

Directors Short films, big style

BY JUAN LOYA
The Battalion

Short films largely go unseen by the mainstream community. The few public forums available for viewing short films usually reside on Websites and occasionally precede larger releases, such as the film *Ger's Game*, which preceded Disney's *A Bug's Life* last year. The only alternative the population has to see short films is film festivals.

The Seventh Annual Texas Film Festival has three "Night of Shorts" programs in its schedule, each offering a collection of films ranging from two minutes to 40 minutes in length. These films represent the most creative and oddball visions of the independent film industry.

Featured twice in the festival's schedule is *George Lucas In Love*, Joe Nussbaum's parody of last year's Oscar-winning film *Shakespeare In Love*. Substituting the *Star Wars* creator for William Shakespeare, the film is a creative look at writing and romance, and gets big laughs with clever nods to the *Star Wars* mythology, as well as some of George Lucas's not-so-successful filmmaking endeavors.

Voodoo, a short film by Gregg Bishop, is a funny, kinetic look at one man's date from hell.

The daughter of a woman he is trying to woo lashes out at the man with a hexed voodoo doll, and the man's final solution is both shocking and absurdly funny.

In the same vein, the film *Who, Me?* pro-

ceeds in a droll fashion. It follows one man's strange morning after being questioned by police officers about his collection of "naked girl pictures," and ends with a left-field conclusion that only the question mark at the end of the film's title can adequately describe.

On the dramatic side, *Dreamcatcher* is a poignant look at childhood fantasies and escapism.

The main character, a 10-year-old-boy named Jesse, escapes from the reality of an abusive home by dreaming of a Native American protector named Lone Wolf. The film captures a wonderful blend of reality and imagination, and touches on themes of childhood and family in a subtle and effective way.

Producer Charles Leon will be at the screening of the film and will participate in a question-and-answer session after the film.

From Australia, the short thriller *Freezer* shows the chilling demise of a handyman trapped inside of a warehouse freezer.

Using his last remaining strength to record his dying thoughts, the handyman leaves behind a wall of messages scrawled on packing boxes inside the freezer. The irony of his passing leaves an impression on the viewer that makes the film incredibly unforgettable.

The films showcased in the festival's "Night of Shorts" series are hugely entertaining, offering quick doses of comedy and drama to be enjoyed by any loyal movie fan. The length of the films may be short, but the level of creativity and imagination are without limit.



An evening with Robert Rodriguez

BY KYLE WHITACRE
The Battalion

Few names in independent film are as respected as Robert Rodriguez.

A Texas native and University of Texas graduate, Rodriguez is a pioneer in low-budget filmmaking and has written books and made videos on his techniques to make films cheaper and better.

His debut feature, *El Mariachi*, was shot in two weeks in Mexico and had a budget of only \$7,000. Rodriguez earned the production money by checking himself into a drug testing clinic for one month, where he spent his time writing the script for the film and was used as a guinea pig for experimental drugs.

The cast of *El Mariachi* consisted of mainly friends and family of Rodriguez. Most of the shots used in the film were done in one take and innovative editing techniques kept cost to a minimum.

El Mariachi went to international film festivals including those in Telluride, Toronto, Sundance, Berlin, Munich, Edinburgh, Deauville and the Yubari film festival in Japan. The film won the Audience Award for best dramatic film at Sundance and was released by Columbia Pictures in 1993.

After *El Mariachi*, Rodriguez went on to write, direct and edit *Roadracers*, *Desperado*, *From Dusk Til Dawn*, and a

segment of *Four Rooms*. He also directed *The Faculty* in 1998. He is currently writing, producing, directing and editing an adventure film titled *Spy Kids*. Other future projects of Rodriguez include a feature version of *Bedhead*, Rodriguez's award-winning short film, a Stevie Ray Vaughn biopic and a film adaption of the comic *Madman*.

"For the past three years we've tried to book Rodriguez for festival, but never got a response about it," said Casey Starr, director of the Texas Film Festival and a senior industrial distribution major. "We finally called his lecture agency-contract agent instead of his publicity agent and got him booked this year. He's in Europe right now and will be heading into the states later this week for our festival."

Rodriguez will be participating in the "War Stories" panel Saturday afternoon, then will speak at "An Evening with Robert Rodriguez," where he will present out-takes from his films, show *El Mariachi*, then hold a question-and-answer segment afterwards. When asked about the presentation of film out-takes, Starr said it was something special Rodriguez was doing on his own.

"An Evening with Robert Rodriguez" will begin Saturday at 8 p.m. in Rudder Auditorium. Tickets are \$10 and are available at MSC Box Office.

Graphics by Robert Hynceck, Jeff Smith and JP Beato



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SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 19	
10:00 a.m.	The Waitors
3:00 p.m.	Director's Reception
5:00 p.m.	Night of Shorts III
7:30 p.m.	Awards Ceremony
8:00 p.m.	An Evening with Robert Rodriguez
	-Presentation of Outtakes
	-El Mariachi
	-Q & A: Robert Rodriguez
SHOWING AT RUDDER AUDITORIUM	



This is an abridged schedule for the festival. For a full schedule, program guides are available from MSC Film Society.