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Cable Car Cinema delivers short films for Convergence fest

BY Michael Janusonis, Journal Arts Writer

PROVIDENCE -- The Convergence 2001 International Arts Festival never does anything in an ordinary way, whether it's the astonishing sculpture works that have suddenly enlivened the urban landscape or "new music for the millennium" or giant robotic spiders which will dance along the Providence River.

So it's hardly a surprise that the festival's program of short films, which will run nightly at the Cable Car Cinema now through next Thursday, would be anything except out of the ordinary, too.

On screen you'll find a man who joins a bevy of synchronized swimming beauties, another whose sleep is assaulted by his snoring bedmate, a snoopy landlady who uncovers too much about her tenant, dancing tomatillos, angry Vietnam veterans, a soccer ball that briefly stops a war, Jesus on the cross, worms falling from the skies. Why, there's even an ordinary folks-next-door kind of couple and their kids doing very ordinary (and some very extraordinary) things whose home address turns out to be somewhere other than planet Earth.

The Convergence screenings encompass two separate programs of about 90 minutes each. The "Close to Home Program" will run at the Cable Car starting at 7 p.m. tonight, Monday and Wednesday. The "Wide Angles Program" will run at 7 p.m. tomorrow, Tuesday and Thursday. On Sunday at 7 p.m. they'll show the hour-long documentary Unfinished Symphony, made by filmmakers Bestor Cram of Boston and Mike Majoros of Providence, about the 1971 anti-war rally organized by Vietnam veterans on the Lexington, Mass., green.

Both 90-minute short programs have their pluses and minuses. The nice thing about both of them is that if you see something you're not terribly impressed with, just wait a few minutes and something else will flash on screen that may delight your eye.

Close to Home Program

A highlight of the "Close to Home Program" is Leif Tilden's Big Love, that seemingly ordinary film about what appears to be an ordinary California couple who slowly show their extraordinary not-so-human powers.

Probably the most provocative film in the entire show is here, too, Jay Rosenblatt's King of the Jews, a very personal look at one Jewish man's relationship with Jesus Christ. Rosenblatt contends that the New Testament gospels were fabricated to put the blame for the crucifixion on the Jews rather than on the Romans whom the early Christians were trying to court. This film incorporates footage from a silent movie version of King of Kings as well as newsreels of Nazi concentration camp atrocities.

On the brighter side are Johnnie Semerad's fanciful pen-and-ink animation *Josh W. Eats a Bug*, which is just what you'd suspect it to be, and Eric Anderson's computer-animated *Horses on Mars*, which follows the adventures of a microbe through space over billions of years.

Memorable, too, is Anna Dudley's *Special Day* which recreates the sit-in by blacks at the Greensboro, N.C., Woolworth segregated lunch counter in the early 1960s that helped spark the civil rights movement. The film centers on a young man who tremulously has decided to join the protest, until his wife and young son turn up at the store's door. Produced at the North Carolina School of the Arts, it's a way-we-were story that now seems very far away.

So very far away, too, are the details of *Unfinished Symphony* which memorializes the 1971 anti-war protest by Vietnam veterans in Lexington, during which they were joined by hundreds of townspeople.

The film's use of grainy newsreel footage of fighting in Vietnam and written statements about war atrocities that scroll up the screen set the scene at the start, although eventually this seems heavy handed.

Filmmakers Cram and Majoros used mainly existing footage to tell this story and, looking at it today in hindsight, some of it does not present a favorable impression of the veterans. It was a rag-tag group, long-haired in unkempt uniforms. An interview with two veterans resting behind the Minuteman statue at the protest finds them smoking marijuana and talking about how it eased their mental anguish in Vietnam and opened their minds on the home front.

Many suburban Lexingtonites followed the protesters, however, in what appears to be a groundswell of support against the war. Some 400 were arrested. Yet one isn't sure how slanted the available film coverage was from that time nor what the filmmakers chose not to show. *Unfinished Symphony* is backgrounded by an operatic aria from Henryk Gorecki's 3rd Symphony, called the *Symphony of Sorrowful Songs*, which underlines the story's bleakness of the story.

Wide Angles Program

Highlights in the "Wide Angles Program" of short films include Kristen Nutile's *Synchro*, the story of a young man who joined a California aquamaids synchronized swim team to perform water ballets; Chel White's *Soulmate*, about a snoopy landlady whose discovery of her tenant's girlie magazines underlines her own loneliness; Pamela Turner's exotic computer-animated *Falling Back to Earth: Tomatillo*, with its sexy 3-D imagery of vegetables, and especially Leanna Creel's *Offside*. Set in the World War I trenches on Christmas Day 1914, Germans face off British soldiers through barbed wire until a tossed soccer ball briefly brings the war to a standstill. It's beautifully done and full of possibilities, just like so much of the *Convergence* film selections.

Admission to each program is \$7. There also will be a free showing of the Italian film Cinema Paradiso at 9 p.m. tomorrow in the parking lot next to Buck-a-Book on Westminster Street near the Arcade.