes, who comes from a political science background and first got into film in his 30s after law school, the resounding answer was: "You just have to try."

"You have no excuses," Hayes says. "With laptops, iPhones and digital cameras you have to go out and make movies, put them online and really distribute your work."

For independent filmmakers, the Humboldt International Film Festival can offer exactly that kind of exposure.

Show Time

BACK IN THE JOHN Van Duzer Theatre, the air is tense with anticipation for the big announcement. The projection of a giant red protest fist fashioned out of filmstrips illuminates the entrance to the building, which holds nearly 200 filmgoers.

And the Best of the Fest winner is ... the Taiwanese film "Swing," directed by Yen-Ting Kuo. The film centers on how living people influence the perspectives of people on the brink of death. The universal subjects of mortality and love, paired with impressive animation, sealed the deal. **H**

“FILMS CAN CHANGE THE WAY people look at the world,” says festival co-director and Film major Jeff Cronise. “And in the film world, digital brought its own revolution to the industry—all you need now is the camera and the editing software.” Currently, film classes at HSU work primarily with digital, although a few still use film.

Since 1967, the festival has put HSU students to work building a venue for independent and alternative filmmakers to showcase their work. “Anyone can share their point of view,” says co-director David Fox, a Marine Biology major. “We have film submissions from six different continents and all different walks of life.”

Although the festival used to accept both film and digital submissions, for the past few years, submissions have been DVD only.

Tonight, it's Best of the Fest night for the 44th annual Humboldt International Film Festival, whose theme this year is simply, “Revolution.” And right now the student co-directors putting on the show are trying to make sure everything goes off without a hitch.

It's All in the Planning

PREPARATIONS BEGIN A YEAR before the festival. Students spend hours screening submitted films, whittling down the hundreds of submissions to the few dozen that make it to the screen. Students also put their entrepreneurial talents on display, raising funds and teaming up with local businesses to promote the festival.

Any student can join the film festival class and lend a hand to organize the event. Last year, Theatre major Brittany White took the class on a whim. Since then, she's worked on three locally produced films. This year, she volunteered to take a leading role as house manager for Best of the Fest.

“I had never even seen short films before this class,” she says. “It helped spark my interest in film and in helping short films get noticed in all their different forms. To me, that's the meaning of revolution: a new start and a way to bring attention to things that should be noticed.”

What begins for many as a desire to watch cool films develops into a yearlong training in critical film analysis and event coordination. “It can be stressful. It's always on my mind,” Fox says. “But it's so rewarding to see it all come together.”

To pull it off the festival's student co-directors Cronise, John Manning, Fox and Glen Webster work closely with staff advisor Joshua Nelson and the festival's three guest judges, industry professionals Jessica Mae Stover, Al Hayes and Kevin M. Kearney.

On the morning of Best of the Fest, the group of professional and student film enthusiasts gets down to the business of deciding which films and filmmakers will be recognized that evening. Breakfast—and many cups of coffee—fuel the decision making.

While voting for films can sometimes be contentious, this morning everyone is in agreement over which entries will be honored at tonight's event. The winning titles are kept secret, but these standout films are guaranteed to uphold the tradition of excellence expected of the film fest.

“Expect new ideas,” says Fox. “Expect things you've never seen before.”

Leading up to today, each guest judge hosted a night of events, including a workshop and an evening of screenings.

Kearney, a screenplay writer and former member on the Public Works Media board of directors, led Animation and Experimental Night; Hayes, a motion picture executive, hosted Documentary Night; while Stover, a professional film director, presented Narrative Night. In addition to hosting, guest judges had chosen winners from their respective categories.

