



Figaro! Living in the Moment of Character screens at Open Lens

Cinematic Cornucopia

Local settings fill the screen at Open Lens

There's a certain special something we experience — New Wave critics called it *frisson* — in recognizing locations projected onto the big screen, an undeniable thrill that comes from seeing, say, the Eugene Masonic Cemetery on the UO campus used as a set piece in a modern retelling of the Jack the Ripper story. When this happens, the familiar is viewed anew, bathed in the celluloid aura of heightened awareness. And so the familiar becomes strange, becomes a piece of artistry torn from the everyday.

DIVA's Open Lens Festival, now in its seventh year, provides countless moments of such odd displacement as local filmmakers, often shooting on Eugene's home turf, add to the burgeoning Northwest movie industry. Hosted by storyboard artist and illustrator Dan Schaefer, the Winter Short Film Festival pours out a cinematic cornucopia of drama, comedy, gothic horror, political ads, animation — just about anything you can do on film, sometimes with nothing more than a handheld digital camera.

This year's offerings include two longer films — *Mania*, a documentary about the history of the Portland Trailblazers, and *Figaro! Living in the Moment of*

Character, a behind-the-scenes peek into an international collaboration centering on Mozart's great work — as well as a series of juried short films and a teen video challenge spotlighting short works by local high school auteurs.

Schaefer will host a seminar on storyboarding where he will give demonstrations of the art and talk about his experiences in the film industry since starting out in 1989. All films will screen at UO's Baker Downtown Center, with an opening night meet-and-greet Saturday, Jan. 29, at Davis' Restaurant.

Blazing the hardwood

One of the most pleasant surprises of the festival is *Mania*, which tracks the birth of Portland's NBA expansion team in 1970 through the Blazers' topsy-turvy history of unlikely triumphs and epic struggles, right up to their present incarnation under coach Nate McMillan. Directed by festival host Schaefer, the documentary focuses less on the sport itself — altogether there is about a minute of actual game footage — than the cultural revolution and community bonding sparked by the arrival of a professional franchise in a city that was practically unknown east of the Mississippi

(when the late, great Maurice Lucas was selected by the Blazers in the 1976 ABA Dispersal Draft, he said he didn't even know where Portland was). *Mania* is as much a story of time and place as it is of steals and slam-dunks.

From the founding of the team by Harry Glickman to the arrival of flower-child center Bill Walton and the Blazers' miracle upset of the 76ers in the 1977 NBA finals, on through the injury-riddled collapse of that team, the notorious advent of the "Jailblazers" and the rebirth of a competitive team in the '80s, on up to the present (where, notably, history seems to be repeating with a team devastated by injuries) — *Mania* is a riveting, enlightening movie that harkens to what seems a more innocent, team-oriented era of pro hoops. Non-basketball fans, and even those who proclaim a loathing for all sports, will be hard-pressed to not find uplift in the story of the loyal, spirited bond between a team and its city.

Short and sweet and everything in-between

The short film is an odd beast, a cannon shot that darts across the screen leaving you baffled or burned or blown away, and sometimes all of the above. It's an easily acquired taste, seeing as there's always this truth: Short films don't have all that much time to truly suck, and when they're done well they have all the compressed emotional impact of a great short story. Consider them an art form analogous to weather in the Northwest: If you don't like it, wait five minutes.

This year's offering of short films provides a few real gems. *Near Mint*, produced by Vancouver Film School, is a little burst of *Twilight Zone* fantasia about a snooty retro-dude (he only listens to obscure '80s punk on vinyl) who orders a 1980 Telsamatic microwave only to find he's opened a portal into the past, which leads to some very surreal communications. Director Eric Dion's *Sons La Pluie* is a hilarious piece of poetic mock-Truffaut about a woman pining over a lost love, containing one of the most hilarious subtitles ever: "I think in English."

Perhaps the finest entry of the series, *The Tell*, puts a new twist on the dramatic device of the high-stakes poker game. Directed by Devon Lyon, this nearly perfect short film is creepy, bloody, hilarious and, in the end, completely shocking — like a musical conceived by Scorsese, scored by Sondheim and directed by Guillermo del Toro.

The kids are all right

The Teen Video Challenge is an absolute delight. Conceived and created by local high school students including Springfield's A3 program, what these films lack in polish and professionalism they more than make up for through ingenuity, inspiration and the sheer, unbound excitement of smart kids getting their hands on a camera and having at. The pieces run the gamut from comic sketches, nightmare scenarios and slapstick comedy to movie spoofs, political ads and public service announcements. All this energy and inventiveness shouldn't surprise you, unless you are in the unfortunate habit of underestimating the intelligence and freedom of young people making art. **EW**

DIVA's Open Lens Winter Short Film Festival runs Jan. 28-30 at Baker Downtown Center, 325 E 10th St.: *Mania* screens 8pm Friday & *Figaro!* screens 1pm Saturday, admission is \$7; the OpenLens Juried Short Films and Awards start at 8pm Saturday, with an encore presentation 4pm Sunday, admission is \$8; Youth Visions Juried Teen Films & Awards start 1pm Sunday, admission by donation; for further information, visit www.openlens.proscenia.net or call 344-DIVA.



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