

The Reel Madness Festival 2000 - Review

The year's work and especially the last two intensive months of planning, networking, seeking and receiving films, writing, publicizing, and fundraising paid off in a very successful Reel Madness Film Festival.

We had great attendances, insightful discussions, a chance for artists, musicians, and film makers to have their work seen and considered and a broad discourse about the topics broached by the films. Agency and professional input was encouraged and had ample opportunity to participate, balanced with the voices of the people whose lives are affected by the illnesses, family members and the interested public. There have been many requests by people who missed our presentations to follow up films they missed.

There was excellent positive coverage in all the print media and on both local and province-wide CBC radio (Positive media message generation is one of our goals beyond filling seats). Our web site, at islandnet.com/mm was integral to the festival presentation, with links to the artist's sites and much background material about most of the films.

Sponsors included; Canada Council for the Arts, Eli Lilly, Novartis, Janssen Pharmaceutica, the Victoria Branch of the BC Schizophrenia Soc. , the Open Mind and Early Intervention projects of CMHA - BC Division, Victoria's Canadian Mental Health Assoc., YO Video, the Capital Health Region (for the theatre facility), St. Michaels University School, Bert and Freda Saunders, the Sedgewick Society for Consumer and Public Education at the UVic School of Social Work, The Mood Disorders Assoc. of BC, and many other smaller donations of services and from individuals in our community. Such broad support for a "consumer driven" program is a success story in itself!

For opening night's "The Living Museum", about 80 people came to our 100 seat venue. They first saw Chantelle Tucker's "Sea of Souls" and participated in a Q&A about her film. There followed a brief reading of a poem that Linda Downey, this year's poster artist, was inspired to write when she saw the feature doc, then a discussion including background and e-mail update from Janos Martin, the museum's director.

Friday night was a full house. Carol Halstead had a 10 minute opportunity to speak to her film "Why?" after which we showed "Dialogues With Madwomen" and followed with discussion facilitated by Echo Helstromme (and Bruce). Again, background and update on the film maker and subjects was presented as well as the issues explored.

Saturday night was again a packed house, with clinical counselor David Stewart presenting his take on the perception, stereotypes, and reality of therapy in the recovery process. It was a lively and light-hearted approach with a positive tone.

Sunday afternoon's doc "Working Like Crazy" was more lightly attended (1/2 full as expected on afternoons) but the following discussion was most interesting, expanding the topic portrayed on screen to Victoria's own work training for consumers and actually bringing together a couple of people from agencies who had been trying to meet. Video excerpts of the panel discussion that took place at the Toronto Rendezvous With Madness presentation were screened, further illuminating the topic as well as the filming process, especially regarding sensitivity about working honestly and frankly with very personal stories.

Our presentation of "Cosi", on Sunday evening started out with a terrific 11 piece band "Minds at Work" who literally had folks dancing in the aisles. Only 40 people to enjoy this entertaining event, probably Sunday night is a difficult night for many. A lot of folks missed a great event!

Monday night's documentary "Holding the Sun" had an overwhelming response, our biggest audience ever! The lobby was full and actually too many in the theatre. A UVic Social Work class was assigned to come but they were only 25. When I asked for hands, "Who are first-timers?", 70% put up hands. So we were very pleased with the new, young audience we had attracted.

We first showed a Vision TV produced doc about Movie Monday, then Penny Joy and Peter Campbell of Gumboot Productions spoke with clips about their social issues focused film making. Peter spoke briefly about "Holding", the film was shown, general comments. Then Emily Henderson, a young woman who survived 7 years of difficulties from untreated schizophrenia, now doing well, spoke frankly about her illness and about her recovery. She was followed by Dr. Don Milliken, Chief of Psychiatry at EMP who gave his perspective of the realities of the illness and our system that can lead to a tragedy like the one described in the film. Q&A, then the film maker Peter Campbell fielded questions about the project and independent film production. An update on the subject of the film and his family was also included in the discussion.

Another of the highlights of the festival was the volunteer participation, mostly people recovering from serious mental illness, who pulled together to enthusiastically and reliably support this initiative. One of our group made a video record of the discussions, another produced an album of stills that was ready for the after party. Nobody missed their shifts, whether entertaining, serving refreshments, greeting and ushering, or cleanup. All were rewarded with distinctive Reel Madness 2000 T-shirts, as were most of the film makers and presenters.

Thanks for your support of our initiative. Please find the included program of the fest. I hope you see how your contribution has made a substantial, direct difference to the wellness of our community.

Sincerely

Bruce Saunders