

Film Festival Celebration at Sea

By Donna Strong

Neptune, the god that presides over the earth's oceans, is also synchronistically the ruler of the creative art of film making. The Spiritual Cinema Circle could not have asked for a better place to call together its second Festival-at-Sea, than on the Pacific Ocean cruising on the luxurious MS Oosterdam, for one week at the end of April. Casting off from San Diego, we went down the coast of what is known as the Mexican Riviera, making stops at the port cities of Cabo San Lucas, Mazatlan and Puerto Vallarta. The coast was sundrenched much of the time, and the ocean brought the appropriate element of water for this creative gathering.

This festival is more than an opportunity to preview films in the newly-emerging genre of spiritual cinema. It is a multilayered meeting ground for creatives of all kinds; artists, healers and spiritual journeyers seeking more meaning in the media's message. I was truly heartened by the offerings of the four features and seven shorts, as well as special screenings of clips from "Conversations with God," a movie about Neale Donald Walsch's every man journey, and James Twyman's documentary, "The Indigo Evolution."

With two of his films already distributed by the Cinema Circle, this year Geno Andrew's short film, "Speechless," was accepted into the second festival. A lively commentator on events, Los Angeles artist Geno had this to say; "I've been to a lot of film festivals and this one is a unique opportunity to bond together. This is a rare manner of showcasing work and very gratifying to participate in as a film maker."

Aboard ship, the spa's Turkish-style hydro pool was not the only place that was bubbling. The gathering itself was an effervescent pool of stellar creative synergy. Brian Mills, movie therapist and writer, offered this description of his experience: "Seven days of spiritual bliss... mixing with like-minded enthusiasts was so conducive to creativity that I now know I have to make my own movie!"

The festival's film offerings brought together the ordinary and the mystical in a profound manner. The winner of the Festival's Shorts category was a piece directed by Julie Anne Meerscham, titled "Celamy." For the first time I developed a real appreciation of the power of short films. In a few minutes I was easily drawn into Nelly's alternative magical universe, but it was the way her father was magnetically pulled to participate that was most engaging. In eighteen minutes the family dynamic shifted from pain and loss to living again through the wondrous influence of a sylph named Celamy.

The feature winner by writer/director, Mark Bamford, "Cape of Good Hope," was a remarkable interweaving of stories within a diverse community setting. A film with a strong emotional sensibility, it is full of issues we all face about choices in love, family and work. Moving to a crescendo of crisis, as the lead characters stood for what they believed in and found their strength, it led to a triumph of the heart for all. Like the sea so buoyant and strong, the festival films revealed the power of the human spirit to bring a potent sense of connectedness and meaning to life.

Stephen Simon, who is co-founder of the Cinema Circle and Executive Director of the Festival, was indeed correct when he described the festival as a gathering of passionate people. As executive producer of "What Dreams May Come," and director of the forthcoming "Conversations with God" later this year, Stephen has finally found a format that works to not only birth his own dreams to make spiritual films, but to provide a vehicle for others to be touched — offering messages with heart up to a receptive audience, thirsty for

inspiration.

Like the boundless abundance of the ocean waters, the festival was overflowing with inspiration. Indeed, one festival participant offered this quote from an unknown source; “Inspiration is a wellspring that never ceases to exist.”

The second Spiritual Cinema Circle Festival was an auspicious gathering to celebrate creativity and spirit for seven solid days. Presiding over the event were two beneficent influences; Neptune, ruler of dreams, visions and the sea, and Stephen, as the astute and charming salon-at-sea director. The fertile mother water of the Pacific, home to so many forms of life, provided the perfect elemental resonance for this event. Not only was the festival honoring of many dreams that have been birthed this past year, it was a seminal celebration of many more dreams to come.

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