

LIGHTS! CAMERA! nevermind...

Texas Film Festival does not receive the attention it deserves from the A&M student body

Post — here's a secret: the nation's largest student-run film festival is taking place this very moment at Texas A&M. Surprised? Here's the real shocker — the same festival has taken place here every year for the past six years. Run by the Memorial Student Center Film Society, the Texas Film Festival (TxFF) has evolved into a formidable haven for independent filmmakers and film buffs from all over Texas and the nation. What the festival has not become a haven for is a large part of the A&M student body — and that lack of student support is both disappointing and unacceptable.



MELISSA JOHNSTON

In 1993, MSC Film Society inaugurated the Texas Film Festival "to help educate the students of Texas A&M and the Brazos Valley about the importance of film as an art form." One might note the primary emphasis here is given to students — yet students are not buying a whole lot of tickets. Maybe they feel they learned all they wanted to learn about independent filmmaking when they paid \$6.50 to see *The Blair Witch Project* at Cinemark. In that case, paying \$4.00 to see a screening at the festival would seem unnecessary.

MSC Film Society does some great promotions to attract fickle twenty-somethings; however, the response it gets is still weak at best. Perhaps students cannot get past the idea that they may have never heard of some of the films that are being shown at the festival. If they would just show up with some friends anyway, they would realize what an opportunity they have been missing.

For instance, this year's festival focuses on a college-age favorite — independent film. The scheduled screenings this week have been full of those irreverent, anti-establishment pictures that come out of nowhere and make it big. One film is similar to *Clerks*, which is undoubtedly a favorite of many Aggies. Another film comes from the husband of the late Mary Kay

Bergman, who did the voices for the "South Park" characters, and yet another follows Stanford students through four years of college, a la "The Real World." Some have already made it big in the independent industry, with new directors who are quickly becoming household names. MSC Film Society is offering students not only the chance to see these up-and-coming films but also the rare opportunity to interact with their producers and directors. In addition,

the festival folks have also created a new filmmaking workshop series that should inspire all the wanna-be directors and producers on campus. Shows, workshops and Q&A sessions that should be packed houses are strangely marked with low attendance.

It must be disappointing, not only to the students who run the TxFF, but also to the directors and producers who have come to interact with festival attendees.

On the opening night of the TxFF, audiences had the opportunity to screen *Flirting With Power*. The documentary covering the rise of the Reform Party during Ross Perot's 1992 and 1996 presidential campaigns was produced by a current A&M professor and a former student. The fact that they chose to premiere the documentary at this TxFF is not merely an issue of loyalty to A&M but also an acknowledgment of the festival's prestige and widespread stature. At

least someone realizes the breadth of opportunity MSC Film Society is attempting to provide. Now, if only students would begin to understand this as well.

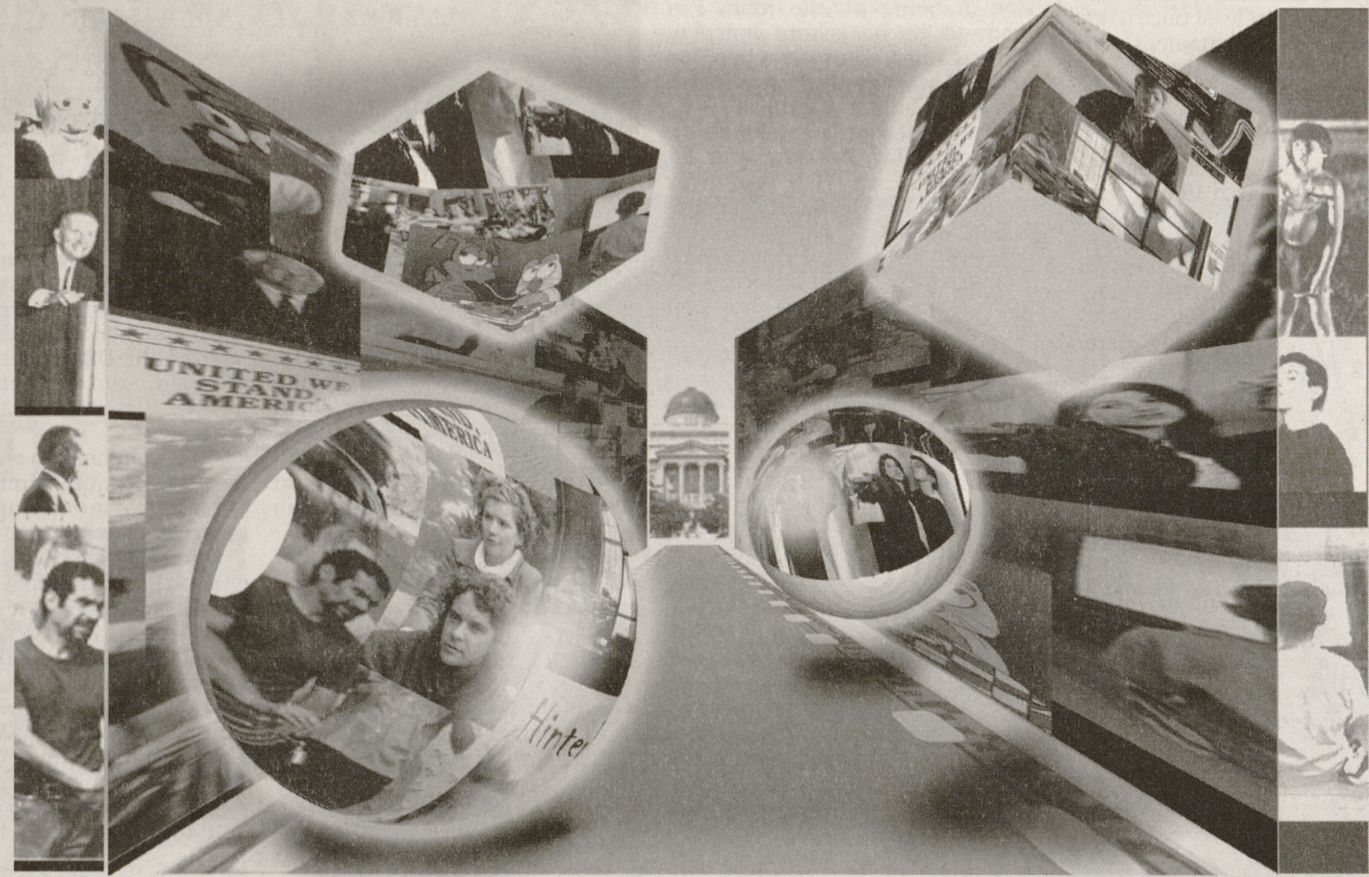
Lack of student attendance is not just disappointing; it is also an inaccurate reflection of the festival's stature. One certainly could not get a true perspective on how well-run and prestigious the festival really is by counting the number of students at the screenings. Only 88 weeks-long passes had been sold on the second night of the TxFF, and though this is an increase from last year, it is still insufficient. Students must realize what an effort this undertaking is for Film Society, and not showing up is unacceptable and even reflects badly on A&M itself.

This University is extremely lucky to have students like those in MSC Film Society who are willing to devote themselves to bringing a stellar lineup of films, directors and speakers to this campus.

If nothing else, these students deserve their fellow students' support — they have classes, tests and homework just like everyone else, but they are attempting to provide the rest of the University with an experience that few colleges, or even few communities, can equal. Even the University of Texas, which claims liberal arts as its forte, can claim nothing comparable to the Texas Film Festival. It is as important as it is unique to this University, and it is time for more A&M students to realize its worth.

From the first Texas Film Festival, when a young Spike Lee was the featured speaker, the event's influence in the film world has continued to grow, and it may even be following in the footsteps of festivals like Sundance and Cannes. This year's TxFF, to put it bluntly, is better than ever. Aggies should trade in their Blockbuster nights, get off their lumpy couches and find themselves seats at the festival screenings. Two more nights remain — and it is up to students to make those two nights the best nights of the festival, simply by showing up.

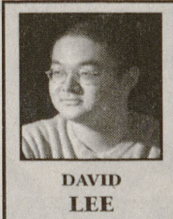
Melissa Johnston is a senior English major.



RUBEN DELUNA/THE BATTALION

Good intentions lost in student revolt

A ridiculous spectacle of student arrogance has finally ended, thanks to the Mexican City police's raid on the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM) last week. The early-morning raid was carried out by thousands of unarmed police officers with few injuries and little resistance. It brought to an end a 10-month student strike that was instigated by a proposed tuition hike the Mexican government announced last year which would increase the yearly tuition from pennies to \$140.



DAVID LEE

The existing cheap tuition rates give UNAM the proud tradition of providing any qualified student a free college education, but with the new rates, the Mexican government hoped to raise additional revenue. Needless to say, the government did not foresee the explosive response that completely shut down the most influential institution of higher learning in Latin America.

Although it is considered a footnote in the history of the strike, it must be kept in mind that the student leaders managed to pull the ultimate of Dr. Jekyll - Mr. Hyde jobs — underneath their sincere exterior lay an opportunistic and selfish agenda. Instead of sticking to their objective of getting the tuition increase eliminated, the students abused their undeserved power and began making irrational and impractical demands of the government.

History must remember the shameful demise of this otherwise commendable protest — to forget would be a disservice to the future of legiti-

mate student protests. In addition, the vilification of the Mexican government in their handling of the strike must cease.

Granted, the strike began as an honorable act of non-violent defiance by a united student body against an unreasonable government. The vast majority of the 270,000 students would have been unable to pay the new tuition rates and would have been forced to discontinue their education. Although it would have been the first tuition increase since 1948, the students were rightfully outraged at the sheer magnitude of the increase.

The level of resolve and solidarity exhibited by the students during the early months drew awe and praise from observers around the world. Countless political activist organizations used the students' struggle as a lightning rod for their campaigns. The most notable of these efforts was a free concert held on campus during the strike by the politically-motivated rock band Rage Against the Machine. With the concert broadcast worldwide on MTV, millions of people became aware of the strike and the students' cause. They were portrayed as visionaries who were fighting against a grave injustice. At the time, such a portrayal would be accurate.

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As the strike dragged on, the title of "bad guys" gradually transferred from the government to the students. What had been peaceful, student-held rallies became increasingly violent, with police officers being pelted with eggs, fruit and rocks. Even after the government bowed to the public pressure and voided its planned tuition hike, the strike continued. Strike leaders changed their demands and refused to return to class.

Making matters worse, members of a small group of anarchists managed to seize power amongst the strike leadership — their nicknames included Mosh, the Devil and the Snake. These leaders managed to form a rift between the students by refusing to recognize the results from a university-wide election held last month. Drawn up by university rector Juan Ramon de la Fuente, the students, faculty and university workers overwhelmingly ratified a plan to end the strike.

This mutiny steered the strike to its apex as two weeks ago students who opposed the strike clashed with supporters. Under the watch of university police, 37 people were injured and 248 were arrested. This was by far the most violent demonstration during the course of the strike.

The student leadership involved should be condemned and prosecuted for their actions during the latter months of the strike. They are a testament to the adage "power corrupts."

Everyone who has been duped into supporting the students' plight must be able to differentiate the strike's honorable origins from its disastrous finish.

David Lee is a junior economics and journalism major.

VIEW POINTS

Youth movie plots hit close to home

The surprising commercial success of blockbusters like *Toy Story 2* and *Stuart Little* proves that G-rated movies are not immune from the truism that art often imitates life. And it is not hard to glean insight about modern American culture from movies made for kids because most of the plots in the recent spate of popular children's films hang transparently on the same allegorical structure.

In *Stuart Little*, an orphaned mouse trying to find a stable family is torn between his adoptive human parents and his fraudulent biological family.

In *Muppets from Space*, Gonzo finally meets his alien biological family and is invited to return to his home planet, but, in the end, he decides to stay on Earth with his "adoptive" family — Kermit the Frog and company.

In *Toy Story 2*, Woody, a cowboy-clad action figure, discovers his long-lost companions from the classic TV show in which he starred. He is torn between his love for Andy, his human owner, and these fellow toys. Eventually, his plastic buddies from the first *Toy Story* persuade him that his real home is with them. This past Friday, Disney release its latest feature film, *The Tigger Movie*. The title character bounces off to find his biological family, but eventually he discovers that his real family is the one who loves him — the Christopher Robin gang.

It does not take Mrs. Doubtfire to discern the moral of these stories: Home is where the heart is, and the important thing for characters with divided familial feelings is to realize this practical truth.

Of course, it may be going too far to say that the adventures of a computer-generated mouse say something profound about the state of the American family, but it is not ludicrous to suggest that these plots point to some hard realities about the limbo in which American children often flounder.

The tug-of-war over Elian Gonzalez is only a high-profile, international example of what happens every day in this country, where almost 50 percent of marriages end in divorce or separation. Unfortunately, the fairy tale dream of too many children is no longer to find Prince Charming — it is just to find a family.

Could this trend be a rare case of Hollywood telling the country something it needs to hear?

— Caleb McDaniel

No reason to get excited about law

Gentlemen: the State of Mississippi wants you to keep it in your pants. To be precise, they want you to keep it in a certain state in your pants.

A new law passed in Mississippi makes it a crime for a man to show himself in a state of arousal in public. This does not mean showing up in public in the buff while... happy, it means being in such a state at any time.

According to this new law, strip joints are considered public places. By making it a crime for a man to be found "locked and loaded," it is hoped that the frequenting of such clubs will be diminished. This, the backers of the measure hope, will put strip joints out of business. Either that, or someone is very kinky.

There are two major questions left unanswered by this law. The first is what happens to the young ladies who assist the men to get to their "state of grace."

But the other is the real catch — who is going to check and see if someone is "packing heat"?

Very few men go into strip clubs in order to watch the big game or judge the dancers on their ability to bump and grind. They are there to judge their other talents.

One of the effects of such judgments can be a man — how can this be put nicely? — breaking the law.

If a dancer's skills induce a man into "fighting the battle of the bulge," is she aiding and abetting a crime? Will males be forced to think of "Margaret Thatcher in a bikini on a cold day"?

Also, how is this law to be enforced? Will the police stand outside a club and frisk those leaving? Will they conduct occasional raids? Will there be an 800 number set up to report those that have "bulked up"?

Mississippi has successfully enacted the first stupid law of the 21st century. It is not only pointless, it is unenforceable.

If Mississippi would like to attack strip clubs, it should do so directly and not do so through some moronic piece of legislation.

Until then, males found in a compromising situation should remember to pour cold water on themselves when a stripper dances to "pour some sugar on me."

— Mark Passwaters

MAIL CALL

What matters is talent, not sex

In response to Jessica Crutcher's Feb. 17 column.

Crutcher's article began with an excellent point, that "society is obsessed with female habits," but attempts to support this idea with teeny-bopper icons such as Britney Spears and Christina Aguilera.

She cites bare midriffs and suggestive dance styles, but apparently never considered this sexy, sultry image is what is used to sell albums. Crutcher condemns LFO for endorsing Abercrombie and Fitch in their lyrics, and praises Spears and Aguilera for "at least" not going that far. As shallow and just downright lame as these lyrics are, are Spears' or Aguilera's any better?

Aniel Nalk
Class of '02

Grade listings help students

In response to Brandie Liffick Feb. 15 article.

It is my opinion that to deny grade distributions being made available is an effort to protect bad professors from being exposed. Grade distributions are one of the few methods that a student can use to make informed decisions about what professors are fair and what aren't.

If a professor fails a large portion of the class or has a lot of q-drops in his classes then chances are that he is not a very good teacher or is not reasonable.

Consequently, it is important for students to be able to access this information to determine if a class or a professor is reasonable. If this infor-

mation and course syllabi are not made available then it would appear that the university is ashamed of its professors and the material and results from these classes. This should not be the case.

The University needs to realize that they are here to serve the student, not protect themselves and make money.

Ben Borgers
Class of '00

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