

Student Director Shares Spotlight – April 8, 2009

By Tim Pompey

It's one thing to do a film for a college class. Professors, other students see it, eh, no big deal. It's a totally different experience to have a film premiered at a festival where people for miles around have the opportunity to view your work.

Such was the recent experience of Michael Thanhouser at the Ventura Film Festival. Michael, along with his class partner Jennifer Shick, co-directed the film "Gauging (Unplugged)", a short documentary about people who create large holes in their bodies, especially their ears (ouch!) and insert jewelry. Why you ask? Well, watch the film, or talk to Michael. I actually did both.

Michael (from Portland, OR), a third year student at Brooks Institute, worked closely with Festival Director Lorenzo DeStefano to help kick off the VFF's successful launch. He shared some thoughts about his movie and the Festival.

T: So what are you studying at Brooks?

M: I came down to study photojournalism. I got interested in video and documentaries when I took a documentary class here. It opened my eyes to film making.

T: How did you get involved in the Festival?

M: Lorenzo came to one of my classes and did a presentation on "10 Phases of Addiction to Filmmaking". I helped digitize the film clips he used in my class and he invited me to help him out.

T: What were you involved with at the Festival?

M: I started as a film screener. Then I got involved with developing graphics and video. I also worked with advertising, marketing, whatever they needed to get the job done.

T: How did your film get chosen?

M: I brought a copy to Lorenzo just to let him see some of my work. I wasn't thinking about the Festival when I did it, but he really liked it and decided to put it in the program.

T: Who came up with the idea for exploring gauging as a film topic?

M: We originally intended to make a different film but the idea fell through. Jennifer had this friend who had been gauged and we thought, wow, that would be a really interesting idea for a film. From there, everything just sort of fell into place.

T: What's it like to have your film premiered at a festival?

M: Bizarre. I never thought of myself in that way until my film got into the Festival. It didn't actually hit me until the film was shown. Then I said, yeah, I guess I'm a filmmaker.

T: So where will you go from here?

M: I plan on becoming active with the Ventura Film Society. I also plan to start another documentary. I want to dig into my great grandfather's history. He owned his own silent film studio, Thanhouser Company, from 1909 to 1919. I'd like to explore his thoughts about filmmaking.

T: Can you get your hands on some of those old films?

M: Yeah, my father has transferred about 200 of them to DVD. We still have a lot of my great grandfather's material to go through. Unfortunately the studio itself burned down in 1913, but some of his stuff survived. It will be fun to find out what filmmaking meant to him.