

# Calendar

March 18-24, 2004

## Island Arts and Entertainment



## Martha's Vineyard Independent Film Festival

By Julian Wise

The title of the fourth annual Martha's Vineyard Independent Film festival is "The Power of Truth," a theme that resonates in a time of slick campaign ads and military intelligence failures. The festival is emerging as a powerful instrument for sharing alternative points of view that are often ignored by major media outlets. The more than 30 films in the 2004 lineup explore euthanasia, home burial, eunuchs, surfing, Iranian women, New York City street life, Sudanese orphans, and more.

Festival founder Thomas Bena says this year's festival is the best yet.

"Last year was good, but this year is great," he says. "There's not a weak spot in the program."

Mr. Bena sits on a five-member board, joined by filmmaker/graphic designer Jeremy Mayhew, filmmaker Richard Skidmore, Island Entertainment manager Anne Evasick, and chef Heather Gude. The board sifted through boxes of independent films, seeking the ones with the power to move the viewer and stimulate intellectual curiosity. Not every film



FILE PHOTO BY RALPH STEWART

Organizer Thomas Bena, left, meets with William Marks, Sara Nesson, and Kate Feiffer (right) before last year's festival.

mosphere. The festival is supported by contributions from community members, businesses, and the local cultural council. While many corporate-backed festivals charge artists to have their films shown, the Vineyard festival pays the artists. The casual seating arrangement, with worn couches spread around the room, creates an informal atmosphere. The quality of the films matches the larger festivals; last year's event featured the Oscar-nominated documentary "Ferry Tales", while this year's festival includes the acclaimed "Lost Boys of Sudan." Filmmaker Kate Davis calls the three-day event "a mid-winter miracle," saying "the M.V. Film Festival is like no other."

Attendance has risen each year, suggesting the Island community is receptive to the alternative points of view shown in the independent films.

"The majority of the films are documentaries," says Mr. Skidmore. "Often they're films with no funding, made by individuals working from the heart, trying to get a message out."

Many of the documentaries are a testament to the rise of digital technology. Once filmmaking was the province of those with large bankrolls or industry connections. Now, anyone with a camera and a laptop computer can get in the game.

"If you really want to make a film you can do it whether you have \$10 in your pocket or several thousand," says Mr. Skidmore.

"It is as if the printing press has been reinvented," says Mr. Bena.

Mr. Bena and his cohorts have been planning the 2004 festival since December. He says the spirit of the festival makes the hard work worthwhile.

"The energy is contagious, you can really feel it," Mr. Bena says. "It's a simple formula, gathering people together to experience the art of storytelling. I don't know of any other event on the Island where people break bread, spend time getting to know each other, and talk about important issues that affect our lives."

The Martha's Vineyard Independent Film Festival runs Friday through Sunday, March 19-21 at the Chilmark Community Center on South Road. Admission is \$5 per show. Information: 508-645-2705.

### Local Art To Enhance Festival

Adding to the cultural abundance at the Martha's Vineyard Independent Film Festival, a number of Island artists will be showing their work at the Chilmark Community Center. Titled "Interplay," the group show focuses on positive human relationships and interaction, featuring paintings, drawings, photography, sculpture, and mixed media pieces by Marcia Smilack, Steve Lohman, Chris Dreyer, Bill McLane, Margot Datz, Andrew Fischer, Melissa Breese, Richard Limber, Jennifer Christy, Elliott Vecchia, Althea Lowell, Tom Carberry, Barney Zeitz, Nina Gomez Gordon, MJ Bindu Delekta, Rose Treat, Joan Walsh, and Basia Jaworska.



## 2004 Entries: Reviews & Previews

By Niki Patton

Friday, March 19, 2004



Program One: 7 pm

**"Thirty Seconds or Less/Unstoppably Watchable/The Fastest Show on Earth,"** Richard Skidmore, 8 minutes.

The great thing about the new style of filmmaking is that it's up-to-minute-current — so current that this film won't be finished until festival time. As a result, we can't tell you more about this short by Island videographer Skidmore. But with a title like that,



maybe we don't need to.

**"A Film about Dan,"** Nancy Aronie, Joel Aronie, Jerry Storrow, Elizabeth Witham, Ken Wentworth, 45 minutes. Followed by Q & A session with Dan Aronie.

Islander Daniel Aronie was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis in 1994 at the age of 22. In 1995 the Aronie family began to record the experience of family life with chronic illness. A combination of home footage and professional interviews, the family collaborated with Island filmmaker Liz Witham (and her newly formed Island production company — Film Truth Productions) to create an extraordinary chronicle — the trials and tribulations, joys, and accomplish-



ments of Dan and his family.

**\*8:30 Opening Night Reception\***  
**Program Two:** 9:30 pm  
**Narrowcast:** Eric Marciano. 20 minutes. Post film discussion with Eric Marciano.

**"Move over Divine!"** Meet Candy Kane — an overweight, has-been, drag queen who stars in this wonderfully awful comedy that

also spoofs current HBO megadevelopment-mistress Sheila Nevins. Bad lighting, bad direction, boomy sound — what more can we say?



It's terrific.

**"Brave New York,"** Richard Sandler, 60 minutes. Post-film discussion with Richard Sandler.

A celebration of the odd, the out-cast, and the outrageous, as exemplified by inhabitants of the East Village in New York City. Mr. Sandler is an archivist of sorts, intent on saving those wonderful examples of one-of-a-kind personalities that once so personified New York but that are now being driven out or submerged by gentrification and upscaling. Mr. Sandler comes from a photographic background and revels in the graphic composition of his material — a joy which is communicated to his audience. In both content and form, a film well worth the watch.

**\*11:15 pm Opening Night Party\*** with Latin Quintet featuring Marta Topferova and Angus Martin.



Saturday, March 20, 2004

**Program Three:** 10 am  
Vineyard Shorts  
**"Dean K. Denniston: A Man of Color - An Oak Bluffs Childhood,"** 30 minutes. Post film discussion with Linsey Lee.

Linsey Lee continues her extraordinary work as collector of Island stories — from the distant past to the very present. With a wealth of wonderful archival images, we are treated to Oak Bluffs circa 1900, via the memories of Dean K. Denniston, son of the first African-American minister on the Vineyard. He talks about his summers, his education, his experiences with prejudice, and most of all about his father, Oscar Edwin Denniston, a West Indies native who came to the island and who led the Bradley Memorial Church for 46 years. As Mr. Denniston says, "[My father] would help people regardless of their race or col-

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Filmmaker Jeremy Mayhew at work.

made the cut.

"If a film turns you off in the first 5 to 10 minutes, you have to cut it short and move on to the next one," says Jeremy Mayhew. "There are so many hours of film to see."

In addition to film viewings, the festival will include an art exhibit, live music, chef Marvin Jones's ethnic dishes, and ample opportunities for mingling and conversation. Cultural critic Dave Lasagna will lead the panel discussion "How To Get Your Independent Film Made" featuring Kate Davis ("Southern Comfort"), Richard Sandler ("Brave New York"), Franco Sacchi and Gian Claudio Guiducci ("American Eunuchs"), and Eric Marciano ("Narrowcast").

The Martha's Vineyard Independent Film Festival is gaining national recognition for its artist-friendly philosophy and casual at-

## Film Festival Reviews

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rich source of Vineyard lore.

**"Weekends are Taller than Weekdays,"** Marcia Smilack, 19 minutes. Post-film discussion with Ms. Smilack.

If you've ever wondered what a color might sound like, then you won't want to miss this film of photographer and Island resident Marcia Smilack giving a talk to a convention of "synesthetes," people who literally "cross wires" when it comes to their senses. A synesthete may literally "see" a sound in addition to hearing it, or hear a picture. When Marcia talks about hearing cello music as she looks at a photograph she is not speaking metaphorically.



11:45-12:45 pm: **Panel Discussion.** "How to Get Your Film Made" with Kate Davis, Franco Sacchi, Richard Sandler, Eric Marciano, and special guest — University of Dave Graduate, David Lasagna.

**Program Four: 1 pm**  
**"The Smell of Burning Ants,"** Jay Rosenblatt, 21 minutes. Post-film discussion with psychiatrist Charles Silberstein, M.D.

A documentary on the perils of growing up male. Pushing, shoving, and scenes of common child exploration take on a haunting air as Mr. Rosenblatt examines just how boys become men — and geez, it ain't easy. The old black-and-white footage is brilliantly chosen and the track makes it all the more provocative. The film communicates an essence of male angst. You'll laugh as it sends some chills up your spine.



**"The Ladies: Mahnaz Afzali,"** 60 minutes. Post-film discussion with Laura Roosevelt.

"The Ladies" refers to a public ladies room in Laleh Park, Tehran, where prostitutes, runaways, and other regulars meet. They unveil themselves, gossiping, swearing, even smoking. They talk about their lives in blunt terms — divorce, mental illness, rape, robbery. We peer into this film as though we were looking through the keyhole at a forbidden view. Iran has been in the midst of their own version of a feminist revolution in the recent past and "Ladies" highlights the costs of that transition. A mind-changing perspective of Iran.

**Program Five: 3:15 pm**  
**"Skateboarding,"** Charlie Samuels. 3 and 4 minutes.

Two short video visions of skateboarding by Charlie Samuels. Skateboarding then and now. Just plain fun to watch. Whichever era they're skating in...they're amazing.

**"Destination Unknown,"**



Nathan Gebhard, Mike Marriner, Brian McAllister, Amanda Gall. 80 minutes.

The new generation, whichever alphabet letter they've taken, still pursues the same quest as the old ones, looking for direction in an increasingly complex world and trying to find some meaning for their lives. Three young men take to the open road for a three-week tour of the West and also manage to grab interviews with some of the prime movers and shakers in American business and culture, as they search to find out what makes a life worthwhile. Fascinating inter-generational dialogues. A shot in the arm for anyone, young or old, looking for a dose of motivation and inspiration on their current quest.

**Program Six: 5:15 pm**  
**John Douglas Retrospective**

John Douglas has been a radical filmmaker for some 40 years, agitating for social and political change with each frame. He's also brother to Islanders Robert and David Douglas. Mr. Douglas will come to the Island for the fourth annual MVIFF for a retrospective of his work. From "Strike City," documenting crop workers who left the plantation in search of better conditions in 1965 to his current films, Mr. Douglas is adamant about decimating the status quo. His current films make use of avant garde animation. Striking imagery and tracks, without narration, impart strong sense messages that will stay with you long beyond words: A military helicopter in the shape of a case of Coke. A skeleton falling through the sky. A rap song on Osama Bin Laden and George Bush Jr. Powerful stuff. Love it or hate it, it won't leave you cold.

**Program Seven: 7:30 pm**  
**"A Taste of Life,"** Bob Morrison, 10 minutes.

Bob Morrison takes us on a virtual vacation. Adventures definitely go beyond the standard Frommer guide as Bob introduces us to a winemaker, a chef, and Il Palio — a 600-year-old horse race held annually in Sienna, Italy, with an audience of 35,000.



**"Miguel Ne Terren,"** ("Miguel on the Spot"), by Lluís Jene, Enric Miro

One day lawyer Miguel Gil Moreno walked out of his office in Barcelona and took to the streets — of Bosnia, Kosovo, Sierra Leone, Rwanda, Zaire, Burundi, Liberia, and Somalia. For the next 12 years, he spent his days and nights as a passionate journalist in the midst of conflict who hoped to use his camera to advocate for the war-caught millions. "Miguel Ne Terren" gives a name and personality to the often unknown journalist behind the camera that shoots the scenes we see in our news re-

ports, documentaries, etc. Now that we know who's behind the camera, we marvel at his courage and his unflinching eye in standing his ground while chaos rages around him. "Miguel Ne Terren" was created as a memorial to a man who gave his life to the true journalistic cause — that of bringing the truth to the world. In 1998 he was killed in Sierra Leone, ambushed by rebels.

**Program Eight: 9:30 pm** Adults only.

**"The Subject is Sex,"** Stephen Pan. Even we don't know what's in this short excerpt from a 100-minute film, but rest assured, it's sexy.



**"American Eunuchs,"** Claudio Guiducci, Franco Sacchi, 90 Minutes.

An exploration of why people voluntarily castrate themselves in America. While there are obvious reasons for castration, as in a transgender operation, "Eunuchs" explores the less obvious cases of men who want to remove this universal symbol and container of male sexuality. There's George, one half of the happily married heterosexual couple of Cookie and George. Then there's a gay man who names himself as Gelding. And last there's a man who aches for some resolution to his sexuality issues. The interviews are riveting, but still left me wanting to know more about just what compelled each of the subjects to make this drastic choice. But that doesn't make it any less fascinating. Note: There are graphic views of operations.

### Sunday, March 21

10-11 am, Sunday Samba Brunch featuring Marta Topferova and Angus Martin.

**Program Nine: 11 am** Vineyard Shorts:  
Four shorts by Island filmmakers:



**"Standing Up,"** Taylor Toole, 20 minutes. This film, Mr. Toole's first, made it into the Boston film fest. The story of a girl and boy from the right and wrong side of the tracks, respectively, as they begin the teenage dance of love. Toole has an innate sense of how to build tension in his shots and dialogue. This is great first filmmaking. Local talent stars. Filmed on Island.



**"Lost Jewel of the Atlantic,"** Jake Holcomb, 9 minutes.

There are some things you just can't put a price on. Case in point: the extraordinary ocean waves off the island of Madeira in the At-

lantic — a sight to behold, a natural element to be honored, and a terrific wave to be surfed. Unfortunately, unlike lands under conservation, you can't buy 'em to protect 'em. So now they're destroying the waves as they surround this island resort with concrete rip-rap to protect newly constructed oceanfront trophy houses. Nobody seems to care, except, that is, the surfers — who take the streets to save these magnificent natural elements. Jake Holcomb's trailer for an upcoming film by Save the Waves compellingly combines breath-taking surfing and nature shots with politics and protest and leaves you aching for the impending loss of this beauty. Makes you want to go and save that island too.

(The following two films were still under construction at press time and not viewed.)

**"Ice Henge,"** Jay Lagemann, 10 minutes.

Island artist Jay Lagemann takes to the ice — with a chainsaw. And creates? We're not sure yet, since this is another example of fresh-off-the-hard-drive filmmaking and won't be viewable till the festival. We know it won't be filmmaking as usual.

**"AKA Martha's Vineyard,"** Richard Sandler, 15 minutes.

We haven't seen it yet, but we gladly anticipate this second installment in Richard Sandler's visual history of Martha's Vineyard. Last year's part one was a treat for the senses and an homage to Noepe.

**Program Ten: 1 pm**  
**"I Used To Be a Filmmaker,"** Jay Rosenblatt, 10 minutes.

This is cute. Very cute. A very funny 10 minutes with Jay Rosenblatt and his daughter Ella as she grows from babyhood to toddler age. Clever word play. Did we mention this was cute?



**"A Family Undertaking,"** Elizabeth Westrate, 57 minutes. Post-film open discussion.

It used to be that death was an intimate event usually happening at home in familiar surroundings among family and friends, but the 20th century changed all that. Now most of us begin and end our lives in an intentionally sterile environment that is bereft of our history, to be put in the hands of stranger for burial the moment we die. In some states it's actually illegal to care for your own dead. Elizabeth Westrate explores the possibilities of returning to the old family ways of seeing loved ones through their final rites, as this film gently deals with our learned fears about death and dead bodies. Family Undertaking will not be screened nationally until its first airing on PBS this summer.

**Program Eleven: 3 pm**  
**"Mademoiselle Nigot and the Doctor,"** Janine Hoskin, 90 minutes.

80-year-old Lisette Nigot lives alone in Australia. A pleasant,



smiling woman, she is sociable and charming. There seems to be no hint of depression and she says she has never had any pain. But Mademoiselle Nigot wants to die. Can hardly wait, as a matter of fact. Enter Dr. Nitschke, the Australian inventor of a suicide/euthanasia machine that allows the user to control their demise. Filmmaker Hoskin was brilliant in her choice of subject — Mademoiselle Nigot seems to be the perfect candidate for life — healthy, vibrant, laughing in her interviews. But she wants to die. Is she really making a rational choice? Are there underlying reasons for her wish? And whatever the answers, who gets to choose?



**Hetty.** Angus Stevens. 8 minutes.

A short dark comedy about euthanasia. Hetty is determined to end her life in dignity, but it turns out other people have something else in mind. You'll die laughing.



**Program Twelve: 5:15 pm**  
**"Savior,"** Erlu Skuladottur, 28 minutes.

Turns out even in Iceland they're stressed out. Teenage Kaja is virtually abandoned by two parents who instead concentrate on charitable works for others. She is left to struggle through her own puberty. Magnificent locations include glaciers, fjords, and raging rivers — many of them used as metaphors for our young heroine's journey. Highly recommended for teenage girls.



**"Lost Boys of Sudan,"** Megan Mylan and John Shenk, 90 minutes.

This film was nominated for a 2004 Oscar. In 1992 20,000 Sudanese boys escaped massacre by Islamic fundamentalists by escaping the villages where their parents and siblings were being murdered or driven out. Eventually, massive refugee camps were set up and the orphan boys created their own families and tribes. In 2000, a group of them were brought to the US for resettlement in places like Nebraska, Kansas, and Texas. "Lost Boys" follows the story of two of them, Peter and Santino, as they come to what they have been told is the promised land. Instead they discover such a demanding new life that they yearn for their old refugee camp. They both struggle, but eventually one begins to emerge and the other sinks. Watching this film allows the viewer to truly see American culture through new eyes. A remarkable film.

**Note:** All film times are approximate and subject to change.