

CLEVELAND INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL 2006
HIPHOPBATTLE.COM
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Cleveland Film Festival Independent Shorts Program Part 1

Close C+
Ireland
Directed by Tom Hopkins

Close is a short film about a woman who has a near death experience in a car crash. The film starts with a woman standing outside a house in a suburb. She has a flashback as she is staring at a small, white house. In a white flash accompanied by the sound of sirens, a long line of backed up cars sitting on a bridge appears. The camera begins to weave through the crowd of people standing outside their cars. As the camera passes each person, their thoughts are heard as though they are speaking. The opinions range from impatient to concerned. As the camera finishes its trail through the crowd, a woman speaks to the camera and begs it to return to back to life. The camera work with its long and flowing shots add a slow, analyzing pace to the film. *Close* is an interesting idea with a new spin on how people approach and handle a tragedy that they witness, but have no personal tie to.

Vagabond Shoes A-
England
Directed by Jackie Quidney

Vagabond Shoes follows a homeless man named Alec living on the streets of England. One night as he is sitting outside an upscale jazz party, Alec sees a man leave the party, and place his tuxedo on the back of his car. As the man drives away, the tux falls to the ground. Alec picks up the tux, changes into it, and walks into the party without a second look from the bouncer. Alec mingles with the upper class in the party, drinking, smoking, and eating with the rich. As the night progresses, Alec meets the jazz band and ends up singing for the party. *Vagabond Shoes* makes a bold statement about the class system of the world today. The film questions the social walls that exist between the rich and poor. The homeless Alec walking unquestioned into an upper class party because of a tuxedo, speaks worlds about the interpretation of social status.

Soap Opera B-
USA
Directed by Zachary Brewster-Geisz

Soap Opera is an animated short about a bar of soap endeavoring to clean a bathroom. The soap must appeal to the tile washer with the help of a sponge. Complete with Italian dialog, the short pokes fun at the operatic style of story telling. The soap must defend himself from the accusations of the tile cleaner. The tile cleaner thinks that the

soap has neglected to keep the bathroom clean. The short culminates with a play on the Faustian as a bunch of rubber duckies send the soap and sponge down the toilet bowl of hell. *Soap Opera* is a quirky and funny animated short good for a laugh or two.

Round 5

B

Mexico

Directed by Jorge Aguilera and Javier Aguilera

Round 5 is a short that begins with an amateur boxer working in a meatpacking plant. At the end of the day he goes home. As he is walking past a cheap hotel, he runs into a woman in a white shirt. The woman runs off frantically leaving behind a large key chain. The boxer picks up the keys and finds that they are numbered one through five. Three men come out of the hotel and chase after him. The chase leads him to set of numbered locks that get him out of several dead ends. The locks lead him to a boxing ring. When the confused boxer steps into the ring, he finds that his opponent is the woman he ran into outside of the hotel. The woman is forcing the amateur boxer to face his destiny and fight. *Round 5* is a fast paced chase film with a pulsing sound track. In short *Round 5*, is a cool movie with a great concept.

Sign of the Times

USA

D

Directed by Ole Brereton

Sign of the times makes an attempt at addressing the current world order, specifically the events that took place between 9/11 and the Iraq war. The short consists of one man standing in the center of the screen rapping about the images of the war on terrorism. The short questions the methods and actions of the West agents the Middle East. Unfortunately, the rap stirs up memories of Vanilla Ice and Marcy Mark. The rap has no flow or rhyme, it decays into a string of words that just sound alike but don't mean anything. Although the topic addressed in *Sign of the Times* is important, the topic is poorly represented by the weak verse and poorly written lyrics.

Duck, Duck, Goose!

USA

C-

Directed by D.C. Douglas

Duck, Duck, Goose explores a twisted tale of an ill-fated first date between two odd balls. A man goes to a singles speed dating session for professional women. After many questionable hookups, he connects with a woman obsessed with France; they decide to go on a date. The next night the man goes to the woman's house where he meets her eccentric ex-husband with whom she continues to live for companionship. The husband insists on accompanying the two on their first date. The threesome continues on to a French restaurant where the inevitable conflict plays out between the husband and the new suitor. To make matters worse a pushy French waiter and a drunken barmaid are

thrown into the mix. The relentless quirkiness of *Duck, Duck, Goose* is entertaining to a point, but by the end of the 21 minute “short” the constant weirdness is simply annoying.

My Back Yard Was a Mountain

USA

B+

Directed by Adam Schlachter

My Back Yard Was a Mountain tells the story of a young Mexican boy whose family is moving to the United States. The boy must find a home for his baby goat before he leaves for the States. If the boy cannot find a home for the goat, he will have to give it to a farmer who he believes will eat it. With the help of his friend, a girl who lives next door to him, he travels up a mountain to find an old woman who once ran an orphanage to care for the goat; they discuss their lives and speculations about the United States. The acting by the two children in *My Back Yard Was a Mountain* is excellent. Due to the good direction and acting an audience cannot help but sympathize with the main characters plight. The story is stirring, uplifting, thought provoking and heart warming.

By Robert O’Neil

Cleveland International Film Festival Shorts Program II

The Death of Kevin Carter: The Casualty of the Bang Bang Club

USA

A-

Directed by Dan Krauss

The Death of Kevin Carter documents the life and death of Kevin Carter a Pulitzer Prize photojournalist. The short begins with the story of the journalist’s experiences in South Africa during the civil war over apartheid. Carter manages to make friends with the freedom fighters. The Photos he and his friends are able to shoot photos that bring them and the crisis resignation and the nickname the Bang Bang Club. Carter begins to use cocaine to suppress horrible images of death and war that plagued his life. Carter then moves on to Somalia where he takes a Pulitzer Prize winning photo of an emaciated Somalian infant being followed by a Vulture. The reporter began to have troubles in his professional life, and he began to fall into depression. His drug use increased and finally he tragically took his own life. The short is very well done filled with many fond and heartfelt memories about the life of Carter.

Something’s In The Air/ But It’s Not On the Airwaves

USA

C

Directed by Karen Kilroy & Chris Chandler

This musical short protests and speaks about the public response to the war in Iraq. The film is formatted with a lead singer and his band in singing with cuts back to

images of war and protest. Throughout the short the message becomes: why if there are more protests now than there were during Vietnam why popular culture has not embraced the movement. Although the message of the video is meaningful and important the film itself is poorly done. The camera work is simple and unimaginative using only one angle to photograph the band, the editing is basic and does not highlight the music or subject, and the music is spoken by some old hippy whose lyrics are not synced with the motion of his mouth. The work was rough and unpolished.

Smart Card

USA

B/B-

Directed by James Oxford

Smart Card is set in the feutcher. In this feutcher there exists something called a smart card. This card starts your car, buys things for you checks you in and out of work, autopilots you home and makes chooses that enhance your life. In this film the main character in a client of this corporation. The card regulates the food he can buy and determine when he will buy them. One day after work the smart system demands that the man go to the store to buy food and gas. There her meets a drifter that talks to him about how the card rules his life. After the meeting the drifter he finds that the drifter stole his smart car, and as he is trying to open his car the smart system calls the police on him. Because he does not have the card he is arrested for not having ID. He finds that the smart company works with the police department and a smart company employee interrogates him and ends up selling him as smart card imprinted in his hand. The movie ends with the same drifter cutting of the man's hand to use the card. Smart Card's chilling interpretation of the progressing role of technology in our daily lives makes it a unique and thought provoking short.

Perils in Nude Modeling

USA

C+

Directed by Scott Rice

The short Perils in Nude Modeling tells the tail of a nude body model for an art class, and her attraction to one of the students. The class is run by a Nazi like teacher that times his students and expels a student every few minuets. The student begins to have trouble in the class when the model starts to beg him to kiss her. His work begins to slip, so begins a gauntlet between the student and the teacher. The student must draw quickly as he can while the teacher rushes to see his drawings. The only thing that saved this odd comedy was the lighting, camera work, and the actor who played the instructor. The movie became relentlessly repetitive at a point, but despite the story the movie looked great.

Good Vibrations

USA

B

Carla Waddles

In Good Vibrations is a tale of a dysfunctional married couple. After the wife wins a sex toy at a bachelor party she becomes obsessed with the toy that she names Jeremy. She begins to spend more time with Jeremy than with her husband. The wife eventually tries to bring the toy into bed with the husband, and the husband tries to get the toy away from his wife. The short continues on as the husband competes for his wife's affections with a toy. Good Vibrations's hilarious and satirical writing along with excellent performances by the two lead roles make it a great comedy. This was definitely one of the funniest shorts of the festival.

The Backbrace
USA
Carolyn London

D+

Backbrace describes the torturous tale of a young boy forced to wear a large metal brace throughout his childhood. The short depicts many awkward situations the boy falls into because of the brace. At one point he falls on his back and the brace prevents him from standing up. This short's cheese animation and annoying dialog make it hard to sit through. Although moments of the film are funny the whole story is depressing. No purpose or point other than to describe the ordeals of this boy comes out of this short. This is an example of a short that missed the mark.

Celamy
USA
Directed by Julie Anne Meerschwan

B/B+

The short Celamy is about a little girl whose mother dies. Directly after her mother's death the girl creates an imaginary friend a girl named Celamy. Confident and fun loving Celamy steers the girl through her mother's death and helps her through her childhood. The two girls become best friends, and the girl's father even begins to accept Celamy into the family. As the girl grows up Celamy stays the same age. The girl's as a teenager begins to not have time for Celamy. The girl begins to lose interest in her imaginary friend. Celamy is a very touching coming of age story told from a unique perspective. What seems to be a wonderfully repetitive occurrence in the festival's shorts is the superb acting on the part of young people. The compelling relationship between the girl and Celamy makes this film very meaningful to the viewer.

By Robert O'Neil

Tsotsi

South Africa 2005

Directed by Gavin Hood

Language: Africans

Tsotsi, (meaning “thug” in South African slang), explores the experiences of a street thug named Tsotsi living in shantytown, a cramped grouping of thousands of makeshift shacks and rundown houses on the outskirts of the city of Johannesburg, South Africa. Tsotsi is a cold-hearted criminal indifferent to human suffering with no real name or past. The driving force in Tsotsi’s life is his own survival without second thought of any other human or animal life that stands in his way. Tsotsi works with three partners in crime: Butcher, a brutal knife-wielding thug itching to spill blood whenever possible; Boston, a failed teacher now living out his life as a criminal in shantytown, and Tsotsi’s life long friend a jovial round man always loyal to his best friend Tsotsi.

The film first introduces the four as they are playing a craps game in shantytown. The group is preparing to go the subway station in the city. When they arrive at the subway station, the group begins to follow Tsotsi as he watches the people in the crowd. As Tsotsi’s eyes travel over the crowd, he spots an elderly man buying something from a vender. The man pays with cash from a large envelope. As the old man departs for the trains, the group led by Tsotsi follows him onto the train. Once the train is in motion, the four slowly surround the man. As the man begins to move away, Butcher withdraws a knife from his jacket and presses it against the elderly man’s chest. Slowly Tsotsi removes the money from the old man’s jacket the train suddenly shifts, and the knife embeds into the old man’s chest. Silently the old man dies. The four hold the man upright until the train stops. They wait for everyone to get off the train, and then run from the train and back to a bar in Shantytown.

In the bar Boston begins to feel guilt about the killing. Boston blames Tsotsi for the old man’s death. He begins to question Tsotsi, prying into his past, trying to find his real name, and his lack of remorse about the killing of the old man. He accuses Tsotsi of having no decency as a human being. Tsotsi jumps up from the table and throws Boston to the floor beating his head in to the ground with his bare fists. Tsotsi then bolts off into the stormy night fleeing the bar. He continues to run through the night until he finds himself in a wealthy suburb of the city. There he observes a woman in a BMW trying to get through a gate outside her house. When she leaves the car, she uses the intercom to call for her husband to open the gate. Tsotsi runs up and jumps into the car. As he puts the car into gear the woman tries to jump into the passenger’s side and stop the theft. Tsotsi pulls out a gun and shoots the woman in the stomach. The woman’s husband runs out to his wife as Tsotsi drives wildly off into the night.

Tsotsi hears a noise from the back seat and looking back he sees that the woman’s baby is still in the car. He stops the car and begins to strip the car of everything inside of it. As he is leaving he hears the baby crying and cannot bring himself to leave the child behind. In an amazingly uncharacteristic act he takes the child with him and returns to Shantytown. Tsotsi begins to care for the child naming him David, and claiming him as

his own. Tsotsi forcefully enlists the help of a single mother tailor named Miriam to breast feed the child. Tsotsi's relationships with Miriam and David along with a host of events cause him to reexamine himself and the company he keeps.

The setting of Tsotsi is breathtaking sight. The landscape shots of the endless sea of the rusted roofs of Shantytown ending at the towers of Johannesburg are stirring. The screenplay to Tsotsi is incredible, and most of the actors portray their characters well. The stories characters and important events fit together perfectly to form the steep character arc of the main character. The photography of the film is very vivid and enhances the actor's performances. The soundtrack of Tsotsi is a heart pounding mix of South African rap, tribal music. The sounds of the movie match its powerful subject matter and its strong imagery to a tea.

There are few drawbacks of the film, and those few are not significant. The climax of Tsotsi is slightly abrupt in coming and rather lengthy in getting to the point. Many of Tsotsi's changed relationships are left in flux at the end of the movie. Those few drawbacks are not nearly enough to harm the effectiveness of the film.

Tsotsi is an excellent film fully deserving of the distinction of being the 2006 academy award for best foreign language film.

By Robert O'Neil

Grade B+