

Indie films thrive in Eugene

Independent filmmakers in Eugene often are inspired by Hollywood productions

By Ryan Nyburg
Senior Pulse Reporter

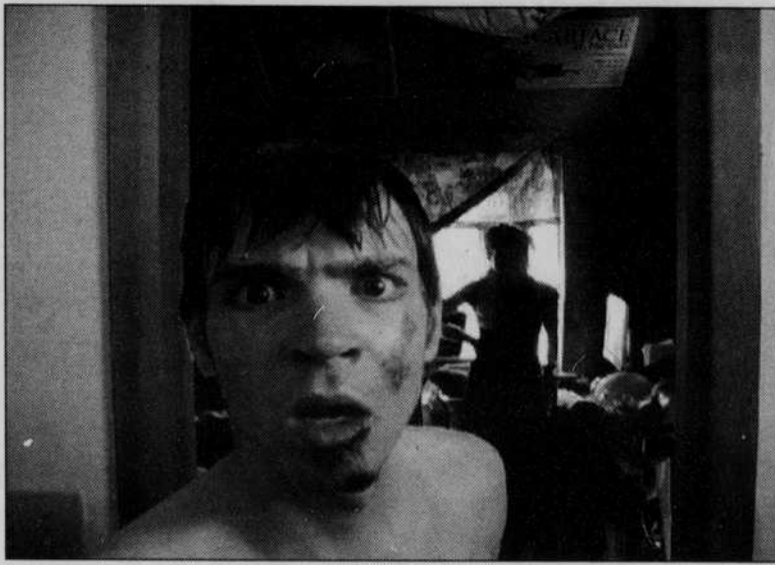
Most people who witness filmmakers invading their town to shoot a movie will remember it years later. Some communities even bear it as a mark of distinction.

People in Newport might remember when Paul Newman came to town and adapted Ken Kesey's novel "Sometimes a Great Notion" back in the early 1970s. Eugene and Cottage Grove still celebrate the filming of "National Lampoon's Animal House," which remains one of the University's claims to fame.

Maybe someday people will remember that "Sisters," starring Chris O'Donnell and Rip Torn, was partly filmed on this campus.

But, while people tend to remember productions that brought large crews and famous actors into town, or the films that played in theaters across the nation, something else lies beneath this — independent home-grown filmmaking. Emboldened by others who made it big through the freedom of expense and expression that has become associated with cheaper digital technology, these directors, producers, actors and crew members make movies right here in Eugene with little or no money.

These filmmakers come from different educational and economic backgrounds. Henry Weintraub has a high school degree and works at a local Circle K convenience store; he's directed six short films, including an hour-long documentary on local punk bands. Sophomore journalism major Daniel Epstein helps run House of Film, the University's film club, and along with other club



Courtesy

Local filmmaker Henry Weintraub's "Eternal Lesson" is one of many independently made films produced in Eugene. Weintraub has directed six short films.

members has created a feature-length thriller entitled "Proctor." The rest have equally diverse pasts, but one thing that unites them is a love for film and filmmaking.

"I've loved movies my whole life," Weintraub said. "I've been collecting films since I was 10 and now have about 350 DVDs. I swear I watch three movies a day."

Many of these local filmmakers have shared influences. Weintraub, Epstein and Lane Community College student Tyler Benjamin, who has directed a number of short films, all cited Sam Raimi (most famous for his "Evil Dead" and "Spiderman" series of films) as an influence on their work. Other "do it yourself" style filmmakers, such as Robert Rodriguez, George Romero and Peter Jackson, were also listed as artists whose work was influential to these small-time directors.

"Directors like Raimi and Romero

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have an original style of storytelling," Benjamin said. "They have created movies which went on to set the standard for their genre."

Storytelling is something else these filmmakers value.

"I love entertaining people," Epstein said. "I like to tell stories, but when I'm just talking I don't always have the enthusiasm to keep people interested. When I make a movie, I can tell a story while entertaining people. Movies just have that kind of connection with the audience."

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SLAM

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With a calm outer appearance, Kitt Jennings shocked the audience with inner rage and some of the most violent and intense poetry of the evening. I never realized expelling demons could be so artful.

The slightly bashful Cassie Sorensen had some of the most beautiful and spiritual poems of the six performers. Her words were subtle yet fiery. Her gently burning poems lingered in my head long after she recited them.

Olivia Pepper's poems progressed from heart-breaking to hilarious as the night went on. She had a modest quality that helped her poetry get under your skin. They were so heart-felt it sent chills down the spine.

The most impressive poet of the evening was easily Jahan Khalighi. He seemed to summon ancient energy into his body and release it, eyes closed, with the passion of John Coltrane and the delivery of a young Martin Luther King Jr. People were gasping and whooping and rocking to the rhythms of his meter. His quivering voice and powerful portrayal of the mystical idea of spoken word gave him the highest score of the evening, and he received an explosive standing ovation from the crowd.

All of the poets were absolutely stunning. There was a great diversity of stories and styles. Sometimes they left you feeling raw and spent. Sometimes they were hilarious. Sometimes they lashed out. But they all revealed multiple truths that exist in this sometimes ugly world. And there was hope buried

in all of the poets' work. In my opinion, they all should have won.

Unfortunately, it wasn't up to me. So, the four poets chosen to represent Eugene in the National Poetry Slam are Jennings, Pepper, Rutledge and Khalighi.

After the winners were determined, the crowd slowly dissipated into the night as Eleven Eyes began to set up its equipment. This was the end of the event for many. The rest of the evening was more of an insider's party, a celebration for those involved.

The 2004 Eugene Slam Team will perform at the Willamette Valley Folk Festival this Sunday at 1 p.m. in the Ben Linder Room.

Contact the Pulse columnist at carlsundberg@dailyemerald.com.

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