

## Texas Film Festival rolls in with screenings, lectures

**S**undance, Cannes and College Station. For the final week of February, Hollywood is relocating to Aggie land, bringing with it a slew of new movies, cinema workshops and aspiring media moguls. The Texas Film Festival is entering its sixth year of entertaining, enlightening and educating film-goers.

As one of the largest volunteer student-operated film festivals in the country, the festival has not only been the target of critical acclaim, but also the pivotal point for numerous beginners in the film industry.

Beverly Anderson, chair of the MSC Film Society, said the film festival is among the elite of student operated events.

"It's the largest student film festival," Anderson said. "Most festivals are not five days long. Also, it is unusual for something of this size to be all volunteer."

Although it is student-operated, the Texas Film Festival is readily supported by the University.

"Being a member of the MSC committee is a big help," Anderson said.

Most of the films featured at the festival are independent movies made away from

the contracts with large corporate studios and production companies. The featured independent films are selected from a pool of over 150 productions, guaranteeing a diverse mix of the absolute cream of the 8mm, 16mm and 35mm crop. The basis on which movies are selected reads like the awards categories at the Oscars: scripting, lighting, directing, acting and so on. Although the festival is purely for the purpose of education and not competition, it is definitely a grueling task to out-perform other films and to secure a feature spot.

Aside from independent movies, the Texas Film Festival has graced audiences with screenings of larger, more publicized studio productions with larger budgets. Such notable films that have been shown include Oliver Stone's *Platoon*, Spike Lee's *Do the Right Thing* and John Landis's testament to college life, *Animal House*.

Although most of the festival's featured, non-independent movies have been in circulation for awhile, the experience of viewing them in the festival's artistic setting and the opportunity to reflect on them with noteworthy film critics and experts provides an insight that one simply cannot attain at the theaters on premiere night.

A new speaker is invited to address the festival every year, providing attendees an opportunity to obtain a professional's understanding of the film industry. This year's speaker is Tim McCanlies, director of the movie *Dancer, TX, Pop. 81*. Approximately 20 short films (40 minutes or less) and eight feature films will be shown Feb. 24-28. Showtimes are 7 p.m. and 9:30 p.m.

The primary purpose of the Texas Film Festival is to educate audiences about the film industry with the screenings being accompanied by lectures. Wednesday's workshop is "Engineers in Film," and in-depth study of the role of engineers in modern movie-making. Thursday offers the workshops "Remakes" and "Film Consciousness and Poetry." Friday's workshops are "Films on Film," a look at films about filming, and "The Female Body on Film," an examination of the portrayal and treatment of the female body on film. A special Saturday workshop on screenwriting will be led by McCanlies.

The first two evenings of the festival will be held at Hollywood 16 in College Station. Lindsay Hearn, general manager of Hollywood 16, said the Texas Film Festival is welcome.

"We're doing this to show that we sup-

port both the University and independent films," Hearn said.

Wednesday's screenings are stories about the perseverance of hope, courage and the coming of age in Andres Heinz's *Origin of the Species* and William Roth's *Floating*. Thursday's features are the acclaimed *Naturally Native*, by Jennifer Farmer and Valerie Red-Horse, and *The Intervention*, a comedy by Glen Freyzer. After Thursday, the festival will be held at Rudder Theater. Friday's festivities begin with a series of shorts, followed by *Dancer, TX, Pop. 81* and a special midnight presentation of Sundance-veteran Neil LaBute's *Your Friends and Neighbors*, starring Ben Stiller and Natassja Kinski. Feature films continue throughout the weekend with Saturday's feature, *The Dry Season*, by Brian Blotner, a graduate from A&M Consolidated High School. There will also be a rescreening of *Origin of the Species*. Sunday brings the festival to a close with Gary Ellenberg's *Ted*, a mockumentary comedy based on the life of the infamous Unabomber, and another series of shorts.

Festival tickets, which will provide access to all screenings and workshops, are \$15. Individual movie passes are \$3.

# FILM CLIPICS

## *Dancer, TX* director returns to old stomping ground

**A**ggie land is not a usual stop on the path to Hollywood stardom, but it was for Tim McCanlies. Carol Jackson, Texas Film Festival director and a junior English major, said having McCanlies involved will give a much needed boost to Texas filmmaking.

"We're really excited to bring him in because we wanted to focus on the booming film industry in Texas, and he used to be an Aggie," Jackson said.

McCanlies should know a thing or two about searching for the Hollywood dream. He spent the better part of his life doing just that.

After graduating from Bryan High School in 1971 (then known as Stephen F. Austin High School), McCanlies went to the University of Texas for a couple of years where he found the film school to be less than adequate.

"They had this big, snazzy film school, but I wasn't impressed," McCanlies said. "I frankly didn't learn much about writing films there. It seemed like the teachers were teaching what they learned in classes, not from actual experience. It wasn't till I moved to L.A.

and took courses from professionals that I actually learned anything."

McCanlies said he went through UT's four-year film school in about two years and he decided he wanted to try something else — returning to Bryan to attend Texas A&M.

McCanlies majored in theater at A&M and also directed for the first time. He spent one and one half years at A&M before leaving for his third school, Southern Methodist University.

While at SMU, McCanlies finished his undergraduate degree and then earned a Master's Fine Arts from the Graduate Cinema program and made several short films. One of them, Nicole et Claude, tied for first place at the University of Southern California's prestigious Student Film Awards.

Because his options were limited in Texas, McCanlies said he went to Los Angeles looking to break into the film industry.

"Before [*Dazed and Confused* director Richard] Linklater and [*Desperado* director Robert] Rodriguez, you had to stay in Texas and do industrials or go to L.A. and try to make it," he said. "I didn't know anybody who went to L.A., but I started making progress and got an agent."

McCanlies' screenplay "Harlem" was optioned and helped him land an agent. He

then began receiving writing jobs.

"The accepted procedure for my generation was make it as a writer first," he said.

Walt Disney Studios signed McCanlies to a writing/producing/directing deal, and he script doctored *Shoot to Kill*, *Little Giants* and *My Fellow Americans*.

But it was his work on *Dancer, Texas Pop. 81* that has received the most acclaim. McCanlies said he began working on *Dancer* when he moved to Los Angeles. *Dancer* is the story of four boys and their vow to leave the West Texas town of Dancer upon graduation from high school. The story is semi-autobiographical.

"Bryan wasn't as small as Dancer, but it was pretty small," he said. "I had friends, and we talked about going to L.A. It's a whole new world out there."

*Dancer* was originally supposed to be a low-budget independent film, but it was purchased by Tri-Star one week into production.

*Dancer* became somewhat of a cult phenomenon, playing in Austin, Dallas and Houston for seven months before going to video.

Although he directed *Dancer*, McCanlies said he does not really have much passion for directing.

"Directing is really hard work. It's harder than writing," he said. "I did it to protect the writing. I don't want to be a director for hire and not have a life."

McCanlies said he has a lot more job offers now, but he turns many of them down.

"They're mostly bad versions of John Hughes' movies," he said. "If the material isn't great ... I can't see myself doing bad stuff."

Despite his recent acclaim, McCanlies insists he is the same, regular guy.

"I'm a private guy, but I'm getting a lot more requests for my time," he said.

After living in Hollywood for awhile, McCanlies did the opposite of the boys in *Dancer* — he moved back to Texas. He still maintains a home in Los Angeles out of necessity, but now owns a 250-acre cattle ranch, the "High Lonesome," 40 miles outside of Austin in a town is smaller than Dancer.

McCanlies will host a screenwriting workshop in conjunction with the Texas Film Festival Saturday, Feb. 27 at 2 p.m. in Rudder 701.

Although the workshop is supposed to concentrate on writing, McCanlies said discussions about breaking into the film industry will probably dominate.