

# Some Filmmakers Take the Short Path to Exposure

By Michael Bergeron

Film festivals often earn reputations for elevating directors' careers by premiering and successfully launching their feature length movies, but four filmmakers who participated in the 2007 SXSW Film Festival have shown that short subjects can propel careers as well. *Piece By Piece*, *We're Going To The Zoo*, *By Modern Measure* and *Clear Cut, Simple* were all presented as part of shorts programs during SXSW, and each of the quarter's directors has since parlayed his or her film's warm Austin reception into a positive career move.

Suchi Schuricht and three other teens (Emma Thatcher, Grace Rathbone-Webber and Isaiah Allekotte) directed *Piece By Piece*, a film that explores the twisting world of the Rubik's Cube, through a collaboration with West Side Filmworks, a documentary filmmaking workshop for high school students based in Berkeley, California.

Schuricht, who is currently studying film at Colgate College in New York, explained how a group of teenagers took an interest into a 25 year-old craze: "Although I wasn't even born when the Rubik's craze first hit, the Rubik's Cube was back on the market in 2003. The entire school speed cubed all the time."

"We sold most of the worldwide rights to Shorts International," said Jeff Castle of West Side Filmworks and *Piece By Piece's* producer. "The deal is for seven years. We retained the DVD rights and are in the process of negotiating a deal for those. We had other offers that provided more money up front but decided to take a gamble and go with a distributor

that stands to put the film in front of the most eyes possible." The deal also includes distribution via iTunes.

*We're Going To The Zoo*, directed by Josh Safdie, depicts a brother and sister on the trip mentioned in the title and chronicles their subsequent encounter with a hitchhiker. Safdie runs Red Bucket Films, a film collective in New York City, and is currently prepping his feature film debut, *Go Get Some Rosemary*. That film will star Ronald Bronstein, who world premiered his feature directorial debut, *Frownland* (see page 20), at the 2007 SXSW Film Festival as well.

Matthew Lessner's *By Modern Measure* played on the same Sunday afternoon shorts program as the previous two films. *By Modern Measure* presents a story within a story in which a French scientist observes two guys having a conversation on the sidewalk outside a Taco Bell. "I used the conventions of the French Nouvelle Vague to comment on today's culture," explained Lessner.

In late August, Lessner moved to New York City. "A couple of friends I made during SXSW are now my new contacts," he explains. Lessner's current project is a documentary on honeybees. For one of the storylines, he followed bees as they were shipped from Oregon to South Dakota: "The mystery is how bees progressed from their natural behavior to becoming just a tool in an industrialized system."

*Clear Cut, Simple*, which unspooled at a Saturday SXSW short program, tells the story of an American soldier in Iraq and his loyalty issues with



Above: Vineet Dewan, director, *Clear Cut, Simple*. Below: Scenes from *Clear Cut, Simple*.



an Iraqi interpreter. Director Vineet Dewan won a SXSW Special Jury Prize for *Clear Cut, Simple*, as well as an award at the Aspen Film Festival. These kudos led to representation by the William Morris Agency. Since then, Dewan has been in a film training program at NBC and has also been working on some of that network's primetime television shows. "All of a sudden I was back in Austin where I was working on *Friday Night Lights*," said Dewan, who was calling from the set of *Heroes*.

While their shorts may not have become as well-known as such 2007 SXSW features as *Knocked Up*, judging from these four filmmakers, the director-to-watch factor does not just apply to long form movies. ■

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