

WISCONSIN FILM FESTIVAL

Jurying the Wisconsin Film Festival

Tona Williams on the process of selecting the Wisconsin Student Shorts

David Medaris on Wednesday 04/04/2007 04:04:23.

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A member of [Blame Society Productions](#), Tona Williams is a cinematographer and art director for the Chad Vader series, a documentary filmmaker (the *Earth Walls* and *God Project* through [Bigbite Productions](#)), a Web site and graphic designer, illustrator and sculptor who holds a Ph.D. in sociology.

Her film work has been seen at previous Wisconsin Film Festivals. As a juror for this year's event, she helped select the Wisconsin Student Shorts that will be screening next weekend.

In this Q&A conducted via email for The Daily Page, she discusses the jurying process, the reasons for the vitality of the local and state filmmaking communities, the last two commercial movies she saw that she would recommend, and some of the films she is looking forward to seeing at the festival, scheduled for April 12-15 in Madison.

The Daily Page: As a juror, what qualities did you look for in the student films you helped judge?

Williams: The process was a lot of fun -- a real pleasure for someone who loves films of all sorts. We screened all the submissions and selected those that we felt were the best fit for the festival. Our goal was to create a fantastic program for the public to watch.

How did you draw on your own experiences as a filmmaker -- and as a filmmaker whose work has been screened at past Wisconsin Film Festivals -- to judge the films you helped choose?

My own experience as a filmmaker helps me to understand when certain aspects of a film are done really well, and why, and it also helps me notice places where films could be improved. I'm not sure that the fact that my films have screened at the festival had much bearing on my judging of this year's films. Certainly because I've had films both get in and not get in to the festival in past years, I'm sensitive to how the process feels from a filmmaker's perspective.

Even more importantly, because I've been attending the festival for several years I have a solid perspective on what it's like to be in the audience and what I, as a member of the audience, want my viewing experience to be like.

Which three films jumped out at you as the most compelling must-see choices for this year's festival?

I can only speak to the student shorts, since those were the only films I pre-screened. I'm happy with all our selections and personally find it impossible to label three as "most compelling."

How easy or difficult was it for the jurors to reach consensus?

We had a lot of interesting discussion, and I believe we all felt good about our final selections. Everything was very carefully considered.

In terms of difficulty, how is judging films by Wisconsin students different than comparing apples and oranges?

I've never been asked to compare apples and oranges. If I'm going to choose a fruit I'll just take what I'm in the mood for that day and leave it at that. The nice thing about selecting festival films is that we can make multiple choices from many different genres, styles, and lengths without any given selection necessarily excluding another. Though it's a bit more complicated, I prefer it to fruit sorting.

From your perspective as a local filmmaker, what accounts for the growth and vigor in the Wisconsin and Madison filmmaking communities?

It's all about maintaining a network of communication and collaboration among local filmmakers, providing lots of venues for them to screen their work, and helping them find ways to support themselves through their art.

I am self-employed, as are many of my collaborators, so when local businesses look to local artists for their film, video, performance and design needs, it goes a long way towards supporting the filmmaking community so that we can keep working on our own projects too.

The Wisconsin Film Festival has certainly played a crucial role both in bringing artists together and providing annual screening opportunities. The local [Wis-Kino](#) filmmaking network, which was sparked by the film festival several years back, provides a monthly venue for filmmakers to bring their short films to the public. It anchors the community of local filmmakers year-round as they coordinate to help each other make films. In addition, it helps to keep Wisconsin connected with the [Kino International](#) network, which helps filmmakers travel all around the world to collaborate with one another and screen each others' work at all sorts of festivals.

Leaving aside the Wisconsin student films you've already seen and judged, which films will you be seeing at this year's Wisconsin Film Festival?

I'm seeing a bunch of films, but I'm especially looking forward to the [British Television Advertising Awards](#) and [Punk's Not Dead](#). There are tons of great films this year (as always) and it was hard to choose which to see.

What was the last mass-market commercial movie you saw that you would recommend to friends, and why would you recommend it?

It has been a few months now since I've seen it, but *Children of Men* really stuck with me. It impressed and inspired me by blending a

compelling narrative with an almost documentary style of cinematography and some amazing action sequences. I hadn't had such an intense emotional response to a film in a long time; certain scenes gave me chills.

In a different part of the spectrum, I thoroughly enjoyed *Nacho Libre* -- a masterful display of physical comedy, with excellent art direction. I watched it in a room alone and belly laughed all the way through.

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