



Short and Sometimes Sweet Films Kick Off Today

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Roll Call Staff

There is no overarching theme filmmakers have to follow when they submit their work to the DC Shorts Film Festival. Writers and producers are free to develop whatever content interests them. But according to festival director Jonathan Gann, some common threads naturally emerged this year — and in many cases, this art does appear to imitate life.

Gann said the festival judges have received numerous submissions inspired by the economic crisis, and the ongoing conflicts between Muslims and Jews. And then there is the ever-popular theme of love.

However, “It’s not really a happy romantic year,” Gann said. “It’s a ‘this is what I got’ year.”

Whatever the mood, DC Shorts kicks off today and will run through Sept. 17. Volunteer judges will review the 100 short films accepted for the festival during the weekend showings, and each movie will be rescreened next week. Festival-goers can purchase \$12 tickets to separate showcases, which includes eight to 12 films on a range of subjects, or they can buy an all-access pass to all screenings and receptions for \$125.

Families on a budget can get a real bargain at the Free Family Showcase screening Saturday morning. A series of films, including the kid-friendly “Pigeon: Impossible” and “Doggie Drill Team,” will be shown at both festival locations, the Burke Theater at the U.S. Navy Memorial and the E Street Cinema.

The films range from 90 seconds to 26 minutes and are a mix of documentary and fictional material. This year’s festival is different from previous ones in that movies are being shown at two venues (the entire event used to be held at the E Street Cinema). Gann said the festival staff has also worked to make it an interactive experience by setting up post-screening question-and-answer sessions between the audience and filmmakers.

Now in its sixth year, DC Shorts has become an established event on the film festival scene. *MovieMaker* magazine named the festival one of the nation’s best, and some of this year’s participants said they chose to enter because credible sources had spoken so highly of it.

For writer/director Shawn Morrison, all it took was a couple of clicks on his computer screen to know that DC Shorts was something he wanted to be a part of.

“I could tell by the Web site alone that D.C. had their act together,” he said. “D.C. has been great. They really care about the format. They’re on our side and publicizing for us.”

Morrison is showing “Forever’s Not So Long,” an end-of-the-world tale about a guy who loses everything as he faces the prospect of his final moments on earth.

The audience is never told why the world is ending — Morrison said he wanted to leave that question open-ended. Movies about the final days are usually big-budget Hollywood films, Morrison said, and he wanted his to be a

character study instead.

“It’s kind of nice when you just sort of hint at something and let people’s imaginations take over. It adds to the spookiness of it,” he said.

Not all of the shorts are quite so heavy.

“Pigeon: Impossible” is a six-minute animated feature that was originally a learning vehicle for director Lucas Martell. He developed the story line — a Secret Service agent has to figure out how to remove a pigeon that has gotten into his nuclear briefcase — while teaching himself animation software. Martell also used the opportunity to help other filmmakers, recording podcasts and posting them to the film’s Web site as tutorials. Martell said the creation of the film and podcasts was a “very organic process.”

Sig Libowitz and Adam Rodgers took a story from the headlines and created a dramatic retelling using transcripts from the trials of Guantánamo Bay, Cuba, detainees.

Libowitz said he wanted to show people the complexity of the situation there — the pressures on the military officers running the trials, as well as the stress and confusion endured by prisoners.

Before reading the transcripts in a class at the University of Maryland law school, Libowitz said he “thought I had an understanding of Guantánamo.”

“But it’s much deeper, and I really wanted to show what’s going on,” he said.

Libowitz also said the movie was not made with any political motive. “It’s just to give an audience the opportunity to see what these tribunals are like,” he said.

While festival-goers are treated to creative and diverse films, it also gives filmmakers a chance to appreciate the work of their peers.

“It’s inspiring to see how other people work in that format,” Morrison said. “You see what another filmmaker does and you get jealous and think about what else you can do.”

Visit dshorts.com for more information and to purchase tickets.