

UO alumnus takes a gamble on indie cinema



Courtesy of crazyemergency.com/film/jacks/

■ 'Jacks,' an independent film featuring student work, will premiere at the Bijou Theater this week

By Lisa Toth
Oregon Daily Emerald

Jesse Lawler and his college buddies starting playing poker his junior year, when he first moved out of the dorms. So, if the toilet needed to be cleaned, the loser of the round got the job. The \$5 bets became \$200 addictions. Massive fortunes weren't won or lost, but an idea was sparked.

"Seeing the escalation of playing poker was something I thought would be interesting to see in a movie," Lawler said.

"Jacks," an independent local film written, directed and produced by Lawler, a 23-year-old University alumnus, will screen at the Eugene Bijou Theater beginning Friday, May 26 at 11:20 p.m.

The film, featuring local talent, music and scenery, won "Best Feature" at the American Digital Arts Festival 2000, a film festival in Florida.

The dark comedy revolves around four college students who learn that the less cash they have, the more every bet counts. What starts out as a low-money poker game turns into a game of high stakes, dares, stolen beers, a kidnapped fraternity mascot, stolen cars, love, deceit and tangled friendships hanging in the balance.

"Anyone who has had a hard time reconciling friendships and rivalries will see a lot they are familiar with in this movie," Lawler said.

Lawler added that in the major poker scenes, the audience tension builds when the stakes become high.

"The easiest response to get out of an audience is laughter. I had never made them tense or uncomfortable. But there were scenes in 'Jacks' where I have succeeded in doing that," Lawler said.

The soundtrack includes local bands such as the American Girls, the Habañeros and Groove Juice Special, with location filming at the Wild Duck Brewery, Espresso Roma, Lucky's and the 5th Street Market.

Line producer Jeff Miholer, a law student at the University and the executive director of the University's Film Club, said Lawler was looking for places that had a "really classy" or "really gritty" look. The Wild Duck Brewery was rented out for a nightclub scene.

The film was produced and filmed at Chambers Media Center in Eugene. Lawler said using the sound stage at Chambers Productions was an in-kind investment for the film.

"In a town like Eugene, you have a lot more you can do because people are dazzled by it, in a good way," producer Kenneth Brady said. Brady, who has four years of film experience in Los Angeles, also served as the film's

casting director and stunt coordinator.

Hans Hlawaty stars in the lead role as Connor Briggs as well as being as the film's composer, conductor and soundtrack producer. Hlawaty said the bands were all chosen because they fit with the movie while providing local appeal.

"I felt they would flesh out the soundtrack," Hlawaty said.

It doesn't seem complicated to make a film, but when you have 20 people on the crew... there is always something people don't count on.

Jeff Miholer
executive director
UO Film Club

As for his acting career, Hlawaty, who graduated from the University last year, said his skills and experience came from his four years in college. Hlawaty said all he needed to play the part was "a strong liver, a good poker face and questionable morals."

Miholer recommended that students interested in the motion picture industry should get involved and learn specific skills in college. Michael Govier, Scott Vogel and Chris Wooten were involved with the production of Nicholas Nickelby, and along

with other students in "Jacks," were key assets to the team.

"The three of them built our set, which was extremely valuable because we wouldn't have been able to film without that set," Miholer said.

Lawler said that everyone's efforts — students, community members and volunteers — all put countless hours of time and effort into completing the final production.

"It doesn't seem complicated to make a film, but when you have 20 people on the crew that have to be at different places and different times, there is always something people don't count on," Miholer said.

Miholer said that the demanding and crazy hours caused personal relationships to go on hold.

"There was this one time, for this car crash, and we had a \$4,000 camera. We tied the camera to a tree and crashed the car into that tree on purpose," Miholer said. "We spent three hours arguing about how we were going to do it without breaking anything."

Miholer said that Lawler, as an artist, cared only about getting the shot.

Despite the pressure on the set, the crew socially developed their own poker addiction offstage.

As for their future plans, the crew will continue to push the flick to attract exposure through film festivals, direct-to-video distributors and showings on The Independent Film Channel.

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Pink Martini vocalist China Forbes sings during the Folk Festival on the EMU lawn. Pink Martini was the last act to perform on Sunday evening. The band consists of 10 musicians and is based in Portland.

Sonic Youth

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and continue to be, a bouquet of colorful moods and sounds.

The album's centerpiece and title track, "nyc ghosts & flowers," is the only song from guitarist Lee Ranaldo. It shows the band at its creative best, methodically building a sonic storm from the simple scene of a phone ringing in the middle of the night where Ranaldo answers to find "nuthin' on the line."

On this record, the band truly embraces its beat-poetry side. Starting with cover art from the late William S. Burroughs called "X-Ray Man," and continuing through the many spoken pieces, the band again seems more concentrated on its lyrics.

Sure, they have always been more talkers than singers. But here they go another step further. From Thurston Moore's spoken-word-with-ambient-noise "small flowers crack concrete" about a shake-down, to Kim Gordon's talking-blues-meets-trumpet-playing on the closer "lightnin,'" it is clear that the band has been spending time thinking about poetry in relationship to its music.

When there is singing, Gordon and Moore sing together. This is a surprisingly rare occurrence in Sonic Youth's past records. But here it works well to thicken up the texture of the early songs on the record.

Cover art has always been a real treat when it comes to Sonic Youth records, and it would be negligent to disregard it here. Indeed, it is what separates the band's Geffen

Records from the handfuls of mostly instrumental records released on its very own SYR record label.

"A Thousand Leaves" cover art was so good that it competed with the songs themselves. This time the art has little if any continuity, other than it is all very Sonic Youth. The back cover is a mosaic of flowers. Inside are color street photos snapped by a wandering Lee Ranaldo, presumably trying to capture pictures of ghosts in the city. The back of the jacket is an untitled painting by Robert Mooney showing the pope, beaming with celestial light while dancing to a DJ.

Sonic Youth has rebuilt itself. So it appears that you can take the instruments from the musicians, but in the case of Sonic Youth, you can't take the musicians out of the instruments.