

SUPPORT GROUP

SCOTT MACAULAY recaps the 2007 IFP Narrative Rough Cut Lab.

Three years ago the IFP and I developed a program called the Narrative Rough Cut Lab, a sort of intensive mentorship in which filmmakers who have shot but not completed their films receive advice about the stages of the filmmaking process that lay ahead of them. Completing edits, sound design, festival planning, marketing and publicity, obtaining a producer's rep and even DIY and self-distribution strategies are all discussed in a three-day series of small-group meetings led by myself and, this year, producer and HDNet Films exec Gretchen McGowan.

The idea for the Rough Cut Lab came from the realization that while there are several labs and seminars devoted to projects at the script or financing stages, there are none devoted to projects entering that often most crucial phase: post production. One of the many luxuries studio films have that independents usually don't is the budget for test screenings, recuts and reshoots. If a studio film doesn't work, you can rest assured that a team of people are busy figuring out why and how to fix it. Independents, however, have to gather their small teams of friends and colleagues and figure out how to address the issue with minimal resources. And while seasoned producers know how to plan for their optimum festival premiere, too many beginning filmmakers accept their first invitation and blow their shot at a potentially stronger platform for their domestic or foreign sale.

This year the Rough Cut Lab took place in June and to help filmmakers make sense of it all were a great roster of industry advisers. To discuss distribution options were Melissa Raddatz of Truly Indie and Ryan Werner of IFC First Take. Composer Mychael Danna (*Little Miss Sunshine*, *Capote*) listened to all of the participating filmmakers' music choices and offered guidance on scoring. Scott Young, Independent Liaison from the MPAA, talked about the rating system. Filmmaker Lance Weiler discussed DIY distribution and marketing. Producers Karin Chien (*The Motel*) and Joshua Zeman (*Mysterious Skin*) discussed festival strategy. Publicists Jeremy Walker and Susan Norget offered advice on indie film publicity. Music Supervisor Tracy McKnight and BMI's Doreen Ringer Ross talked about licensing music. Dana O'Keefe and Sarah Lash from Cinetic Media sketched out the current

domestic sales landscape. Shooting People's Ingrid Kopp and *indieWIRE*'s Brian Brooks discussed social networking publicity strategies. And, finally, editors Sabine Hoffman (*The Ballad of Jack and Rose*) and Kate Williams (*Interview*) watched all the rough cuts and tendered specific editorial advice. From the IFP Amy Dotson (Producer and Managing Director of Narrative Programming) and Jihan Robinson (Coordinator of Narrative Rough Cut Lab), produced.

After the Lab I asked the participants to jot down a few notes on their experience — specifically, how their thoughts on their films have changed after attending. Here are their replies.

Jeffrey Jay Orgill's *Boppin' at the Glue Factory* is the story of a strung out male nurse at a convalescent home and it's told with a vibrant, kinetic visual (and aural) style. Appropriately Orgill, who has been editing his film for two years, describes the Lab as "rehab." "I just couldn't 'see' the film anymore," he says. "I was 'blind.' As quickly as I'd make a discovery, I'd get bored with something that was working fine and cut it up or cut it out." He credits Williams and Hoffman with telling him to "trust your performances, stop overediting and let the story unfold," and he has now locked picture.

Sergio Palacios and Damian Rodriguez di-

rected *El Coyote*, a heavy metal scored revenge drama set in a ghost town. Rodriguez also credits Williams and Hoffman with helping solve a seemingly insurmountable problem: a slow opening. "With just a few key suggestions they solved what we had been laboring over for months," he says. "After we made a few edits and replaced some title cards with a voice-over, it really changed the pace of the cut. After watching our film so many times, it suddenly felt new and alive again."

Junko Kajino and Ed M. Koziarski directed the ambitious *The First Breath of Tengan Rei*, a drama about a young Okinawan woman who travels to the U.S. to confront the two Marines who assaulted her a decade earlier. Comments Koziarski: "Through a thought process that begun at the Lab, we recut our film, resolving to trust our audiences' intelligence and the strength of our core material. We pared away unneeded footage that we were relying on to spell out the story and had renewed confidence that our target audience wants to be challenged. Indeed it is our responsibility to our audience to challenge them. Likewise with music, we learned not to rely on score to emotionally 'wrap up' difficult scenes and thus risk softening their impact, but instead to let the score mirror and

see page 108



THE IFP NARRATIVE ROUGH CUT LAB FELLOWS WITH JOHN SAYLES (CENTER) AND MAGGIE RENZIE (HOLDING POSTER).

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New Streams Of Revenue

The other element of a MIG that is exciting for independent filmmakers is that you can creatively build a game around your film, building and testing new storylines and properties in the process. For instance the *Hope is Missing* MIG has lead to a number of high-level discussions about turning the concept into a fully funded, ongoing Web series.

After the *Head Trauma* cinema game experiments my whole focus around story has changed. I am now considering creating a world around each of my works — worlds that can cross devices, platforms and audiences. In fact, I have been writing game bibles (which overviews games and their rules) at the same time that I am scripting.

SAMPLES:

Hope Is Missing (hopeismissing.blogspot.com): Promotion for *Head Trauma*.

ARGnet (argn.com): A comprehensive site covering all things ARG.

World Without Oil (worldwithoutoil.org): Ken Eklund's social conscious ARG about an oil shock.

Super Columbine Massacre (columbine-game.com): Controversial RPG.

Cloverfield (1-18-08.com): Promotion for the upcoming J.J. Abrams film.

Eldritch Errors (eldritcherrors.com): Interesting horror ARG.

Perplex City (perplexcity.com): Immersive ARG dealing with murder, intrigue and conspiracy. The first season concluded and a second season is in the works. ▼

SUPPORT GROUP

from page 98

emphasize the emotional discord of those scenes. Three months later, we have a cut that is tighter, more focused, more uncompromising in its vision and in a better position to represent its distinctiveness in the marketplace."

Alex Karpovsky directed *General Impression of Size and Shape*, a genre-challenging story about the hunt for The Ivory-Billed Woodpecker in eastern Arkansas. Editing issues were also paramount for Karpovsky as he and his editor had been wrestling with "act two issues" for months. "My editor and I had slipped deep into the murky twilight where perspective and conviction begin to fade," he said. "Having two great editors at the Lab lend fresh eyeballs and neurons to our little struggle, we were able to talk specifically and tangibly about ways to

feather the birdwatcher into our story. Basically, we broke down the main birdwatcher's character arc into very broad and simple steps — a process that, again, my editor and I had trouble doing because of how close we had gotten to the footage. Then we outlined the main beats of the plot and discussed it. In a way, it was kind of like psychoanalysis. Instead of unloading a bunch of new ideas on how to actually implement this or structure that, it was more of them breaking things down into very clear and straightforward terms and allowing us to view them from a new and less cluttered perspective; one that was much lighter on associations, stress, fatigue and doubt."

Marco Ricci and Michael Canzoniero directed *The Marconi Bros.*, a comedy about two carpet installers who "escape" the family business for the comparatively more glamorous world of wedding videographers. The Lab helped them resolve issues brought up by an overpowering temp score. "By removing the temp score, we noticed audiences beginning to discover our characters in a much deeper way," Canzoniero says. "As it often happens in the post production process we had become so familiar with our dailies that we assumed that everyone was catching all the comedic nuances in Dan Fogler's performance and yet, as soon as we removed the music, test audiences were catching beats that previously had been lost in the pace of the score."

Chris Bower's *Moon Europa* is an intriguing and visually arresting science-fiction tale set in a ravaged, depleted future. "I finished the IFP Rough Cut Lab on June 14 and locked picture on August 31," he says. "It was sad to let my film go, make that final edit." A fan of composer Danna's work before entering the Lab, Bower says his guidance was invaluable. "*Moon Europa* is unique in that we have multiple composers attached to the project," he says. "Mychael took the time to help us focus on maintaining creative continuity throughout the entire picture and offered suggestions on which composer should take the lead. After the Lab we took his insights into our process and moved forward with finishing the composition."

Philadelphia-based Tom Quinn directed *The New Year Parade*, a drama about the effect of divorce on adult children set against the backdrop of the city's annual Mummer's Parade. Again, Hoffman's and Williams's help in clarifying storytelling goals was the director's big gain. "Essentially, *The New Year Parade* is built on five elements: son, daughter, father, mother and Mummery, one of America's old-

est folk traditions rooted in Philadelphia," Quinn explains. "Kate and Sabine correctly defined the parents as 'triggers' for the son and daughter's conflicts. While this may seem obvious, and was of course designed in the writing process, I learned the importance of boiling complex story elements to a carefully chosen word. In his book *Kazan: The Master Director Discusses His Films*, Jeff Young suggests Terry Malloy's objective in the first scene of *On the Waterfront* is to get Joey Doyle on the roof. Kazan corrects him, stating his objective is to follow orders. That seemingly minor shift reframes the whole scene for an actor. Here too, by defining the parents as 'triggers' I could better decide which moments were most important and how to weave them around the son and daughter."

Oklahoma-based Beau Leland and Kevin Ely directed *Rainbow Around the Sun*, a full-on musical centered around a hard-drinking, talented songwriter dealing with the impending death of his father. Leland says the Lab helped the two of them to figure out how to unite the musical and dramatic sections of their film. "We were advised by Danna to lay a continual bed of underscoring in between musical numbers so that the presence of music was constant," he reports. "We took this advice and hired the original arranger of the film's source music to create original scoring appropriate for each dialogue sequence." Adds Ely, the criticism the two received at the Lab "was tough to hear," but the feedback resulted in two newly written and shot scenes and a "more cohesive film."

Jason Cuadrado's *Tales from the Dead* is a Japanese-language horror anthology made, ambitiously, as an L.A. independent film. Cuadrado says that the Lab helped him "inspire a post strategy." He relates, "We probably made more mistakes that anyone else when deciding how to complete the film with no money. We had tried to partner with a production company/distributor to pay for post in exchange for a percentage of the film's ownership. That didn't work. Then we attempted to partner with a post house offering the same deal. No dice. It was only after the Lab that we went across the street to eat tapas and sketch out a plan to do it ourselves. Within two months, we had raised just enough money to hire some very talented, very generous artisans to give it the kind of polish the rough cut needed to look, sound and feel like a solid film."

Finally, Georgina Lightning's *Older Than America*, a tale of the supernatural set in a Na-

tive American boarding house, used the Lab to strategize festival strategy as well as the DIY outreach possible for a film with strong Native American subject matter. ▼

INDUSTRY BEAT

from page 24

she says, will admit that 14 theaters in 10 cities is a lot to commit to.

There's also the ongoing question as to which venues are eligible for the rollout. Academy rules state that theaters must "show new releases," "charge admission" and "generally run films for three to seven consecutive days, with multiple showings daily," but such regulations are still vague enough to cause confusion.

"They've set up an impossible system in which it is up to filmmakers and venues to determine whether or not a particular venue meets these criteria," says docmaker AJ Schnack, who is qualifying his doc *Kurt Cobain: About a Son*. "A far better system would be for the Academy to officially recognize certain venues and to post these locations publicly."

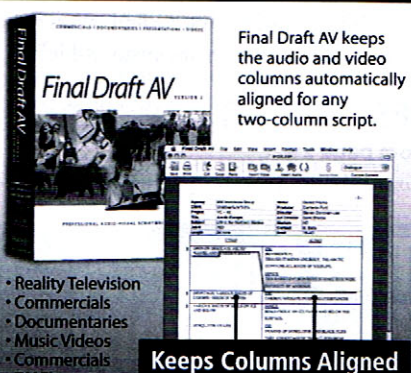
Another challenge is that docs who make it as far as the Academy shortlist must also supply two 35mm prints just two weeks after the announcement is made. "It's a big rush," says Stern. "At a minimum that is going to cost you \$35,000 to \$40,000."

"This is clearly meant to eliminate films that are primarily broadcast in their origin and their expected destiny," says Urman. But the irony, he points out, is that "broadcasters are so rich that they are among the few that, without regard to box office, can underwrite this." Therefore, he argues, the new regulations actually make it especially difficult for small theatrical distributors — the very folks that put docs in theaters. "I can play the majority of the markets and a greater number of secondary and tertiary markets without ever going to 35mm. To be forced to do so, at a point where you don't know anything, is onerous."

Another oft-cited catch-22 is the fact that broadcasters, who require broadcasts that would disqualify a film, are the backers of most documentary films. This year, one much-loved documentary, Pernille Rose Gronkjaer's *The Monastery: Mr. Vig and the Nun*, for example, winner of Grand Jury Prizes at both IDFA and Full Frame, has been disqualified after a broadcast on Belgian television.

Despite all these Byzantine rules and limitations, however, documentary makers say they're still going "to go through whatever hoops to qualify," says Leifer. "We feel that the Academy is a real useful tool. It's a long

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