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## An Upstate State of Mind

*Day One at the Woodstock Film Festival*

October 12th, 2007 Posted in [October 2007](#), [Film Festivals](#), [New York](#)

Everyone loves the Woodstock Film Festival. That's the sense you get, anyway, when arriving at this picturesque little Catskills town that proudly bills itself as a "colony of the arts." Here, there are no red carpets, no velvet ropes. The town's only permanent big screen venue, the Tinker Street Cinema, is a modest white clapboard building that used to be a church. You're more likely to see visiting celebrities queuing for bagels at the town bakery than flying by in a limousine.



**A still from 3 Américas**

The festival's motto is "fiercely independent," a banner it's carried with pride since its launch in 2000. "In the beginning, we didn't really have much competition because we were so unique," says festival director and co-founder Meira Blaustein. As the festival circuit has grown, Woodstock has retained its niche as a place that celebrates thoughtful, provocative filmmaking, even as it's grown itself: 2,500 submissions and 150 screenings this year, up from 250 submissions and 75 screenings in 2000.

And so I'm here to sample the wares: 12 films, two panels, various schmooze-a-thons packed into four days – the typical festival smorgasbord. This year, there's a lot of programming that references the 1960s, including Brett Morgen's *Chicago 10*, about the 1968 protests at the Democratic National Convention; Todd Haynes's out-of-the-box biopic of Bob Dylan, *I'm Not There*, and Noah Buschel's *Neal Cassady*, about Jack Kerouac's close friend and muse. Dylan, of course, famously lived in Woodstock in the late 1960s, discovering it years before the 1969 pop concert (which was actually held 70 miles away in Bethel) put the town on the map.

The first day offers rich pickings: three world premieres of narrative features that have little in common except their shoestring budgets. But first, in the morning, I catch Laura Dunn's documentary about the effects of aggressive development on the city of Austin, Texas, *The Unforeseen*. This film clearly has some money behind it – Robert Redford and Terrence Malick are listed as executive producers – which explains the delicate and expensive-looking animations showing the growth of suburbs and razing of farmland around Austin.

Dunn traces Austin's development since the 1970s, when it was lauded as a place where "the cowboys and the hippies are getting along better than anywhere else in the world." Alas, the good vibes didn't last: with suburban sprawl came serious environmental

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damage, and the result was a heated standoff between developers and environmentalists. Chronicling all of this in painstaking detail, Dunn makes no bones about her agenda (it could be summed up as "development is bad for children and other living things") but she does make some effort at balance. There's a poignant interview with Gary Bradley, an Austin developer who lost everything in the Savings & Loan crisis of the late 1980s, and who comes across as a fundamentally decent guy.

Unfortunately, Dunn never explores more sustainable alternatives to the big, bad development projects, and the film suffers from an excess of earnestness. (There are a few too many Malick-like close-ups of waving wheat stalks and water drops on branches.) My neighbor in the audience, who outs himself as a former developer from the Bay Area, grouches that the film is "long on criticism, short on solutions" and reluctantly, I have to agree.

América Campo, the 16-year-old heroine of Cristina Kotz Cornejo's astonishing *3 Américas*, would love to live in the Austin suburbs – or anywhere far away from her hot-headed, controlling uncle in Boston. A troubled teen (she's lost both parents) América is also a pain in the ass: she scowls, lies and shoplifts compulsively. When a domestic dispute results in a tragedy, América is sent to live with her grandmother Lucia in a poor suburb of Buenos Aires. Here, the gloomy teen has to cope with deprivations that go way beyond her grandmother's frostiness: there's no indoor toilet, the refrigerator constantly breaks, and her peers, forced out of high school by poverty, scavenge the streets for plastic bottles to recycle.

The film is beautifully shot, and the screenplay is a marvel of minimalism in which every word matters. As América, newcomer Kristen Gonzalez gives an utterly compelling performance, her smoldering temper perfectly offset by the bone-weariness portrayed by veteran Argentinian actress Ana Maria Colombo. If the story has a somewhat predictable arc – two prickly, difficult women gradually come to care for each other – it's handled gracefully and with infinite subtlety. Kotz Cornejo based some of the narrative on her own experiences as a teen, and in the post-screening Q&A she described how she had to resist a producer who "wanted me to change the script to include tango, because I didn't want to be that clichéd." Luckily, she succeeded: the film is a cliché-free zone, and a richly nuanced character study.

*Neal Cassady*, Noah Buschel's sophomore feature, traces the opposite trajectory: a man who starts life with potential and optimism only to become a caged animal. Famous for being Jack Kerouac's buddy and the inspiration behind his *On the Road* character Dean Moriarty, Cassady (played by Tate Donovan) lived his life under that shadow. We see flashes of the charm that made him so compelling to Kerouac and others, but for the most part the film focuses on Cassady's middle age, when he became a driver and performing seal of sorts for Ken Kesey's drug-addled band of Merry Pranksters.

Cassady's widow, Carolyn, has excoriated this film, saying that it is "based on false myths, disoriented, with no continuity, development, plot or purpose." Those are harsh words, but they're not entirely unjustified – the film has a rambling, addled quality that can't all be ascribed to the drugginess it's depicting. Here and there are some sharp, amusing scenes, like the one in which Kerouac comes off as prissy at a Merry Pranksters party because he won't take drugs – then later collapses in an alcoholic stupor in a bar. But without more glimpses of the brilliant minds these two men had—one brought to literary greatness, the other wasted—it's hard to care about the dissolute characters on screen.

It's nice to end the evening on a lighter note, and Jonathan Blitstein's *Let Them Chirp Awhile* hits the spot. This tongue-in-cheek comedy, which is getting its world premiere

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here, follows the fortunes of two twentysomething male friends in the East Village as they struggle with love and the need to find an authentic creative vision. Scott, a musician, is feeling hemmed in by his live-in girlfriend, while Bob, a budding screenwriter, is too indecisive to plunge fully into writing or seduction. Another friend, Hart, is a prolific hack whose 9/11-themed play has just won a major prize, and whose ambition is matched only by his lasciviousness.

Needless to say, shenanigans ensue – there's mucho bed-hopping, angst, and a subplot involving the loss of a dog owned by a former girlfriend-turned-full-time-lesbian. It's a coming-of-age story with familiar elements, but Blitstein manages to make it feel fresh and original despite obvious nods to Woody Allen and Richard Linklater. After the screening, Blitstein describes the process of making the movie on a shoestring – giving the actors clothes from his own wardrobe, shooting in his and his girlfriend's apartments. According to festival co-founder Meira Blaustein, the film came to Woodstock through open submission, with zero word of mouth. "These are the kinds of films you look for as a festival director – the hidden gems," she says. Amen to that.

*For more information on the Woodstock Film Festival visit ,[www.woodstockfilmfestival.com](http://www.woodstockfilmfestival.com)*

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## The Discomfitting "Dark Matter"

*Day Two at the Woodstock Film Festival*

October 14th, 2007 Posted in [October 2007](#), [Film Festivals](#), [New York](#)

I'm facing a difficult choice this morning: whether to go to the screening of *Black White & Gray*, James' Crump's documentary about the relationship between Robert Mapplethorpe and his curator/lover Sam Wagstaff, or Julian Schnabel's feature *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly* (which sounds even prettier in its French title, *Le Scaphandre et le Papillon*.) In the end, for logistical reasons, I choose *The Diving Bell*, though I think it will garner more mainstream press attention than the Crump documentary, which was well-reviewed when it screened at the Tribeca Film Festival.

Schnabel's third feature is adapted from a bestselling memoir of the same name by Jean-Dominique Bauby, published in 1998. Stories don't come much more intense than Bauby's: at 42, he was the editor-in-chief of French *Elle*, a decadent playboy, when he suffered a massive stroke that left him paralyzed on both sides of his body. A victim of an extremely rare condition called "locked-in syndrome," he was completely cognizant but unable to move beyond blinking his left eyelid.

For the first twenty minutes or so, Schnabel (who fought hard to make the film in French) presents the world from Bauby's point of view as he wakes up, terrified, in a provincial hospital. Lurching, half-focused visions fill the screen: curtains blow in the wind, a doctor's stubble looms inches from the camera. It's visceral, virtuosic filmmaking that conveys the horror of paralysis from the inside -- as shocking, in its own way, as the opening of *Saving Private Ryan*. Any possible pretentiousness of this stream-of-consciousness point of view is undercut by the guiding intelligence of Bauby (Mathieu Amalric), who offers wry commentary on everything he's (half) seeing. When, for example, two comely therapists lean over him, exposing their cleavage to his view, he wonders, "Am I in heaven now?"

Later, the film turns into a more conventional narrative of spiritual recovery, though "conventional" is a relative term for Schnabel (*Basquiat*, *Before Night Falls*), the former art world darling known for his broken crockery-encrusted paintings. Incredibly, Bauby wrote his book by blinking out letters with his one working eyelid, and the film manages to depict this process without becoming stultifyingly boring. What Amalric accomplishes with the use of a single eye is pretty amazing. It sounds hokey to say you'll come out of this movie grateful for every step you can take and word you can utter, but I'll say it anyway. Thanks to cinematographer Janusz Kaminski, the film is also ravishingly beautiful to look at.

The next movie on my slate, Shi-Zheng Chen's *Dark Matter* made me uncomfortable in a whole different way. This low-budget (\$1 million) film starring Meryl Streep and Aidan Quinn is stuck in distribution limbo because of its subject matter, which involves a foreign student on an American campus committing an act of horrific violence. The film is

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extremely stylish, smartly-paced and well-acted -- so whence my discomfort? Well, it's not just that the narrative is profoundly sympathetic to anti-hero Liu Xing (Liu Ye), an earnest astrophysicist who gets screwed over by his self-regarding professor (Quinn) -- though this sympathy no doubt explains why a bidding war for the film evaporated after the Virginia Tech shootings. No, it's more that the presentation of the Chinese students -- as graspingly materialistic math nerds -- seems like an uncomfortable stereotype. In one scene, Liu and his friends attend a Bible study meeting, descending like buzzards on the snack table before they're supposed to, then admitting they're there only because the church offers Chinese students rides and free furniture. The scene is good for a laugh, but it seems like a cheap one at the expense of hardworking Chinese students everywhere.

In the post-screening Q&A, Quinn reported that China's Film Censorship Board has responded very positively to the movie, which initially made me think, "Huh?" Then I realized this made perfect sense: after all, the movie depicts an upright, brilliant Chinese student slowly driven crazy by the superficial, cutthroat nature of American society. Judging by the very positive audience reaction, though, nobody else seems to have shared my uneasiness, so hey, rent it on Netflix and judge for yourself. Which reminds me: Ted Sarandos of Netflix is receiving a well-deserved Trailblazer award at this year's festival for his contribution to getting more indie films in front of more eyeballs. Hip hip hurray.

I also saw Brett Morgen's very interesting documentary *Chicago 10* this evening -- but I'm going to save discussion for that until tomorrow's blog, which will be dedicated to documentary films.

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## Testing the Moral Code of Documentary Film

*Day Three at the Woodstock Film Festival*

October 15th, 2007 Posted in [October 2007](#), [Film Festivals](#), [New York](#)

Meira Blaustein is the director of the Woodstock Film Festival, but this year she's also a contributing filmmaker. She's screening her heartrending documentary about her disabled son, *For the Love of Julian*, and it begins my day of documentary viewing. "I made the film out of necessity," Blaustein told me when I bumped into her at the opening night party. She's nervous about bringing such a personal piece of work to the festival, she says, but feels it's time since Julian passed away last year.

In her film, Blaustein delves deeply into the experience of having a profoundly disabled child. Her son was born with extensive brain damage and never gained the ability to walk or talk. Instead of hewing to the party line that "special children are given to special parents," Blaustein explores her feelings of frustration and impotence, and brings up some difficult questions about whether technology should be used to save such children at birth. This is courageous, and it also makes me feel double impressed about what Blaustein does with this festival. She's been everywhere these past few days: introducing movies and panels, coordinating events, posing for photographs with celebrities. Her husband Laurent Rejto, the fest's co-founder and now head of the Hudson Valley Film Commission, has been around too – but Blaustein is indefatigable. When I met with her last year, she was gushing with enthusiasm about getting a sound stage and production facility built at a former IBM site in Kingston, 10 miles from Woodstock.

Leaving Blaustein's film, I head over to a panel called "Where Journalism Ends and Filmmaking Begins," about the similarities and differences between traditional journalism and documentary filmmaking. On the panel are four doc-makers: Robert Stone (*Oswald's Ghost*), Michele Ohayon (*Steal a Pencil for Me*), Godfrey Cheshire (*Moving Midway*) and Bill Siegel (*The Road to 9/11*). In addition, we have Molly Thompson of A&E Indie Films (which produced, among others, *Jesus Camp* and *Murderball*), and moderator David D'Arcy.

Here are some highlights from the discussion:

- Robert Stone says that he has a basic, two-part moral code as a documentarian: (1) He never makes financial deals or promises flattery in return for access, and (2) He never presents archival footage as anything other than it purports to be. Bill Siegel wonders if he broke Stone's second rule in *The Weather Underground* when he used general archival footage of a hippie love-in to represent his subjects' orgies. Stone says he doesn't think so.
- Michele Ohayon thinks that the difference between journalism and documentary filmmaking is in the point of view. "Our job as documentarians is to show our point of

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view, not hide it," she says. Molly Thompson says that A&E Indie Films is not looking for "films that convey balance." What she's looking for, she says, is a great story with a 3-act narrative. "We do impose that requirement on filmmakers because, let's face it, we want people to see the movie."

- There's a lot of discussion about Amir Bar-Lev's *My Kid Could Paint That* (produced by A&E Indie Films), which divides the panel because the film doesn't draw hard conclusions about whether its subject, four year-old Marla Olmstead, really painted her "masterpieces." Godfrey Cheshire says that "fashionable ambiguity" is sometimes not good enough. Thompson defends Bar-Lev, saying that mysteries are usually the best stories. Robert Stone remarks that not everyone likes the fact he drew a conclusion about Lee Harvey Oswald at the end of *Oswald's Ghost*.

- David D'Arcy brings up the question of topicality in documentary filmmaking. "These days, it seems there are two documentaries on everything, and everyone's trying to scoop everyone else," he says. He suggests that the current trend to make ultra-topical documentaries can be dangerous if the film is outstripped by events, as it was in the case of Charles Ferguson's *No End in Sight*. Thompson says that A&E Indie Films looks for subject matter that's unique rather than topical.

In the light of this discussion, it's interesting to see two films that, in very different ways, push the envelope of documentary filmmaking: Brett Morgen's *Chicago 10* and Nina Davenport's *Operation Filmmaker*.

*Chicago 10* tells the story of the 1969 trial in which activists Abbie Hoffmann, Jerry Rubin, and Bobby Seale, among others, were accused of conspiracy to commit violence at the 1968 Democratic National Convention. "I think the world needs a little Abbie Hoffman now," Morgen says when he appears, to resounding applause, after the screening. What's new here is that, in an attempt to draw in young viewers, Morgen decided to use colorful rotoscope animation to recreate the trial. He was inspired, he says, by Jerry Rubin's comment that the trial was "a cartoon show." The animation takes up over a third of the film; the rest is archival footage from the 1968 protests.

It's what Morgen refers to as "experiential cinema," and probably, it's going to ruffle some feathers in the Old Guard documentary community. I'm reminded of Tom Twyker's 1998 film *Run Lola Run*, another fast-paced mixture of live action and animation calculated to appeal to a youthful audience. Personally, I like the way he's pushing the envelope, though I have to admit that I've never been a huge fan of the Ken Burns school of meticulous and exhaustive documentary filmmaking.

Nina Davenport's *Operation Filmmaker* pushes the envelope in completely different way. The film recounts how Davenport got much, much more than she signed up for during a shoot in the Czech Republic. She was hired by actor Liev Schreiber, who was directing his first movie, *Everything is Illuminated*. Schreiber had decided to bring a young Iraqi film student to work as an intern on the film, and Davenport thought she'd be making a bland piece that she jokingly referred to afterward as *The Kindness of Liev Schreiber*.

Things quickly went awry, though when Mohmed turned out to be as feckless as he was charming. He screwed up every chance he was given and hit up various crew members for money, and "I felt as though I was documenting a train wreck," Davenport said. As things went from bad to worse, the people who'd brought Mohmed from Iraq began to wonder if their plan wasn't just a little bit too hasty and unplanned.

The film is remarkable for several reasons. First, it has obvious parallels to the larger

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screw-up of the Iraq War itself, and brings up some hard questions relating to that mess. Second, Davenport puts herself in the movie with a degree of vulnerability that I've never seen before on the part of a documentary filmmaker. Continuing her relationship with Mohamed long after the Schreiber crew has left Prague, she follows his progress at the same time as asking herself tough questions. Is her presence helping or hurting Mohamed? Why is she so invested in his success, and should she keep on giving him handouts?

"I had a huge amount of anxiety, because I was making a film about an Iraqi who wasn't likable," Davenport says in the Q&A after the screening. Asked why she and other members of the crew broke several rules of documentary filmmaking (principally Robert Stone's Moral Code Rule (1): Never make deals in return for access), she sighs heavily and runs a hand through her hair. "What I think it comes down to is the power of guilt. You know, here was the one Iraqi we could actually help."

Stone, who attended the screening, didn't seem bothered that this movie made mincemeat of his golden rule. He told Davenport that her movie "might just be the most honest and informative film about the Iraq War yet." Asked to report on Mohamed's current situation, Davenport said he is living in London, having persuaded a movie star to give him money to attend film school. Clearly his story isn't over yet.

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## What's in a Name?

*Day Four at the Woodstock Film Festival*

October 16th, 2007 Posted in [October 2007](#), [Film Festivals](#), [New York](#)

Today is Bob Dylan day at the Woodstock Film Festival. The four-day fest is closing tonight with a screening of the Todd Haynes biopic *I'm Not There*, in which six different actors, including Christian Bale, Richard Gere, and Cate Blanchett, portray various incarnations of His Bobness over the years. The movie had its official premiere at the New York Film Festival ten days ago, but this is undoubtedly its sentimental premiere. There's a strong connection between Dylan and Woodstock: Dylan first came here in the early 1960s, seeking an escape from the fishbowl of his mega-celebrity. From 1966 to 1970, he lived here and enjoyed a degree of peace – though, as he writes in his 2004 *Chronicles: Volume One*, rabid fans tracked him down and invaded his property even here.



A still from *The Cake Eaters*

These days, Woodstock is still a town with a strong counterculture identity (need I say more than “drumming circle on the Village Green every Sunday”?) There's clearly a lot of excitement about this movie, and despite what I thought of as the all-encompassing power of my press pass, I've been unable to score a ticket to *I'm Not There* (so in fact, I can literally say “I wasn't there.”) By way of consolation, I head over to the Bob Dylan lookalike contest at the Lotus Gallery on Rock City Road, which is also exhibiting images of Dylan's Woodstock years by local photographer Elliott Landy.

Dylan was famously suspicious of photographers, but he made an exception for Landy (it helped that their last names were anagrams of each other). Starting in 1968, Landy took a series of charming, [candid images](#) of Dylan, some of which ended up on the star's album covers. My favorites are the ones that show Dylan goofing around as he plays with his children – bouncing on a trampoline, peeking out from behind bushes. Landy himself turns out to be a warm, soft-spoken and modest man. “I wasn't sure whether to put descriptions with the images,” he tells me, “but then my wife told me I had to.” His wife made a good choice, I say.

Just then, we're interrupted by the judging of the lookalike contest. I thought I'd be swimming in a sea of Dylans here, but in fact, only three lookalikes have shown up – and one of them confesses that he “just dressed like this by coincidence.” The winner, Zach Gluser, is an Los Angeles filmmaker whose short film *Who You Know*, is playing at the festival. “Someone told me the other day I looked like Geoffrey Rush,” he says. “I'll take Dylan over Geoffrey Rush any day.”

The next thing on my slate is a panel discussion with the intriguingly vague title “Indie Filmmakers Talk.” It turns out to be a bit of a bust. Moderator Peter Bowen begins by suggesting that “independent film” is a misnomer, since indie filmmakers are so dependent on friends, family, and community. This leads to panel members discoursing at eye-

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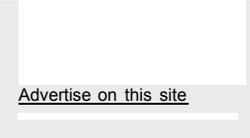
popping length about their individual histories, mentors, and challenges. The most interesting panelist is Paul Rachman, who co-founded the Slamdance Film Festival in 1995 when his short film *Drive Baby Drive* didn't get in to Sundance. For the last 12 years, Slamdance has shadowed Sundance, occasionally scooping its more glamorous sister. (In 2005, it premiered *Mad Hot Ballroom*, which immediately sold to Paramount Pictures for the largest amount ever for a feature-length documentary.) "It was like group therapy," Rachman says of the festival's early days. "We could lean on each other. We had positive energy and strength in numbers."

The rest of the panel is less than scintillating, but it does provide a handy lens through which to view my final screening of the festival, Mary Stuart Masterson's directorial debut *The Cake Eaters*. The movie was filmed in the Hudson Valley, with significant help from the Hudson Valley Film Commission. Closely allied with the Woodstock Film festival, HVFC has been instrumental in bringing many film productions to the area. For *The Cake Eaters*, HVFC helped find local crew members, extras and locations, providing the kind of community that Paul Rachman extolled in the Indie Filmmakers panel.

*The Cake Eaters* is a bittersweet story about the sparks set off in a family after the oldest son Guy, a failed rock star, returns home. As you'd expect from someone who's logged plenty of time on indie films, Masterson understands her actors and gets wonderful performances from them – notably from Kristen Stewart, who plays a lovely, neurally-damaged teenager, without using the character as an excuse for a "star turn." Jayce Bartok, who plays the role of Guy, also contributed the poignant script.

There's only one problem, though. I hate to be literal, but unless I missed something, there wasn't a single cake in the movie, eaten or otherwise. The filmmaker wasn't on hand to answer questions, and as the screening emptied out I heard several people ask, "Why that title?" The best theory I can come up with is that it references the old saying, "You can't have your cake and eat it too." If so, the reference doesn't resonate deeply enough in the movie. It's a small quibble, yet not a negligible one. As Mr. Tambourine Man knew very well, titles do matter.

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## Wrapping up the Woodstock Film Festival

*What sticks? A film that could be called "the feelbad movie of the year"*

October 19th, 2007 Posted in [October 2007](#), [Film Festivals](#), [New York](#)

My sojourn at the Woodstock Film Festival is over, and it's time to reflect a little on the gazillions of frames that have passed in front of my eyeballs in the last four days. As with any other works of art, films often demand some settling-in time. The results of a few days' worth of mental processing can sometimes be surprising: a movie that left you in tears fades quickly, while another that didn't seem thrilling slowly works its way into your heart.

Now that the dust has settled, here's what has stayed with me:

- The look of arrogance, mingled with pain, on the face of Iraqi student Muthana Mohmed at the end of the documentary *Operation Filmmaker*. Mohmed was plucked from his bombed art school in Baghdad to work as a Hollywood movie intern, but—to the horror of his American benefactors—turned out to have zero talent and a lousy work ethic. The film, which has fascinating parallels to the larger picture of the war in Iraq, could be described as the feelbad movie of the year.
- The first twenty minutes or so of *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly*, Julian Schnabel's third feature. Impressionistic and visceral, this film is a terrifying recreation of how it feels to wake up from a coma to find that life will never be the same. Schnabel uses a wide range of visual devices to put the viewer directly into the action, but it never feels forced or tricky. This is virtuoso filmmaking (and the rest of the movie isn't too shabby either.)
- Brett Morgen also aims to put the viewer in the action in the vibrant, rotoscope-animated courtroom scenes in *Chicago 10*. Sure, he's pandering to the YouTube/MySpace crowd, but the film is bracing and exuberant, and it makes a political history lesson go down easily.
- Performances: Kristen Gonzalez and Ana Maria Colombo are perfectly matched as feisty teenager América Campo and her frosty grandmother in Cristina Kotz Cornejo's *3 Américas*. The ensemble cast in Mary Stuart Masterson's debut feature *The Cake Eaters* is stellar, and I'll give a special call-out to Kristen Stewart for her subtle work as a neurally-damaged teen.

Of course, I only saw a tenth of the movies on the program at this year's festival, and I



**Operation Filmmaker: Kouross Esmaeli, Muthana Mohmed & Nina Davenport in Prague.**

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couldn't even get to all the movies I had tickets for. Luckily, I found local resident Alice, a sprightly 85-year-old artist and yoga practitioner, who was thrilled to take a couple of tickets off of me. My surrogate reported back that she loved James Crump's movie *Black White & Gray*, about Robert Mapplethorpe and Sam Wagstaff. "I'd never heard of Wagstaff," she said. "Such a lovely, interesting man, and the way the movie unfolded was wonderful."

None of these movies that Alice or I saw this year won awards, however, so there were apparently lots of other great movies at the festival. The winner of the best narrative feature was Chris Eska's *August Evening*, about a conflicted Mexican-American family; Morgan Neville's *The Cool School*, about avant-garde artists in 1940s Los Angeles, took the prize for best feature-length documentary. Audience favorite awards went to Sol Tryon's dark comedy-fantasy *The Living Wake* and Sean Fine and Andrea Nix Fine's documentary about war-ravaged Uganda *War/Dance*. (Marlo Poras' documentary *Run Granny Run* was a very close second.)

So that's it for now. The festival signs have been taken down, the leaves are turning orange and gold, and Woodstock's eclectic residents are left to get on with their lives. If this were a movie, we'd see a final shot of an old Volkswagen driving past the Village green as dusk settles on the town, the storefronts twinkling and glowing in the half light. But since it's prose, I'll just say that the last four days have been an (exhausting) blast, and that the Woodstock Film Festival 2008 is sure to be well worth checking out, either as an audience member or a potential contributor, in the years to come. Small enough to feel genuinely intimate, the festival is also prestigious enough to attract a wide range of high-quality, provocative, and of course, "fiercely independent" films. Peace out, man.

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