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**FRONT ROW: AN UP-CLOSE VIEW OF CHICAGOLAND'S ENTERTAINMENT SCENE:
PREVIEW**

Short movies about nature and abductions--and a beer

By Robert Loerzel
Special to the Tribune

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Millions of people watch short video clips on YouTube, but Chicago filmmaker Xan Aranda says that's no substitute for watching well-crafted films with a crowd of cinema buffs.

"That just sounds so lonely to me," says Aranda of the plugged-in option. Aranda also is executive director of the new Chicago Short Film Brigade. The group will make its debut Thursday with a screening of short films at the Hideout (1354 W. Wabansia Ave.), a bar best known as a haven for alternative music.

Somewhere fun and accessible is the point, she says. "If you hear it's happening at the Hideout and you can have a beer and see some friends, that's more inviting."

Some background: Aranda first organized a series of film screenings in 2003 and 2004 at the Hideout under the name "Prime Shorts." In addition to being a filmmaker, she has studied film at Columbia College and dabbled in television commercials and music videos. After running "Shorts" by herself, Aranda decided she needed some help. Last spring, she pulled together a board of directors--including other filmmakers as well as her boyfriend, singer-songwriter Andrew Bird.

Most of the movies in Thursday's 90-minute program schedule were made in the last two years; the show will also include "The Witch and the Cow," acclaimed Latvian animator Signe Baumanes's 1991 debut.

The Chicago Short Film Brigade will show films four times a year at the Hideout. The same programs will be screened at a nightclub in Dubuque, Iowa, and Aranda hopes to host screenings at other venues around Chicago's neighborhoods. She's planning an annual "best of" program at the Gene Siskel Film Center. (A word to filmmakers: To submit your work, see www.filmbrigade.com.)

"Some Ghosts" -- Chicago filmmaker Aay Preston-Myint combined images painted on glass with embroidery and fabric for his experimental film, which takes viewers into a spaceman's sleep chamber.

"Pie Cycle" -- By Iowa City animator Christina McClelland; it features strangely quilted humans interacting with bears and cherry pies.

"Los Ojos de Alicia"-- Thriller by Ugo Sanz, a Basque director in Spain, which opens with a woman waking up in an

empty room with her hands tied and her head wrapped in a hood.

"Ride of the Mergansers" -- Nature documentary by Minnesota director Steve Furman; newborn ducklings face a perilous drop from a treetop nest.

Chicago Short Film Brigade

When: 8:30 p.m. Thursday

Where: The Hideout, 1354 W. Wabansia Ave.

Price: \$7; 773-227-4433

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