

Take two or more

Oscar-nominated 'Spellbound' launches documentary series

BY NICOLE STAFFORD
STAFF WRITER

It's fair to say documentaries are a catch-when-you-can commodity in metro Detroit.

Films in the genre play regularly at Detroit Film Theatre, sporadically in local art cinemas and rarely in large theaters.

Yet, documentaries are more in demand than ever. So when Chris Walny, a PBS free-lance producer from Royal Oak, approached the Woodward Film Society with the idea of a monthly documentary series, the green light came quickly.

Walny is the founder of Detroit Docs, the nonprofit organization that sponsored the city's first documentary festival in 2002.

"Documentaries are a kind of untapped area. People love them," said Jill Ulje, publicist for the Woodward Film Society and Uptown Entertainment, which runs downtown Birmingham's two theaters. "We thought it would be a great match."

Film society members, which number more than 200, certainly want to see more of them, she said.

STARTING WITH A WINNER

To kick off the series, Walny arranged for an advance screening of the Oscar-nominated documentary 'Spellbound,' as well as a Q & A with the film's director, Sean Welch. The screening is scheduled Wednesday, April 9 at



'Spellbound,' a suspenseful and riveting film nominated for an Oscar in the category of Best Documentary, follows eight driven youngsters as they compete in the National Spelling Bee.

Uptown Palladium 12. The film doesn't open until Wednesday, April 30 in New York.

'Spellbound,' which is Welch's first film, is a behind-the-scenes look at the National Spelling Bee from the viewpoint of eight young competitors from different walks of life.

The film's DVD version is expected to include footage of a young speller from Michigan, Alyson Lieberman, a student at Greenhills School in Ann Arbor.

Critics have described the award-winning film as suspenseful, exciting and hopeful.

"I knew the outcome and thought it was riveting," said Alyson's mother, Julie Kovach. "Alyson ended up on the cutting room floor, but I think (Welch) really captured the whole experience."

AT THE BEE

Although Alyson, now 14, was slightly disappointed she didn't make it into the film, she was impressed by the story in 'Spellbound.'

"It shows the real personalities and the diversity of the people at the Bee," she said. "The National Spelling Bee isn't as publicized as it probably should be. It's really a great opportunity for all types of kids."



'Spellbound' is scheduled to open April 30 in New York, but local movie-goers will be treated to an advance screening, along with a visit from the filmmaker, April 9 thanks to Detroit Docs and the Woodward Film Society.

FILM PREVIEW

What: Advance screening of the Oscar-nominated documentary "Spellbound" followed by a Q & A with director Sean Welch to kick off planned documentary series.

When: 7 p.m. Wednesday, April 9.

Where: Uptown Palladium 12 Theater, 250 N. Old Woodward Ave., downtown Birmingham.

Tickets: General admission, \$8, students and members of Woodward Film Society or Detroit Docs, \$6, call (248) 644-FILM or visit Uptown Palladium 12 box office.

Not only does the film explore the emotional struggle and pressure felt by competitors, but also speaks to the hopes of children and families from all types of backgrounds in a way that critics say captures the American Dream.

REAL TIME OR REAL VIEWS?

So why are documentaries gaining in popularity?

The genre is like reality television in that documentaries unfold stories about real people.

But Walny thinks the public has embraced the form for other reasons.

For one, the genre has evolved in sophistication; today's documentaries employ a

variety of film-making techniques and styles.

The availability of inexpensive equipment has opened up film-making to a pool of talented individuals, as well, she said. Documentaries bring us real life, but do so with artistic vision and an eye towards enlightenment.

"Reality shows are more for people who want to escape reality," she said. "Does open up your eyes to reality."

Membership with Detroit Docs is \$35 (\$25 for students), call (248) 214-6952 or visit www.detroitdocs.org. Membership with Woodward Film Society is \$25; call (313) 471-3123.

nkaleski@oe.hometown.com | (248) 901-2587

Look at other photos to improve your own

Did you know that one of the best ways to improve your photography is by closely looking at the pictures of others?

Whether it's browsing through a gallery or leisurely thumbing through a good photography book, many benefits can be yours by a good, hard, critical look and an analysis of the photographs.

Put on your "detective hat," tune in your emotions and ask yourself some important questions as you "read" a photograph. In doing so, you'll gain insight and technical skills that will certainly help you in taking your own pictures.

Begin by asking what the subject or main theme of the photograph is. Does it move you and how do you respond to it? How do you suppose the photographer felt about it?

Study the lighting. Is it harsh or soft? What direction is it coming from and what time of the day do you think it was? Ask yourself what might happen to the picture if the lighting were different.

What camera position was used—near or far, low angle or high? Why do you think the photographer used a particular camera position and what does it do for the picture? How might another camera location affect the photograph?

What lens do you think was used and why? Was it a wide-angle, normal or perhaps a telephoto?

How about depth-of-field? Is there a lot or a little?

Would a change in depth-of-field alter the final image?

What about shutter speed—fast or slow? Is the subject



Focus on Photography
Monte Hagler

blurred in motion or caught at the peak of the action? Look for the use of filters or any other special effects, too.

Of course, you should carefully study the composition. How are the elements of the picture arranged and does it all make sense to you?

Is the photograph telling a story? If so, tune into your feelings of it. Try to interpret what the photographer is trying to say and what your responses are.

So, you see? Becoming a photo "detective" can give you deeper insight into photography which will most certainly help you with your own pictures.

Monte Hagler is a fine art photographer based in Farmington Hills. You can leave a message for him at (734) 953-2047.



There's a lot to "read" in this Monte Hagler photo of these Hawaiian waterfalls taken on the Big Island.

MYTH and MAGIC
Friday, April 11, 2003 at 8:00pm
Macomb Center for the Performing Arts
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Box office: (248) 359-2295
Tickets: \$22 adult / \$18 senior / \$6 students

With mysterious, visionary and compelling dance, Myth and Magic will include an eclectic program of contemporary choreography. Highlight of the evening will be the premiere of Steven Janosson's Bolero to Maurice Ravel's famous score by the same name. You won't want to miss this gala event!

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at the
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The Ave Maria Fine Art Gallery is proud to present an exhibit featuring the works of Mark Eberhard. Having received his first bird book at age five, Eberhard is now best known for his colorful and detailed paintings of birds. His passion has helped him to win numerous awards, both regionally and nationally. Take the time to experience the beauty of Eberhard's birds.

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