

Frank-ly Speaking



By Frank D. Quattrone
Ticket Editor

Film buff alert! For movie lovers, ecstacy is at hand... or you'll soon be weeping in your wine. That's because three filmfests are coming to town, with a profusion of dramatic, funny and intensely personal films to satisfy virtually every taste.

First up, the Jewish Film Festival's Annual New Filmmakers' Weekend, opening at the Prince Music Theater and at Gershman Y, Philadelphia, March 30 - April 1, will showcase three talented local filmmakers: West Philly's Daniel Anker and Gladwyne's Barak Goodman, whose award-winning "Scottsboro: An American Tragedy," will be screened Saturday, March 30, 8 p.m., and Benjamin Semanoff, a Doylestown native and Temple U. grad, whose short comedy, "On Common Ground," will also be screened that evening. (See Jeremy Rosenbaum's article, p. 10.)

Meanwhile, Bryn Mawr College is hosting the 30th anniversary celebration of "Women Make Movies," showing 20-plus films by and about women, April 4 - 6. (See Daniel Sean Kaye's article, also on this page.)

Finally, the Philadelphia Festival of World Cinema returns to area theaters April 4 - 18.

That's a lot of celluloid. Aren't we lucky!

Don't say I didn't warn you.

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Bryn Mawr College hosts 'Women Make Movies' filmfest

By Daniel Sean Kaye
Correspondent

More than 20 powerful, dramatic and deeply personal films will be showcased in the 30th anniversary celebration of "Women Make Movies," a feminist film festival, April 4 - 6, at Bryn Mawr College.

Nandini Sikand's "Don't Fence Me In" is the life story of Krishna Sikand, the filmmaker's strong and fiercely independent mother, through the years of pre- and post-independence Bombay's political and social history. The daughter of a well-to-do Bengali family, Krishna marries a Punjabi army officer (against family resistance), raises two daughters and eventually thrives as an academic, small business owner, journalist and poet. Krishna herself narrates the film through letters and poems that reveal her life's many milestones.

Choosing her family as the subject for her film was not easy for Nandini. "I was nervous about asking [my mother] to do this," she says. "I didn't know how she would feel about me making a film about her life. But she was flattered. Still, it was a struggle. You ask yourself, 'whose story is it?' I'm the one who gets to create the history, but my memories are different from other family members' ideas. There's negotiating that has to be done. But I felt it was my mother's story and I wanted her to write it. Making a film like this is getting to know who you are and realizing that your relationship to your family is an ongoing process."

"Don't Fence Me In" is a project that came from familial tragedy and the life that follows. "My father died when I was 19,"



Nandini Sikand's "Don't Fence Me In" is a lyrical documentary about the life of the filmmaker's mother, Krishna Sikand (above). The film will be shown at the "WMM" festival on April 6.



says Nandini. "This film is about my family's healing process. I wanted to discuss the legacy he left, and what it meant to my family. It is [a film] about separation, whether through death or geography. [Yet], it is philosophical. It shows the deepening of the relationship within the family."

When the film was completed, Nandini offered to give her mother an advance preview. "She told me she trusted me and didn't want to see it prior. That made me nervous, but then she saw it and loved it. It was more difficult for me. I couldn't watch it for a year," she says. "My films are very cathartic for me. This one raised a lot of stuff. I eventually came to peace. [thinking that] the end of one phase is the beginning of another. I think this is what every piece [an artist creates] does for them. It changes them."

The film was awarded a grant from the Jerome Foundation, won "Best Super 8mm Film" at Philafilm, The Philadelphia International Film Festival, and was screened at the Tribeca Film Center in NYC and the Chingari Film Festival at the University of Wisconsin.

The filmmaker acknowledges that she offers a glimpse of the

Indian world that often escapes Hollywood's efforts. "It is important to have a range of people, the good and bad," she says. "That is the only way you can [remove] stereotypes. It is not about one filmmaker's voice; it is an effort to get different voices on universal themes: life, death, pain, trauma. The best compliments I can get from my audience are 'I can relate to that. That's the complexity I have in my life.'"

Nandini is thrilled to be a part of the "Women Make Movies" series. "I can't say enough about WMM," she says. "I'm really lucky to be included in the 30th year celebration of a feminist organization. Because of these groups, women in my generation can choose to be filmmakers. I feel [there is a need] to honor those who struggled to make this happen. We have that option because of them."

A freelance television producer and filmmaker based in New York, Nandini's previous film, "The Bhangra Wrap," played at U.S. film festivals and won a Certificate of Merit at the Chicago Asian-American Film Festival. Her resume includes work with MTV, UK's Channel Four, The Story Channel and HBO. She



Scenes from acclaimed filmmaker Trinh T. Minh-Ha's digital feature, "The Fourth Dimension," also on tap for the "WMM" Festival.

has also taught courses in Asian Cinema at Hunter College, CUNY, where she is in a Ph.D. program in the College of Anthropology.

Currently, Nandini, 33, is working on "Amazonia," a collaborative piece with her sister, Chandana Sikand, a writer in law school who came with her to America in 1989. The film explores the myth of Amazonian women and breast cancer. "We compare the body to a city under siege," she says. Ironically, during the film, Chandana herself had a bout with breast cancer. Nandini is also producing a documentary on writer and activist Mahashweta Devi.

IF YOU GO

"Women Make Movies"
takes place at Bryn Mawr College, 101 N. Merion Ave., Bryn Mawr, Thursday - Saturday, April 4 - 6, Free
Nandini Sikand will introduce "Don't Fence Me In" with discussion following, April 6, 3 - 5 p.m.
Info: (610) 526-8520, or e-mail Joseph Boles at jboles@bryn-mawr.edu or visit www.wmmf.com or www.brynmawr.edu/visualculture/wmmindex.html