

On the lot Blog

Italian Director, Christian Filippella.

Star rising!

Jul 26, 2007 | 5:35 PM



Occasionally, a filmgoer stumbles upon the opportunity to catch a young Director on his ascent.

Last night, at the **Fine Arts Theatre** (owned & operated by avid film buff **Michael Hall**), I experienced just that. A young Italian filmmaker residing in Los Angeles, **Christian Filippella**, screened a retrospective of his eclectic, short features: **Silver Nail**, **Cold Sun**, **Bury the Love Axe** (my favorite), **Bobby Fischer**, and **Thermae 2'20**.

To his credit, the 32 year-old filmmaker can boast a scholarship at the **American Film Institute**, but more importantly, has not remained content to sit on his laurels gloating over that good fortune.

Not a social person, he noted to a rapt audience - captivated by his charismatic, diminutive presence - more often than not, long hours wither away as he painstakingly works out the schematics of upcoming artistic projects.

Laughingly, he noted in the **Q & A** afterward, that the **AFI** rarely ever supplied any of the essential tools to hone his craft or facilitate the art of movie-making.

If he wanted to utilize a steady cam, or construct a precise contraption to capture

images on a careening car, for example, instructors deterred him - first and foremost arguing that he might hurt himself, or flat-out insisting there weren't any of the essentials in stock for his capable directorial hands to put to use. Subsequently, the persistent young artist was forced to rely on his wits. You know the old saying: **"necessity is the motherhood of invention"**. "The **American Film Institute** gave me a great gift," he stressed.

Notwithstanding, the brazen **Filippella** was egged on to realize his dreams. He definitely has an eye for film. Once out of the starting gate, the visionary director often seduces the unsuspecting audience with skillful storytelling exacted from the pages of profoundly, original scripts. Spellbinding cinematography and provocative images are his forte - with a twist of fantasy or the macabre thrown in for good measure.

Artists throughout the medium struggle to achieve their own recognizable filmic style; in the case of **Filippella**, his body of work to date signals he's on his way to securing a foothold in that sacred place - the illustrious film library where exalted directors have their names enconced in print because of their signature work, inimitable style, and undeniably fresh, innovative approach to their craft.

During the preview of one short, a shiver ran up my spine as subtle strains of the haunting soundtrack hinted at Hitchcockian moments to come. The young auteur did not disappoint. In another, I sat transfixed by a surreal wide shot of the main characters as they tossed about an azure sea, then beckoned me into their arms as they were all swept up onto the shore where a tantalizing tale of mayhem, madness and murder unfolded before my eyes. The moods he evokes at times are difficult to express in words. Obviously, it was not by chance he accomplished these ends.

Filmmakers "on the lot" take note: while a chance encounter with a select jury may springboard you on to your first feature, with backers, and a chance at the brass ring, it is the foundation - your training, and the skills under your belt - that will propel you on to greatness in the industry.

Filippella is a classic example of this.

I was not surprised, for instance, to learn that he studied at the prestigious **Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia**, in **Italy**.

Otherwise known as the **National Film School**, the center is the leading Italian Institution for education, research and experimentation in the field of cinema in its widest sense: film, documentaries, TV series and animation.

Their mission is simple: to develop cinematographic art and technique to the highest levels through research, experimentation, production and teaching.

It also has the role of promoting and raising awareness of the cultural heritage in Italy and abroad, through agreements with State bodies, Cultural Associations and Institutions, Schools and Universities. A three-year didactic program is divided into interdisciplinary areas and aimed at specialisation in one of the following fields: directing, acting, scriptwriting, set and costume design, cinematography, sound, producing, editing and animation (in the Torino-Chieri faculty).

The number of places is limited, attendance is obligatory, and the syllabus includes theory and specialist lessons for each field.

Students also perform practical exercises - initially with video, later with 35mm film - which develop into the creation of short films and, finally, at the end of the course, make final works which are often co-produced with **RAI Cinema**.

So, while you may hanker to follow in **Filippella's** footsteps, remember - training is the key.

With all the tools of your "trade" at your command, a modicum of filmmaking talent, and a stroke of good luck - who knows - you may be on your way to blockbuster films and celebrated openings in exotic locales, such as **Cannes**.

But, first, you'll inevitably have to pay your dues.

Amen.
Julian