

Finding God in Film: Young Filmmakers Showcase their Work at WYD's

2nd Iñigo Film Festival (TIFF)

The 2nd Iñigo Film Festival was launched in Sydney on Wednesday, July 16, at the height of the World Youth Day celebrations. Sponsored by the Jesuit Conference of European Provincials, the festival included select short films from all over the world. As had the previous festival, this year's focused on young filmmakers grappling with the spiritual dimensions of life. It honored films which reflect the spiritual yearnings and experiences of young people today that indicate the presence and/or absence of God in our modern secularized world or that take into account the twin dimensions of faith and justice.

"Iñigo Awards" were given to the three best short films, a first prize of \$ 3,700, a second prize of \$ 2,700, and a third prize \$ 1,500. There were two additional Awards: one to a film chosen by the audience, "Audience Award"(non-monetary), and the "Fidel Goetz Emerging Film-Maker Award", includes top-of-the-line professional editing software, FCP Studio Pro, and a travel stipend for the festival. Each prize is accompanied with additional professional software bundle by Showbiz (Hollywood).

The winner *Mujo No Kaze*, which means *The Wind of Impermanence*, by Dean Yamada 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. The second prize went to *Cocoon* by Jeroen Bogaert. The film is about a dancer and how her body is the place of her passion and means of expression, but therein lies the problem that drives the film as she is confronted with a pregnancy that seems to threaten both. The third prize went to *Blind* (USA) by Nikkhil Pradash. How can God be among us? How can Jesus be our best friend? It is refreshing to see films that successfully make use of comedy to approach faith-based narratives. The „Fidel Goetz Emerging Film Maker Award“ went to an African film *Le Tourmant d'une Vie* (The Turn of a Life), confronting the audience with the tough social reality of AIDS and the ethical conflicts of many Africans, the film raises into relief the themes of loyalty, love, and compassion. The Audience Award went to *Judas' Pane*, a Canadian animated film, in which the ostracized apostle seeks to redeem himself with Christ.

The program included 19 international films, selected from more than one hundred submissions, each of which explored the general themes *City of God*. Categories included narrative fiction as well as animated and documentary films. The festival's single theme cannot be said to have constrained the young filmmakers, as the submissions clearly proved with their at times thought-provoking, at times unsettling, at times funny and exciting approaches. The stories are set in all corners of the world, for example, in Sri Lanka, Burundi, Canada, Belgium, Korea, the Philippines, France, India, Japan and the U.S.

Why do Jesuits support the Iñigo Film Festival? Aren't there enough 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 so also the Jesuits and the Catholic Church give young people and the public a signal, that faith enriches and fits in our modern world. In the end the festival demonstrates that it is not only in rituals, nature, and the encounter with others that God can be best sought and found but in film as well. As the late Pope John Paul II said, "[The cinema] offers an incomparable

storehouse of expressive means for portraying the various areas in which the human being finds himself and for interpreting his inescapable call to the beautiful, the universal and the absolute.“

The success of TIFF would not be possible without the great financial support of the U.S. Jesuit Conference, Jesuit provinces around the world, and other private and commercial contributors and foundations interested in religious film and other 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 time in Madrid in 2011 again in conjunction with the WYD. (www.tiffestival.org)