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SCREEN SCENE

An outlet for film that's reel local

By Robert K. Elder
September 7, 2007

Do you have a favorite, well-loved seat at your local movie theater? Do you listen to DVD commentary tracks? Find yourself at film festivals and drive-in movies? Read geeky movie Web sites?

If so, Screen Scene is for you. Every Friday, we'll bring you the inside scoop on the indie film scene, from director Q&As and festival coverage to special events and Chicago filmmaker profiles.

Now you've sat through the coming attractions, we begin our feature presentation:

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"I think a lot of people feel that short films are for other people," Aranda said. "Yet, you'll slog through YouTube. But I want people to leave the house and see short films with other people. That's important. People don't make short films to show other short filmmakers. Everyone should see them."

The entire 2007 Film Brigade lineup will screen this weekend at the Hideout Block Party, complete with live music by Andrew Bird, Art Brut and The Frames. Tickets and information: [www.filmbrigade.com](#).

Premiering

"Cut" is not an Eli Roth-style slasher film -- but a documentary that may make some just as squeamish.

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Xan Aranda has one of those names that sounds made up, but it's not.

The producer and director of the Chicago Short Film Brigade isn't out of place, however, in a town with creative names like Rusty Nails and Dean Rank.

Aranda (full name: Alexandra), however, has proven what's NOT in a name. Two years after she folded Prime Shorts -- her showcase for short film at the Hideout -- Aranda went back to film school, dropped out again, fell in love and, earlier this year, revived her cinematic passions with the Chicago Short Film Brigade.

She's also just produced a music video ("Imitosis") for longtime boyfriend and Brigade vice president Andrew Bird, which makes them a Chicago power couple of sorts.

"We're both workaholics, so we take turns talking one another down off the ledge," said Aranda recently, over lunch at Logan Square's Cafe Lulu. "He's one of the most reasonable people I know -- who still has an imagination."

Bird said the Brigade falls right in line with his own creative philosophy.

"I've always admired when people don't wait for the normal channels to come to them," said Bird. "You need to make your own fun."

The Brigade's mission, in addition to showcasing talent, is a simple one: to expose mainstream audiences to shorts.

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Eliyahu Ungar-Sargon's curiosity about the history of circumcision grew, he said, from a "constant state of tension with my Jewish identity ... and for me, circumcision is a metaphor for that struggle."

Ungar-Sargon continues: "The story of how it got started in the U.S. is a little bizarre. It was a Victorian fad that got imported. When you look at this history of circumcision, every generation had a new reason for it. It's kind of a treatment in search of a disease."

"Cut" premieres at the Gene Siskel Film Center, 5 p.m. Sun., followed by a discussion with the filmmaker. www.cutthefilm.com. For a review, see page 7.

Breaking news

Daniel P. Coffey, governing board chairman of Cinema/Chicago and its Chicago International Film Festival, resigned this week after 11 years.

"Dan served above and beyond the call of duty for more than a decade," said fest founder Michael Kutza in a press release. "His belief in Cinema/Chicago as a key element in the cultural life of the city has contributed greatly to our organization's endurance and vitality."

Jeanne Randall Malkin and Ross Miller, both veteran board members, have been appointed interim co-chairs.

reider@tribune.com

* indicates a capsule review from Chicago Tribune archives.

(diamond) indicates a film that is not reviewed, but of interest.

After Hours Film Society

Tivoli Theatre

5021 Highland Ave., Downers Grove

630-534-4528

afterhoursfilmsociety.com

Once' ** (Ireland; John Carney, 2007). The Irish musical romance "Once" is so beguiling I didn't realize until after a second viewing how infernally corny writer-director John Carney's film might've turned out in lesser hands. It's a very small piece, working in a deceptively casual storytelling style. But it's my favorite music film since "Stop Making Sense," and it's more emotionally satisfying than any of the Broadway-to-Hollywood adaptations made in the last 20 years. The plot: The sweet son of a vacuum repairman has a life outside the shop as a busker, accompanying himself on guitar on a downtown Dublin thoroughfare. One day he meets a Czech woman selling flowers on the same street. She's a pianist and fledgling writer herself. After playing and singing together in a music store the man asks the woman to help him record an album before he heads off to London, where an ex-girlfriend awaits. Then comes a happy ending, though not necessarily the one you expect. It's about the happiest happy ending I've seen in a movie in years. 7:30 p.m. Mon.

Beverly Arts Center

2407 W. 111th St.

773-445-3838

beverlyartcenter.org

Golden Door' * 1/2 (Italy/Germany/France; Emanuele Crialese, 2006). An often lyrical and moving movie about a poor rural Italian family who, inspired by postcard images of the U.S. and its riches, immigrate to America in the early 20th Century. Like numerous families before them, in life and in the movies, the Mancusos survive hardships in their passage from the Old World to the New, running into last-minute obstacles at the Ellis Island entry station and a heartbreaking final choice. It's bittersweet, neither as comic and sentimental as Charlie Chaplin's 1917 great silent "The Immigrant," nor as cynical and epic as Elia Kazan's 1963 "America, America," but close to both. In English and Italian with English subtitles. 7:30 p.m. Wed.

LaSalle Bank Cinema

4901 W. Irving Park Rd.

312-904-9442

(diamond)'Pennies From Heaven' (U.S.; Norman Z. McLeod, 1936). Sorry, Steve Martin fans, this is the

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1936 film. Bing Crosby stars as a drifter named Larry, and a young Louis Armstrong plays Henry the handyman. The picture has a fairly dark opening for a musical, but soon lightens up -- if you consider a haunted building lighter fare. Plays with the short "Blue of the Night," also starring Crosby. 8 p.m. Sat.

**** EXCELLENT

*** GOOD

** FAIR

* POOR

Compiled by Michael Esposito

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