

2012



Yearbook of the Society of Jesus

Finding God in film

Every year on the last weekend in February, the *Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences* announces the winners of the Oscars. For this event, the whole motion picture industry gathers in Hollywood. The event is broadcast world-wide, showing movie stars on the red carpet, and their tears and excitement.

Since movies attract millions of people worldwide, especially younger people, in preparation for World Youth Day in Cologne (Germany) in 2005, Fr. Christof Wolf, S.J. had the idea of hosting a film festival called *The Iñigo Film Festival* (TIFF). If we can find God in all things, why not in film? Every film festival needs a good sounding abbreviation and it should have a relation to who we are. "TIFF" sounded fine and Iñigo as the Spanish name of Ignatius of Loyola links the festival to the Jesuits.

Why do Jesuits support the *Iñigo Film Festival*? Aren't there enough festivals already? In fact, it is not so easy for young film-makers to find a public space for their films, especially those with spiritual and faith-based themes. TIFF offers the film-makers a platform for their work; and it also lets the Jesuits and the Catholic Church show young people and the public that faith enriches and fits into our modern world. Even if the film-makers do not belong to a faith community, to get a "Catholic Award" is not just an honor for their movies, but poses to them the question of their relationship to spirituality and religion.

Whoever organizes a film festival faces a couple of challenges. What kind of films are you showing? What is your profile of the festival? Who is going to come to see your films? And because movies normally are screened in 35mm prints in commercial theaters, how do you deal with the technical and financial side of it?

TIFF is a film festival world-wide in scope for



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independent young film-makers under age 35. It shows their films to what must be the largest young international audience in the world. The festival has the general theme of *City of God*: a cinematic vision with a message—like St. Augustine's—to be spiritual rather than political.

A wide variety of interpretations of this topic is



expected and encouraged. For example, submissions that reflect the spiritual yearnings and experiences of young people today; that show the presence and/or absence of God in our modern secularized world; or that take into account the twin dimensions of faith and justice.

In Cologne (Germany, 2005) we had about 40 short films in the categories of narrative fiction, animation, and documentary; in Sydney (Australia, 2008), 110; and in Madrid (Spain, 2011), about 200. Film-makers submitted their films from all over the world: Portugal, Spain, Italy, France, Slovenia, Germany, Philippine, Sri Lanka, India, Brazil, USA, Canada, China, Burundi, Japan, Finland, Ireland, UK, Australia, Mexico, Lebanon, Israel, United Arab Emirates, and Hong Kong.

Not just to make the festival attractive but to support young film-makers five *Iniigo Awards* are given to the best short films. There is a first prize of 2.500 EUR, with a second and third prize of 1.500 EUR and 1.000 EUR respectively. There are two additional awards: an *Audience Award* (non-monetary) to a film chosen by the audience; and the *Fidel Goetz Emerging Film-Maker Award*, which recognizes the best film by a young film-maker

who does not have access to professional equipment. The latter includes FCP Studio Pro, a top-of-the-line professional editing software and a travel stipend for the festival. Each of the five prizes is accompanied by an additional professional software bundle by Showbiz of Hollywood. The winners are decided by a jury consisting of two representatives from the area of film and new media, and two members of the Society of Jesus.

Rather than having the trouble of attracting an audience, which would go to TIFF, the film festival instead goes to the audience. After the third festival, TIFF is very well established as a part of World Youth Day. With digital projection and affordable but decent sound equipment TIFF overcomes the obstacle of expensive 35mm film projection. No independent film-maker can afford an expensive film print.

Usually the screenings are over-flooded with young people, who can come and go and talk to young directors, all of which forms a small friendly community during the festival. The big event at the end is the Award Ceremony. The president of the Conference of European Provincials (C.E.P.)—which is the festival's official

sponsor and represents the Jesuits—presents the *Iniigo Awards*. The statue heavier than an Oscar is an original art work designed by the famous artist Josef Henselmann (Munich, Germany). It has a shape of a TV screen or camera view-finder with a little "golden Iniigo" in the middle.

In 2008 in Sydney the winner was *Mujo No Kaze* (Japan), which means *The Wind of Impermanence* directed and produced by Dean Yamada, it explores the chilling pull of Japan's suicide club subculture. The themes of life, death, and friendship are presented with a poetic and spiritual reverence. Second prize went to *Cocoon* (Belgium) by Jeroen Bogaert. This film is about a dancer and how her body is the place of her passion and means of expression. Therein lies the problem that drives the film, as she is confronted with a pregnancy that seems to threaten both, her passion and expression. Third prize went to *Blind* (USA) by Nikkhil Pradash. Which asks questions like:

How can God be among us? How can Jesus be our best friend? It is refreshing to see a film like this, that successfully makes use of comedy to approach faith-based narratives. The *Fidel Goetz Emerging Film-Maker Award* went to an African film *Le Tournant d'une Vie* (Burundi), *The Turn of a Life* by Linda Kamuntu. Confronting the audience with the tough social reality of AIDS and the ethical conflicts of many Africans, the film brings into relief the themes of loyalty, love, and compassion. The *Audience Award* went to *Judas' Pane*, a Canadian animated film by Steven K. L. Olson, in which the ostracized apostle seeks to redeem himself with Christ.

The festival demonstrates that God can be found not only in rituals, nature, and in the encounter with others but in film as well. As the late Pope John Paul II said: "The cinema enjoys a wealth of languages, a multiplicity of styles and a variety of narrative forms that are truly great. It thus offers an incomparable storehouse of expressive means for portraying the various areas in which the human being finds himself and for interpreting his inescapable calling to the beautiful, the

universal and the absolute."

The *Iniigo Film Festival* with its comprehensive program could not take place without the special support of our many funding partners and our committed sponsors: the U.S. Jesuit Conference; the Conference of European Provincials; the Irish, British, South Belgian, Swiss, and German Jesuit Provinces; the Jesuit Missions in Germany and Switzerland; the Fidel Goetz Foundation; and other private and commercial contributors interested in religious film and media for youth. The reactions of both the large audiences and the film-makers themselves encourage festival director Fr. Christof Wolf, S.J. (*Loyola Productions*, Munich, Germany), to continue with the "Jesuit Oscars" (as some in the press call them), which will be held next in 2014, again in conjunction with the World Youth Day.

Christof Wolf, S.J.
www.tiffestival.org

In the band at the top: Scenes from some of the films presented at the Festival. Here: An advertisement for the 2008 Festival. Next page: The joy of the awardees!

