W E S T M I C H I G A N F I L M V I D E O

Alliance Quarterly

Promoting a thriving film and video production community, attracting and retaining production work, and developing and supporting the production community in West Michigan.

A Quarterly Newsletter Volume 2, Number 3 — July 2006

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WFF Debuts All-Michigan Venue

WMFVA Hosts Party in Saugatuck

Michigan film is growing. For the first time in the Waterfront Film Festival's eight years, the independent-entry judges in Los Angeles found themselves with enough good stuff from Michigan to require an additional venue. The festival's Michigan Film Lodge (the American Legion Hall on Mason Street) became Venue #4 for the entire weekend of the festival, and site of the Michigan Sidebar: all Michigan film, all day Saturday and Sunday.

With a new event to prepare for, the WFF organizers called the West Michigan Film Video Alliance: "Hey, will you guys actually host this shindig?" *Oh, yeah!* "And will you run the first ever WFF Audience Choice award program?" *Double yeah!* "And the award party afterward?" *Died and on the way to heaven!* So WMFVA board members went off to Saugatuck toting the brand new WMFVA banner, flashy name tags, cake for the award party, and our famous Slatie awards for the audience's favorite Michigan short and feature.

Viewers chose Valerie Kemp's *A Change Is Gonna Come* as the top Michigan short.

Friday night we started the festival with the Michigan Film Office Mixer, sponsored by the Michigan Film Office. MFO Director Janet Lockwood stages a food fest that leaves one simply standing in front of the elegantly catered table, moaning with delight. Another first this year: wine was provided by the Michigan Grape and Wine Council, FennValley Vineyards, and Select Michigan. Despite the plummeting temperature and late-night rain, the festival kicked off in high spirits.

Screenings were strongly attended throughout the weekend. After each film, the ballots and attendance figures were tallied. WMFVA Chair Deb Havens announced the Audience Award winners for the Michigan Sidebar films at the WMFVA closing reception Sunday night, and winners were featured on nightly TV news coverage. Prizes also included hats and mugs from the Michigan Film Office and other assorted swag.

Top Films

First Place Feature: *Asparagus! (A Stalk-umentary)*, by Ann De Mare and Kirsten Kelly
First Place Short: *A Change is Gonna Come*, by Valerie Kemp
Second Place Feature: *On Oak Island*, by Joseph Horn
Second Place Short: *What Will We Eat?* by Christopher B. Bedford
Third Place Feature: *Black Mary*, by Matthew Leary
Third Place Short: *Michigan Sky*, by Rik Swartzwelder

There's a New Film Festival in Town

The horror film has long embraced the energy and creativity of the independent filmmaker. Many of today's top filmmakers started their careers in this genre. The Thriller! Chiller! Film Festival is here to honor that tradition by combining the independently produced horror films of today with the classics of the past, films that have defined the genre: *The Exorcist*. *Halloween*. Who knows, the independent films that we showcase at Thriller! Chiller! could very well become the horror classics of the future.

Why is it that hundreds gather in darkened theaters; what compels people to see characters on giant screens belting out dreadful cries and being mutilated by masked maniacs? If you don't know already, the festival's organizers can't explain it, either. "But if this sounds like the festival for you," they say, "then you're just the freak we've been looking for."

The Thriller! Chiller! Film Festival will be held October 13 and 14 at the Frauenthal Theater in Muskegon. Check out www.thrillerchiller.com for updates and submission guidelines. We will soon be accepting both short and feature-length independent horror films. Of course WMFVA members will receive special discounts on tickets and submission fees.

Don't miss it. We know where you live.

—Chris Randall

New Michigan Film Advisory Commission Seated

At the Michigan Film Advisory Commission's meeting in Lansing on May 12, one of the new commissioners seated was Emily Loeks, special projects director for Celebration Cinema (which hosted the previous MFAC meeting October 12). A second West Michigan representative is East Grand Rapids native Brendan Ringlever, former assistant to Senator Ken Sikkema. Other new members are former Detroit Film Office director Karen Dumas; Tim Magee, vice-president of the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees, SAG Director for Michigan Marsha Fishman; and entertainment attorney Howard Hertz.

Chairman Emery King announced his primary goal is the passage of a motion picture industry incentive package for Michigan. Toward this end, he proposed that MFAC have four meetings per year on a quarterly basis and to make sure a meeting schedule is set up for the next year rather than picking dates at every meeting.

John Kelly remains vice-chair and Marsha Fishman was elected secretary. For details of the meeting, please go online to http://www.mi.gov/hal0,1607,7-160-17445_19275_34162-107230--,00.html

The next MFAC meeting will be in Detroit in July, followed by September and November meetings with dates to be announced.

Second Motion Picture Forum Draws Crowd

The WMFVA presented the second Motion Picture Industry Forum in West Michigan, created to promote filmmaking in West Michigan, with special guests Bob Brown and Avram Ludwig (see inset photo), Representative Bill Huizenga and Senator Tom George. Editor Lee Percy was patched in from location work in an isolated mountain range outside Vancouver. Over a hundred twenty people—filmmakers, plus representatives from production companies, film schools and related retail and economic development offices in West Michigan—gathered in March for an update on the state motion-picture incentives package (introduced by Rep. Huizenga) and to discuss what needs to happen to make Michigan a production-friendly state.

The emphasis was, and remains, getting incentives out of the Senate Finance Committee and onto the floor for passage. Rep. Huizenga and Sen. George urged attendees to write to Sen. Nancy Cassis, chair of the Senate Finance Committee and copy their letters to Senate Majority Leader Ken Sikkema as well as local representatives. Michigan will truly not be competitive until this legislation is on the books. Panelists also focused on the need to have an organized structure in place to promote West Michigan and to help filmmakers find locations and special local incentives that will make it worth their while to shoot here. The terrific press turnout—print, TV and radio—indicated this topic is of heavy interest to the area.

The event, at the elegant Brook Lodge in Augusta, just west of Kalamazoo, was organized and sponsored by WMFVA board member Ken Robinson, founder and president of Kalamazoo Pictures, and primarily sponsored by Southwest Michigan First Foundation.

Write Senator Cassis today!

Ask her to move the incentive package out of committee and onto the senate floor!

Sen. Nancy Cassis:
senncassis@senate.michigan.gov
Sen. Ken Sikkema
senksikkema@senate.michigan.gov

WMFVA Welcomes Marketing Maven

The former director of the East Lansing Children's Film Festival has joined the WMFVA leadership team as Coordinator of Marketing. Jerri Puerner, ELCFF Director for six years, moved to Ada with her family in 2004. "We had just the right mission, and she stepped into the position with energy, enthusiasm, and a great laugh," said WMFVA Chair Deb Havens. "We're lucky to have her."

Jerri works closely with members of the board, especially Ken Robinson, who is responsible for Alliance marketing overall. She has already handled last-minute PR for the first WMFVA Presents..., arranging radio interviews for event chair Anthony Griffin and director Jon Worful; for the Waterfront Film Festival's Michigan films she took on event preparation for the awards process, the program, and the prizes.

"I am pleased to be associated with the WMFVA and to promote this amazingly talented group of film and video production professionals," said Jerri. If you enjoy marketing, public relations and event planning, please contact Jerri or any board member for information on how you can participate.

Filmmaker News Notes

Launching Fanboy in Kalamazoo

Fanboy Show has taken off! Three of the five slated episodes have been filmed and are now in post production. The website www.fanboyshow.com features art clips, bios and the Fanboy trailer. A special thanks to Fanfare Entertainment (Michigan's largest comic book store) for allowing us to shoot there. We are also excited to announce that we will be screening in August at GenCon, the largest geek convention in the United States. Come check us out!

—Kevin Park

Fourth Season Biggest Yet for Snow Show

SnowTrails TV represents the snowmobile life style to the public unlike any other program, and is being used as a Public Relations image campaign for all 26 snowmobile states in the USA and territories/provinces in Canada. Last week I attended the International Snowmobile Conference in Vermont and secured worldwide support for the program. SnowTrails TV on PBS is the only TV program to have this cooperation and partnerships. And doing all this commercial free.

Taken at about 9,000 feet, this picture from Togwotee, Wyoming is an example of the scenery shown in SnowTrails TV.

It takes about six weeks of shooting each winter (approximately 30 hours of tape), and five months of editing, for the next season's series of ten programs.

SnowTrails TV is supported on the Internet with www.snowtrailstv.com

—"Video Mike" Grant

Kalamazoo River Production Heating Up

Boiling Water Productions, LLC, has been prepping for the final few shoots for *Kalamazoo, River: US* and the challenging editing process which will fill the rest of the summer in order to submit to festivals next fall. For those interested in seeing some footage, sneak-peek scenes (including shortened pieces of a 10-minute trailer) can be found at kalamazooriverus.com/clips. Groups that monitor the health of the Kalamazoo River Watershed are generating some exciting projects, including—as a follow-up to the experimental *Kalamazoo, River: US*—a more traditional documentary, currently titled *Rock the Boat*. Interviews with new subjects will soon be filmed.

Other tidbits: we just finished production on a DVD for local trapeze artists The Aerial Angels, and look forward to working with the City of Kalamazoo's Wastewater Treatment Center on a coming project.

Anyone interested in helping out, please contact me through the movie website!

—Matt Dunstone

News from the East Side

Though the conversation and push has been for tax incentives, the fact remains that if producers want or need to shoot here they will (at least in the case of commercials).

Evidence for this is the burst of projects this month. Backyard Productions was back in the Lansing area shooting for GM/UAW, specifically about a facility there. (They used Chicago grip crew though, along with six SE Michigan crew members.) Avalon is shooting for Michigan Economic Development Corp and the Michigan travel office, and Radish and Mindfield are shooting, too (all with local crews).

How many jobs can we field here? Three? Four at a time? We hope to improve that!

The basic foundations still need to be maintained: Train up good crew and improve our depth. Maintain and grow facilities and equipment base. Provide quality service to the client. Make sure clients have good hotel experiences, and keep high-quality relations with all service providers.

Incentives will be like icing on the cake. Hopefully this little spurt of activity will continue through the summer.

—Mark Adler, President
Michigan Production Alliance

WMFVA salutes Michigan Vue on ten years serving Michigan's film and video production community. Thanks for keeping us in the know!

Filming the Blues

by Eric Richter

In one hour, the Budweiser Blues Series concert would begin. The ushers were about to open the doors to the State Theater in Kalamazoo so a couple thousand fans could see national guitar phenom Anthony Gomes (with an opener by local band Red Rooster). A film crew was in the house with four DV cameras, ready to roll, as was an eight-track sound recordist. It was to be live concert film, one single, long live take and no do-overs. And I was afraid it was all about to unravel—over a microphone.

"That microphone is blocking my line of sight to you!" shouted the stage guy at the mixing guy, pointing at a small, solitary mic on a stand in the seats next to the concert mix board.

"Oh, come on, you can see around it!" said the mix guy.

"Look, you clear it or we stop. I'm staging the headliner, not doing sound for some local warm-up band!" They both looked at me.

I was the one who placed that microphone; I had two major projects riding on it. My band—Red Rooster—was having its last major concert appearance before the guitarist moves to California; we wanted to make a DVD. And I'd written a script, called *BlueTune*, in which an accountant has a fantasy about playing in a blues band (conveniently I look like an accountant and play in a blues band, so I cast myself). This was a once-in-a-lifetime chance to capture utterly realistic footage for a song from the script, with genuine crowd reaction. Was this guy blocking me just so he could prove he was in charge?

I think blues recording is about capturing that evanescent, unplanned moment, as reflected in the bubbling energy of the fans. Within the song structure are wide spaces for solos: the guitarist spontaneously rips a new lick; the audiences responds. Anything can happen, and you hope it will. That's why I'd so carefully placed that microphone on the audience, for reasons upon reasons.

But the stage crew guy had his reasons too, reasons I had to respect: he was responsible for seeing that people got the concert they deserved. It strikes me that people come to the creative effort—studio or stage or set or location—for a variety of their own reasons; some believe in the film or song, some like being around creative people, some to gain experience and credibility to launch their own projects.

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Maybe good producers and directors are as much about harmonizing a myriad of purposes as they are about imposing their own good reasons on others.

"We can move that microphone over a few feet; it won't matter much" I said, unconvinced. But in truth it didn't matter much. We got a great concert on film and people had fun. Red Rooster thanks Larry Renuart, Kurt Pruett, Prof, and the whole State Theater crew for a great show.

Filming Effervescence

I have a few thoughts about filming spontaneous music like the blues:

Forget pre-planned camera choreography; a blues band can hardly play a song the same way twice anyway. Assign zones around players—e.g. guitar area, drum kit—and encourage cameras to wander within them. If your drum-zone cameraman trips during the big drum solo and gets three seconds of his shoelaces, you can always splice in reaction shots from other band members. Or keep the goof for live flavor.

Tell your camera operators to quit being shy and get in front if they need to. People are used to seeing cameras and don't mind them; it actually spices the experience for them.

You must have at least as many cameras as soloists or singers in the band. With live blues there is no telling when a solo will start, and you won't have time to pan to the soloist. Have the camera crew cue off the spotlight operator; he's usually quite experienced at guessing who needs watching next.

You absolutely, positively must capture both the direct sound from the PA board AND the live room or crowd sound; later you will master just the right balance. Befriend the live-sound mixer and cajole him into providing submix outputs for your recordist. And place that all-important live-sound ambient mic where you can get the sound of the room and the crowd. If you have to double up instruments to have a spare track for live sound (as we did), then do it; there is no point making a live recording if all the tracks sound studio-dry.

Come Catch Some Blue Tunes

I'm setting up another multi-purpose shoot towards the last week of June—a combination of filming session and WMVFA party (exact time and location to be announced). I'll be there to shoot the band doing a couple more scenes from my script, but you're invited to show up and have a good time partying to a free blues band for whatever reason you like (price of admission: sign a standard film waiver at the door in case your face shows up in my film).

Keep an eye on the WMFVA site for details. The blues will be hot, the bar will be serving, and if we harmonize our reasons for being there we may make some moments.

Connect and Grow with WMFVA Committees

Feeling underutilized? Things are too quiet? Wondering what the WMFVA is up to lately, or how you can pump up the volume on your work schedule?

You obviously haven't been volunteering at the seminars, forums, festivals and film events hosted by your beloved organization! Why don't you do something about that? It's the best possible way to know who's doing what, and get a leg up on paying work. So here's another opportunity: join a committee and meet your colleagues who are up to something!

Marketing Handle press and promotion to build awareness and support for the WMFVA and our agenda for a thriving film and video production community.

Membership Develop programs that give members the benefits they deserve. (Right now, we're working on creating a special discount for members on services, concessions, and other special options.)

Development Help build relationships with sponsors and supporters in the community.

Contact any board member via the website or email list to ask questions or sign up. C'mon—come out and play!

Grand Valley Pictures Presents *Story Time*

Film Short In Pre-Production

Story Time is the winner of Grand Valley State University's 12th International Short Screenplay Competition. Written by Elizabeth C. Grant of Sherman Oaks, California, the film is about a recovering alcoholic who tells stories to children and ultimately finds her own recovery through storytelling.

"The story is interesting because its approach to addiction is more complex than usual," said Robert Hurst, Visiting Assistant Professor at GVSU. Hurst is also producing and directing the film. Jack Anderson, Director of Photography from Los Angeles, will lens the picture. By working on *Story Time*, the crew of Grand Valley students will experience the rigors and joys of a professional production. "We are excited to get the project rolling and we expect high numbers to audition for this remarkable story," said Hurst.

For more Information about *Story Time*, please contact one of the following:

Paul Damore at damorep@student.gvsu.edu or 616.331.0835
Jillian Austin at jillianaustin@gmail.com or 248.854.3834
Robert Hurst at hurstr@gvsu.edu or 616.331.3607

WMFVA Presents... *Frozen Stupid*

Rich Brauer's latest comedy, starring Oscar-winner Ernest Borgnine, premieres July 20 at the Wealthy Theatre. Borgnine (*Marty, Poseidon Adventure, Dirty Dozen, Barn Red*) stars in this wacky story of a cantankerous father and his bumbling but well-meaning son Tony (Joey Albright; *Escanaba in da Moonlight, Barn Red*) who share an obsession for ice fishing—even when it gets them in big trouble. The tale starts on a snowy midwestern Saturday; Tony really wants to go ice fishing instead of attending his mother-in-law's birthday, which leads to a day of comic misadventures.

The Wealthy Theatre will open its doors at 6:30 pm and the show starts at 7:00 pm, with a Q&A session afterward. Admission is $5 for members of WMFVA, CMC, and MCAI, and $7 for the public.

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Public Relations

Jerri Puerner: jspuerner@comcast.net

WMFVA
c/o Digital Video Servies
4592 40th Street SE
Grand Rapids MI 49512

Alliance Staff

Tom Humiston — Editor & Layout

Contributors: Mark Adler, Paul Damore, "Video Mike" Grant, Deb Havens, Kevin Park, Chris Randall, Eric Richter

Please send submissions to Tom Humiston: fuper@earthlink.net